



Ririro

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The Sea King and the Magic Jewels

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This story is beloved by children in Japan, as well as by elderly people. It is the tale of the Magic Jewels and the visit to the palace of the Sea King.

Once upon a time, Prince Blushing-Red-Rice-Ears fell in love with a beautiful and royal maiden and made her his bride. The lady was called Princess Bright-Blooming-Like-the-Flowers-of-the-Trees, so sweet and honest was she.

But her father was very angry about her engagement because Prince Blushing-Red-Rice-Ears, had rejected her older sister, the Princess of the Rocks (who was not honest), because he only loved Princess Bright-Blooming. So the old King said, "Your children will be fragile and will fade and wither like the flowers of the trees. So it will be. The life of your children will not last long."

After a couple of years Princess Bright-Blooming-Like-the-Flowers-of-the-Trees gave birth to two beautiful boys. She named the eldest Fireflash and the youngest Fire Fading.

Prince Fireflash was a true fisherman. He tried his luck on the wide sea, and when he was not at sea, he ran along the coast in the wind. He often stayed all night in his boat on the high waves. He caught fish with narrow and broad fins. He was a true god on the sea and knew all the seaweed and all the fish of the sea.

But Prince Fire Fading was a hunter. He found his luck in the mountains and in the forest. He caught animals with soft and rough fur. He knew the trail of the badger and knew the blooming time of the wild cherry. He was the god of the forest.

One day, Prince Fire Fading spoke to his older brother Prince Fireflash. He said, "Brother, I'm tired of the green hills. Let us exchange our luck. Give me your fishing hook and I will go to the cool waters. You may take my bow and arrows and try your luck in the mountains. Believe me, you will see new, strange, beautiful things that you were previously unaware of."

But Prince Fireflash didn't feel much for this plan and refused. After a few days, Prince Fire Fading went back to his brother and sighed, "I'm really fed up with the green hills...the beautiful waters are calling me. What bad luck I have to be a younger brother..."

But Prince Fireflash ignored him and caught fish with narrow and broad fins day and night. Finally, one day, Prince Fire Fading collapsed on the ground while his long hair fell unkempt on his shoulders. He mumbled, "Oh, let me try my luck on the sea, Prince Fireflash." Finally, tired of his whining, his brother gave him his fishing hook.

So Prince Fireflash, the fisherman, went to the mountains. He hunted all day and let the arrows fly through the air. But he caught nothing. He caught nothing at all. He cried out, "Fool, what a fool I am to exchange the luck of the gods." So he returned home.

Prince Fire Fading, the hunter, tried his luck at sea. But whether he went out fishing at twilight or in the sun, he never caught a fish with narrow fins or with broad fins. And he lost his brother's fishhook in the sea. So he hung his head and returned.

Prince Fireflash said, "Everyone has their own domain. The hunter belongs to the mountain, the fisherman belongs to the sea... You and I have brought nothing home. We will go to sleep hungry tonight. We should not trade the luck of the Gods. Where is my fishing hook?"

Prince Fading Fire replied softly, "Dear brother, please don't be angry... I toiled with your fishing hook all day, but I did not catch a single fish. Finally, I lost your fishing hook in the sea."

Upon hearing this, Prince Fireflash erupted in anger. He stamped his feet. "Give me my fishing hook! I need it!" he screamed.

Prince Fading Fire replied, "Dear brother, I do not have your fishing hook. The depth of the sea has it. Even if I were to die for you, I could not return your fishing hook to you." But his older brother demanded it all the more forcefully.

Then, Prince Fading Fire broke the wild blue wisteria vines that bound his sword to his side. He said, "Farewell, good sword." He broke it into many pieces and made five hundred fishing hooks to give to his brother, Prince Fireflash. But Prince Fireflash did not want them.

Then Prince Fading Fire worked hard at a great oven and made a thousand fishing hooks. He humbly offered them to Prince Fireflash, for he loved his brother. Nevertheless, Prince Fireflash did not even look at them. He sat sullenly with his head in his hand and said, "I want my own lost fishing hook, and no other."

So Prince Fading Fire, mourning, left the palace gates and wandered along the coast. His tears fell into the water and mingled with the foam. When night fell, he still did not return home. He sat wearily on a rock amid the salt pools.

And he cried out, "My brother, it is all my fault. This has happened because of my foolishness."

Then appeared the Lord of Sea Salt with the rising tide and spoke, "Why are you crying?"

And Prince Fading Fire replied, "I took my brother's fishing hook and lost it in the sea. And although I gave him many other fishing hooks as compensation, he does not want them. He only wants the original fishing hook."

The Lord of Sea Salt took him by the sleeve. He placed him in a boat and pushed him from the shore, saying, "Follow the pleasant path that the Owner of the Night of the Moon has made for you on the waters. At the end of the path, you will come to a palace made of fish scales. It is the palace of the King of the Sea. Before the gate is a clear well. On the edge of the well grows a cassia tree with many spreading branches. Climb into the branches of the cassia tree and wait there for the Princess, who will come to give you advice."

Prince Fading Fire thanked the Lord of Sea Salt while standing in the boat. The Lord of the Sea Salt pushed the boat ahead of him until he stood thigh-deep in the water and said, "No, no thank you, just do as I say."

So Prince Fading Fire, went to the palace of the Sea King. He immediately climbed the cassia tree and waited among the green branches.

At daybreak, the maids of the Sea King's daughter, with their jewel-encrusted vessels, came to draw water from the well. As they stooped to dip their vessels in the water, Prince Fading Fire leaned over and looked at them from the branches of the cassia tree.

His reflection could be seen in the water of the well. So all the girls looked up and saw his gracefulness and were amazed. He asked them for some water from their vessels. The girls poured water into a jeweled cup for him and offered it to him.

Then, without drinking the water, Prince Fading Fire took a jewel from his neck, and while holding it between his lips, he dropped it into the cup. He handed the cup back to the girls.

Now they saw the large jewel sparkling in the cup, but they could not move it. The jewel was stuck to the gold. The maidens left. They came to the Sea King's daughter, with the cup and the jewel inside.

Looking at the jewel, the princess asked them, "Is there perhaps a stranger at the gate?"

And one of the girls replied, "There is someone in the branches of the cassia tree that stands by our well."

Another said, "He is a very handsome young man."

And another said, "He is more glorious than our king. And he asked us for water, so we gave him water in this cup. He did not drink it, but dropped a jewel into it. So we have brought both the cup and the jewel to you."

Then the princess herself took a vessel and went to draw water from the well. Her long sleeves and elevated clothing floated behind her, and she wore a wreath of sea flowers on her head. When she arrived at the well, she looked up through the branches of the cassia tree. Her eyes met the eyes of Prince Fading Fire.

Quickly she fetched her father, the Sea King, and said, "Father, there is a beautiful person at our gate." So the Sea King came out and welcomed Prince Fading Fire.

That evening, he made a grand banquet and celebrated the engagement of Prince Fading Fire with his daughter, the beautiful Jewel Princess. For many days, there was joy in the Sea King's palace.

But one evening, when they were sitting having dinner in the palace hall, Prince Fading Fire looked out over the Sea Path and thought about what had happened before. He let out a deep sigh. Then the Sea King became concerned and asked him, "Why do you sigh?" But Prince Fading Fire did not answer.

And the beautiful Jewel Princess, his wife, approached, touched his chest, and said softly, "Oh my dear lover, are you not happy in our water palace where the shadows turn green? You look so longingly out over the Sea Path. Tell me what is in your heart."

Then Prince Fading Fire replied, "My dear lady, I will tell you everything because of our love." And he told the whole story of the fishhook and his older brother's anger.

"And now," he said, "will you give me advice?"

The Jewel Princess smiled and got up. She walked to where the palace stairs led to the water. Standing on the last step, she called the fish of the sea. She called them, big and small, from far and wide.



The fish of the sea, both big and small, swam to her feet. The water turned silver from their scales. The king's daughter called out, "Oh fish of the sea, bring me the noble fishhook of Prince Fireflash."

And the fish replied, "Lady, the Tai is in distress, for there is something stuck in his throat so that he cannot eat. Perhaps this is the noble fishhook of Prince Fireflash."

Then the princess lifted the Tai out of the water. With her hand, she took the lost fishhook from his throat.

After she had cleaned the fishhook, she brought it to Prince Fading Fire. He was very pleased and said, "This is indeed my brother's fishhook. I will finally resolve the problem between my brother and me. We will now reconcile." He loved his brother after all.

But the Jewel Princess stood still and sadly thought, "Now he will leave me and I will be left alone."

Prince Fading Fire hurried to the water's edge. Before he left, the Sea King spoke: "Listen now to my advice. If your brother plants rice on the highlands, then plant rice low in the water basins. But if your brother plants rice in the water basins, then plant your rice on the highlands. And I, who rule over the rains and floods, will constantly provide prosperity for your work. Furthermore, I give you two Magic Jewels. If your brother is consumed by envy and wants to attack you, hold the Tide Jewel Flood and the waters will rise to drown him. But if you have pity on him, lay down the Tide Jewel Ebb and all the water will disappear. His life will then be spared."

Prince Fading Fire thanked him. He hid the fishhook in his long sleeve and hung the two Magic Jewels around his neck. Then the Jewel Princess came to him and bid farewell to him with many tears.

Within a day, he arrived at his own home and leaped ashore with a light step. Next, Prince Fading Fire found his brother and returned the fishing hook that he had lost.

After some time, the daughter of the Sea King, the fair Jewel Princess, came to Prince Fading Fire. She came over the Sea Path and held a young child in her arms. Then she placed the child his feet and said, "We have a son."

Prince Fading Fire welcomed her. He built a palace for her on the shore, on the tops of the waves. They lived there with their child.

The fair Jewel Princess begged her husband: "Beloved husband, do not look at me in the dark of night, because I live on the land now I must assume my own form at night."

But there came a night when Prince Fading Fire lay awake and couldn't sleep. Finally, when it was very dark, just before dawn, he got up and took a light to look at his sleeping bride.

And... he saw a great scaled dragon with transparent eyes, coiled at the foot of the couch. Prince Fading Fire cried out in horror and dropped the light. At the same moment, the great dragon moved, and from its coils, the Jewel Princess lifted her lovely head. The green scales fell off her like a garment. Then she stood there in a white dress.

She hung her head and wept: "I thought that we could live together in peace, even though we are from different lands. But now, even though I warned you, you have looked at me in the night. Therefore I have to say goodbye. I am going over the Sea Path and there is no return. I will take the child with me."

She immediately disappeared over the Sea Path, weeping, and covering her face with her hair as she looked back at the shore. She was never seen again on land.

Furthermore, she closed the gates of the sea and shut off the road to her father's palace. But she could not control her loving heart, so she wrote a song and had it sent to her husband.

Her husband replied, also in the form of a song and the last line was: "I will not forget you until the end of my life."

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