

The Golden Fish

“The Golden Fish” is a story that is told in several countries and cultures, most commonly across Asia. Read this story and the two after it.

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was an old man who lived in a small cottage with his wife on the bay. They didn't have much money, so the man would catch fish from the ocean for them to eat and sell. Every day, he sailed out with his huge fishing nets, hoping to catch lots of fish.

One day, he went out to sea. As he sat there, his net cast, there was suddenly a pull. He'd never felt a pull this hard before! He strained and struggled to pull the net out of the water. When he finally did, he was shocked to see it empty except for one tiny fish.

The fish was gold, and sparkled in the sunlight. Stranger still, it looked up at him and said: “Please, do not eat me! Put me back in the ocean and I will do whatever you wish.”

He thought for a minute, but he couldn't say no to the helpless creature. He returned the fish to the sea and went home. When he got home, he told his wife what had happened. “You fool!” she shouted. “That fish could have helped us! Think about how hard we work every day to make ends meet! Go find the fish and ask it for food to eat.”

The next day, he went back to the beach and stared out at the sea. He called out to the waves: “Little fish, little fish, please come to me.”

To his amazement, the golden fish swam up to the shore. “What do you need?” the fish asked. “My wife has sent me to ask

you for food to eat.”

“Go home,” the fish said. When you return you will find food in plenty.”

He went home to find food spilling out of the pantry! “Is that enough food?” he asked her.

“Yes, but we have more troubles,” she replied. “The roof is leaking, and the windows shake every time a storm passes overhead. Go back to the fish and ask it to give us a new home.”

Again, he returned to the sea. “Little fish, little fish, please come to me,” he called again. The fish appeared. “What do you need?” he asked.

“My wife is still unhappy. She doesn't want to live in our old hut anymore. She wants a big, beautiful house.”

“Don't worry,” said the fish. “Go back home. When you get there, you will see that her wish has come true.”

He went back home. A big, beautiful house stood where their hut used to be. He was delighted to now own such a grand home, but as soon as he got to the door, his wife came rushing out. “Go back to the fish and tell him I don't want to be just a peasant anymore. I want to be queen of the island!”

Yet again he returned to the shore and called out for the fish, who again swam up to meet him.

“My wife is still unhappy. She says she wants to be queen.”

“Go home. By the time you are there, her wish will have come true.”

He arrived home to see not a house, but a huge palace! Guards marched around the garden and servants scurried to and fro inside the house. He found his wife in the parlor, wearing an elegant gown and sitting on a golden throne.

A few days later, she had another request. "I have grown tired of being queen," she said. "Go back to the fish and tell him I want something bigger—I want to be the Empress of the Seven Seas!"

"But your majesty..." he started to protest.

"Do not argue with me! Go to the fish," she said. "Or I will have you banished from my kingdom forever."

The fisherman trudged back to the shore. "Little fish, little fish, please come to me," he pleaded.

He waited and waited and waited. Minutes passed, but the fish did not appear. He called again, but still it did not come.

On his third try, he suddenly heard a great rumble as the sea swelled up and spat out the little fish onto the shore. "What else could you possibly need?" said the fish. "My wife wants to be the Empress of the Seven Seas," he said.

The fish said nothing, then slowly turned away and swam off into the sea. The man walked home, afraid of what his wife would say. When he walked up to his house, he was sad, but not surprised, to see that the palace had vanished—in its place stood the same small hut he was used to. His wife sat inside in a plain dress. She looked up at him, but did not say a word.

The next day, the man went out to fish, just as he always had. He called out for the golden fish, but he did not arrive. Thought he fished every morning for the rest of his life, he never found the golden fish again.