

The King of the Fishes

Long ago there lived a poor fisherman called Li. Every day he went down to the shore where he stood on the rocks and threw the nets into the icy waters and waited. When he pulled the nets in, he would take any fish back to the market and sell them.

One day, he caught a huge fish. It had silver scales that glittered red and gold. It was so beautiful that Li stood amazed and thought about the fish and its family. Li suddenly felt guilty.

So he scooped the fish up and set it free. Li stood watching as the fish swam out to sea. Then to his amazement, it turned and spoke to him. 'Li, you have saved the King of the Fishes. I grant you one wish. Come back here when the moon is high in the sky and tell me what you would like.' With that, the King of the Fishes swam away.

Li hurried home, wondering what he should wish for. There were so many things that his family needed. First he asked his old father. 'Father, if you had one wish, what would it be?' There was a silence and then his father said, 'Why son, I would wish for new eyes, for I am blind.'

Next he asked his old mother. 'Mother, if you had one wish, what would it be?' There was a silence and then his mother said, 'Why son, I would wish for money, for the roof needs mending.'

Finally he asked his wife. 'Wife, if you had one wish, what would it be?' There was a silence and then his wife said, 'I would wish for a baby.'

Li could not make up his mind. All evening he paced up and down trying to decide what the wish should be. Suddenly, he stopped pacing and grinned. Yes, he had it! He rushed out of the house, through the forest and down to the sea. The moon was high in the sky and so it was the time to talk to the King of the Fishes. He could see the moon's reflection on the waves, and then there was the King of the Fishes. 'What do you wish for, Li?' called the King in his high, silvery voice. 'I wish for my father to see our son in a cradle made of gold,' shouted Li. There was a silence and the great fish disappeared. The waves stilled and Li could see the stars like silvery freckles in the dark night sky. Then out of the darkness he heard a noise, drifting down through the forest. It was a baby crying.