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The Queen of the Sea

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The choice of the mermaid to be Queen of the ocean was one of the most important events that the fish of the seven seas ever had known. For years, as far back as the oldest fish could remember, even as far back as a whale who was so old that he could no longer swim about, a man with long whiskers and flowing hair, who carried a three-pronged spear and who answered to the name of Neptune, had been the King and ruler of the sea. But in his old age, he had decided that now that there were so many ships and so many more fish than there used to be, he had better give up the rule of the sea and appoint another to his throne.

So he called all the inhabitants of the sea together and told them of the decision and asked whom of the watery world he should name to rule.

There was very little indecision, for all the fish who had ever seen the mermaid knew how beautiful she was, and those who had not seen her had heard her described. They knew what wonderful hair she had and how, when she undid it and allowed it to float in the water, it looked like threads of polished gold. They knew how the most wonderful of the coral was made to match the color of her lips, and how her skin was like the wave-washed marbles of a sunken city in its whiteness. They knew, too, of her kindness, and how, in storm, she called and called to the ships of the danger of the hidden rocks and treacherous sands and tried to keep them on their courses.

And so when Father Neptune asked whom he should name to take his place, the fishes with one voice chose the mermaid, and the King of the sea announced that she should be their Queen.

The preparations for her crowning were immediately begun. At the bottom of the sea, where the sand was whitest, a place was selected for the throne, and thousands and thousands of insects began the erection of the most wonderful coral throne you ever dreamed of, with the arms all inlaid with gold, which the fish found in the cabin of a sunken pirate ship. Then to attend the Queen, a hundred fish with golden scales were chosen, and a hundred others with scales of silver were to stand about the throne. Two swordfish were to guard her night and day, and twenty dolphins, the fastest in all the sea, were to draw her chariot. But despite all this wonderful preparation, the mermaid was not happy, for she could not decide what she should wear on the day she was made Queen.

The scissor-fish were waiting to cut the dress, and the needle-fish were ready to sew it, but she could not make any choice. They brought her the most wonderful seaweed, as thin as the thinnest silk and as fine as the most beautiful lace, but she did not like the color. They brought long grasses, which they wove into beautiful cloth, but these did not please her, and she was almost on the point of declaring that there would be no public crowning when as a last resort she proclaimed that the fish who brought her a satisfactory material for her gown should sit beside her and help her in ruling the sea.

How the fish did swim about! From one ocean to another, they rushed as fast as they could, looking for what they hoped would please the new Queen. In fact, they left the mermaid all alone, so anxious was everybody to have the honor of sitting beside her on the throne.

One day while they were all away, she heard the tiniest voice coming from a rock just beside her, and, looking around, she saw an oyster, and as she looked she heard him speak again.



"Your Majesty," he said, "I cannot swim about and seek for the wonderful gown you want, but I can perhaps show you where it may be found." How should you know?" asked the mermaid. "You have not moved off that rock since you were born."

"I know that what you say is true," said the oyster, "but, nevertheless, I may help you."

"Where is this beautiful material that you know about?" asked the mermaid, now anxious to get the knowledge even from the oyster.

"Here in my shell," said the oyster, and as he spoke, he opened his shell to its full width, and the mermaid saw the wonderful colors of the mother-of-pearl with which it was lined.

"Nothing could be more beautiful," she exclaimed. "I was seeking for something which all the time was right by my side."

The other oysters, hearing her admiration, opened their shells, and from each, the mermaid gathered a bit of the wonderful lining. With the juice from a seaweed, she fastened the bits together, and when the fish returned to tell her that they could find nothing more beautiful than that which they had brought before, they found her already dressed in the wonderful gown of mother-of-pearl.

And when they asked where she got it, she did not tell them, but on the day when she was crowned, an oyster lay resting on the arm of the throne, and when the gold and silver fish sought to remove it, she bade them let it stay.

But to this day, they do not know why she wished to have it remain, for the oysters never having opened their shells again, none of the fish knew that the beautiful gown their Queen wore came from the rough and ugly-looking oysters who could not even swim about.

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