CLASSIC FAIRY TALES




CHARLES
FOLKARD '16

CLASSIC FAIRY TALES

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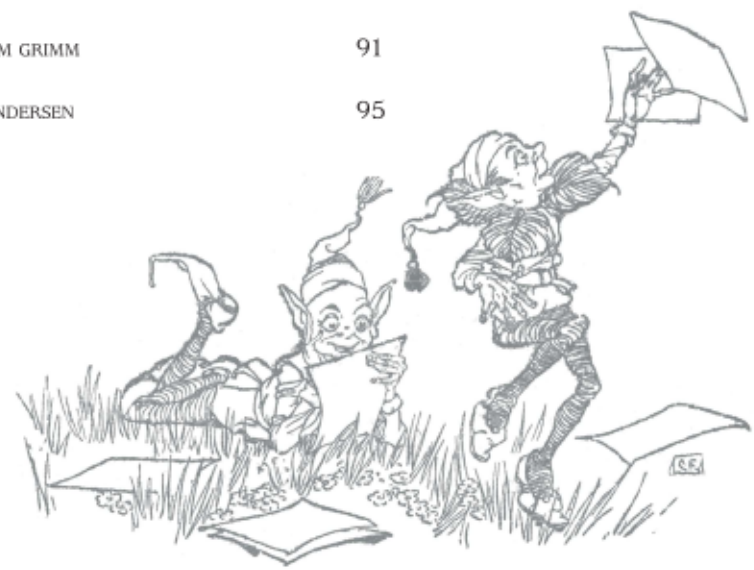
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The Little Mermaid

— BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN —



ar out in the sea the water is as blue as the most beautiful corn-flower, and as transparent as the clearest glass; but it is very deep – deeper than any ship's cable can reach – and many church-spires would have to be placed one on the top of the other to reach from the bottom above the surface of the water. There below live the people of the sea.

Now it must not be imagined that the bottom is merely bare white sand; no, the most curious trees and plants grow there, the stems and leaves of which are so pliant, that the slightest agitation of the water moves them, just as if they were alive. All the fish, large and small, slip through the branches like the birds here, in the air above. In the very deepest part lies the Sea-King's palace, the walls of which are of coral, the long, pointed windows being of the purest amber, and the roof is formed of mussel shells, that open and shut according to the flowing of the waters, which has a very beautiful appearance, for in each lie glistening pearls, of which either would be the chief ornament in the crown of a queen.

The Sea-King there below had been a widower for many years, and his old mother conducted his household for him. She was a clever woman, but very proud of her birth, on which account she wore twelve oysters on her tail, whereas the highest of the nobles were allowed to wear only six. In other respects she deserved the highest praise, particularly for her great care of her granddaughters. These were six beautiful children. But the youngest was the most beautiful of all; her skin was as soft and tender as the petal of a rose, and

her eyes as blue as the deepest sea; but, like her sisters, she had no feet, her body ending in the tail of a fish.

The whole day they could play in the large halls of the palace, where living flowers grew out of the walls. When the amber windows were thrown open, the fish swam in, as with us the swallows fly into the room; but the fish swam straight up to the princesses, eating out of their hands, and allowing themselves to be stroked by them.

In front of the palace was a large garden, with deep red and dark blue trees, the fruit of which shone like gold, and the flowers were like the brightest fire, the stems and leaves being in perpetual movement. The ground was the finest sand, but blue, like the flame of burning sulphur, and, indeed, a peculiar blue tint pervaded everything, so that one would have thought one was high up in the air, with sky above and below, rather than at the bottom of the sea.

During very calm weather the sun could be seen, looking like a purple flower, from the calyx of which streamed all the light.

Each princess had a little piece of ground in the garden, where she could dig and plant as best pleased her. The one gave her garden the form of a whale, whilst another preferred hers looking like a mermaid; but the youngest made hers round, like the sun, and planted it only with flowers of the same colour as the sun. She was a strange child, quiet and thoughtful; and whilst her sisters delighted in all the beautiful things they got from wrecked vessels, she, besides her flowers that were like the sun, cared only for a beautiful little statue of a boy, of pure white marble, which had fallen down from some vessel to the bottom of the sea. She planted a rose coloured weeping willow by the side of her statue, which it covered with its branches, hanging down towards the blue sand, where they cast violet shadows, in constant movement like the branches themselves. It had the appearance as if the top of the tree and the roots were playing, and wished to kiss each other.

Nothing gave her so much pleasure as to hear about the world above, and her old grandmother had to tell all she knew of ships, cities, men, and beasts: but of all things it seemed to her most delightful that the flowers on the earth

had scent, which those of the sea had not; that the woods were green; and that the fish, which were there seen amongst the trees, sang so loud and beautifully that it was a pleasure to listen to them. These were the birds, which the grandmother called fish, for otherwise they would not have understood her, as they had never yet seen a bird.

"When you have reached your fifteenth year," the grandmother said, "you will be allowed to rise up to the top of the sea, where, seated on a rook in the moonlight, you will see the large ships sail past, and also see cities and forests."

The following year the elder sister would be fifteen, and as there was a year's difference in all their ages, the youngest would consequently have five full years to wait before being allowed to come up from the bottom of the sea, and see how all looked with us. But the eldest promised to tell the others what she should see, and find the most beautiful on the first day, for their grandmother did not tell them near enough, and there remained much they wished to know about.

Not one had such a strong desire after this knowledge as the youngest, just the one that had the longest to wait, and who was so quiet and thoughtful. Many a night she stood at the open window watching the fish, how they moved their fins and tails about in the water. She could see the moon and stars, which certainly appeared paler than with us, but through the water they seemed much larger than appears to our eyes; and when anything dark, like a cloud, passed between them and her, she knew that it must be either a whale-fish, or a ship full of human beings, into whose heads it certainly did not enter that a pretty young mermaid was standing below, raising up her white hands towards them.

The eldest princess was now fifteen years old, and might rise up to the surface of the sea.

On her return she had a hundred different things to tell, but the most beautiful of all, she said, had been lying on a sand bank in the calm sea, with the moon shining, and looking at a large city on the coast close by, where the

lights glittered like hundreds of stars; to hear the music and the noise made by the men and the conveyances of different sorts; to see the church-spires, and to listen to the ringing of the bells, and she felt the greater longing for all these, just because she could not get there.

Oh! how attentively the youngest sister listened, and as she, later in the evening, stood at the open window looking up through the dark water, she thought of the large city and the noise, and then she thought she heard the ringing of the bells.

The following year, the second sister's turn came to rise up through the water, and to swim whither she felt inclined. She rose to the top just as the sun was going down, and this sight she thought the most beautiful. The whole sky looked like gold, she said, and the beauty of the clouds she could not describe, as they sailed over her head, red and violet-coloured, but still faster than these flew a flock of wild swans, across the water towards where the sun was. She herself swam in the same direction, but the sun went down, and the rose-coloured tint faded from the water and the clouds.

The next year the third sister rose to the surface of the water, and she was the boldest of them, for she swam up a broad river which flowed into the sea. She saw beautiful green hills covered with vines; she saw castles and farm-houses appearing from amongst magnificent forests; and heard how the birds sang, the sun shining so hot that she often had to dive under the water in order to cool her burning face. In a little creek she came upon a number of children, who were splashing about in the water quite naked. She wished to play with them, but they ran away frightened and a little black animal, namely a dog, came and barked so fiercely at her, that she was quite afraid and sought the open sea again. She could never forget the magnificent forests, the green hills, and the pretty children that could swim although they had no fishes' tails.

The fourth sister was not so bold, remaining out in the middle of the vast sea, and she maintained that just there it was the most beautiful, for that one could see for miles around, with the sky above like a glass bell. She had

seen ships, but only far off in the distance looking like little dark specks, and the funny dolphin turning somersaults, and the large whales throwing up the water through their nostrils, so that it looked like hundreds of fountains.

Now the fifth sister's turn came, and, as her birthday happened to be in winter, she saw what the others had not seen the first time. The sea looked quite green, and round about large icebergs were floating, which, she said, looked like pearls, but were much larger than the church-steeples that men build. They were of the most extraordinary forms, and sparkled like diamonds. She had seated herself upon one of the largest, the wind playing with her long hair, and towards evening the sky became overcast; it thundered and lightened, whilst the black sea raised the large blocks of ice high up, and they glittered with the reflection of the red lightning. On all the vessels the sails were taken in, and there was fear and trembling, as they sought to steer clear of the huge masses of ice, but she sat calmly watching the lightning passing in zig-zag through the air, till lost in the sea.

The first time that either of the sisters came up to the top of the water, she was delighted with the beauty and novelty of all she saw, but now, that as grown up girls they could rise up when they chose, it became indifferent to them; and after the lapse of a month they said that down below it was most beautiful, as there they felt at home.

Often of an evening the five sisters, arm in arm, rose to the surface of the water. They had beautiful voices, far more beautiful than any human being; and when a storm was coming on, and they might expect the ships to be wrecked, they swam before them, singing so delightfully how beautiful it was at the bottom of the sea, and begging the sailors not to fear going down: but these could not understand their words, thinking it was the storm, nor did they ever see the splendour there below, for when the ship sank they were drowned, and as dead bodies only reached the Sea-King's palace.

When the sisters rose thus, arm in arm, from their dwelling below, the little sister stood alone watching them, and she felt as if she must cry, but a mermaid has no tears and therefore she suffers far more.

"Oh, were I but fifteen!" she would say. "I know that I shall love the world above, and the beings that inhabit it, with all my heart."

At length she was fifteen.

"Well, now you are grown up," her grandmother, the old widowed queen, said. "Come, that I may decorate you like your sisters;" and she placed a wreath of lilies on her head, of which each leaf was the half of a pearl, and let eight large oysters stick fast on the princess's tail, in order to show her rank.

"Oh, how it hurts!" the Little Mermaid said.

"Yes, rank has its inconveniences," the old Queen answered.

She would so gladly have thrown off all this magnificence, for the red flowers of her garden would have become her better, but she could not help herself. "Farewell!" she cried, and rose up in the water, as light as a bladder.

The sun had just gone down as her head appeared above the water, but the clouds still glittered like roses and gold, and in the midst of the light red sky the evening star sparkled so bright and beautiful, the air was mild and the sea quite calm. There lay a large ship with three masts, she had all her sails spread, for scarcely a breath of air was stirring, and the sailors sat about in the rigging. On board there was music and singing, and as the evening grew darker hundreds of variegated lamps were lighted, which looked like the flags of all nations waving in the air.

The Little Mermaid swam right up to the cabin window, and each time that she rose with a wave, she could look into the room, where there were several richly dressed men, but by far the handsomest of all was a young Prince, with large black eyes. He could not be more than sixteen years old, and this being his birthday was the cause of all the splendour. The sailors were dancing, and when the young Prince appeared on deck, more than a hundred rockets rose up in the air, which threw light around like day, so that the Mermaid was very much frightened, and dived down under the water; but her head soon appeared again, and it was just as if all the stars of heaven were falling down upon her. She had never seen any fireworks before. Splendid suns whirled round, and serpents of fire rose up in the air, all being reflected

in the clear calm sea. On the vessel itself it was so light that one could see every rope, much more the men. Oh! How handsome the young Prince was, and smiling he pressed the sailors' hands, whilst the music sounded through the clear night.

It was growing late, but the Little Mermaid could not turn her eyes away from the ship and the handsome Prince. The lamps were put out, no more rockets rose up in the air nor did the cannon sound any longer; but deep down in the sea there was a rumbling and rolling noise whilst she was rocked up and down on the waves, so that she could see into the cabin window. The ship now began to make more way, one sail after the other was unfurled, the waves rose higher, and black clouds began to appear whilst it lightened in the distance. It threatened to be bad weather, and the sailors therefore again furled the sails. The large ship rocked to and fro in its rapid course on the wild sea, and the water rose like black mountains, threatening to overwhelm it, but it dived down like a swan between the high waves, appearing again on the heaped-up waters. The Little Mermaid thought this most delightful, but it did not seem so to the sailors, for momentarily the ship's distress increased. The thick planks began to yield to the pressure of the waves and the water burst into the vessel, the mast now snapped in two as if it were only a reed, and the ship lay entirely at the mercy of the waves.

The Little Mermaid now saw that they were in danger, and she had to be on her guard against beams and pieces of the ship which were floating on the water. One moment it was so pitch-dark that she could see nothing, but when it lightened it became so light again that she could recognise all on board the vessel. In particular she sought the young Prince, and she saw him, as the ship disappeared, sink into the depth of the sea. Her first feeling was that of delight, for he would now come down to her, but then she bethought herself that human beings could not live in the water, and that he would not reach her father's palace otherwise than dead. Die he must not, and therefore she swam between beams and planks which were floating on the sea without a thought that she might be crushed by them, dived down deep under the

water, rising again between the waves, and thus at length reached the spot where the Prince with difficulty kept himself afloat. He was nearly exhausted, his beautiful eyes closing, and he must have died had not the Little Mermaid come to his assistance. She held his head above the water, and allowed herself to be borne along with him at the will of the waves.

In the morning the storm had subsided, but of the ship not a splinter was to be seen; the sun rose red and bright, and it appeared as if life returned to the Prince's cheeks, but his eyes remained closed. The Mermaid kissed his beautiful, high forehead, stroking back his wet hair, and it seemed to her that he resembled the marble statue down below in her little garden. She kissed him, and wished he might come to life again.

She now saw land before her with high blue mountains, on the tops of which lay the snow as if it were swan's down. Below on the coast were beautiful green woods, and in front stood a church or convent, she did not know exactly which, but it was a building at any rate. In the garden there grew lemon and orange-trees, and before the gates stood high palm-trees. The sea here formed a little creek, where the water was calm but very deep, and under the cliffs were firm white sands. To these she swam with the handsome Prince, and laid him in the sand, taking care that his head lay high in the warm sunshine.

Now the bells began to ring in the large white building, and many young girls came through the garden, when the Little Mermaid swam further out behind some rocks that rose from the water, and she laid some of the foam of the sea on her hair and her breast, so that she might not be noticed. Then she watched to see who would come to the poor Prince.

Not long after a young girl came to the spot where he lay; at first she seemed frightened, but only for a moment, when she called several others, and the Mermaid saw that the Prince came to life, smiling on all around him, but on her out in the sea he did not smile, for how should he know that it was she who had saved him? She felt quite sorrowful, and when he was led into the large building, she dived down under the water in sadness, returning to her father's palace.



"It was now her only consolation to sit in her little garden, with her arms around the beautiful marble statue"

She had always been quiet and thoughtful, but she was now much more so. Her sisters asked her what she had seen, but she did not answer them. Many an evening and morning she returned to where she had left the Prince. She saw how the fruit of the garden ripened and was gathered, she saw how the snow on the high mountains melted, but the Prince she did not see, and sadder and sadder she returned home. It was now her only consolation to sit in her little garden, with her arms around the beautiful marble statue, but her flowers she did not attend to, so that they grew wild across the paths, winding amongst the branches of the trees till it was quite dark there.

At length she could bear it no longer, and told one of her sisters, then the others knew it too, but none besides these and a couple of other mermaids, who spread it no further than amongst their intimate friends. One of them knew who the Prince was; she had seen the rejoicing on board the vessel, and told whence he came and where his kingdom lay.

"Come, little sister," the other princesses said, and arm in arm they rose with her, swimming to where they knew the Prince's palace stood.

This was built of a light yellow sparkling stone, with large marble steps, which ran down into the sea. Splendid gilt domes rose above the roof, and between the pillars, which quite surrounded the building, were marble statues, which looked as if they were alive. Through the clear glass in the high windows, the most magnificent rooms could be seen, with costly silk curtains, and the walls all hung with beautiful paintings which were delightful to behold. In the middle of the largest room a fountain threw up its sparkling waters to the glass dome in the roof, through which the sun shone upon the water and the beautiful plants which grew in the basin.

She now knew where he lived, and there she was on the water many an evening and many a night; she swam much nearer the land than either of the others had ventured to do, and even made her way along the whole length of the canal up to the magnificent marble terrace, which threw a long shadow over the water. Here she sat and watched the young Prince, who thought himself quite alone in the clear moonlight.

She saw him many an evening sailing with music in his beautiful boat; she listened from amidst the green reeds, and when anyone saw her long silvery veil, waving in the air, he thought it was a swan spreading out its wings.

At night when the fishermen were out by torchlight, she heard them say so much in praise of the young Prince, that she felt delighted she had saved his life when half dead he could no longer struggle with the waves, and she thought how his head had rested on her, and how she had kissed him, but of that he knew nothing, and could not even dream of her.

She began to love the human race more and more, and more and more she wished she could dwell amongst them, for their world appeared much larger to her than hers. They could cross the seas in ships, and they could climb the high mountains high up above the clouds, and the territory they possessed with forests and fields stretched further than her eye could reach. There were so many things she wished to know, but her sisters could not answer all her questions, and therefore she had to ask her grandmother, who knew the upper world well, and called it the lands above the sea.

"If men are not drowned," the Little Mermaid asked, "do they live for ever? Do they not die, as we here below in the sea?"

"Yes," the old grandmother answered. "They must die, too; and their life is even shorter than ours. We may live for three hundred years; but then, when we cease to exist, we only turn to foam on the water, and have not even a grave here below amongst those we love. We have no immortal soul, we never come to life again, we are like the green reeds, which, if once broken, can never become green again; whereas men have a soul which lives for ever – lives after the body has turned to dust. It takes its flight through the clear air up to the shining stars, and the same as we rise up out of the water and behold the lands of men, so they rise to beautiful, unknown places, which we shall never see."

"Why did we not receive an immortal soul?" the Little Mermaid said sadly. "I would gladly give my hundreds of years that I have to live to be a man for only one day, and have part in the heavenly kingdom."

"You must not think of that," the old grandmother said. "We feel much happier and are better than the men above."

"I must die, then, and become foam on the top of the water, and not hear the music of the waves, nor see the beautiful flowers and the red sun. Can I not do anything to gain an immortal soul?"

"No," was the answer. "Only if a man were to love you so that you would be more to him than father or mother; if he clung to you with all his thoughts and all his love, and let the priest lay his right hand in yours, with the promise of fidelity now and to all eternity, then his soul would flow into your body, and you would have part in the felicity of mankind. He would give you a soul, and still keep his own. But that can never be. Just that which is a beauty here in the sea namely your fish's tail, is thought ugly on earth. They know no better; and to be beautiful one must have two sturdy props, which they call legs."

Then the Little Mermaid sighed, and looked down sadly upon her fish's tail.

"Let us be happy," the old grandmother said. "We will jump and dance during the three hundred years we have to live, which is long enough in all conscience and then we shall rest all the better. To-night there is a state ball."

There was splendour, such as is never seen on earth. The walls and the ceiling of the large dancing-hall were of thick but clear crystal. Several hundred colossal mussel-shells, red and green, stood in rows on either side, with a blue burning flame, which lighted up the hall, and shone through the walls, so that the whole sea around was bright. Innumerable shoals of fish, large and small, were seen swimming about, the scales of some being scarlet, and of others like silver and gold. In the middle, through the hall, flowed a broad stream, and in this the mermaids and men danced to their own lovely singing. The beings on earth have not such beautiful voices. The Little Mermaid sang more beautifully than any of them, so that she was very much applauded, and for a moment she experienced a feeling of pleasure, for she knew that she had the most beautiful voice of all on earth or in the sea.

But soon again she thought of the world above her. She could not forget the handsome Prince, and her sorrow at not possessing an immortal soul. Then

she stole out from her father's palace, and whilst all within was merriment and happiness, she sat in deep sorrow in her little garden. She now heard a horn sound through the water, and she thought, "That is no doubt the Prince sailing there above, he for whom I care more than for father or mother, he in whom all my desires centre, and in whose hands I would trust my life's happiness. I will venture everything to gain him and an immortal soul. Whilst my sisters are dancing in my father's palace I will go to the Water-witch of whom I have always been so afraid; but she can, perhaps, advise and help me."

Now the Little Mermaid left her garden, and went to the roaring whirlpool, beyond which the Water-witch dwelled. She had never been that way before. No flowers grew there – no sea-grass – only the naked grey sand stretched towards the whirlpool, where the water whirls round like boisterous water-wheels, dragging everything it lays hold of down into the depths below. Through the middle of this all-destroying whirlpool she had to pass in order to reach the domains of the Water-witch; and part of the way she had to cross hot bubbling slime; this the witch called her peat-bog. Behind this lay her house, in the midst of a most extraordinary forest. All the trees and bushes were polypi – half-animal and half-plant – which looked like a hundred-headed snakes growing out of the earth. All the branches were long slimy arms with fingers like pliant worms, and every limb from the root to the highest point moved. Everything in the sea that they could catch they laid hold of and never let it go again.

The Little Mermaid was quite frightened; her heart beat with fear, and she nearly turned back again; but then she thought of the Prince and of the human soul, which gave her fresh courage. Her long, flowing hair she fastened up tight round her head, that the polypi might not catch her by it; and, with her hands crossed over her bosom, she swam swiftly between the hateful polypi, which stretched out their pliant arms after her. She saw how each of them held something or other, that it had caught, with hundreds of little arms like strong iron bands. Human beings, that had been drowned and sunk deep down in the sea, remained as skeletons in the arms of the polypi.

They held boxes and rudders of ships, and the skeletons of animals, besides a little mermaid which they had caught and smothered and this was to her the most horrible sight of all.

Now she came to a large swampy spot in the forest, where huge fat water-snakes twisted and twirled about; and in the middle of this spot was a house built of the bones of wrecked human beings, and there sat the witch, feeding a toad out of her mouth, just as we give a canary sugar, and the snakes hung round her neck.

"I know already what you want," the witch said. "It is foolish enough of you, but you shall have your wish, since it will bring you to misery, my pretty Princess. You want to get rid of your fish's tail and have two legs instead, like a man, so that the young Prince may fall in love with you, and you may gain him and an immortal soul." Saying this the witch laughed so loud and repulsively that the toad and the snakes fell to the ground, where they rolled over together. "You come just in time," she continued, "for tomorrow, after the rising of the sun, I could not have helped you for another year. I will prepare you a draught with which, before the sun rises, you must swim to the land and there drink it. Then your tail will disappear, shrinking into what men call legs, but it will give you pain, just as if a sword were being thrust through you. All who see you will say you are the most beautiful being they have seen, you will retain a floating gait, such as no dancer can equal, but every step you take will be as if you trod on sharp knives, and as if your blood must flow. If you consent to suffer all this I will help you."

"Yes," the Little Mermaid answered quickly, and she thought of the Prince and of an immortal soul.

"But, consider," the witch continued, "after you have once assumed the human form you can never become a mermaid again. You can never return to your sisters or to your father's palace; and if you do not gain the Prince's love, so that for you he forgets father and mother, clinging to you with body and soul, and if the priest does not join your hands together so that you are man and wife, you will not gain an immortal soul. The first morning after

his marriage with another, your heart will break and you will turn to foam on the water."

"I agree," the Little Mermaid said, and she was as pale as death.

"But I must be paid," the witch resumed, "and it is not little I require. You have the most beautiful voice of any here at the bottom of the sea; with that you trust to fascinating him, but that voice you must give me. The best you possess I require for my invaluable draught for it is some of my own blood I must give you, so that it may be sharp like a two-edged sword."

"But if you take my voice what have I left?" the Little Mermaid said.

"Your beautiful person, your floating gait, and your speaking eyes, and these are enough to gain any heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Come, put out your little tongue, which I will cut off in payment for the powerful draught!"

"So be it," the Little Mermaid said, and the witch put her kettle on the fire to boil the magic draught.

"Cleanliness is a good thing," she said, as she scoured out the kettle with the snakes which she tied in a knot. She then cut open her breast, and let the black blood drop into the kettle, the steam of which formed such extraordinary figures, enough to frighten anyone. Each moment she threw fresh things into the kettle, and when it boiled thoroughly it was like the crying of a crocodile. At length it was ready and looked like the clearest water.

"There it is," the witch said, and cut off the Little Mermaid's tongue, so that she was now dumb, and could neither sing nor speak.

"If the polypi should lay hold of you as you pass through my forest," the witch continued, "throw only one drop of this draught upon them and their arms and fingers will break into a thousand pieces." But that was not necessary, for they drew back frightened when they saw the sparkling draught, which shone like a star, so she passed quickly through the forest, the bog, and the roaring whirlpool.

She could see her father's palace. The lights were extinguished, and no doubt all were long past asleep, but she dared not go to them now that she

was dumb, and on the point of leaving them for ever. She felt as if her heart would break with grief. She stole into the garden, took a flower from each of her sisters' beds, and kissing her hand, she rose up through the dark blue sea.

The sun had not yet risen when she reached the Prince's palace, and the moon was still shining brightly. She drank the magic draught, and it felt as if a two-edged sword were cutting through her tender body, so that she fainted and lay there as dead. When the sun shone upon the sea she awoke, feeling a cutting pain, but immediately before her stood the handsome young Prince, who fixed his coal-black eyes upon her, so that she cast hers down, and then she perceived that her fish's tail had disappeared, in the place of which she had the prettiest little white legs that any girl can have. But she was quite naked, and she therefore covered herself with her long hair. The Prince asked who she was and how she came there, and she looked at him mildly, yet at the same time so sadly, with her dark blue eyes, but speak she could not. He then took her by the hand and led her into the palace. Every step she took was, as



the witch had foretold, as if she were walking on the edge of sharp knives, but she bore it willingly, and led by the Prince she mounted the steps so lightly that he and everyone marvelled at her lovely, floating gait.

She had now costly clothes of silk and muslin, and was the most beautiful of all in the palace, but she was dumb and could neither speak nor sing. Beautiful women, dressed in silk and gold, sang before the Prince and his royal parents, and one sang more delightfully than all the others, so that the Prince clapped his hands and smiled, which made the Little Mermaid quite sad, for she knew that she had sung much better, and she thought, "Oh, did he but know that in order to be near him I have sacrificed my voice for ever."

The slaves now danced to beautiful music, and the Little Mermaid rose, stood on the points of her toes, and then floated across the boards so that none had danced like her, her beauty becoming more striking at every movement, and her eyes spoke more touchingly to the heart than the singing of the slaves.

All were delighted with her, particularly the Prince, who called her his little foundling, and she danced more and more, though each time she put her foot to the ground it was as if she trod on knives. The Prince said she should always remain with him, and she received permission to sleep on a velvet cushion at his door.

He had man's clothes made for her so that she might accompany him on horseback, and they rode together through the fragrant groves where the green boughs touched their shoulders and the little birds sang behind the fresh leaves. She climbed with the Prince up the highest mountains, and though her tender feet bled so that he could see it, she only laughed, and still followed him till they saw the clouds floating beneath them, like a swarm of birds flying to another country.

At night, when the others slept, she would go down the broad marble stairs and cool her burning feet in the cold sea, and her thoughts then flew back to those below in the deep.

One night her sisters came arm in arm, and they sang so sadly as they floated on the water. She made signs to them, and when they recognised her

they told her into what grief she had plunged them all. After that they came every night, and once she saw, far out in the sea, her old grandmother, who for many years had not risen to the surface of the water, as also the Sea-King with the crown upon his head. They stretched out their hands towards her, but did not venture too far inland as her sisters.

She daily became dearer to the Prince, who loved her as one loves a good, dear child, but to make her his queen never once entered his head; and unless she became his wife she would not receive an immortal soul, but the morning after his marriage with another must become foam upon the sea.

"Do you not love me more than them all?" the Little Mermaid's eyes seemed to say, when he took her in his arms and kissed her beautiful forehead.

"Yes, you are the dearest to me," the Prince said, "for you have the best heart and are the most devoted to me, besides that you are like a young girl whom I saw once, but shall never see again. I was on board a ship that was wrecked, when the waves cast me on land near a holy temple, which was tended by several young girls, of whom the youngest found me on the shore and saved my life. I saw her only twice, and she is the only one in this world whom I could really love, but you are like her and have nearly driven her image from my heart. She belongs to the holy temple, and therefore my good fortune has sent you to me, and we will never more be parted."

"Oh, he does not know that it was I who saved his life, carrying him through the sea to where the temple stands," the Little Mermaid thought. "I sat behind the foam, watching till someone should come, and I saw the pretty girl whom he loves more than me. The girl belongs to the temple, he has said, so they can never meet, whereas I am with him, and see him daily. I will tend him, love him, and sacrifice my life for him."

"The Prince is about to marry our neighbouring king's beautiful daughter, and therefore so magnificent a ship is got ready," was said on all sides. "It is announced that he is going to travel, but it is in reality to see the king's daughter, and a large retinue is to accompany him."

The Little Mermaid smiled, for she knew the Prince's thoughts better than they. "I must travel," he had told her. "My parents desire that I should see the beautiful Princess, but they will not force me to marry her. I can never love her, for she is not like that beautiful girl in the temple whom you resemble, and if I must ever choose a wife it would be you rather, my dumb foundling with the speaking eyes;" and he kissed her rosy lips, played with her long hair, and laid his head on her heart, so that it dreamed of human happiness and of an immortal soul.

"You are not afraid of the sea, my dear?" he asked, as they stood together on the deck of the magnificent vessel which was to carry him to the neighbouring king's country; and he told her of storms and calms, of the curious fish in the deep, and of what the divers had seen below. She smiled at what he told her, for she knew better than all what it was like at the bottom of the sea.

In the moonlight night, when all, even the pilot who stood at the rudder, were asleep, she sat at the side of the vessel staring down into the clear water, and she thought she saw her father's palace, with her grandmother looking up towards her. Then her sisters appeared above the water, and looking at her sadly, wrung their white hands. She nodded to them, and, smiling, wished to tell them that all was going well and happily for her, but the cabin-boy came near, so that her sisters dived down, and he thought what he had seen was the foam of the waves.

The next morning the ship entered the harbour of the neighbouring king's splendid city. All the church-bells rang, the trumpets sounded from the high towers, and the soldiers presented arms. There was some new fete every day. Balls and parties followed one upon the other, but the Princess was not yet there. She was far away, it was said, being educated in a holy temple where she was learning all royal virtues. At length she arrived.

The Little Mermaid was very anxious to see her, and was obliged to acknowledge her beauty, for a more lovely apparition she had never beheld. Her skin was so clear and transparent, and from beneath the long dark lashes smiled the most honest eyes of a deep blue.

"It is you," the Prince said. "You, who saved me when I lay as dead on the shore;" and he pressed his blushing bride to his breast. "Oh, I am too happy!" he said to the Little Mermaid. "My fondest hopes are realised. You will rejoice in my happiness, for you take more interest in me than any of them." The Little Mermaid kissed his hand, and began to feel already as if her heart were breaking. Was not the morning after his marriage to bring death to her and to change her into foam on the sea?

All the church-bells rang, and heralds rode about the streets announcing the betrothal. On all the altars sweet-scented oil was burning in beautiful silver lamps. The priests swang the censers, and the bride and bridegroom received the bishop's blessing. The Little Mermaid stood there, clothed in silk and gold, holding the bride's train, but she did not hear the beautiful music, nor did she see the holy ceremony, she only thought of her death and of all she had lost in this world.

The same evening the bride and bridegroom went on board the vessel. The cannon thundered, the flags were flying, and in the middle of the ship's deck a magnificent tent of purple and gold was erected, furnished with the most beautiful cushions, and there the newly-married couple were to pass the night. The sails swelled with wind and the ship glided smoothly through the calm sea.

When it grew dark lamps of all colours were lighted, and the sailors danced merrily on the deck. The Little Mermaid could not help thinking of the first time she rose to the surface of the sea, when she witnessed the same magnificence and rejoicing, and she whirled round in the dance so that all applauded her, for she had never danced so beautifully. It was as if sharp knives were cutting into her tender feet, but she did not feel it, for her heart was cut still more painfully. She knew it was the last night she would see him for whom she had left her home and relations, for whom she had sacrificed her lovely voice and had suffered daily tortures, and of all this he knew nothing. It was the last night that she should breathe the same air with him, or behold the sea and the sky studded with stars. An eternal night without thoughts or dreams awaited

her, who had no soul and could not gain one. All was joy and merriment till long past midnight, and she laughed and danced with death in her heart. The Prince kissed his beautiful bride, whilst she played with his black hair, and hand in hand they retired to rest in their magnificent tent.

All was silent and quiet on board, only the pilot stood at the helm, when the Little Mermaid laid her white arms on the side of the vessel looking towards the east, for she knew that the first ray of the sun would kill her. She now saw her sisters rise from the waves as pale as herself. Their beautiful long hair did not now float in the air, it was cut off.

"We have given it to the witch to purchase help for you," they said, "so that you may not die this night, and she has given us a knife – here it is – see how sharp it is. Before the rising of the sun you must bury it in the Prince's heart, and when the warm blood falls upon your feet, they will turn into a fish's tail, and you will again be a mermaid. You can then return to us and live your three hundred years, before you become the dead salt sea-foam. Make haste, for he or you must die before the sun rises. Your old grandmother has fretted so that her white hair has fallen off, like ours has fallen by the witch's scissors. Kill the Prince and return to us, but make haste, for do you not see the red streak in the sky? In but a few minutes the sun will rise and you must then die." They heaved a heavy sigh and disappeared in the waves.

The Little Mermaid drew back the curtain from the tent and saw the beautiful bride resting with her head on the Prince's breast. She bent down and kissed him on the forehead, then looked at the sky which was becoming redder and redder. She examined the sharp pointed knife, and again fixed her eyes on the Prince who in his dreams murmured his bride's name. She only was in his thoughts, and the knife trembled in the Little Mermaid's hand, but then she threw it far out into the sea, which shone red where it fell, as if drops of blood bubbled up from the water. Once more she looked upon the Prince with dying eyes, then threw herself from the vessel into the sea, and felt her body dissolving into foam.

The sun now rose above the water, the rays falling warmly upon the cold sea-foam, and the Little Mermaid felt nothing of death. She saw the bright sun, and just above her floated hundreds of transparent, beautiful beings, through whom she could see the white sails of the ship and the red clouds in the sky. Their voices were delightful melody, but so spiritual that no human ear could hear them, nor could the eye of man perceive them, and they were so light that they floated in the air without wings. The Little Mermaid saw that she had a body like these, which rose higher and higher out of the foam.

"To whom am I carried?" she asked, and her voice sounded like that of the other beings, so spiritual that no earthly music could imitate it.

"To the daughters of the air," the others answered. "Mermaids have no immortal soul, and can never have one unless they gain a man's love, so that their future existence depends upon another power. The daughters of the air have no immortal soul either, but by good acts they can gain one for themselves. We fly to the warm countries where the plague is in the burning air, and there we fan coolness, we impregnate the air with the scent of flowers, and give relief and health. When we have striven for three hundred years to accomplish all the good we can, we then receive an immortal soul, and share in the eternal bliss of mankind. You, poor Little Mermaid, have had the same lofty aspirations, you have suffered and endured, and thus raised yourself to the equal of the spirits of the air, so that you can now, after three hundred years of good works, earn an immortal soul."

The Little Mermaid raised her hands towards the glorious sun, and now for the first time refreshing tears filled her eyes. On the vessel there was again life and bustle, and she saw the Prince with his beautiful bride looking for her. Sadly they looked down upon the waves as if they knew that she had thrown herself into the water, when, invisible, she kissed the bride's forehead, smiled upon her and rose with the other children of the air upon the red cloud into the ethereal regions.

"After three hundred years we shall thus glide into heaven."

"And we may even get there earlier," one of the daughters of the air whispered. "Invisibly we glide into the dwellings of man where there are children, and for each day on which we find a good child that pleases its parents and deserves their love, the Lord shortens the time of our probation. The child does not know that we pass through the room, but if it draws from us a smile of pleasure, one year is taken off the three hundred; but if, on the contrary, we have to shed tears of sorrow over a bad child, each tear adds one day to the time of our probation."

