

Mary Howitt (1799-1888)

8 *The Voyage with the Nautilus*

I made myself a little boat,  
As trim as trim could be;  
I made it of a great pearl shell  
Found in the Indian Sea.

I made my masts of wild sea-rush 5  
That grew on a secret shore,  
And the scarlet plume of the halcyon  
Was the pleasant flag I bore.

For my sails I took the butterfly's wings;  
For my ropes the spider's line; 10  
And that mariner old, the Nautilus,  
To steer me over the brine.

For he had sailed six thousand years,  
And knew each isle and bay;  
And I thought that we, in my little boat, 15  
Could merrily steer away.

The stores I took were plentiful:  
The dew as it sweetly fell;  
And the honey that was hoarded up  
In the wild bee's summer cell. 20

"Now steer away, thou helmsman good,  
Over the waters free;  
To the charm'd Isle of the Seven Kings,  
That lies in the midmost sea."

He spread the sail, he took the helm; 25  
And, long ere ever I wist,  
We had sailed a league, we had reached the isle  
That lay in the golden mist.



And I saw a laugh in his fishy eye,  
As he turned it up to me.

So on we went; but soon I heard 65  
A sound as when winds blow,  
And waters wild are tumbled down  
Into a gulf below.

And on and on flew the little bark,  
As a fiend her course did urge; 70  
And I saw, in a moment, we must hang  
Upon the ocean's verge.

I snatched down the sails, I snapped the ropes,  
I broke the masts in twain;  
But on flew the bark and 'gainst the rocks, 75  
Like a living thing did strain.

"Thou'st steered us wrong, thou helmsman vile!"  
Said I to the Nautilus bold;  
"We shall down the gulf; we 're dead men both!  
Dost know the course we hold?" 80

I seized the helm with a sudden jerk,  
And we wheeled round like a bird;  
But I saw the Gulf of Eternity,  
And the tideless waves I heard.

"Good master," said the Nautilus, 85  
"I thought you might desire  
To have some wondrous thing to tell  
Beside your mother's fire.

"What's sailing on a summer sea?  
As well sail on a pool; 90  
Oh, but I know a thousand things  
That are wild and beautiful!

"And if you wish to see them now,  
You 've but to say the word."  
"Have done!" said I to the Nautilus, 95

“Or I ’ll throw thee overboard.

“Have done!” said I, “thou mariner old,  
And steer me back to land.”

No other word spake the Nautilus,  
But took the helm in hand. 100

I looked up to the lady moon,  
She was like a glow-worm’s spark;  
And never a star shone down to us  
Through the sky so high and dark.

We had no mast, we had no ropes, 105  
And every sail was rent;  
And the stores I brought from the charmèd isle  
In the seven days’ sail were spent.

But the Nautilus was a patient thing,  
And steered with all his might 110  
On the up-hill sea; and he never slept,  
But kept the course aright.

And for thrice seven nights we sailed and sailed;  
At length I saw the bay  
Where I built my ship, and my mother’s house 115  
’Mid the green hills where it lay.

“Farewell!” said I to the Nautilus,  
And leaped upon the shore;  
“Thou art a skilful mariner,  
But I ’ll sail with thee no more!” 120

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