

THE FISHERMAN AND THE GATEKEEPER

A tale from Burma

Adapted by Carole L. Cooney

Setting: The King's Palace

Characters:

Narrator

King Lwin.....the *excellent* King

Myat.....the King's *best* servant

Zaw.....the *brave* Fisherman

Belu.....the *bully* Gatekeeper

(The italicized words are the meaning of the Burmese name)

Narrator: There was great cause for celebration! King Lwin's Queen gave birth to a handsome baby boy. A great announcement spread throughout the land.

King: (clapping his hands) Myat! Myat! Make haste! Let there be a great banquet. Let the Kings and Noblemen from all lands be invited to a most spectacular banquet!

Myat: Yes, most excellent King. It shall be done. Your word is my command!

Narrator: As the day approached, the Master Cooks prepared elaborate dishes. Since fish was the favorite food of the land, it was to be the main course. To preserve its freshness, it was to be caught at the last moment.

King: At last the day of celebration has arrived! I see my friendly Kings and Noblemen approach the Palace Gates. Myat, tell Belu to open wide the Palace Gates. Then, you are to show them to their rooms.

Narrator: The brightly shining sun brought a sense of calm and beauty to the day. But as evening came, large black clouds sped swiftly across the sky. Rumbling thunder came closer and closer. Suddenly, rain poured down on the land. The sea swelled with a storm so mighty that fishermen were terrified to set sail.

King: Oh, mighty gods, why is there a deluge of rain on this day of celebration? What must I do to make the rains stop?

Narrator: Suddenly, Belu, the gatekeeper rushed into the palace.

Belu: Your majesty, Your Majesty! You have a visitor. Shall I let him enter?

King: Who is it?

Belu: It is Zaw, the fisherman. He has brought something for you.

King: Very well, perhaps he can do something to make our feast worthwhile.

Narrator: When the King saw what Zaw was dragging into the palace, he leapt from his throne and ran to him.

Zaw: Your Majesty! I am a poor fisherman. When I heard of your need of fish, I knew what I had to do. The seas were very high, and I braved them as best as I could. These fish are the best I could catch. I am so sorry there aren't many more...

King: Hush! With the gods' help, you have performed what many fearless fishermen dared not do. Quick, call the Cooks to gather the fish and prepare them for our feast. Zaw, you have made me very happy. What reward would you like for your bravery?

Zaw: One hundred lashes.

King: (shocked) What? That is not a reward – that is a punishment.

Zaw: That will be a great reward for me.

King: (whispering) Myat, come close. When you strike that poor fishman with the whip, please do it so gently that it does not harm him.

Narrator: And so, Myat and the fishman left the palace and walked to the whipping field. Myat was so sad as he lifted the long black whip. With a most gentle swing, the whip landed like a feather on Zaw's back.

Myat: I have counted fifty strikes, Zaw. Must I go on?

Zaw: No, please stop for a moment. Now it is time to call in Belu, the gatekeeper. I promised I would give him half of my reward if he opened the Palace Gate for me.

Myat: Come with me, Zaw. We must tell the King.

Narrator: When the King heard what Belu, the gatekeeper did, he became very angry. He ordered the servants to give the gatekeeper the remaining fifty lashes but this time without gentleness. Then the King made an announcement.

King: The gatekeeper is banished from my kingdom forever! And you, my good fisherman, come and join me at my banquet table. Your fresh fish has been prepared. Let us taste it! Ahhh... this fish is the most delicious fish I have ever tasted. And so, 1000 golden kyat coins is a most fitting reward for you!