



# Ririro

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## The Bamboo Cutter and the Moon Child

*Unknown writer*

Long ago, there lived an old Bamboo Cutter. He was poor and sad because he had no children to care for him in his old age and bring him joy. Every morning, he went in search of bamboo. When he found a good bunch of bamboo, he cut the stems and sliced them into pieces. He could make useful things for his home from them and earn some money.

One morning, while he was at work, the green bamboo forest suddenly flooded with a bright, soft light, like the light of the full moon. The woodcutter looked around in amazement and saw that the light was streaming out of a bamboo stem. Full of wonder, the old man dropped his axe and walked towards the light. In the center of the light, he saw a beautiful, tiny Moon Child, no larger than five centimeters.

"You were sent to me to be my child, for I found you here in the bamboo forest," said the old man. He took the Moon Child home to raise her with his wife. The girl was so extraordinarily beautiful and small that the old woman put her in a basket to protect her from danger. The old couple was very happy with the girl and gave her all their love, as they had not been blessed with children of their own. From that time on, happiness came to the old man. He often found gold and precious stones in the bamboo stems and became increasingly wealthy. He built a beautiful house for his family and was now known as a rich man, rather than the poor Bamboo Cutter.

Three months went by, and during that time, the Moon Child had grown into a young woman. Her foster parents put her hair up and dressed her in beautiful kimonos. She possessed such wondrous beauty that they placed her behind a screen so that no one could see her. They themselves stood guard in front of the screen. The girl seemed to have a benign influence on everyone. When the old man was sad, he looked at his foster daughter and immediately his sadness disappeared, and he was as happy as before.

Finally, the day came when their newly found Moon Child had to be named, so the old couple called in a celebrated name-giver, and he gave her the name Princess Moonlight because her body radiated so much soft, bright light. She must have been the daughter of a moon god, for sure.



Three days of feasting were held to celebrate the naming of Princess Moonlight. Everyone who saw her said that they had never seen such beauty before. The news about this miraculously beautiful princess spread all over the world. And young men came from all over the world to see her or ask for her hand in marriage. They stood in line outside the house, hoping to catch a glimpse of her, but no one was allowed inside. But despite all this disappointment, they remained day after day, night after night, so great was their desire to see the princess.

Eventually, most of the young men gave up and returned to their homes. But there were five knights whose passion and determination were so great that they stayed. These five men stood in all weather in front of the house and sometimes had nothing to eat. They also wrote letters to the princess, but received no reply. Then they tried with love poems, but Princess Moonlight gave no indication that she had received their poems.

So passed the winter, and the cold and snow gradually gave way to the warmth of spring. In the summer, the sun burned in the sky, but the faithful knights continued to wait. After these long months outside, they begged the old Bamboo Cutter to have mercy on them and show them the princess. He replied that, since he was not her real father, he could do nothing against her will. When the five knights heard this, they returned to their homes and thought about the best way to win the heart of the proud princess.

Later, they went back to the Bamboo Cutter's house and begged him to put in a good word for them with the princess and to tell her about the greatness of their love and how long they had waited through all seasons, sleepless and homeless, without food. The old man listened willingly to their pleas, for deep in his heart he had pity for these faithful suitors, and he would have liked to see his lovely foster daughter married to one of them. So he went to Princess Moonlight and said respectfully:

"Although you came to earth as a heavenly Moonchild, I have raised you as my own child and protected you. Would you then refuse to do what I want?"

Princess Moonlight answered that there was nothing she would not do for him, that she honored and loved him as her own father, and that she could not

remember the time before she came to earth. The old man listened with great joy as she spoke these dutiful words. Then he told her how anxious he was to see her safely and happily married before he died. "I am an old man, over seventy, and my end can come at any moment. It is necessary and right that you meet these five knights and choose one."

"Oh, why," said the princess, in despair, "why must I do this? I have no desire to marry now."

"I found you," the old man answered, "many years ago, in the midst of a great white light. The light flowed out of a bamboo stalk and led me to you. I always knew that you were a special being. As long as I live, it is good for you to remain unmarried. But if I am no longer here one day, who will take care of you? That's why I beg you to marry one of these five knights."

The princess said that the five knights first had to prove their love by bringing something for her from a distant land. That same evening, the five knights came and took turns playing their flutes for her and singing love songs. The Bamboo Cutter told them of the princess's wish.

The first knight was asked to bring her a stone bowl that had belonged to Buddha in India.

The second knight was asked to go to the mountain of Horai and bring her a branch from the beautiful tree that grew on top. The roots of this tree were of silver and the branches of gold.

The third knight had to go to China to find the fire rat and bring her its skin.

The fourth knight was tasked with finding the dragon that carried the stone that radiated five colors on its head and bringing the stone to her.

The fifth knight had to find the swallow that had a shell in its stomach and bring the shell to her.

When the five knights heard what was required of them, they were all discouraged and returned home in despair. But after a while, when they thought of the princess, love revived in their hearts for her, and they decided to do what she asked of them.

The first knight announced that he was searching for the Bowl of Buddha. However, he did not travel to India, as it was very dangerous at the time. He went to the temples in Kyoto and took a stone bowl from the altar, paying the priest a large sum of money. After three days, he returned. Princess Moonlight was surprised that he had returned so quickly. She took the bowl out of the golden packaging, but it did not emit a clear light, so it was not the real bowl. The knight returned home in despair.

The second knight set out to find the Golden Branch on Mount Horai. He hired carpenters to build a house for him and locked himself in with six skilled jewelers, attempting to make a golden branch that would satisfy the princess. When the branch was finished, he set out to see the princess, pretending to look tired and exhausted from his travels. He put the jewel-encrusted branch in a lacquered box and carried it to the Bamboo Cutter's house, begging him to present it to the princess.

The old man believed that the knight had traveled far, so he tried to convince the princess to see the knight. The old man showed her the branch and told her how clever and brave the knight was to go to Mount Horai. The princess examined the branch carefully. Then she said that the branch looked strange and that it was impossible to obtain a branch from Mount Horai so easily.

When the old man asked where the knight had found the branch, the knight quickly made up a story:

"Two years ago, I sailed to Mount Horai. Then a great storm arose, and I was blown ashore on an unknown island. There lived spirits who threatened to kill and eat me. But I managed to become friends with these terrible creatures. They helped me repair the boat. Then I left again, and after five hundred days, I saw the top of a mountain on the horizon. I landed and saw a radiant being coming towards me, telling me that I was on Mount Horai. The golden tree stood on the top. After I broke off a branch, I hurried back. I needed four hundred days to return, and as you see, my clothing is still damp from the long sea voyage. I wanted to bring the branch to the princess as soon as possible."

But at that moment, the six jewelers came to the Bamboo Cutter's house and asked for money because they had not been paid by the knight. They said they had worked on the golden branch for more than a thousand days. So the knight's deception was discovered, and the princess returned the branch. She paid the workers and was glad she did not have to marry the knight. The knight was angry and hit the jewelers so hard that they were almost dead. Then he withdrew to the mountains to live a lonely life.

The third knight had a friend in China, so he asked him for the skin of a fire rat. He was willing to pay a lot of money if he could get the skin. The friend sent a skin. At home, he sent the skin to the princess while waiting outside for her reply. The Bamboo Cutter brought the box to the princess. The princess put the skin in the fire, but it burned, while the real skin of the fire rat does not burn in the fire. Thus, the princess also exposed the deception of this knight.

The fourth knight was tasked with finding the dragon's jewel and ordered his servants to search in China and Japan. They were not allowed to return until they found the jewel. They departed in different directions but did not obey their

master's orders and went on vacation instead. Meanwhile, the knight believed that his servants would find the jewel, so he decorated his house beautifully in preparation for the princess's arrival. After a year, the servants had not yet returned with the dragon's jewel. The knight became desperate and hired a ship to search for the jewel. The captain and crew refused the absurd search, but the knight forced them to go out to sea with him.

After a few days, a violent storm arose, and after many days, they were washed ashore. The knight was exhausted and ill from the journey and gave up hope. Meanwhile, the knight's love for the princess had turned into anger, and he blamed her for everything. He said that she had wanted to kill him and that she had sent him on an impossible quest. When his servants returned without the jewel, he did not complain but told them that he was tired of the adventure and said that he would never again come near the princess's house.

Like the others, the fifth knight also failed in his quest; he could not find the swallow's shield.

By that time, the emperor had also heard of Princess Moonlight's beauty. He ordered a lady-in-waiting to see her and, if she was indeed as beautiful as they say, to bring her to his palace. However, the princess refused to see the lady-in-waiting, despite her father's pleas. But it was an imperial command. Princess Moonlight told the old man that if she were forced to go, she would disappear from the earth.

When the emperor heard that the princess refused his request and that she would disappear if forced to go to the palace, he decided to visit her himself. He was granted permission from the old man to see her. He had never seen anyone as miraculously beautiful as she was. He could only look at her; she was lovelier than any human being. The emperor begged her to listen to what he had to say. Her only response was to hide her face in her sleeves.

The emperor fell in love with her on the spot and begged her to come to the court, where he would give her anything she wished. He wanted to send the imperial sedan chairs to take her away because he believed that her beauty should no longer be hidden in the Bamboo Cutter's cottage. But the princess stopped him. She said that if she were forced to go to the palace, she would immediately turn into a shadow. As she spoke, she began to lose her shape. Her figure disappeared from his sight as he watched. The emperor then promised to set her free if she would resume her former shape, which she did.

It was now time for the emperor to return to his palace. He left the princess with a heavy heart. For him, Princess Moonlight was the most beautiful woman in the world, and he thought of her day and night. He spent his time writing love poems for her. The princess refused to see him but sent back poems that said she could

never marry anyone on this earth.

The princess's foster parents noticed that she sat on her balcony night after night, staring at the moon for hours and finally bursting into tears. One night, the old man found her crying as if her heart were broken and asked her why she was so sad.

She told him that he had understood well that she was not of this world and that she was actually a Moon Person, and that her time on earth would soon be over. On the fifteenth day of that month, the moon people would come to take her. She also had moon parents, but she had forgotten them due to her life on earth. She cried a lot when she thought about leaving her kind foster parents on earth. When her servants heard this, they were also very sad and could not eat or drink in sorrow at the thought of the princess leaving them so soon.

As soon as the news reached him, the emperor sent messengers to the house to find out whether the news was true or not. The old man had become very old due to his sorrow and told the messengers, bitterly weeping, that the news was true. He planned to capture the moon people so that they could not take the princess back.

The messengers returned to the emperor and he sent two thousand warriors to guard the house on the fifteenth day of the month. They kept watch on the roof and at all the entrances. The Bamboo Cutter and his wife hid Princess Moonlight in a room. The old man ordered that no one should sleep that night. Everyone had to guard the princess. But the princess said that nothing could stop the moon people from taking her away. Even the emperor's men would be useless. She said she was very sorry to leave her foster parents, who had raised her so lovingly, and that she would try to do something for them in return.

The yellow harvest moon rose high in the sky and flooded the sleeping world with its golden light. Silence reigned over the pine and bamboo forests, and on the roof where the thousand warriors waited. Then the night turned gray and everyone hoped the danger was over, that Princess Moonlight did not have to leave them after all. But suddenly the onlookers saw a cloud around the moon and as they looked, this cloud began to roll towards the earth. It came closer and closer and everyone saw with horror that the cloud was going to the Bamboo Cutter's house. In the middle of the cloud was a flying vehicle with a group of moon people. One of them looked like the leader and he called the old man to come out.

"The time has come," he said, "for Princess Moonlight to return to the moon, where she came from. She made a serious mistake and was sent to earth as punishment. We know you have taken good care of the princess. In return, we have sent you wealth and prosperity, like the gold in the bamboo stalks.

"I have raised this princess for twenty years and she has never done anything wrong, so this cannot be the lady you are looking for," said the old man. "I beg you to look elsewhere."

Then the messenger shouted loudly: "Princess Moonlight, come out. You cannot stay here for another minute."

At these words, the screen of the princess's room slid open by itself, revealing the princess shining and bright, and full of wondrous beauty. The messenger put her outside in the vehicle. She looked back and felt great pity for the enormous sorrow of the old man. She spoke comforting words to him and said it was not her will to leave him and that he should always think of her when he looked at the moon.

The Bamboo Cutter begged to accompany her, but this was not allowed. The princess took off her embroidered upper garment and gave it to him as a memento.

One of the moon people in the chariot had beautiful wings, while another held a vial of elixir of life which was given to Princess Moonlight to drink. She drank a little and was about to give the rest to the old man, but she was prevented from doing so. When she received the winged robe, she said:

"Just a moment. I have forgotten my good friend, the emperor. I must write to him once more to bid him farewell while I am still in this human form."

Despite the impatience of the messengers and charioteers, she made them wait while she wrote. She placed the vial of elixir with the letter and gave it to the old man, asking him to give it to the emperor. Then the chariot began to roll skyward to the moon, and as they all gazed tearfully at the departing princess, dawn broke and in the pink daylight, the moon chariot with the moon people vanished between the woolly clouds floating on the morning wind.

The letter from Princess Moonlight was taken to the palace. The emperor was afraid to touch the elixir, so he sent the elixir with the letter to the top of the most sacred mountain in the land, Mount Fuji. There, the royal envoys burned the elixir at the top at sunrise.

To this day, people say that smoke can be seen rising from the top of Mount Fuji to the clouds.

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