

**LYMAN BAUM**

THE SEA  
FAIRIES

**Lyman Baum**  
**The Sea Fairies**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=23159003](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23159003)*

*The Sea Fairies:*

# Содержание

1	6
2	12
3	23
4	32
5	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	52

# **L. Frank Baum**

## **The Sea Fairies**

**THE** oceans are big and broad. I believe two-thirds of the earth's surface is covered with water. What people inhabit this water has always been a subject of curiosity to the inhabitants of the land. Strange creatures come from the seas at times, and perhaps in the ocean depths are many, more strange than mortal eye has ever gazed upon.

This story is fanciful. In it the sea people talk and act much as we do, and the mermaids especially are not unlike the fairies with whom we have learned to be familiar. Yet they are real sea people, for all that, and with the exception of Zog the Magician they are all supposed to exist in the ocean's depths.

I am told that some very learned people deny that mermaids or sea-serpents have ever inhabited the oceans, but it would be very difficult for them to prove such an assertion unless they had lived under the water as Trot and Cap'n Bill did in this story.

I hope my readers who have so long followed Dorothy's adventures in the Land of Oz will be interested in Trot's equally strange experiences. The ocean has always appealed to me as a veritable wonderland, and this story has been suggested to me many times by my young correspondents in their letters. Indeed, a good many children have implored me to "write something about the mermaids," and I have willingly granted the request.

*Hollywood, 1911. L. Frank Baum.*

# 1

## Trot and Cap'n Bill

"Nobody," said Cap'n Bill, solemnly, "ever sawr a mermaid an' lived to tell the tale."

"Why not?" asked Trot, looking earnestly up into the old sailor's face.

They were seated on a bench built around a giant acacia tree that grew just at the edge of the bluff. Below them rolled the blue waves of the great Pacific. A little way behind them was the house, a neat frame cottage painted white and surrounded by huge eucalyptus and pepper trees. Still farther behind that – a quarter of a mile distant but built upon a bend of the coast – was the village, overlooking a pretty bay.

Cap'n Bill and Trot came often to this tree, to sit and watch the ocean below them. The sailor man had one "meat leg" and one "hickory leg," and he often said the wooden one was the best of the two. Once Cap'n Bill had commanded and owned the "Anemone," a trading schooner that plied along the coast; and in those days Charlie Griffiths, who was Trot's father, had been the Captain's mate. But ever since Cap'n Bill's accident, when he lost his leg, Charlie Griffiths had been the captain of the little schooner while his old master lived peacefully ashore with the Griffiths family.

This was about the time Trot was born, and the old sailor became very fond of the baby girl. Her real name was Mayre, but when she grew big enough to walk she took so many busy little steps every day that both her mother and Cap'n Bill nicknamed her "Trot," and so she was thereafter mostly called.

It was the old sailor who taught the child to love the sea – to love it almost as much as he and her father did – and these two, who represented the "beginning and the end of life" became firm friends and constant companions.

"Why hasn't anybody seen a mermaid and lived?" asked Trot, again.

"'Cause mermaids is fairies, an' ain't meant to be seen by us mortal folk," replied Cap'n Bill.

"But if anyone happens to see 'em, what then, Cap'n?"

"Then," he answered, slowly wagging his head, "the mermaids give 'em a smile an' a wink, an' they dives into the water an' gets drowned."

"S'pose they know how to swim, Cap'n Bill?"

"That don't make any diff'rence, Trot. The mermaids live deep down, an' the poor mortals never come up again."

The little girl was thoughtful for a moment.

"But why do folks dive in the water when the mermaids smile an' wink?" she asked.

"Mermaids," he said, gravely, "is the most beautifulest creatures in the world – or the water, either. You know what they're like, Trot; they's got a lovely lady's form down to the

waist, an' then the other half of 'em's a fish, with green an' purple an' pink scales all adown it."

"Have they got arms, Cap'n Bill?"

"'Course, Trot; arms like any other lady. An' pretty faces that smile an' look mighty sweet an' fetchin'. Their hair is long an' soft an' silky, an' floats all around 'em in the water. When they comes up atop the waves they wring the water out 'n their hair and sing songs that go right to your heart. If anybody is unlucky enough to be 'round jes' then, the beauty o' them mermaids an' their sweet songs charm 'em like magic; so's they plunge into the waves to get to the mermaids. But the mermaids haven't any hearts, Trot, no more 'n a fish has; so they laughs when the poor people drown, an' don't care a fig. That's why I says, an' I says it true, that nobody never sawr a mermaid an' lived to tell the tale."

"Nobody?" asked Trot.

"Nobody a tall."

"Then how do you know, Cap'n Bill?" asked the little girl, looking up into his face with big round eyes.

Cap'n Bill coughed. Then he tried to sneeze, to gain time. Then he took out his red cotton handkerchief and wiped his bald head with it, rubbing hard so as to make him think clearer.

"Look, Trot; ain't that a brig out there?" he inquired, pointing to a sail far out in the sea.

"How does anybody know about mermaids, if those who have seen them never lived to tell about them?" she asked again.

"Know what about 'em, Trot?"



"About their green and pink scales, and pretty songs, and wet hair."

"They don't know, I guess. But mermaids jes' natcherly has to be like that, or they wouldn't be mermaids."

She thought this over.

"Somebody *must* have lived, Cap'n Bill," she declared, positively. "Other fairies have been seen by mortals; why not mermaids?"

"P'raps they have, Trot; p'raps they have," he answered, musingly. "I'm tellin' you as it was told to me; but I never stopped to inquire into the matter so clost, before. Seems like folks wouldn't know so much about mermaids if they hadn't seen 'em; an' yet accordin' to all accounts the victim is bound to get drowned."

"P'raps," suggested Trot, softly, "someone found a fotygraph of one of 'em."

"That might 'a' been, Trot; that might 'a' been," answered Cap'n Bill.

A nice man was Cap'n Bill, and Trot knew he always liked to explain everything so she could fully understand it. The aged sailor was not a very tall man, and some people might have called him chubby, or even fat. He wore a blue sailor shirt, with white anchors worked on the corners of the broad square collar, and his blue trousers were very wide at the bottom. He always wore one trouser leg over his wooden limb and sometimes it would flutter in the wind like a flag, because it was so wide and the

wooden leg so slender. His rough kersey coat was a pea-jacket and came down to his waist line. In the big pockets of his jacket he kept a wonderful jackknife, and his pipe and tobacco, and many bits of string, and matches and keys and lots of other things. Whenever Cap'n Bill thrust a chubby hand into one of his pockets Trot watched him with breathless interest, for she never knew what he was going to pull out.

The old sailor's face was brown as a berry. He had a fringe of hair around the back of his head and a fringe of whisker around the edge of his face, running from ear to ear and underneath his chin. His eyes were light blue and kind in expression. His nose was big and broad and his few teeth were not strong enough to crack nuts with.

Trot liked Cap'n Bill and had a great deal of confidence in his wisdom, and a great admiration for his ability to make tops and whistles and toys with that marvelous jackknife of his. In the village were many boys and girls of her own age, but she never had as much fun playing with them as she had wandering by the sea accompanied by the old sailor and listening to his fascinating stories.

She knew all about the Flying Dutchman, and Davy Jones' Locker, and Captain Kidd, and how to harpoon a whale or dodge an iceberg, or lasso a seal. Cap'n Bill had been everywhere in the world, almost, on his many voyages. He had been wrecked on desert islands like Robinson Crusoe and been attacked by cannibals, and had a host of other exciting adventures. So he was

a delightful comrade for the little girl, and whatever Cap'n Bill knew Trot was sure to know in time.

"How do the mermaids live?" she asked. "Are they in caves, or just in the water like fishes, or how?"

"Can't say, Trot," he replied. "I've asked divers about that, but none of 'em ever run acrost a mermaid's nest yet, as I've heard of."

"If they're fairies," she said, "their homes must be very pretty."

"Mebbe so, Trot; but damp. They're sure to be damp, you know."

"I'd like to see a mermaid, Cap'n Bill," said the child, earnestly.

"What, an' git drownded?" he exclaimed.

"No; and live to tell the tale. If they're beautiful, and laughing, and sweet, there can't be much harm in them, I'm sure."

"Mermaids is mermaids," remarked Cap'n Bill, in his most solemn voice. "It wouldn't do us any good to mix up with 'em, Trot."

"May – re! May – re!" called a voice from the house.

"Yes, Mamma!"

"You an' Cap'n Bill come in to supper."

## 2

# The Mermaids

The next morning, as soon as Trot had helped wipe the breakfast dishes and put them away in the cupboard, the little girl and Cap'n Bill started out toward the bluff.

The air was soft and warm, and the sun turned the edges of the waves into sparkling diamonds. Across the bay the last of the fisherboats was speeding away out to sea, for well the fishermen knew this was an ideal day to catch rockbass, barracuda and yellowtail.

The old man and the young girl stood on the bluff and watched all this with interest. Here was their world.

"It isn't a bit rough this morning. Let's have a boat ride, Cap'n Bill," said the child.

"Suits me to a T," declared the sailor.

So they found the winding path that led down the face of the cliff to the narrow beach below, and cautiously began the descent. Trot never minded the steep path or the loose rocks at all; but Cap'n Bill's wooden leg was not so useful on a down grade as on a level, and he had to be careful not to slip and take a tumble.

But by and by they reached the sands and walked to a spot just beneath the big acacia tree that grew on the bluff. Halfway to the top of the cliff hung suspended a little shed like structure that

sheltered Trot's rowboat, for it was necessary to pull the boat out of reach of the waves which beat in fury against the rocks at high tide. About as high up as Cap'n Bill could reach was an iron ring, securely fastened to the cliff, and to this ring was tied a rope. The old sailor unfastened the knot and began paying out the rope, and the rowboat came out of its shed and glided slowly downward to the beach. It hung on a pair of davits, and was lowered just as a boat is lowered from a ship's side. When it reached the sands the sailor unhooked the ropes and pushed the boat to the water's edge. It was a pretty little craft, light and strong, and Cap'n Bill knew how to sail it or row it, as Trot might desire.

To-day they decided to row, so the girl climbed into the bow and her companion stuck his wooden leg into the water's edge, "so he wouldn't get his foot wet," and pushed off the little boat as he climbed aboard. Then he seized the oars and began gently paddling.

"Whither away, Commodore Trot?" he asked gaily.

"I don't care, Cap'n. It's just fun enough to be on the water," she answered, trailing one hand overboard.

So he rowed around by the North Promontory, where the great caves were, and much as they were enjoying the ride they soon began to feel the heat of the sun.

"That's Dead Man's Cave, 'cause a skellington was found there," observed the child, as they passed a dark yawning mouth in the cliff. "And that's Bumble Cave, 'cause the bumblebees make nests in the top of it. And here's Smuggler's Cave, 'cause

the smugglers used to hide things in it."

She knew all the caves well, and so did Cap'n Bill. Many of them opened just at the water's edge and it was possible to row their boat far into their dusky depths.

"And here's Echo Cave," she continued, dreamily, as they slowly moved along the coast; "and Giant's Cave, and – oh, Cap'n Bill! do you s'pose there were ever any giants in that cave?"

"Pears like there must 'a' been, Trot, or they wouldn't 'a' named it that name," he replied, pausing to wipe his bald head with the red handkerchief, while the oars dragged in the water.

"We've never been into that cave, Cap'n," she remarked, looking at the small hole in the cliff – an archway through which the water flowed. "Let's go in now."

"What for, Trot?"

"To see if there's a giant there."

"H-m. Aren't you 'fraid?"

"No; are you? I just don't b'lieve it's big enough for a giant to get into."

"Your father was in there once," remarked Cap'n Bill, "an' he says it's the biggest cave on the coast, but low down. It's full o' water, an' the water's deep down to the very bottom o' the ocean; but the rock roof's liable to bump your head at high tide."

"It's low tide now," returned Trot. "And how could any giant live in there if the roof is so low down?"

"Why, he couldn't, mate. I reckon they must have called it Giant's Cave 'cause it's so big, an' not 'cause any giant man lived

there."

"Let's go in," said the girl, again; "I'd like to 'splore it."

"All right," replied the sailor. "It'll be cooler in there than out here in the sun. We won't go very far, for when the tide turns we mightn't get out again."

He picked up the oars and rowed slowly toward the cave. The black archway that marked its entrance seemed hardly big enough to admit the boat, at first; but as they drew nearer the opening became bigger. The sea was very calm here, for the headland shielded it from the breeze.

"Look out fer your head, Trot!" cautioned Cap'n Bill, as the boat glided slowly into the rocky arch.

But it was the sailor who had to duck, instead of the little girl. Only for a moment, though. Just beyond the opening the cave was higher, and as the boat floated into the dim interior they found themselves on quite an extensive branch of the sea.

For a time neither of them spoke and only the soft lapping of the water against the sides of the boat was heard. A beautiful sight met the eyes of the two adventurers and held them dumb with wonder and delight.

It was not dark in this vast cave, yet the light seemed to come from underneath the water, which all around them glowed with an exquisite sapphire color. Where the little waves crept up to the sides of the rocks they shone like brilliant jewels, and every drop of spray seemed a gem fit to deck a queen.

Trot leaned her chin on her hands and her elbows on her lap

and gazed at this charming sight with real enjoyment. Cap'n Bill drew in the oars and let the boat drift where it would, while he also sat silently admiring the scene.

Slowly the little craft crept farther and farther into the dim interior of the vast cavern, while its two passengers feasted their eyes on the beauties constantly revealed. Both the old seaman and the little girl loved the ocean in all its various moods. To them it was a constant companion and a genial comrade. If it stormed and raved they laughed with glee; if it rolled great breakers against the shore they clapped their hands joyfully; if it lay slumbering at their feet they petted and caressed it; but always they loved it.

Here was the ocean yet. It had crept under the dome of overhanging rock to reveal itself crowned with sapphires and dressed in azure gown, revealing in this guise new and unsuspected charms.

"Good morning, Mayre," said a sweet voice.

Trot gave a start and looked around her in wonder. Just beside her in the water were little eddies – circles within circles – such as are caused when anything sinks below the surface.

"Did – did you hear that, Cap'n Bill?" she whispered, solemnly.

Cap'n Bill did not answer. He was staring, with eyes that fairly bulged out, at a place behind Trot's back, and he shook a little, as if trembling from cold.

Trot turned half around – and then she stared, too.



Rising from the blue water was a fair face around which floated a mass of long, blonde hair. It was a sweet, girlish face, with eyes of the same deep blue as the water and red lips whose dainty smile disclosed two rows of pearly teeth. The cheeks were plump and rosy, the brows gracefully penciled, while the chin was rounded and had a pretty dimple in it.

"The – the – most beauti-ful-est – in all the world!" murmured Cap'n Bill, in a voice of horror; "an' no one has ever lived to – to tell the tale!"

There was a peal of merry laughter, at this; laughter that rippled and echoed throughout the cavern. Just at Trot's side appeared a new face – even fairer than the other – with a wealth of brown hair wreathing the lovely features. And the eyes smiled kindly into those of the child.

"Are you – a – a – mermaid?" asked Trot, curiously. She was not a bit afraid. They seemed both gentle and friendly.

"Yes, dear," was the soft answer.

"We are all mermaids!" chimed a laughing chorus, and here and there, all about the boat, appeared pretty faces lying just upon the surface of the water.

"Are you part fishes?" asked Trot, greatly pleased by this wonderful sight.

"No, we are all mermaid," replied the one with the brown hair. "The fishes are partly like us, because they live in the sea and must move about. And you are partly like us, Mayre dear, but have awkward stiff legs so you may walk on the land. But the

mermaids lived before fishes and before mankind, so both have borrowed something from us."

"Then you must be fairies, if you've lived always," remarked Trot, nodding wisely.

"We are, dear; we are the water fairies," answered the one with the blonde hair, coming nearer and rising till her slender white throat showed plainly.

"We – we're – goners, Trot!" sighed Cap'n Bill, with a white, woebegone face.

"I guess not, Cap'n," she answered calmly. "These pretty mermaids aren't going to hurt us, I'm sure."

"No, indeed," said the first one who had spoken. "If we were wicked enough to wish to harm you our magic could reach you as easily upon the land as in this cave. But we love little girls dearly, and wish only to please them and make their lives more happy."

"I believe that!" cried Trot, earnestly.

Cap'n Bill groaned.

"Guess why we have appeared to you," said another mermaid, coming to the side of the boat.

"Why?" asked the child.

"We heard you say yesterday you would like to see a mermaid, and so we decided to grant your wish."

"That was real nice of you," said Trot, gratefully.

"Also we heard all the foolish things Cap'n Bill said about us," remarked the brown haired one, smilingly; "and we wanted to prove to him they were wrong."

"I on'y said what I've heard," protested Cap'n Bill. "Never havin' seen a mermaid afore, I couldn't be ackerate; an' I never expected to see one an' live to tell the tale."

Again the cave rang with merry laughter, and as it died away Trot said:

"May I see your scales, please? And are they green and purple and pink, like Cap'n Bill said?"

They seemed undecided what to say to this, and swam a little way off, where the beautiful heads formed a group that was delightful to see. Perhaps they talked together, for the brown haired mermaid soon came back to the side of the boat and asked:

"Would you like to visit our kingdom, and see all the wonders that exist below the sea?"

"I'd like to," replied Trot, promptly; "but I couldn't. I'd get drowned."

"That you would, mate!" cried Cap'n Bill.

"Oh, no," said the mermaid. "We would make you both like one of ourselves, and then you could live within the water as easily as we do."

"I don't know as I'd like it," said the child; "at least, for always."

"You need not stay with us a moment longer than you please," returned the mermaid, smiling as if amused at the remark. "Whenever you are ready to return home we promise to bring you to this place again and restore to you the same forms you are now wearing."

"Would I have a fish's tail?" asked Trot, earnestly.

"You would have a mermaid's tail," was the reply.

"What color would my scales be – pink, or purple?"

"You may choose the color yourself."

"Look a' here, Trot!" said Cap'n Bill, in excitement, "you ain't thinkin' o' doin' such a fool thing, are you?"

"Course I am," declared the little girl. "We don't get such inv'tations every day, Cap'n; and if I don't go now I may never find out how the mermaids live."

"I don't care how they live, myself," said Cap'n Bill. "I jes' want 'em to let *me* live."

"There's no danger," insisted Trot.

"I do' know 'bout that. That's what all the other folks said when they dove after the mermaids an' got drowned."

"Who?" asked the girl.

"I don't know who; but I've heard tell – "

"You've heard that no one ever saw a mermaid and lived," said Trot.

"To tell the tale," he added, nodding. "An' if we dives down, like they says, we won't live ourselves."

All the mermaids laughed at this, and the brown haired one said:

"Well, if you are afraid, don't come. You may row your boat out of this cave and never see us again, if you like. We merely thought it would please little Mayre, and were willing to show her the sights of our beautiful home."

"I'd like to see 'em, all right," said Trot, her eyes glistening with pleasure.

"So would I," admitted Cap'n Bill; "if we would live to tell the tale."

"Don't you believe us?" asked the mermaid, fixing her lovely eyes on those of the old sailor and smiling prettily. "Are you afraid to trust us to bring you safely back?"

"N – n – n-o," said Cap'n Bill; "'tain't that. I've got to look after Trot."

"Then you'll have to come with me," said Trot, decidedly, "for I'm going to 'cept this inv'tation. If you don't care to come, Cap'n Bill, you go home and tell mother I'm visitin' the mermaids."

"She'd scold me inter shivers!" moaned Cap'n Bill, with a shudder. "I guess I'd ruther take my chances down below."

"All right; I'm ready, Miss Mermaid," said Trot. "What shall I do? Jump in, clothes an' all?"

"Give me your hand, dear," answered the mermaid, lifting a lovely white arm from the water. Trot took the slender hand and found it warm and soft, and not a bit "fishy."

"My name is Clia," continued the mermaid, "and I am a princess in our deep-sea kingdom."

Just then Trot gave a flop and flopped right out of the boat into the water. Cap'n Bill caught a gleam of pink scales as his little friend went overboard, and the next moment there was Trot's face in the water, among those of the mermaids. She was laughing with glee as she looked up into Cap'n Bill's face and called:

"Come on in, Cap'n! It didn't hurt a bit!"

### 3

## The Depths of the Deep Blue Sea

Cap'n Bill stood up in the boat as if undecided what to do. Never a sailorman was more bewildered than this old fellow by the strangeness of the adventure he had encountered. At first he could hardly believe it was all true, and that he was not dreaming; but there was Trot in the water, laughing with the mermaids and floating comfortably about, and he couldn't leave his dear little companion to make the trip to the depths of the ocean alone.

"Take my hand, please, Cap'n Bill," said Princess Clia, reaching her dainty arm toward him; and suddenly the old man took courage and clasped the soft fingers in his own. He had to lean over the boat to do this, and then there came a queer lightness to his legs and he had a great longing to be in the water. So he gave a flop and flopped in beside Trot, where he found himself comfortable enough, but somewhat frightened.

"Law sakes!" he gasped. "Here's me in the water with my rheumatics! I'll be that stiff termorrer I can't wiggle."

"You're wigglin' all right now," observed Trot. "That's a fine tail you've got, Cap'n, an' its green scales is jus' beautiful."

"Are they green, eh?" he asked, twisting around to try to see them.

"Green as em'ralds, Cap'n. How do they feel?"

"Feel, Trot – feel? Why, this tail beats that ol' wooden leg all holler! I kin do stunts now that I couldn't 'a' done in a thousand years with ol' peg."

"And don't be afraid of the rheumatism," advised the Princess. "No mermaid ever catches cold or suffers pain in the water."

"Is Cap'n Bill a mermaid now?" asked Trot.

"Why, he's a *merman*, I suppose," laughed the pretty princess. "But when he gets home he will be just Cap'n Bill again."

"Wooden leg an' all?" inquired the child.

"To be sure, my dear."

The sailor was now trying his newly-discovered powers of swimming, and became astonished at the feats he could accomplish. He could dart this way and that with wonderful speed, and turn and dive, and caper about in the water far better than he had ever been able to do on land – even before he got the wooden leg. And a curious thing about this present experience was that the water did not cling to him and wet him, as it had always done before. He still wore his flannel shirt and pea-jacket, and his sailor cap; but although he was in the water, and had been underneath the surface, the cloth still seemed dry and warm. As he dived down and came up again the drops flashed from his head and the fringe of beard, but he never needed to wipe his face or eyes at all.

Trot, too, was having queer experiences and enjoying them. When she ducked under water she saw plainly everything around her, as easily and distinctly as she had ever seen anything above



water. And by looking over her shoulder she could watch the motion of her new tail, all covered with pretty iridescent pink scales, which gleamed like jewels. She wore her dress, the same as before, and the water failed to affect it in the least.

She now noticed that the mermaids were clothed, too, and their exquisite gowns were the loveliest things the little girl had ever beheld. They seemed made of a material that was like sheeny silk, cut low in the neck and with wide flowing sleeves that seldom covered the shapely white arms of her new friends. The gowns had trains that floated far behind the mermaids as they swam, but were so fleecy and transparent that the sparkle of their scales might be seen reaching back of their waists, where the human form ended and the fish part began. The sea fairies wore strings of splendid pearls twined around their throats, while more pearls were sewn upon their gowns for trimmings. They did not dress their beautiful hair at all, but let it float around them in clouds.

The little girl had scarcely time to observe all this when the princess said:

"Now, my dear, if you are ready we will begin our journey, for it is a long way to our palaces."

"All right," answered Trot, and took the hand extended to her with a trustful smile.

"Will you allow me to guide you, Cap'n Bill?" asked the blonde mermaid, extending her hand to the old sailor.

"O' course, ma'am," he said, taking her fingers rather

bashfully.

"My name is Merla," she continued, "and I am cousin to Princess Clia. We must all keep together, you know, and I will hold your hand to prevent your missing the way."

While she spoke they began to descend through the water, and it grew quite dark for a time because the cave shut out the light. But presently Trot, who was eagerly looking around her, began to notice the water lighten and saw they were coming into brighter parts of the sea.

"We have left the cave now," said Clia, "and may swim straight home."

"I s'pose there are no winding roads in the ocean," remarked the child, swimming swiftly beside her new friend.

"Oh, yes, indeed. At the bottom the way is far from being straight or level," replied Clia. "But we are in mid-water now, where nothing will hinder our journey, unless –"

She seemed to hesitate; so Trot asked: "Unless what?"

"Unless we meet with disagreeable creatures," said the Princess. "The mid-water is not as safe as the very bottom, and that is the reason we are holding your hands."

"What good would that do?" asked Trot.

"You must remember that we are fairies," said Princess Clia. "For that reason nothing in the ocean can injure us; but you two are mortals, and therefore not entirely safe at all times unless we protect you."

Trot was thoughtful for a few moments and looked around her

a little anxiously. Now and then a dark form would shoot across their pathway, or pass them at some distance; but none was near enough for the girl to see plainly what it might be.

Suddenly they swam right into a big school of fishes, all yellowtails and of very large size. There must have been hundreds of them lying lazily in the water, and when they saw the mermaids they merely wiggled to one side and opened a path for the sea fairies to pass through.

"Will they hurt us?" asked Trot.

"No, indeed," laughed the Princess. "Fishes are stupid creatures mostly, and this family is quite harmless."

"How about sharks?" asked Cap'n Bill, who was swimming gracefully beside them, his hand clutched in that of pretty Merla.

"Sharks may indeed be dangerous to you," replied Clia; "so I advise you to keep them at a safe distance. They never dare attempt to bite a mermaid, and it may be they will think you belong to our band; but it is well to avoid them, if possible."

"Don't get careless, Cap'n," added Trot.

"I surely won't, mate," he replied. "You see, I didn't use to be 'fraid o' sharks, 'cause if they came near I'd stick my wooden leg at 'em. But now, if they happens to fancy these green scales, it's all up with ol' Bill."

"Never fear," said Merla; "I'll take care of you on our journey, and in our palaces you will find no sharks at all."

"Can't they get in?" he asked, anxiously.

"No. The palaces of the mermaids are inhabited only by

themselves."

"Is there anything else to be afraid of in the sea?" asked the little girl, after they had swum quite a while in silence.

"One or two things, my dear," answered Princess Clia. "Of course, we mermaids have great powers, being fairies; yet among the sea people is one nearly as powerful as we are, and that is the devilfish."

"I know," said Trot; "I've seen 'em."

"You have seen the smaller ones, I suppose, which sometimes rise to the surface or go near shore, and are often caught by fishermen," said Clia; "but they are only second cousins of the terrible deep-sea devilfish to which I refer."

"Those ones are bad enough, though," declared Cap'n Bill. "If you know any worse ones I don't want a interduction to 'em."

"The monster devilfish inhabit caves in the rugged, mountainous regions of the ocean," resumed the Princess, "and they are evil spirits who delight in injuring all who meet them. None lives near our palaces, so there is little danger of your meeting any while you are our guests."

"I hope we won't," said Trot.

"None for me," added Cap'n Bill. "Devils of any sort ought to be give a wide berth, an' devilfishes is worser ner sea serpents."

"Oh, do you know the sea serpents?" asked Merla, as if surprised.

"Not much I don't," answered the sailor; "but I've heard tell of folks as has seen 'em."

"Did they ever live to tell the tale?" asked Trot.

"Sometimes," he replied. "They're jes' *or*-ful creatures, mate."

"How easy it is to be mistaken," said Princess Clia, softly. "We know the sea serpents very well, and we like them."

"You do!" exclaimed Trot.

"Yes, dear. There are only three of them in all the world, and not only are they harmless, but quite bashful and shy. They are kind-hearted, too, and although not beautiful in appearance, they do many kind deeds and are generally beloved."

"Where do they live?" asked the child.

"The oldest one, who is king of this ocean, lives quite near us," said Clia. "His name is Anko."

"How old is he?" inquired Cap'n Bill, curiously.

"No one knows. He was here before the ocean came, and he stayed here because he learned to like the water better than the land as a habitation. Perhaps King Anko is ten thousand years old – perhaps twenty thousand. We often lose track of the centuries down here in the sea."

"That's pretty old, isn't it," said Trot. "Older than Cap'n Bill, I guess."

"Summat," chuckled the sailorman; "summat older, mate; but not much. P'raps the sea serpent ain't got gray whiskers."

"Oh yes, he has," responded Merla, with a laugh. "And so have his two brothers – Unko and Inko. They each have an ocean of their own, you know; and once every hundred years they come here to visit their brother Anko. So we've seen all three many

times."

"Why, how old are mermaids, then?" asked Trot, looking around at the beautiful creatures wonderingly.

"We are like all ladies of uncertain age," rejoined the Princess, with a smile. "We don't care to tell."

"Older than Cap'n Bill?"

"Yes, dear," said Cia.

"But we haven't any gray whiskers," added Merla, merrily, "and our hearts are ever young."

Trot was thoughtful. It made her feel solemn to be in the company of such old people. The band of mermaids seemed, to all appearances, young and fresh and not a bit as if they'd been soaked in water for hundreds of years. The girl began to take more notice of the sea maidens following after her. More than a dozen were in the group; all very lovely in appearance and clothed in the same gauzy robes as Merla and the princess. These attendants did not join in the conversation, but darted here and there in sportive play, and often Trot heard the tinkling chorus of their laughter. Whatever doubts might have arisen in the child's mind, through the ignorant tales of her sailor friend, she now found the mermaids to be light-hearted, joyous and gay, and from the first she had not been in the least afraid of her new companions.

"How much farther do we have to go?" asked Cap'n Bill, presently.

"Are you getting tired?" Merla inquired.

"No," said he; "but I'm sorter anxious to see what your palaces look like. Inside the water ain't as interestin' as the top of it. It's fine swimmin', I'll agree; an' I like it; but there ain't nuthin' special to see, that I can make out."

"That is true, sir," replied the Princess. "We have purposely led you through the mid-water, hoping you would see nothing to alarm you until you get more accustomed to our ocean life. Moreover, we are able to travel more swiftly here. How far do you think we have already come, Cap'n?"

"Oh, 'bout two mile," he answered.

"Well, we are now hundreds of miles from the cave where we started," she told him.

"You don't mean it!" he exclaimed, in wonder.

"Then there's magic in it," announced Trot, soberly.

"True, my dear. To avoid tiring you, and to save time, we have used a little of our fairy power," said Clia. "The result is that we are nearing our home. Let us go downward a bit, now, for you must know that the mermaid palaces are at the very bottom of the ocean – and in its deepest part."

## The Palace of Queen Aquareine

Trot was surprised to find it was not at all dark or gloomy as they descended farther into the deep sea. Things were not quite so clear to her eyes as they had been in the bright sunshine above the ocean's surface, but every object was distinct, nevertheless, as if she saw it through a pane of green tinted glass. The water was very clear, except for this green shading, and the little girl had never before felt so light and buoyant as she did now. It was no effort at all to dart through the water, which seemed to support her on all sides.

"I don't believe I weigh anything at all," she told Cap'n Bill.

"No more do I, Trot," said he. "But that's nat'ral, seein' as we're under water so far. What bothers me most is how we manage to breathe, havin' no gills, like fishes have."

"Are you sure we haven't any gills?" she asked, lifting her free hand to feel her throat.

"Sure. Ner the mermaids haven't any, either," declared Cap'n Bill.

"Then," said Trot, "we're breathing by magic."

The mermaids laughed at this shrewd remark, and the Princess said:

"You have guessed correctly, my dear. Go a little slower, now,



for the palaces are in sight."

"Where?" asked Trot, eagerly.

"Just before you."

"In that grove of trees?" inquired the girl. And, really, it seemed to her they were approaching a beautiful grove.

The bottom of the sea was covered with white sand, in which grew many varieties of sea shrubs with branches like those of trees. Not all of them were green, however, for the branches and leaves were of a variety of gorgeous colors. Some were purple, shading down to light lavender; and there were reds all the way from a delicate rose-pink to vivid shades of scarlet. Orange, yellow and blue shades were there, too, mingling with the sea-greens in a most charming manner. Altogether, Trot found the brilliant coloring somewhat bewildering.

These sea shrubs, which in size were quite as big and tall as the trees on earth, were set so close together that their branches entwined; but there were several avenues leading into the groves, and at the entrance to each avenue the girl noticed several large fishes, with long spikes growing upon their noses.

"These are swordfishes," remarked the Princess, as she led the band past one of these avenues.

"Are they dang'rous?" asked Trot.

"Not to us," was the reply. "The swordfishes are among our most valued and faithful servants, guarding the entrances to the gardens which surround our palaces. If any creatures try to enter uninvited these guards fight them and drive them away. Their

swords are sharp and strong, and they are fierce fighters, I assure you."

"I've known 'em to attack ships, an' stick their swords right through the wood," said Cap'n Bill.

"Those belonged to the wandering tribes of swordfishes," explained the Princess. "These, who are our servants, are too sensible and intelligent to attack ships."

The band now headed into a broad passage through the "gardens," as the mermaids called these gorgeous groves, and the great swordfishes guarding the entrance made way for them to pass, afterward resuming their posts with round and watchful eyes. As they slowly swam along the avenue Trot noticed that some of the bushes seemed to have fruits growing upon them; but what these fruits might be, neither she nor Cap'n Bill could guess.

The way wound here and there for some distance, till finally they came to a more open space, all carpeted with sea flowers of exquisite colorings. Although Trot did not know it, these flowers resembled the rare orchids of earth in their fanciful shapes and marvelous hues. The child did not examine them very closely, for across the carpet of flowers loomed the magnificent and extensive palaces of the mermaids.

These palaces were built of coral; white, pink and yellow being used, and the colors arranged in graceful designs. The front of the main palace, which now faced them, had circular ends connecting the straight wall, not unlike the architecture we are all familiar with; yet there seemed to be no windows to the building,

although a series of archways served as doors.

Arriving at one of the central archways the band of sea maidens separated, Princess Clia and Merla leading Trot and Cap'n Bill into the palace, while the other mermaids swam swiftly away to their own quarters.

"Welcome!" said Clia, in her sweet voice. "Here you are surrounded only by friends and are in perfect safety. Please accept our hospitality as freely as you desire, for we consider you honored guests. I hope you will like our home," she added, a little shyly.

"We are sure to, dear Princess," Trot hastened to say.

Then Clia escorted them through the archway and into a lofty hall. It was not a mere grotto, but had smoothly built walls of pink coral inlaid with white. Trot at first thought there was no roof, for looking upward she could see the water all above them. But the princess, reading her thought, said with a smile:

"Yes, there is a roof, or we would be unable to keep all the sea people out of our palace. But the roof is made of glass, to admit the light."

"Glass!" cried the astonished child. "Then it must be an awful big pane of glass."

"It is," agreed Clia. "Our roofs are considered quite wonderful, and we owe them to the fairy powers of our queen. Of course, you understand there is no natural way to make glass under water."

"No, indeed," said Cap'n Bill. And then he asked: "Does your queen live here?"

"Yes. She is waiting now, in her throne room, to welcome you. Shall we go in?"

"I'd just as soon," replied Trot, rather timidly; but she boldly followed the princess, who glided through another arch into a small room, where several mermaids were reclining upon couches of coral. They were beautifully dressed and wore many sparkling jewels.

"Her Majesty is awaiting the strangers, Princess Clia," announced one of these. "You are asked to enter at once."

"Come, then," said Clia, and once more taking Trot's hand she led the girl through still another arch, while Merla followed just behind them, escorting Cap'n Bill.

They now entered an apartment so gorgeous that the child fairly gasped with astonishment. The queen's throne room was indeed the grandest and most beautiful chamber in all the ocean palaces. Its coral walls were thickly inlaid with mother-of-pearl, exquisitely shaded and made into borders and floral decorations. In the corners were cabinets, upon the shelves of which many curious shells were arranged, all beautifully polished. The floor glittered with gems arranged in patterns of flowers, like a brilliant carpet.

Near the center of the room was a raised platform of mother-of-pearl upon which stood a couch thickly studded with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and pearls. Here reclined Queen Aquareine, a being so lovely that Trot gazed upon her spellbound and Cap'n Bill took off his sailor cap and held it in his hands.

All about the room were grouped other mother-of-pearl couches, not raised like that of the queen, and upon each of these reclined a pretty mermaid. They could not sit down as we do, Trot readily understood, because of their tails; but they rested very gracefully upon the couches, with their trailing gauzy robes arranged in fleecy folds.

When Clia and Merla escorted the strangers down the length of the great room toward the royal throne they met with pleasant looks and smiles on every side, for the sea maidens were too polite to indulge in curious stares. They paused just before the throne, and the queen raised her head upon one elbow to observe them.

"Welcome, Mayre," she said; "and welcome, Cap'n Bill. I trust you are pleased with your glimpse of the life beneath the surface of the sea."

"I am," answered Trot, looking admiringly at the beautiful face of the queen.

"It's all mighty cur'ous an' strange like," said the sailor, slowly. "I'd no idee you mermaids were like this, at all!"

"Allow me to explain that it was to correct your wrong ideas about us that led me to invite you to visit us," replied the Queen. "We usually pay little heed to the earth people, for we are content in our own dominions; but, of course, we know all that goes on upon your earth. So, when Princess Clia chanced to overhear your absurd statements concerning us, we were greatly amused and decided to let you see, with your own eyes, just what we are

like."

"I'm glad you did," answered Cap'n Bill, dropping his eyes in some confusion as he remembered his former description of the mermaids.

"Now that you are here," continued the Queen, in a cordial, friendly tone, "you may as well remain with us a few days and see the wonderful sights of our ocean."

"I'm much obliged to you, ma'am," said Trot; "and I'd like to stay, ever so much; but mother worries jus' dreadful if we don't get home in time."

"I'll arrange all that," said Aquareine, with a smile.

"How?" asked the girl.

"I will make your mother forget the passage of time, so she will not realize how long you are away. Then she cannot worry."

"Can you do that?" inquired Trot.

"Very easily. I will send your mother into a deep sleep that will last until you are ready to return home. Just at present she is seated in her chair by the front window, engaged in knitting." The queen paused to raise an arm and wave it slowly to and fro. Then she added: "Now your good mother is asleep, little Mayre, and instead of worries I promise her pleasant dreams."

"Won't somebody rob the house while she's asleep?" asked the child anxiously.

"No, dear. My charm will protect the house from any intrusion."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Trot in delight.

"It's jes' won-erful!" said Cap'n Bill. "I wish I knew it was so. Trot's mother has a awful sharp tongue when she's worrited."

"You may see for yourselves," declared the Queen, and waved her hand again.

At once they saw before them the room in the cottage, with Mayre's mother asleep by the window. Her knitting was in her lap and the cat lay curled up beside her chair. It was all so natural that Trot thought she could hear the clock over the fireplace tick. After a moment the scene faded away, when the queen asked with another smile: "Are you satisfied?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Trot. "But how could you do it?"

"It is a form of mirage," was the reply. "We are able to bring any earth scene before us whenever we wish. Sometimes these scenes are reflected above the water, so that mortals also observe them."

"I've seen 'em," said Cap'n Bill, nodding. "I've seen mirages; but I never knowed what caused 'em, afore now."

"Whenever you see anything you do not understand, and wish to ask questions, I will be very glad to answer them," said the Queen.

"One thing that bothers me," said Trot, "is why we don't get wet, being in the ocean with water all around us."

"That is because no water really touches you," explained the Queen. "Your bodies have been made just like those of the mermaids, in order that you may fully enjoy your visit to us. One of our peculiar qualities is that water is never permitted to quite

touch our bodies, or our gowns. Always there remains a very small space, hardly a hair's breadth between us and the water, which is the reason we are always warm and dry."

"I see," said Trot. "That's why you don't get soggy, or withered."

"Exactly," laughed the Queen, and the other mermaids joined in her merriment.

"I s'pose that's how we can breathe without gills," remarked Cap'n Bill, thoughtfully.

"Yes; the air space is constantly replenished from the water, which contains air, and this enables us to breathe as freely as you do upon the earth."

"But we have fins," said Trot, looking at the fin that stood upright on Cap'n Bill's back.

"Yes; they allow us to guide ourselves as we swim, and so are very useful," replied the Queen.

"They make us more finished," said Cap'n Bill, with a chuckle. Then, suddenly becoming grave, he asked: "How 'bout my rheumatics, ma'am? Ain't I likely to get stiffened up with all this dampness?"

"No, indeed," Aquareine answered; "there is no such thing as rheumatism in all our dominions. I promise no evil result shall follow this visit to us, so please be as happy and contented as possible."



## The Sea Serpent

Just then Trot happened to look up at the glass roof and saw a startling sight. A big head, with a face surrounded by stubby gray whiskers, was poised just over them, and the head was connected with a long, curved body that looked much like a sewer pipe.

"Oh, there is King Anko," said the Queen, following the child's gaze. "Open a door and let him in, Clia, for I suppose our old friend is anxious to see the earth people."

"Won't he hurt us?" asked the little girl, with a shiver of fear.

"Who, Anko? Oh, no, my dear! We are very fond of the sea serpent, who is king of this ocean, although he does not rule the mermaids. Old Anko is a very agreeable fellow, as you will soon discover."

"Can he talk?" asked Trot.

"Yes, indeed."

"And can we understand what he says?"

"Perfectly," replied the Queen. "I have given you power, while you remain here, to understand the language of every inhabitant of the sea."

"That's nice," said Trot, gratefully.

The Princess Clia swam slowly to one of the walls of the throne room where, at a wave of her hand, a round hole appeared

in the coral. The sea serpent at once observed this opening and the head left the roof of glass only to reappear presently at the round hole. Through this he slowly crawled, until his head was just beneath the throne of Queen Aquareine, who said to him:

"Good morning, your Majesty. I hope you are quite well?"

"Quite well, thank your Majesty," answered Anko; and then he turned to the strangers. "I suppose these are the earth folks you were expecting?"

"Yes," returned the Queen; "the girl is named Mayre, and the man Cap'n Bill."

While the sea serpent looked at the visitors they ventured to look at him. He certainly was a queer creature, yet Trot decided he was not at all frightful. His head was round as a ball, but his ears were sharp pointed and had tassels at the ends of them. His nose was flat and his mouth very wide indeed, but his eyes were blue and gentle in expression. The white, stubby hairs that surrounded his face were not thick, like a beard, but scattered and scraggly. From the head, the long brown body of the sea serpent extended to the hole in the coral wall, which was just big enough to admit it, and how much more of the body remained outside the child could not tell. On the back of the body were several fins, which made the creature look more like an eel than a serpent.

"The girl is young and the man is old," said King Anko, in a soft voice. "But I'm quite sure Cap'n Bill isn't as old as I am."

"How old are you?" asked the sailor.

"I can't say, exactly. I can remember several thousands of

years back, but beyond that my memory fails me. How's your memory, Cap'n Bill?"

"You've got me beat," was the reply. "I'll give in that you're older than I am."

This seemed to please the sea serpent.

"Are you well?" he asked.

"Pretty fair," said Cap'n Bill. "How's yourself?"

"Oh, I'm very well, thank you," answered Anko. "I never remember to have had a pain but three times in my life. The last time was when Julius Sneezer was on earth."

"You mean Julius Cæsar," said Trot, correcting him.

"No; I mean Julius Sneezer," insisted the Sea Serpent. "That was his real name – Sneezer. They called him Cæsar sometimes, just because he took everything he could lay hands on. I ought to know, because I saw him when he was alive. Did you see him when he was alive, Cap'n Bill?"

"I reckon not," admitted the sailor.

"That time I had a toothache," continued Anko; "but I got a lobster to pull the tooth with his claw, so the pain was soon over."

"Did it hurt to pull it?" asked Trot.

"Hurt!" exclaimed the Sea Serpent, groaning at the recollection. "My dear, those creatures have been called lobsters ever since! The second pain I had way back in the time of Nevercouldnever."

"Oh, I s'pose you mean Nebuchadnezzar," said Trot.

"Do you call him that, now?" asked the Sea Serpent, as if

surprised. "He used to be called Nevercouldnever when he was alive, but this new way of spelling seems to get everything mixed up. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't mean anything at all, it seems to me."

"It means he ate grass," said the child.

"Oh, no; he didn't," declared the Sea Serpent. "He was the first to discover that lettuce was good to eat, and he became very fond of it. The people may have called it grass, but they were wrong. I ought to know, because I was alive when Nevercouldnever lived. Were you alive, then?"

"No," said Trot.

"The pain I had then," remarked Anko, "was caused by a kink in my tail, about three hundred feet from the end. There was an old octopus who did not like me, and so he tied a knot in my tail when I wasn't looking."

"What did you do?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"Well, first I transformed the octopus into a jelly fish, and then I waited for the tide to turn. When my tail was untied the pain stopped."

"I – I don't understand that," said Trot, somewhat bewildered.

"Thank you, my dear," replied the Sea Serpent, in a grateful voice. "People who are always understood are very common. You are sure to respect those you can't understand, for you feel that perhaps they know more than you do."

"About how long do you happen to be?" inquired Cap'n Bill.

"When last measured, I was seven thousand four hundred and

eighty-two feet, five inches and a quarter. I'm not sure about the quarter, but the rest is probably correct. Adam measured me when Cain was a baby."

"Where's the rest of you, then?" asked Trot.

"Safe at home, I hope, and coiled up in my parlor," answered the Sea Serpent. "When I go out I usually take along only what is needed. It saves a lot of bother and I can always find my way back in the darkest night, by just coiling up the part that has been away."

"Do you like to be a sea serpent?" inquired the child.

"Yes, for I'm King of my Ocean, and there is no other sea serpent to imagine he is just as good as I am. I have two brothers who live in other oceans, but one is seven inches shorter than I am, and the other several feet shorter. It's curious to talk about feet when we haven't any feet, isn't it?"

"Seems so," acknowledged Trot.

"I feel I have much to be proud of," continued Anko, in a dreamy tone; "my great age, my undisputed sway, and my exceptional length."

"I don't b'lieve I'd care to live so long," remarked Cap'n Bill, thoughtfully.

"So long as seven thousand four hundred and eighty-two feet, five inches and a quarter?" asked the Sea Serpent.

"No; I mean so many years," replied the sailor.

"But what can one do, if one happens to be a sea serpent?" Anko inquired. "There is nothing in the sea that can hurt me,

and I cannot commit suicide because we have no carbolic acid, or firearms, or gas to turn on. So it isn't a matter of choice, and I'd about as soon be alive as dead. It does not seem quite so monotonous, you know. But I guess I've stayed about long enough; so I'll go home to dinner. Come and see me, when you have time."

"Thank you," said Trot; and Merla added:

"I'll take you over to his majesty's palace when we go out, and let you see how he lives."

"Yes, do," said Anko; and then he slowly slid out of the hole, which immediately closed behind him, leaving the coral wall as solid as before.

"Oh!" exclaimed Trot; "King Anko forgot to tell us what the third pain was about."

"So he did," said Cap'n Bill. "We must ask him about that, when we see him. But I guess the ol' boy's mem'ry is failin', an' he can't be depended on for pertic'lars."

### Exploring the Ocean

The queen now requested her guests to recline upon couches, that they might rest themselves from their long swim and talk more at their ease. So the girl and the sailor allowed themselves to float downward until they rested their bodies on two of the couches nearest the throne, which were willingly vacated for them by the mermaids who had occupied them until then.

The visitors soon found themselves answering a great many questions about their life on the earth, for, although the queen had

said she kept track of what was going on on the land, there were many details of human life in which all the mermaids seemed greatly interested.

During the conversation several sea-maids came swimming into the room, bearing trays of sea apples and other fruit, which they first offered to the queen and then passed the refreshments around to the company assembled. Trot and Cap'n Bill each took some, and the little girl found the fruits delicious to eat, as they had a richer flavor than any that grew upon land. Queen Aquareine was much pleased when the old sailor asked for more, but Merla warned him dinner would soon be served and he must take care not to spoil his appetite for that meal.

"Our dinner is at noon, for we have to cook in the middle of the day, when the sun is shining," she said.

"Cook!" cried Trot; "why, you can't build a fire in the water, can you?"

"We have no need of fires," was the reply. "The glass roof of our kitchen is so curved that it concentrates the heat of the sun's rays, which are then hot enough to cook anything we wish."

"But how do you get along if the day is cloudy, and the sun doesn't shine?" inquired the little girl.

"Then we use the hot springs that bubble up in another part of the palace," Merla answered. "But the sun is the best to cook by."

So, it was no surprise to Trot when, about noon, dinner was announced and all the mermaids, headed by their queen and their guests, swam into another spacious room where a great,

long table was laid. The dishes were of polished gold and dainty cut glass, and the cloth and napkins of fine gossamer. Around the table were ranged rows of couches for the mermaids to recline upon as they ate. Only the nobility and favorites of Queen Aquareine were invited to partake of this repast, for Clia explained that tables were set for the other mermaids in different parts of the numerous palaces.

Trot wondered who would serve the meal, but her curiosity was soon satisfied when several large lobsters came sliding into the room, backward, bearing in their claws trays loaded with food. Each of these lobsters had a golden band around its neck to show it was the slave of the mermaids.

These curious waiters were fussy creatures and Trot found much amusement in watching their odd motions. They were so spry and excitable that, at times, they ran against one another and upset the platters of food, after which they began to scold and argue as to whose fault it was, until one of the mermaids quietly rebuked them and asked them to be more quiet and more careful.

The queen's guests had no cause to complain of the dinner provided. First the lobsters served bowls of turtle soup, which proved hot and deliciously flavored. Then came salmon steaks fried in fish oil, with a fungus bread that tasted much like field mushrooms. Oysters, clams, soft-shell crabs and various preparations of sea foods followed. The salad was a delicate leaf from some seaweed that Trot thought was much nicer than lettuce. Several courses were served and the lobsters changed the



plates with each course, chattering and scolding as they worked, and as Trot said, "doing everything backwards" in their nervous, fussy way.

Many of the things offered them to eat were unknown to the visitors, and the child was suspicious of some of them; but Cap'n Bill asked no questions and ate everything offered him, so Trot decided to follow his example. Certain it is they found the meal very satisfying, and evidently there was no danger of their being hungry while they remained the guests of the mermaids. When the fruits came, Trot thought that must be the last course of the big dinner, but, following the fruits were ice creams frozen into the shapes of flowers.

"How funny," said the child, "to be eating ice cream at the bottom of the sea!"

"Why does that surprise you?" inquired the Queen.

"I can't see where you get the ice to freeze it," Trot replied.

"It is brought to us from the icebergs that float in the northern parts of the ocean," explained Merla.

"O' course, Trot; you orter thought o' that; I did," said Cap'n Bill.

The little girl was glad there was no more to eat, for she was ashamed to feel she had eaten every morsel she could. Her only excuse for being so greedy was that "ev'rything tasted just splendid!" as she told the queen.

"And now," said Aquareine, "I will send you out for a swim with Merla, who will show you some of the curious sights of our

sea. You need not go far this afternoon, and when you return we will have another interesting talk together."

So the blonde mermaid led Trot and Cap'n Bill outside the palace walls, where they found themselves in the pretty flower gardens.

"I'd feel all right, mate, if I could have a smoke," remarked the old sailor to the child; "but that's a thing as can't be did here in the water."

"Why not?" asked Merla, who overheard him.

"A pipe has to be lighted, an' a match wouldn't burn," he replied.

"Try it," suggested the mermaid. "I do not mind your smoking at all, if it will give you pleasure."

"It's a bad habit I've got, an' I'm too old to break myself of it," said Cap'n Bill. Then he felt in the big pockets of his coat and took out a pipe and a bag of tobacco. After he had carefully filled his pipe, rejoicing in the fact that the tobacco was not at all wet, he took out his match box and struck a light. The match burned brightly and soon the sailor was puffing the smoke from his pipe in great contentment. The smoke ascended through the water in the shape of bubbles and Trot wondered what anyone who happened to be floating upon the surface of the ocean would think to see smoke coming from the water.

"Well, I find I can smoke, all right," remarked Cap'n Bill; "but it bothers me to understand why."

"It is because of the air space existing between the water and

everything you have about you," explained Merla. "But now, if you will come this way, I will take you to visit some of our neighbors."

They passed over the carpet of sea flowers, the gorgeous blossoms swaying on their stems as the motion of the people in the water above them disturbed their repose, and presently the three entered the dense shrubbery surrounding the palaces. They had not proceeded far when they came to a clearing among the bushes, and here Merla paused.

Trot and Cap'n Bill paused, too, for floating in the clear water was a group of beautiful shapes that the child thought looked like molds of wine jelly. They were round as a dinner plate, soft and transparent, but tinted in such lovely hues that no artist's brush has ever been able to imitate them. Some were deep sapphire blue; others rose pink; still others a delicate topaz color. They seemed to have neither heads, eyes nor ears, yet it was easy to see they were alive and able to float in any direction they wished to go. In shape they resembled inverted flowerpots, with the upper edges fluted, and from the centers floated what seemed to be bouquets of flowers.

"How pretty!" exclaimed Trot, enraptured by the sight.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.