



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Ripple, the water spirit

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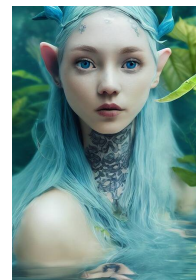
Down in the deep blue sea lived Ripple, a happy little Water-Spirit; all day long she danced beneath the coral arches, made garlands of bright ocean flowers, or floated on the great waves that sparkled in the sunlight; but the pastime that she loved best was lying in the many-colored shells upon the shore, listening to the low, murmuring music the waves had taught them long ago; and here for hours the little Spirit lay watching the sea and sky, while singing to herself.

But when strong winds rose, she hastened down, to where all was calm and still, and with her sister Spirits waited till it should be calm again, listening sadly, meanwhile, to the cries of those whom the wild waves wrecked and cast into the angry sea, and who soon came floating down, pale and cold, to the Spirits' pleasant home; then they wept pitying tears above the lifeless forms, and laid them in quiet graves, where flowers bloomed, and jewels sparkled in the sand.

This was Ripple's only grief, and she often thought of those who now slept far down in the dim and silent coral caves, and gladly would she have saved the lives of those who lay around her; but the great ocean was far mightier than all the tender-hearted Spirits dwelling in its bosom. Thus she could only weep for them, and lay them down to sleep where no cruel waves could harm them more.

One day, when a fearful storm raged far and wide, and the Spirits saw great billows rolling like heavy clouds above their heads, and heard the wild winds sounding far away, down through the foaming waves a little child came floating to their home; its eyes were closed as if in sleep, the long hair fell like sea-weed round its pale, cold face, and the little hands still clasped the shells they had been gathering on the beach, when the great waves swept it into the troubled sea.

With tender tears the Spirits laid the little form to rest upon its bed of flowers, and, singing mournful songs, as if to make its sleep more calm and deep, watched long and lovingly above it, till the storm had died away, and all was still again.



While Ripple sang above the little child, through the distant roar of winds and waves she heard a wild, sorrowing voice, that seemed to call for help. Long she

listened, thinking it was the echo of their own song, but high above the music still sounded the sad, wailing cry. Then she glided up through foam and spray, till, through the parting clouds, the sunlight shone on her from the sky; and, guided by the mournful sound, she floated on, till, close before her on the beach, she saw a woman stretching forth her arms, and with a sad, imploring voice praying the restless sea to give her back the little child it had so cruelly taken away. But the waves dashed foaming up among the bare rocks at her feet, mingling their cold spray with her tears, and gave no answer to her prayer.

When Ripple saw the mother's grief, she longed to comfort her; so, bending tenderly beside her, where she knelt upon the shore, the little Spirit told her how her child lay softly sleeping, far down in a lovely place, where sorrowing tears were shed, and gentle hands laid garlands over him. But all in vain she whispered kindly words; the weeping mother only cried,—

"Dear Spirit, can you use no charm or spell to make the waves bring back my child, as full of life and strength as when they swept him from my side? O give me back my little child, or let me lie beside him in the bosom of the cruel sea."

"I help you if I can, though I have little power to use. I will search both earth and sea, to find some friend who can bring back all you have lost. Watch daily on the shore, and if I do not come again, then you will know my search has been in vain. Farewell, poor mother, you shall see your little child again, if Fairy power can win him back." And with these cheering words Ripple sprang into the sea; while, smiling through her tears, the woman watched the gentle Spirit, till her bright crown vanished in the waves.

When Ripple reached her home, she hastened to the palace of the Queen, and told her of the little child, the sorrowing mother, and the promise she had made.

"Good little Ripple," said the Queen, when she had told her all, "your promise never can be kept; there is no power below the sea to work this charm, and you can never reach the Fire-Spirits' home, to win from them a flame to warm the little body into life."

"Ah, dear Queen! If you had seen her sorrow, you too would seek to keep the promise I have made. I cannot let her watch for me in vain, till I have done my best. Tell me where the Fire-Spirits dwell, and I will ask of them the flame that shall give life to the little child and such great happiness to the sad, lonely mother: tell me the path, and let me go."

"It is far, far away, high up above the sun, where no Spirit ever dared to venture yet," replied the Queen. "I cannot show the path, for it is through the air. Dear Ripple, do not go, for you can never reach that distant place: some harm will surely get to you; and then how shall we live, without our dearest, gentlest Spirit? Stay here with us in your own pleasant home, and think no more of this,

for I can never let you go.”

But Ripple would not break the promise she had made and the queen let her go. She, with her sister Spirits, built up a tomb of delicate, bright-colored shells, where the child would lie, till she would come to wake him into life; then, praying them to watch most faithfully above it, she said farewell, and floated bravely forth, on her long, unknown journey, far away.

“I will search the broad earth till I find a path up to the sun, or some kind friend who will carry me; for I have no wings, and cannot glide through the blue air as through the sea,” said Ripple to herself, as she went dancing over the waves, which bore her swiftly onward towards a distant shore.

Long she journeyed through the pathless ocean. Sometimes great ships sailed by, and then with longing eyes did the little Spirit gaze up at the faces that looked down upon the sea; for often they were kind and pleasant ones, and she gladly would have called to them and asked them to be friends. But they would never understand the strange, sweet language that she spoke, or even see the lovely face that smiled at them above the waves; her blue, transparent garments were but water to their eyes, and the pearl chains in her hair but foam and sparkling spray; so, hoping that the sea would be most gentle with them, silently she floated on her way, and left them far behind.

At last green hills were seen, and the waves gladly bore the little Spirit on, till, rippling gently over soft white sand, they left her on the pleasant shore.

“Ah, what a lovely place it is!” said Ripple, as she passed through sunny valleys, where flowers began to bloom, and young leaves rustled on the trees.

“Why are you all so happy, dear birds?” she asked, as their cheerful voices sounded far and near; “is there a festival over the earth, that all is so beautiful and bright?”

“Do you not know that Spring is coming? The warm winds whispered it days ago, and we are learning the sweetest songs, to welcome her when she shall come,” sang the lark, soaring away as the music gushed from his little throat.

“And shall I see her, Violet, as she journeys over the earth?” asked Ripple again.

“Yes, you will meet her soon, for the sunlight told me she was near; tell her we long to see her again, and are waiting to welcome her back,” said the blue flower, dancing for joy on her stem, as she nodded and smiled on the Spirit.

“I will ask Spring where the Fire-Spirits dwell; she travels over the earth each year, and surely can show me the way,” thought Ripple, as she went journeying on.

Soon she saw Spring come smiling over the earth; sunbeams and breezes

floated before, and then, with her white garments covered with flowers, with wreaths in her hair, and dew-drops and seeds falling fast from her hands the beautiful season came singing by.

“Dear Spring, will you listen, and help a poor little Spirit, who seeks far and wide for the Fire-Spirits’ home?” cried Ripple; and then told why she was there, and begged her to tell what she sought.

“The Fire-Spirits’ home is far, far away, and I cannot guide you there; but Summer is coming behind me,” said Spring, “and she may know better than I. But I will give you a breeze to help you on your way; it will never tire nor fail, but bear you easily over land and sea. Farewell, little Spirit! I would gladly do more, but voices are calling me far and wide, and I cannot stay.”

“Many thanks, kind Spring!” cried Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze; “give a kindly word to the mother who waits on the shore, and tell her I have not forgotten my vow, but hope soon to see her again.”

Then Spring flew on with her sunshine and flowers, and Ripple went swiftly over hill and vale, till she came to the land where Summer was dwelling. Here the sun shone warmly down on the early fruit, the winds blew freshly over fields of fragrant hay, and rustled with a pleasant sound among the green leaves in the forests; heavy dews fell softly down at night, and long, bright days brought strength and beauty to the blossoming earth.

“Now I must seek for Summer,” said Ripple, as she sailed slowly through the sunny sky.

“I am here, what do you want?” said a musical voice in her ear; and, floating by her side, she saw a graceful form, with green robes fluttering in the air, whose pleasant face looked kindly on her, from beneath a crown of golden sunbeams that cast a warm, bright glow on all beneath.

Then Ripple told her tale, and asked where she should go; but Summer answered,—

“I can tell no more than my young sister Spring where you may find the Spirits that you seek; but I too, like her, will give a gift to help you. Take this sunbeam from my crown; it will cheer and brighten the most gloomy path through which you pass. Farewell! I shall carry tidings of you to the watcher by the sea, if in my journey round the world I find her there.”

And Summer, giving her the sunbeam, passed away over the distant hills, leaving all green and bright behind her.

So Ripple journeyed on again, till the earth below her shone with yellow harvests waving in the sun, and the air was filled with cheerful voices, as the reapers sang

among the fields or in the pleasant vineyards, where purple fruit hung gleaming through the leaves; while the sky above was cloudless, and the changing forest-trees shone like a many-colored garland, over hill and plain; and here, along the ripening corn-fields, with bright wreaths of crimson leaves and golden wheat-ears in her hair and on her purple mantle, stately Autumn passed, with a happy smile on her calm face, as she went scattering generous gifts from her full arms.

But when the wandering Spirit came to her, and asked for what she sought, this season, like the others, could not tell her where to go; so, giving her a yellow leaf, Autumn said, as she passed on,—

“Ask Winter, little Ripple, when you come to his cold home; he knows the Fire-Spirits well, for when he comes they fly to the earth, to warm and comfort those dwelling there; and perhaps he can tell you where they are. So take this gift of mine, and when you meet his chilly winds, fold it about you, and sit warm beneath its shelter, till you come to sunlight again. I will carry comfort to the patient woman, as my sisters have already done, and tell her you are faithful still.”

Then on went the never-tiring Breeze, over forest, hill, and field, till the sky grew dark, and bleak winds whistled by. Then Ripple, folded in the soft, warm leaf, looked sadly down on the earth, that seemed to lie so desolate and still beneath its shroud of snow, and thought how bitter cold the leaves and flowers must be; for the little Water-Spirit did not know that Winter spread a soft white covering above their beds, that they might safely sleep below till Spring should waken them again. So she went sorrowfully on, till Winter, riding on the strong North-Wind, came rushing by, with a sparkling ice-crown in his streaming hair, while from beneath his crimson cloak, where glittering frost-work shone like silver threads, he scattered snow-flakes far and wide.

“What do you seek with me, fair little Spirit, that you come so bravely here amid my ice and snow? Do not fear me; I am warm at heart, though rude and cold without,” said Winter, looking kindly on her, while a bright smile shone like sunlight on his pleasant face, as it glowed and glistened in the frosty air.

When Ripple told him why she had come, he pointed upward, where the sunlight dimly shone through the heavy clouds, saying,—

“Far off there, beside the sun, is the Fire-Spirits’ home; and the only path is up, through cloud and mist. It is a long, strange path, for a lonely little Spirit to be going; the Fairies are wild, wilful things, and in their play may harm and trouble you. Come back with me, and do not go this dangerous journey to the sky. I’ll gladly bear you home again, if you will come.”

But Ripple said, “I cannot turn back now, when I am nearly there. The Spirits surely will not harm me, when I tell them why I am come; and if I win the flame, I

shall be the happiest Spirit in the sea, for my promise will be kept, and the poor mother happy once again. So farewell, Winter! Speak to her gently, and tell her to hope still, for I shall surely come."

"Adieu, little Ripple! May good angels watch above you! Journey bravely on, and take this snow-flake that will never melt, as my gift," Winter cried, as the North-Wind bore him on, leaving a cloud of falling snow behind.

"Now, dear Breeze," said Ripple, "fly straight upward through the air, until we reach the place we have so long been seeking; Sunbeam shall go before to light the way, Yellow-leaf shall shelter me from heat and rain, while Snow-flake shall lie here beside me till it comes of use. So farewell to the pleasant earth, until we come again. And now away, up to the sun!"

When Ripple first began her airy journey, all was dark and dreary; heavy clouds lay piled like hills around her, and a cold mist filled the air but the Sunbeam, like a star, lit up the way, the leaf lay warmly round her, and the tireless wind went swiftly on. Higher and higher they floated up, still darker and darker grew the air, closer the damp mist gathered, while the black clouds rolled and tossed, like great waves, to and fro.

"Ah!" sighed the weary little Spirit, "shall I never see the light again, or feel the warm winds on my cheek? It is a dreary way indeed, and but for the Seasons' gifts I should have perished long ago; but the heavy clouds must pass away at last, and all be fair again. So hasten on, good Breeze, and bring me quickly to my journey's end."

Soon the cold vapors vanished from her path, and sunshine shone upon her pleasantly; so she went on, till she came up among the stars, where many new, strange sights were to be seen. With wondering eyes she looked upon the bright worlds that once seemed dim and distant, when she gazed upon them from the sea; but now they moved around her, some shining with a softly radiant light, some circled with bright, many-colored rings, while others burned with a red, angry glare. Ripple would have gladly stayed to watch them longer, for she fancied low, sweet voices called her, and lovely faces seemed to look upon her as she passed; but higher up still, nearer to the sun, she saw a far-off light, that glittered like a brilliant crimson star, and seemed to cast a rosy glow along the sky.

"The Fire-Spirits surely must be there, and I must stay no longer here," said Ripple. So steadily she floated on, till straight before her lay a broad, bright path, that led up to a golden arch, beyond which she could see shapes flitting to and fro. As she drew near, brighter glowed the sky, hotter and hotter grew the air, till Ripple's leaf-cloak shrivelled up, and could no longer shield her from the heat; then she unfolded the white snow-flake, and, gladly wrapping the soft, cool

mantle round her, entered through the shining arch.

Through the red mist that floated all around her, she could see high walls of changing light, where orange, blue, and violet flames went flickering to and fro, making graceful figures as they danced and glowed; and underneath these rainbow arches, little Spirits glided, far and near, wearing crowns of fire, beneath which flashed their wild, bright eyes; and as they spoke, sparks dropped quickly from their lips, and Ripple saw with wonder, through their garments of transparent light, that in each Fairy's breast there burned a steady flame, that never wavered or went out.

As thus she stood, the Spirits gathered round her, and their hot breath would have scorched her, but she drew the snow-cloak closer round her, saying,—

“Take me to your Queen, that I may tell her why I am here, and ask for what I seek.”

So, through long halls of many-colored fire, they led her to a Spirit fairer than the rest, whose crown of flames waved to and fro like golden plumes, while, underneath her violet robe, the light within her breast glowed bright and strong.

“This is our Queen,” the Spirits said, bending low before her, as she turned her gleaming eyes upon the stranger they had brought.

Then Ripple told how she had wandered round the world in search of them, how the Seasons had most kindly helped her on, by giving Sun-beam, Breeze, Leaf, and Flake; and how, through many dangers, she had come at last to ask of them the magic flame that could give life to the little child again.

When she had told her tale, the spirits whispered earnestly among themselves, while sparks fell thick and fast with every word; at length the Fire-Queen said aloud,—

“We cannot give the flame you ask, for each of us must take a part of it from our own breasts; and this we will not do, for the brighter our bosom-fire burns, the lovelier we are. So do not ask us for this thing; but any other gift we will most gladly give, for we feel kindly towards you, and will serve you if we may.”

But Ripple asked nothing else, and, weeping sadly, begged them not to send her back without the gift she had come so far to gain.

“O dear, warm-hearted Spirits! give me each a little light from your own breasts, and surely they will glow the brighter for this kindly deed; and I will thankfully repay it if I can.” As thus she spoke, the Queen, who had spied out a chain of jewels Ripple wore upon her neck, replied,—

“If you will give me those bright, sparkling stones, I will bestow on you a part of my own flame; for we have no such lovely things to wear about our necks, and I

desire much to have them. Will you give it me for what I offer, little Spirit?"

Joyfully Ripple gave her the chain; but, as soon as it touched her hand, the jewels melted like snow, and fell in bright drops to the ground; at this the Queen's eyes flashed, and the Spirits gathered angrily about poor Ripple, who looked sadly at the broken chain, and thought in vain what she could give, to win the thing she longed so earnestly for.

"I have many fairer gems than these, in my home below the sea; and I will bring all I can gather far and wide, if you will grant my prayer, and give me what I seek," she said, turning gently to the fiery Spirits, who were hovering fiercely round her.

"You must bring us each a jewel that will never vanish from our hands as these have done," they said, "and we will each give of our fire; and when the child is brought to life, you must bring all the jewels you can gather from the depths of the sea, that we may try them here among the flames; but if they melt away like these, then we shall keep you prisoner, till you give us back the light we lend. If you consent to this, then take our gift, and journey home again; but fail not to return, or we shall seek you out."

And Ripple said she would consent, though she knew not if the jewels could be found; still, thinking of the promise she had made, she forgot all else, and told the Spirits what they asked most surely should be done. So each one gave a little of the fire from their breasts, and placed the flame in a crystal vase, through which it shone and glittered like a star.

Then, bidding her remember all she had promised them, they led her to the golden arch, and said farewell.

So, down along the shining path, through mist and cloud, she travelled back; till, far below, she saw the broad blue sea she left so long ago.

Gladly she plunged into the clear, cool waves, and floated back to her pleasant home; where the Spirits gathered joyfully about her, listening with tears and smiles, as she told all her many wanderings, and showed the crystal vase that she had brought.

"Now come," said they, "and finish the good work you have so bravely carried on." So to the quiet tomb they went, where, like a marble image, cold and still, the little child was lying. Then Ripple placed the flame upon his breast, and watched it gleam and sparkle there, while light came slowly back into the once dim eyes, a rosy glow shone over the pale face, and breath stole through the parted lips; still brighter and warmer burned the magic fire, until the child awoke from his long sleep, and looked in smiling wonder at the faces bending over him.

Then Ripple sang for joy, and, with her sister Spirits, robed the child in graceful

garments, woven of bright sea-weed, while in his shining hair they wreathed long garlands of their fairest flowers, and on his little arms hung chains of brilliant shells.

“Now come with us, dear child,” said Ripple; “we will bear you safely up into the sunlight and the pleasant air; for this is not your home, and on the shore, there waits a loving friend for you.”

So up they went, through foam and spray, till on the beach, where the fresh winds played among her falling hair, and the waves broke sparkling at her feet, the lonely mother still stood, gazing wistfully across the sea. Suddenly, upon a great blue billow that came rolling in, she saw the Water-Spirits smiling on her; and high aloft, in their white gleaming arms, her child stretched forth his hands to welcome her; while the little voice she so longed to hear again cried,—

“See, dear mother, I am here; and look what lovely things the gentle Spirits gave, that I might seem more beautiful to you.”

Then gently the great wave broke, and rolled back to the sea, leaving Ripple on the shore, and the child clasped in his mother’s arms.

“O faithful little Spirit! I would gladly give some precious gift to show my gratitude for this kind deed; but I have nothing save this chain of little pearls: they are the tears I shed, and the sea has changed them thus, that I might offer them to you,” the happy mother said, when her first joy was passed, and Ripple turned to go.

“Yes, I will gladly wear your gift, and look upon it as my fairest ornament,” the Water-Spirit said; and with the pearls upon her breast, she left the shore, where the child was playing, and the mother’s glad smile shone upon her, till she sank beneath the waves.

And now another task was to be done; her promise to the Fire-Spirits must be kept. So far and wide she searched among the caverns of the sea, and gathered all the brightest jewels shining there; and then upon her faithful Breeze once more went journeying through the sky.

The Spirits gladly welcomed her, and led her to the Queen, before whom she poured out the sparkling gems she had gathered with such toil and care; but when the Spirits tried to form them into crowns, they trickled from their hands like colored drops of dew, and Ripple saw with fear and sorrow how they melted one by one away, till none of all the many she had brought remained. Then the Fire-Spirits looked upon her angrily, and when she begged them to be merciful, and let her try once more, saying,—

“Do not keep me prisoner here. I cannot breathe the flames that give you life, and but for this snow-mantle I too should melt away, and vanish like the jewels

in your hands. O dear Spirits, give me some other task, but let me go from this warm place, where all is strange and fearful to a Spirit of the sea.”

They would not listen; and drew nearer, saying, while bright sparks showered from their lips, “We will not let you go, for you have promised to be ours if the gems you brought proved worthless; so fling away this cold white cloak, and bathe with us in the fire fountains, and help us bring back to our bosom flames the light we gave you for the child.”

Then Ripple sank down on the burning floor, and felt that her life was nearly done; for she well knew the hot air of the fire-palace would be death to her. The Spirits gathered round, and began to lift her mantle off; but underneath they saw the pearl chain, shining with a clear, soft light, that only glowed more brightly when they laid their hands upon it.

“O give us this!” cried they; “it is far lovelier than all the rest, and does not melt away like them; and see how brilliantly it glitters in our hands. If we may but have this, all will be well, and you are once more free.”

And Ripple, safe again beneath her snow flake, gladly gave the chain to them; and told them how the pearls they now placed proudly on their breasts were formed of tears, which but for them might still be flowing. Then the Spirits smiled most kindly on her, and would have put their arms about her, and have kissed her cheek, but she drew back, telling them that every touch of theirs was like a wound to her.

“Then, if we may not tell our pleasure so, we will show it in a different way, and give you a pleasant journey home. Come out with us,” the Spirits said, “and see the bright path we have made for you.” So they led her to the lofty gate, and here, from sky to earth, a lovely rainbow arched its radiant colors in the sun.

“This is indeed a pleasant road,” said Ripple. “Thank you, friendly Spirits, for your care; and now farewell. I would gladly stay yet longer, but we cannot dwell together, and I am longing sadly for my own cool home. Now Sunbeam, Breeze, Leaf, and Flake, fly back to the Seasons whence you came, and tell them that, thanks to their kind gifts, Ripple’s work at last is done.”

Then down along the shining pathway spread before her, the happy little Spirit glided to the sea.

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