

Ripple, The Water Spirit



By Louisa May Alcott

Adapted by Anna Suarez for LibraryCall.

To listen call:

In the deep blue sea lived Ripple, a Water-Spirit. All day long she danced beneath the coral arches, made garlands of bright ocean flowers, or floated on the great waves that sparkled in the sunlight.

One day, when a fearful storm raged far and wide, a child came floating to their home with their eyes closed like they were fast asleep.

The Spirits let the child rest upon a bed of flowers while singing lullabies till the storm had died away, and all was still again.

While Ripple found the mother of the child crying. The waves dashed, foaming up among the bare rocks at her feet.

When Ripple saw the mother's grief, she longed to comfort her. The Spirit told her how her child lay softly sleeping.

"Dear Spirit, can you use a charm or spell to make the waves bring back my child, full of life and strength?"

"I will gladly help you if I can. I will search both earth and sea. If I do not come again, then you will know my search has failed. You will see your child again, if Fairy power can win him back. Goodbye."

Ripple then sprang into the sea.

When Ripple reached her home, she went to the palace of the Queen, and told her of the child, the saddened mother, and the promise she made.

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“Dear Ripple,” said the Queen, “your promise cannot be kept; there is no power below the sea to work this charm, and you can never reach the Fire-Spirits’ home, to win from them a flame to warm the little body into life.”

“Dear Queen! if you had seen her crying, you too would seek to keep the promise I have made. Tell me the path, and let me go.”

“It is far, far away, above the sun, where no Spirit ever dared to venture yet,” replied the Queen. “Dear Ripple, do not go, you can never reach that distant place. Stay here with us in your own pleasant home.”

Ripple would not break the promise she had made. She said farewell, and floated away.

She journeyed through the pathless ocean, with only the sea-birds who went sweeping by.

The warm winds whispered Spring is on her way.

“I will ask Spring where the Fire-Spirits live; she travels over the earth each year, and surely can show me the way,” thought Ripple.

Soon she saw Spring smiling over the earth; with her white garments covered with flowers, with wreaths in her hair, and dew-drops and seeds falling fast from her hands.

“Dear Spring, will you listen, and help me search far and wide for the Spirits’ home?” asked Ripple.

“The Fire-Spirits’ home is far, far away, and I cannot guide you there; but Summer is coming behind me,” said Spring, “and she may know better than I. I will give you a breeze to help you on your way. Farewell, dear Spirit!”

“Thank you, kind Spring!” exclaimed Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze.

Spring flew on with her sunshine and flowers, and Ripple traveled over the hill, till she came to the land where Summer was dwelling.

“Now I must find Summer,” said Ripple, as she sailed slowly through the sunny sky.

“I am here, how can I help you, Spirit?” said a musical voice in her ear; and, floating by her side, she saw a graceful form, with green robes fluttering in the air.

Then Ripple told her tale, and asked where she should go; but Summer answered, “I can tell no more than my young sister Spring where you may find the Spirits. I will give you a gift to help you. Take this sunbeam from my crown; it will cheer and brighten the darkest path. Farewell!”

Summer, giving her the sunbeam, passed over the distant hills.

Ripple continued till the earth below her was shining with yellow harvests waving in the sun, and the air was filled with cheerful voices. When Ripple found Autumn, she came to her, and asked for help. Autumn could not tell her where to go, but she gave her a yellow leaf.

“Ask Winter, Ripple, when you come to his cold home; he knows the Fire-Spirits. Perhaps he can tell you where they are. So take this gift of mine. I will comfort the kind mother, as my sisters have already done, and tell her you have not given up.”

Then on went the never-tiring Breeze, over forest, hill, she moved forward, till Winter, riding on the strong North-Wind, came rushing by, with a sparkling ice-crown in his streaming hair, while from beneath his crimson cloak.

“How may I help you, Spirit? Do not fear me. I am warm at heart.” said Winter, looking kindly on her.

When Ripple told him why she had come, he pointed upward, where the sunlight dimly peaked through the heavy clouds, saying,—

“Far off there, beside the sun, is the Fire-Spirits’ home; and the only path is up, through cloud and mist. Adieu, Ripple! May good angels guide you! Take this snow-flake that will never melt, as my gift,” Winter said.

As Ripple continued her journey, the cold vapors vanished from her path, and the sun was shining.

“The Fire-Spirits surely must be there, and I must stay no longer here,” said Ripple. So steadily she floated on, till she saw the bright path that led up to a golden arch.

Through the red mist that floated all around her, she could see high walls of changing light, where orange, blue, and violet flames frickled. Spirits glided, wearing crowns of fire, beneath which flashed their wild, bright eyes.

Ripple approached the spirits. “Take me to your Queen, so that I may tell her why I am here, and ask for what I seek.”

Through long halls of many-colored fire, they led her to the Queen Fire Spirit.

“This is our Queen,” the Spirits said, bending low before her, as she turned her gleaming eyes upon the stranger they had brought.

Ripple told how she had journeyed far in search of them and how the Seasons had most kindly helped her. She had come at last to ask of them the magic flame that could give life to the child again.

When she had told her tale, the spirits whispered earnestly among themselves and the Fire-Queen said aloud, “We cannot give the flame you ask, but any other gift we will most gladly give, because we feel sympathy for you.”

Ripple wept sadly, and begged them not to send her back without the gift she had come so far to gain.

“If you will give me bright, sparkling stones, I will grant you a part of my own flame.”

“I have fair gems in my home below the sea; and I will bring all I can gather, if you will grant my prayer, and give me what I seek,” she said.

“You must bring us each a jewel and we will each give you fire.”

Ripple agreed, though she did not know if she could find the jewels. Though she was worried she could not complete the task, she did not give up.

The fire spirits finally said farewell.

Ripple floated back to her pleasant home; where the Spirits gathered joyfully about her, listening with tears and smiles, as she showed the crystal vase that she had brought.

Ripple then placed the flame upon the child’s heart, and watched it gleam and sparkle, while light came slowly back into the once dim eyes.

Ripple joyfully sang, with her sister Spirits.

“Now come with us, dear child,” said Ripple. So up they went through the sea to find the child’s mother. They found her smiling as she saw dear child.

“See, dear mother, I am here,” said the child.

“Oh faithful little Spirit! I would gladly give some precious gift to show my gratitude for this kind deed; Please accept this chain of little pearls. They are the tears I shed, and the sea transformed them into beautiful pearls” the happy mother said.

“Yes, I will gladly wear your gift, and look upon it as my most precious piece of jewelry,” the Water-Spirit said.

Her promise to the Fire-Spirits must be kept. So far and wide she searched among the caverns of the sea, and gathered all the brightest jewels shining there.

The Spirits gladly welcomed her, and led her to the Queen, before whom she poured out the sparkling gems she had gathered, but when the Spirits tried to form them into crowns, they melted in their hands like colored drops of dew.

The Spirits saw Ripple’s pearl chain, shining with a clear, soft light that glowed more brightly when they laid their hands upon it.

“O give us this!” they cried, “it is far lovelier than all the rest, and does not melt away. If we can have this, all will be well, and you will be free.”

Ripple gladly gave the chain to them; and told them how the pearls were formed of tears. The Spirits smiled.

“Thank you, friendly Spirits, for your care,” Ripple said as she began her journey home.

Down along the shining pathway spread before her, the happy little Spirit glided to the sea.