



# Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

## The Necklace Of Pearls

*Elsie Spicer Eells*

In a tiny cottage on the steep rocky hillside of one of the islands of the Azores there lived a poor woman and her only son whose name was Francisco. Every day the boy went fishing in his little boat, and every night he brought home fish for his mother to cook for their evening meal and to carry into the market to sell. In this way they lived very comfortably, and they loved each other so dearly that they were as happy as happy can be.

Francisco, with his fair skin, blue eyes and thatch of curly golden hair, was the handsomest boy in the whole parish, and by the time he was sixteen years old there was many a rich man's daughter who had smiled upon him. However, the lad thought only of his fishing boat and his mother and did not notice the smiles.

One night the moon was so bright that Francisco could not sleep. He awakened his mother who was dozing comfortably in her bed.

"I'm going fishing, mother dear," he said as he kissed her. "The moonlight is calling me."

His mother started up from her bed in terror and amazement.

"Why, my boy, do you do such a thing as this?" she asked. "You have never been fishing in the night before. Some evil will surely befall you."

"Don't worry about me, dear mother," replied Francisco, laughing at her fears. "I know how to take care of myself. It is as light as day. Think how many fish I'll bring back for you to sell in the market to-morrow."

His mother shook her head anxiously, but, with another loving kiss, the lad ran out into the bright moonlight. He quickly launched his little fishing boat and soon was floating smoothly along on the peaceful waters of the bay which gleamed like a silver pathway in the moonlight. The soft air, the gentle rocking of the little boat, and the face of the moon upon which his blue eyes were fixed combined to send sleep to his eyelids. Soon he was nodding in the little boat. A few moments later and he was fast asleep. The moon's rays upon his curls made them shine as if they were indeed made of gold.

Now the village maidens were not the only ones who had noticed Francisco's blue eyes and handsome face. A water-nymph who dwelt in the depths of the sea had often observed him. In the daytime she was invisible to the eye of

humans and so the lad had never seen her though she often spent long hours near him, never taking her eyes from his face.

"Here comes the beautiful youth in his little fishing boat!" cried the nymph as she saw the moonlight gleaming upon his bright curls. "At last my wish has come true. Now at night he'll be able to see me."

She hastily arranged her own beautiful hair before a little mirror she carried. Some of the strands of priceless pearls which decked her lovely head were a trifle awry. These and the necklaces of rare pearls which hung about her fair throat surrounded her with a gleam of soft light almost like the light of the moon. As she approached nearer to the little boat she saw that Francisco was fast asleep. She swam in the direction of the lad with all possible speed, a wild terror in her eyes.

"What madness is this?" she asked as she looked down upon his bowed head. "This frail boat will drift upon the dangerous rocks and be dashed to pieces. I'll take him home to my own palace without awakening him. Perhaps when he sees how lovely it is he'll even like me a little bit."

Just for a moment she hesitated, thinking how far from home Francisco would be in the palace of mother-of-pearl in the depths of the sea.

"The rocks are really very dangerous," she said to herself as she gently drew his sleeping form into her arms.

The next morning Francisco's empty fishing boat was found by the fishermen. For hours his mother had watched in vain for his return. When at last she heard that the empty boat had been found she was nearly wild with grief.

"He was the best son a mother ever had," she moaned over and over again. "How can I live without him!"

Indeed, as the days and weeks went by it was increasingly difficult for the poor woman to live. She not only missed her boy's loving smile, but she also missed the fish he caught so skillfully. There was little for the poor woman to eat if she had any appetite for food.

"Why don't you go to the Wiseman of the Sea and tell him your troubles?" asked one of the neighbors.

Francisco's mother knew that it was a long and difficult journey to reach the Wiseman of the Sea. She decided, however, it would be worth the effort just to gaze into his wise eyes. He knew so much, perhaps he would know how to say something to comfort her in her great sorrow and loneliness. She had shrugged her shoulders when her neighbor had spoken of it but she could not get the idea out of her mind. She knew that she would never rest in peace until she had

made this journey. Accordingly, she launched Francisco's fishing boat, and, thanks to smooth seas, reached the little rocky island in the midst of the sea where the Wiseman of the Sea lived.

His tall form was outlined above the cliff even as she tied her little boat. He was very tall, far taller than anybody she had ever seen, and his snow-white beard fell to his feet. He was clothed in fish scales which gleamed in the sunlight.

"Well, little mother, what can I do for you to-day?" he asked, as she came up the path to the summit of the rock.

The eyes of the Wiseman of the Sea were very kind as well as full of great wisdom. Francisco's mother forgot to be afraid of him as she had expected to be. She told him the story of her lost son. The Wiseman listened carefully to her words and then he said:

"Good mother, I am glad to tell you that I know where your Francisco is. He is in the power of a water-nymph who has carried him away to her castle of mother-of-pearl in the depths of the sea."

Francisco's mother felt the tears of joy well up into her eyes. "Is my boy happy there and is he well?" she asked eagerly.

"He is entirely well and happy. The water-nymph gave him a philtre which has made him forget his past life entirely."

"I'm glad you told me that," said the boy's mother. "I was just wondering how my dear lad could be happy while he was causing me so much sorrow. He has always been the best and kindest son with which a mother ever was blessed."

The Wiseman of the Sea started to say something, but the woman interrupted as a new thought flew into her mind. "Tell me," she cried, "is there no way of getting him back? With all your wisdom can't you think of some way to make him once more remember the mother who loves him and the little home in which we have passed so many happy days together? Do you not know some means of breaking the power which this water-nymph has over him?"

The Wiseman looked out across the sea in silence for at least a minute and a half. He thought hard. Francisco's mother watched him with eager eyes. She could hardly wait for his answer. At last these were the words which fell from his lips:

"You have shed many tears, good woman, but tears are still to flow if you are to bring back your son."

"Oh, must I suffer more?" cried the heart-broken mother. "It seems that I have already lived a lifetime since my dear lad kissed me in the moonlight. I have endured all that I can bear."

The Wiseman smiled gently as he raised his hand. "Listen, my child," he said. "Your tears must be shed upon the bosom of the waters. If, perchance, one of them should fall upon your son's heart there in the palace of the water-nymph in the depths of the sea, the power of her philtre will be broken."

"I'll shed whole oceans of tears if I can break the power of that water-nymph and bring back my Francisco," said his mother.

The fact is that she began to shed tears then and there, even before she had thanked the Wiseman of the Sea for what he had told her.

Now it happened that Francisco had grown to love the beautiful palace of mother-of-pearl in the depths of the sea. He never tired of all its beauty. About the palace there were lovely gardens filled with flowers made of precious gems. Each tiny bud of that garden was worth a king's ransom, so rich were the jewels which composed it. The water-nymph often gathered her arms full of these rare blossoms and wove them into a garland to crown Francisco's golden curls. He never had a thought of the old life at home with his mother, so completely had the nymph's philtre done its work.

There was always a big fish swimming about the palace. On its back there was a cushion of seagreen satin embroidered with lovely pearls.

"This is your riding horse," said the water-nymph to Francisco the first day he had seen it. "If you should ever get tired of the palace and find the life here a bit monotonous, just mount this horse and ride about for a little."

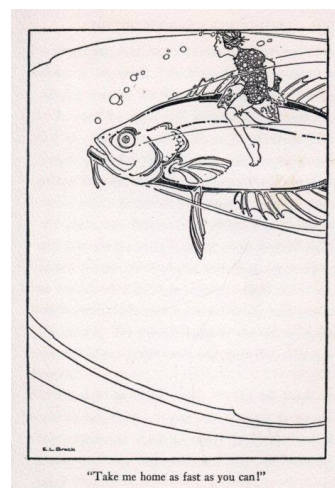
The water-nymph had shaken out her long fair tresses so that they covered as much as possible of the fishtail she had instead of feet. She was very sensitive about the fact that she had no feet upon which to wear pretty little slippers like those of the maidens she had seen so often as they called out gay greetings to the handsome fisher-lad.

Francisco had smiled into her eyes. "How absurd," he cried, "to think of such a thing as getting tired of this wonderful place!"

In fact the days had slipped by all too fast for the happy youth. Then it suddenly happened one day while the water-nymph was asleep that he thought of his mother, the little house which had been his home for sixteen years and more, the fishing boat which was his pride and joy, the moonlight night when he had gaily kissed his mother's cheek and gone away never to return. He did not stop to waken the sleeping nymph. He said no word to the servants of the palace. He thought only of the fish with the cushion of sea-green satin embroidered with rare pearls.

"Quick!" he cried to it. "Take me home as fast as you can! My mother's heart is breaking! She has shed so many tears for me, I know, that by this time she may be entirely blind."

In another hour Francisco was safe at home with his mother's arms about him. She had shed so many tears that her eyes were swollen almost shut, but they were not closed so completely that they could not shine with the great joy which once more filled her heart.



"Promise me one thing," she said to him. "Give me your word that you'll never go fishing again. I don't trust that water-nymph even in the daytime."

Accordingly, Francisco gave up being a fisherman and became a hunter. To make his spears, he gathered the young sapling which grew on the hillside even down to the edge of the water. He had grown still handsomer while he had lived in the palace of mother-of-pearl in the depths of the sea, and there were twice as many pretty maidens who cast smiling glances in his direction.

It was the daughter of the rich man of the village who at last won the heart of Francisco. When he went a-wooing, however, he had no gift to take except the birds he had killed with his own hand. The rich man laughed at him. These were his words:

"When my daughter marries it shall be only to a youth who can bring her rich gifts."

Francisco went away with a sad heart and sat upon the rocks at the edge of the sea, gazing out over the water with eyes so full of tears that they saw nothing.

The water-nymph was not far away from the shore those days. She was always seeking for a glimpse of the golden head which she had so often crowned with flowers. Her joy now at the sight of him was buried by her sorrow when she saw that his heart was full of woe. She knew at once the cause of his grief.

The next morning when Francisco went to get wood to make a new spear, he found a necklace of priceless pearls lying on the shore. It was the gift of the water-nymph, but since his heart had been touched by his mother's tears he had entirely forgotten her. He took the gift to the maid he loved with never a thought of the giver.

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