



The Sparrow and His Wife

(An Iraqi folktale retold by Noorah Al-Gailani)


There was once a sparrow and his wife who lived in a tree. One day the sparrow decided to invite his friends for a meal; so he went out to get some grains for the feast, and brought back seven. He gave the grains to his wife and told her to prepare the meal, while he went out to invite his friends and bring them back with him.


The wife-sparrow cooked the grains and tidied up the home for their guests; and then waited for her husband to return with them. She waited and waited, but her husband didn't come back. As time passed on, she grew hungrier and hungrier, and one by one she ended up eating all seven cooked grains. But once she'd eaten the last of the seven grains, her husband arrived with his guests, and asked her to bring the food. She confessed to having eaten the grains, as her stomach and head had started to hurt her from hunger, which was caused by the long wait.

The sparrow, embarrassed by the situation he found himself in front of his guests, grew into a rage and declared that he is divorcing his wife there and then as punishment for what she had done. He pronounced "you are divorced" three times in front of his guests; and by doing so, he ended their marriage in the legal manner following the Islamic tradition, in front of his guests, who became the witnesses to it. At this, the wife-sparrow became very upset and left her home for her father's. The guests left too; and the husband-sparrow was left alone to reflect on what he had just done.

After a while he realised his mistake, in being hasty in divorcing his beloved wife. A few days later, he set off to his wife's parents' tree to ask for her pardon and bring her back home.

When he arrived he perched on a branch on her father's tree. The wife-sparrow, now divorced, heard someone landing and called out asking who it was. The sparrow replied that it was him and that he had come to make up with her. The wife-sparrow said no, and told him to go away.





The next day, and the day after that, and after that too, the sparrow kept on going to his wife's father's tree, asking for his wife's pardon and her return home with him; but she refused and told him to go back to where he had come from.

One day, on the way to his wife's father's home, the sparrow decided to stop by a dressmaker and asked her to sell him coloured threads to take as a peace gift to his wife. He asked her for five colours: red, blue, green, yellow and purple. He then flew to his wife's father's tree with the five threads in his beak.

When the wife-sparrow heard some one perch on their tree, she called out and asked who it was. The sparrow replied that it was he, her husband, having come for her, to ask for her pardon and to take her home with him. As in the previous days, she told him to go away. But he did not. He called out to her again and said that he had brought her a gift of red, green, yellow, blue and purple threads. At hearing this, the wife-sparrow was overjoyed and flew out of her father's home to greet her husband. She accepted the gift and made up with him, and both flew back to their home.

When they got back, the wife-sparrow braided the five coloured threads into a protective charm; and then they bought more grains and called their friends for another feast; and lived happily ever after.

