JAPAN

Ignoring the instructions or well-meaning advice of others is a popular theme in many tales around the world. Often a story's hero is able to overcome any resulting problems and everything turns out all right. Not so in this Japanese tale, which ends on a more somber note.

Urashima the Fisherman

Many years ago in a small village in the Tango province, there lived an old man and his wife and their grown son Urashima (oo-RAH-she-mah).

Each day Urashima would row out to sea in a small boat. There he would drop his nets in the water and pull up the fish that got trapped in them. When luck was with him, Urashima might pull up several huge baskets of fish, which his mother and father would then sell at the village market. This was how they lived.

One day, Urashima rowed out to sea as usual. When he pulled up his nets, he hadn't caught a single fish. He tried again, and again his nets were completely empty.

Urashima had no luck the next day, nor the next. He was ready to go home empty-handed once again when he dropped the nets into the water one last time. When he pulled them up, he found he had snared a sea turtle.

Urashima carefully untangled the netting from around the turtle's
the color of jade. He could see a magnificent palace with waterfalls

"Take the cars in your hands and shut your eyes," the woman said.

"Yes, I will come with you. But how shall we get to your home?"


Lushinha suddenly lost all his fear and replied, "Yes, I will come with you. I want to bring you to my home. Will you come with me?" the woman said. "I have loved you from the first moment I set eyes on you.

"But why did you wish to talk with me?"


Lushinha nodded his understanding and somehow accepted that a

Lushinha's eyes. "I am a goddess; and I live in the sky. Yes, it seems that I am in heaven."

"I am not from your world; the woman replied, "I am an immortal, n
terious woman." asked Lushinha. He stared uncertainly at the woman.

"Who are you?"

"meet you."

Lushinha said to Lushinha, "I so wanted to

Long time, the young woman

I've been watching you for a


meaning Klimono patterned with a design of clouds.

The woman had changed into a beautiful young woman, dressed in a shin-

When Lushinha turned back, he saw that the

Hippies. He turned around to face a bit of the rope that was caught on
that rose even higher than the clouds. It was unlike anything Urashima had ever seen, or even imagined.

The two landed on a pebbly beach and strolled hand in hand up to the gates of the palace. "My parents are most anxious to meet you," the goddess said. Urashima was introduced to her mother and father, and they greeted him warmly, telling him how gladdened they were by this rare meeting of gods and mortals.

That evening, Urashima was invited to join the family at a special banquet held in his honor. The food was delicious and beautifully prepared. After the meal, Urashima and the Immortals talked of the future.

"When the sun goes down," the goddess's father said, "you shall be man and wife." And so they were wed, and Urashima lived happily with his new wife and her family in their home in the sky.

All was fine for three years—three years that went by so quickly it seemed like only three days. Then one day Urashima felt a pang of longing for his own mother and father and for his life as a fisherman in their village. Each day he felt the tug of his past more strongly, until he finally spoke to his wife about it.

"My parents must be very worried about me," Urashima told his wife. "I never told them where I was going. Besides, I miss them greatly, and I wish I could see them and make sure they are all right."

"I understand," Urashima's wife said kindly. "But when we wed, we promised we would be as true to one another as the rocks are to the mountains. Your parents are fine; I know they are. Your homesickness will go away, too, I am sure."

But Urashima missed his own family more and more, and finally
Christmas stuck from one end of the village to the other, search-
walked away, shaking her head.

"Well, I don't understand why you're looking for someone who
has been missing for three hundred years," replied the old woman. She
stammered.

"Christmas was special for a moment. I don't understand, he
day and never returned. But that was over three hundred years ago."
Fellow named Christmas. They say he went out fishing in his boat one
about now. I remember my great-grandfather telling a story about a

"Oh, yes, the old woman recalled. I know who you are talking
spot, my friend Christmas.

But he lived with his mother and father in a house right on this

"Who?" asked the old woman. "Christmas, the Christmasian?"

He could find nowhere. He stopped a woman on the street. "Excuse
Christmas walked toward where his house should have been, but
Ferent he could hardly recognize it.

opened his eyes and saw he was back in this village. But it looked so dif-
Christmas got into his boat, and his father-in-law took him to close
she warned, kissing her husband good-bye.

"Take this box," said Christmas's wife, handing him a tiny box that

he could return to the kingdom of the dead, but they told Christmas
to his village. They were saddened to see him go, but they told Christmas
be persuaded his wife and her parents that he must be allowed to return

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ing for at least something that he might recognize. Had all traces of his 
mother and father disappeared? Could it be that three years in the king-
dom in the clouds were really three hundred years on earth? He looked 
down at the box he held in his hand. “Perhaps this box holds the 
answers,” he thought to himself.

Ignoring his wife’s stern warning, Urashima lifted its lid. A white 
cloud rose from the box and Urashima could just make out the shape 
of the goddess as it floated up into the sky and vanished from view.

“What have I done!” Urashima wailed, realizing that he would 
ever see his wife again. He sat on the ground and held his head in his 
hands and wept.

When Urashima had dried his tears, he sang of his love for his wife. 
“My love,” he sang, “each morning when I wake, I will listen for the 
sound of the waves breaking against the shore of your island home.”

If only Urashima hadn’t opened the box, the villagers said from that 
day on, he could have returned to his beloved wife.

“If only,” Urashima sang, “if only.”