



The Ship of Dreams

# SUSAN and the MERMAID

Told and Pictured by Pamela Colman Smith

GRANDMAMA sat by the fire knitting. Outside the wind blew the yellow-beech leaves in clouds across the lawn, and the rain tapped on the window-panes. Susan sat on a hassock at Grandmama's knee.

It had rained since early morning and Susan had not been allowed out. She was tired of being indoors all day, not being able to visit her friends, the brown owl Diogenes, and the goldfish in the fountain. There was no one in the house to play with. Grandmama had read her all her favorite fairy stories.

"Did you ever see a fairy?" asked Susan suddenly. "I was thinking of them this morning at lessons, and did wish one would come out of the ink-pot."

"Yes, Susan, I remember seeing one when I was small. I was walking along a country road with my brothers and my cousin Matilda, and on the top of a high wall was a little man dressed in yellow leaves. I danced about and clapped my hands, calling to the others, but when they came running to look—he was gone! And once, by the seashore, I was sitting on a rock looking down into a little pool where there were starfish and crabs and tufts of red seaweed. The sand at the bot-

tom of the pool was golden, and from under some seaweed swam a tiny mermaid, with a tail like a fish. She was all green, with blue hair, and a string of red-coral beads round her neck. She was not longer than my finger. As she rose to the top of the water she held out her hand, and in it was a large pearl. She called out to me in a high, silvery voice: 'This is for you, O mortal, a gift from the sea!' And she gave me this pearl. It was made into a ring by a wise man with horn spectacles.

"I wonder if we can bring the little mermaid here for you to see! We must have a bowl of water. Run and ask Jenkins to give you that one with fish on it from the cupboard shelf. I had it for bread and milk when I was a little girl."

When Susan came back with the bowl, Grandmama was sitting in her great armchair, looking so wise in her tortoise-shell spectacles. Susan thought of the wise man who made the ring.

Grandmama took the bowl from Susan, and slipping the ring from her finger, she dropped it into the water. Susan leaned over the bowl, and as the ring touched the bottom the water clouded over, and turned green, and then blue, and then rose-color; little waves began to lap against the sides of the bowl, the water became clear once more, and in the place of the pearl a little mermaid was standing on the very tip of her tail, holding out her hand





The rude fish who stared

to herself, for she and the mermaid were both the same size. They swam along a great avenue of coral-trees. "Much easier than walking on land," said Susan. "I thought you would find it so," replied the mermaid

to Susan, who took it. There was chiming of silver bells, and the crash of waves, and sinking through the water and the bottom of the bowl Susan saw the wise face with horn spectacles growing dimmer and dimmer, and found herself swimming hand in hand with the green mermaid who had blue hair and a string of red beads round her neck.

"Has she grown large, or have I grown small?" thought Susan

So on they swam through the forests, and over fields of sand, and by pastures full of colts and sea-horses, over long bare tracts of rock, and came to a mountain covered with red seaweed bushes. Very like the hill behind Grandmama's house, Susan thought.

They swam up the side of the mountain and could see far-stretching valleys and hills and flat fields, and at last they came out of the water, and on the beach of a little island. They sat there awhile, and the mermaid said:

"This is a reef, Susan—you have no doubt read in your geography book how they are formed. It is the best place in the world to see a royal procession. It is never overcrowded, as the fish find the air too strong for them, so we mer-people have it to ourselves, but most of us are busy and have little time for sightseeing."

("I wonder what they are busy about," thought Susan.)

Just then they heard shouts of laughter and splashing, and three nice mer-children with their Governess and a pugfish emerged from the water. The pugfish saw Susan and began to bark angrily. The Governess cried: "Oh, Toby, you must not bark at the little girl!" But Toby only barked more and more.

"If you are not quiet," she went on, "I shall put you on the lead—you ought to know better!"

So Toby subsided. The mer-children were very smartly dressed: they had hats made of shells, and reefer jackets, and their fins neatly combed and brushed. They carried bunches of wild flowers from the coral fields.

From over the water came the sound of clanging bells.

"She is coming!" shouted the children.

They saw little tides rise in rows of waves, and between them came a pompous-looking officer on a dolphin followed by a troop of fishguards, with long plumes of spray in their mother-o'-pearl helmets.

"My father the Colonel," whispered the mermaid as they passed. Coming along the way lined with tides was a tall figure in a long spreading cloak, fringed with drops of crystal and pearls, and trimmed with foam. In her right hand she carried a jeweled scepter, and in her left a full moon, and on her head was a silver crown.

"Her Majesty, the Queen of Tides," whispered the mermaid as they all courtesied low.

When Susan raised her head again, the tides bowed and fell into the water head first, and a cloud of mist was speed-



The Queen of the Tides

politely. Fat fish with glowing eyes swam in and out between the tree-trunks.

"I fear you find the behavior of these common fish rather disconcerting. Please remember they have not the least education, and can not possibly know how rude it is to stare at strangers!"

So saying the mermaid drew Susan aside onto a coral branch. Down the waterway came a company of spearfish with a captain looking very smart, with waxed mustache and an eye-glass, his Highland bonnet much over his left ear.

"Going to meet her majesty," said the mermaid. "She has been on a visit to her sister, the Empress of the Underseas, and is returning with a large treasure from the tribes of the hidden valleys, deep down in the black water. Let us hurry to the reef—we may see her pass by there, the tides bowing before her, ringing their bells."

So they started swimming along the waterway. And the mermaid continued:

"The Queen sometimes rides in a polished shell coach, drawn by forty swift-swimming fish. She arranges all the storms and the fine weather. Storms are kept in strong boxes made of shell, and are carried with great care, and let loose at the top of the water. Fine weather is kept in bags of seaweed woven closely, and opened only when the order is given. Sun-rays caught in golden nets and wrapped in mist to keep them bright are put in the bags with the fine weather."



The Mer-children returning from the coral fields

ing gently away over the sea.

"That was very nice," said Susan.  
"I should like to know where she lives."  
"Her Majesty lives where a good monarch always should, in the midst of her people—the city of coral," said the mermaid in a reproving voice.

"We will go there now, if you think you can swim so far."

"I am not in the least tired, thank you," said Susan.

So bidding the mer-children and their Governess good-by, and patting the pugfish, who by this time was quite friendly, they slipped into the water on the other side of the island.

Down the hillside blue with anemones they swam. They passed an orchard of sea-apples and saw a poet sitting reading under a tree, and a garden where a mer-lady was picking gooseberries; until in the distance they saw the gleaming towers of the city, its domes and palaces and its waving turrets, twisted like tulip stems, full of windows with boxes of flowers and hanging gardens.

"No stairs, you know," remarked the mermaid. "You just swim in and out as you like. It saves a deal of trouble."

Susan thought it would be lovely if it would only rain very hard for days and days, and weeks and weeks, and months and months, and years and years! It might fill up all the country with water except the hill-tops, and then it would be so delightful to go to church on Sunday in the family shell coach, drawn by fat fish—only if it rained as hard as that, all the dates would be washed off the almanac and no one would know when it was Sunday.



In a garden near the royal palace they saw a mer-lady drying her hair, and three girls with a puss-fish. They saw the bank of ocean guarded by spearfish, and met a mer-lady taking a little mer-girl to a party, and a Duchess driving her own twenty-four-in-hand with a footman perched on the back of her dog-shell.

They swam aside to let a parcels-post shell go by, with a large, high-swimming, black sea-horse.

They went all over the city, and saw great galleries of pictures, and the national theater, and a large concert-hall with notes painted outside, that played themselves when you looked at them.

Suddenly it grew dark, and the mermaid hastily dragged Susan under an overhanging roof.

"That is a large giant fish going by. We must keep very still, so he will not hear us; they are stupid and dull-sighted, but they do eat us when they can."

He passed overhead without seeing them.

By this time it was really dark, and the starfish were being lighted by lamplighters.

"I shall have to



The Mer-lady taking the little girl to a party



The three girls and the puss-fish

"Give me your hand Grandmother," she called, and her voice sounded like the whisper in the heart of a shell.

"How can I? You are in Oceana," Grandmother laughed back.

"Do I have to stay? Will I grow into a mer-child?" Susan cried, and her tears made the water rise so, that she was almost drowned.

Then Grandmother bent her face to the ocean and said some magical words. Instantly the enchanted ring rose and anchored right where Susan tiptoed in her tears. She scrambled up and seated herself upon the pearl, holding fast to the rim as the ring shot up.

There was a great jolt and when Susan opened her eyes Grandmother was putting the ring on her finger.

"Grandmother, the ring obeyed you," Susan gasped.

"Were you ever in Oceana?" And Grandmother said: "Little girl, when we are very old or very young, we spend most of our time in Wonderland."



Lighting the starfish

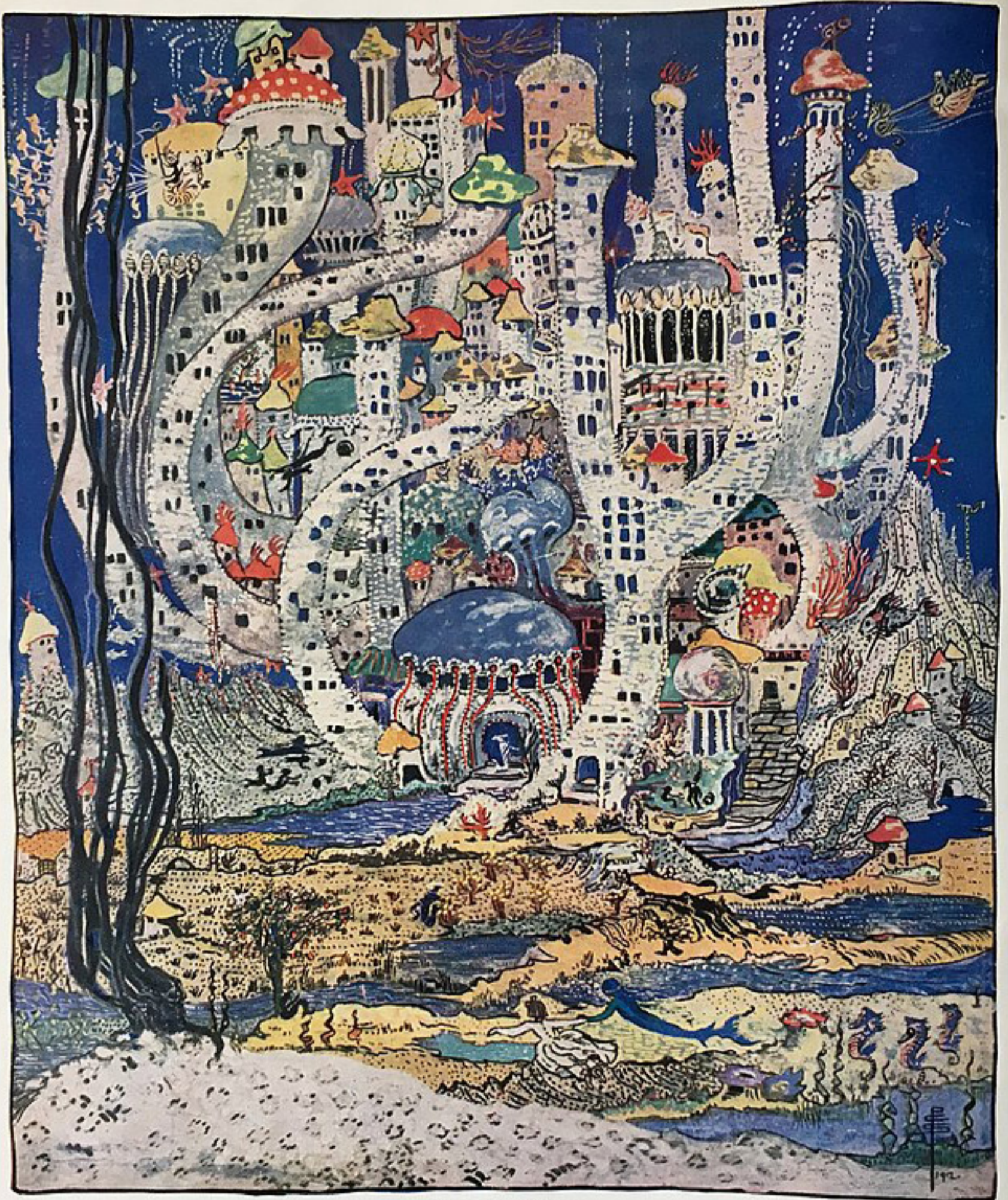
leave you now," said the mermaid. "Father will be wanting his dinner, and I am the only one at home; he so hates coming back to an empty house. Good-by; come again one day. So pleased to meet you, little Susan." And she turned on her tail and disappeared through a gaping door.

"How does she think I am to get home?" thought Susan. Just in front of her she saw two lights with black rims, that reminded her of Grandmama's tortoise-shell spectacles.

"I wonder where Grandmama is," she said as she rubbed her eyes.

"Here I am," said Grandmama, smiling wisely at Susan through her tortoise-shell spectacles.

But she seemed a great way off as if miles of blue sea separated them. Susan began to feel very queer.



The City of Coral

Key to the Pictures

