

THE SILK DRUM

Japanese Folk Tale about "Listening To The Silence)

Retold by P. L. Travers (the author of Mary Poppins)

In the ancient days there was a great Japanese ruler Yumiyo who, feeling himself near to his ending, admonished his only daughter.

"The green of the plum tree has come and gone. Now is the time of blossoming. But still you have not chosen a husband. This and that suitor comes and goes but none is to your liking. Must I die and leave you unaccompanied?"

"Not so, my father," said his daughter, the Lady Yumiyo. "I shall cause to be fashioned a drum of silk - of silk stretched upon a bamboo frame. He who hears the note when my fingers strike it is the man whom I shall marry."

"This is foolishness," her father said. "A silken drum will make no sound. Alas, I shall never see a grandchild. " But the drum, nevertheless, was made.

And many a one came to listen, head stretched forward, urgent to hear - some because of the lady's beauty, some for the readiness of her wit, some because it was widely known that she would be well-provided. And some for all three reasons.

But not a sound did anyone hear when she struck the drum with her hand.

"I told you so," her father said.

But the Lady Yumiyo said nothing.

She merely went on striking the drum as the suitors came and went.

And then, one day, in the frame of the doorway, there appeared a dignified and beautiful young man, richly appareled, keen of glance, with the air of one who had come a long way.

He made a deep bow to the old lord and a lesser one to his daughter.

"From where do you come?" the father asked.

"From beyond the mountains and seas and valleys."

"And for what have you come, man from afar?"

"For your daughter, the Lady Yumiyo. "

"My daughter's hand in marriage can only be for a man who can hear the silk drum. Please don't pretend and tell me that the sound of the silk drum has reached you, across the seas and mountains!"

"No sound of the drum has reached me, sir."

"Then why, stranger, have you traveled all this way?"

"I have heard its silence," the young man said.

The Lady Yumiyo smiled at her father and put the silken drum aside.

She had no longer any need of it.