

"You are speaking our language!" said he; "what do you want? Why do you come here you strange woman?"

"It is I! it is Helga! Don't you know me? Three minutes ago we were talking together, yonder in the verandah."

"That is a mistake!" said the stork; "you must have dreamt it!"

"No, no!" she said, and reminded him of the Viking's stronghold and the moor, and of the journey hither!

Then father-stork blinked his eyes: "That is a very old story; I have heard it from my great-great-great-grandmother's time! Yes, certainly, there was such a princess in Egypt from the land of Denmark, but she disappeared on the night of her wedding many hundreds of years ago, and never came back again. That you may read for yourself on the monument in the garden; there are sculptured both swans and storks, and at the top you yourself stand in white marble."

It was indeed so. Little Helga saw it, understood it, and fell on her knees.

The sun broke forth, and as in former times at the touch of its beams the toad form disappeared and the beautiful shape was seen, so she raised herself now at the baptism of light in a form of brighter beauty, purer than the air, a ray of light—to the Father of all.

Her body sank in dust; there lay a faded lotus-flower where she had stood.

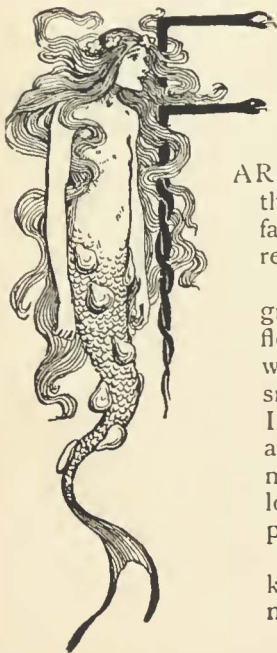
"Then that was a new ending to the story!" said the father-stork. "I had not at all expected it! but I rather like it!"

"I wonder what my young ones will say about it!" said the mother-stork.

"Yes, that is certainly the principal thing!" answered the father.



FELL ON HER KNEES.



## The Little Mermaid

AR out at sea, the water is as blue as the prettiest cornflowers, and as clear as the purest crystal. But it is very deep—so deep, indeed, that no rope can fathom it; and many church steeples need be piled one upon the other to reach from the bottom to the surface. It is there that the sea-folk dwell.

Nor must it be imagined that there is nothing but a bare, white, sandy ground below. No, indeed! The soil produces the most curious trees and flowers, whose leaves and stems are so flexible that the slightest motion of the waters seems to fluster them as if they were living creatures. Fishes, great and small, glide through the branches as birds fly through the trees here upon earth. In the deepest spot of all stands the sea-king's palace; its walls are of coral, and its tall pointed windows of the clearest amber, while the roof is made of mussel shells, that open and shut according to the tide. And beautiful they look, for in each shell lies a pearl, any one of which would be worthy to be placed in a queen's crown.

The sea-king had been a widower for many years, so his aged mother kept house for him. She was a very wise woman, but extremely proud of her noble birth, which entitled her to wear twelve oyster shells on her tail, while



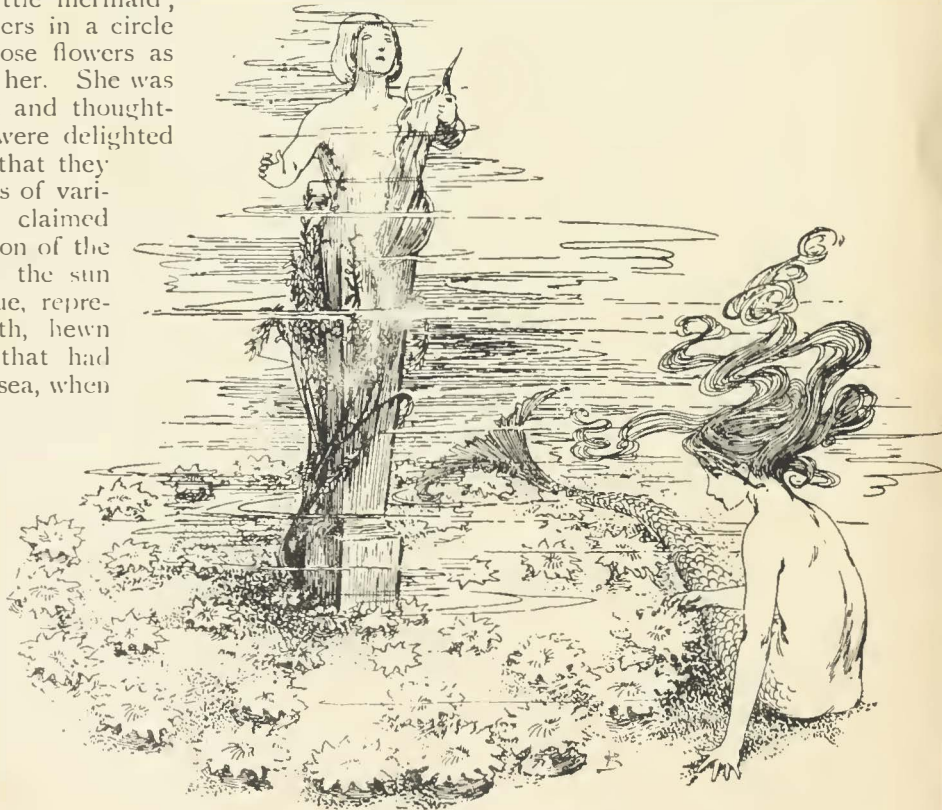
ATE OUT OF THEIR HANDS, AND ALLOWED  
THEMSELVES TO BE STROKED.

They were free to play about all day long in the vast rooms of the palace below water, where live flowers grew upon the walls. The large amber windows were opened, when the fishes would swim inwards to them just as the swallows fly into our houses when we open the windows; only the fishes swam right up to the princesses, ate out of their hands, and allowed themselves to be stroked.

In front of the palace was a large garden with bright red and dark blue trees, whose fruit glittered like gold, and whose blossoms were like fiery sparks, as both stalks and leaves kept rustling continually. The ground was strewn with the most delicate sand, but blue as the flames of sulphur. The whole atmosphere was of a peculiar blue tint that would have led you to believe you were hovering high up in the air, with clouds above and below you, rather than standing at the bottom of the sea. When the winds were calm, the sun was visible; and to those below it looked like a scarlet flower shedding light from its calyx.

Each of the little princesses had a plot of ground in the garden, where she might dig and plant as she pleased. One sowed her flowers so as to come up in the shape of a whale; another preferred the figure of a little mermaid; but the youngest planted hers in a circle to imitate the sun, and chose flowers as red as the sun appeared to her. She was a singular child, both silent and thoughtful; and while her sisters were delighted with all the strange things that they obtained through the wrecks of various ships, she had never claimed anything—with the exception of the red flowers that resembled the sun above—but a pretty statue, representing a handsome youth, hewn out of pure white marble that had sunk to the bottom of the sea, when a ship ran aground. She planted a bright red weeping-willow beside the statue; and when the tree grew up, its fresh boughs hung over it nearly down to the blue sands, where the shadow looked quite violet, and kept dancing about like the branches. It seemed as if the top of the tree were at play with its roots, and each trying to snatch a kiss.

There was nothing she delighted in so much as to



THE YOUNGEST PLANTED HERS IN A CIRCLE TO IMITATE THE SUN.

other well-born persons might only wear six. In all other respects she was a very praiseworthy sort of body; and especially as regards the care she took of the little princesses, her granddaughters. They were six pretty children; but the youngest was the prettiest of all. Her skin was as clear and delicate as a rose leaf, and her eyes as blue as the deepest sea; but she had no feet any more than the others, and her body ended in a fish's tail.



hear about the upper world. She was always asking her grandmother to tell her all she knew about ships, towns, people, and animals. What struck her as most beautiful was that the flowers of the earth should shed perfumes, which they do not below the sea; that the forests were green, and that the fishes amongst the trees should sing so loud and so exquisitely that it must be a treat to hear them. It was the little birds that her grandmother called fishes, or else her young listeners would not have understood her, for they had never seen birds.

"When you have accomplished your fifteenth year," said the grandmother, "you shall have leave to rise up out of the sea, and sit on the rocks in the moonshine, and look at the large ships sailing past. And then you will see both forests and towns."

In the following year one of the sisters would reach the age of fifteen, but as all the rest were each a year younger than the other, the youngest would have to wait five years before it would be her turn to come up from the bottom of the ocean, and see what our world is like. However, the eldest promised to tell the others what she saw, and what struck her as most beautiful on the first day; for their grandmother did not tell them enough, and there were so many things they wanted to know.

But none of them longed for her turn to come so intensely as the youngest, who had to wait the longest, and was so reserved and thoughtful. Many a night did she stand at the open window, and gaze upwards through the dark blue water, and watch the fishes as they lashed the sea with their fins and tails. She could see the moon and stars, that appeared, indeed, rather pale, though much larger, seen through the water, than they do to us. If something resembling a black cloud glided between the stars and herself, she knew that it was either a whale swimming overhead, or a ship full of human beings, none of whom probably dreamed that a lovely little mermaid was standing below, and stretching forth her white hands towards the keel of their vessel.

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

On her return she had a great deal to relate; but the most delightful thing of all, she said, was to lie upon a sand-bank in the calm sea, and to gaze upon the large city near the coast, where lights were shining like hundreds of stars; to listen to the sounds of music, to the din of carriages, and the busy hum of the crowd; and to see the church steeples, and hear the bells ringing. And she longed after all these things, just because she could not approach them.

Oh, how attentively her youngest sister listened! And later in the evening, when she stood at the open window, and gazed up through the dark blue water, how she thought about the large city, with its din and bustle, and even fancied she could hear the church bells ringing from below.

In the following year, the second sister obtained leave to rise up to the surface of the water, and swim about at her pleasure. She went up just at sunset, which appeared to her the finest sight of all. She said that the whole sky appeared like gold, and as to the clouds, their beauty was beyond all description. Red and violet clouds sailed rapidly above her head, while a flock of wild swans, resembling a long white scarf, flew still faster than they across the sea towards the setting sun. She, too, swam towards it, but the sun sank down, and the rosy hues vanished from the surface of the water and from the skies.

The year after, the third sister went up. She was the boldest of them all, so she swam up a



A STATUE, REPRESENTING A HANDSOME YOUTH,  
HEWN OUT OF PURE WHITE MARBLE.



river that fell into the sea. She saw beautiful green hills covered with vines ; castles and citadels peeped out from stately woods ; she heard the birds singing, and the sun felt so warm that she was frequently obliged to dive down under the water to cool her burning face. In a small creek she met with a whole troop of little human children. They were naked, and dabbling about in the water. She wanted to play with them, but they flew away in great alarm, and there came a little black animal (she meant a dog, only she had never seen one before), who barked at her so tremendously that she was frightened, and sought to reach the open sea. But she should never forget the beautiful forests, the green hills, or the pretty children, who were able to swim in the water although they had no fish's tails.



THEY FLEW AWAY IN GREAT ALARM.

The fourth sister was less daring. She remained in the midst of the sea, and maintained that it was most beautiful at that point, because from thence one could see for miles around, and the sky looked like a glass bell above one's head. She had seen ships, but only at a distance—they looked like sea-mews ; and the waggish dolphins had thrown somersaults, and the large whales had squirted water through their nostrils, so that one might fancy there were hundreds of fountains all round.

It was now the fifth sister's turn. Her birthday was in the winter, therefore she saw what the



ALL THE VESSELS SCUDDED PAST IN GREAT ALARM.

others had not seen the first time they went up. The sea looked quite green, and huge icebergs were floating about ; each looked like a pearl, she said, only larger than the churches built by human beings. They were of the oddest shapes, and glittered like diamonds. She had placed herself upon the largest of them, letting the wind play with her long hair, and all the vessels

scudded past in great alarm, as though fearful of approaching the spot where she was sitting, but towards evening, the sky became overcast, it thundered and lightened, while the dark sea lifted up the huge icebergs on high, so that they were illuminated by the red flashes of the lightning. All the vessels reefed in their sails, and their passengers were panic struck, while she sat quietly on her floating block of ice and watched the blue lightning as it zig-zagged along the silent sea.

The first time that each of the sisters had successively risen to the surface of the water, they had been enchanted by the novelty and beauty of all they saw; but being now grown up, and at liberty to go above as often as they pleased, they had grown indifferent to such excursions. They longed to come back into the water, and at the end of a month they had all declared that it was pleasanter to stay at home.

It frequently happened in the evening that the five sisters would entwine their arms, and rise up to the surface of the water all in a row. They had beautiful voices, far finer than any human being's, and when a storm was coming on, and they anticipated that a ship might sink, they swam before the vessel, and sang most sweetly of the delights to be found beneath the water, begging the seafarers not to be afraid of coming down below. But the sailors could not understand what they said, and mistook their words for the howling of the tempest, and they never saw all the fine things below, for if the ship sank the men were drowned, and their bodies alone reached the sea-king's palace.

When the sisters rose up arm-in-arm through the water, the youngest would stand alone, looking after them, and felt ready to cry; only mermaids have no tears, and therefore suffer all the more.

"How I wish I were fifteen!" said she. "I am sure I shall love the world above, and the beings that inhabit it."

At last she reached the age of fifteen.

"Well, now you are grown up!" said her grandmother, the widow of the late king. "So let me dress you like your sisters." And she placed in her hair a wreath of white lilies, every leaf of which was half a pearl; and the old dame ordered eight large oyster shells to be fastened to the princess's tail, to denote her high rank.

"But they hurt me so," said the little mermaid

"Pride must suffer pain," said the old lady.

Oh! how gladly would she have shaken off all this pomp and laid aside her heavy wreath—the red flowers in her garden adorned her far better—but she could not help herself. "Farewell!" cried she, rising as lightly as a bubble to the surface of the water.

The sun had just sunk as she raised her head above the waves, but the clouds were still pink, and fringed with gold; and through the fast vanishing rosy tints of the air beamed the evening in all its beauty. The atmosphere was mild and cool, and the sea quite calm. A large ship with three masts was lying on its surface; only a single sail was hoisted, for not a breeze was stirring, and the sailors were sitting all about in the rigging. There were musical instruments playing, and voices singing; and when the evening grew darker, hundreds of gay-coloured lanterns were lighted, which looked like the flags of all nations streaming through the air. The little mermaid swam close to the cabin window, and as often as the water lifted her up, she peeped in through the transparent panes, and saw a number of well-dressed persons. But the handsomest of all was the prince, with



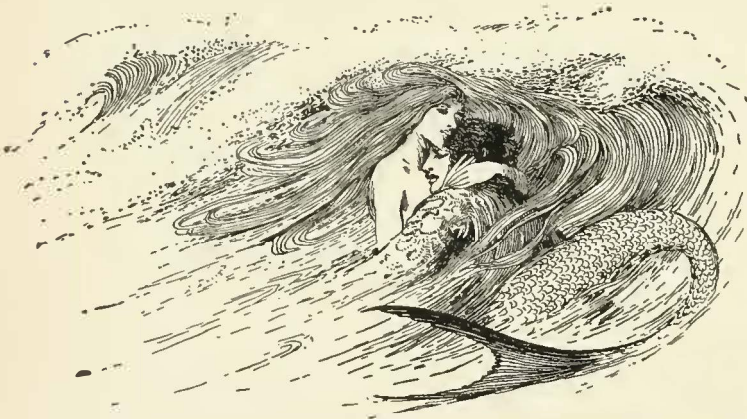
AS OFTEN AS THE WATER LIFTED HER UP SHE PEEPED  
IN THROUGH THE TRANSPARENT PANES.



large, dark eyes ; he could not be above sixteen, and it was *his* birthday that was being celebrated with such magnificence. The sailors danced upon deck, and when the young prince came up above a hundred rockets were let off, that lit the air till it was as bright as day, and so frightened the little mermaid that she dived under the water. But she soon popped out her head once more, when all the stars in heaven seemed to be falling down upon her. She had never seen such fireworks before ; large suns were throwing out sparks, beautiful fiery fishes were darting through the blue air, and all these wonders were reflected in the calm sea below. The ship itself was thrown into such bright relief that every little cord was distinctly visible, and, of course, each person still more so. And how handsome the young prince looked, as he pressed the hands of those present and smiled, while the music resounded through that lovely night !

It was late. Still the little mermaid could not take her eyes off the ship or the handsome prince. The variegated lanterns were now extinguished, the rockets ceased to be let off, and no more cannons were fired ; but there was a rumbling and a grumbling in the heart of the sea. Still she sat rocking up and down in the water, so as to peep into the cabin. But now the ship began to move faster, the sails were unfurled one after another, the waves ran higher, heavy clouds flitted across the sky, and flashes of lightning were seen in the distance. A tremendous storm seemed coming on, so the sailors reefed in the sails once more. The large ship kept pitching to and fro in its rapid course across the raging sea ; the billows heaved, like so many gigantic black mountains, threatening to roll over the topmast, but the ship dived down like a swan between the high

waves, and then rose again on the towering pinnacle of the waters. The little mermaid fancied this was a right pleasant mode of sailing, but the crew thought differently. The ship kept cracking and cracking, the thick planks gave way beneath the repeated lashings of the waves, a leak was sprung, the mast was broken right in twain like a reed, and the vessel drooped on one side, while the water kept filling the hold. The little mermaid now perceived that the crew were in danger, and she herself was obliged to take care not to be hurt by the beams and planks belonging to the ship that were dispersed upon the waters. For one moment it was so pitch dark that she could see nothing, but when a flash of lightning illumined the sky,



SHE HELD HIS HEAD ABOVE THE WATER, AND THEN LET THE WAVES CARRY THEM WHITHER THEY PLEASED.

and enabled her to discern distinctly all on board, she looked especially for the young prince, whom she perceived sinking into the water just as the ship burst asunder. She was then quite pleased at the thought of his coming down to her, till she reflected that human beings cannot live in water, and that he would be dead by the time he reached her father's castle. But die he must not, therefore she swam towards him through the planks and beams that were driven about on the billows, forgetting that they might crush her to atoms. She dived deep under the water, and then, rising again between the waves, she managed at length to reach the young prince, who was scarcely able to buffet any longer with the stormy sea. His arms and legs began to feel powerless, his beautiful eyes were closed, and he would have died had not the little mermaid come to his assistance. She held his head above the water, and then let the waves carry them whither they pleased.

Towards morning the storm had abated, but not a wreck of the vessel was to be seen. The sun rose red and beaming from the water, and seemed to infuse life into the prince's cheeks, but his eyes remained closed. The mermaid kissed his high, polished forehead, and stroked back his wet hair ; she fancied he was like the marble statue in her garden, and she kissed him again, and wished that he might live.

They now came in sight of land, and she saw high blue mountains, on the tops of which the snow looked as dazzlingly white as though a flock of swans were lying there. Below, near the coast, were beautiful green forests, and in front stood a church or a convent—she did not rightly

know which—but, at all events, it was a building. Citrons and China oranges grew in the garden, and tall palm-trees stood in front of the door. The sea formed a small bay at this spot, and the water, though very deep, was quite calm; so she swam with the handsome prince towards the cliff, where the delicate white sands had formed a heap, and here she laid him down, taking great care that his head should be placed higher than his body, and in the warm sunshine.

The bells now pealed from the large white building, and a number of girls came into the garden. The little mermaid then swam farther away and hid herself behind some high stones that rose out of the water, and covering her head and bosom with foam, so that no one could see her little countenance, she watched whether any one came to the poor prince's assistance.

It was not long before a young maiden approached the spot where he was lying. She appeared frightened at first, but it was only for a moment; and then she fetched a number of persons; and the mermaid saw that the prince came to life again, and that he smiled on all those around him. But he did not send her a smile, neither did he know she had saved him, so she felt quite



IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE A YOUNG MAIDEN APPROACHED THE SPOT WHERE HE WAS LYING.

afflicted; and when he was led into the large building she dived back into the water with a heavy heart and returned to her father's castle.

Silent and thoughtful as she had always been, she now grew still more so. Her sisters inquired what she had seen the first time she went above, but she did not tell them.

Many an evening, and many a morning, did she rise up to the spot where she had left the prince. She saw the fruit in the garden grow ripe, and then she saw it gathered; she saw the snow melt away from the summits of the high mountains, but she did not see the prince; and each time she returned home more sorrowful than ever. Her only consolation was to sit in her little garden and to fling her arm round the beautiful marble statue that was like the prince; but she ceased to tend her flowers, and they grew like a wilderness all over the paths, entwining their long stems and leaves with the branches of the trees, so that it was quite dark beneath their shade.

At length she could resist no longer, and opened her heart to one of her sisters, from whom all the others immediately learned her secret, though they told it to no one else, except to a couple of other mermaids, who divulged it to nobody, except to their most intimate friends. One of these happened to know who the prince was. She, too, had seen the gala on ship-board, and informed them whence he came, and where his kingdom lay.



"Come, little sister," said the other princesses; and, entwining their arms, they rose up in a long row out of the sea at the spot where they knew the prince's palace stood.

This was built of bright yellow, shining stone, with a broad flight of marble steps, the last of which reached down into the sea. Magnificent golden cupolas rose above the roof, and marble statues, closely imitating life, were placed between the pillars that surrounded the edifice. One could see, through the transparent panes of the large windows, right into the magnificent rooms, fitted with costly silk curtains and splendid hangings, and ornamented with large pictures on all the walls; so that it was a pleasure to look at them. In the middle of the principal room, a large fountain threw up its sparkling jets as high as the glass cupola in the ceiling, through which the sun shone down upon the water, and on the beautiful plants growing in the wide basin that contained it.

Now that she knew where he lived, she spent many an evening, and many a night, on the neighbouring water. She swam much nearer the shore than any of the others had ventured to do; nay, she even went up the narrow canal, under the handsome marble balcony that threw its long shadow over the water. Here she would sit, and gaze at the young prince, who thought himself quite alone in the bright moonshine.

Many an evening did she see him sailing in his pretty boat, adorned with flags, and enjoying music: then she would listen from amongst the green reeds; and if the wind happened to seize hold of her long silvery white veil, those who saw it took it to be a swan spreading out his wings.

Many a night, too, when fishermen were spreading their nets by torchlight, she heard them speaking highly of the young prince; and she rejoiced that she had saved his life, when he was tossed about, half dead, on the waves. And she remembered how his head had rested on her bosom, and how heartily she had kissed him—but of all this he knew nothing, and he could not even dream about her.

She soon grew to be more and more fond of human beings, and to long more and more fervently to be able to walk about amongst them, for their world appeared to



"YOU MUST NOT THINK ABOUT THAT," SAID THE OLD DAME.

her far larger and more beautiful than her own. They could fly across the sea upon ships, and scale mountains that towered above the clouds; and the lands they possessed—their fields and their forests—stretched away far beyond the reach of her sight.

There was such a deal that she wanted to learn, but her sisters were not able to answer all her questions; therefore she applied to her old grandmother, who was well acquainted with the upper world, which she called, very correctly, the lands above the sea.

"If human beings do not get drowned," asked the little mermaid, "can they live for ever? Do not they die, as we do here in the sea?"

"Yes," said the ancient dame, "they must die as well as we; and the term of their life is even shorter than ours. We can live to be three hundred years old; but when we cease to be here, we shall only be changed into foam, and are not even buried below among those we love. Our souls are not immortal. We shall never enter upon a new life. We are like the green reed, that can never flourish again when it has once been cut through. Human beings, on the contrary, have a soul that lives eternally—yea, even after the body has been committed to the earth—and that rises up through the clear pure air to the bright stars above! Like as we rise out of the water to look at the haunts of men, so do they rise to unknown and favoured regions, that we shall never be privileged to see."

"And why have not we an immortal soul?" asked the little mermaid sorrowfully. "I would willingly give all the hundreds of years I may have to live, to be a human being but for one day, and to have the hope of sharing in the joys of the heavenly world."

"You must not think about that," said the old dame. "We feel we are much happier and better than the human race above."

"So I shall die, and be driven about like foam on the sea, and cease to hear the music of the



waves, and to see the beautiful flowers, and the red sun? Is there nothing I can do to obtain an immortal soul?"

"No," said the old sea-queen; "unless a human being loved you so dearly that you were more to him than either father or mother; if all his thoughts and his love were centred in you, and he allowed the priest to lay his right hand in yours, promising to be faithful to you here and hereafter: then would his soul glide into your body, and you would obtain a share in the happiness awaiting human beings. He would give you a soul without forfeiting his own. But this will never happen! Your fish's tail, which is a beauty amongst us sea-folk, is thought a deformity on earth, because they know no better. It is necessary there to have two stout props, that they call legs, in order to be beautiful!"

The little mermaid sighed as she cast a glance at her fish's tail.

"Let us be merry," said the old dame; "let us jump and hop about during the three hundred years that we have to live—which is really quite enough, in all conscience. We shall then be all the more disposed to rest at a later period. To-night we shall have a court ball."

On these occasions there was a display of magnificence such as we never see upon earth. The walls and the ceiling of

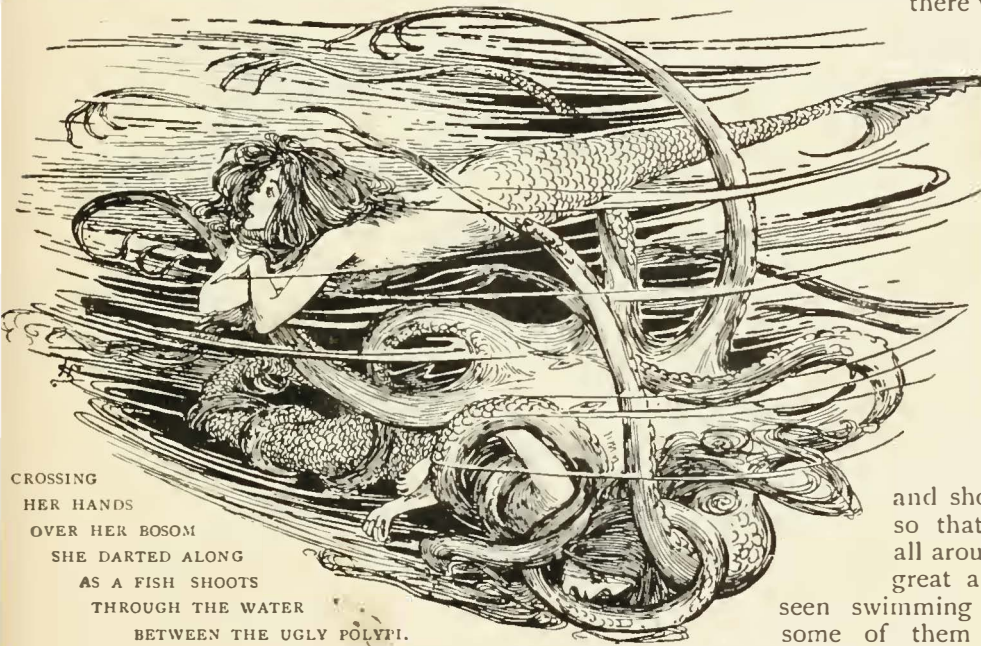
the large ball-room were of thick, though transparent glass. Hundreds of colossal mussel-shells—some of a deep red, others as green as grass—were hung in rows on each side, and contained blue flames, that illuminated the whole room,

and shone through the walls, so that the sea was lighted all around. Countless fishes, great and small, were to be seen swimming past the glass walls, some of them flaunting in scarlet scales, while others sparkled like liquid gold or silver.

Through the ball-room flowed a wide stream, on whose surface the mermen and mermaids danced to their own sweet singing. Human beings have no such voices. The little mermaid sang the sweetest of them all, and the whole court applauded with their hands and tails; and for a moment she felt delighted, for she knew that she had the loveliest voice ever heard upon earth or upon the sea. But her thoughts soon turned once more to the upper world, for she could not long forget either the handsome prince or her grief at not having an immortal soul like his. She, therefore, stole out of her father's palace, where all within was song and festivity, and sat down sadly in her own little garden. Here she heard a bugle sounding through the water.

"Now," thought she, "he is surely sailing about up above—he who incessantly fills all my thoughts, and to whose hands I would fain entrust the happiness of my existence. I will venture everything to win him and to obtain an immortal soul. While my sisters are dancing yonder in my father's castle, I will go to the sea-witch, who has always frightened me hitherto, but now, perhaps, she can advise and help me."

The little mermaid then left her garden, and repaired to the rushing whirlpool, behind which the sorceress lived. She had never gone that way before. Neither flowers nor sea-grass grew there; and nothing but bare, grey, sandy ground led to the whirlpool, where the waters kept eddying like waving mill-wheels, dragging everything they clutched hold of into the fathomless depth below. Between these whirlpools, that might have crushed her in their rude grasp, was the



CROSSING  
HER HANDS  
OVER HER BOSOM  
SHE DARTED ALONG  
AS A FISH SHOOTS  
THROUGH THE WATER  
BETWEEN THE UGLY POLYPI.

mermaid forced to pass to reach the dominions of the sea-witch; and even here, during a good part of the way, there was no other road than across a sheet of warm, bubbling mire, which the witch called her turf-common. At the back of this lay her house, in the midst of a most singular



WITHIN SAT THE SEA-WITCH, FEEDING  
A TOAD FROM HER MOUTH.

forest. Its trees and bushes were polypi—half animal, half plant—they looked like hundred-headed serpents growing out of the ground; the branches were long, slimy arms, with fingers like flexible worms, and they could move every joint from the root to the tip. They laid fast hold of whatever they could snatch from the sea, and never yielded it up again. The little mermaid was so frightened at the sight of them that her heart beat with fear, and she was fain to turn back; but then she thought of the prince, and of the soul that human beings possessed, and she took courage. She knotted up her long, flowing hair, that the polypi might not seize hold of her locks; and, crossing her hands over her bosom, she darted along, as a fish shoots through the water, between the ugly polypi, that stretched forth their flexible arms and fingers behind her. She perceived how each of them retained what it had seized, with hundreds of little arms, as strong as iron clasps. Human beings, who had died at sea and had sunk below, looked like white skeletons in the arms of the polypi. They clutched rudders, too, and chests, and skeletons of animals belonging to the earth, and even a little mermaid whom they had caught and stifled—and this appeared to her, perhaps, the most shocking of all.

She now approached a vast swamp in the forest, where large, fat water-snakes were wallowing in the mire and displaying their ugly whitish-yellow bodies. In the midst of this loathsome spot stood a house, built of the bones of shipwrecked human beings, and within sat the sea-witch, feeding a toad from her mouth, just as people amongst us give a little canary-bird a lump of sugar to eat. She called the nasty fat water-snakes her little chicks, and let them creep all over her bosom.

"I know what you want!" said the sea-witch. "It is very stupid of you, but you shall have your way, as it will plunge you into misfortune, my fair princess. You want to be rid of your fish's tail, and to have a couple of props like those human beings have to walk about upon, in order that the young prince may fall in love with you, and that you may obtain his hand and an immortal soul into the bargain!" And then the old witch laughed so loud and so repulsively that the toad and the snakes fell to the ground, where they lay wriggling about. "You come just at the nick of time," added the witch, "for to-morrow, by sunrise, I should no longer be able to help you till another year had flown past. I will prepare you a potion; and you must swim ashore with it to-morrow, before sunrise, and then sit down and drink it. Your tail will then disappear, and shrivel up into what human beings call neat legs. But mind, it will hurt you as much as if a sharp sword were thrust through you. Everybody that sees you will say you are the most beautiful mortal ever seen. You will retain the floating elegance of your gait: no dancer will move so lightly as you, but every step you take will be like treading upon such sharp knives that you would think your blood must flow. If you choose to put up with sufferings like these, I have the power to help you."

"I do," said the little mermaid, in a trembling voice, as she thought of the prince and of an immortal soul.

"But bethink you well," said the witch; "if once you obtain a human form, you can never be a mermaid again! You will never be able to dive down into the water to your sisters or return to your father's palace; and if you should fail in winning the prince's love to the degree of his forgetting both father and mother for your sake, and loving you with his whole soul, and bidding the priest join your hands in marriage, then you will never obtain an immortal soul! And the very day after he will have married another, your heart will break, and you will dissolve into the foam on the billows."

"I am resolved," said the little mermaid, who had turned as pale as death.

"But you must pay me my dues," said the witch, "and it is no small matter I require. You have the loveliest voice of all the inhabitants of the deep, and you reckon upon its tones to charm him into loving you. Now, you must give me this beautiful voice. I choose to have the best of all you possess in exchange for my valuable potion. For I must mix my own blood with it, that it may prove as sharp as a two-edged sword."



"But if you take away my voice," said the little mermaid, "what have I left?"

"Your lovely form," said the witch, "your buoyant carriage, and your expressive eyes. With these you surely can befool a man's heart. Well? Has your courage melted away? Come, put out your little tongue, and let me cut it off for my fee, and you shall have the valuable potion."

"So be it," said the little mermaid; and the witch put her cauldron on the fire to prepare the potion. "Cleanliness is a virtue!" quoth she, scouring the cauldron with the snakes that she had tied into a knot; after which she pricked her own breast, and let her black blood trickle down into the vessel. The steam rose up in such fanciful shapes that no one could have looked at them without a shudder. The witch kept flinging fresh materials into the cauldron every moment, and when it began to simmer it was like the wailings of a crocodile. At length the potion was ready, and it looked like the purest spring water.

"Here it is," said the witch, cutting off the little mermaid's tongue; so now she was dumb, and could neither sing nor speak.

"If the polypi should seize hold of you on your return through my forest," said the witch, "you need only sprinkle a single drop of this potion over them, and their arms and fingers will be shivered to a thousand pieces." But the little mermaid had no need of this talisman; the polypi drew back in alarm from her on perceiving the dazzling potion that shined in her hand like a twinkling star. So she crossed rapidly through the forest, the swamp, and the raging whirlpool.

She saw her father's palace—the torches were now extinguished in the large ball-room—and she knew the whole family were asleep within, but she did not dare venture to go and seek them, now that she was dumb and was about to leave them for ever. Her heart seemed ready to burst with anguish. She stole into the garden and plucked a flower from each of her sisters' flower-beds, kissed her hand a thousand times to the palace, and then rose up through the blue waters.

The sun had not yet risen when she saw the prince's castle and reached the magnificent marble steps. The moon shone brightly. The little mermaid drank the sharp and burning potion, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was run through her delicate frame. She fainted away, and remained apparently lifeless. When the sun rose over the sea she awoke, and felt a sharp pang; but just before her stood the handsome young prince. He gazed at her so intently with his coal-black eyes that she cast hers to the ground, and now perceived that her fish's tail had disappeared, and that she had a pair of the neatest little white legs that a maiden could desire. Only, having no clothes on, she was obliged to enwrap herself in her long, thick hair. The prince inquired who she was, and how she had come thither; but she could only look at him with her mild but sorrowful deep blue eyes, for 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 warned her it would be, like treading on the points of needles and sharp knives; but she bore it willingly, and, hand in hand with the prince, she glided in as lightly as a soap-bubble, so that he, as well as everybody else, marvelled at her lovely lightsome gait.

She was now dressed in costly robes of silk and muslin, and was the most beautiful of all the inmates of the palace; but she was dumb, and could neither sing nor speak. Handsome female slaves, attired in silk and gold, came and sang before the prince and his royal parents; and one of them happening to sing more beautifully than all the others, the prince clapped his hands and smiled. This afflicted the little mermaid. She knew that she herself had sung much more exquisitely, and thought, "Oh, did he but know that to be near him I sacrificed my voice to all eternity!"

The female slaves now performed a variety of elegant, aerial-looking dances to the sound of the most delightful music. The little mermaid then raised her beautiful white arms, stood on the tips of her toes, and floated across the floor in such a way as no one had ever danced before. Every motion revealed some fresh beauty, and her eyes appealed still more directly to the heart than the singing of the slaves had done.

Everybody was enchanted, but most of all the prince, who called her his little foundling; and she danced on and on, though every time her foot touched the floor she felt as if she were treading on sharp knives. The prince declared that he would never part with her, and she obtained leave to sleep on a velvet cushion before his door.



WHEN THE SUN ROSE OVER THE SEA SHE AWOKE, AND FELT A SHARP PANG.

He had her dressed in male attire, that she might accompany him on horseback. They then rode together through the perfumed forests, where the green boughs touched their shoulders, and



EVERYBODY WAS ENCHANTED, BUT MOST OF ALL THE PRINCE, WHO CALLED HER HIS LITTLE FOUNDLING.

the little birds sang amongst the cool leaves. She climbed up mountains by the prince's side ; and though her tender feet bled so that others perceived it, she only laughed at her sufferings, and



followed him till they could see the clouds rolling beneath them like a flock of birds bound for some distant land.

At night, when others slept throughout the prince's palace, she would go and sit on the broad marble steps, for it cooled her burning feet to bathe them in the sea water; and then she thought of those below the deep.

One night her sisters rose up arm in arm, and sang so mournfully as they glided over the waters. She then made them a sign, when they recognised her, and told her how deeply she had afflicted them all. After that they visited her every night; and once she perceived at a great distance her aged grandmother, who had not come up above the surface of the sea for many years, and the sea-king, with his crown on his head. They stretched out their arms to her, but they did not venture so near the shore as her sisters.

Each day she grew to love the prince more fondly; and he loved her just as one loves a dear, good child. But as to choosing her for his queen, such an idea never entered his head; yet, unless she became his wife, she would not obtain an immortal soul, and would melt to foam on the morrow of his wedding another.

"Don't you love me the best of all?" would the little mermaid's eyes seem to ask, when he embraced her and kissed her fair forehead.

"Yes, I love you best," said the prince, "for you have the best heart of any. You are the most devoted to me, and you resemble a young maiden whom I once saw, but whom I shall never meet again. I was on board a ship that sank; the billows cast me near a holy temple, where several young maids were performing divine service; the youngest of them found me on the shore and saved my life. I saw her only twice. She would be the only one that I could love in this world; but your features are like hers, and you have almost driven her image out of my soul. She belongs to the holy temple; and, therefore, my good star has sent you to me—and we will never part."

"Alas! he knows not that it was I who saved his life!" thought the little mermaid. "I bore him across the sea to the wood where stands the holy temple, and I sat beneath the foam to watch whether any human beings came to help him. I saw the pretty girl whom he loves better than he does me." And the mermaid heaved a deep sigh, for tears she had none to shed. "He says the maiden belongs to the holy temple, and she will, therefore, never return to the world. They will not meet again while I am by his side and see him every day. I will take care of him, and love him, and sacrifice my life to him."

But now came a talk of the prince being about to marry, and to obtain for his wife the beautiful daughter of a neighbouring king; and that was why he was fitting out such a magnificent vessel. The prince was travelling ostensibly on a mere visit to his neighbour's estates, but in reality to see the king's daughter. He was to be accompanied by a numerous retinue. The little mermaid shook her head and smiled. She knew the prince's thoughts better than the others did. "I must travel," he had said to her. "I must see this beautiful princess, because my parents require it of me; but they will not force me to bring her home as my bride. I cannot love her. She will not resemble the beautiful maid in the temple whom you are like; and if I were compelled to choose a bride, it should sooner be you, my dumb foundling, with those expressive eyes of yours." And he kissed her rosy mouth, and played with her long hair, and rested his head against her heart, which beat high with hopes of human felicity and of an immortal soul.

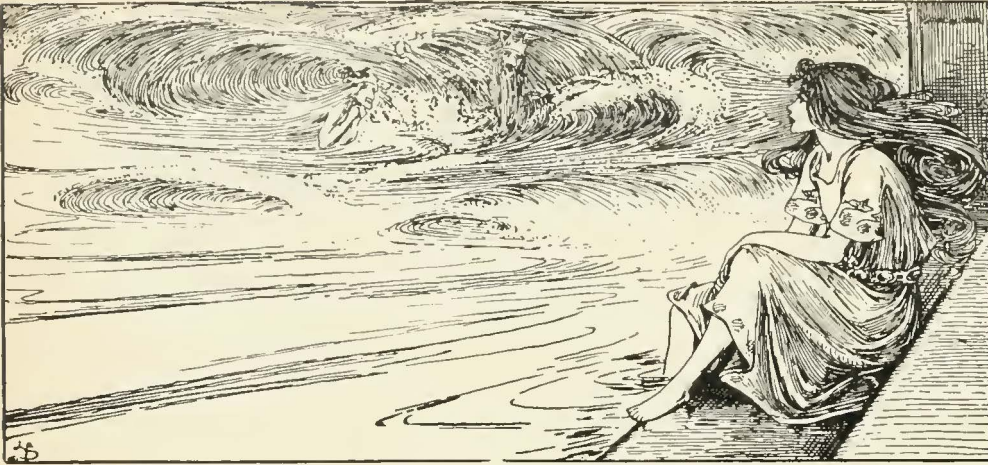
"You are not afraid of the sea, my dumb child, are you?" said he, as they stood on the magnificent vessel that was to carry them to the neighbouring king's dominions. And he talked to her about tempests and calm, of the singular fishes to found in the deep, and of the wonderful things the divers



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GAZED THROUGH THE CLEAR WATERS, AND FANCIED SHE SAW HER FATHER'S PALACE.

her silver crown on her head, looking up intently at the keel of the ship. Then her sisters rose up to the surface, and gazed at her mournfully, and wrung their white hands. She made a sign to them, smiled, and would fain have told them that she was happy and well off; but the cabin-boy approached, and the sisters dived beneath the waves, leaving him to believe that the white forms he thought he descried were only the foam upon the waters.

Next morning the ship came into port, at the neighbouring king's splendid capital. The bells were all set a-ringing, trumpets sounded flourishes from high turrets, and soldiers, with flying colours and shining bayonets, stood ready to welcome the stranger. Every day brought some fresh entertainment: balls and feasts succeeded each other. But the princess was not yet there; for she had been brought up, people said, in a far distant, holy temple, where she had acquired all manner of royal virtues. At last she came.

The little mermaid was curious to judge of her beauty, and she was obliged to acknowledge to herself that she had never seen a lovelier face. Her skin was delicate and transparent, and beneath her long, dark lashes sparkled a pair of sincere, dark blue eyes.

"It is you!" cried the prince—"you who saved me, when I lay like a lifeless corpse upon the shore!" And he folded his blushing bride in his arms. "Oh, I am too happy!" said he to the little mermaid: "my fondest dream has come to pass. You will rejoice at my happiness, for you wish me better than any of them." And the little mermaid kissed his hand, and felt already as if her heart was about to break. His wedding-morning would bring her death, and she would be then changed to foam upon the sea.

All the church-bells were ringing, and the heralds rode through the streets, and proclaimed the approaching nuptials. Perfumed oil was burning in costly silver lamps on all the altars. The priests were swinging their censers; while the bride and bridegroom joined their hands, and received the bishop's blessing. The little mermaid, dressed in silk and gold, held up the bride's train; but her ears did not hear the solemn music, neither did her eyes behold the ceremony: she thought of the approaching gloom of death, and of all she had lost in this world.

That same evening the bride and bridegroom went on board. The cannons were roaring, the banners were streaming, and a costly tent of gold and purple, lined with beautiful cushions, had been prepared on deck for the reception of the bridal pair.

The vessel then set sail, with a favourable wind, and glided smoothly along the calm sea.

saw below; and she smiled, for she knew better than any one else what was in the sea below.

During the moonlit night, when all were asleep on board, not even excepting the helmsman at his rudder, she sat on deck, and gazed through the clear waters, and fancied she saw her father's palace. High above it stood her aged grandmother, with



SHE WAS FAIN TO LAUGH AND DANCE, THOUGH THE THOUGHTS OF DEATH WERE IN HER HEART.



When it grew dark, a number of variegated lamps were lighted, and the crew danced merrily on deck. The little mermaid could not help remembering her first visit to the earth, when she witnessed similar festivities and magnificence; and she twirled round in the dance, half poised in the air, like a swallow when pursued; and all present cheered her in ecstasies, for never had she danced so enchantingly before. Her tender feet felt the sharp pangs of knives; but she heeded it not, for a sharper pang had shot through her heart. She knew that this was the last evening she should ever be able to see him for whom she had left both her relations and her home, sacrificed her beautiful voice, and daily suffered most excruciating pains, without his having even dreamed that such was the case. It was the last night on which she might breathe the same air as he, and gaze on the deep sea and the starry sky. An eternal night, unenlivened by either thoughts or dreams, now awaited her; for she had no soul, and could never now obtain one. Yet all was joy and gaiety on board till long past midnight; and she was fain to laugh and dance, though the thoughts of death were in her heart. The prince kissed his beautiful bride, and she played with his black locks; and then they went, arm in arm, to rest beneath the splendid tent.

All was now quiet on board; the steersman only was sitting at the helm, as the little mermaid leaned her white arms on the edge of the vessel, and looked towards the east for the first blush of morning. The very first sunbeam, she knew, must kill her. She then saw her sisters rising out of the flood. They were as pale as herself, and their long and beautiful locks were no longer streaming to the winds, for they had been cut off.

"We gave them to the witch," said they, "to obtain help, that you might not die to-night. She gave us a knife in exchange—and a sharp one it is, as you may see. Now, before sunrise, you must plunge it into the prince's heart; and when his warm blood shall besprinkle your feet, they will again close up into a fish's tail, and you will be a mermaid once more, and can come down to us, and live out your three hundred years, before you turn into inanimate, salt foam. Haste, then! He or you must die before sunrise! Our old grandmother has fretted till her white hair has fallen off, as ours has under the witch's scissors. Haste, then! Do you not perceive those red streaks in the sky? In a few minutes the sun will rise, and then you must die!" And they then fetched a deep, deep sigh, as they sank down into the waves.

The little mermaid lifted the scarlet curtain of the tent, and beheld the fair bride resting her



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head on the prince's breast ; and she bent down and kissed his beautiful forehead, then looked up at the heavens, where the rosy dawn grew brighter and brighter ; then gazed on the sharp knife, and again turned her eyes towards the prince, who was calling his bride by her name in his sleep. She alone filled his thoughts, and the mermaid's fingers clutched the knife instinctively—but in another moment she hurled the blade far away into the waves, that gleamed redly where it fell, as though drops of blood were gurgling up from the water. She gave the prince one last, dying look, and then jumped overboard, and felt her body dissolving into foam.

The sun now rose out of the sea ; its beams threw a kindly warmth upon the cold foam, and the little mermaid did not experience the pangs of death. She saw the bright sun, and above were floating hundreds of transparent, beautiful creatures ; she could still catch a glimpse of the ship's white sails, and of the red clouds in the sky, across the swarms of these lovely beings. Their language was melody, but too ethereal to be heard by human ears, just as no human eye can discern their forms.

Though without wings, their lightness poised them in the air. The little mermaid saw that she had a body like theirs, that kept rising higher and higher from out the foam.

"Where am I?" asked she! and her voice sounded like that of her companions—so ethereal that no earthly music could give an adequate idea of its sweetness.

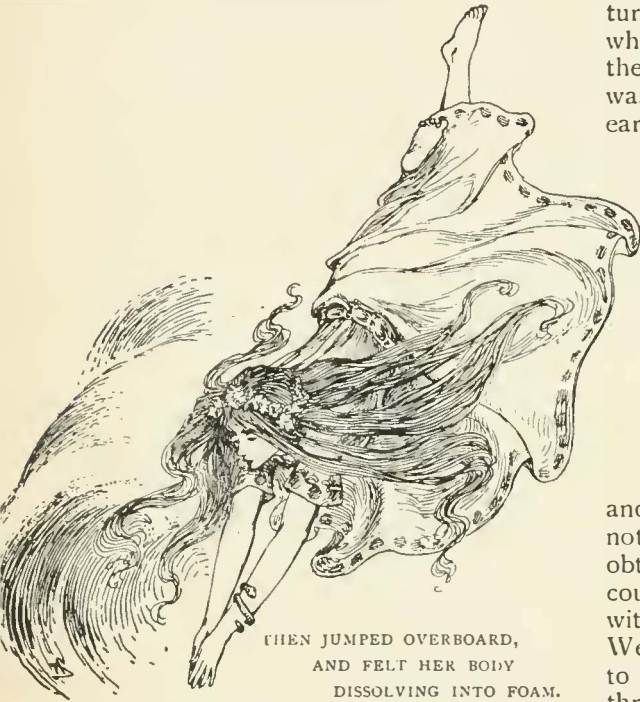
"Amongst the daughters of the air!" answered they. "A mermaid has not an immortal soul, and cannot obtain one, unless she wins the love of some human being—her eternal welfare depends on the will of another. But the daughters of the air, although not possessing an immortal soul by nature, can obtain one by their good deeds. We fly to warm countries, and fan the burning atmosphere, laden with pestilence, that destroys the sons of man. We diffuse the perfume of flowers through the air to heal and to refresh. When we have striven for three hundred years to do all the good in our power, we then obtain an immortal soul, and share

in the eternal happiness of the human race. You, poor little mermaid! have striven with your whole heart like ourselves. You have suffered and endured, and have raised yourself into an aerial spirit, and now your own good works may obtain you an immortal soul after the lapse of three hundred years."

And the little mermaid lifted her brightening eyes to the sun, and for the first time she felt them filled with tears. All was now astir in the ship, and she could see the prince and his beautiful bride looking for her, and then gazing sorrowfully at the pearly foam, as though they knew that she had cast herself into the waves. She then kissed the bride's forehead, and fanned the prince, unseen by either of them, and then mounted, together with the other children of the air, on the rosy cloud that was sailing through the atmosphere.

"Thus shall we glide into the Kingdom of Heaven, after the lapse of three hundred years," said she.

"We may reach it sooner," whispered one of the daughters of the air. "We enter unseen the dwellings of man, and for each day on which we have met with a good child, who is the joy of his parents, and deserving of their love, the Almighty shortens the time of our trial. The child little thinks, when we fly through the room, and smile for joy at such a discovery, that a year is deducted from the three hundred we have to live. But when we see an ill-behaved or naughty child, we shed tears of sorrow, and every tear adds a day to the time of our probation."



THEN JUMPED OVERBOARD,  
AND FELT HER BODY  
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