

# The tale of the Bamboo Cutter

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Once upon a time, there lived a poor bamboo cutter who was one day cutting bamboo in his fields when he beheld a wondrous light, bending down to have a closer look he saw a beautiful creature in the heart of the reed, the girl was only four inches tall. The bamboo cutter picked the small girl up and took her home to his wife, and together they raised her in a small basket. As the days went by, every time the cutter returned to his fields to do his cutting work he found gold, and soon the cutter and his wife became very rich.

After a period of only three months the girl grew from her small stature to a fully grown maid, the most beautiful maid in the whole land. When the bamboo cutter decided to name his daughter, he held a feast and named her Lady Kaguya or (Precious Slender Bamboo of the Field of Autumn). As the story of Lady Kaguya's beauty spread throughout the land, many suitors showed up at the bamboo cutter's house attempting to win her love. After a long period of time, all but five of the men went home and finally the remaining five men (all Noblemen) asked the bamboo cutter to bestow his daughter to one of them, to which, he replied that since Lady Kaguya really wasn't his real daughter she wasn't required to follow his wishes. Even though the five men eventually went home, they still kept asking the bamboo cutter for his daughter's hand in marriage.

The bamboo cutter soon became bothered by the men's demands for his daughter's hand and he went to her and said it would be fitting for such a handsome and fair maid to marry one of the noblemen, to which, she replied that I'm not so fair to be able to trust myself to choose marriage to an untested heart. So, it was soon arranged that all five noblemen were summoned before Lady Kaguya and each nobleman was be given a difficult task to complete, and the one that succeeded would marry Lady Kaguya.

The first nobleman, Prince Ishizukuri, was told to travel to northern India and bring back the stone beggar bowl that the Buddha himself had used. The second nobleman, Prince Kuramochi, was told to travel to a mountain named Horai where a tree grows that has silver roots, a golden trunk, and bears fruit of pure white jade and bring back a branch. The third nobleman, Sadaijin Dainagon, was told to find and have fashioned a robe made of the pelts of flame proof rats for Lady Kaguya. The fourth nobleman, Chiunagon, was told to bring back the rainbow hued jewel that's hidden inside a dragon's head. The fifth and final nobleman, lord Iso, was told to find and

return with the cowry-shell that the swallow carries over the sea plain.

The noblemen departed to complete their tasks, and over the course of several years either tried to fake, steal, or just plain failed to complete their assigned tasks and Lady Kaguya rejected all five of the noblemen. Soon the news of Lady Kaguya's beauty eventually reached the Mikado (Emperor of Japan) so he sent one of his palace ladies to meet with, and report back to him everything about Lady Kaguya, but Lady Kaguya refused to meet with her. The Mikado soon sends for the bamboo cutter and his daughter to report to the palace with the reward of a noble title to be awarded to the bamboo cutter. After talking with his daughter, Lady Kaguya tells her father that if she's forced to his house she'll die, so the price of his nobility will be his daughter's life. The bamboo cutter travels to the palace and tells the Mikado of his daughter decision, and the Mikado is so interested in seeing Lady Kaguya that he arranges a royal hunt so he can stop by for a visit the bamboo cutter's house.

When the Mikado enters the bamboo cutter's house he sees a wondrous light and finds its source is Lady Kaguya, as he gets a glimpse of her face she disappears. Knowing that Lady Kaguya is no mortal woman he begs for her to return, and she does. The Mikado pleads his love for Lady Kaguya, but Lady Kaguya tells him that she must remain at this house, so the Mikado departs in sadness. In the seventh month of the third year after the royal visit, Lady Kaguya looks upon the full moon with sadness and pain, and Lady Kaguya tells her father that the sight of the moon causes her to reflect on the sadness of the world. The next month, Lady Kaguya tells her maids that she's no mortal woman but was born in the palace of the moon kingdom, and will soon leave this world and depart for her birthplace. . When the bamboo cutter finds out that his daughter would soon depart he becomes angry and informs the Mikado, who sends a whole company to prevent her departure.

On the night of the next full moon, a great cloud descends from the moon bringing with it a great host of moon-folk, and a glorious carriage. The troop of soldiers tries to prevent the moon-folk from landing but all their arrows miss the mark, and the leader of the moon-folk orders the bamboo cutter to bring forth Lady Kaguya, the power of his command opens all the locked doors, and Lady Kaguya comes forth. The commander tells Lady Kaguya that it's time to leave this sorry world, and just as she's about to depart she hands the bamboo cutter a scroll which says that she's sorry for causing him pain and that if she was born to this world she would have not caused her father pain. Lady Kaguya also says that because her father loved her so well, she'll leave behind her silken mantle as a memorial so he can gaze upon it when the moon shines and he can remember his daughter.

Then the moon-folk bring forward a coffer that contains a Celestial Robe of Feathers and a small portion of the Elixir of Life, and after Lady Kaguya drinks some of the Elixir of life the moon-folk attempt to place the Robe of Feathers over her back but she stops them. She tells the moon-folk that she still has something to do; Lady Kaguya proceeds to write a message to the Mikado, and she gives the scroll and the remaining Elixir of Life to the troop commander. Once Lady Kaguya places the Robe of Feathers over her back all her memories of the mortal world are erased and she departs with the moon-folk to return to the moon.

The message to the Mikado says that while he desired to be with her, it was not permitted to be, and that basically she wanted to be with him but she was forbidden to do so, and that caused great pain to her heart, so she's sorry.

After the Mikado read the letter his heart was so overcome with sadness that he ordered his commander to take the scroll along with the Elixir of life to the top of the highest mountain in Suruga and burn them. His loyal commander, following the Mikado's orders, climbed to the summit of the tallest mountain and carried out the Mikado's orders. From that time forward men would look upon that mountain and say that the smoke rising from its peak mingles with the clouds of heaven, and that mountain is now called Fuji-yama, the never dying.

This is a wonderful tale that showcases how the Japanese love of nature is linked with the divine.