

Hello my Lovely Learners, and welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's beginner-level story is called *How the Moon Became Beautiful*. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com, and you can find the link in the description.

This story is a Chinese folktale translated into English by Mary Hayes David and Chow-Leung. But, as always, I have rewritten it in my own style.

I'll just start by explaining some words that are in the story.

Astronomy is a science. It is the science of space, stars and planets. Astronomers are people who do astronomy. Astronomers study stars and galaxies. When astronomers discover new stars, they give names to them, such as Sirius or Pleiades.

A **poem** is a piece of artwork somewhere between a song and speech. Poems sometimes rhyme, for example, 'Roses are red, violets are blue, this is a podcast that you're listening to.' In that *very bad* poem, 'blue' and 'to' rhyme because they end in the same vowel sound. Poems are fun to write, but it's very hard to make money as a poet, someone who writes poems. Oh well!

When you pull a flower out of the ground, you **pick** it. You can pick lots of flowers to make a bouquet, for example. These days, people don't usually pick flowers. Instead, they buy flowers from a florist.

When something is **sharp**, it can cut you. For example, a sharp knife is good at cutting food. If the edge of a table is sharp, then parents might put something on it so that children don't hurt themselves on the sharp edge.

Gentle means soft or kind. Gentle people don't talk loudly, and they don't say mean things. It's good to be gentle with young children, as they can get hurt easily.

Ridiculous means very silly, very stupid. If you think something is ridiculous, then you usually don't like it and don't think it is serious. For example, if a student tells me, 'I'll never be good at English!' I say, 'Ridiculous! Keep studying and you'll definitely get better at English.' Ridiculous literally means 'something that you should laugh at.' But the only thing you'll be laughing at in this story is my jokes... I hope!

Please laugh! I have a gentle heart, you see. I know it sounds ridiculous, and sometimes people's words can be sharp, but please be gentle with me.

OK, on that note, please listen and enjoy!

How the Moon Became Beautiful

Today, the moon is beautiful, but in the past, the moon was ugly. Today, the moon's face is bright and everyone likes to look at it, but in the past, the moon's face was dark, and nobody looked at it. How did things become this way? Well, the moon's face changed one night, 6000 years ago.

At that time, the moon was sad, because he was ugly and nobody liked to look at him. So one night, the moon talked to the flowers and the stars. They were beautiful, and they were the only things that looked at the moon's face.

'Oh, flowers, oh, stars,' said the moon. 'I do not like being the moon. I wish I were a flower or a star, like you. You are so beautiful. If I were a small star, then maybe an **astronomer** would look at me every night.'

'Ha! Astronomers,' said one of the stars. 'Astronomers look at us every night, and then they make names for us. Can you believe it? We don't need names! But the astronomers give us stupid names, like Sirius and Pollux and Pleione. No, it is better to be an ugly moon.'

‘Oh, but flowers, but stars!’ said the moon. ‘I really do not like being the moon. I wish I were a flower. If I were a flower, maybe beautiful women would come and look at me, and write poems about me.’

‘You do not want that!’ said one of the flowers. ‘First they write poems, then they pick you. Can you imagine? One day, you’re sitting there, and the next day you’ve been picked out of the ground, and they put you inside some horrible glass, or give you to some stupid girl. And then you slowly die... No, it is better to be an ugly moon. Nobody can pick the moon from the sky.’

‘But not all flowers are like that!’ said the moon. ‘I could grow on a mountain, far away from people. I would see the beautiful world, and nobody would pick me.’

The stars and the flowers were tired of talking to the moon, and they said nothing. But there was one flower who was interested. This flower was ugly and sharp. Nobody liked to pick this flower, because he was ugly and sharp, and so this flower understood the moon very well.

‘There is a garden,’ said the sharp flower. ‘In this garden, there are the most beautiful flowers in the world, and there lives also the most beautiful woman in the world. Her name is Chang’e. She is very kind. Perhaps, if you talk to her, you might feel better.’

So the next night, the moon went to this garden and found Chang’e. She was indeed beautiful, the most beautiful woman in the world, and the moon fell in love immediately. So, he decided to talk to her.

‘Lady Chang’e, you are so beautiful! Your smile is like the sun, your eyes are like jewels, your mouth is like a delicious cherry. You move slowly and gently, like a calm sea. I wish that you would come with me and become my face. If you were my face, we could shine down on the world every night. Even bad people would see us and become good. Tell me, Chang’e, how did you become so beautiful?’

Chang’e smiled. ‘I have always lived with those who are gentle and happy, and I believe that is why I am beautiful.’

The moon came every night to see Chang’e’s gentle face. Every night, he told her how beautiful she was, and every night, his love for her grew. Slowly, Chang’e started to feel love for him, too.

One day, Chang’e said to her mother, ‘Mother, I have fallen in love with the moon. Yes, he is ugly, but he has such a kind heart. May I go and live with him?’

Her mother thought this was ridiculous, so she only said, ‘Huh!’

But Chang’e was a romantic girl, so when her mother said ‘huh!’, she heard ‘yes’, and she went away very happy. She went and told all her friends that she was going to marry the moon.

A few days later, Chang’e was gone. Her mother looked everywhere, and finally asked Chang’e’s friends where she was.

‘Why, she’s gone to live with the moon!’ they said.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ said her mother. ‘That can’t be.’

‘But it’s true!’ said another girl. ‘Look up at the sky tonight.’

Chang’e’s mother still thought this was all ridiculous, but that night, she looked out of her window up at the moon. And there she saw it.

The moon’s face was not dark and ugly anymore. It was bright and beautiful. Chang’e’s mother started to cry. There, in the night sky, was her daughter’s face, full of love, shining down on the world.

And so it has been for 6000 years. Now the moon is as beautiful as any woman on earth, and it shines bright for us night after night.

THE END

I hope you enjoyed today's story. It was quite a short one. A classic origin myth: why something became something, or how something became something, in this case, how the moon became beautiful.

I found this story in a collection of Chinese folktales. It's called Chinese Fables and Folktales. It was actually the first collection of Chinese folktales published in English in the early 20th century, and because of that, it comes with a few problems.

The authors were an American woman and a Chinese man who lived in America, and he helped her write down these stories, but it was published at a time before the standardisation of the Chinese language. So although the same writing system was used throughout China, there were many different dialects with many different pronunciations, and there was no standardised way to transcribe the pronunciation of Chinese into English.

So the problem that this causes is all of the names in the book are very hard to understand in terms of modern Chinese. The name of the beautiful woman in the book is written as Tseh-N'io, maybe?

This does not correspond with modern Mandarin. It probably comes from a dialect of Chinese, not the standard language, and then it's also been filtered through writing in English, so it's pretty much impossible for me to find out what the original name actually was either in written Chinese or modern spoken Mandarin.

Now, I asked Deep Seek for some help with this, and it suggested to use the name Chang'e, which is the name of this mythical figure who in some stories goes and lives on the moon, in some stories, she becomes the moon. Very broadly we can call her the Lady of the Moon.

I'm mentioning this now because there will be some other stories in the podcast with Chang'e in them. But the version of her will be different. It's very normal in myths and folktales to have different versions of the same stories. One character might be very different in one story versus another, or different things might happen to them.

So I don't really know if the character in this story is supposed to be the same Chang'e. But it seemed to be close enough that I might as well choose it because otherwise I would be just choosing a random name in Chinese.

Anyway, thanks again for listening and look out for more Chinese folktales coming up this year on Easy Stories in English. I'm really enjoying diving into this new area of mythology and folklore. I've done a few Chinese tales on the podcast before, but this year I really want to dig in.

So, thanks again for listening and see you soon!