Once upon a time there lived an old man and an old woman. The old man, who had a kind heart, kept a young sparrow, which he tenderly nurtured. But the dame was a cross-grained old thing; and one day, when the sparrow had pecked at some paste with which she was going to starch her linen, she flew into a great rage, and cut the sparrow's tongue and let it loose. When the old man came home from the hills and found that the bird had flown, he asked what had become of it; so the old woman answered that she had cut its tongue and let it go, because it had stolen her starching-paste. Now the old man, hearing this cruel tale, was sorely grieved, and thought to himself, "Alas! where can my bird be gone? Poor thing! Poor little tongue-cut sparrow! where is your home now?" and he wandered far and wide, seeking for his pet, and crying, "Mr. Sparrow! Mr. Sparrow! where are you living?"

One day, at the foot of a certain mountain, the old man fell in with the lost bird; and when they had congratulated one another on their mutual safety, the sparrow led the old man to his home, and, having introduced him to his wife and chicks, set before him all sorts of dainties, and entertained him hospitably.

"Please partake of our humble fare," said the sparrow; "poor as it is, you are very welcome."

"What a polite sparrow!" answered the old man, who remained for a long time as the sparrow's guest, and was daily feasted right royally. At last the old man said that he must take his leave and return home; and the bird, offering him two wicker baskets, begged him to carry them with him as a parting present. One of the baskets was heavy, and the other was light; so the old man, saying that as he was feeble and stricken in years he would only accept the light one, shouldered it, and trudged off home, leaving the sparrow-family disconsolate at parting from him.

When the old man got home, the dame grew very angry, and began to scold him, saying, "Well, and pray where have you been this many a day? A pretty thing, indeed, to be gadding about at your time of life!"

"Oh!" replied he, "I have been on a visit to the sparrows; and when I came away, they gave me this wicker basket as a parting gift." Then they opened the basket to see what was inside, and, lo and behold! it was full of gold and silver and precious things. When the old woman, who was as greedy as she was cross, saw all the riches displayed before her, she changed her scolding strain, and could not contain herself for joy.

"I'll go and call upon the sparrows, too," said she, "and get a pretty present." So she asked the old man the way to the sparrows' house, and set forth on her journey. Following his directions, she at last met the tongue-cut sparrow, and exclaimed--

"Well met! well met! Mr. Sparrow. I have been looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you." So she tried to flatter and cajole the sparrow by soft speeches.

The bird could not but invite the dame to its home; but it took no pains to feast her, and said nothing about a parting gift. She, however, was not to be put off; so she asked for something to carry away with her in remembrance of her
visit. The sparrow accordingly produced two baskets, as before, and the greedy old woman, choosing the heavier of the two, carried it off with her. But when she opened the basket to see what was inside, all sorts of hobgoblins and elves sprang out of it, and began to torment her.

But the old man adopted a son, and his family grew rich and prosperous. What a happy old man!

(The end)

Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford's short story: Tongue-Cut Sparrow

By Algernon Bertram Freeman-mitford