

# **Fisherman Plunk and his Wife**



# Fisherman Plunk and His Wife

## I

**F**ISHERMAN PLUNK was sick and tired of his miserable life. He lived alone by the desolate sea-shore, and every day he caught fish with a bone hook, because they didn't know about nets in those parts at that time. And how much fish can you catch with a hook, anyhow?

“What a dog's life it is, to be sure!” cried Plunk to himself. “What I catch in the morning I eat up at night, and there's no joy for me in this world at all, at all.”

And then Plunk heard that there were also rich sheriffs in the land, and men of great power and might, who lived in luxury and comfort, lapped in gold and fed on truffles. Then Plunk fell a-thinking how he too might come to look upon such riches

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and live in the midst of them. So he made up his mind that for three whole days he would sit still in his boat on the sea and not take any fish at all, but see if that spell would help him.

So Plunk sat for three days and nights in his boat on the face of the sea—three days he sat there, three days he fasted, for three days he caught no fish. When the third day began to dawn, lo and behold, a silver boat arose from the sea—a silver boat with golden oars—and in the boat, fair as a king's daughter, stood the Pale Dawn-Maiden.

“For three days you have spared my little fishes' lives,” said the Dawn-Maiden, “and now tell me what you would like me to do for you?”

“Help me out of this miserable and dreary life. Here am I all day long slaving away in this desolate place. What I catch during the day I eat up at night, and there is no joy for me in the world at all, at all,” said Plunk.

“Go home,” said the Dawn-Maiden, “and you will find what you need.” And as she spoke, she sank in the sea, silver boat and all.

Plunk hurried back to the shore and then home.

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When he came to the house, a poor orphan girl came out to meet him, all weary with the long tramp across the hills. The girl said : “ My mother is dead, and I am all alone in the world. Take me for your wife, Plunk.”

Plunk hardly knew what to do. “ Is this the good fortune which the Dawn-Maiden has sent me ? ” Plunk could see that the girl was just a poor body like himself ; on the other hand, he was afraid of making a mistake and turning away his luck. So he consented, and took the poor girl to be his wife ; and she, being very tired, lay down and slept till the morning.

Plunk could scarcely await the next day for wondering how his good fortune would show itself. But nothing happened that day except that Plunk took his hook and went out fishing, and the Woman went up the hill to gather wild spinach. Plunk came home at night, and so did the Woman, and they supped upon fish and wild spinach. “ Eh, if that is all the good luck there is to it, I could just as well have done without,” thought Plunk.

As the evening wore on, the Woman sat down

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beside Plunk to tell him stories, to wile away the time for him. She told him about nabobs and kings' castles, about dragons that watch treasure-hoards, and kings' daughters who sow their gardens with pearls and reap gems. Plunk listened, and his heart within him began to sing for joy. Plunk forgot that he was poor ; he could have sat and listened to her for three years together. But Plunk was still better pleased when he considered : " She is a fairy wife. She can show me the way to the dragons' hoards or the kings' gardens. I need only be patient and not make her angry."

So Plunk waited ; and day after day went by, a year went by, two years passed. A little son was born to them ; they called him little Winpeace. Yet all went on as usual. Plunk caught fish, and his wife gathered wild spinach in the mountains. In the evening she cooked the supper, and after supper she rocked the baby and told Plunk stories. Her stories grew prettier and prettier, and Plunk found it harder and harder to wait, till at last, one evening, he had had enough of it ; and just as his wife was telling him about the immense treasures of the Sea

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King, Plunk jumped up in a rage, shook her by the arm and cried :

“ I tell you I’ll wait no longer. To-morrow in the morning you shall take me down to the Sea King’s Castle ! ”

The Woman was quite frightened when Plunk jumped up like that. She told him that she did not know where the Sea King had his Castle ; but Plunk began to beat his poor wife most unmercifully, and threatened to kill her unless she told him her fairy secret.

Then the poor girl understood that Plunk had taken her for a fairy. She burst into tears and cried :

“ Truly I am no fairy, but a poor orphan girl who knows no spells nor magic. And for the tales I have told you, I had them from my own heart to beguile your weariness.”

Now this only put Plunk all the more in a rage, because he had lived in a fool’s paradise for over two years ; and he angrily bade the Woman go away next morning ere dawn with the child, along the sea-shore to the right-hand side, and he, Plunk, would go to the left, and she was not to come back



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again till she had found the way to the Sea King's Castle.

When the dawn came, the Woman wept and begged Plunk not to send her away. "Who knows where one of us may be destroyed on this desolate sea-shore?" said she. But Plunk fell upon her again, so that she took up her child and went away crying whither her husband had bidden her. And Plunk went off in the opposite direction.

So the Woman went on with her baby, little Winpeace. She went on for a week; she went on for a fortnight, and nowhere did she find the way to the Sea King. She grew so terribly tired that one day she fell asleep on a stone beside the sea. When she woke up, her baby was gone—her little Winpeace.

Her grief was so great that the tears froze fast in her heart, and not a word could she speak for sorrow, but became dumb from that hour.

So the poor dumb creature wandered back along the sea-shore and home. And next day Plunk came home, too. He had not found the way to the Sea King, and he came back disappointed and cross.

When he got home, there was no baby Win-



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peace, and his wife had gone dumb. She could not tell him what had happened, but was all haggard with the great trouble.

And so it was with them from that day forward. The Woman neither wept nor complained, but did her housework and waited upon Plunk in silence; and the house was still and quiet as the grave. For some time Plunk stood it, but in the end he got thoroughly weary. He had just felt almost sure of the Sea King's treasure, and lo! all this trouble and worry had come upon him.

So Plunk made up his mind to try his sea-spell once more. Again for three whole days he sat in his boat on the sea, for three days he fasted, for three days he caught no fish. At the third day, at day-break, the Dawn-Maiden arose before him.

Plunk told her what had happened, and complained bitterly.

"I'm worse off than ever before. The baby is gone, the wife is dumb, and my house dreary as the grave, and I'm just about bursting with trouble."

To this the Dawn-Maiden said never a word, but just asked Plunk a question:

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“What do you want? I will help you just this once more.”

But Plunk was such a zany that he couldn't think of anything else but just this, that he was set on seeing and enjoying the Sea King's treasure; and so he didn't wish for his child back again, or that his wife should regain the power of speech, but he begged the Dawn-Maiden:

“Fair Dawn-Maiden,” said he, “show me the way to the Sea King.”

And again the Dawn-Maiden said nothing, but very kindly set Plunk on his way:

“When day dawns at the next New Moon, get into your boat, wait for the wind, and then drift eastward with the wind. The wind will carry you to the Isle Bountiful, to the stone Gold-a-Fire. And there I shall be waiting for you to show you the way to the Sea King.”

Plunk went joyfully home.

When it was about the New Moon (but he never told his wife anything) he went out at the streak of dawn, got into his boat, waited for the wind, and let the wind carry him away toward the east.





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The wind caught the boat and carried it along to the Unknown Sea, to the Isle Bountiful. Like a green garden the fruitful island floats upon the sea. The grass grows rank, and the meadows lush, the vines are full of grapes and the almond-trees pink with blossom. In the midst of the island there is precious stone, the white blazing stone Gold-a-Fire. One half of the stone sheds its glow upon the island, and the other half lights up the sea under the island. And there on the Isle Bountiful, on the stone Gold-a-Fire, sits the Dawn-Maiden.

Very kindly did the Dawn-Maiden receive Plunk, very kindly she set him on his way. She showed him a mill-wheel drifting on the sea towards the island, and the mermaids dancing in a ring around the wheel. Then she told him—always very kindly—how he must ask the mill-wheel politely to take him down to the Sea King and not let the Dark Deeps of the Sea swallow him.

Last of all the Dawn-Maiden said :

“Great store of gold and treasure will you enjoy in the Sea King’s domain. But mark—to earth you cannot return, for three terrible watchers bar the



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way. One troubles the waves, the second raises the storm, and the third wields the lightning.”

But Plunk was happy as a grig in his boat as he paddled towards the mill-wheel, and thought to himself :

“ It’s easy to see, fair Dawn-Maiden, that you’ve never known want in this world. I shan’t hanker back after this earth, where I’m leaving nothing but ill-luck behind ! ”

So he paddled up to the mill-wheel, where round the mill-wheel the mermaids were playing their foolish games. They dived and chased each other through the water ; their long hair floated on the waves, their silver fins glittered, and their red lips smiled. And they sat on the mill-wheel and made the sea all foamy around it.

The boat reached the mill-wheel, and Plunk did as the Dawn-Maiden had told him. He held his paddle aloft so that the Dark Deeps should not swallow him, and he politely asked the mill-wheel :

“ Round wheel giddy-go-round, please take me down, either to the Dead Dark Deep or to the Sea King’s Palace.”



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As Plunk said this, the mermaids came swishing along like so many silver fish, swarmed round the mill-wheel, seized the spokes in their snowy hands, and began to turn the wheel—swiftly, giddily.

An eddy formed in the sea—a fierce eddy, a terrible whirlpool. The whirlpool caught Plunk; it swept him round like a twig, and sucked him down to the Sea King's fastness.

Plunk's ears were still ringing with the swirl of the sea and the mermaids' silly laughter when he suddenly found himself sitting on beautiful sand—fine sand of pure gold.

Plunk looked round and cried out: "Ho, there's a wonder for you! A whole field of golden sand."

Now what Plunk had taken to be a big field was only the great Hall of the Sea King. Round the Hall stood the sea like a marble wall, and above the Hall hung the sea, like a glass dome. Down from the stone Gold-a-Fire streamed a bluish glare, livid and pale as moonlight. From the ceiling hung festoons of pearls, and on the floor below stood tables of coral.

And at the end—the far end, where slender pipes

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were piping and tiny bells tinkling—there lazed and lounged the Sea King himself; he stretched his limbs on the golden sand, raising only his great bullock's head, beside him a coral table, and behind him a golden hedge.

What with the quick, shrill music of the pipes, the tinkling of the bells, and the sheen and glimmer all around him, Plunk wouldn't have believed there could be so much pleasure or wealth in the world!

Plunk went clean mad for pure joy—joy went to his head like strong wine; his heart sang; he clapped his hands; he skipped about the golden sand like a frolicsome child; he turned head over heels once, twice, and again—just like a jolly boy.

Now this amused the Sea King vastly. For the Sea King's feet are heavy—far too heavy—and his great bullock's head is heavier still. The Sea King guffawed as he lounged on the golden sand; he laughed so heartily that the golden sand blew up all round him.

"You're fine and light on your feet, my boy," said the Sea King, and he reached up and pulled down a branch of pearls and gave it to Plunk. And

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then the Sea King ordered the Under Seas Fairies to bring choice viands and honeyed drink in golden vessels. And Plunk had leave to sit beside the Sea King at the coral table, and surely that was a great honour !

When Plunk had dined, the Sea King asked him :

“ Is there anything else you would like, my man ? ”

Now what should a poor man ask for, who had never known what it is to have a good time ? But Plunk was hungry from his long journey, and he had made but a poor meal of it off the choice viands and the honeyed drinks. So he said to the Sea King :

“ Just as you were saying that, O King of the Sea, I was wishing that I had a good helping of boiled wild spinach.”

The Sea King was rather surprised, but he recovered himself quickly, laughed and said to Plunk :

“ Eh, brother of mine, wild spinach is very dear down here, dearer than pearls and mother-o'-pearl, because it's a long way from here to the place where

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it grows. But since you have just asked for it, I will send a Foam Fairy to bring you some from the land where the wild spinach grows. But you must turn three more coach-wheels for me."

As Plunk was already in the best of humours he didn't find that hard either. Lightly he leapt to his feet, and quickly they all flocked round him, the mermaids and the tiny folk in the Palace, and all for to see that wonder!

Plunk took a run over the golden sand, turned a beautiful coach-wheel, then a second and a third, light as a squirrel, and the Sea King and all the tiny folk rocked with laughter at such cunning.

But heartiest of all laughed a little baby, and that was the little King whom the mermaids themselves had crowned King for fun and idle sport. The wee baby was sitting up in a golden cradle. His little shirt was of silk, the cradle was hung with tiny bells of pearl, and in his hands the child held a golden apple.

While Plunk was turning coach-wheels and the little King laughed so heartily, Plunk looked round at him. He looked at the little King, and then—

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Plunk started. It was his own baby boy, little Winpeace.

Well, Plunk was suddenly disgusted. He would never have guessed that he would grow sick of it so soon.

Plunk frowned; he was angry, and when he had got over his shock a bit he thought :

“Look at him, the urchin, how he’s got on, lording it here in idleness and sport, and his mother at home gone dumb with grieving !”

Plunk was vexed ; he hated seeing himself or the child in this Palace ; yet he dared not say a word, lest they should part him from the boy. So he made himself the servant of his son, of little Winpeace, and thought to himself : “Perhaps I shall be left alone with him sometimes. Then I will remind the boy of his Father and Mother ; I will run away with him ; I will carry off the little brat and go back with him to his mother.”

So thought Plunk, and one fine day, when he happened to be alone with the little King, he whispered to the child : “Come along, my boy ; let’s run away with father.”



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But Winpeace was only a baby, and what with living so long under the sea, he had quite forgotten his father. He laughed; the little King laughed. He thought: "Plunk is making fun," and he kicked Plunk with his little foot.

"You are not my father; you are the silly-billy who turns head over heels before the Sea King."

That stung Plunk to the heart, so that he well-nigh died with the pain of it. He went out and wept for sheer bitter sorrow. All the Sea King's attendants gathered round him and said one to the other:

"Well, well, he must have been a great lord on earth, to weep amid such splendours."

"Upon my soul," cried Plunk wrathfully, "I was the same as your Sea King here. I had a son who tugged my beard, a wife who showed me marvels, and wild spinach, brothers, as much as you want—and no need to turn coach-wheels before anybody either."

The sea-folk marvelled at such magnificence, and left Plunk to mourn his lost greatness. But Plunk went on serving the little King. He did all he could to please the boy, thinking: "I shall get him





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somehow to run away with me.” But the little King grew sillier and more wayward every day; the days passed, and every day the child only thought Plunk more than ever a zany.

## II

Now all this time Plunk’s wife was at home, all alone and grieving. The first evening she made up the fire and kept the supper hot for Plunk; but when she gave up expecting Plunk, she let the fire go out, nor did she kindle it again.

So the poor dumb soul sat on her threshold. She neither worked, nor tidied, nor wept, nor lamented, but just pined away with grief and sorrow. She could not take counsel with anyone, because she was dumb; nor could she cross the sea after Plunk, because she was all broken up with grieving.

Where could she go, poor soul! but back one day to the far hills, where her mother lay buried. And as she stood by her mother’s grave a beautiful Hind up came to her.

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And as the dumb animals speak, so the Hind spoke to the Woman :

“ You must not sit there and pine away, my daughter, for else your heart will break and your house will perish. But every evening you must get Plunk’s supper ready for him, and after supper you must unpick some fine hemp. If Plunk does not come home, then you must take his supper in the morning and the fine hemp as well, and also the slender twin pipes, and go up into the rocky mountain. Play upon the twin pipes ; the snakes and their young will come and eat up the supper, and the sea-fowl will line their nests with the hemp.”

Full well the daughter understood all that her mother said, and as she was bid so did she do. Every evening she cooked supper, and after supper she unpicked hemp. Plunk did not come back ; and so the Woman took her little twin pipes in the morning, and carried both supper and hemp to the rocky mountain. And as she played on her little pipes, played softly on the right-hand pipe, lo, snakes and baby snakes came out of the rocks. They ate up the supper and thanked the Woman in the

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dumb speech. And when she played on the left-hand pipe, lo, gulls great and small came flying, carried off the hemp to their nests, and thanked the Woman.

For three months the Woman went on in this way; thrice the moon waxed and waned, and still Plunk had not come home.

Again grief overcame the poor dumb soul, so that she went again to her mother's grave.

The Hind came up, and in dumb speech the Woman said to her :

"Well, Mother, I have done all you told me, and Plunk has not come back. I am weary of waiting. Shall I throw myself into the sea, or fling myself down from the cliffs?"

"Daughter of mine," said the Hind, "you must not fail in your trust. Your Plunk is in grievous trouble. Now listen and hear how you may help him. In the Unknown Sea there is a Big Bass, and that Bass has a golden fin, and on that fin grows a golden apple. If you catch that Bass by moonlight you will deliver your dear Plunk from his trouble. But on the road to the Unknown Sea you



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will have to pass three caverns of cloud. In the first there is a monstrous Snake, the Mother of All Snakes—it is she who troubles the sea and stirs up the waves ; in the second there is a monstrous Bird, the Mother of All Birds—it is she who raises the storm ; and in the third there is a Golden Bee—it is she who flashes and wields the lightning. Go, daughter dear, to the Unknown Sea, and take nothing with you but your bone hook and slender twin pipes, and if you should find yourself in great trouble, rip open your right-hand sleeve, all white and unhemmed.”

The daughter gave good heed. Next day she took out the boat and put off to sea, taking nothing with her but her hook and the slender twin pipes.

She drifted and sailed on the face of the sea till the waters bore her to a far-off place, and there on the sea, lo, three terrible caverns of lowering cloud !

From the entrance of the first cavern peered the head of a fearsome Snake, the Mother of All Snakes. Her grisly head blocked up all the entrance, her body lay coiled along the cave, and with her



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monstrous tail she lashed the sea, troubling the waters and stirring up the waves.

The Woman did not dare go near the terrible sight, but remembered her little pipes, and began to play upon the right-hand pipe. And as she played, there came from the far-off rock-bound lands snakes and baby snakes galore swimming over the sea. Great coloured snakes and tiny little snakes all came hurrying up and scurrying up and begged the fearsome Snake—

“Let the Woman take her boat through your cavern, Mother dear! She has done us a great good turn and fed us every day in the morning.”

“Through my cavern I may not let her pass,” answered the fearsome Snake, “for to-day I must stir up the waves of the sea. But if she did you such a good turn, I will repay it with another. Would she rather have a bar of gold or six strings of pearls?”

But a true wife is not to be beguiled with gold or pearls, and so the Woman answered in dumb speech :

“’Tis only for a small matter I have come here—

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for the Bass that lives in the Unknown Sea. If I have done you a good turn, let me pass through your cavern, fearsome Snake."

"Let her pass, Mother dear," said the snakes and baby snakes again. "Here are many of us whom she has fed—full many to whom she gave meat. You just lie down, Mother dear, and take a nap, and we'll stir up the waters for you."

Now the Snake couldn't very well disoblige such a big family, and she had been longing for sleep for a thousand years. So she let the Woman through the cavern, and then curled up on the floor of the cavern and fell into a fearsome sleep. But before she fell asleep she reminded the snakes and baby snakes once more :

"Now, stir me up the waters right properly, children dear, while I rest a little."

So the Woman passed through the cavern, and the snakes and their young stayed in the cavern; but instead of stirring up the sea they soothed it and made it calm.

The Woman sailed on, and came to the second cavern. And in the second cavern there was a

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monstrous Bird, the Mother of All Birds. She craned her frightful head through the opening, her iron beak gaped wide ; she spread her vast wings in the cavern and flapped them, and whenever she flapped her wings she raised a storm.



The Woman took up her twin pipes and sweetly played upon the left-hand pipe. And from the far shore came flying gulls great and small, and begged the monstrous bird to let the Woman pass with her boat through her cavern, for that she had been a

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good friend to them and unpicked hemp for them every day.

“I can’t let her pass through my cavern, for to-day I must raise a mighty storm. But if she was so kind to you, I will repay her with even greater kindness. From my iron beak I will give her of the Water of Life, so that the power of speech shall be restored to her.”

Well, and wasn’t it a sore temptation for the poor dumb creature who desired above all things that the power of speech should return to her? But she remained steadfast, and this is what she answered the Bird :

“ ’Tis not for my own good that I came, but for a small matter—for the Bass that lives in the Unknown Sea. If I have done you a good turn, let me pass through your cavern.”

Then the grey gulls all entreated the Mother Bird and also advised her to take a little nap, and they would meanwhile raise the storm for her. The Mother Bird listened to her children’s entreaty, clung to the wall of the cavern with her iron talons and went to sleep.

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But the gulls great and small, instead of raising the storm, calmed the wild winds and soothed them.

So the dumb Woman sailed through the second cavern and came to the third.

In the third cavern she found the Golden Bee. The Golden Bee buzzed in the entrance; she wielded the fiery lightning and the rolling thunder. Sea and cavern resounded; lightnings flashed from the clouds.

Fear seized upon the Woman when she found herself all alone with these terrors. But she remembered her right sleeve; she ripped it off, her sleeve all white and unhemmed, flung it over the Golden Bee and caught her in the sleeve!

The thunder and lightning were stilled at once, and the Golden Bee began to coax the Woman:

“Set me free, O Woman! and in return I will show you something. Look out over the wide waters, and it’s a joyful sight you will see.”

The Woman looked out over the wide waters. The sun was just on the horizon. The sky grew pink overhead; the sea grew crimson from the east, and from the sea arose a silver boat. And in the



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boat sat the Dawn-Maiden, pale and fair as a king's daughter, and beside her a little child in a silken shirt and with a golden apple in his hand. It was the Dawn-Maiden taking the little King for his morning sail on the sea.

The Woman recognised her lost baby.

Now isn't that a wonder of wonders, that the sea should be so wide that a mother cannot encompass it, and the sun so high that a mother should not be able to reach it?

Her joy took hold of her like terror. She trembled like the slender aspen. Should she stretch out her hand to the child? or call to him tenderly? or should she just stand and look at him for ever and ever?

The silver boat glided over the crimson sea. It faded away in the distance; the boat sank under the waves, and the mother roused herself with a start.

"I will show you," said the Golden Bee to the Woman, "how to get to the little King, your son, and live with him in joy and happiness. But first set me free, that I may wield the lightnings



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in the cavern—and through my cavern I cannot let you pass ! ”

A fierce pang overcame the poor mother, overwhelmed and shook her. She had seen her darling ; her eyes had beheld her heart's desire ; she had seen and beheld him, but not hugged him, not kissed him ! The pang shook her from head to foot. Should she be true to Plunk or no ? Should she let the Bee go and win to her child, or pass through the cavern to the Unknown Sea for the sake of the Big Bass ?

But even as the pang shot through the Woman, the tears gushed forth from her heart ; the power of speech returned to her, and 'twas in living words that she answered the Golden Bee :

“ Don't sting me, O Golden Bee ! I shall not let you go, because I must pass through your cavern. I have wept for my child and buried him in my heart. I have not come here for my own happiness, but for a small matter—for the Big Bass that lives in the Unknown Sea.”

Thus said the Woman, and passed into the cavern. She rested in the cavern ; she took her ease

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in the boat, and there she waited for nightfall and moonrise.

Eh, my dearie, but the sea was quiet that day, with the winds at rest in the sky, and the fearsome Snake asleep in the first cavern, and the monstrous Bird asleep in the second, and the wearied Woman in the third !

So the day went quietly by ; evening came, and the moon rose. When the moon rode high in the heavens, the Woman sailed out upon the Unknown Sea at midnight, and in the midst of the Sea she let down her little bone hook.

### III

That very evening the little King bade Plunk knit him a nice set of silken reins. "First thing to-morrow morning I shall harness you to my little carriage, and you shall give me a ride on the golden sands."

Dearie me, considered poor Plunk, and where was he to hide from the Dawn-Maiden when she

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would go down into the sea in the morning and behold him thus to-morrow harnessed to a cart by his own son?

All the Sea King's court slept. The Sea King slept. The wilful little King slept—only Plunk was awake and knitting away at the reins. He knitted fiercely, like one who is thinking hard. When it seemed to him that the strings were strong enough, Plunk said to himself :

“I never asked anyone's counsel when I was making a fool of myself, nor shall I do so now that I have come to my senses.”

And as he said this he went softly up to the cradle where his son lay fast asleep, wound the reins round and round the rockers of the cradle, lashed the cradle to his own back, and started to run away with his son.

Softly Plunk strode over the golden sand—strode through the mighty Hall, spacious as a wide meadow; slipped through the golden hedge, parting the branches of pearls; and when he came to where the sea stood up like a wall, nothing daunted, Plunk dived into the water with his boy.

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But it is far—terribly far—from the Sea King’s fastness to the world of day above! Plunk swam and swam; but how was a poor fisherman to swim when he was weighed down by the little King—golden cradle, golden apple and all—on his back?

Plunk felt as if the sea was piling itself up above him, higher and higher, and heavier and heavier!

And just as Plunk was at the last gasp, he felt something scrape along the golden cradle, something that caught in the rocker of the cradle; and when it had caught fast, it began to haul them along apace!

“Now it’s all up with me!” said poor Plunk to himself. “Here’s a sea-monster carrying me away on his tusk.”

But it wasn’t the tusk of a sea-monster; it was a bone fish-hook, the very hook that Plunk’s wife had let down.

When the Woman felt that her hook had caught, she joyfully summoned all her strength, pulling and hauling with all her might, for fear of losing the great Big Bass.

As she began to haul in her catch the golden

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rocker began to show above the water. The Woman could not distinguish it rightly by moonlight, but thought: "It is the golden fin of the Bass."

Next came up the child with the golden apple. Again the Woman thought: "It is the golden apple on the fish's fin." And when at last Plunk's head came up, the Woman cried out joyfully: "And here is the head of the great Big Bass."

And as she cried out she hauled in her catch, and when she had hauled it close alongside—why, dearie mine, how am I to tell you rightly how overjoyed were those three when they met again in the boat, all in the moonlight, in the middle of the Unknown Sea?

But they dare not lose any time. They had to pass through the three caverns ere the monstrous watchers should awaken. So they took out the oars and rowed with all their might and main.

But oh dear! the bad luck they had! When the little King awoke and saw his mummy, he remembered her at once. He threw both his little arms round his mummy's neck—and the golden apple fell out of his hand. Down fell the apple into



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the sea, down to the very bottom and into the Sea King's Castle, and hit the Sea King right on his shoulder !

The Sea King woke up, and bellowed with rage. All the court jumped to their feet. They saw at once that the little King and his servant were missing !

They gave chase. The mermaids swam out under the moonlight ; the light foam fairies flew out over the water ; runners were sent out to rouse the watchers in the caverns.

But the boat had already passed through the caverns, and so they had to pursue it farther on. Plunk and the Woman were rowing—rowing for dear life, their pursuers close in their wake. The mermaids whipped up the waters ; the swift foam fairies darted after the boat ; the angry waves rose up in wrath behind them ; the wind howled from the clouds. Nearer and nearer came the pursuers. The finest ship afloat would not have had a chance, and how could a tiny two-oared boat ? For hours and hours the boat flew on before the tempest, and just as the day began to break, lo, terror gathered from all sides around the boat.

# Fisherman Plunk and his Wife

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For the hurricane beat upon the boat; the crested billows towered above it; the mermaids joined in a ring around it. The ring heaved and swayed around the boat; the mermaids raised their linked hands high to let the mountainous waves pass through, but never let the little craft escape the waves. Sea and storm whistled and roared.

The fear of death was upon Plunk, and in his dire need he cried out :

“ Oh, fair Dawn-Maiden, help ! ”

The Dawn-Maiden arose from the sea. She saw Plunk, but never looked at him. She looked at the little King, but no gift had she for him; but to the faithful Wife she swiftly gave her gift—a brodered kerchief and a pin.

Quickly they hoisted the kerchief, and it became a white sail, and the pin turned into a rudder. The wind filled the sail, so that it bulged like a ripe apple, and the Woman gripped the rudder with a strong hand. The mermaids' ring round the boat was broken; the boat rode upon the azure sea like a star across the blue heavens ! A wonder of wonders, it flew over the sea before its terrible pursuers ;

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the fiercer the pursuit, the greater help it was to them; for the swifter the wind blew, the more swiftly yet flew the boat before the wind, and the swifter the sea, the more swiftly rode the boat upon the sea.

Already the rock-bound shore loomed afar, and upon the shore Plunk's little cottage and the bar of white sand before it.

As soon as the land hove in sight, the pursuit slackened. The foam fairies fear the shore; the mermaids keep away from the coast. Wind and waves stayed on the high seas, and only the boat flew straight ahead to land like a child to its mother's lap.

The boat flew to land over the white sand bar, and struck on a rock. The boat split on the rock. Down went sail and rudder; down went the golden cradle; away flew the Golden-winged Bee; and Plunk and his wife and child were left alone on the beach outside their cottage.

When they sat down that night to their supper of wild spinach, they had clean forgotten all that had happened. And but for those twin pipes, there's

# Fisherman Plunk and his Wife

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not a soul would remember it now. But whoever starts to play on the pipes, the fat pipe at once begins to drone out about Plunk :

Harum-scarum Plunk would go  
Where the pearls and corals grow ;  
There he found but grief and woe.

And then the little pipe reminds us of the Woman :

Rise, O Dawn, in loveliness !  
Here is new-born happiness ;  
Were it three times drown'd in ill,  
Faith and Love would save it still !

And that is the twin pipes' message to the wide,  
wide world.

