

Sahwah and Berry Blue

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Sahwah lived by a river. It flowed past his house on its way to the sea. One day he found a slim skiff with only one oar drawn up on the shore. He climbed in and paddled onto the water. The river ran swiftly, far swifter than usual, and he struggled to reach the farther shore. He climbed out and saw a pair of golden boots lying on the grass. They were too big for him, but he slipped his feet inside just the same. They fit him snugly, as if made for him. He took a step and instantly was miles away. He walked, and every step he took was as quick as lightning.

He came to a castle of white stone sitting between two hills. It gleamed in the sunlight. He entered, and in the courtyard was a tower. In the tower was a red bell ringing. Each time it rang Sahwah's heart beat for joy. Beside the bell tower sat Berry Blue. In her hand she held a casket. Sahwah took it up and opened the lid. Out flew a bird. It was golden yellow. It sat on Sahwah's hand and sang. Sahwah had never heard such singing before. It was singing-speaking and speaking-singing, and he understood. What it said was so clear, so wonderful, that Sahwah had to tell Berry Blue all that it meant. Sahwah struggled to put the song-speech into thoughts and words. As he was about to speak the bird sank down and died.

Sahwah and Berry Blue wept bitterly. They dug a hole beneath the bell tower and laid the bird within. The red bell stopped ringing and Berry Blue fled the castle. Sahwah followed her. He searched up and down the shore, but she was gone. He tried to climb into the skiff but his golden boots would not leave the ground. He took them off, stepped into the skiff and paddled for the far shore. The river flowed fiercely and swept him downstream. He hit a rock and remembered nothing.

He awoke in his room. He rose and went to find his sister. She met him in the hallway, tears streaming from her eyes.

"What have you done? What have you done!" she cried, and fell into his arms.

Sahwah searched the riverbank. The skiff was nowhere to be found. He gathered food and a hat and left his family. He roamed up and down the river for a hundred miles. The skiff still was nowhere to be found. He asked, he pleaded: no one had seen the skiff.

At last he came to a town. It was walled and he lived there. Sahwah became a carpenter, making furniture. He was skilled and soon had more than enough work and had to hire others. At first he longed for the speaking-singing. Then he forgot the skiff. Then he forgot the river.

Years passed and Sahwah became thirsty. At first he thought it was because of the summer heat. In winter he suffered more. He became restless and his work fell away. He wandered beyond the walls and came to a riverbed. It was dry. Only the trees growing on the banks showed that water still flowed underneath. He followed and it led to a desert. Strangely, his thirst was less and he lived quietly. Snakes came and lay in the shade of his shack. They slithered inside and sat in his shadow. Sahwah learned to live with them.

One day a snake opened its mouth and spoke. Out came gold, then jewels. Sahwah took them up and left. He found the river flowing and he followed it. He came to his childhood home—but it was on the further shore. There was no need of a skiff. The golden boots lay glinting on the green grass. He stepped in and walked, and each stride was a thousand miles.

He saw the castle gleaming white. Berry Blue was waiting for him, patiently. They dug up the casket and the bird was dead. Sahwah speaking-sang. He sang and spoke. The bird flew up and sat on his head. Then the red bell in the tower rang. It rang and it rang, and with each stroke Sahwah's heart beat for joy as he and Berry Blue became one.