The King of the Fishes

Once upon a time there was a poor fisherman called Li.

Every day, he went down to the sea to fish. There 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 in the sunlight, blood-red fins and a golden crown. It was so beautiful that Li stood, amazed, staring at the fish as it thrashed about in the net. Suddenly Li felt guilty. It was so beautiful, and surely it must have a family…

So, he scooped it up out of the net 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. When the moon is high in the sky, come back here and tell me your heart's desire.' With a flick of his fin, the King of the Fishes was gone.

Immediately, Li hurried home, wondering what on earth he should wish for. There were so many things that his family needed. First, he asked his elderly father. "Father, if you had one wish, what would it be?" There was a silence and then his father spoke, 'Why son, I would wish for new eyes, for I am blind and will never see again.'

Next, he asked his mother. "Mother, if you had one wish, what would it be?" His mother thought for a minute and then said, "Why son, I would wish for money, for the roof needs mending and the winter winds whip through the house and make my bones shiver so."

Finally, he asked his beautiful wife. "Wife, if you had one wish, what would it be?" There was a silence and then his wife whispered, "Why Li, I would wish for a baby, for who will care for us when we are old? Yes, nothing would be more precious than a child."

Poor Li could not make up his mind – they needed the money certainly, but his father was blind and that was a terrible thing. However, he also knew that a child would bring joy to them all. All evening, Li 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 time to talk to the King of the Fishes. Li ran down onto the rocks and stood there with the foam crashing about him. He could see the moon's reflection on the waves, and then came the King of the Fishes.

"What do you wish for Li?" called the King in a 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…