

# The Tale of the Broomsticks

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**Based on a Chinese folktale**



Once upon a time in a small village lived a tailor named Old Chang who had three grown sons.

Their names were Ho Wu, Sing Wu, and Ah Wu.

One day, Old Chang called his children together.

"My sons," he said. "I have worked hard through the years. Now I wish to spend my remaining days resting in the shade of the elm trees. I am giving the tailor shop to you."

Ho Wu stepped forward. "Thank you, Father," he said. "My brothers and I hope that we can live up to your wise teachings."

Old Chang smiled. "How wonderful it will be to see my sons working together."

Sing Wu picked up some cloth. "I can design the garments," he said, excitedly.

"I will cut the patterns," added Ah Wu, happily.

"And I will sew the pieces of cloth," said Ho Wu, eagerly.

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"Excellent," said Old Chang, nodding. "You have made me very happy."

A moment later, there was a knock at the door. Old Chang opened it.

A messenger handed him a letter. "I have important news from the emperor," he said, then bowed and left.

Old Chang opened the letter and read it aloud:

"My daughter, Princess Jade Blossom, will be married on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon. A prize of 100 gold pieces will go to the tailor who can make the most beautiful gown."

"Our fortune will be made," exclaimed Sing Wu.

"We will become known throughout the city," cried Ah Wu.

"Everyone will buy our fine clothing," rejoiced Ho Wu. "Let us get busy. We do not have much time to make the gown."

Old Chang moved closer. "I am going to the city to buy more cloth. I will return tomorrow. I know that you will do well together, my sons."

And he left.

Sing Wu picked up some paper. He thought, *I should win the prize because I will make the pattern.* He quickly drew some sketches of a beautiful wedding dress.

"Show us what you have drawn," said Ho Wu.

Sing Wu hid the paper behind his back. "No," he said. "Not unless you both agree that I win the gold!"

"That is not fair," said Ah Wu. "If anyone should win the prize it is I, because I will cut the pattern with such care."

"Wait!" cried Ho Wu. "I will sew the fine white silk with delicate stitches, so the prize should rightfully be mine!"

The brothers argued all day, into the night, and through the next morning.

When Old Chang returned, he heard angry voices coming from his small house. Quickly he went inside.

"What is the matter?" he asked, confused.

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The angry brothers told their father exactly how they felt about who should receive the prize.

Old Chang sadly shook his head. "As of this moment, I do not even see the beginning of a gown," he said with a heavy heart. "Yet all of you seek to be rewarded alone."

He fetched a broom from the doorway and removed three straws from the sweeping portion.

"Sing Wu," he said. "Can you break this?"

"Of course," replied Sing Wu, snapping it in half easily.

"What about you, Ah Wu?" asked Old Chang. "Can you break a straw as well?"

"Easily," said Ah Wu, breaking the straw with no effort.

"Can you do the same, Ho Wu?" asked Old Chang.

"Certainly, Father," replied Ho Wu, twisting the straw in two. "But what does this prove?"

Old Chang smiled. "You will soon know."

The sons looked at each other, puzzled.

"Now," said Old Chang as he lifted the broom, "break these straws that are all bound together!"

Each brother took a turn, but try as they might, none could do it.

Old Chang held the broken straws in his hands. "You can see that it seems easier to stand alone," he said, "but like these bound straws, working together brings strength."

The brothers looked again at each other and nodded.

"We have wasted time being greedy," said Ah Wu. "Now it is too late, Father."

"Nonsense," said Old Chang. "Sing Wu, place the pattern on the table so Ah Wu can cut the cloth and then Ho Wu can sew it. Together, you will make a fine gown!"

Quickly, the brothers began to make the wedding dress.

They worked hard together all night and most of the next day to finish the gown before the deadline.

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When Princess Jade Blossom saw the wedding dress, she was very pleased, but she liked another gown better and the prize went to someone else.

On their way home, the brothers remained silent.

"I know that you are disappointed," said Old Chang, "but you made a very fine silk garment. You will see that others will buy the clothing you make."

The next day, people came into the shop.

One of them was the court minister who helped rule the land. He brought his daughter, Su Chee, who was also getting married.

"Oh," said Su Chee, admiring the wedding dress. "What a beautiful design; such delicate stitches and it is cut so perfectly. It will surely fit me."

She was so happy with the gown, she bought it and ordered more dresses.

The court minister was so happy that his daughter was pleased, he invited Old Chang and his sons to the wedding, where there was much talk about the beautiful gown and the three brothers who made it.

When asked how the gown was made, each brother told about his part from start to finish, but they kept the tale of the broomstick to themselves.

Later that evening, as Old Chang and his sons started to leave, Old Chang said, "I am very proud of all of you, and I hope that in years to come, you will continue to work together—with your own sons!"

And so it was.

Go On



- 1** How are the three brothers in the story ALIKE, and how are they DIFFERENT? Support your answer with details from the story.

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- 2** What is the brothers' MAIN problem in the story? Explain how the problem is solved. Support your answer with details from the story.

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- 3** What is the MAIN message of "The Tale of the Broomsticks"? Support your answer with details from the story.

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