



The Fisherman and the Little Fish

*retold by Sarah Marino
illustrated by Dion Williams*

In a little village by a lake, there lived a hardworking fisherman named Walter. Just as he did every morning, Walter awoke today and washed and dressed before having a breakfast of oatmeal with his wife and children. He left the warmth of his home and began his walk to the shore of the lake. There, he would fish on his own dock, made of pine, which he had built himself.

Walter and his family were not rich, but they got along well enough. They always had food on the table, whether fish that Walter could not sell at the market or vegetables from his wife's garden.

It was December. The temperature was just barely above freezing. Walter walked along the sidewalk on the edge of town, toward the lake. Tiny white specks of snow flew around him in the cold, misty air. He was thankful that he had taken his wife's advice to put on his old wool snow hat.

As he arrived at the dock, the sun began to rise on the eastern edge of the lake. The sky was glowing bright pink, fading into white, above the tip of the round edge of the sun. Tim was already set up at his dock, which was, in Walter's opinion, too close to his own. "Figures,"

Walter thought. "Even on the first cold day, he had to beat me to it."

"Ah, good morning, Walter," said Tim. "Fine, fine morning, isn't it?" Tim was shorter than Walter and a good bit heavier. He had large ears that were always red and brown hair cut close to his head.

"Good morning," Walter replied. "Yes, a bit chilly, but fine." It wasn't that Walter disliked Tim. He would simply prefer to fish without so much talking, to listen to the ripples of the water as the wind moved it and to the gulls and ospreys that flew around the lake. Tim, on the other hand, enjoyed a good chat at all times.

Walter had learned how to ignore him in a kind way. He gave short answers, some longer if he was interested in a topic. Tim had come to accept that Walter was just a different type, a quiet sort of fellow. This was fine with Walter.

Walter prepared his pole, line, and bait, and cast off. He sometimes used a net if the water was calm and the birds were far off in the distance. This was when the smaller catfish and trout would come close to the dock to feed on the grasses near the shore.

"I already caught a nice one," Tim said. "Look at this." He held up a ten-inch bass. Its scales were sparkling. It was plump and broad, as if it might burst.

Walter glanced at the fish. He felt a pang of envy that quickly turned to annoyance. He had not caught anything that big in days. He was beginning to wonder whether his skill was fading now that he'd reached middle age. He knew it wasn't a competition. Besides, Tim had five children to feed; Walter only had three.

As Walter turned to see who was at the other docks nearby, he felt a small pull on his line. It was just barely a tug. He reeled in a bit to test it and felt a definite resistance, though it wasn't very strong. He never announced his catches to Tim, usually because Tim would be commentating on the entire scene as soon as he realized Walter had something. Tim would chatter away like a regular sports announcer.

He brought his line in and found a little fish there. The fish was light blue with a yellow line down the side of it, below its fin. Walter took hold of it and heard the fish begin to speak: "Please, sir, I beg you, let me return to the lake. I am a little fish and am surely of no use to you. If you put me back in the water, I may grow big and fat, and you can feast on me then."

"That is a tempting idea," Walter said. "But there are no guarantees, little fish. I would be a fool to throw away a good thing I've already got. A little thing in hand is worth more than the hope of a grand thing in the future."