THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH
Rendered into English by
LAFCADIO HEARN

LONG, long ago there lived somewhere among the mountains of Japan a poor woodcutter and his wife. They were very old, and had no children. Every day the husband...
went alone to the forest to cut wood, while the wife sat weaving at home.

One day the old man went further into the forest than was his custom, to seek a certain kind of wood; and he suddenly found himself at the edge of a little
spring he had never seen before. The water was strangely clear and cold, and he was thirsty; for the day was hot, and he had been working hard.

That water seemed to refresh him in a most extraordinary way.

So he doffed his huge straw-hat, knelt down, and took a long drink.
Then he caught sight of his own face in the spring, and started back. It was certainly his own face, but not at all as he was accustomed to see it in the bronze mirror at home. It was the face of a very young man! He could not believe his eyes. He put up both hands to his head which had been quite bald only a moment before, when he had wiped it with the little blue towel he always carried with him. But now it was covered with thick black hair. And his face had become smooth as a boy's: every wrinkle was gone. At the same moment he discovered himself full of new strength. He stared in astonishment at the limbs that had been so long withered by age: they were now shapely and hard with dense young muscle. Unknowingly he had drunk of the Fountain of Youth; and that draught had transformed him.
First he leaped high and shouted for joy; then he ran home faster than he had ever run before in his life. When he entered his house his wife was frightened; because she took him for a stranger; and when he told her the wonder, she could not at once believe him. But after a long time he was able to convince her that the young man she now saw before her was really her husband; and he told her where the spring was, and asked her to go there with him.

Then she said: "You have become so handsome and so young that you cannot continue to love an old woman; so I must drink some of that water immediately. But it will never do for both of us to be away"
from the house at the same time.
Do you wait here, while I go."

And she ran to the woods all by herself.
She found the spring and knelt down, and began to drink.

Oh! how cool and sweet that water was! She drank and drank and drank, and stopped for breath only to begin again.

Her husband waited for her impatiently;—he expected to see her come back changed into a pretty slender girl. But she did not come back at all. He got anxious, shut up the house, and went to look for her.
When he reached the spring, he could not see her. He was just on the point of returning.

when he heard a little wail in the high grass near the spring. He searched there and discovered his wife's clothes and a baby,—a very small baby, perhaps six months old.
For the old woman had drunk too deeply of the magical water: she had drunk herself far back beyond the time of youth into the period of speechless infancy.

He took up the child in his arms. It looked at him in a sad wondering way. He carried it home, — murmuring to it, — thinking strange melancholy thoughts.

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