

URASHIMA TARO
The fisher boy
(Inspired by the traditional Japanese folktale)

By

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URASHIMA TARO - The fisher boy

CHARACTERS

(written for 5 actors with doubling)

STORYTELLER

URASHIMA TARO

FIRST CHILD / TURTLE / PRINCESS OTO

FIRST CHILD / DANCING MAID / OLD MAN

SECOND CHILD / DANCING MAID

STORYTELLER (sings)

Some years ago in old Japan,
There lived youthful fisherman.
From early dawn till setting sun
His nets would fill up one by one.
And though the young man loved to fish
He had a dream, a secret wish!
What was this special fantasy?
He wished to travel undersea.
Once in a story he'd been told
Of a huge palace made of gold.
While walking through the fresh sea foam
He saw something while going home.

(URASHIMA sees some children teasing a small turtle)

URASHIMA

Hey you there! What are you doing to that turtle?

FIRST CHILD

Who are you?

URASHIMA

My name's Urashima. Urashima Taro.

FIRST CHILD

Well, Urashima Taro. Why don't you leave us alone?

URASHIMA

If you go on treating it like that, it will die!

SECOND CHILD

Who cares if it dies?

URASHIMA

Well, I do.

THIRD CHILD

But it's ours, we caught it!

URASHIMA

I wish I could have a nice turtle like that. What if I give you some money for it?

FIRST CHILD

What good will that be?

SECOND CHILD

A turtle's more fun than money.

URASHIMA

But with this money you could buy anything you wanted?

THIRD CHILD

Like a red bean cake? Here. Give it to me. (he takes the money and runs off)

SECOND CHILD

Wait for me. (*takes the money and runs*)

FIRST CHILD

Here. It's just a stupid old turtle anyway. (*gives URASHIMA the turtle, takes the money and leaves*)

URASHIMA

Ah! You poor thing. Everything will be okay now. I'll return you to the sea. They say a stork lives for 1,000 years and that turtles like you live for 10,000. It's a good thing I came along little one, or you wouldn't have lasted very long. I wish I could live as long as you and swim to the bottom of the sea.

STORYTELLER (sings)

Urashima had a kind heart
And gave the turtle a new start.
Homeward he did travel straight--
The turtle's tale he did relate.
His parents, proud of what he'd done,
Then told him he was a good son.
Urashima then told them he
Would like to live ten centuries.
They said that would bring him sorrow
So he slept until the morrow.
When he arose and went to sea
Who knew he'd find his fantasy?

(URASHIMA throws out his net and begins to fish)

TURTLE

Urashima!

URASHIMA
Who's there?

TURTLE
Urashima! Urashima Taro!

URASHIMA
Who said that?

TURTLE
It is I. The turtle!
URASHIMA
A talking turtle? I must be dreaming!

TURTLE
I heard that you saved a small turtle yesterday and I have come to reward you.

URASHIMA
Reward me?

TURTLE
Yes, that little turtle was the Sea Emperor's daughter.

URASHIMA
I had no idea.

TURTLE
The emperor would like to thank you himself for saving her life. Come, climb upon my back and I will take you there.

URASHIMA
I'd like that very much but am afraid I'd drown beneath the sea.

TURTLE
You needn't worry about that. Here. (*casts a magic spell*) Now you can breathe. Come, we've a long journey ahead of us.

STORYTELLER (*sings*)
And so he rode upon his shell
Under the waves and foamy swells
Cascading deep beneath the sea
To live his lifelong fantasy.
Beneath the waves, like flying birds,
The fish swam by and spoke kind words.
Forests of coral far and near
Seemed to wave to allay his fear.
And then, as in the tales of old
They swam toward the palace gold.
It's roof was topped with brilliant jade
And greeting him were dancing maids.

(URASHIMA dismounts the turtle and the maids dance)

FIRST MAID

Greetings honourable Urashima Taro.

SECOND MAID

You are welcome here in the palace of gold.

URASHIMA

That is most gracious of you. (fanfare)

MAIDS

Let us present, her royal highness, Princess Oto. (URASHIMA and the MAIDS bow)

PRINCESS OTO

Arise, Urashima Taro. It is I who should bow to you for your generosity and kindness, for it is you who saved my life.

URASHIMA

It was the least I could do, I couldn't bear to see the children treat you that way.

PRINCESS OTO

You wished that you could come to visit us at the bottom of the sea—and here you are.

URASHIMA

It's more wonderful than I imagined.

PRINCESS OTO

And you also wished you could live for 10,000 years.

URASHIMA

Yes I did.

PRINCESS OTO

Urashima Taro, you may stay here at the palace for as long as you like, for we are eternally grateful.

STORYTELLER

They took him to a special feast
The finest fit for man and beast
And treated him like royalty
For setting Princess Oto free.
She danced for him for days and days
And he loved her in many ways.
But days and weeks turned in to years
And his love gave way to fears.
Because he had not said goodbye
Thoughts of his parents made him cry.

So one day he said he would leave
And leave the princess there to grieve.

URASHIMA

Your Highness. You've been so kind to me. Over the last three years, I have grown to love you. That is what makes this so difficult.

PRINCESS OTO

What is it Urashima? You can tell me anything.

URASHIMA

I fear something has happened to my mother and father. I never said goodbye to them. Surely they must be worried.

PRINCESS OTO

Then go if you must, Urashima. But before you do, allow me to give you a gift.

URASHIMA

Your highness, you owe me no gift.

PRINCESS OTO

Remember when you wished to live 10,000 years as we do?

URASHIMA

Yes, I remember.

PRINCESS OTO

Then here. Take this box. As long as you have it, you will never grow old. But please, never open it for fear of what's inside.

URASHIMA

What is inside, your highness?

PRINCESS OTO

I dare not say. If you love me, ensure that it stays closed. I cannot bear the thought of a world without you in it, Urashima.

STORYTELLER

Urashima called forth his friend
To travel home he did intend.
And all turned out to wave goodbyes
And see him off towards blue skies.
So on the turtle's shell he rode
To go back to his old abode.
And soon he washed up on the sand
Soon back home in his native land.
He ran back to his old front door
But things weren't the same as before.
His home, his friends and all had gone
Just like the stars die at the dawn.

He stopped an old man by the shore
And asked what had transpired afore.

URASHIMA

Pardon me, sir. I am looking for my home.

OLD MAN

Your home?

URASHIMA

Yes. It was right here, by the beach. I've been gone for a while and it's no longer here.

OLD MAN

I've been fishing here for years, and I've never seen a home here.

URASHIMA

How can this be? I am Urashima Taro, perhaps you've seen my parents.

OLD MAN

Urashima Taro? You must be joking.

URASHIMA

No, sir that is my name.

OLD MAN

Urashima Taro is an old legend. Some say that a giant turtle took him away to the bottom of the sea some 300 years ago.

URASHIMA

300 years? How can this be? I've been gone for only three!

STORYTELLER

Urashima then ran away
Towards the swirling blue sea spray.
He called out to his princess fair
But found that nobody was there.
He then remembered her strange gift
And unwrapped it ever so swift.
"This box must be the cause," he said
As saddened thoughts filled up his head.
He opened up the box of gold
And then he started to grow old.
The sea mixed with his bitter tears
As he lamented his lost years.

[END]