

The Fisherman and the Mermaid



by
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Chapter

1



A long time ago, in a small village on the edge of the sea, there lived a fisherman and his beautiful wife. They lived in a small house made of wood. They were poor but happy.

Every day the fisherman went out to catch fish in his small boat. He left very early in the morning, just after sunrise and came back every evening, just before sunset. Every day at midday he sailed to a small island called Duyong Island, where he cooked some of the fish he caught and drank some of the fresh water from a stream on the island. In the afternoon he continued fishing.



His wife stayed at home and repaired the fishing nets or made baskets from the pandan leaves which she collected from the beach around their house. In the evening, she prepared dinner. The fisherman always came back at the same time, just before it got dark.

Then one day, the fisherman's wife found out she was pregnant. This was going to be their first child. She was very happy and decided to tell her husband as soon as he came home that evening. All that day she thought about their child: would it be a boy or a girl? What should they call it? Would it be strong and healthy?

When her husband arrived home that evening, she told him the news. He was delighted and they spent the evening talking about their first child.



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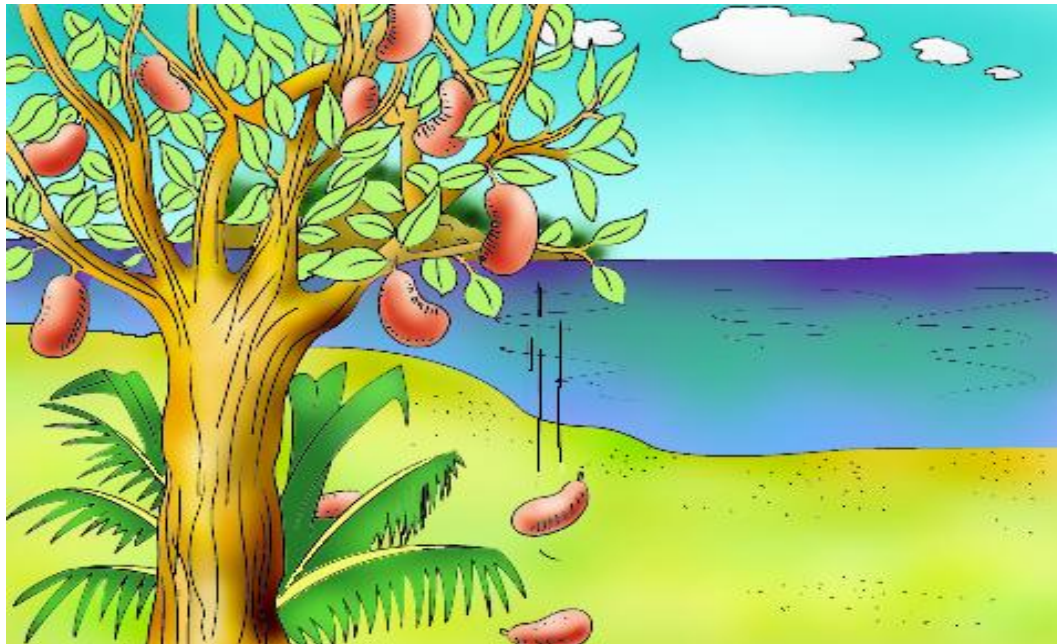
The next day the fisherman went out to sea in his boat as usual. After he left, his wife decided to go and visit her grandmother. She wanted to ask her grandmother what she should do to make sure her baby would be healthy and strong.

Her grandmother made a cup of strong coffee and they sat down to talk about the baby.



‘When I was a young woman like you,’ said the grandmother, ‘my mother told me about a special fruit which grows on an island not far from here. The fruit is called ‘mermaid fruit’, or ‘buah duyong’, as she called it. This fruit grows only on Duyong Island. People say it is delicious.

People also say that the flesh from this fruit is magic. Whenever someone eats the flesh they can make a wish and this wish will come true. But according to the story, the fruit grants only one wish each day.’



‘Oh, really?’ asked the young woman. ‘I would love to find this fruit and eat some. I would wish for a strong, healthy baby. Perhaps my husband can find some of this fruit. He sails his boat near Duyong Island every day.’

'Mmmm,' said the grandmother, 'perhaps he can. But be careful. Not all magic is good magic.' And with that, she took away the coffee cups and sent her grand-daughter home.



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When the fisherman returned home that evening, his wife ran down to the beach to meet him. She helped him to pull the boat onto the sand and she collected the nets which she would repair the next day. Then the fisherman and his wife carried the fish to the market where they sold as much as they could. They gave some of their fish to a poor old couple who lived in the village, and the rest they left for the birds and crabs to finish.



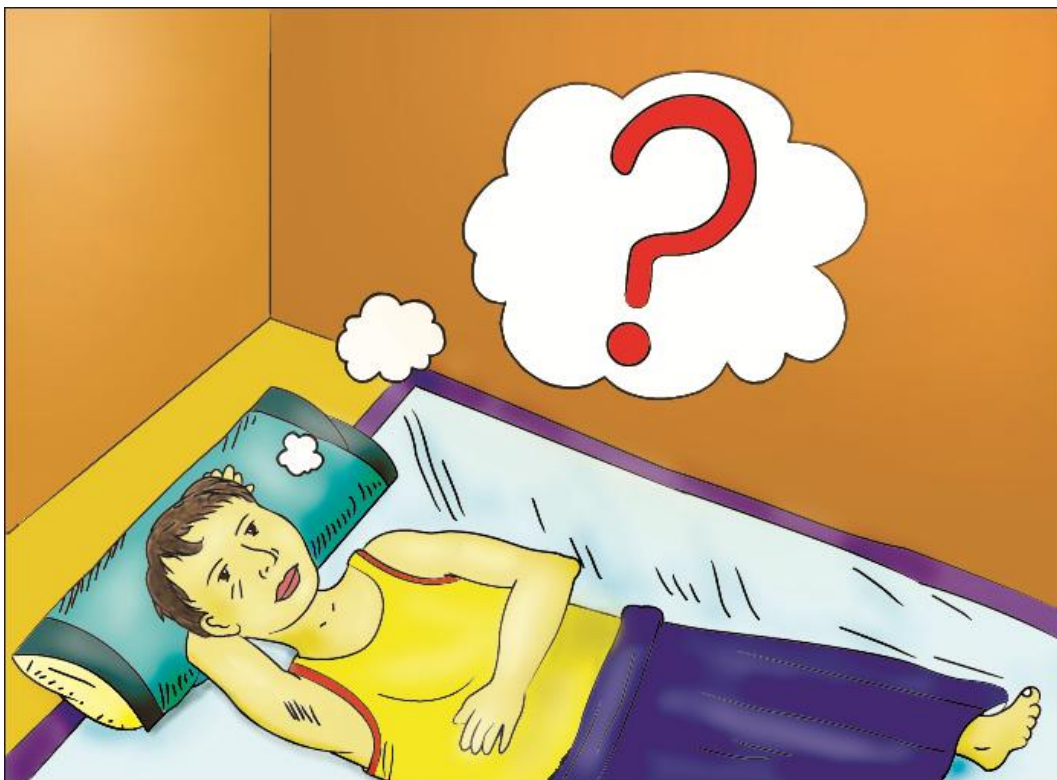
When they reached their small house, she said to him:

‘Husband, I would really like to eat mermaid fruit. I’ve heard there are some delicious fruits on Duyong Island, not far from where you go to fish. The fruit is very good for our child. Could you find some for me?’

‘Of course, my darling wife,’ said the fisherman. ‘I will find some for you when I go fishing tomorrow. I always sail to Duyong Island to have my lunch. I will find some mermaid fruit for you then, I promise.’

That evening she told the fisherman about her visit to her grandmother.

She told him how delicious the mermaid fruit was, and she told him about the magic wish. He was very excited, too, and in his head he was thinking about what he would wish for.



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The next day the fisherman and his wife got up early and prepared the boat for the day's fishing. Just before the fisherman left the house, his wife reminded him:

'Husband, don't forget to bring me some mermaid fruit when you come back today.'

'Of course I won't forget,' said the fisherman and he climbed into his boat and sailed out to sea.



That day was a very good day for the fisherman. Every time he threw his net into the sea, it soon filled up with fish. After only a few hours his boat was full of fish. He was so busy catching fish that he forgot to sail to Duyong Island or his lunch, and he forgot about his promise to find some mermaid fruit for his wife. It was only when he was pulling in his net for the last time that day that he remembered his promise.



‘Oh dear!’ he said to himself. ‘I almost forgot my promise to my wife. But what shall I do? It’s almost dark and I must return home with all this fish. Never mind about the mermaid fruit. I will find some tomorrow.’

So he set sail and returned to the seashore. It wasn’t easy because the boat was full of fish and heavy. The boat sat low in the water but the fisherman reached the safety of the shore just before it got dark.

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When he arrived home that evening, his wife ran to the beach to meet him. 'Have you brought me some mermaid fruit?' she asked excitedly. She was very disappointed when he told her that he did not have any with him. 'But you promised me you would find some!' she said. 'I'm sorry!' he said but my boat was full of fish and it was getting dark so I had to come home immediately. I promise I will bring you some tomorrow.



The next day, early in the morning, the fisherman got up early, had some breakfast and went down to the sea. Once again his wife reminded him about the promise to bring some mermaid fruit from Duyong Island.

‘Of course, I won’t forget this time,’ he promised, and set sail in his boat.



The sea was very calm, almost like a mirror, as he reached the place where he threw his net into the sea. But today he was not so lucky. Each time he pulled in his net, it was almost empty.

‘Oh dear,’ he thought, ‘I wonder where all the fish have gone today.’

He spent a long time in his usual place but he didn't catch many fish. After some hours he decided to try a different place, a few kilometers away. When he threw his net into the sea it wasn't long before it filled up. This happened a few times and by early evening he had enough fish so he decided to return to the shore.

'Oh dear!' he thought to himself. 'I have forgotten to find some mermaid fruit again. My wife is sure to be angry but it is too late to sail to Duyong Island now. It's getting dark.'



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When he arrived home his wife helped him pull the boat out of the water, collected the nets and took the fish to market to sell.

When they sold all the fish and went back home, she asked him:

‘Well, my husband, have you brought me mermaid fruit? Where is it? I can’t see any.’

She was very disappointed when he told her that he didn’t have any mermaid fruit.

‘Don’t you love me anymore? Why do you always break your promises?’ she asked angrily and immediately started crying, tears streaming down her face.

‘But look at all the beautiful, delicious fish I have caught for you, my love!’ said the fisherman, but he knew that she was not so interested in the fish. He knew that the only thing on her mind was the mermaid fruit.



The fisherman felt sorry for her and was a little ashamed that he didn't keep his promise. He thought about this all night and couldn't sleep.



'I must keep my promise tomorrow,' he said to himself. 'I will not forget again!'

His wife couldn't sleep either. She was angry that her husband couldn't remember to bring some mermaid fruit. All night long she couldn't sleep but in her mind she was making a plan for the next day.

'I'll make sure he doesn't forget tomorrow,' she thought to herself.

'Tomorrow I will eat mermaid fruit and make my wish at last!'

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The next morning the fisherman got ready as usual and his wife helped him put everything on the boat. Then she said

‘Husband, every day you forget to bring me mermaid fruit from Duyong Island so today I am going with you in the boat and we will find mermaid fruit together, you and I.’

The fisherman was very surprised at this and said to her:

‘But you are expecting a baby! It is hard work on the boat. Perhaps it is not good for our baby! It may be dangerous.’

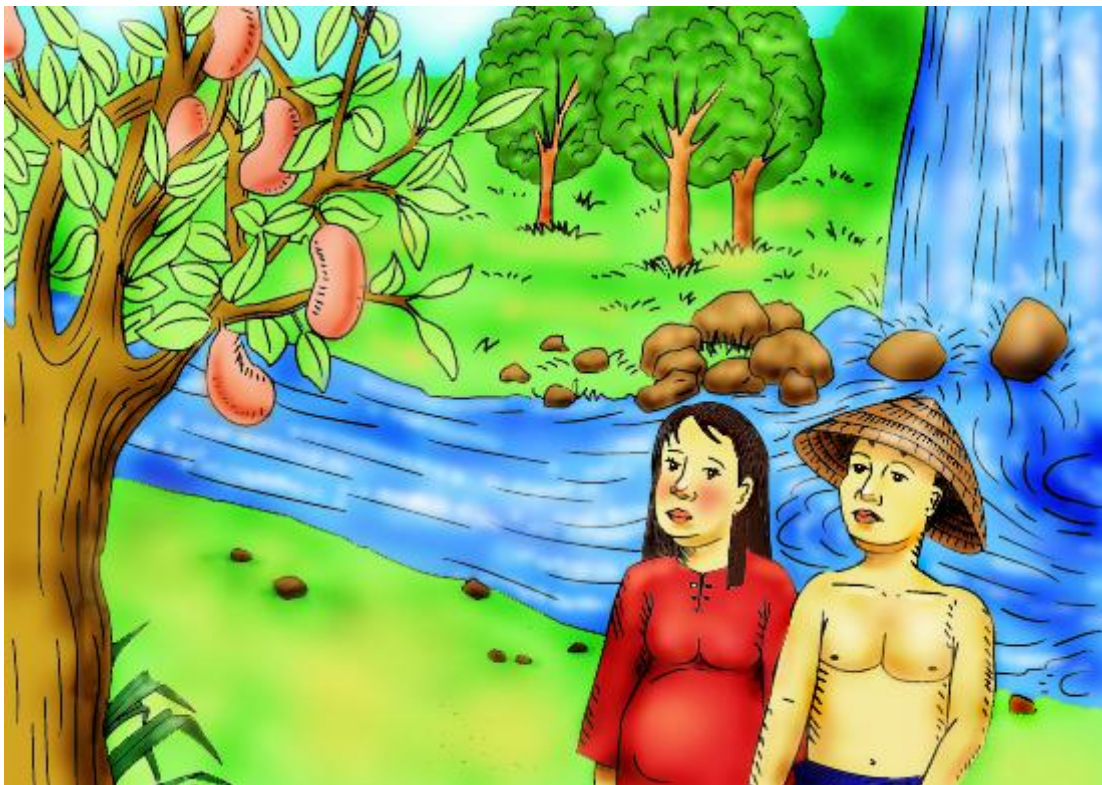
‘Don’t worry about me!’ she said, ‘and don’t worry about my baby. I will take care of everything as soon as we find some mermaid fruit.’



The fisherman wasn't happy but he knew his wife would not change her mind. They set off and sailed towards Duyong Island. When they reached the usual place on the sea, the fisherman wanted to throw his net into the sea to catch some fish but his wife said:

'No! Today there will be no fishing. We will go to Duyong Island immediately and find some mermaid fruit. You will not forget your promise today!'

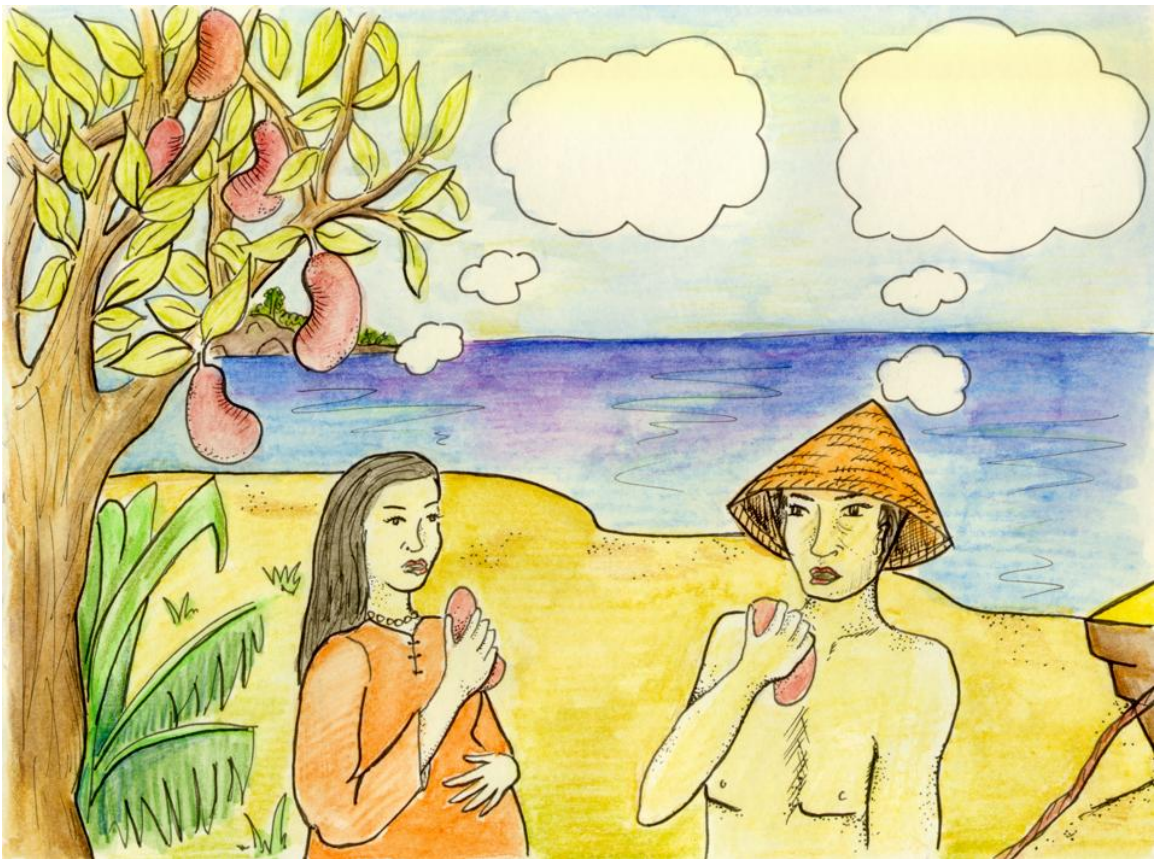
The fisherman knew she wouldn't change her mind so he sailed to Duyong Island. When they reached the island, he jumped out of the boat into the water and pulled the boat onto the sand. Then they followed a small stream for a few minutes until they saw a large tree with lots of fruit hanging from its branches.



'I don't know this tree,' said the fisherman. 'I've never seen fruit like this in all my life.'

'This must be the mermaid fruit!' cried the wife excitedly. 'Climb up and get me some fruit!'

So the fisherman climbed up the tree and chose two large fruits; one for himself and one for his wife. When he reached the ground again, he gave his wife one of the fruits and kept the other for himself. As they started to eat the fruit, each of them started to make their wish.'



Chapter

8

Now, if you remember Chapter 2 of this story, you will know that the mermaid fruit can grant only one wish each day. So what do you think happened when both the fisherman and his wife made a wish at exactly the same time? And what do you think they both wished for? Well, we know the wife wanted to wish for a strong, healthy baby, but what about the fisherman?

When the fisherman bit into the fruit he was surprised how delicious the flesh tasted.

‘This really must be magic fruit,’ he thought to himself, and he started to make his wish. ‘I want to catch a big fish, the biggest fish in the world. Fish...fish...fish!’

At exactly the same time, of course, the fisherman’s wife made her wish. ‘I want a strong, healthy baby. Baby...baby...baby!’



The mermaid fruit was a little confused by this. This was the first time that people had made two wishes on one day and it didn't know what to do. In the end, it decided to join their wishes together.

As soon as the wife had eaten her fruit she began to feel something moving inside her stomach.

'Husband,' she cried, 'help me! Our baby is coming!'

After a few minutes a strong, healthy little girl was born. She was really beautiful! But there was something about her, something different. When the fisherman and his wife looked closely at their beautiful little daughter, they saw that in place of strong, healthy legs, she had a strong, healthy tail, very much like the tail of a fish. The tail moved from one side to the other. What's more, the tail was covered in scales, just like a fish. So, you see, in a way they both got what they wished for!



As the baby girl moved about, she slipped from her mother's arms and fell into the fresh water of the stream. Her parents cried out in fear as their daughter fell into the water. But after a few minutes they saw her again. She was swimming in the stream, just like a fish! She swam away towards the sea.

Her parents never saw her again. But sometimes, when the fisherman went out to his usual place in the sea to catch fish, he saw (perhaps only in his mind) a young woman with a tail sitting on a rock in the distance.

