

FOREVER YOUNG

URASHIMA TARŌ & OISÍN



by Ann Lewinson • illustrated by
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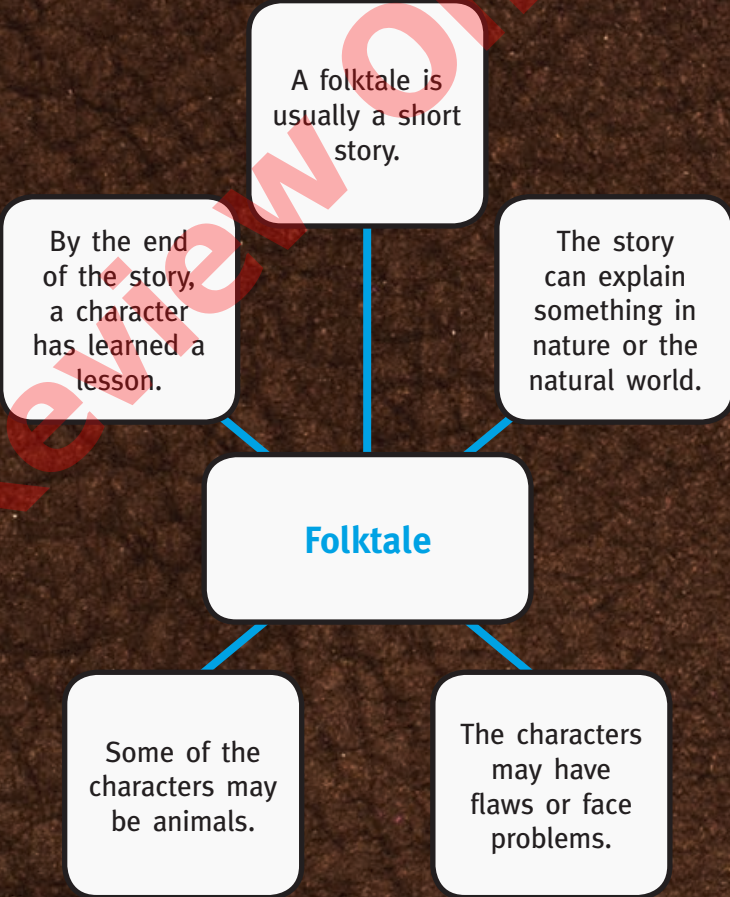
FOLKTALE
LITERATURE

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The two folktales retold
in this book are from Japan
and Ireland.

Folktale

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URASHIMA TARŌ

AND THE KINGDOM
OF RYŪGŪ-JŌ



There once was a boy named Urashima Tarō who lived with his parents on the shore of the Sea of Japan. He loved his mother and father very much, but he was lonely, for there were no other children to play with.

One day Urashima Tarō was walking along the beach when he saw a turtle stuck on its back. *Poor turtle, he thought. You're all alone, just like me.*

He picked up the turtle and carried it to the sea. "Swim away. Go play with your friends!" he whispered.

The next morning Urashima Tarō was out fishing when the turtle came paddling toward him.

"Thank you for helping me yesterday," said the turtle. This startled Urashima Tarō, who had never heard a turtle talk before. "Would you like to come play with me in Ryūgū-jō, my father's kingdom under the sea?"

The turtle seemed much larger than the one he had carried back to the sea the day before. He could never have picked up such a large one. And yet he knew this was the same turtle.

He wanted nothing more than to play with the turtle in this kingdom under the sea. So he hopped on the turtle's back and they were off, down, down, below the waves, past dolphins and schools of fish.

Down, down they went, until they came to a castle made of coral. The door was guarded by a fearsome jellyfish, who eyed the boy with suspicion. "It's okay," said the turtle. "This is Urashima Tarō. He's come to play with me."

And with that the turtle led Urashima Tarō into the castle and offered him a chair made from a giant seashell. "Please wait a moment while I change into my play clothes," said the turtle. But when the turtle returned, it was not a turtle at all, but a child, just like him.



Her name was Princess Otohime, and her father, Ryūjin, was the dragon king of the sea. And while she loved her father very much, Otohime was lonely, for she had no one to play with.



Now, Urashima Tarō and Otohime had each other. They played hide-and-seek in the tall seagrasses. They played tag, which is called *onigokko* in Japanese. For three days, they did nothing but play.

But after three days, Urashima Tarō thought of his parents. *They must be worried, he thought. I never even said goodbye. Perhaps they think that I've drowned.* He asked Otohime to take him back to the shore so that he might visit his parents.

Otohime was very sad, but she understood, for she also loved her father very much. She agreed to take Urashima Tarō back but first gave him a brightly polished box with three drawers and a silky black tassel. But she cautioned him not to open it.

“Open it only if you do not like what you see,” she warned. “If you open this box, you will never be able to return to Ryūgū-jō.” And with that she changed back into a turtle and carried Urashima Tarō back to the shore.

Urashima Tarō ran all the way home. He hoped his parents hadn't been too worried about him. After all, he had been gone only three days. Nevertheless, three days can seem like a very long time when you love someone very much.

But Urashima Tarō's house looked different. The wooden beams were weathered, but the roof was freshly thatched. The cherry trees were taller than he remembered. He heard a cow mooing in the barn, which was curious, because his family had only pigs. But he put such questions out of his mind.

"Otosan! Okaasan!" he called to his parents. "Your son is home."

The door slid open slowly. It looked like his house inside, but the furniture was different. There was another father sitting there, and another mother, and another little boy.

"Where are my parents?" asked Urashima Tarō. "This is their house."

"They must have lived here long ago," said the father, shaking his head. "I'm very sorry, old man."

