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## The Golden Fish: A Russian Folktale



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**Narrator 2:** This time, the golden fish did not reply. Instead, it turned and vanished into the deep black sea. Not knowing what else to do, the old man headed back to the palace, but the palace was gone! In its place stood a small shabby cottage. Inside, the old woman sat in ragged clothes. They began to live as they had before.

**Old Man:** Each day I go down to the sea, but never again do I see a golden fish. I've seen great wealth, but no happiness. It is better to be content with a crumb than to have a feast with no joy.



## The Golden Fish:

### A Russian Folktale



**Narrator 1:** Once upon a time, an old man and an old woman lived in a shabby cottage on an island in Russia. The old man was a fisherman, but in spite of his efforts he caught barely enough to keep the two of them alive. One day, something amazing happened.

**Old Man:** My tired body aches from casting my net into the sea day after day. Today my net feels heavier than usual. Perhaps tonight the old woman and I will have full bellies!

**Narrator 2:** But when the old man dragged up his net, it was empty except for one little fish—a bright golden fish.

**Golden Fish:** Don't hurt me, old man! Let me go back into the deep blue sea and I'll be useful to you. I'll do whatever you wish. You need only to free me.

**Old Man:** I need nothing from you. Go back and swim in the sea.

**Narrator 3:** So the old man set the fish free and turned toward home where the old woman was waiting.

**Old Woman:** How much did you catch today?

**Old Man:** Nothing. I did catch one very curious little golden fish. It spoke in a human voice asking me to let it go back into the sea and offering to do for me whatever I wished. I asked for nothing, and I set it free.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Narrator 2:** This time, no golden fish appeared, so the old man called out again.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Narrator 3:** Again, no fish.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Narrator 1:** Suddenly the sea began to churn. The water changed from clear blue to deep black. The golden fish swam up to the shore.

**Golden Fish:** What do you need, old man?

**Old Man:** The old woman has gone completely mad! Now she wants to be the mistress of the sea, ruling all the waters and commanding all the fish.



**Old Woman:** Listen to me, you old fool. Go to the golden fish and tell it this. I don't want to be just the queen. I also want to be mistress of the sea, so that all the seas and all the fish obey me.

**Narrator 1:** The old man tried to object, but his wife would not listen. So, reluctantly, he went down to the sea once more.

**Old Woman:** Oh, you old fool! Good luck falls from the skies and you haven't the sense to grab it. You could have asked for bread at least.

**Narrator 1:** The woman gave the man no peace until he returned to the sea and called out to the golden fish.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Golden Fish:** What do you need, old man?

**Old Man:** The old woman is very angry with me and has sent me for bread.



**Golden Fish:** Go home. You'll have bread aplenty when you get there.

**Narrator 2:** When the old man returned home, there was, indeed, plenty of bread.

**Old Woman:** How can I be happy with bread when my washtub has sprung a leak and I can't do the washing? Go back to your golden fish and ask it for a new washtub.



**Narrator 3:** The old man returned to the sea.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Golden Fish:** What do you need, old man?

**Narrator 2:** The old man went back to the sea feeling very unhappy.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Golden Fish:** What do you need, old man?

**Old Man:** My old woman has demanded to be the queen. She's become unkind and greedy.

**Golden Fish:** Cheer up. Go home now and all will be done.

**Narrator 3:** When the old man returned home, instead of his stone house he saw a towering palace with a golden roof. On a balcony sat the old woman dressed like a queen, surrounded by generals and governors. After some time, the old woman grew tired of being a queen. She ordered her soldiers to find the old man and bring him to her.

**Narrator 3:** The old man was dismayed. He had done so much for his wife, and look how she treated him!

**Old Man:** I bring her good fortune, and she feels she's better than I am and refuses to consider me her husband!

**Narrator 1:** Soon the old woman wished to be greater than a fine lady. She commanded her servants to bring the old man to her.

**Old Woman:** Old man, go back to the golden fish and tell it that I want to be the queen!



**Old Man:** The old woman sent me. She wants a new washtub.

**Golden Fish:** All right, you'll have a new washtub when you arrive home.

**Narrator 1:** And when the man returned home, there stood a new wash-tub. But his wife was still upset.

**Old Woman:** This house is about to fall down upon us! Go back to your golden fish and tell it to build us a new house.

**Narrator 2:** Again, the old man returned to the sea.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Golden Fish:** What do you want?

**Old Man:** Build us a new house. The old woman is angry and won't give me any peace. She says she won't live in the old cottage anymore.

**Narrator 3:** When the old man approached home, he saw that in place of the cottage there now stood a brand new oak house with beautiful carved eaves.

**Old Woman:** Oh, you old fool! Do you think I can live in this house and remain a poor fisherman's wife? Go back to that golden fish and tell it that I want to be a fine lady so that people will do as I tell them and bow when they meet me.

**Narrator 1:** With the woman's angry voice following him, the man went to the sea.

**Old Man:** Fish, oh fish!

**Golden Fish:** What do you need, old man?

**Old Man:** The old woman gives me no peace. She's gone quite mad. She's demanded to become a fine lady now.



**Golden Fish:** Very well. Go home now and all will be done.

**Narrator 2:** As the old man neared home, he was surprised to see that his oak house had been replaced by a large stone house with many servants and that his wife was now a fine lady wearing expensive clothes. He greeted her hopefully.

**Old Man:** Hello, wife.

**Old Woman:** This old fisherman dares to call me, a fine lady, his wife. How improper! Servants, remove him at once!