

# The Koi Fish Are Back

## by Sophia Bouw

Down a small, dirt road there was a little cottage. In this cottage lived Mei, Mama, Papa and Mei's little brother, Chang. Mei was ten years old. Chang was four. Mei wasn't really sure how old her parents were, but she was sure they were pretty old, much older than her.

Mei's Papa worked up north at a railway station as a ticket master. Such a job doesn't pay much, resulting in Mei's family being poor.

Mei's mama stayed at home, taking care of the children, cleaning the house, and other household jobs. Mei was constantly bored. "Mama," Mei said. "Can I go out to play?" Mama sighed and looked up from the load of laundry she was washing. Mama had long, black hair that flowed down to her shoulders, and she smiled even when she missed Papa. "Fine. But bring Chang, and be back in time to do bedtime chores." "We will!" Mei promised. "Come on, Chang!" Mei urged. "I want to show you something." "Okay!" said Chang, in his little, childish voice as he followed her down the steps out into their backyard. Their backyard had a huge, beautiful cherry blossom tree, and a small pond that had a mini waterfall.

Sometimes, if you were lucky, koi fish would be lazily swimming about. Their scales shine in the summer light and are wonderful to watch. Yesterday, Mei had seen some, and that was what she wanted to show Chang. "Let's go!" Mei said as she ran towards the pond. "Wait fa meee!" Chang shouted as he chased after her. But by time he got there, Mei was crying. "Mei!" Chang said in alarm. "Wot's wong?" Mei turned her tear-streaked face towards him. "Sit" she said, and took a deep breath. "You know, I miss papa." Chang nodded, his eyes moist with tears now, too. "He only comes back twice a month from the railroad station." Chang asked; "What's a wairode shaishon?" Mei giggled at her brother's puzzled face. "No, a *railroad station*." She said, pronouncing the words clearly so that he could understand. "A railroad

station is a place where trains stop to let people, clothes, food and other things on and off.”

Mei said. “Does Papa get to ride in a train?” Chang asked. “No. Papa doesn’t get to ride on a train or a train.” Mei replied. “But, look!” Mei cried with delight, facing the pond. “The koi fish are back!”

As the two happy children blissfully played, laughing together, their Mama watched them from a window. She relaxed, relieved that they were smiling for at least a moment. Life had been hard, and they missed their Papa so terribly much, that they barely smiled until he came home. Even when their Papa did come home, they knew that he was going to leave soon. It was especially hard on Mei. She did her best to be helpful and supportive, but she wanted to pursue her own dreams, too. Mama waited a bit before calling the children inside for supper. That night, everyone fell asleep with a smile on their face because they had each other.

