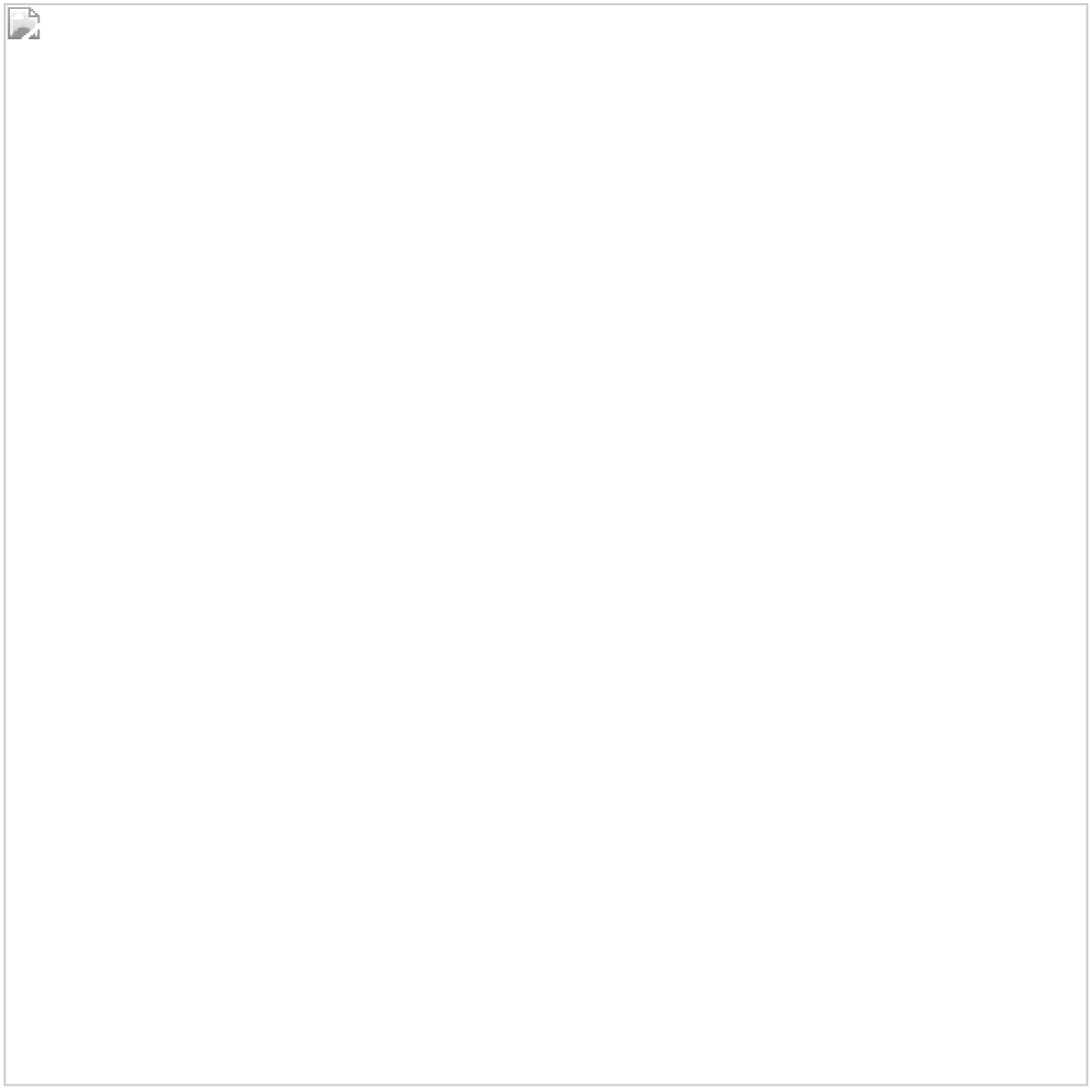
COLORING THE CLASSICS

The Tongue-Cut Sparrow

A Tale from Japan



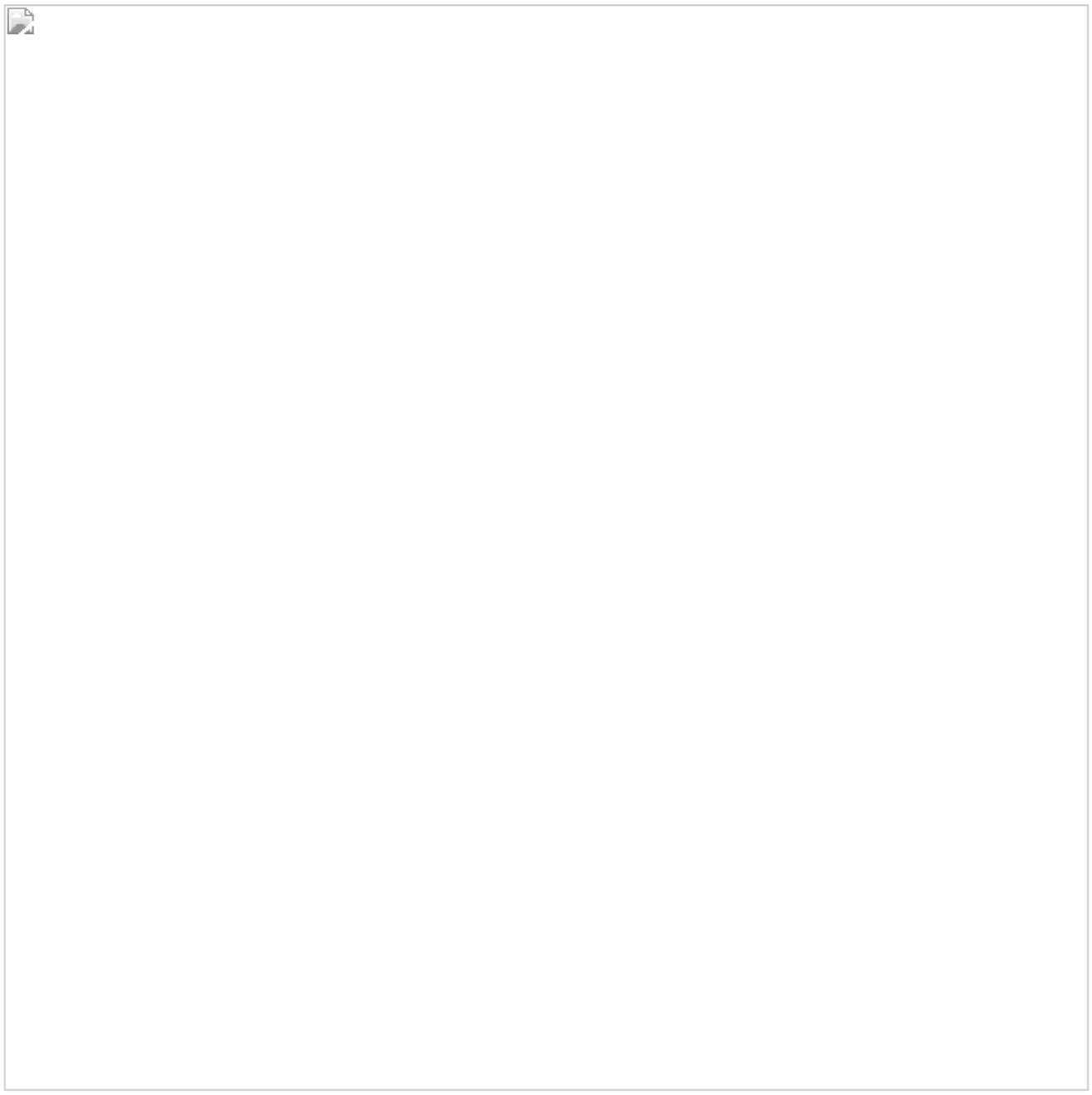
Long, long ago in Japan there lived an old man and his wife. The old man was good and kind-hearted and hard-working. His wife was a cross-patch, who grumbled about something from morning to night.

TALK ABOUT IT

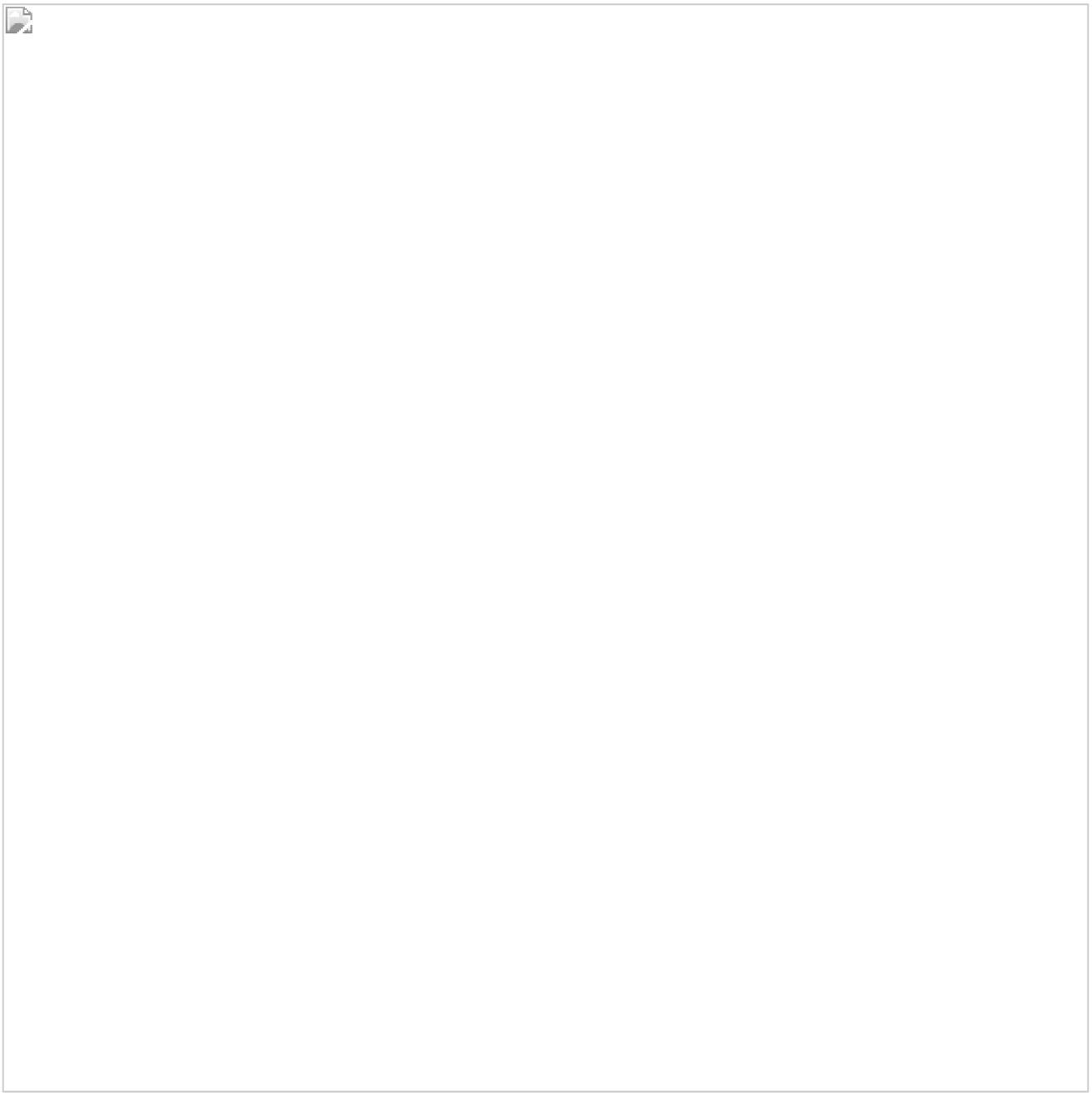
The old man had a pet. Do you have a pet, or one you would like to have?

This book belongs to _____

The Tongue-Cut Sparrow · another picture



The Pet Sparrow

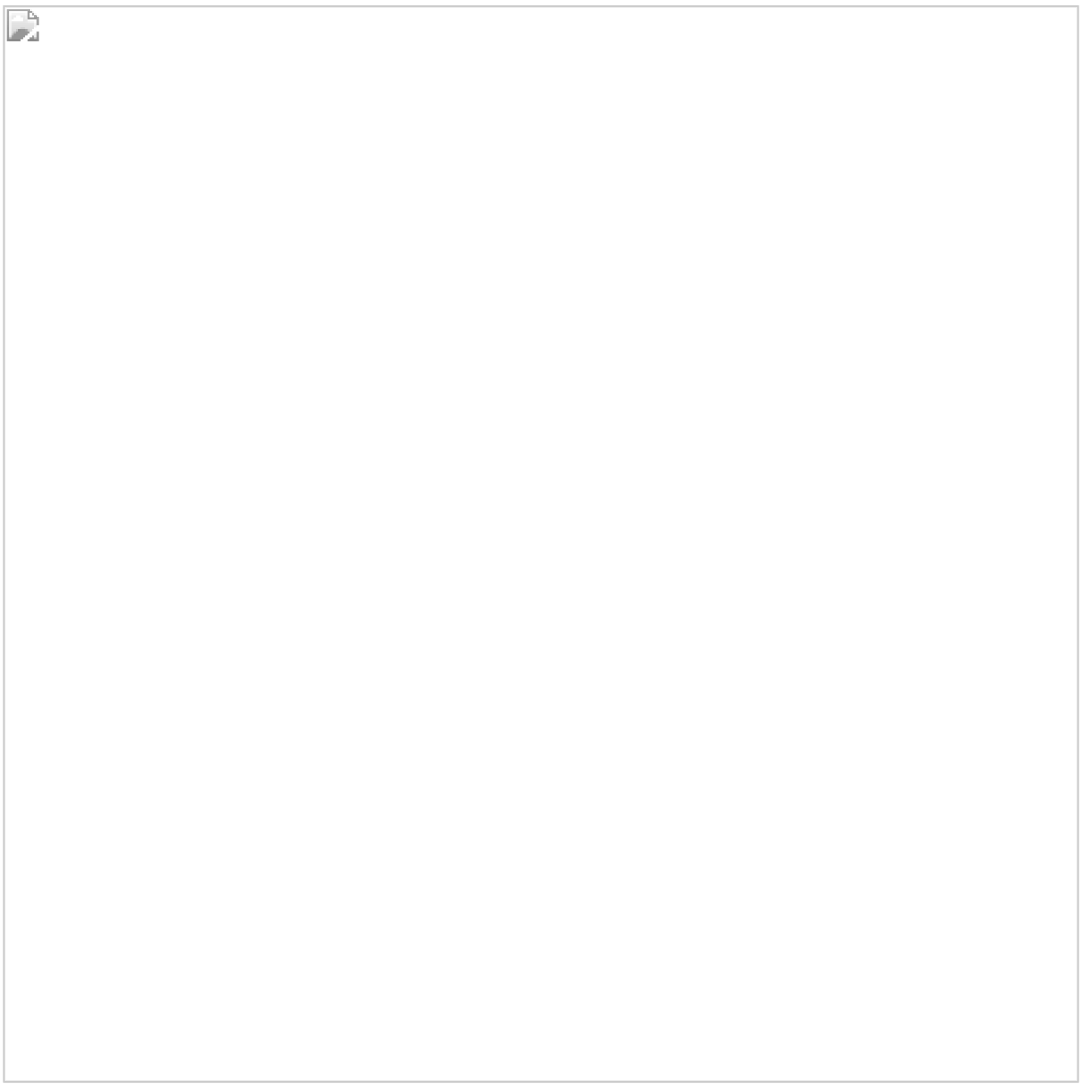


The old man had no child, so he kept a tame sparrow. He loved the little bird just as much as if she had been his child.

When he came home from work, he petted her and talked to her and taught her little tricks, which she learned very quickly. He let her fly about the room, and at supper he always saved some tit-bits to feed her.

TALK ABOUT IT

What would you teach a pet to do?

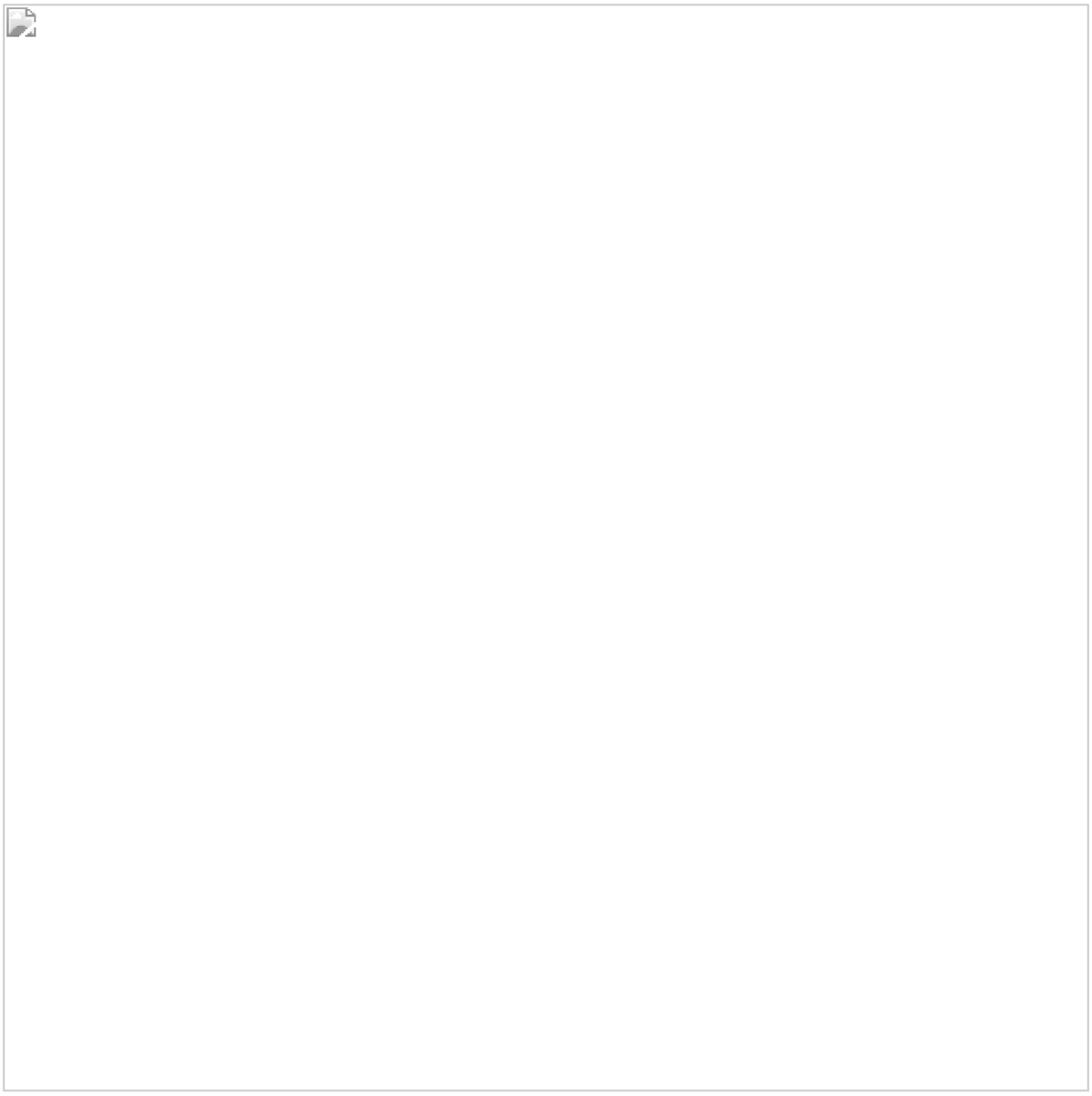


Think about it

1. How did the old man treat his sparrow?

- ○ He ignored her
- ○ He loved her as if she were his child
- ○ He kept her shut in the cage all day

The Empty Bowl



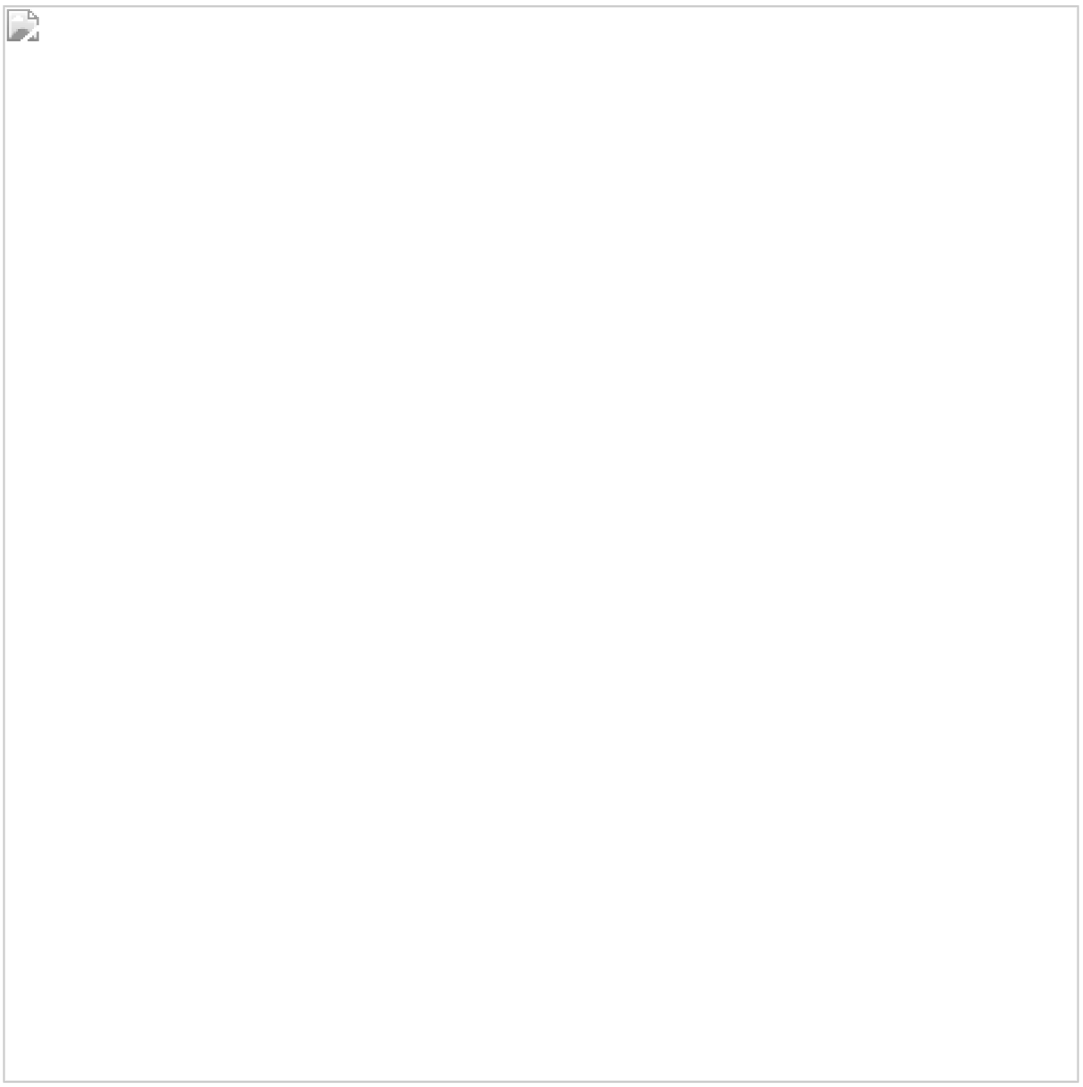
One day the old man went to chop wood, and the old woman stayed home to wash clothes. The day before, she had made some starch. Now the bowl was quite empty.

Down flew the pet sparrow. She bowed her little head, the way her master had taught her, and said, “It is I who have taken the starch.”

She explained that she thought it was food put out for her. “If I have made a mistake I beg you to forgive me!” she said. “Tweet, tweet, tweet!”

TALK ABOUT IT

The sparrow told the truth right away. Is it easy or hard to tell the truth when you have made a mistake?

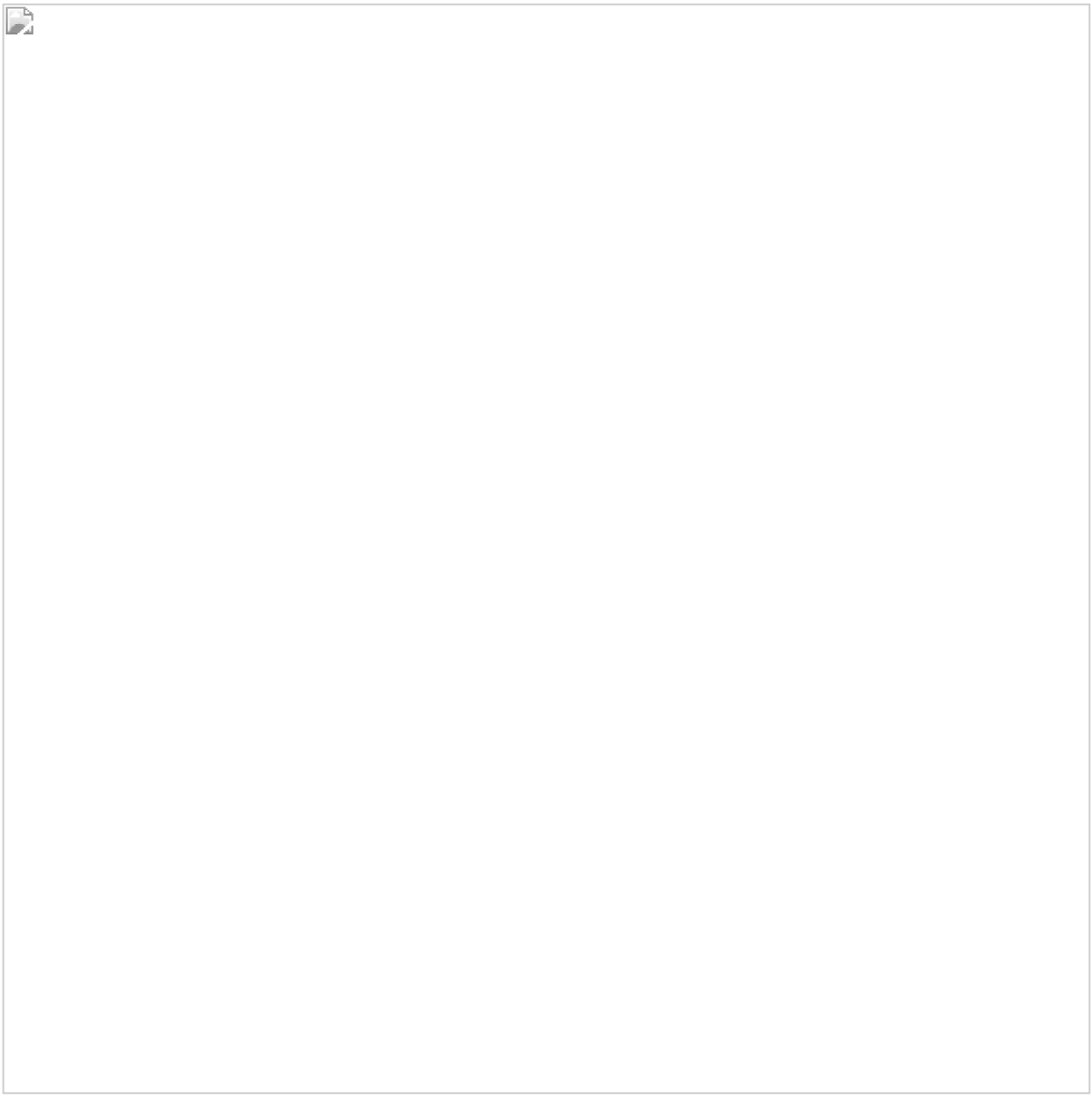


Think about it

1. What did the sparrow do when the bowl was empty?

- ○ She hid
- ○ She said it was I who took the starch
- ○ She flew away

The Old Woman's Anger



The old woman had never loved the sparrow. She was glad to have a reason to complain, and she scolded the bird.

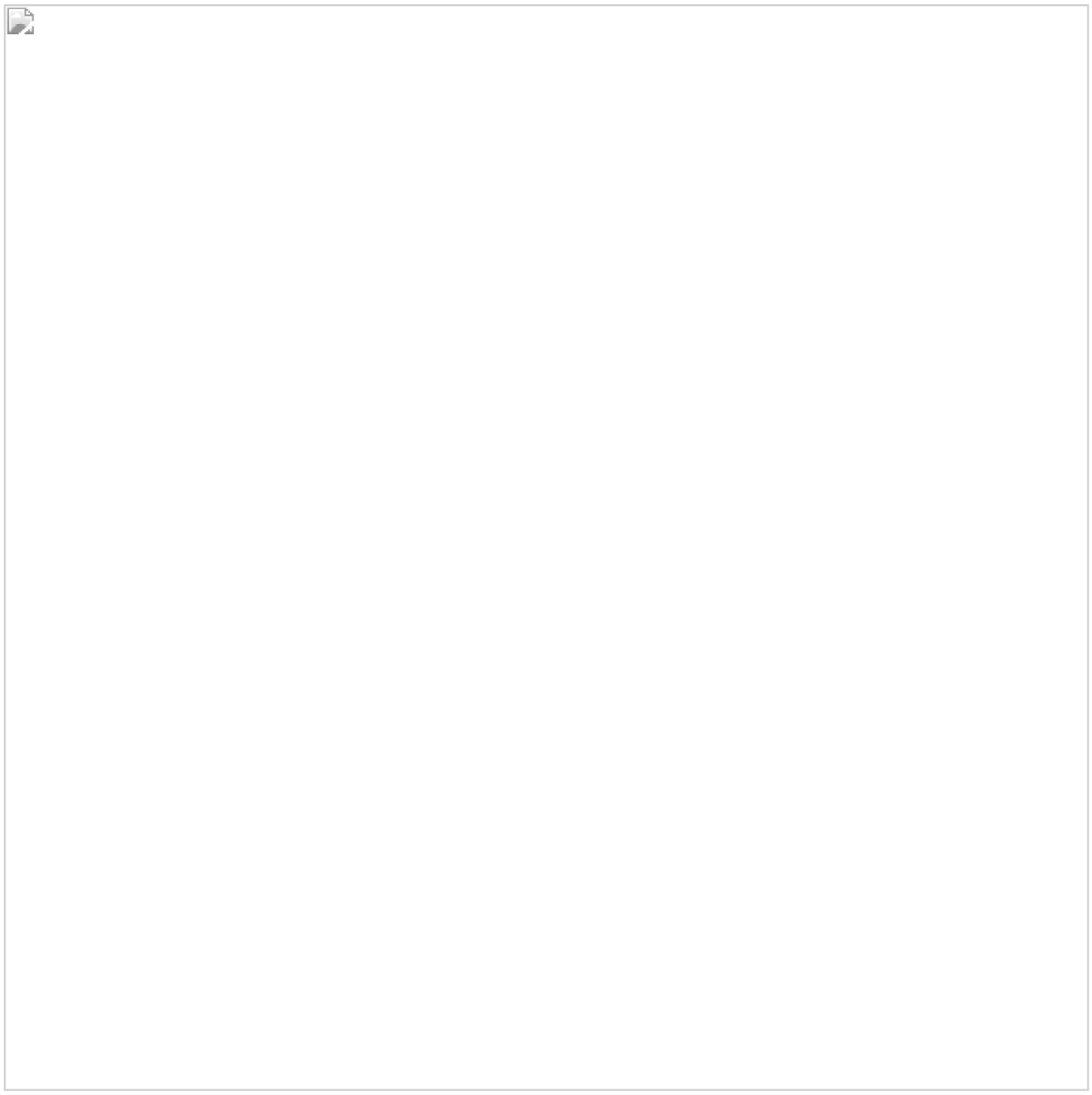
The sparrow spread her wings and bowed to show how sorry she was. But in a fit of rage the old woman took her scissors and cut off the little bird's tongue.

"Now you may see what it is like to go without it!" she said. Then she drove the sparrow away.

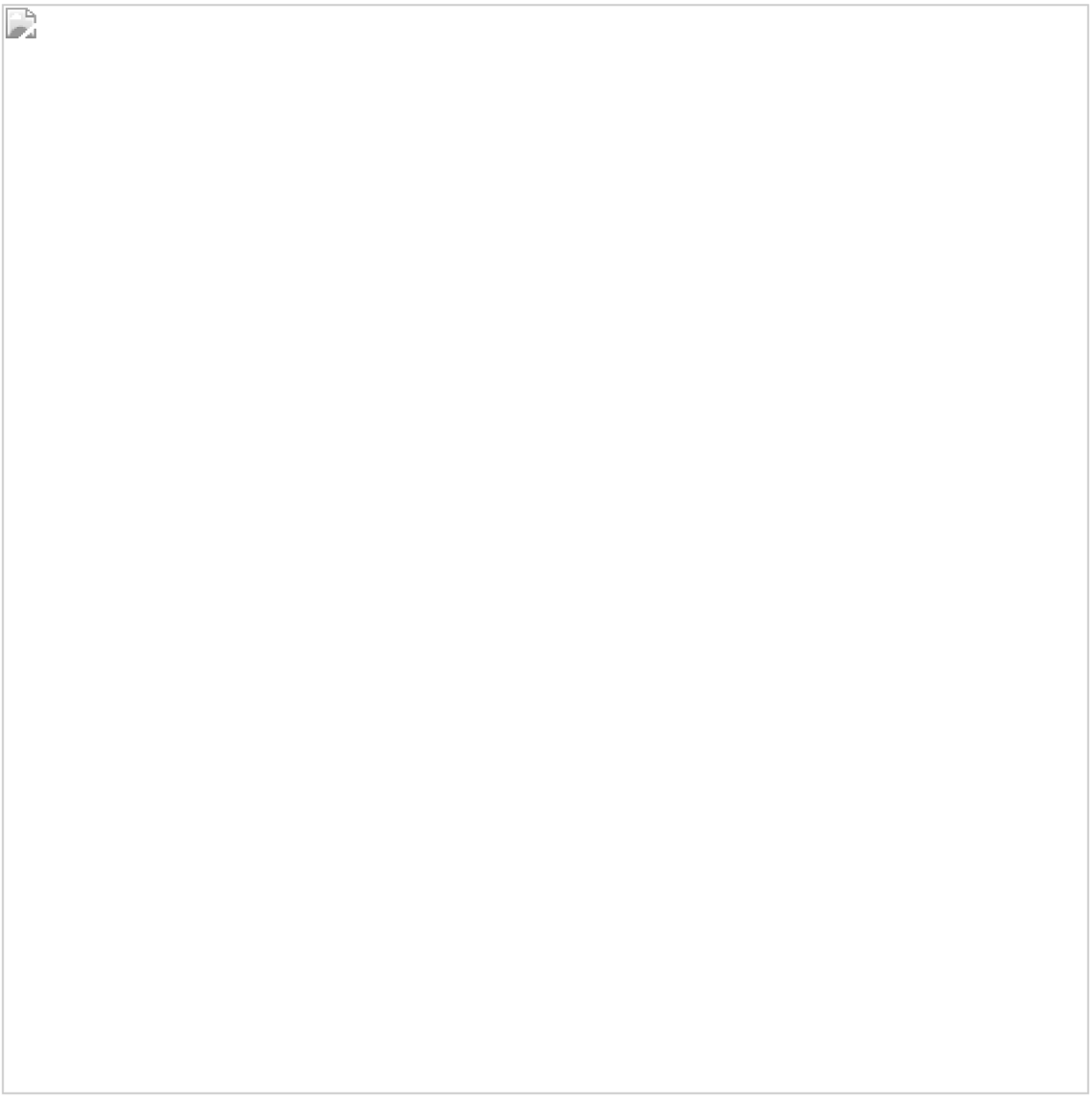
TALK ABOUT IT

The sparrow said she was sorry. What do you think the old woman could have done instead?

The Old Woman's Anger · another picture



Where Is Suzume San?



In the evening the old man came home, looking forward to seeing his pet come flying to meet him. But there was no sparrow to be seen.

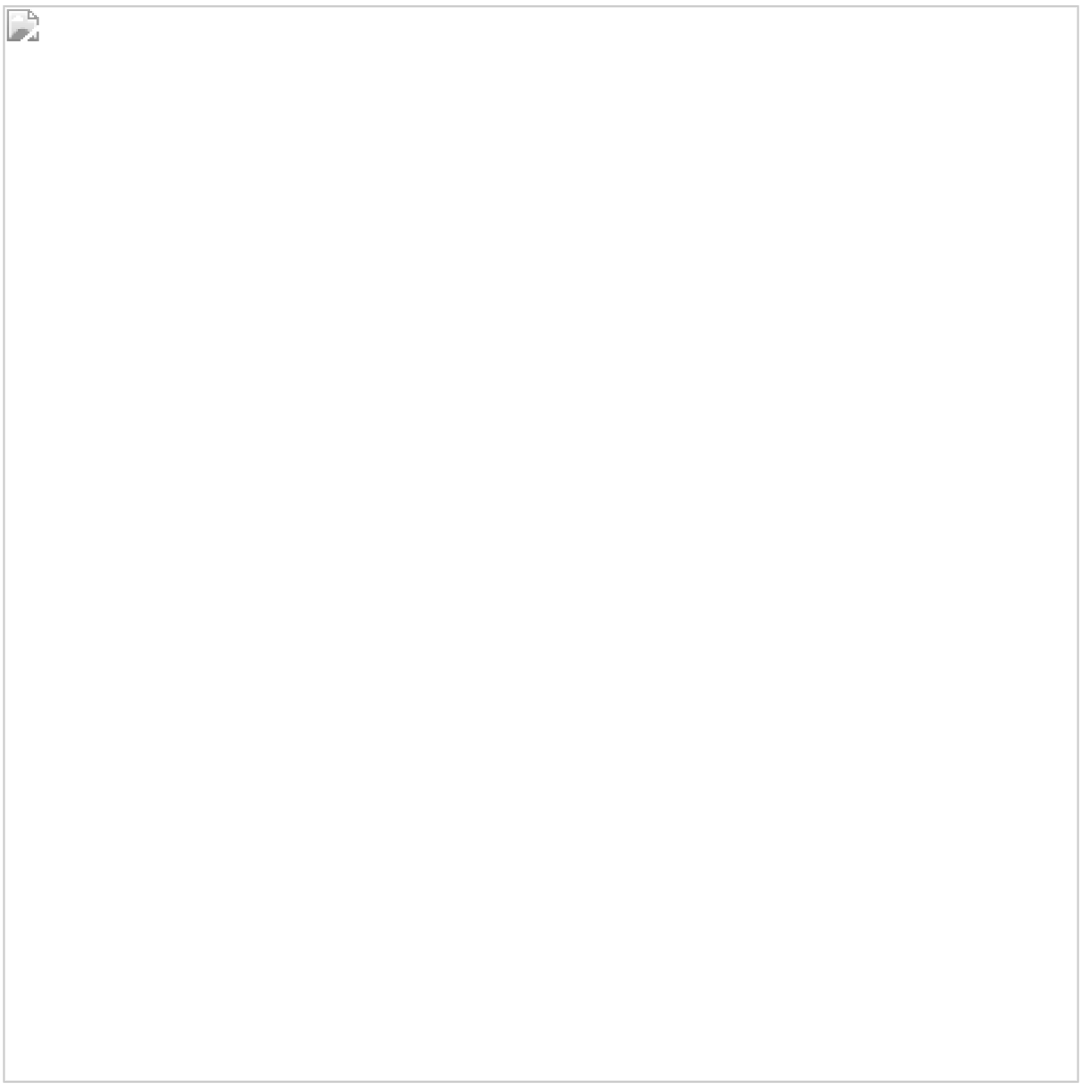
“Where is Suzume San (Miss Sparrow) today?” he asked. The old woman pretended not to know. But when he asked again and again, she told him everything, and showed him the tongue.

“How could you be so cruel?” was all the old man could say. He was too kind-hearted to punish his wife, but he was terribly distressed. That night, he decided he would go and look for the sparrow the next morning.

TALK ABOUT IT

The old man did not shout. He made a plan to help. What would you do if a friend were hurt?

Where Is Suzume San? · another picture

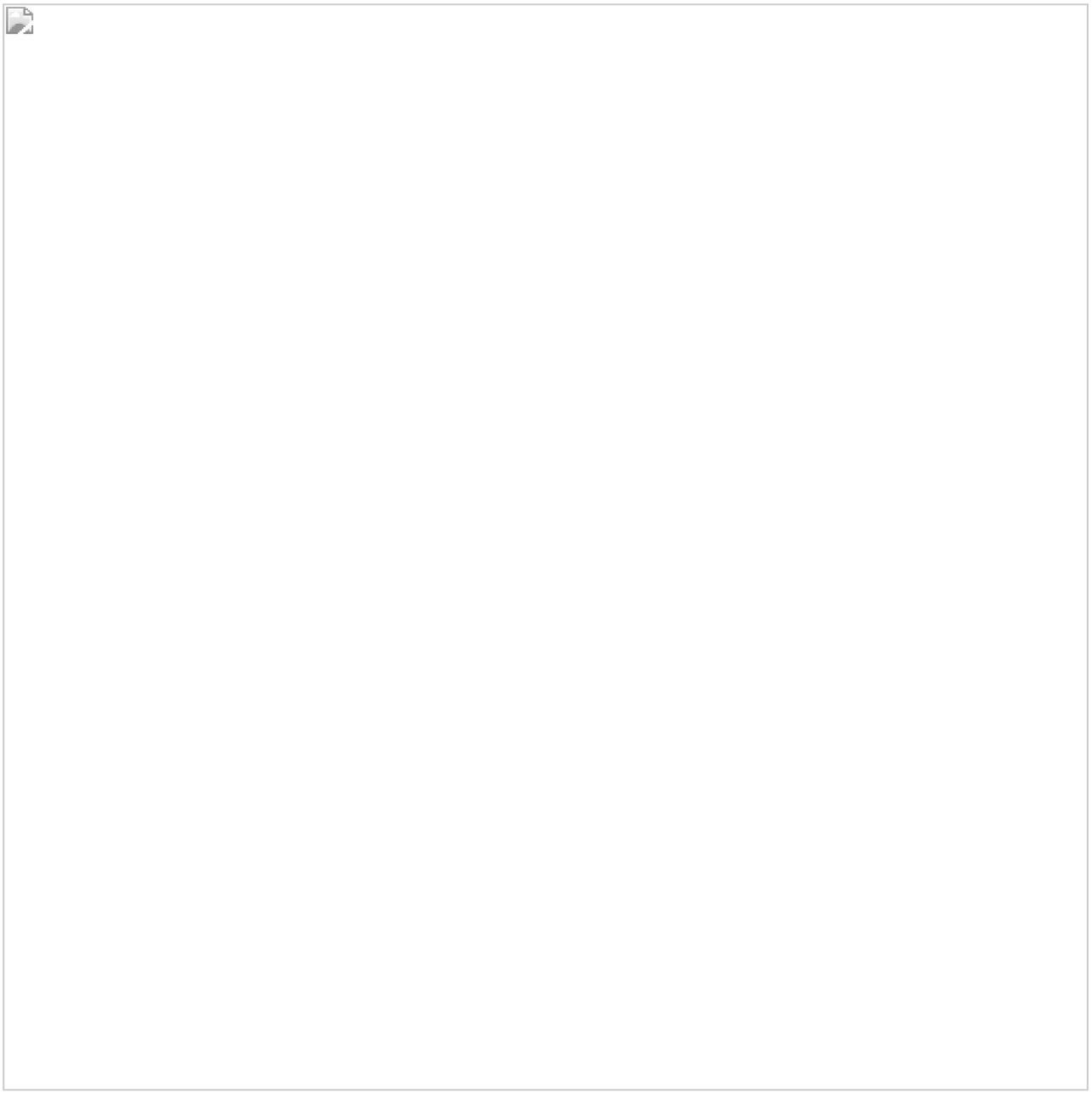


Think about it

1. What did Suzume San mean?

- ○ Miss Sparrow
- ○ Mister Wood
- ○ Little Rice

Over the Hills

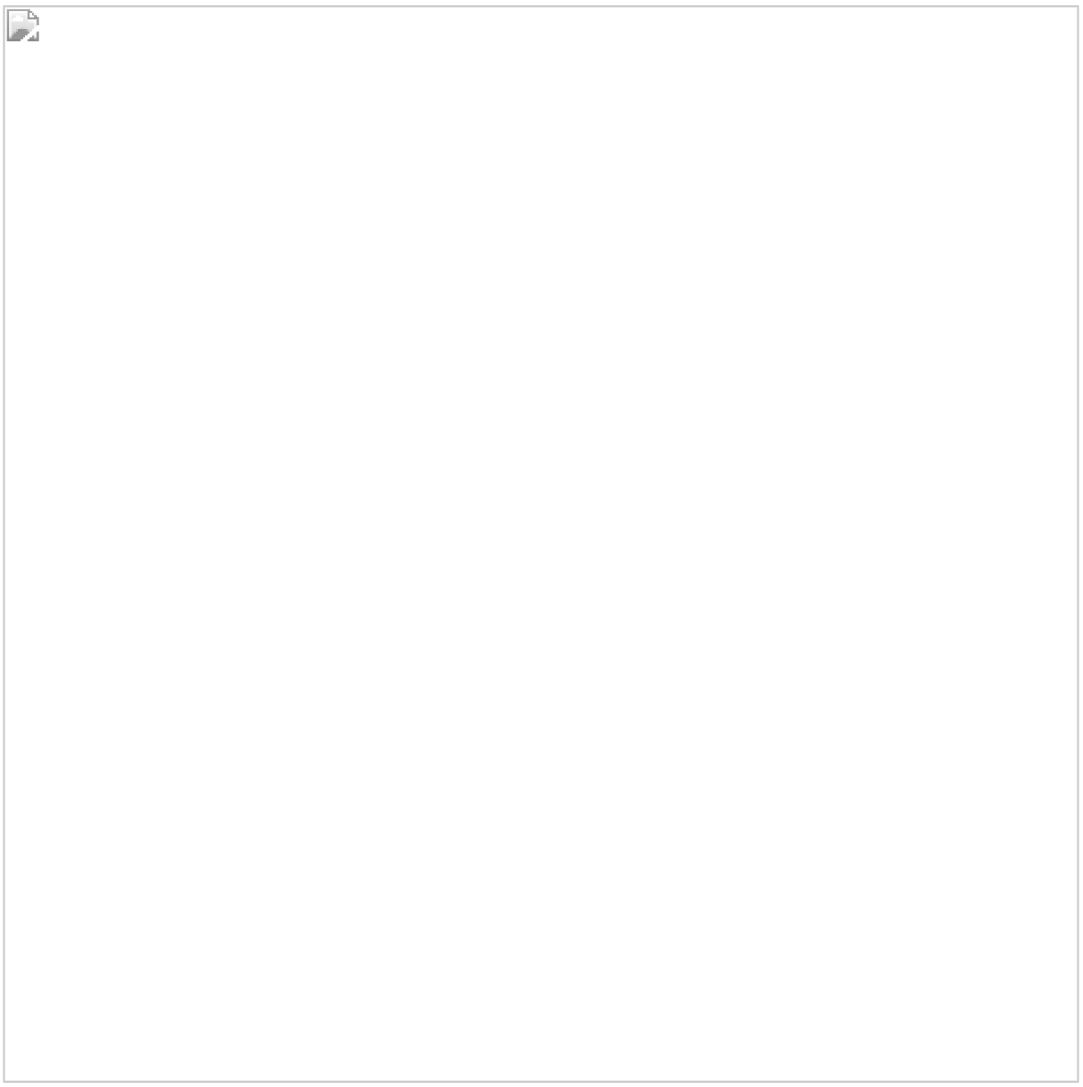


The next morning the old man rose early and set off over the hills and through the woods. At every clump of bamboo he stopped and cried, “Where, oh where does my tongue-cut sparrow stay?”

He did not stop to rest, even at noon. It was far on in the afternoon when he came near a large bamboo wood. And there, at the edge of the wood, he saw his own dear sparrow waiting to welcome him.

TALK ABOUT IT

He walked all day without resting. What is something you would walk a long way for?



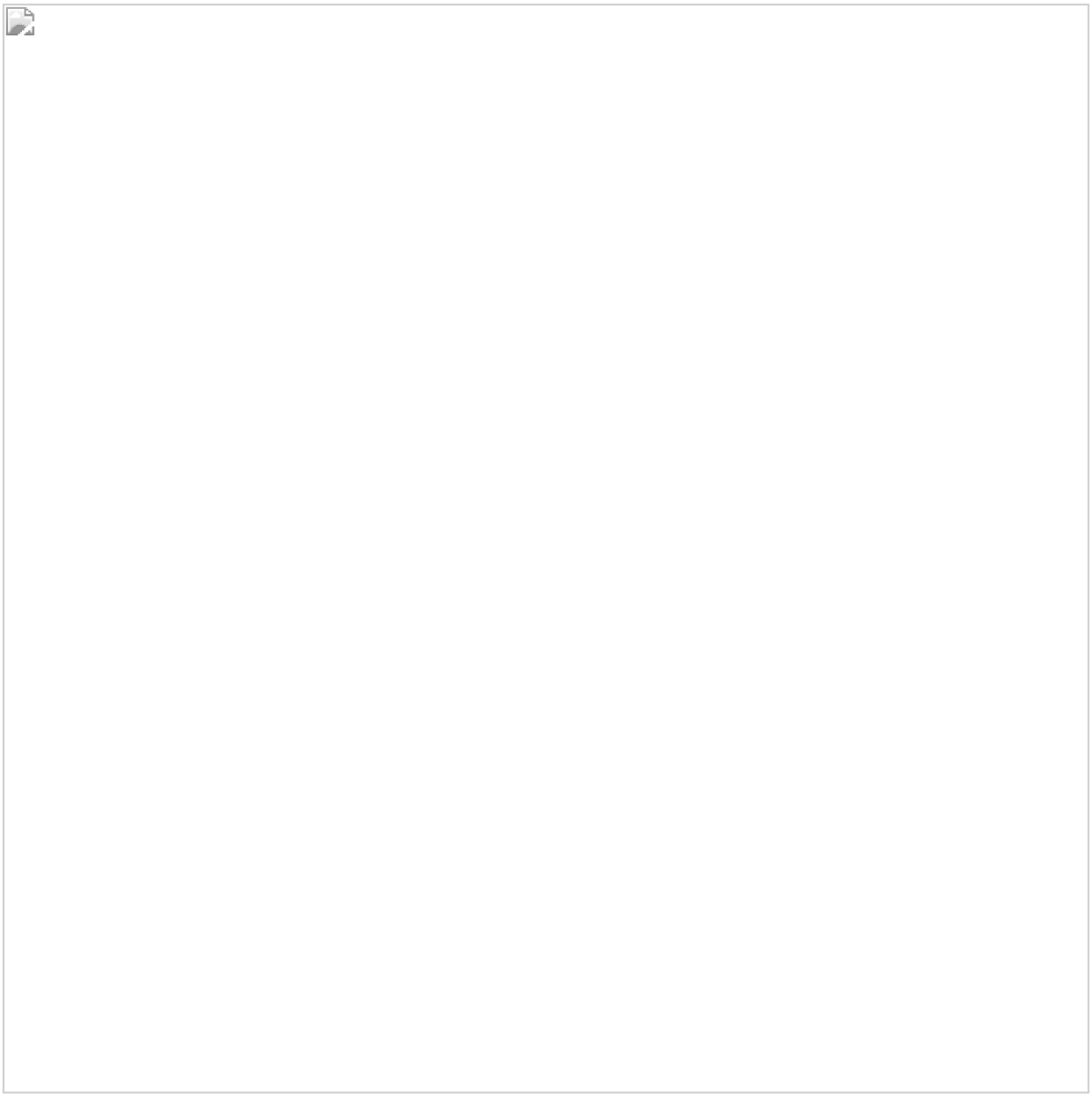
Think about it

1. Where did the old man find the sparrow?

- ○ In his own cage
- ○ At the edge of a bamboo wood
- ○ By a river

2. What would you have said to the sparrow?

The Sparrow Is Well



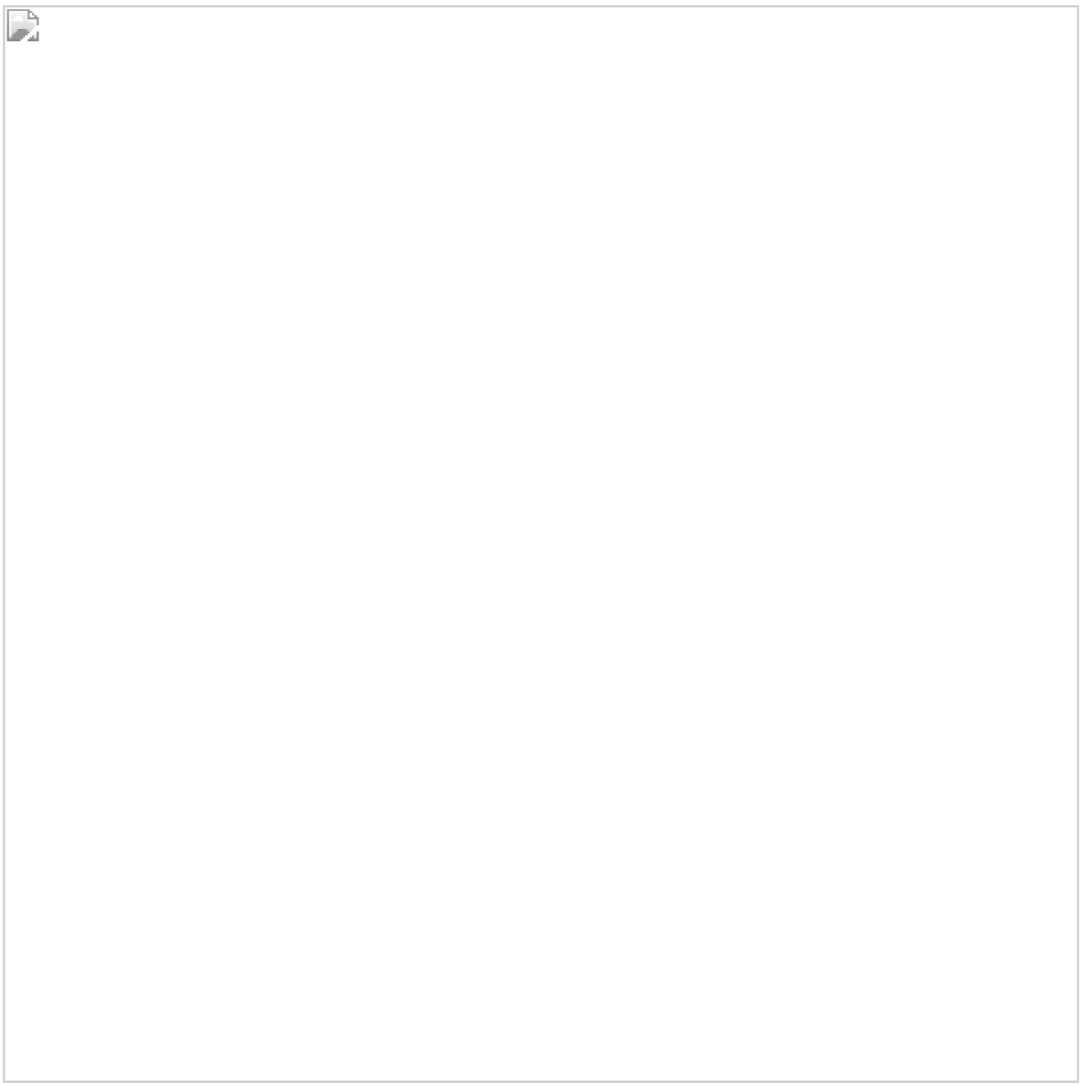
The sparrow bowed her little head and did her tricks, to show how glad she was to see him. And she could talk, just as before!

The old man told her how sorry he was. The sparrow opened her beak and showed him that a new tongue had grown in place of the old one. She begged him not to think any more about the past.

Then the old man knew that his sparrow was a fairy, and no common bird.

TALK ABOUT IT

The old man came to say he was sorry, even though it was not him who did it. Why do you think he did?

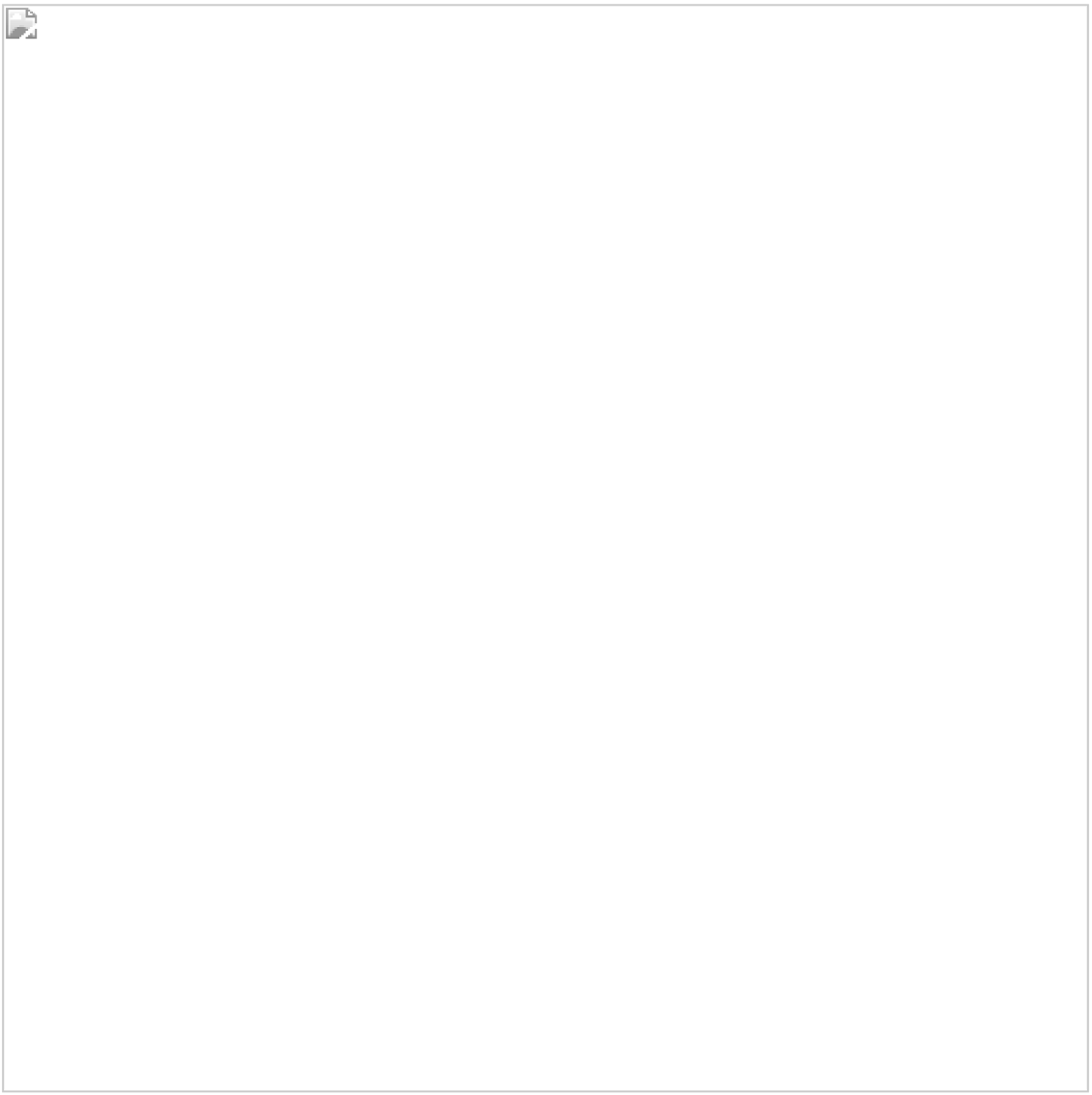


Think about it

1. What did the sparrow show the old man?

- ○ A new tongue
- ○ A silver coin
- ○ A secret door

The House in the Bamboo



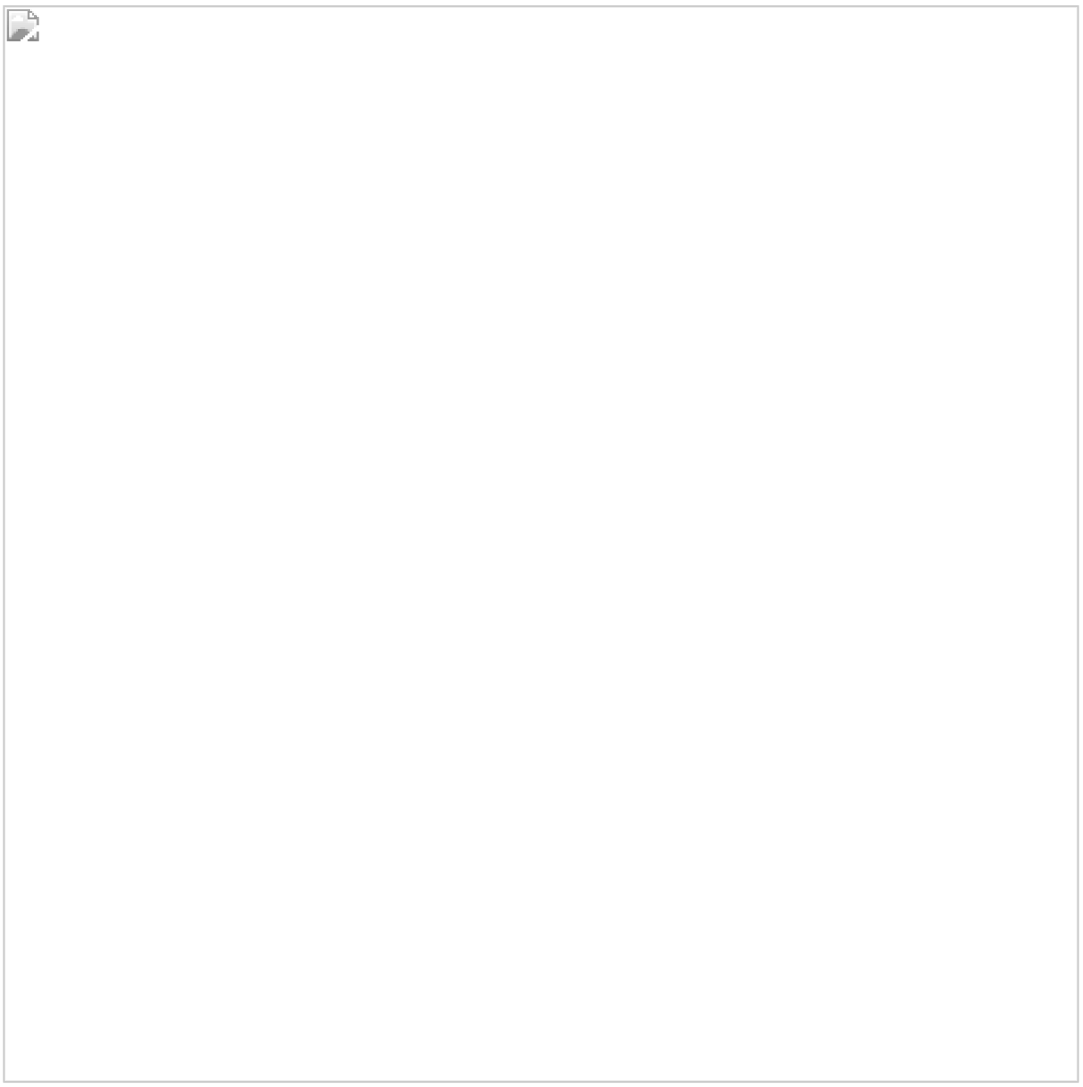
The sparrow led him to a beautiful house in the heart of the bamboo grove. It was built of the whitest wood. The cushions she brought out for him were made of the finest silk.

She led him to the place of honor and thanked him with many polite bows for his kindness over many years. Then the Lady Sparrow, as the tale now calls her, introduced her family.

Her daughters brought in a feast of delicious foods. In the middle of dinner, some of them performed a wonderful dance, called the “suzume-odori,” or the Sparrow’s dance.

TALK ABOUT IT

Would you like a Sparrow's dance for dinner? What dance would you do?

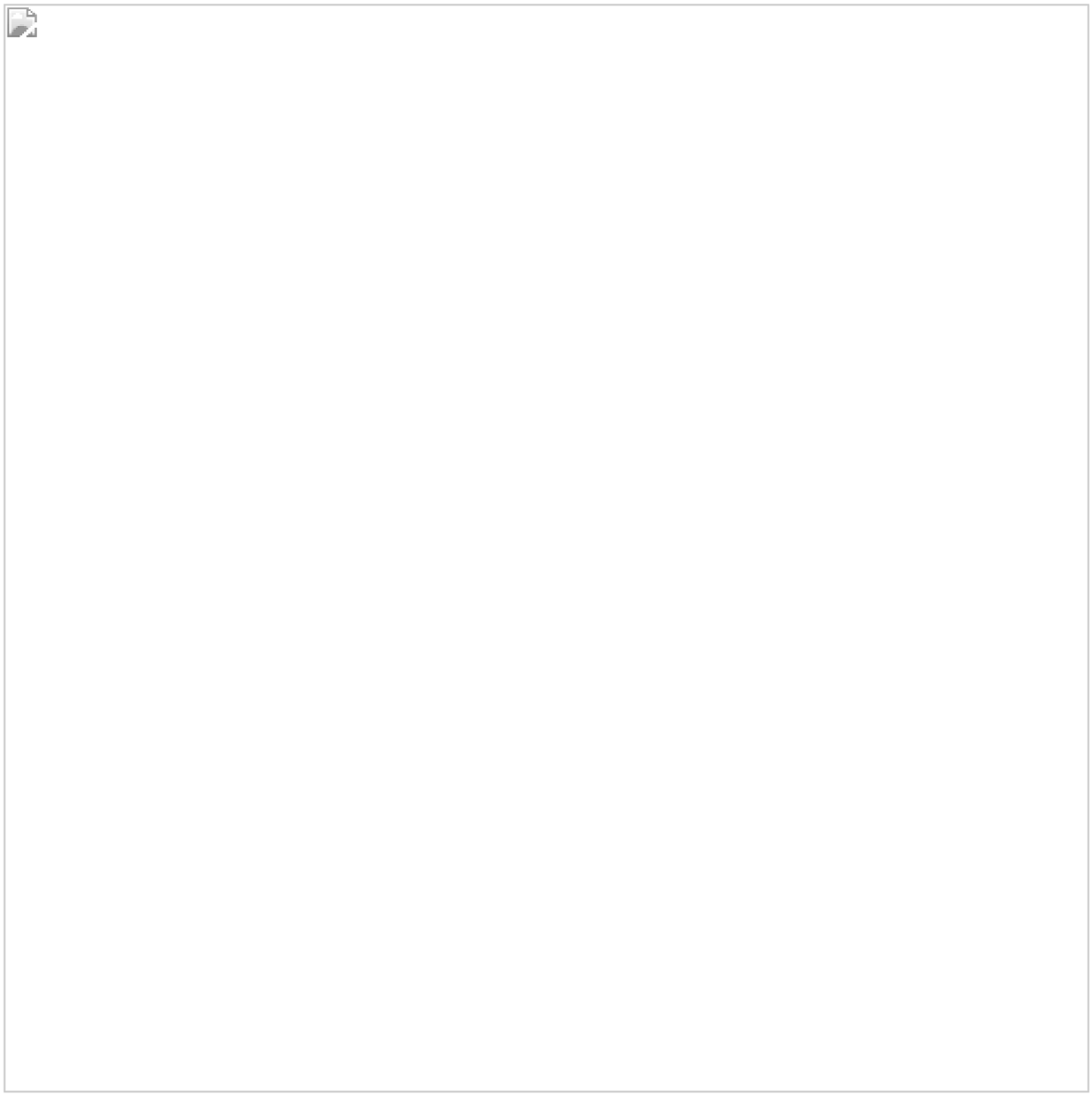


Think about it

1. What was the sparrows' dance called?

- ○ The tokonoma
- ○ The suzume-odori
- ○ The tweet-tweet

Two Boxes



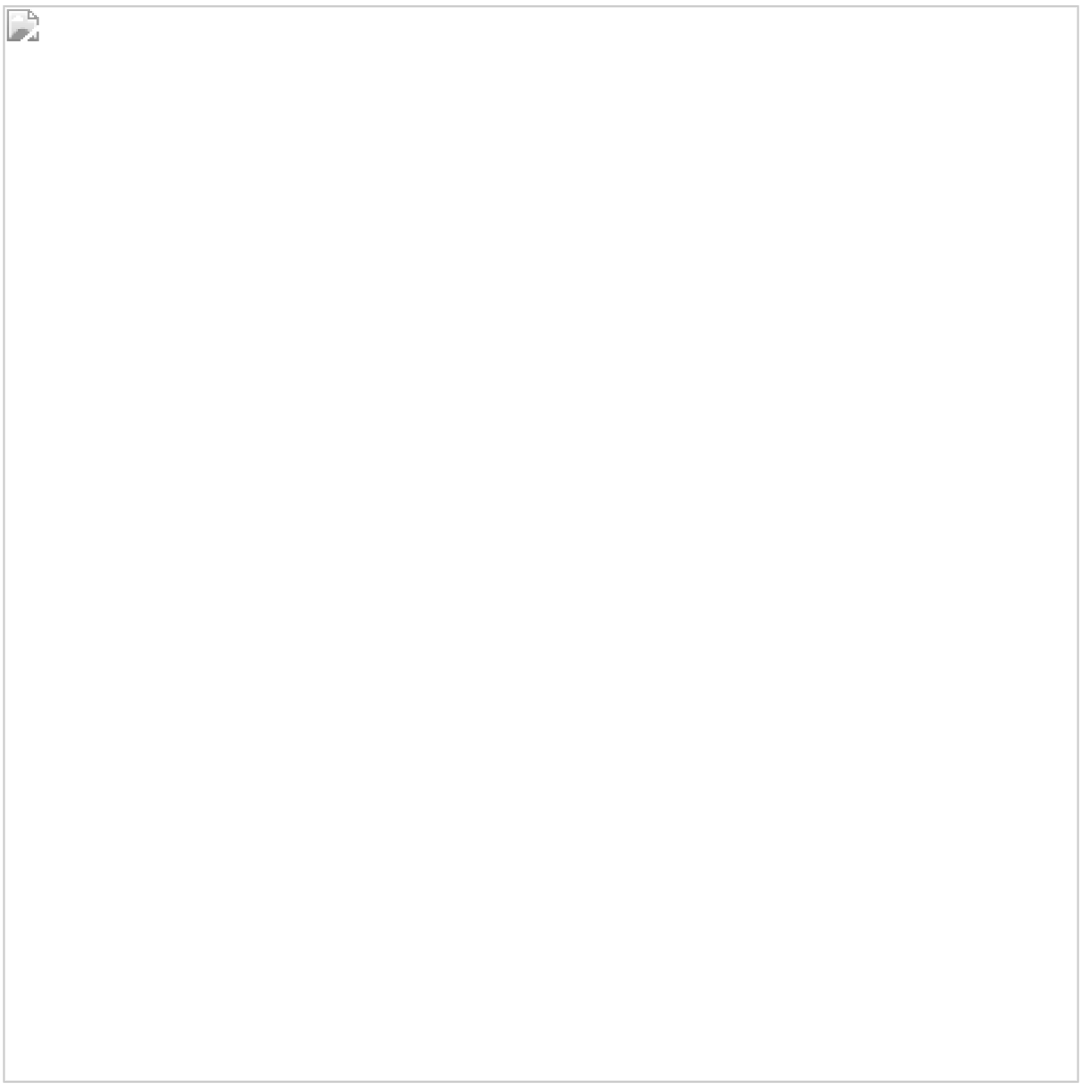
When night came, the old man said he must go home to his wife and to his work. The Lady Sparrow begged him to stay several days. But he said he could not, though he would come to see her whenever he had time.

Then the Lady Sparrow had two boxes brought in, one large and one small. She asked him to choose whichever he liked as a present.

“I am now too old and feeble to carry the big and heavy box,” said the old man. So he chose the small one. The sparrows helped him put it on his back and waved him off.

TALK ABOUT IT

Which box would you have picked? Why?

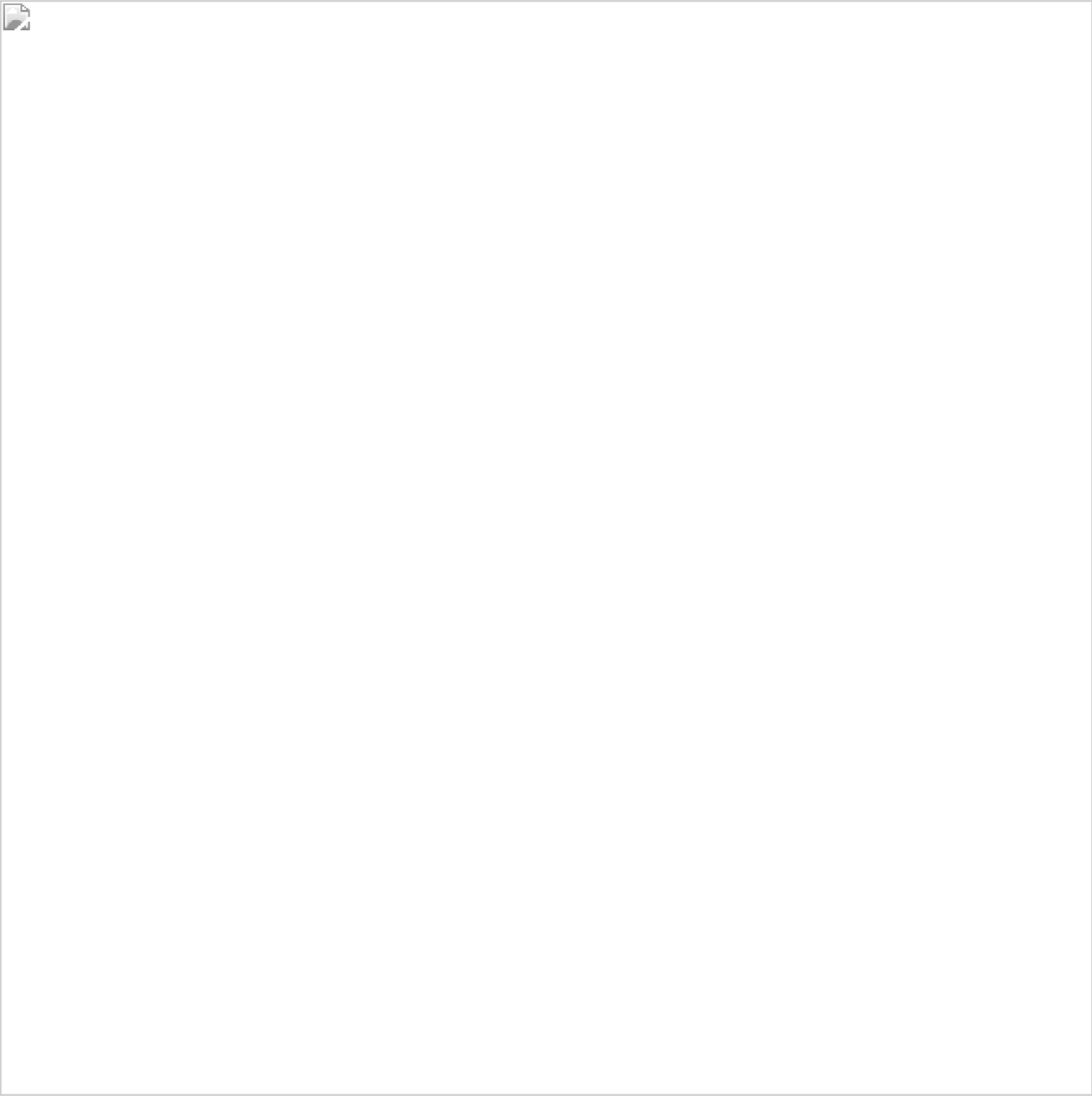


Think about it

1. Which box did the old man choose?

- ○ The big one
- ○ Both of them
- ○ The small one

What Was in the Box



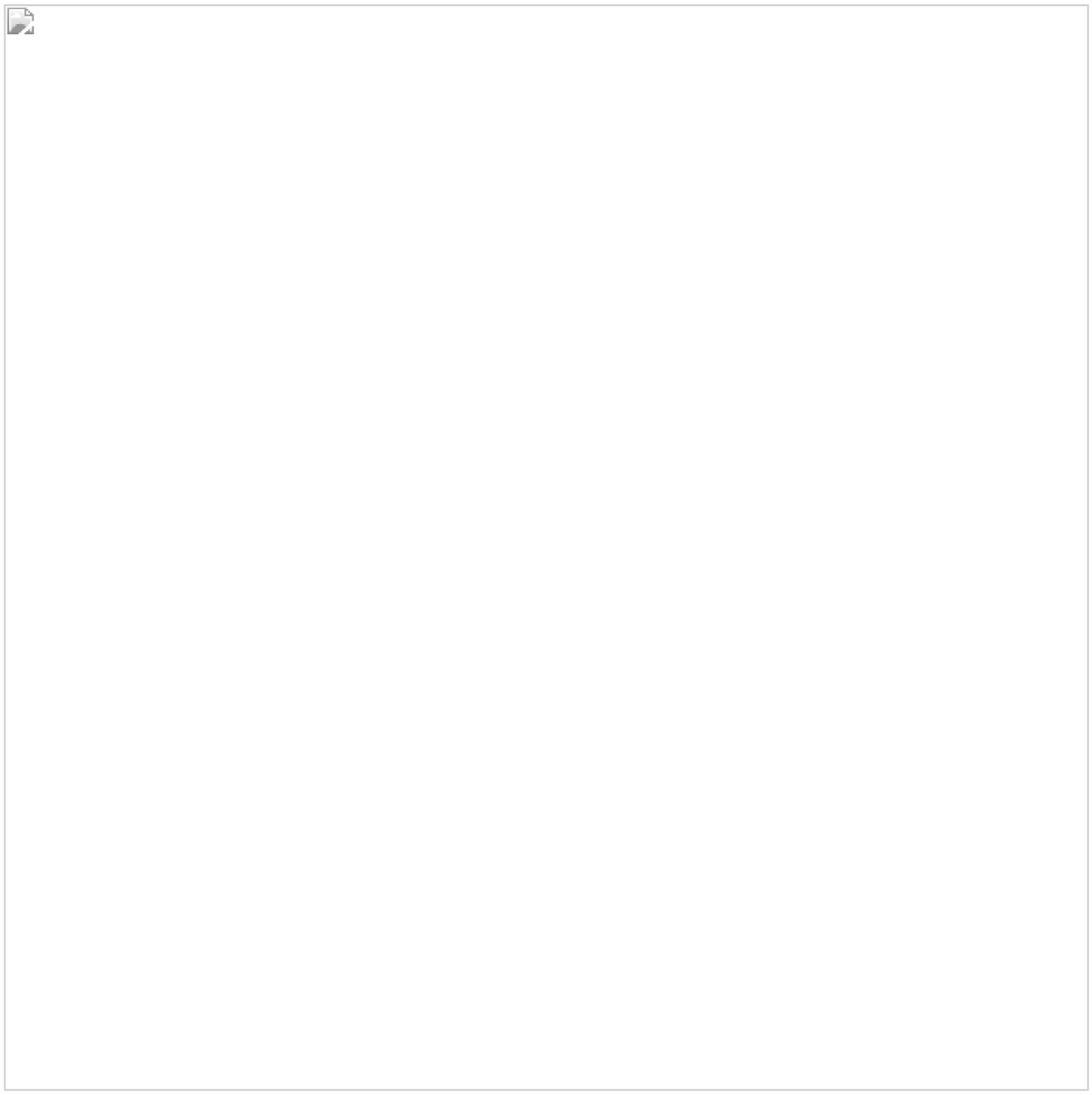
When the old man reached home, his wife was crosser than usual. “Where have you been all this time?” she asked in a big voice.

He told her everything. Then they opened the box together. It was filled to the brim with gold and silver coins and many other precious things.

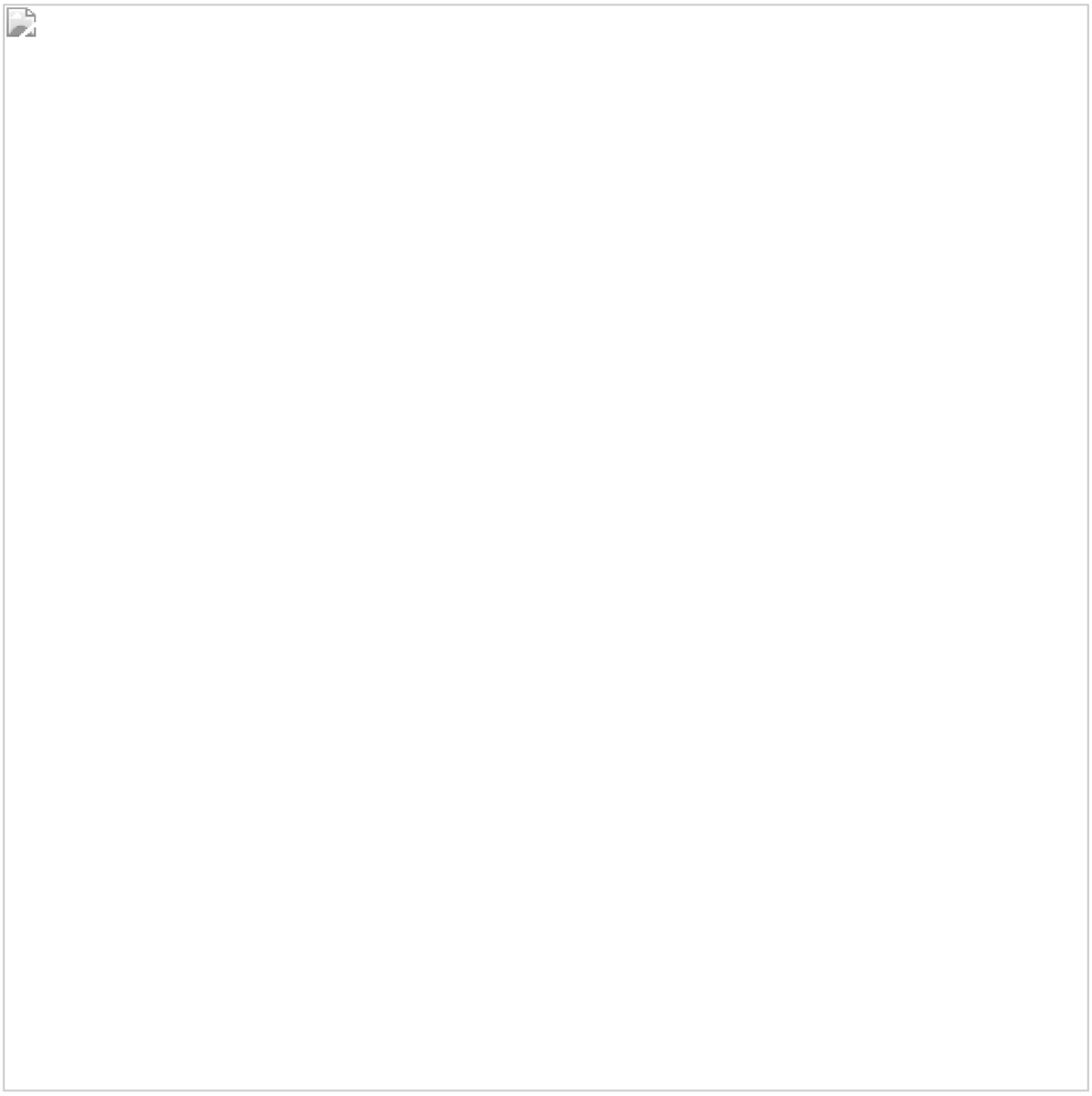
“Thanks to my good little sparrow!” the old man said, over and over.

TALK ABOUT IT

What would you do with a box of treasure?



The Greedy Wish



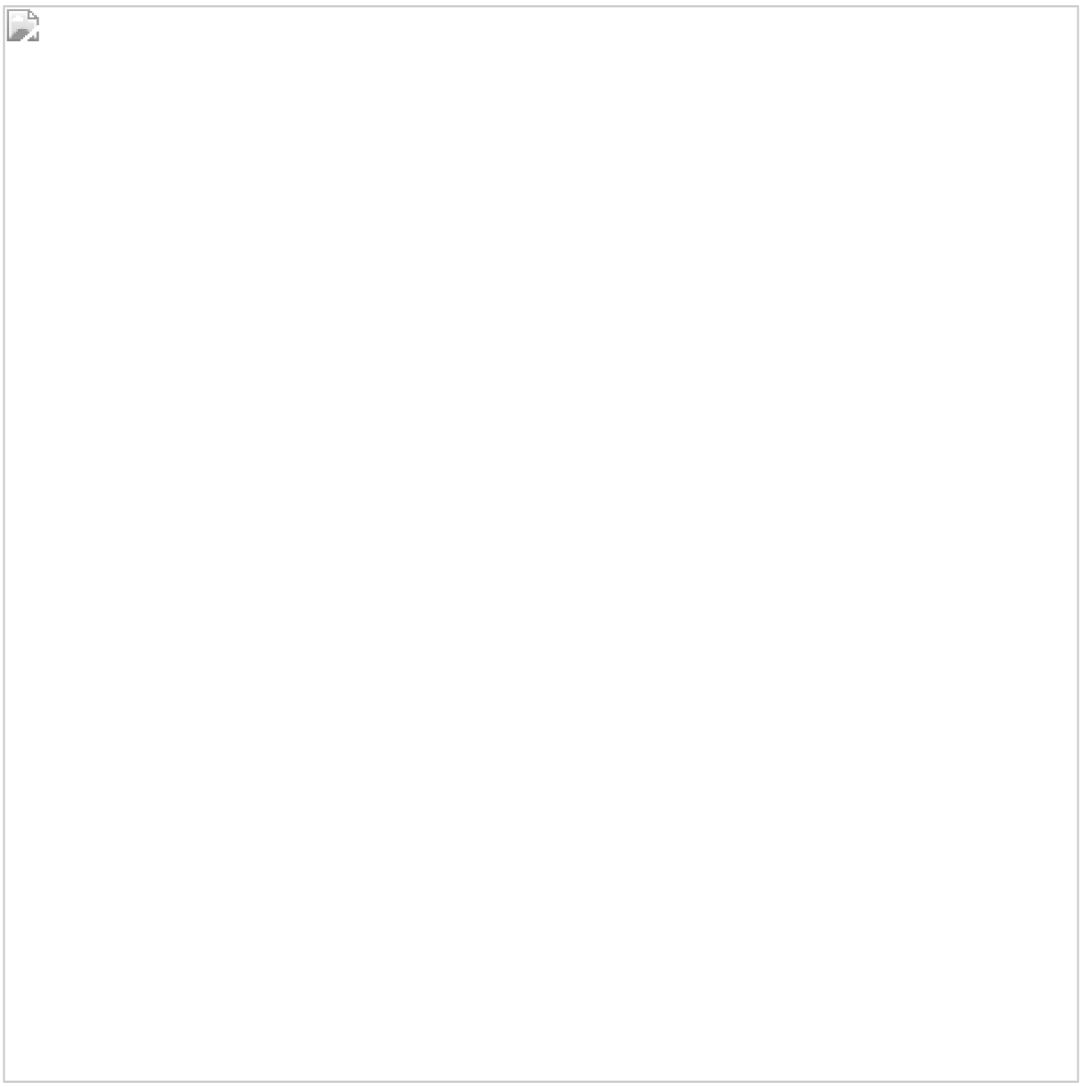
The old woman was glad for a moment. Then she was angry that he had not brought the big box too. “Why did you not bring the large box?” she cried.

Early the next morning she made the old man tell her the way to the sparrow’s house. He tried to stop her, but she would not listen.

She found the bamboo grove and cried out, “Where is the tongue-cut sparrow’s house?” At the door she asked the Lady Sparrow for the big box, and for nothing else. The Lady Sparrow was a polite bird. She had the servants bring it out.

TALK ABOUT IT

The old woman had a box of treasure and still wanted more. What do you think makes someone want more and more?



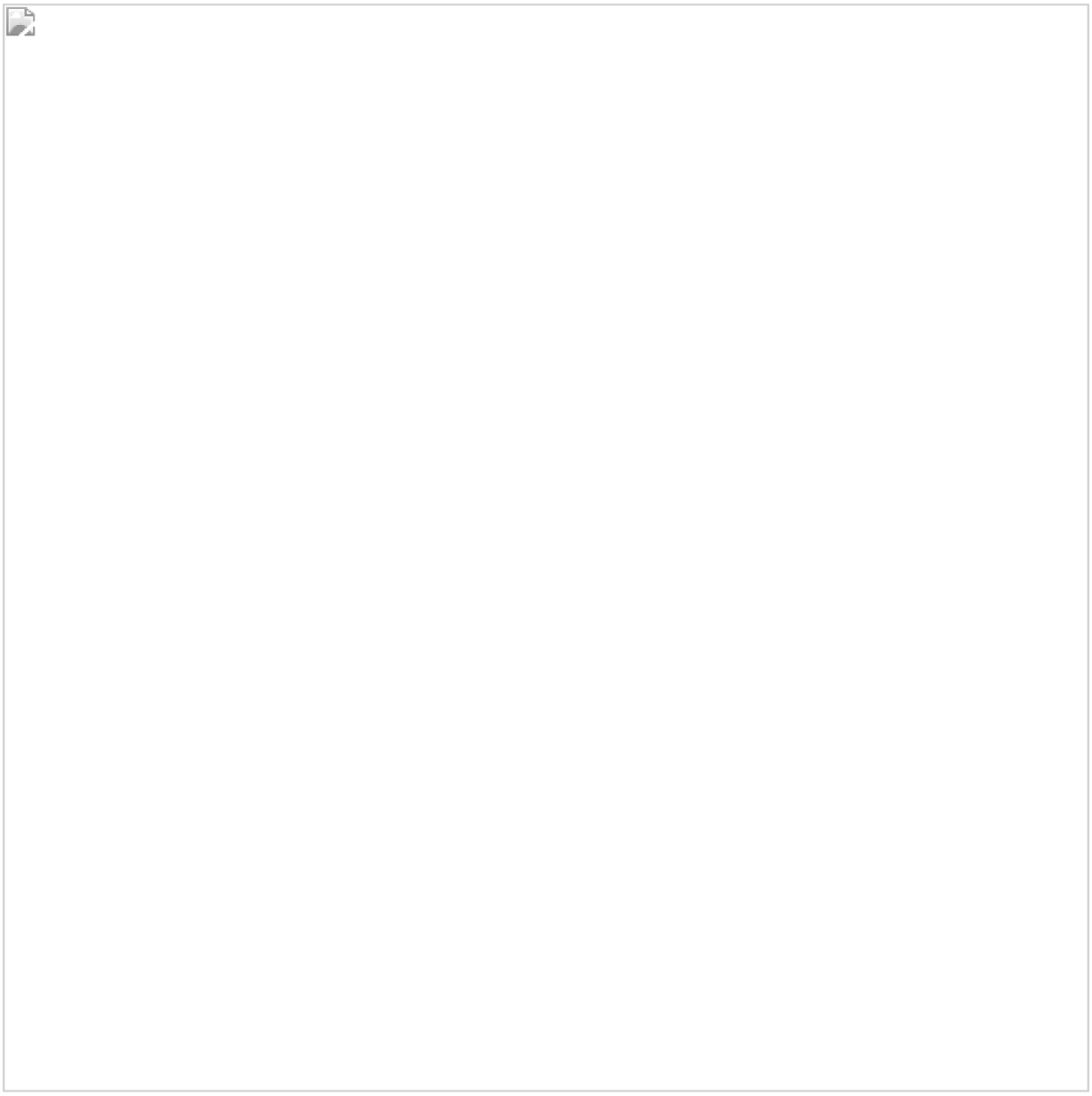
Think about it

1. What did the old woman ask the Lady Sparrow for?

- ○ A new tongue
- ○ The big box
- ○ A feast

2. Why do you think the Lady Sparrow gave her the box?

The Big Box



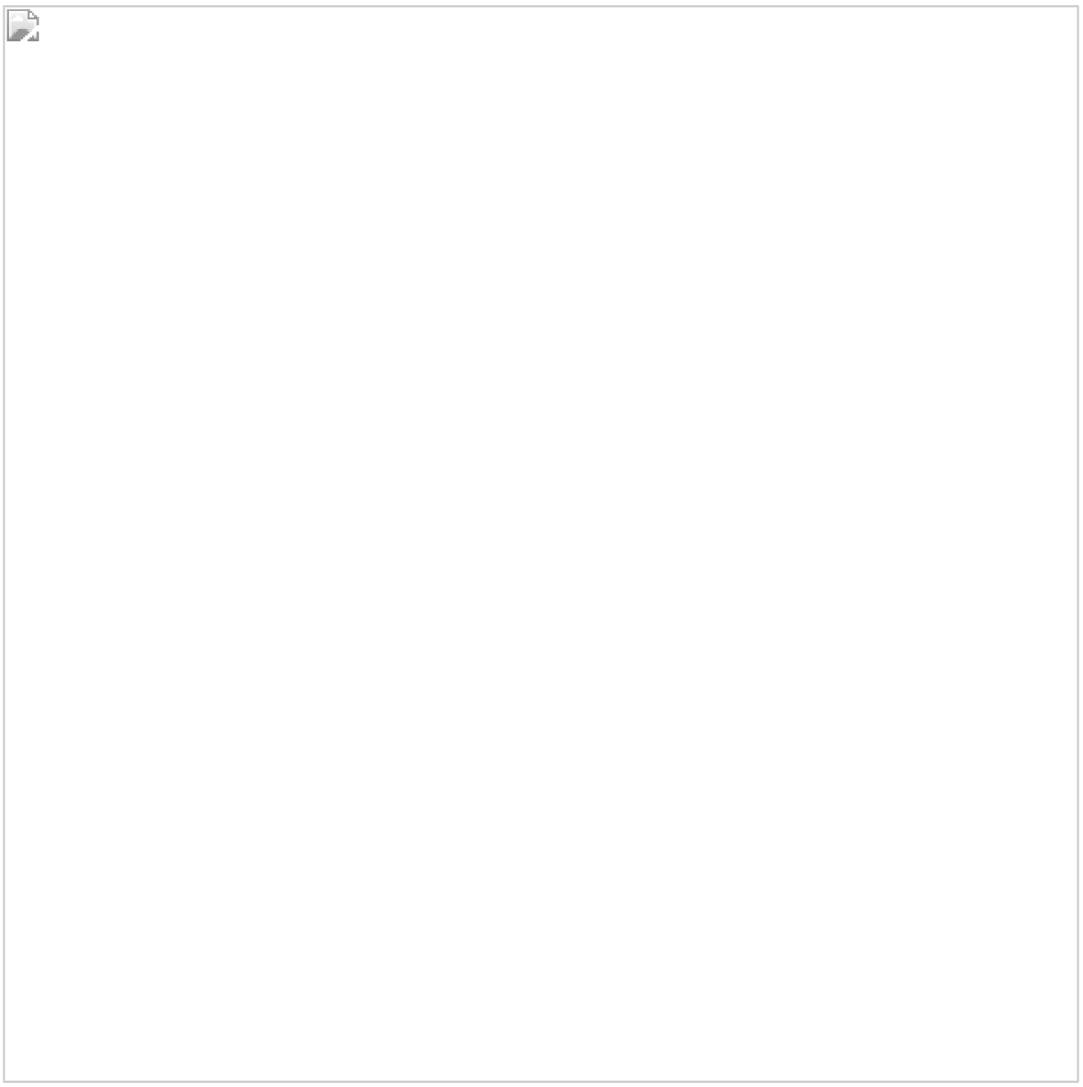
The box was so heavy that she had to rest often on the way home. At last she put it down by the road and opened it, expecting a mine of wealth.

Out bounced horrible, frightful demons! One had a huge eye in the middle of its forehead. Others had gaping mouths. A big snake coiled and hissed, and a big frog hopped and croaked toward her.

She had never been so frightened. She ran from the spot as fast as her quaking legs would carry her, glad to escape alive.

TALK ABOUT IT

She did not wait to get home before opening the box. Why do you think she could not wait?

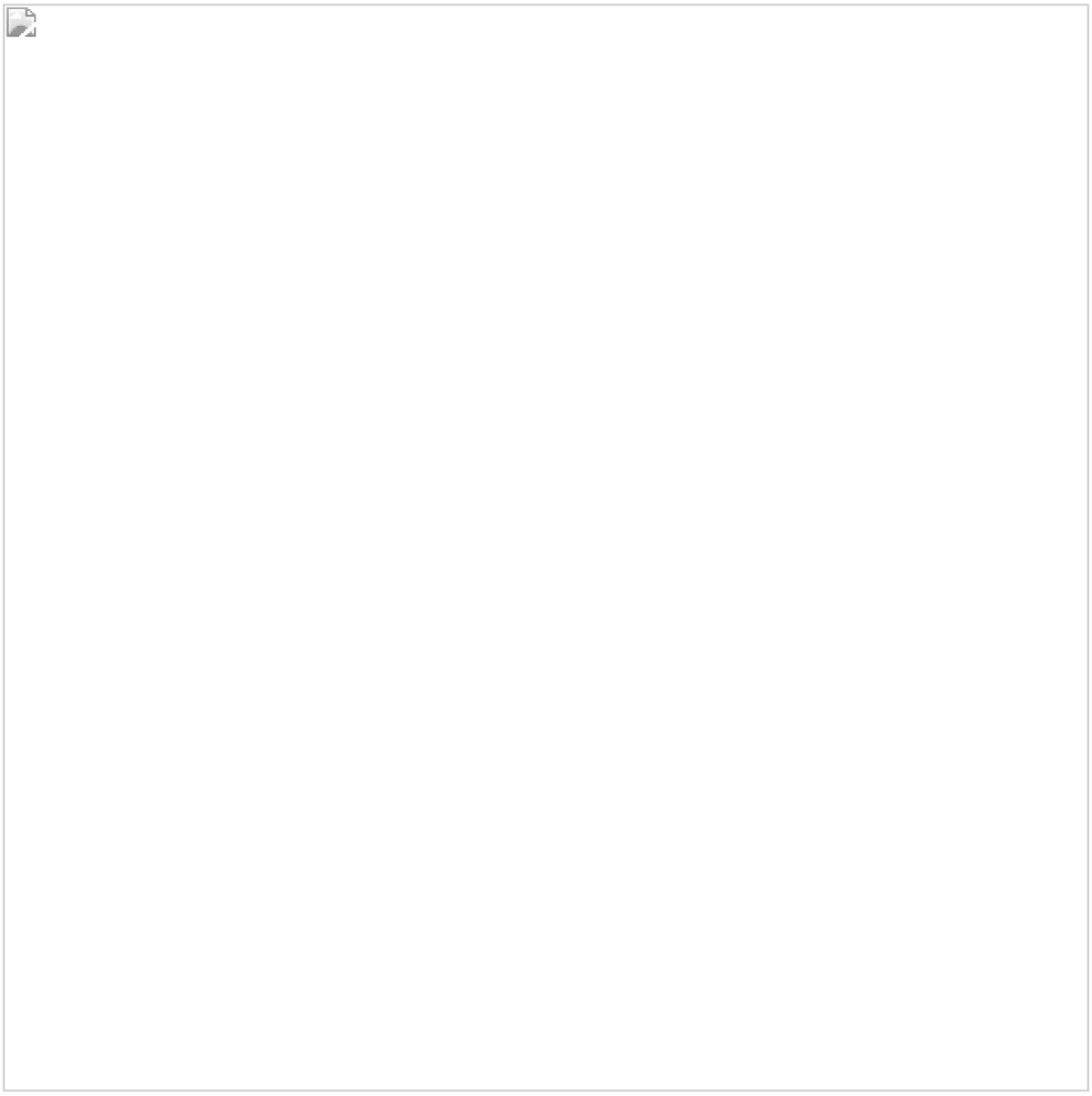


Think about it

1. Where did the old woman open the big box?

- ○ By the road on the way home
- ○ At the sparrow's house
- ○ At her own table

Home Again



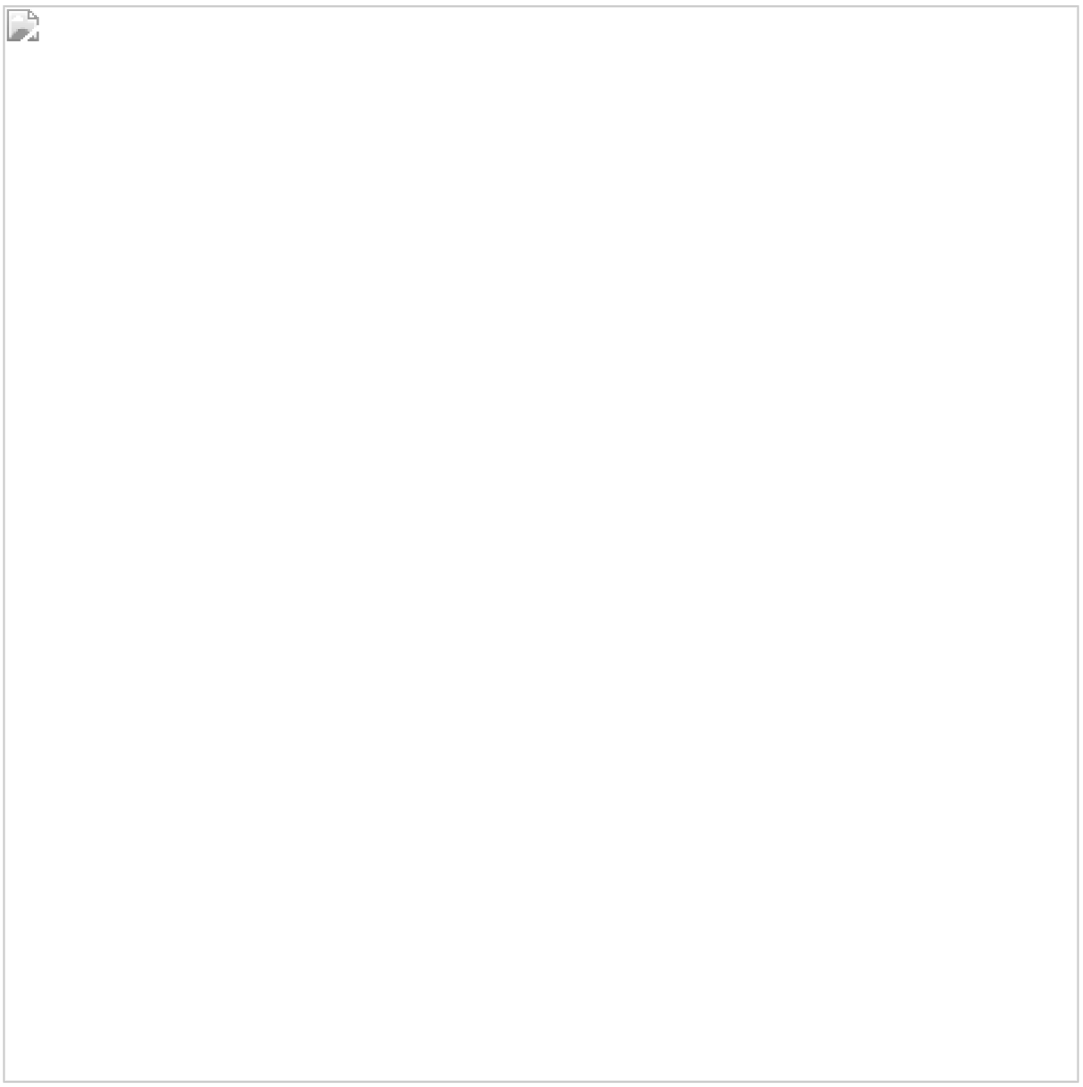
At home she fell to the floor and told her husband everything, with tears. Then she began to blame the sparrow.

The old man stopped her at once. “Don’t blame the sparrow, it is your wickedness which has at last met with its reward.”

The old woman said nothing more. From that day she gave up her cross, unkind ways, and little by little became a good old woman. They spent their last days together happily, spending carefully the treasure the sparrow had given.

TALK ABOUT IT

The old woman changed. Have you ever changed something about how you act? How did it start?



Think about it

1. What happened to the old woman after that day?

- ○ She stayed cross
- ○ She became a good old woman
- ○ She moved away

2. Who in this story was kind? How did you know?

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

— Yeshua HaMashiach

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