The Silly Jelly-Fish

by B. H. Chamberlain

The whole book, word for word, from The Silly Jelly-Fish, told in English by B. H. Chamberlain (Japanese Fairy Tale Series No. 13; London: Griffith Farran & Co., printed by the Kobunsha in Tokyo; the Gutenberg text prints no date, and 1887 is the date scholars give for it). Public domain in the United States. Text from Project Gutenberg eBook #25590, with its chapter headings, italics and line breaks kept; illustration notes and the contents list are left out.

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Once upon a time the King of the Dragons, who had till then lived as a bachelor, took it into his head to get married. His bride was a young Dragonette just sixteen years old,--lovely enough, in very sooth, to become the wife of a King. Great were the rejoicings on the occasion. The Fishes, both great and small, came to pay their respects, and to offer gifts to the newly wedded pair; and for some days all was feasting and merriment.

But alas! even Dragons have their trials. Before a month had passed, the young Dragon Queen fell ill. The doctors dosed her with every medicine that was known to them, but all to no purpose. At last they shook their heads, declaring that there was nothing more to be done. The illness must take its course, and she would probably die. But the sick Queen said to her husband:

"I know of something that will cure me. Only fetch me a live Monkey's liver to eat, and I shall get well at once."--"A live Monkey's liver!" exclaimed the King. "What are you thinking of, my dear? Why! you forget that we Dragons live in the sea, while Monkeys live far away from here, among the forest-trees on land. A Monkey's liver! Why! darling, you must be mad." Hereupon the young Dragon Queen burst into tears: "I only ask you for one small thing," whimpered she, "and you won't get it for me. I always thought you didn't really love me. Oh! I wish I had staid at home with my own m-m-m-mama and my own papa-a-a-a!" Here her voice choked with sobs, and she could say no more.

Well, of course the Dragon King did not like to have it thought that he was unkind to his beautiful young wife. So he sent for his trusty servant the Jelly-Fish, and said: "It is rather a difficult job; but what I want you to try to do is to swim across to the land, and persuade a live Monkey to come here with you. In order to make the Monkey willing to come, you can tell him how much nicer everything is here in Dragon-Land than away where he lives. But what I really want him for is to cut out his liver, and use it as medicine for your young Mistress, who, as you know, is dangerously ill."

So the Jelly-Fish went off on his strange errand. In those days he was just like any other fish, with eyes, and fins, and a tail. He even had little feet, which made him able to walk on the land as well as to swim in the water. It did not take him many hours to swim across to the country where the Monkeys lived; and fortunately there just happened to be a fine Monkey skipping about among the branches of the trees near the place where the Jelly-Fish landed. So the Jelly-Fish said: "Mr. Monkey! I have come to tell you of a country far more beautiful than this. It lies beyond the waves, and is called Dragon-Land. There is pleasant weather there all the year round,

there is always plenty of ripe fruit on the trees, and there are none of those mischievous creatures called Men. If you will come with me, I will take you there. Just get on my back."

The Monkey thought it would be fun to see a new country. So he leapt on to the Jelly-Fish's back, and off they started across the water. But when they had gone about half-way, he began to fear that perhaps there might be some hidden danger. It seemed so odd to be fetched suddenly in that way by a stranger. So he said to the Jelly-Fish: "What made you think of coming for me?" The Jelly-Fish answered: "My Master, the King of the Dragons, wants you in order to cut out your liver, and give it as medicine to his wife, the Queen, who is sick."

"Oh! that's your little game,--is it?" thought the Monkey. But he kept his thoughts to himself and only said: "Nothing could please me better than to be of service to Their Majesties. But it so happens that I left my liver hanging to a branch of that big chestnut-tree, which you found me skipping about on. A liver is a thing that weighs a good deal. So I generally take it out, and play about without it during the day-time. We must go back for it."--The Jelly-Fish agreed that there was nothing else to be done under the circumstances. For,--silly creature that he was,--he did not see that the Monkey was telling a story in order to avoid getting killed, and having his liver used as medicine for the fanciful young Dragon Queen.

When they reached the shore of Monkey-Land again, the monkey bounded off the Jelly-Fish's back, and up to the topmost branch of the chestnut-tree in less than no time. Then he said: "I do not see my liver here. Perhaps somebody has taken it away. But I will look for it. You, meantime, had better go back and tell your Master what has happened. He might be anxious about you, if you did not get home before dark."

So the Jelly-Fish started off a second time; and when he got home, he told the Dragon King everything just as it had happened. But the King flew into a passion with him for his stupidity, and hallooed to his officers, saying: "Away with this fellow! Take him, and beat him to a jelly! Don't let a single bone remain unbroken in his body!" So the officers seized him, and beat him, as the King had commanded. That is the reason why, to this very day, Jelly-Fishes have no bones, but are just nothing more than a mass of pulp.

As for the Dragon Queen, when she found she could not have the Monkey's liver,--why! she made up her mind that the only thing to do was to get well without it.

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