

The Jelly Fish and the Monkey

Yei Theodora Ozaki

Japanese

Intermediate

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Long, long ago, in old Japan, the Kingdom of the Sea was governed by a wonderful King. He was called Rin Jin, or the Dragon King of the Sea. His power was immense, for he was the ruler of all sea creatures both great and small, and in his keeping were the Jewels of the Ebb and Flow of the Tide. The Jewel of the Ebbing Tide when thrown into the ocean caused the sea to recede from the land, and the Jewel of the Flowing Tide made the waves to rise mountains high and to flow in upon the shore like a tidal wave.

The Palace of Rin Jin was at the bottom of the sea, and was so beautiful that no one has ever seen anything like it even in dreams. The walls were of coral, the roof of jadestone and chrysoprase, and the floors were of the finest mother-of-pearl. But the Dragon King, in spite of his wide-spreading Kingdom, his beautiful Palace and all its wonders, and his power which none disputed throughout the whole sea, was not at all happy, for he reigned alone. At last he thought that if he married he would not only be happier, but also more powerful. So he decided to take a wife. Calling all his fish retainers together, he chose several of them as ambassadors to go through the sea and seek for a young Dragon Princess who would be his bride.

At last they returned to the Palace bringing with them a lovely young dragon. Her scales were of glittering green like the wings of summer beetles, her eyes threw out glances of fire, and she was dressed in gorgeous robes. All the jewels of the sea worked in with embroidery adorned them.

The King fell in love with her at once, and the wedding ceremony was celebrated with great splendor. Every living thing in the sea, from the great whales down to the little shrimps, came in shoals to offer their congratulations to the bride and bridegroom and to wish them a long and prosperous life. Never had there been such an assemblage or such gay festivities in the Fish-World before. The train of bearers who carried the bride's possessions to her new home seemed to reach across the waves from one end of the sea to the other. Each fish carried a phosphorescent lantern and was dressed in ceremonial robes, gleaming blue and pink and silver; and the waves as they rose and fell and broke that night seemed to be rolling masses of white and green fire, for the phosphorus shone with double brilliancy in honor of the event.

Now for a time the Dragon King and his bride lived very happily. They loved each other dearly, and the bridegroom day after day took delight in showing his bride all the wonders and treasures of his coral Palace, and she was never tired of wandering with him through its vast halls and gardens. Life seemed to them both like a long summer's day.

Two months passed in this happy way, and then the Dragon Queen fell ill and was obliged to stay in bed. The King was sorely troubled when he saw his precious bride so ill, and at once sent for the fish doctor to come and give her some medicine. He gave special orders to the servants to nurse her carefully and to wait upon her with diligence, but in spite of all the nurses' assiduous care and the medicine that the doctor prescribed, the young Queen showed no signs of recovery, but grew daily worse.

Then the Dragon King interviewed the doctor and blamed him for not curing the Queen. The doctor was alarmed at Rin Jin's evident displeasure, and excused his want of skill by saying that although he knew the right kind of medicine to give the invalid, it was impossible to find it in the sea.

"Do you mean to tell me that you can't get the medicine here?" asked the Dragon King.

"It is just as you say!" said the doctor.

“Tell me what it is you want for the Queen?” demanded Rin Jin.

“I want the liver of a live monkey!” answered the doctor.

“The liver of a live monkey! Of course that will be most difficult to get,” said the King.

“If we could only get that for the Queen, Her Majesty would soon recover,” said the doctor.

“Very well, that decides it; we MUST get it somehow or other. But where are we most likely to find a monkey?” asked the King.

Then the doctor told the Dragon King that some distance to the south there was a Monkey Island where a great many monkeys lived.

“If only you could capture one of these monkeys?” said the doctor.

“How can any of my people capture a monkey?” said the Dragon King, greatly puzzled. “The monkeys live on dry land, while we live in the water; and out of our element we are quite powerless! I don’t see what we can do!”

“That has been my difficulty too,” said the doctor. “But amongst your innumerable servants you surely can find one who can go on shore for that express purpose!”

“Something must be done,” said the King, and calling his chief steward he consulted him on the matter.

The chief steward thought for some time, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, said joyfully:

“I know what we must do! There is the kurage (jelly fish). He is certainly ugly to look at, but he is proud of being able to walk on land with his four legs like a tortoise. Let us send him to the Island of Monkeys to catch one.”

The jelly fish was then summoned to the King’s presence, and was told by His Majesty what was required of him.

The jelly fish, on being told of the unexpected mission which was to be intrusted to him, looked very troubled, and said that he had never been to the island in question, and as he had never had any experience in catching monkeys he was afraid that he would not be able to get one.

“Well,” said the chief steward, “if you depend on your strength or dexterity you will never catch a monkey. The only way is to play a trick on one!”

“How can I play a trick on a monkey? I don’t know how to do it,” said the perplexed jelly fish.

“This is what you must do,” said the wily chief steward. “When you approach the Island of Monkeys and meet some of them, you must try to get very friendly with one. Tell him that you are a servant of the Dragon King, and invite him to come and visit you and see the Dragon King’s Palace. Try and describe to him as vividly as you can the grandeur of the Palace and the wonders of the sea so as to arouse his curiosity and make him long to see it all!”

“But how am I to get the monkey here? You know monkeys don’t swim?” said the reluctant jelly fish.

“You must carry him on your back. What is the use of your shell if you can’t do that!” said the chief steward.

“Won’t he be very heavy?” queried kurage again.

“You mustn’t mind that, for you are working for the Dragon King,” replied the chief steward.

“I will do my best then,” said the jelly fish, and he swam away from the Palace and started off towards the Monkey Island. Swimming swiftly he reached his destination in a few hours, and landed by a convenient wave upon the shore. On looking round he saw not far away a big pine-tree with drooping branches and on one of those branches was just what he was looking for—a live monkey.

“I’m in luck!” thought the jelly fish. “Now I must flatter the creature and try to entice him to come back with me to the Palace, and my part will be done!”

So the jelly fish slowly walked towards the pine-tree. In those ancient days the jelly fish had four legs and a hard shell like a tortoise. When he got to the pine-tree he raised his voice and said:

“How do you do, Mr. Monkey? Isn’t it a lovely day?”

“A very fine day,” answered the monkey from the tree. “I have never seen you in this part of the world before. Where have you come from and what is your name?”

“My name is kurage or jelly fish. I am one of the servants of the Dragon King. I have heard so much of your beautiful island that I have come on purpose to see it,” answered the jelly fish.

“I am very glad to see you,” said the monkey.

“By the bye,” said the jelly fish, “have you ever seen the Palace of the Dragon King of the Sea where I live?”

“I have often heard of it, but I have never seen it!” answered the monkey.

“Then you ought most surely to come. It is a great pity for you to go through life without seeing it. The beauty of the Palace is beyond all description—it is certainly to my mind the most lovely place in the world,” said the jelly fish.

“Is it so beautiful as all that?” asked the monkey in astonishment.

Then the jelly fish saw his chance, and went on describing to the best of his ability the beauty and grandeur of the Sea King’s Palace, and the wonders of the garden with its curious trees of white, pink and red coral, and the still more curious fruits like great jewels hanging on the branches. The monkey grew more and more interested, and as he listened he came down the tree step by step so as not to lose a word of the wonderful story.

“I have got him at last!” thought the jelly fish, but aloud he said:

“Mr. Monkey. I must now go back. As you have never seen the Palace of the Dragon King, won’t you avail yourself of this splendid opportunity by coming with me? I shall then be able to act as guide and show you all the sights of the sea, which will be even more wonderful to you—a land-lubber.”

“I should love to go,” said the monkey, “but how am I to cross the water! I can’t swim, as you surely know!”

“There is no difficulty about that. I can carry you on my back.”

“That will be troubling you too much,” said the monkey.

“I can do it quite easily. I am stronger than I look, so you needn’t hesitate,” said the jelly fish, and taking the monkey on his back he stepped into the sea.

“Keep very still, Mr. monkey,” said the jelly fish. “You mustn’t fall into the sea; I am responsible for your safe arrival at the King’s Palace.”

“Please don’t go so fast, or I am sure I shall fall off,” said the monkey.

Thus they went along, the jelly fish skimming through the waves with the monkey sitting on his back. When they were about half-way, the jelly fish, who knew very little of anatomy, began to wonder if the monkey had his liver with him or not!

“Mr. Monkey, tell me, have you such a thing as a liver with you?”

The monkey was very much surprised at this queer question, and asked what the jelly fish wanted with a liver.

“That is the most important thing of all,” said the stupid jelly fish, “so as soon as I recollected it, I asked you if you had yours with you?”

“Why is my liver so important to you?” asked the monkey.

“Oh! you will learn the reason later,” said the jelly fish.

The monkey grew more and more curious and suspicious, and urged the jelly fish to tell him for what his liver was wanted, and ended up by appealing to his hearer’s feelings by saying that he was very troubled at what he had been told.

Then the jelly fish, seeing how anxious the monkey looked, was sorry for him, and told him everything. How the Dragon Queen had fallen ill, and how the doctor had said that only the liver of a live monkey would cure her, and how the Dragon King had sent him to find one.

“Now I have done as I was told, and as soon as we arrive at the Palace the doctor will want your liver, so I feel sorry for you!” said the silly jelly fish.

The poor monkey was horrified when he learnt all this, and very angry at the trick played upon him. He trembled with fear at the thought of what was in store for him.

But the monkey was a clever animal, and he thought it the wisest plan not to show any sign of the fear he felt, so he tried to calm himself and to think of some way by which he might escape.

“The doctor means to cut me open and then take my liver out! Why I shall die!” thought the monkey. At last a bright thought struck him, so he said quite cheerfully to the jelly fish:

“What a pity it was, Mr. Jelly Fish, that you did not speak of this before we left the island!”

“If I had told why I wanted you to accompany me you would certainly have refused to come,” answered the jelly fish.

“You are quite mistaken,” said the monkey. “Monkeys can very well spare a liver or two, especially when it is wanted for the Dragon Queen of the Sea. If I had only guessed of what you were in need. I should have presented you with one without waiting to be asked. I have several livers. But the greatest pity is, that as you did not speak in time, I have left all my livers hanging on the pine-tree.”

“Have you left your liver behind you?” asked the jelly fish.

“Yes,” said the cunning monkey, “during the daytime I usually leave my liver hanging up on the branch of a tree, as it is very much in the way when I am climbing about from tree to tree. To-day, listening to your interesting conversation, I quite forgot it, and left it behind when I came off with you. If only you had spoken in time I should have remembered it, and should have brought it along with me!”

The jelly fish was very disappointed when he heard this, for he believed every word the monkey said. The monkey was of no good without a liver. Finally the jelly fish stopped and told the monkey so.

“Well,” said the monkey, “that is soon remedied. I am really sorry to think of all your trouble; but if you will only take me back to the place where you found me, I shall soon be able to get my liver.”

The jelly fish did not at all like the idea of going all the way back to the island again; but the monkey assured him that if he would be so kind as to take him back he would get his very best liver, and bring it with him the next time. Thus persuaded, the jelly fish turned his course towards the Monkey Island once more.

No sooner had the jelly fish reached the shore than the sly monkey landed, and getting up into the pine-tree where the jelly fish had first seen him, he cut several capers amongst the branches with joy at being safe home again, and then looking down at the jelly fish said:

“So many thanks for all the trouble you have taken! Please present my compliments to the Dragon King on your return!”

The jelly fish wondered at this speech and the mocking tone in which it was uttered. Then he asked the monkey if it wasn't his intention to come with him at once after getting his liver.

The monkey replied laughingly that he couldn't afford to lose his liver: it was too precious.

“But remember your promise!” pleaded the jelly fish, now very discouraged.

“That promise was false, and anyhow it is now broken!” answered the monkey. Then he began to jeer at the jelly fish and told him that he had been deceiving him the whole time; that he had no wish to lose his life, which he certainly would have done had he gone on to the Sea King's Palace to the old doctor waiting for him, instead of persuading the jelly fish to return under false pretenses.

“Of course, I won't GIVE you my liver, but come and get it if you can!” added the monkey mockingly from the tree.

There was nothing for the jelly fish to do now but to repent of his stupidity, and to return to the Dragon King of the Sea and to confess his failure, so he started sadly and slowly to swim back. The last thing he heard as he glided away, leaving the island behind him, was the monkey laughing at him.

Meanwhile the Dragon King, the doctor, the chief steward, and all the servants were waiting impatiently for

the return of the jelly fish. When they caught sight of him approaching the Palace, they hailed him with delight. They began to thank him profusely for all the trouble he had taken in going to Monkey Island, and then they asked him where the monkey was.

Now the day of reckoning had come for the jelly fish. He quaked all over as he told his story. How he had brought the monkey halfway over the sea, and then had stupidly let out the secret of his commission; how the monkey had deceived him by making him believe that he had left his liver behind him.

The Dragon King's wrath was great, and he at once gave orders that the jelly fish was to be severely punished. The punishment was a horrible one. All the bones were to be drawn out from his living body, and he was to be beaten with sticks.

The poor jelly fish, humiliated and horrified beyond all words, cried out for pardon. But the Dragon King's order had to be obeyed. The servants of the Palace forthwith each brought out a stick and surrounded the jelly fish, and after pulling out his bones they beat him to a flat pulp, and then took him out beyond the Palace gates and threw him into the water. Here he was left to suffer and repent his foolish chattering, and to grow accustomed to his new state of bonelessness.

From this story it is evident that in former times the jelly fish once had a shell and bones something like a tortoise, but, ever since the Dragon King's sentence was carried out on the ancestor of the jelly fishes, his descendants have all been soft and boneless just as you see them to-day thrown up by the waves high upon the shores of Japan.

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