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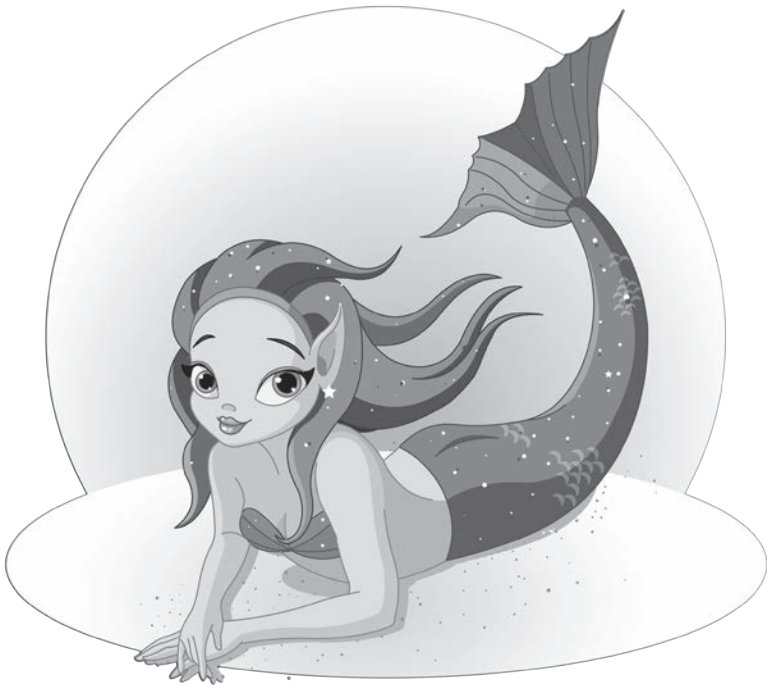
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN'S
**THE LITTLE
MERMAID**

Book by

ROSEMARY NURSEY-BRAY

Music by

ARTHUR HOLLE



THE LITTLE MERMAID

“Imaginative, engrossing adaptation. A wonderful play for children, filled with mystery and delightful characters.” (Evaluation in CTA A Distinguished Play Award judging)

Fantasy with optional music. Book by Rosemary Nursey-Bray. Music by Arthur Holle. Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen. Cast: 6m., 11w., extras. Sun-Through-Water, a beautiful mermaid, falls in love with a handsome human. Through a spell cast by the wicked Sea Witch, the Little Mermaid grows legs and feet—but what a terrible price she has to pay. This dramatization of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale offers enchanting technical effects; the director’s script gives detailed suggestions for staging them. Premiered by Hartley College of Advanced Education in Australia. A director’s script is available with costume plates, suggestions for constructing costumes, details of preparing the black-light scenes, and instructions for designing a set that will provide smooth-flowing scene changes without interrupting the action. This play is, as are all good fairy tales, about the conflict between good and evil. The second lesson to be learned from this story is that people must “flick with their own tail” or walk their own path. No one should choose another’s destiny, or force another to behave in a way that goes against the grain of his or her nature. For ages 6 and up. The video differs from script in various ways, but shows beautiful costumes, good artistry and other helpful features. *Approximate running time: 70+ minutes. Music score available. Video available. Code: LJ4.*

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The Little Mermaid

The Little Mermaid

Adapted as a Play for Children in 2 Acts

by

ROSEMARY NURSEY-BRAY

Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

'Stage Magic' Play

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(THE LITTLE MERMAID)

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To Annie

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Characters

KING OCEANUS, Monarch of the Seven Seas

His daughters, the Mermaid Princesses of the Sea People:

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS, the oldest

FOAM-OF-THE-SEA, sensitive and sensible

QUICK-AS-A-FISH, the boldest

SMOOTH-AS-A-WAVE, with a sense of humour

SPARKLE-OF-BREAKERS, imaginative, soft-hearted

SUN-THROUGH-WATER, the youngest—the “Little Mermaid”

JANAGGA, the Sea Witch, She of the Three Eyes

MOLLYMAWK, the Albatross, the familiar of Janagga

SIX SEA-URCHINS, servants of the Sea Witch

BOOBY, the Gannet, the clown of the play

KING DUNE, King of the Coasts and Lowlands

QUEEN DELL, Queen of the Coasts and Lowlands

PRINCE SEA-FARER, their elder son, a dreamer

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER, their younger son, a sportsman

KING CRAG, King of the Mountains and High Places

QUEEN ZENITH, Queen of the Mountains and High Places

PRINCESS LAUGHING-EYES, their daughter

COURTIERS

Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1: Under the Sea in the Palace of King Oceanus

Scene 2: The Mermaids’ Rocks in the Open Sea

Scene 3: The Island of the Temple

Scene 4: Under the Sea

Scene 5: (Optional Black-Light Theatre) The Black Deepes

Scene 6: The Lair of Janagga, the Sea Witch

ACT II

Scene 1: The Harbour near King Dune’s Castle

Scene 2: The Mermaids’ Rocks

Scene 3: The Hall in King Crag’s Castle

Scene 4: The Lair of Janagga, the Sea Witch

Scene 5: (Optional Black-Light Theatre) The Black Deepes

Scene 6: The Shore of the Land of Mountains and High Places

INTRODUCTION

I don't think anyone has yet staged "The Little Mermaid" as a play, although there was a tiny ballet fragment in the film entitled *Hans Christian Andersen*. I imagine this is because of the technical difficulty of making mermaids move on the stage. We found ways of turning this problem to theatrical advantage, and we share our secrets with you in the technical notes.*

The other reason I imagine is that the story as it stands has a melancholy atmosphere and is really savage in content; but all the old fairy-tales are quite brutal and yet they survive. This story frightened and horrified me as a child.

Why then did I decide to adapt it? My first reason was purely practical. I was looking for a play which could include some Black-Light Theatre, and "under-the-sea" scenes seemed ideal for this. The Black-Light episodes are optional, however, and may be omitted from your production. I consulted my children, asking them what stories they liked that had to do with the sea. They assured me that "The Little Mermaid" would be "fabulous"—if I could change the ending!

So, and my apologies to the purists, that is what I did. I hope the following script retains much of the fascination of the original. It is still a savage story, but the alternative ending is happy and comforting. The heartbreak, the terror, the sense of betrayal are still there and should be performed with genuine feeling, but these emotions are balanced by humour and a sense of warm completion at the end. It is sad to watch a company of actors performing to children playing down anything that might be disturbing and diluting real human emotion into something bland and trivial. This story *should* be strongly played, but the children brought to a safe harbour after the thrills of the journey.

The play is, as are all good fairy-tales, about the conflict between Good and Evil. And the second lesson to be learnt from this story is that everyone must "flick with their own tail" or walk their own path. No one should choose another's destiny, or force another to behave in a way that goes against the grain of his or her nature.

My thanks to my children, whose idea it was; to my husband for his support and constructive criticism; to my colleagues for the help they gave; and to the cast and crew of the original production for their hard work, their enthusiasm, and their contribution in developing the script.

I hope you enjoy it.

Rosemary Nursey-Bray

Magill, South Australia

*Most of the technical data are included in the Director's Production Script (prompt book) available for this play. Costume plates, suggestions for constructing costumes, details of preparing the Black-Light scenes, and instructions for designing a set that will provide smooth-flowing scene changes without interrupting the action are among the material included in the Director's Production Script. It is available from the publisher

PRODUCTION NOTES

Detailed technical information, based on the original production at Hartley College of Advanced Education, Magill, South Australia, is given in the Director's Production Script, available from the publisher. Basic information is given below.

Properties

ACT I, Scene 1

Three strips of blue or green taffeta to represent the sea ("waved" by the Urchins)

Treasure chest full of jewels and gold pieces, and a coronet for Sun-Through-Water

Scene 2

Cut-out profile of a small sailboat (see Director's Production Script for suggestions on making the boat and "wrecking" it in the storm)

6 shell mirrors, 6 jewelled tortoise-shell combs—the Mermaids

Telescope—Falcon-Tamer

Scene 3

Cut-out profile of a temple

Beach ball—Princess Laughing-Eyes

Scene 4

Armour for Sun-Through-Water (see Director's Production Script)

Scene 5

Large black cloth (optional)

Scene 6

Cauldron (may be a cut-out profile piece—see Director's Script)

Four shells, each including one of the Sea Witch's magic ingredients (see Director's Script)—brought on by the Urchins

Human thigh bone—Urchins

Small silver bell—Janagga

Clam shell—Janagga

ACT II, Scene 1

Cut-out profile pieces of sailing ships at anchor

Trawling net, coil of heavy rope, other wharf fixtures ad lib

Cut-out profile of the ship of state

Scene 2

Small jewelled knife—Light-of-the-Depths

Red carpet or cloth

3 banners—Courtiers

Large lace-edged handkerchief—Queen Zenith

Fishing net—Princes

Costumes

The basic costume of the Mermaids may be a leotard extending into the fish tail. The human characters may wear fanciful medieval costumes. The overall tone of the set and costumes should have a fairy-tale quality. Full details of costume, along with sketches, are included in the Director's Production Script.

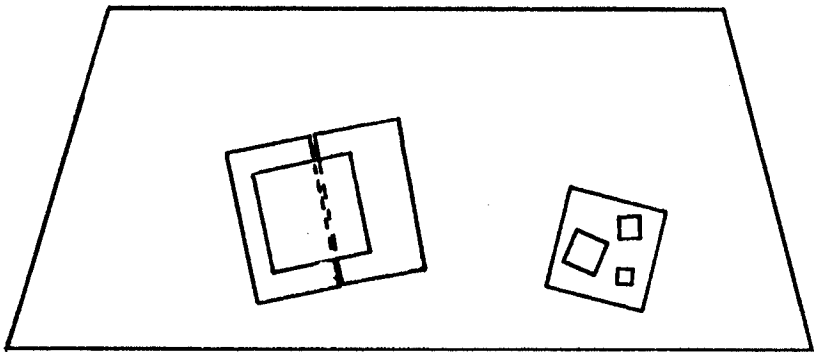
To enable the Mermaids to move, their costumes included two side fins level with the feet. The Mermaids put their feet into these side fins and so could walk with their legs apart; this got them from dressing room to wings. On stage, some of the Mermaids walked, bending the top half of their bodies and "swimming" with their arms. The lower half of their bodies was concealed by the strips of

"sea" rippled up and down by the Urchins. Some of the Mermaids used "skate boards." The actresses lay on these and "swam," pushing themselves along with their feet or hands. Once on stage they could slither up onto the rostra. See the Director's Production Script for details of the "skate board" and other movement of the Mermaids.

Lights, Music, and Special Effects

Lighting cues and suggestions for special lighting are given in the Director's Script. Also included in the Director's Script are treble-clef musical scores and other suggestions for music, and details on constructing and manipulating the puppets suggested for the Black-Light scenes.

The Set



Scale: 1/8"=1'

- 1—A stationary assemblage of platforms or risers, suggesting a small rock island in the sea. This "rostra" also serves other functions as indicated in the text.
- 2—A movable "rostra," more irregular than the stationary set

Other set pieces and decorations may be added, as indicated in the text, or at the director's discretion. See the Director's Script for further suggestions.

THE LITTLE MERMAID

ACT I

Scene 1

UNDER THE SEA IN THE PALACE OF KING OCEANUS

[The basic set: Two piles of rostra, platforms, or risers comprise the principal set pieces for this play. One pile is placed permanently at Right Centre stage and serves as rocks under the sea, the Mermaids' Rocks, a raised level in Janagga's lair, a quay-side, and the dais in King Crag's castle. The other pile of rostra is mounted on casters and may be moved as needed. For this scene, this pile is set at Down Left Centre (seaweed may be draped over the rocks).

A treasure chest with its lid open, full of jewels and gold, stands at Up Centre. (For other suggestions, including lighting details and notes about music, please see the Director's Production Script available for this play))

NARRATOR'S VOICE. Far out in the sea the water is as blue as the petals of the most beautiful cornflower, and as clear as the purest glass. But it is very deep; many church towers must be placed one above the other to reach from the sea-bed to the Surface of the water. And down there lives King Oceanus, Monarch of the Seven Seas, his daughters—the six Mermaid Princesses—and the rest of the Sea People. Now you must not think that they are like you and me, for they can breathe under the sea. Oh, yes! They have faces like you and me, and bodies, but with one important difference: they have no legs, for their bodies end in a fish tail.

[The lights go up during this speech and reveal KING OCEANUS and his daughters. The six MERMAIDS lie gracefully around. SUN-THROUGH-WATER (the "Little Mermaid") is close to her father]

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. Father, King Oceanus, Great King of the Seven Seas, today is the birthday of your youngest daughter, the Princess Sun-Through-Water. Today, according to our custom, she becomes grown up and is allowed to rise to the surface of the sea at the Mermaids' Rocks and see the great world of earth above.

KING OCEANUS. Yes, my little one is fifteen years old today! And so, Sun-Through-Water, have your sisters prepared you well for your first journey beyond our watery kingdom?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Oh, yes, Father! I have been longing for this day! Each time one of my sisters reached her fifteenth birthday, I wished it was mine, for I am longing to see the earth above, and all the strange creatures who dwell there!

KING OCEANUS. Tell us again, my oldest daughter, Light-of-the-Depths, what you saw the first time you rose to the Surface.

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. Father, I lay on a sand-bank in the moonlight. You will see, little sister, that the moon looks smaller on earth and smooth and round and silver; it keeps still; its light does not waver and break as it does when we see it from here, beneath the water. I floated in a quiet sea, and saw a large town where lights twinkled like a hundred stars.

KING OCEANUS. And you, my Foam-of-the-Sea?

FOAM-OF-THE-SEA. I rose just as the sun was setting. It looked like a red ball sinking into the sea, not purple as it does here. The whole sky looked like gold!

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Tell me again, what is the sky?

FOAM-OF-THE-SEA. It is the roof of their world above, as the Surface is the roof of our world. And as we have great whales and ships that pass over our heads and sometimes hide the sun, so in their sky are huge white clouds that sail in the wind!

KING OCEANUS. And what did you see, my daughter Quick-as-a-Fish, who is the strongest swimmer of us all—and the boldest of my daughters?

QUICK-AS-A-FISH. Oh, Father, I had such fun! I swam up a broad stream that poured its waters into the sea. I saw glorious green hills covered in vines, and palaces and castles and woods.

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. What is a wood?

QUICK-AS-A-FISH. It is a lot of trees growing together. Trees are like seaweed but with stiff trunks to hold them up. And in the trees were fish with very big fins, fins so big that they flapped them hard and swam through the air! And then they swam back to the trees and sang. *[She whistles like a bird]*

KING OCEANUS. *[Amused]* They are not fish—they are called birds! Did you see any, Smooth-as-a-Wave?

SMOOTH-AS-A-WAVE. I saw other creatures. I found a little bay where I floated and sang, and a crowd of pretty little humans came down to play. And sister, they have *no tails!* They have two ugly posts to support them!

KING OCEANUS. [*Amused*] They are called “legs” and there is a foot on the end of each one.

SMOOTH-AS-A-WAVE. They stamp about on these “legs” and . . . you’d be surprised! They move quite easily and quickly! And yet they can swim too, but without a tail.

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. How clever they must be!

SMOOTH-AS-A-WAVE. And then a great black hairy beast leapt into the water after me and I dived for the open sea. He made a very frightening noise—woof, woof, woof, woof!

KING OCEANUS. And you, my daughter, Sparkle-of-Breakers. Your birthday is in the winter. Did you see anything different?

SPARKLE-OF-BREAKERS. The sea looked quite green, and great icebergs floated about. They shone like diamonds. I sat on the greatest one of all and sang and let the wind play with my long hair. All the great ships tacked and tacked, and then the wind rose, and great dark clouds piled up in the sky, and the waves turned black, and I could see that the sailors were very afraid. I sang to them not to be frightened, and told them all how beautiful it is down here under the sea in our kingdom.

KING OCEANUS. You forget, my dear, that men cannot breathe here as we do. If they fall into the sea, they drown, and come to our court not as guests, but as dead men.

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. They hear us sing, and do not understand. They think it is the storm sighing, and the wind singing in the sails.

FOAM-OF-THE-SEA. Sometimes they catch a glimpse of us and think they have seen a dolphin!

KING OCEANUS. The earthlings are never quite sure if we exist or are only a legend! And you must be careful, for if you are ever caught by a human and taken far inland, you may find it hard to return to us!

QUICK-AS-A-FISH. That is why we always flick our tails and disappear when a human gets too close!

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. [*Affectionately puts her arm around her father’s neck*] I will sit on a rock and sing, and comb my hair in the wind, and dive for the Deeps if anyone comes too near!

KING OCEANUS. Mermaids are famous for their singing, and you have the most beautiful voice ever heard here under the sea. Men are drawn as if by magic to the sound of a mermaid’s song. That is why you must be careful. And I must warn you of something further. [*He swings around and stands up*] You must beware of Janagga—the Sea Witch,

She of the Three Eyes, for she hates us all and would do us harm if she could.

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. And now is the time of the spring tides when her power is at its greatest.

KING OCEANUS. Never go near her, and beware of Mollymawk the Albatross, that bird of ill-omen, for he is her familiar and spies on us all and tells her what we do. She hates men, too, and would work evil if she could. Take my warning to heart. And now make yourself beautiful for your journey! *[One of the MERMAIDS passes him a little coronet from the treasure chest. He puts it on the LITTLE MERMAID and they embrace. The lights dim to blackout while the SEA PEOPLE swim out and an URCHIN removes the treasure chest. (NOTE: Scene changes are designed to take place in full view of the audience so that the action of the play may be continuous)]*

Scene 2

THE MERMAIDS' ROCKS

[JANAGGA leaps onto the rostra Right. She is a real villainess, delighting in evil. She wears a green stone in the middle of her forehead, which looks like a third eye. Fat sea-snakes coil about her body]

JANAGGA. Come, my ugly ones. Come, my little Sea-Urchins. Where are you, my spiny little horrors, my prickly little pests? It is I, Janagga the Sea Witch, She of the Three Eyes, who calls you. Come, come, come, come, my little pussies. *[The SEA-URCHINS crawl in from all directions and surround her, reaching out for her]* Ah, here you are, my creatures. Stare into my third eye so that you will know who your mistress is. Look deep into the glowing green so that you will remember where my power lies. Bow low to your Queen! *[The URCHINS abase themselves]* Today is the day of the spring tides when both sun and moon pull with great force at the waves of all the oceans of the earth and raise them into mountains of water. Today my power is at its greatest, for I focus the energy of sun and moon through my third eye. Today I will do mischief! And you will all help me, won't you, you spiritless little servants! *[She raises her arms and calls]* Mollymawk, Mollymawk, my Albatross, my familiar, my beautiful bird of ill-omen! Mother calls you to help her on this day of evil! Mollymawk, Mollymawk! *[MOLLYMAWK flies in and perches high on the Left rostra]* Mollymawk. Do you know what day it is today?

MOLLYMAWK. It is the day of the spring tides. I have flown far and near over the seas to bring ill luck to all sailors. [*He flies across to her*]

JANAGGA. Bad boy! [*She pats him, pleased*] You read my mind. I have waited fifteen years for this day, for today is the fifteenth birthday of Sun-Through-Water, the youngest daughter of my enemy King Oceanus. Today she will rise to the Surface for the first time, here at the Mermaids' Rocks.

MOLLYMAWK. She will come within the range of your dark powers.

JANAGGA. And I will bring her evil, for she has the loveliest voice ever heard in this world, and I destroy all that is beautiful when I can.

MOLLYMAWK. [*Squawking with pleasure*] You will hurt her father too if you hurt her. He called her "Sun-Through-Water," for he hopes she will stay with him and keep him warm in his old age.

JANAGGA. [*She strides across downstage, followed by MOLLYMAWK*] He saves the treasures that sink to the bottom of the sea from the ships that I wreck.

MOLLYMAWK. He tries to still the storms that you create.

JANAGGA. He calms the waves to save drowning sailors.

MOLLYMAWK. He turns the minds of all the sea creatures to work against your will. [*The SEA-URCHINS have been creeping forward*]

JANAGGA. [*To the Urchins*] Get back, get back. Save up your stings. Wait for your orders. I have a plan. But we must work slowly, carefully. There is someone else I wish to harm. King Dune of the Lowlands also tries to hunt me out. He knows that I raise the winds that destroy his ships. His fishermen complain that I send creatures to overturn their boats when they fish along his coast.

MOLLYMAWK. He has a son, the Prince Sea-Farer, who loves the sea.

JANAGGA. He has two sons, the Prince Sea-Farer and the Prince Falcon-Tamer.

MOLLYMAWK. I hate *him* for he controls some of the birds of the air. They come at his call—as I come to you.

JANAGGA. He loves the land. I do not care about him. But Sea-Farer I will take. It is his birthday too, today. He is eighteen years old, and has a new sailing-ship. He will go out to sea to try its paces. He is a beautiful boy. The sea is as flat as a table now. I will conjure up a greater tempest than has ever been seen. His ship will be smashed to a thousand pieces, and he will drown in the midst of his joy!

MOLLYMAWK. And the storm will also injure the Little Mermaid!

JANAGGA. Yes, the breakers will punch and pound her. Urchins! Here are my orders. *[They make a circle around her, squatting down]* You will lurk under the waves to do what harm you can. You will prick and sting the sailors bravely swimming, and bring their bones to rest at the bottom of the sea! And then you will come back to my lair. *[JANAGGA runs back onto the rostra Right]*

MOLLYMAWK. And I will circle and hover and bring fear and terror to them. The sight of an Albatross makes a sailor lose heart. He knows I bring bad fortune. He knows he is doomed to a watery death. *[He flies back to the Left rostra]*

JANAGGA. I will stay my hand until evening, for the mermaid will rise when the afternoon cools. And then we will unleash all the furies of wind and weather to crush them both!

[They exultantly disappear. Each URCHIN takes one end of a strip of cloth representing the sea and gently ripples it. The MERMAIDS rise through the "waves." They sit on the rocks Right. The URCHINS remain quite motionless, lurking under the sea]

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. Here we are, little sister. Look about you. Isn't it lovely?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. It is so bright I can hardly see! The air is full of light! The sun is so hot, and my body feels so . . . so . . .

ALL THE MERMAIDS. Dry! *[They all laugh]*

FOAM-OF-THE-SEA. Now you understand what that word means!

THE MERMAIDS. *[Singing and combing their hair]*

1. How we love to sit upon the Mermaids' Rocks
In the sun and wind, combing out our locks.
Seamen come sailing by,
Think they hear the sea-wind sigh.
2. On the Surface here we play and laugh and sing,
O'er the breakers you can hear our voices ring.
Fishermen trawl their nets,
Listen and their cares forget.

[Interlude]

When seas are high
And danger's nigh,
We sing to all the sailors.

The waves we'll calm,
 There'll be no harm,
 Ride out the storm,
 We'll give you shelter.

[Repeat Verse 1]

LIGHT-OF-THE-DEPTHS. And now, we must leave you to have your own adventures. Take care! Farewell!

OTHER MERMAIDS. Farewell! *[They disappear]*

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Now I am alone. What shall I do? Shall I swim on and explore somewhere else? *[She looks about her]* Here comes a strange fish swimming through the sky. Perhaps it is a bird that my sisters told me about! What great big fins he has! *[In flies BOOBY, the Gannet, and does a funny dance, stumbling over things]*

BOOBY. Hello, little mermaid. Who are you?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. I am Sun-Through-Water, the youngest daughter of King Oceanus. And who are you?

BOOBY. I am Booby, the Gannet. How do you do? Would you care to shake wings with me? Or fins . . . or whatever it is that you shake. *[She shakes his wing-tip and feels his feathers]*

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Delighted! What strange scales you have!

BOOBY. Scales! I'm not a fish—I'm a bird. These are feathers, not scales! You must be very new to the world. I haven't seen you around before. Have you risen for the first time?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Yes—this is my first visit to the Surface.

BOOBY. Then it must be your fifteenth birthday. Happy birthday!

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Thank you!

BOOBY. Well, I will look after you, since this is the first time. Not that I'm much use, of course, being a bird of very little brain. That's why they call me Booby, you know. My wits don't exactly sparkle.

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. I wondered why you had such an unusual name!

BOOBY. I'm rather stupid actually. I can only think of one thing at a time—usually fish—oh, I beg your pardon—and when I'm concentrating on that one thing I blunder into things *[he falls over a rock]* and don't notice what's going on around me! *[He blunders back and falls over another rock]* You see what I mean?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Of course I do!

BOOBY. Last week I was sitting on the bow of a boat just looking

at the water and waiting to plunge down and catch—sorry—you know what . . . well, I was very hungry—when a sailor sneaked up behind me and caught me in a fishing net. [*He demonstrates and falls over*]

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Well, he set you free!

BOOBY. Yes, I was very lucky. He even gave me a few tid-bits of . . . oh, dear . . . you know what. It's no good. I've got to get this straight. *I eat fish*. Are you offended? Are they your aunties or uncles or anything? I mean, will you still be my friend?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. [*Laughing*] I would love to be your friend!

BOOBY. Oh, good. So it's your birthday. Do you remember being born?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. No, of course not.

BOOBY. I do. Were you in an egg?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. In an egg? No, I think I was born alive, only very, very small.

BOOBY. Oh, I remember it well. I was in an egg. It's the best way of being born. Everything looked pale blue, and was very warm. I just curled up in there. My mum and dad kept me warm with their feet, you know.

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Their feet?

BOOBY. Yes, gannets have very warm feet. Feel. [*The MERMAID holds a foot*]

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Oh, they're lovely and hot!

BOOBY. Yes, aren't they? Now look, any time you feel the cold, just give a shout and I'll dive down and put my feet on you. All right?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Thank you. How did you get out of your egg?

BOOBY. Well, one day I suddenly felt very cramped— [*He acts all this out*] You know—squashed up in there, and I really got angry and banged my beak on my shell, peck, peck, peck, and I made a hole! Then I wriggled around a bit and suddenly—crack—the whole shell split open and I was born. [*He leaps to his feet*]

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. And did you like it?

BOOBY. No! It was terrible! Everything was so cold—and big! Of course, then I didn't know what the bigness was for.

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. What is it for?

BOOBY. To fly about in, of course! You see, when I was born I didn't have any feathers, so I didn't know what wings were for! But,

of course, that's what life's about—flying! [*He flies onto the Left rostra*]
SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Well, for me life is about swimming!

BOOBY. Well, of course, it would be—for you! Aren't I silly! Have you met any humans yet?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. Not yet.

BOOBY. Well, you be careful when you do. They only have legs, so they can only move about on earth, on the flat. They can't soar up into the air as I can, or dive deep into the depths as you can. They're very jealous. One day they say they'll learn how to fly up into the sky, and travel down under the sea. They'll never do it, of course! [*Looks out over the water*] Oh, dear, a ship is coming to disturb our nice chat. You'd better duck down on the other side of this rock so they can't see you! Oh, it's Prince Sea-Farer. He's a very nice fellow. He's trying out his new boat. It's his birthday too. There he is with his brother, Prince Falcon-Tamer. Here they come! [*The ship comes in upstage behind the rock. The URCHINS gently ripple the sea. BOOBY puts his wings over the Mermaid on the rostra Right*]

PRINCE SEA-FARER. Steady, steady as she goes. Gently, now, gently. Let us beach the boat here. Drop anchor! [*They let down the anchor. The URCHINS let the sea lie flat*]

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. Let us go ashore, Sea-Farer. I want to stretch my legs. You know boats are like cages to me!

PRINCE SEA-FARER. You would rather be on a horse galloping over the Lowlands, your falcon on your wrist!

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. Of course! [*He jumps ashore on the Right rostra. He carries an old-fashioned telescope. The MERMAID on the other side keeps her head down*] Ah, that's better. Firm land beneath my feet. I never have developed sea legs! I think you're more comfortable on a ship tossing about than you are on Mother Earth. Come on, come and join me! [*PRINCE SEA-FARER jumps on land*] Well, are you pleased with your new boat?

PRINCE SEA-FARER. She is like a dream. She handles so smoothly, and she glides through the water like a mermaid.

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. I'm glad! And here we are. These are your famous Mermaids' Rocks. We've found the place! [*He jumps over to the Left rostra*]

PRINCE SEA-FARER. Yes, here it is!

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. You were clever to find two such small islands. They looked like two dots on the map!

PRINCE SEA-FARER. I am a skillful sailor! *[He jumps across to join Falcon-Tamer]* Don't laugh at me, but I felt drawn to sail here, as if something, or someone was waiting for me. As if I was meant to make this journey on my birthday.

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. Well, here we are. But where are the mermaids? There's only old Booby the Gannet, sitting there, looking as stupid as usual. *[Calls]* Hello, Booby! *[BOOBY squawks back]* You told me that the legends say that mermaids rise and sit here and sing and comb their hair in the wind, but where are they?

PRINCE SEA-FARER. We must wait. Have patience, brother. *[They sit and wait]*

BOOBY. There they are. Humans, I mean. Well, two specimens anyway. Both male. Females have a different shape. What do you think of them?

SUN-THROUGH-WATER. *[Entranced]* They're quite beautiful, especially the one with the soft brown hair. I think legs are wonderful things.

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. *[To Sea-Farer]* You don't really believe in them, do you? In mermaids, I mean. It's just a story. Like unicorns.

PRINCE SEA-FARER. I believe in them!

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. Sailors who swear they have seen mermaids find out later that they were frolicking fish, not sea people at all!

PRINCE SEA-FARER. *[Calling]* Booby, come here! *[BOOBY doesn't want to]* Please! I want to ask you something!

BOOBY. *[To Mermaid]* Excuse me, please. *[BOOBY reluctantly flies across]*

PRINCE SEA-FARER. Now, Booby, tell me. Have you ever seen a mermaid? *[BOOBY glances over his shoulder towards the Mermaid]*

BOOBY. Perhaps.

PRINCE SEA-FARER. No, that won't do. I want a straight answer, yes or no.

PRINCE FALCON-TAMER. That bird's so stupid he couldn't answer a straight question! Now if he were a falcon . . .

BOOBY. A falcon? What an insult. I'm getting angry. Me stupid! You're the stupid one! You never use your eyes when you're at sea! Of course there are mermaids! And mermen. Thousands of them! Oh, why can't I keep my big beak shut! *[He realizes he has said too much and goes sheepishly back to the Mermaid and puts his head under his wing]*