

## The Fisherman and His Wife

There was once a fisherman who lived with his wife in a little house that was really a pigpen, close by the seaside. The fisherman used to go out all day long fishing. One day, as he sat on the shore with his rod, looking at the sparkling waves and watching his line, his float was dragged away deep into the water. When he drew his line back in, he pulled out a great big fish. But the fish said, "Please let me live! I am not a real fish—I am an enchanted prince. Put me in the water again, and let me go!"

"Oh, ho!" said the man, "you need not go on so much about it! I will have nothing to do with a fish that can talk. So swim away, sir, as soon as you please!" Then he put the fish back into the water, and it darted straight down to the bottom, and left a long streak of blood behind it on the waves.

When the fisherman went home to his wife in the little pigpen house, he told her how he had caught a great fish, and how it had told him it was an enchanted prince, and how, on hearing it speak, he had let it go again.

"Did you not ask it for anything?" said the wife. "We live very wretchedly here, in this nasty dirty pigpen. That fish must have magical powers. Go back and tell it we want a nice little cottage."

The fisherman did not much like the idea. However, he went back to the seashore, and when he got there the water looked all yellow and green. He stood at the water's edge, and said:

O man of the sea!  
Listen to me!  
My wife Ilsabill  
Will have her own will--  
She has sent me to beg a gift of thee!

Then the fish came swimming to him, and said, "Well, what is her will? What does your wife want?"

"Ah!" said the fisherman, "she says that when I caught you, I should have asked you for something before I let you go. She does not like living any longer in the pigpen, and wants a nice little cottage."

"Go home, then," said the fish. "She is in the cottage already!"

So the man went home, and he saw his wife standing at the door of a pretty little cottage. "Come in, come in!" said she. "Isn't this much better than the filthy pigpen we had?"

In the cottage, there was a parlor, and a bedroom, and a kitchen. Behind the cottage there was a little garden, planted with all sorts of flowers and fruits, and there was a barnyard behind, full of ducks and chickens. “Ah!” said the fisherman, “how happily we shall live now!”

“We will try to do so, at least,” said his wife.

Everything went fine for a week or two, and then Ilsabill said, “You know, there is not near room enough for us in this cottage. The yard and the garden are also too small. I would like to have a large stone castle to live in. Why don’t you go to the fish again and tell him to give us a castle?”

“Ilsabill,” said the fisherman, “I don’t want to go to him again—he might get angry. We should be happy with this pretty cottage to live in.”

“Nonsense!” said Ilsabill. “He will do it very willingly—I know he will. Go along and try!”

The fisherman went, but his heart was very heavy. When he came to the sea, it looked blue and gloomy, though it was very calm. He went close to the edge of the waves, and said:

O man of the sea!  
Listen to me!  
My wife Ilsabill  
Will have her own will--  
She has sent me to beg a gift of thee!

“Well, what does she want now?” said the fish.

“Ah!” said the man, sadly, “my wife wants to live in a stone castle.”

“Go home, then,” said the fish. “She is standing at the castle’s gate already.” So away went the fisherman, and found his wife standing before the gate of a great castle.

“See,” she said, “is not this grand?”

They went into the castle together, and found a great many servants there, and the rooms all richly furnished, full of golden chairs and tables. Behind the castle was a garden, and around it was a park half a mile long, full of sheep, goats, rabbits, and deer. In the yard were stables and cattle barns.

“Well,” said the man, “now we will live cheerful and happy in this beautiful castle for the rest of our lives.”

“Perhaps we may,” said Ilsabill, “but let’s sleep on it, before we make up our minds about that.” So they went to bed.

The next morning when Ilsabill awoke, she poked the fisherman with her elbow, and said, “Get up, husband, and get moving, for we must be king of all the land.”

“Ilsabill, dear wife,” said the man, “why should we wish to be the king? I will not be king!”

“Then I will,” said his wife.

“But, Ilsabill,” said the fisherman, “how can you be king? The fish cannot make you a king!”

“Look,” said she, “say no more about it. Just go and try!”

So the fisherman went away quite upset to think that his wife would now want to be king. This time the sea was a dark gray color, and was covered with curling waves and the ridges of foam as he cried out:

O man of the sea!  
Listen to me!  
My wife Ilsabill  
Will have her own will--  
She has sent me to beg a gift of thee!

“Well, what would she have now?” said the fish.

“Alas!” said the poor man, “my wife wants to be king.”

“Go on home,” said the fish, “she is king already.”

Then the fisherman went home. As he came close to the palace, he saw a troop of soldiers, and heard the sound of drums and trumpets. And when he went inside, he saw his wife sitting on a throne of gold and diamonds, with a golden crown upon her head. On each side of her stood six fair maidens, each a head taller than the other.

“Well, wife,” said the fisherman, “are you king?”

“Yes,” said she, “I am king.”

And when he had looked at her for a long time, he said, “Ah, wife! What a fine thing it is to be king! Now we shall never have anything more to wish for as long as we live.”

“I don't know how true that may be,” said King Ilsabill. “Never is a long time. I am king, it is true, but I begin to be tired of that, and I think I would like to be an emperor.”

“Ilsabill! Why should you wish to be an emperor?” said the fisherman.

“Listen,” she hissed, “go to that fish! I say I will be emperor.”

“Ah, Ilsabill!” replied the fisherman, “the fish cannot make an emperor, I am sure, and I don't want to ask him for such a thing.”

“Well, I am king,” said Ilsabill, “and you are my subject. So go at once!”

So the fisherman was forced to go. He muttered as he went along, “This will come to no good. It is too much to ask. The fish will be tired of us at last, and then we shall be sorry for what we have done.”

He soon came to the seashore, where the water was quite black and muddy. A mighty whirlwind blew over the waves and rolled them around, but the fisherman went as close as he could to the water's edge, and said:

O man of the sea!  
Listen to me!  
My wife Ilsabill  
Will have her own will--  
She has sent me to beg a gift of thee!

“Well, what would she have now?” said the fish.

“Ah!” said the fisherman, “she wants to be an emperor.”

“Go home,” said the fish, “she’s an emperor already.”

So he went home again. As he came near he saw his wife Ilsabill sitting on a very lofty throne made of solid gold, with a great crown on her head two yards high. On each side of her stood her guards and attendants in a row. In front of her stood princes, and dukes, and earls.

The fisherman went up to her and said, “Wife, are you emperor?”

“Yes,” said she. “I am emperor.”

“Well, wife,” replied he, “it is a grand thing to be emperor. Now you must be satisfied, for you can be nothing greater.”

“I will think about that,” said the wife. Then they went to bed.

But Dame Ilsabill could not sleep all night for thinking what she should be next. At last, as she was dropping asleep, morning broke, and the sun rose. “Wait!” she thought, as she woke up and looked through the window, “after all this, I still cannot prevent the sun rising.”

At this thought she grew very angry. She wore up her husband and said, “Now, listen. You go to that fish and tell him I must have power over the sun and moon.” The fisherman was half asleep, but the thought frightened him so much that he fell out of bed.

“What?!” said he, “you cannot you be satisfied with being an emperor?”

“No,” said she, “I will be very unhappy as long as the sun and moon can rise without my permission. Go to the fish at once!”

By then the man was shivering with fear. As he went down to the shore, a dreadful storm rose up—the trees and the very rocks shook. All the heavens became black with stormy clouds, and lightning flashed, and thunder rolled. In the sea great black waves swelled up like mountains with crowns of white foam upon their heads. The fisherman crept towards the sea, and cried out, as well as he could:

O man of the sea!  
Listen to me!  
My wife Ilsabill  
Will have her own will--  
She has sent me to beg a gift of thee!

“What does she want now?” said the fish.

“Ah!” said he, “now she wants . . . she wants to be lord of the sun and moon.”

“Go home,” said the fish, “to your pigpen again.”

And there they live to this very day.