

THE LITTLE FISHERMAN

Once upon a time there was a little boy who sat fishing in the river near his little house. His mother, who was very poor, asked him if he could catch some fish for supper, as there was nothing much for her to cook. This little boy, whose name was Rudy, sat quietly with his fishing pole. He had made his fishing equipment out of a straight stick, a piece of string and a hook from a safety pin. For bait, he found a beetle and was hoping for a good catch.

He felt the string pulling and thought happily: "I've caught a fish". He pulled it out and there was a tiny fish, very pretty, with lovely colours. "Poor little fish", said Rudy to himself and threw the fish back in the water.

Then he found a worm and baited his hook again. Soon he had another bite and pulled up his line. There was another small, beautiful fish with pretty colours, almost like the first, but not quite. "Oh my", said Rudy, "What should I do? This fish is too pretty to eat", and he threw the little fish back into the river.

The same happened a third time. Soon after he threw the third fish back, his mother called out: "Rudy, have you caught anything yet? I'm ready to prepare supper".

This time, Rudy decided that no matter what happened, the next fish he caught was for cooking. He tried again, and again he felt his line pulling. He had caught another fish. He pulled up his fishing line. But it was not a fish, it was something else, more beautiful than any of the three fishes he had caught before. It was a beautiful, tiny mermaid, part fish, part human. Rudy was stunned. The little mermaid said to Rudy: "You were very kind to my brothers and sisters and gave them back their lives. I want to help you. Put back

your fishing line and you will get a big, delicious fish to eat. Tomorrow, I want you to come back at the same time and I will have a big surprise for you".

Rudy put another worm on his hook and again waited for a bite. Before long, he felt the tugging on his line and pulled out a big, ugly fish. "Mom, I've caught a big fish", shouted Rudy and ran to the house with the fish he had caught. His mother was very pleased and that night they had a tasty meal of fish and rice.

The next day, Rudy ran to the river bank at the exact time as told by the mermaid and put bait on the hook, and began fishing. Before long, he felt the tugging on his line and pulled it up. It was only some roots and leaves. He threw these on the bank and began fishing again. Soon, the same thing happened. For a third time, Rudy pulled up river vegetation and again threw it to the side. Rudy wondered why the mermaid had asked him to fish if there was nothing to catch. For the fourth time, he threw in his fishing line. This time, he caught a large fish and carried it to his mother, who gave him a kiss for doing so well.

When Rudy came out of the house, he saw his goat eating the things that had caught on to his fishing line three times. Something bright and gleaming fell out of the leaves and vines as the goat gobbled up the vegetation. It looked like a gold nugget, which porknockers rolled up in their kerchiefs when they went to market to buy goods. He had seen them selling the gold at the market. Once his father had brought home gold he mined in the bush.

Rudy looked closer and found three nuggets. "Mom, Mom, look at this!" Rudy called as he ran to his little hut on the river bank. He showed these to his mother who asked: "Where did these come from?" Rudy explained. His mother went to the river bank with a rake and started scraping up the shallow part near the embankment. She pulled a great

deal of vegetation and stones in front of the house and started searching through the rotten leaves and vines and twigs. "Rudy" she said "there is gold in the river near our house. We never thought of looking here. Your father is away, far in the bush looking for gold and here it is right in front of our noses. Don't tell anyone. Let's wait for your father to come home".

Rudy didn't tell anyone. When his father came back from the bush, empty handed, he was shown the gold nuggets and soon began operations to mine his part of the river. The next year, the little hut Rudy lived in was transformed to a house with water and electricity.

Rudy was sent to school for the first time. When he came home each day, he asked his mother if she wanted any fish, and he continued fishing, which he loved. But he never told anyone about the mermaid. "No one will believe me", Rudy said to himself.