

**The Sea Fairies**

**By**

**L. Frank Baum**

THE oceans are big and broad. I believe two-thirds of the earth's surface is covered with water. What people inhabit this water has always been a subject of curiosity to the inhabitants of the land. Strange creatures come from the seas at times, and perhaps in the ocean depths are many, more strange than mortal eye has ever gazed upon.

This story is fanciful. In it the sea people talk and act much as we do, and the mermaids especially are not unlike the fairies with whom we have learned to be familiar. Yet they are real sea people, for all that, and with the exception of Zog the Magician they are all supposed to exist in the ocean's depths.

I am told that some very learned people deny that mermaids or sea-serpents have ever inhabited the oceans, but it would be very difficult for them to prove such an assertion unless they had lived under the water as Trot and Cap'n Bill did in this story.

I hope my readers who have so long followed Dorothy's adventures in the Land of Oz will be interested in Trot's equally strange experiences. The ocean has always appealed to me as a veritable wonderland, and this story has been suggested to me many times by my young correspondents in their letters. Indeed, a good many children have implored me to "write something about the mermaids," and I have willingly granted the request.

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L. FRANK BAUM.

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## CHAPTER 1 - TROT AND CAP'N BILL

"Nobody," said Cap'n Bill solemnly, "ever sawr a mermaid an' lived to tell the tale."

"Why not?" asked Trot, looking earnestly up into the old sailor's face.

They were seated on a bench built around a giant acacia tree that grew just at the edge of the bluff. Below them rolled the blue waves of the great Pacific. A little way behind them was the house, a neat frame cottage painted white and surrounded by huge eucalyptus and pepper trees. Still farther behind that--a quarter of a mile distant but built upon a bend of the coast--was the village, overlooking a pretty bay.

Cap'n Bill and Trot came often to this tree to sit and watch the ocean below them. The sailor man had one "meat leg" and one "hickory leg," and he often said the wooden one was the best of the two. Once Cap'n Bill had commanded and owned the "Anemone," a trading schooner that plied along the coast; and in those days Charlie Griffiths, who was Trot's father, had been the Captain's mate. But ever since Cap'n Bill's accident, when he lost his leg, Charlie Griffiths had been the captain of the little schooner while his old master lived peacefully ashore with the Griffiths family.

This was about the time Trot was born, and the old sailor became very fond of the baby girl. Her real name was Mayre, but when she grew big enough to walk, she took so many busy little steps every day that both her mother and Cap'n Bill nicknamed her "Trot," and so she was thereafter mostly called.

It was the old sailor who taught the child to love the sea, to love it almost as much as he and her father did, and these two, who represented the "beginning and the end of life," became firm friends and constant companions.

"Why hasn't anybody seen a mermaid and lived?" asked Trot again.

"'Cause mermaids is fairies, an' ain't meant to be seen by us mortal folk," replied Cap'n Bill.

"But if anyone happens to see 'em, what then, Cap'n?"

"Then," he answered, slowly wagging his head, "the mermaids give 'em a smile an' a wink, an' they dive into the water an' gets drowned."

"S'pose they knew how to swim, Cap'n Bill?"

"That don't make any difference, Trot. The mermaids live deep down, an' the poor mortals never come up again."

The little girl was thoughtful for a moment. "But why do folks dive in the water when the mermaids smile an' wink?" she asked.

"Mermaids," he said gravely, "is the most beautiful creatures in the world--or the water, either. You know what they're like, Trot, they's got a lovely lady's form down to the waist, an' then the other half of 'em's a fish, with green an' purple an' pink scales all down it."

"Have they got arms, Cap'n Bill?"

"Course, Trot; arms like any other lady. An' pretty faces that smile an' look mighty sweet an' fetchin'. Their hair is long an' soft an' silky, an' floats all around 'em in the water. When they comes up atop the waves, they wring the water out'n their hair and sing songs that go right to your heart. If anybody is unlucky enough to be 'round jes' then, the beauty o' them mermaids an' their sweet songs charm 'em like magic; so's they plunge into the waves to get to the mermaids. But the mermaids haven't any hearts, Trot, no more'n a fish has; so they laughs when the poor people drown an' don't care a fig. That's why I says, an' I says it true, that nobody never sawr a mermaid an' lived to tell the tale."

"Nobody?" asked Trot.

"Nobody a tall."

"Then how do you know, Cap'n Bill?" asked the little girl, looking up into his face with big, round eyes.

Cap'n Bill coughed. Then he tried to sneeze, to gain time. Then he took out his red cotton handkerchief and wiped his bald head with it, rubbing hard so as to make him think clearer. "Look, Trot; ain't that a brig out there?" he inquired, pointing to a sail far out in the sea.

"How does anybody know about mermaids if those who have seen them never lived to tell about them?" she asked again.

"Know what about 'em, Trot?"

"About their green and pink scales and pretty songs and wet hair."

"They don't know, I guess. But mermaids jes' natcherly has to be like that, or they wouldn't be mermaids."

She thought this over. "Somebody MUST have lived, Cap'n Bill," she declared positively. "Other fairies have been seen by mortals; why not mermaids?"

"P'raps they have, Trot, p'raps they have," he answered musingly. "I'm tellin' you as it was told to me, but I never stopped to inquire into the matter so close before. Seems like folks wouldn't know so much about mermaids if they hadn't seen 'em; an' yet accordin' to all accounts the victim is bound to get drowned."

"P'raps," suggested Trot softly, "someone found a fotygraph of one of 'em."

"That might o' been, Trot, that might o' been," answered Cap'n Bill.

A nice man was Cap'n Bill, and Trot knew he always liked to explain everything so she could fully understand it. The aged sailor was not a very tall man, and some people might have called him chubby, or even fat. He wore a blue sailor shirt with white anchors worked on the corners of the broad, square collar, and his blue trousers were very wide at the bottom. He always wore one trouser leg over his wooden limb and sometimes it would flutter in the wind like a flag because it was so wide and the wooden leg so slender. His rough kersey coat was a pea-jacket and came down to his waistline. In the big pockets of his jacket he kept a wonderful jackknife, and his pipe and tobacco, and many bits of string, and matches and keys and lots of other things. Whenever Cap'n Bill thrust a chubby hand into one of his pockets, Trot watched him with breathless interest, for she never knew what he was going to pull out.

The old sailor's face was brown as a berry. He had a fringe of hair around the back of his head and a fringe of whisker around the edge of his face, running from ear to ear and underneath his chin. His eyes were light blue and kind in expression. His nose was big and broad, and his few teeth were not strong enough to crack nuts with.

Trot liked Cap'n Bill and had a great deal of confidence in his wisdom, and a great admiration for his ability to make tops and whistles and toys with that marvelous jackknife of his. In the village were many boys and girls of her own age, but she never had as much fun playing with them as she had wandering by the sea accompanied by the old sailor and listening to his fascinating stories.

She knew all about the Flying Dutchman, and Davy Jones' Locker, and Captain Kidd, and how to harpoon a whale or dodge an iceberg or lasso a seal. Cap'n Bill had been everywhere in the world, almost, on his many voyages. He had been wrecked on desert islands like Robinson Crusoe and been attacked by cannibals, and had a host of other exciting adventures. So he was a delightful comrade for the little girl, and whatever Cap'n Bill knew Trot was sure to know in time.

"How do the mermaids live?" she asked. "Are they in caves, or just in the water like fishes, or how?"

"Can't say, Trot," he replied. "I've asked divers about that, but none of 'em ever run acrost a mermaid's nest yet, as I've heard of."

"If they're fairies," she said, "their homes must be very pretty."

"Mebbe so, Trot, but damp. They are sure to be damp, you know."

"I'd like to see a mermaid, Cap'n Bill," said the child earnestly.

"What, an' git drowneded?" he exclaimed.

"No, and live to tell the tale. If they're beautiful, and laughing, and sweet, there can't be much harm in them, I'm sure."

"Mermaids is mermaids," remarked Cap'n Bill in his most solemn voice. "It wouldn't do us any good to mix up with 'em, Trot."

"May-re! May-re!" called a voice from the house.

"Yes, Mamma!"

"You an' Cap'n Bill come in to supper."