

*Stories from Around the World*

# *Enchanted Tales*

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# The Magic Fish

## A tale from China

*The Brothers Grimm version of "Cinderella" is the one many of us are familiar with, but there are hundreds – maybe even thousands – of different versions of this tale from around the globe. This version from China was the first to be written down, over 1,000 years ago.*

Once upon a time, in a little shed outside a little house in the cave mountains of Southern China, there lived an orphan called Ye-Tsien. She was bright-eyed, clever, kind and good at making things. Ye-Tsien's stepmother loved her own daughter best, so Ye-Tsien had to do all the heaviest, most dangerous work, like collecting firewood from the deep forest or water from the high mountain pools.

One day, Ye-Tsien was collecting water when up from the bottom of a deep mountain pool there was a shimmering and a glittering. It travelled up and up until something broke the surface – a tiny, shining, golden fish! The fish looked up at Ye-Tsien, Ye-Tsien looked back – and from that moment, the fish

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and Ye-Tsien became friends. She took it home, placed it in a basin and fed it every day with scraps from her own plate. The fish grew and grew until, one day, it had grown so big she had to take it back to the pool. Still, Ye-Tsien visited the golden fish every day, and each time the fish would poke its shining golden head out of the water and greet her.

A few weeks later, the Stepmother was hungry and had an idea. Secretly, she followed Ye-Tsien to the pool. She saw how the huge, sparkling, delicious-looking fish always came out for Ye-Tsien but stayed deep under the water when anyone else came by. *How can I outwit this clever fish?* she thought.

The next day, back at home, the Stepmother gave Ye-Tsien new clothes to put on and sent her on a long errand down the mountain. Then she disguised herself in Ye-Tsien's old clothes, went to the pool and called the fish. When it bubbled up from the bottom of the pool, the Stepmother was ready with a knife. She took the golden fish home, chopped it up, cooked it and served it up to eat with her favourite daughter.

"Delicious!" they both said, wiping their mouths. They ate every morsel and threw its bones away on the rubbish heap.

The following day, Ye-Tsien hurried to the mountain pool and called – but no fish came. Big tears fell from her eyes and splashed into the empty pool. But as she cried, the air thickened, shimmering and glittering, and a figure appeared. It spoke in a voice that reminded her of safety:

*Today you cry, today you weep,  
But look upon the rubbish heap.  
Your fish friend's magic bones are there.  
They'll grant you wishes, never fear.*



Then the figure disappeared. Ye-Tsien dried her cheeks, ran home and gathered the bones of the golden fish from the rubbish heap. She hid them in the woodpile but made no wish. Not until the first day of winter – the day of the Great Festival of the Ancestors. Ye-Tsien had never been before.

"Can I come to the festival with you, Mother?" Ye-Tsien asked.

"Absolutely not!" shouted the Stepmother. "You will stay here and chop this wood. Make sure you're finished by the time my daughter and I return!"

Alone again, Ye-Tsien wept into the woodpile. Then she remembered the hidden enchanted bones. Ye-Tsien carefully took them out and made a wish.

From the depths of the woodpile there was a shimmering and a glittering, and before her appeared an exquisite robe of kingfisher-blue feathers that shone with their own light and a pair of shoes woven from the finest threads of gold, with soles so soft they made no sound when she walked. As soon as Ye-Tsien put the robe and shoes on, she found herself at the festival! Crowds of people, delicious smells and colourful processions – Ye-Tsien was excited! Then, through the noise, Ye-Tsien heard a voice she recognised.

"Ye-Tsien, is that you?" her stepmother's voice rang out.

*Stepmother can't find me here*, Ye-Tsien thought. *I must get home before she finds out!* Ye-Tsien ran – past the stalls, past the processions, through the crowds – in the direction of the cave mountains; too fast to notice one golden shoe had fallen off her foot.

A passerby noticed it in the dust and gave it to their father, who gave it to a shoemaker, who sold it to a merchant, who took it to a palace on a great island far across the sea, where there lived a king who collected beautiful shoes.



"A shoe woven from the finest threads of gold, with soles so soft they make no sound!" the King said, admiring the glittering object. "But why just one? It is so exquisite, its wearer must be even more so. Find me the person this shoe fits!"

The King's advisors went around the island and made sure every single person tried on the shoe. But however small or big, long or thin, short or fat their feet were, none were the right shape or size to fit the golden shoe.

"There's only one thing for it. We must take the shoe back to where it was found and we won't return without its owner," the King declared.

Back across the sea at the cave mountains, the King's guards placed the shoe on the road, and hid. Soon, a young girl in ragged clothes carrying a bucket of water stopped in front of the shoe, gasped and picked it up. The guards followed her to a little shed outside a little house.

"Look! The other shoe!" one guard said, peering through the window.

"And a kingfisher-blue cloak fit for a queen!" the second guard said with surprise. "The girl must be a thief!"

Of course, Ye-Tsien wasn't a thief. When the guards brought her in front of the King, she told them the whole story about the golden fish, the magic bones and the wishes.

"WISHES?!" spluttered the King. "Even more interesting than beautiful shoes!" So the King asked Ye-Tsien to marry him.

"Of course she will!" said the Stepmother. There was a grand wedding and the King took Ye-Tsien, the golden shoes, the cloak and the



wishing bones back to his island kingdom. He wished for gold, jewels, pearls, fine clothes, bigger palaces and an unbeatable army... until one day the magic bones stopped granting wishes.

"These bones are useless now, throw them into the sea!" ordered the King.

But Ye-Tsien didn't throw them away. Carefully, she buried the wishing bones in the fine yellow sand of the beach, as if she were putting her best friend to bed, and whispered, "I wish I were far away from here."

And on the surface of the sea, there was a shimmering and a glittering...





## *The Stonecutter*

*A tale inspired by Japan*

*Having wishes granted is a special kind of magic. What would you wish for? This famous story of a poor stonecutter whose wishes come true has an interesting tale of its own! It happens among the mountains and pine forests of Japan but was probably written by a European writer who travelled to Japan and fell in love with its wondrous landscapes, buildings, customs – and, of course, stories.*

Long ago, on a mountainside where white clouds meet green pine trees, there lived a poor stonecutter. Every day he chiselled out heavy blocks for roads, gravestones, statues and anything else people might need stone for. It was hard work, but the Stonecutter was happy.

One morning, the Stonecutter delivered a cartload of stones to a rich man in the nearby town. The Rich Man's house was grand, with servants running here and there, and a table loaded with delicious things to eat and drink.

"Leave the stones in the courtyard – my servants will collect them later," said the Rich Man.

The Stonecutter left, but along the road home he started thinking, *Why has the Rich Man got so much, and I so little?* And then he said out loud, "I wish I could be a rich man, with all those things!" Of course, he didn't expect anyone to hear him but something did.

Deep inside the earth lived the Spirit of the Mountain. It heard the voice of the Stonecutter and, in a flash, his wish was granted.

"Oh!" The Stonecutter looked around – he was standing outside a large house, with servants running this way and that, and kitchens full of cooks preparing delicacies. "I like this!" said the Stonecutter, and for a few days, he was happy.

One day, word came that the Emperor would be passing by the nearby town. Crowds lined the roads and cheered as the Emperor's golden palanquin passed by, followed by guards riding the finest horses. Everyone bowed to the Emperor but the Stonecutter thought again: *I'm a rich man now, but still I must bow to the Emperor*, and then he said out loud, "I wish I was a king with a palace, a throne, and gold and jewels in abundance!"

The Spirit of the Mountain heard and, in a flash, the Stonecutter was dressed in the heavy woven robes of an emperor, with armoured guards around him and a palace finer than the Stonecutter had ever imagined.

*Ah! What riches! Now, I will surely be happy*, he thought. And he was, all through spring until the summer, when he was sitting out in his palace gardens. The Sun beat down so hot and so fierce that he had to go inside.

"Huh! The Sun has forced me to act against my will – it is more powerful than any person. What good are riches without true power? I wish I was the Sun!" said the Stonecutter.

