



The
Golden Sea Shell

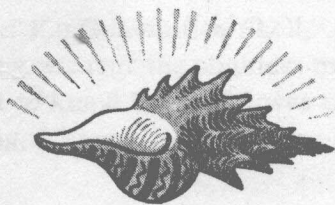
Juan Chang-ching



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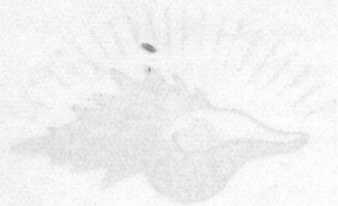
by *Juan Chang-ching*



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I can still remember that it was in the banana grove,
where my neighbour's grandmother taught me all these songs.
I learned to sing them one after another,
and everyday they completely filled my mind.

Now this story of the Golden Sea Shell,
that I used to sing without the slightest mistake.
And if you want to know how old I was then, I can tell you that
I was so young, I hadn't even lost my baby teeth.

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By the side of the big ocean,
there once lived a fine young fisherman.
He lived all alone by himself,
for he had neither parents nor kinsfolk.

Three hundred and sixty mornings every year,
he always rose earlier than the sun.
Never once did he sleep a wink too long,
no matter whether the tide was rising or falling.

Taking the fishing net with him,
he would go out to the quiet beach.
Spreading the fishing net out in the water,
he would then begin singing to the great sea:

“Look! The great sea has awakened;
there is a stirring beneath its silky waves.
The daylight is spreading from the east;
don't you see the pale gleam over the distant edge?

“Look at the frothing foam.
It is just like bouquets of white jasmine in full bloom,
while under the sea, the Sun Goddess is bathing herself now.
In one moment, she will shed her golden glow all over us.”

Through all twelve months in each year,
regardless of whether the season was hot or cold,
everyday the young fisherman went out,
to greet the Sun Goddess with a beautiful song.

It was nearly noon one day,
the tide had just begun to ebb.

The wind also had dropped, so that the blue sea was calm and
peaceful once again.

The wide expanse of the sea now seemed like a vast plain,
as smooth as if it were a leaf of the palm tree.

Mischievous little golden sparkles danced upon the boundless
surface of the blue sea.

The young fisherman folded up his fishing net,
whistling to himself light-heartedly while he did so.
Off across the glittering sand he went on his way home,
leaving behind him a trail of many footprints.

All of a sudden he saw something lying on the sand before him.
It was something quite small but it glowed with a golden light.
He found it was a golden red fish,
stranded all by itself upon the sandy beach.

Its little golden gills rose and fell;
its silvery lips opened and closed.
Then he noticed that its little silvery belly twitched,
alas, the golden fish was dying!



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Above it the sun was scorching;
underneath it the sands were burning.
And then a hungry crow flapped its wings as it flew out from
the cloud.
It hovered over the little fish!

Poor, poor little fish,
never again would it swim in the blue waves!
Poor, poor little fish,
never again would it go back to its home in the deep sea!

Oh, what a pitiful little thing it was!

The young man reached out and took it into his hands,
only just in time, before the black crow could tear it to pieces.
Then he hurried to the sea carefully carrying the little golden
fish.

Gently the young fisherman put the little golden fish back into
the water;

gently, little by little he helped it to swim.

For a long time, he watched and waited beside it.

For a long time, he looked on without even smiling.

Slowly the time passed until at last its little tail began to
move.

Slowly time went on and on until at last it began to move
its golden fins.

As small bubbles floated from its silvery lips,
slowly the little golden fish came back to life.

Once more the fish looked at the kind-hearted young man,
before it glided back into the big ocean.

Two days passed quietly.

Each morning the young man went to the beach;
where, light as a leaf in the wind,
his song flew over the sea.

“Sun Goddess, oh Sun Goddess, please come out and shine.
Make your way over the blue waves,
and smile upon us with your golden rays. . . .”

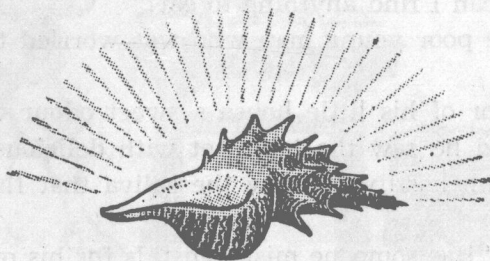
He threw his old, darned fishing net into the sea,
then after waiting for a while, he pulled it up onto the beach.
In the net, however, there was neither a fish nor shrimps,
but only a golden sea shell.

Alas! The young fisherman heaved a long sigh,
then once again he threw his net out into the sea.
As for the golden sea shell he did not bother to even glance at
it a second time,
before he tossed it back into the rolling blue waves.

For the second time he drew on the rope,
and little by little he pulled the fishing net back to the shore.
Again in the net there was neither a fish nor shrimps;
but once more he found the very same golden sea shell.

Alas! Now he heaved a longer sigh.
Once more he threw the fishing net into the sea,
but as for the golden sea shell he did not even bother to give
it a second look.
He just tossed it right back into the far off waves.

For the third time that day he drew on the rope,
and little by little he pulled the fishing net back to shore.
For the third time, there was neither a fish nor shrimps in the net,
but for the third time, he saw the very same golden sea shell.



Alas! Tortured by hunger and thirst, he sat down upon the sands
feeling very dejected.

Then quietly the sea shell moved onto his hand,
shining brightly and glittering like gold.

Casually, as the young man picked up the little golden sea shell,
in great surprise, he discovered its unusual beauty.

It was like a many-coloured rainbow in a rain-swept sky.

As it lay upon his open hand, it dazzled him with its charm.

The young fisherman took the golden sea shell home with him,
and placed it in a jar of clear water, where he left it to live by
itself.

Then with a needle and some hemp,
he sat down under the willow to mend his fishing net.

Soon the sun faded in the western sky,
and his hunger became unbearable.

“Oh! Where can I find anything to eat?”

wondered the poor young man who was worried to death.

From the door of his little house a sweet odour was wafted.

As he entered he saw the table set with delicious dishes.

This made him hastily swallow the saliva that flowed into his
mouth,

and wonder, “Has someone mistaken this for his own house?”

Was someone going to give a party?
Maybe he had blundered into someone else's home?
"Perhaps," he thought, "I am dreaming,
or hunger has caused me to see this vision."

He peeped into the house, but he was the only one there.
He looked outside the door, but there was no one else.
So he sat down upon the doorstep to wait,
for someone to come and take the food away.



Hour after hour dragged by.
It was difficult for the young man to bear,
because the fragrance of the food kept on tickling his nostrils.
And his empty stomach was a torment to him.

Finally he could endure his hunger no longer.
Although he felt it discourteous he ate until his stomach was
filled!
A sound slumber followed this good meal,
and he thought, "Tomorrow let everything begin afresh."

The next day the young man went fishing again.
When he returned, he sat mending his fishing net again
under the willow tree.
When that was finished, he went into the house,
and there he saw the table was covered with warm savoury food.

He thought again, "How can I stand on ceremony when I'm
hungry?
Besides, nothing wrong has happened since yesterday.
A good sleep after nice food would certainly give me more
strength for my work."

The third day the young man went fishing again.
When he returned home, he sat down to mend his fishing net
under the willow tree.
When that was finished he went into the house,
and just as before the table was covered with delicious food.

When he had eaten the food to his heart's content,
the young fisherman wondered, "Where did all the dishes come
from?
If the food has come as a present there ought to be a host,
or maybe it's a mistake, but no mistake would be repeated three
times!"

He spent the whole night by himself thinking.
He thought and thought but could not solve the puzzle.
He was really most embarrassed when he realized that,
for three days he'd freely enjoyed all those dishes!

So the following day he went fishing again.
However, this day he drew up his fishing net earlier than usual.
Then from the back of his house he climbed up into the elm
tree,
and from there he crawled over the roof to the skylight.

When he peeped inside, he saw a beautiful girl in the room.
She was wrapped around in a beautiful coloured light.
Her silken clothes were as pretty as moonbeams,
while her shining hair was as lovely as the morning sun.

She was cleaning the house for the young man,
and she had tidied up all his clothes for him too.
She'd cooked many dishes of good food for the young man,
and washed all the dishes and pots.



The young fisherman was as happy as a bird,
he seemed to be flying in the air like a little feather.
Leaping through the skylight he quickly jumped down upon the
floor,
and most courteously he asked the beautiful girl:

“Whose daughter are you?
And what wind blew you here?
If you’ve come to the wrong house by mistake,
I’ll escort you to wherever you would like to go!”

The beautiful girl smiled gently,
her starry eyes sparkling with tenderness.
Gently she ran her little hand through her shining hair,
then in a voice like the music of a rippling stream she answered
him:

“I live on the other side of the great sea.
The sea is my father, and my name is Golden Sea Shell.
I wish to be a friend of yours,
and to learn all those beautiful songs of yours.”

“I would also like to be a friend of yours;
I wish we could sing happily together every day.
But however my family was so poor,
and now I am an orphan without any parents!”

“I don't wish for fancy and luxurious dresses,
nor do I desire a palace to live in.
All I want is a kind-hearted friend,
who would be sweeter to me than rice sprinkled with sugar!

“I don't crave for any jewelry or gold,
an industrious friend is all I hope for.
Let me stay with you, oh, please do let me;
don't chase me away from your door!”

With her hands the Golden Sea Shell girl covered her eyes,
it was just as if dark clouds had covered the moon and the night
was gloomy suddenly.
It broke the young man's heart,
to see the beautiful girl so unhappy.

“I have never cried before,” said the young fisherman,
“but today hot tears have come to my eyes.
Now from this very instant that I speak,
you've become a member of this house of mine!”

Out of the door dashed our young man,
then with his arms full of wild flowers he returned to build a bed
for her.
He also wove a bed curtain for the lovely girl.