

## Salt fairy tales

Here are some of the interesting fairy tales about salt that illustrate its bond to our cultural lives.

### **The Pearl Princess** A Fairy Tale of the Value of Salt

Once upon a time, there lived a woman on the top of a mountain that lived in a cottage and had geese. In the large nearby forest, she would pick grass for the geese and fruit to carry home. One morning, a handsome young count came into her presence. He asked if she had no one to help her carry her things. She told him that she was poor and had no one to help her and asked if he would be so kind since he was strong and tall. He agreed but soon he was groaning under the weight. "These are so heavy, can we rest," he asked? "No. Go on a bit more," she coaxed. " He tried and tried to take the bundle from his back and found he could not. He began to think she was a witch. As if she could read his thoughts, she tried to console him by saying: "Don't get angry. I will give you a present when we get to my home."

Soon they arrived at her little cottage. It was a bit run down though neat and tidy. There was another woman there who asked: "Kind mother, you have stayed away for so long. You were missed." "I met with this kind gentleman, who carried my burden," replied the old woman as she took the bundles from the Count. "Sir, you may rest upon the bench. And you, little one, go inside the house lest he fall in love with you." The Count was somewhat surprised at the old woman's comment. The girl was homely and old looking and he thought love was an impossibility unless she was considerably younger.

The Count fell asleep. When he awakened the old woman was there ready to give him his reward for his kindness of carrying her bundles. She placed an emerald green box in his hand and admonished him to take good care of it. He put the unopened box into his pocket and left. He was unable to find his way out of the forest even though he had been able to before. Finally, after three days, he came to a large town. He was greeted by a guard that was instructed to take all strangers to the King and Queen.

He respectfully explained his situation: "Your Majesties, I am a Count. I have lost my way." The King asked, "How can you prove what you say?" The Count began to search his pockets and found the emerald box and presented it to the Queen. Upon opening it she gasped in surprise and fainted. The guards seized the Count and the King helped the Queen. As the Count was being taken away she awoke and asked that he be released for she wished to talk to him.... alone.

Once alone the Queen began her sad tale. "I have three daughters. The youngest was rare and wonderful. When she cried, pearls fell from her eyes instead of tears. One day, their Father, the King, decided to divide his kingdom so he called our daughters before us. " He said: "All of you love me. But she who loves me best will receive the greatest part of the kingdom." The Queen continued. "Each child giggled and said that she loved her father best but was asked to tell how much. "The first daughter said that she loved her father as much as the sweetest sugar. The second daughter said that she loved him as much as her prettiest dress. Our youngest was quiet. The King asked her...."How much do you love me." She replied, "I know not what to compare my love to, Father." He encouraged her and asked her to think again. "I do not like even the best food without salt. Therefore, I love my father like salt." He became angry not understanding the compliment she had given him for salt is worth more than gold sometimes. "Like common salt," he raged! He had the kingdom divided between the two oldest daughters and placed a sack of salt upon her back and she was lead into the forest by two guards. I begged him not to but he wouldn't change his mind. I wept. She also wept and the road to the forest was strewn with the pearls from her eyes. After a few days, the King regretted his behavior and the soldiers were sent into the woods to find her. They could not. We have wept since." And so ended the Queen's sad tale.

"When I opened the emerald box, I saw the pearl that my daughter used to cry. Where did you get it" the Queen implored? "In the forest, I met an old woman and carried some bundles to her home. I didn't see a beautiful princess." When the King was told of this, the three of them returned to the forest to look for the old woman.

She was in her cottage spinning with the homely child beside her. An owl came to the window and the old woman said, "It's time to go to the well." Off she went deeper and deeper in to the forest. She brought up a bucket of well water and began to wash her face. As she did so, the homely mask soon came off and in the moonlight you could see she was the beautiful princess.

Meanwhile, the Count had strayed from the King and Queen and climbed a tree to find them. But what he did see was the girl, a beautiful girl. He edged out further on the branch to secure a better look but the tree limb creaked. The girl heard the noise and placed on her mask as she ran from the well. He recognized her as the goose girl from the old woman's cottage. He climbed down the tree as quickly as possible but the fair maiden had disappeared.

He found the King and Queen and said, "I think I have just seen your daughter. She probably went down this path." The three went hurriedly down the path and came upon the old woman's house. They peered in the window and saw the old woman alone at her spinning wheel. They knocked softly and heard her response: "Enter. I was expecting you." They asked the old woman if she knew of her daughter, the Princess. The old woman rose from her stool and pointed a finger to the King and said, "Three years ago, you unjustly drove her away. She who was good, kind and pure as salt! She put out her hand, which was filled with salt and asked, "do you know the value of salt and therefore the love your child has for you?"

The King expressed his sorrow and beseeched the old woman to show him his daughter. A door opened and the Princess appeared. Everyone wept tears of joy but only the princess wept pearls. The King asked her forgiveness and said that he had no kingdom left to divide and that he had nothing of worth to give to her. The old woman said: "This child needs nothing. She is as the salt of the earth, pure, life giving and watched over. Her pearls are finer than those of the sea and she shall always have them."

Upon this comment, the old woman put up her hands and said that for the years the Princess spent tending her geese, the cottage was hers to keep. The kindly woman disappeared and the cottage changed into a beautiful palace.

In all of the commotion, the Count was overlooked and he began to go. The Queen stopped him and asked if there was any way that they could repay him for finding their daughter. The King offered his gold, the Queen offered the pearls. He looked at the Princess and asked if she would marry him. The Princess agreed.....

And they all lived happily ever after.

This tale comes from Russia.....

## **The Salt Mountain**

Once upon a time, there was a successful merchant in Russia. He and his wife had three sons named, Nicholas, Peter and Ivan. They came when the merchant said, "You are my oldest sons it is time you became merchants." Ivan spoke up and said, "what about me, Father?" His Father turned and roughly replied, "You, Ivan, can stay on the stove where you are. You are good for nothing anyway!"

The merchant gave his two older sons each a ship of their own loaded with rich cargo. One sailed to the south and one to the north. That afternoon, Ivan got off the stove and asked his Father again for a ship that

he too could seek his fortune. His Father again told him "NO." He implored, "Just a small ship loaded with black wool." The Father would have none of his talk so Ivan went to speak to his Mother. "Mother, I have talked to Father and asked that I would have a ship like my brothers and he will not even give me a small ship." "Fear not, my son, you too shall have a ship to find your fortune." That night after dinner Ivan's Mother said to her husband, "Ivan is also our son. He should have a chance like his brothers to go and seek his fortune." The Father said that he would fulfill her wish but that he thought Ivan was a fool and would never learn to make money.

Ivan was happy when his Father gave him a leaky ship, lazy sailors for a crew and a cargo of low quality wool. Ivan waved good-bye and said, "You will be proud of me." He traveled for a month in beautiful weather. He saw in the distance a glistening white mountain island rising from the ocean. He went to look at the mountain wondering how snow could exist in such warm weather. He could feel that it wasn't snow and decided to taste it. Much to his joy and surprise....it was salt!

He thought of his good fortune. He could sell the salt for a good price. He ordered his sailors to dump the wool into the ocean and he and his men loaded the bags with salt. Knowing the value of salt, he felt more confident and sailed to a land he had never seen before. Leaving the ship, he went to the marketplace to begin to sell his salt. He approached a vendor and said, "I have good salt to sell." Much to Ivan's surprise, the man replied, "Salt, what is that?" Ivan showed him and the man said, "That is white sand." Ivan told the man to taste it but the man refused saying he did not eat sand! He was surprised to find a place that didn't know about salt. He pondered if he should have kept the wool. He went to another vendor. "This is salt. We use it in my country to make the food taste better." This vendor thought that it was white sand as well and told him to leave.

Ivan was sad, hungry and thirsty. He decided to go to the Tsar's palace to see if he could have some food. He explained that he was a stranger in the land and asked for black bread and cabbage soup. The chef replied, "The Tsar would never turn a hungry person away. Sit, I will give you what you asked for." Ivan looked at the soup and its plentiful cabbage. He took a taste but it was awful! He sprinkled some salt into the soup and the chef asked what it was. Ivan explained how salt made food taste better. The chef said he could put it in his own food but not one grain should go on the Tsar's food or his family's food either. When the chef wasn't looking, Ivan sprinkled salt on everything. A pinch on the potatoes, a sprinkle on the meat, and a spoonful in the soup. Just as he finished, the servants came for the dinner and carried it to the Tsar and his family.

The Tsar, his wife and the Tsarina, their daughter began to eat. "Hmmmmmmm, this is the best cabbage soup I have ever eaten." "This is wonderful." "This is the best meat I have ever eaten." "The food is different tonight," his daughter finally said. He agreed and asked the servant what was different. The servant said nothing was different. The Tsar pounded the table and commanded: "Bring me the chef and his cooks!" The chef was trembling with fear for he knew that he could be *in* the next cabbage soup. He said: "Tsar, there was a stranger in the kitchen from another land that sprinkled salt onto his food. I told him not to do your food but he must have not listened to me." The Tsar demanded that Ivan be brought to him.

Ivan explained that salt was able to make food taste better. The Tsar agreed and asked Ivan if he could buy his cargo of salt for three times its weight in gold. Ivan was thrilled at his good fortune but he was still able to see that the Tsar's daughter was kind and beautiful.

A thousand bags of salt were delivered to the Tsar and 3 thousand bags of gold were given to Ivan. The Tsar thought that Ivan's ship was too old and run down to carry gold so he gave him one of his own ships. Now it was time for Ivan to leave. The Tsarina asked if she could come on board. Then she asked how the ship worked. Then she asked that the anchor be raised. Then sails dropped and they were sailing away. Ivan asked if she would marry him and she said, "Yes."

As they headed to Ivan's home, they saw his brothers returning as well. He was glad to see them but they were jealous of his success. They only had a bag of silver each and decided to put him adrift in a small boat

and steal his ship, cargo and his bride to be. Ivan drifted for some time until he came to an island with a giant greeting him at the shore.

"Are you a fish," said the giant? "No, my brothers put me adrift in this boat." The giant listened to Ivan's story and finally offered to take him home for his name was Deep Walker and he could walk through the oceans. Off they went. Deep Walker told Ivan that he would return for his wedding.

When the Father heard what the older brothers had done, he told them to leave his home and never return. The Tsar's daughter ran to Ivan and decided to marry at that week. The Father asked Ivan what he could give him as a wedding gift. The kind Ivan said, "Forgive my brothers and allow them to come to the wedding and to come home." It was done. All was prepared.

At the party, the people were telling stories and Ivan said: "I was carried on the back of a giant across the ocean to my home." They laughed. But just then, there stood Deep Wader with a gift for the bride and groom. "May this salt of the sea bring you good luck, good food and good health." And they all lived happily ever after.

## **The salt of the Earth**

Strong and silent the tide of Thames flowed upward, and over it swept the morning tide of humanity. Through white autumnal mist yellow sunbeams flitted from shore to shore. The dome, the spires, the river frontages slowly unveiled and brightened: there was hope of a fair day.

Not that it much concerned this throng of men and women hastening to their labour. From near and far, by the league-long highways of South London, hither they converged each morning, and joined the procession across the bridge; their task was the same to-day as yesterday, regardless of gleam or gloom. Many had walked such a distance that they plodded wearily, looking neither to right nor left. The more vigorous strode briskly on, elbowing their way, or nimbly skipping into the road to gain advance; yet these also had a fixed gaze, preoccupied or vacant, seldom cheerful. Here and there a couple of friends conversed; girls, with bag or parcel and a book for the dinner hour, chattered and laughed; but for the most part lips were mute amid the clang and roar of heavy-laden wheels.

It was the march of those who combat hunger with delicate hands: at the pen's point, or from behind the breastwork of a counter, or trusting to bare wits pressed daily on the grindstone. Their chief advantage over the sinewy class beneath them lay in the privilege of spending more than they could afford on house and clothing; with rare exceptions they had no hope, no chance, of reaching independence; enough if they upheld the threadbare standard of respectability, and bequeathed it to their children as a solitary heirloom. The oldest looked the poorest, and naturally so; amid the tramp of multiplying feet, their steps had begun to lag when speed was more than ever necessary; they saw newcomers outstrip them, and trudged under an increasing load.

No eye surveying this procession would have paused for a moment on Thomas Bird. In costume there was nothing to distinguish him from hundreds of rather shabby clerks who passed along with their out-of-fashion chimney-pot and badly rolled umbrella; his gait was that of a man who takes no exercise beyond the daily walk to and from his desk; the casual glance could see nothing in his features but patient dullness tending to good humour. He might be thirty, he might be forty--impossible to decide. Yet when a ray of sunshine fell upon him, and he lifted his eyes to the eastward promise, there shone in his countenance something one might vainly have sought through the streaming concourse of which Thomas Bird was an unregarded atom. For him, it appeared, the struggling sunlight had a message of hope. Trouble cleared from his face; he smiled unconsciously and quickened his steps.

For fifteen years he had walked to and fro over Blackfriars Bridge, leaving his home in Camberwell at eight o'clock and reaching it again at seven. Fate made him a commercial clerk as his father before him; he

earned more than enough for his necessities, but seemed to have reached the limit of promotion, for he had no influential friends, and he lacked the capacity to rise by his own efforts. There may have been some calling for which Thomas was exactly suited, but he did not know of it; in the office he proved himself a trustworthy machine, with no opportunity of becoming anything else. His parents were dead, his kindred scattered, he lived, as for several years past, in lodgings. But it never occurred to him to think of his lot as mournful. A man of sociable instincts, he had many acquaintances, some of whom he cherished. An extreme simplicity marked his tastes, and the same characteristic appeared in his conversation; an easy man to deceive, easy to make fun of, yet impossible to dislike, or despise--unless by the despicable. He delighted in stories of adventure, of bravery by flood or field, and might have posed--had he ever posed at all--as something of an authority on North Pole expeditions and the geography of Polynesia.

He received his salary once a month, and to-day was pay-day: the consciousness of having earned a certain number of sovereigns always set his thoughts on possible purchases, and at present he was revolving the subject of his wardrobe. Certainly it needed renewal, but Thomas could not decide at which end to begin, head or feet. His position in a leading house demanded a good hat, the bad weather called for new boots. Living economically as he did, it should have been a simple matter to resolve the doubt by purchasing both articles, but, for one reason and another, Thomas seldom had a surplus over the expenses of his lodgings; in practice he found it very difficult to save a sovereign for other needs.

When evening released him he walked away in a cheerful frame of mind, grasping the money in his trousers' pocket, and all but decided to make some acquisition on the way home. Near Ludgate Circus some one addressed him over his shoulder.

'Good evening, Tom; pleasant for the time of year.'

The speaker was a man of fifty, stout and florid--the latter peculiarity especially marked in his nose; he looked like a substantial merchant, and spoke with rather pompous geniality. Thrusting his arm through the clerk's, he walked with him over Blackfriars Bridge, talking in the friendliest strain of things impersonal. Beyond the bridge--

'Do you tram it?' he asked, glancing upwards.

'I think so, Mr. Warbeck,' answered the other, whose tone to his acquaintance was very respectful.

'Ah! I'm afraid it would make me late.--Oh, by the bye, Tom, I'm really ashamed--most awkward that this kind of thing happens so often, but--could you, do you think?--No, no; one sovereign only. Let me make a note of it by the light of this shop-window. Really, the total is getting quite considerable. Tut, tut! You shall have a cheque in a day or two. Oh, it can't run on any longer; I'm completely ashamed of myself. Entirely temporary--as I explained. A cheque on Wednesday at latest. Good-bye, Tom.'

They shook hands cordially, and Mr. Warbeck went off in a hansom. Thomas Bird, changing his mind about the tram, walked all the way home, and with bent head. One would have thought that he had just done something discreditable.

He was wondering, not for the first time, whether Mrs. Warbeck knew or suspected that her husband was in debt to him. Miss Warbeck--Alma Warbeck--assuredly had never dreamed of such a thing. The system of casual loans dated from nearly twelve months ago, and the total was now not much less than thirty pounds. Mr. Warbeck never failed to declare that he was ashamed of himself, but probably the creditor experienced more discomfort of that kind. At the first playful demand Thomas felt a shock. He had known the Warbecks since he was a lad, had always respected them as somewhat his social superiors, and, as time went on, had recognised that the difference of position grew wider: he remaining stationary, while his friends progressed to a larger way of living. But they were, he thought, no less kind to him; Mrs. Warbeck invited him to the house about once a month, and Alma--Alma talked with him in such a pleasant, homely way. Did their expenditure outrun their means? He would never have supposed it, but for the City man's singular behaviour. About the cheque so often promised he cared little, but with all his heart he hoped Mrs. Warbeck did not know.

Somewhere near Camberwell Green, just as he had resumed the debate about his purchases, a middle-aged woman met him with friendly greeting. Her appearance was that of a decent shopkeeper's wife.

'I'm so glad I've met you, Mr. Bird. I know you'll be anxious to hear how our poor friend is getting on.'

She spoke of the daughter of a decayed tradesman, a weak and overworked girl, who had lain for some weeks in St. Thomas's Hospital. Mrs. Pritchard, a gadabout infected with philanthropy, was fond of discovering such cases, and in everyday conversation made the most of her charitable efforts.

'They'll allow her out in another week,' she pursued. 'But, of course, she can't expect to be fit for anything for a time. And I very much doubt whether she'll ever get the right use of her limbs again. But what we have to think of now is to get her some decent clothing. The poor thing has positively nothing. I'm going to speak to Mrs. Doubleday, and a few other people. Really, Mr. Bird, if it weren't that I've presumed on your good nature so often lately--'

She paused and smiled unctuously at him.

'I'm afraid I can't do much,' faltered Thomas, reddening at the vision of a new 'chimney-pot.'

'No, no; of course not. I'm sure I should never expect--it's only that every little--\_however\_ little--\_does\_ help, you know.'

Thomas thrust a hand into his pocket and brought out a florin, which Mrs. Pritchard pursed with effusive thanks.

Certain of this good woman's critics doubted her competence as a trustee, but Thomas Bird had no such misgiving. He talked with kindly interest of the unfortunate girl, and wished her well in a voice that carried conviction.

His lodgings were a pair of very small, mouldy, and ill-furnished rooms; he took them unwillingly, overcome by the landlady's doleful story of their long lodgerless condition, and, in the exercise of a heavenly forbearance, remained year after year. The woman did not cheat him, and Thomas knew enough of life to respect her for this remarkable honesty; she was simply an ailing, lachrymose slut, incapable of effort. Her son, a lad who had failed in several employments from sheer feebleness of mind and body, practically owed his subsistence to Thomas Bird, whose good offices had at length established the poor fellow at a hairdresser's. To sit frequently for an hour at a time, as Thomas did, listening with attention to Mrs. Batty's talk of her own and her son's ailments, was in itself a marvel of charity. This evening she met him as he entered, and lighted him into his room.

'There's a letter come for you, Mr. Bird. I put it down somewheres--why, now, where \_did\_ I--? Oh, 'ere it is. You'll be glad to 'ear as Sam did his first shave to-day, an' his 'and didn't tremble much neither.'

Burning with desire to open the letter, which he saw was from Mrs. Warbeck, Thomas stood patiently until the flow of words began to gurgle away amid groans and pantings.

'Well,' he cried gaily, 'didn't I promise Sam a shilling when he'd done his first shave? If I didn't I ought to have done, and here it is for him.'

Then he hurried into the bedroom, and read his letter by candle-light. It was a short scrawl on thin, scented, pink-hued notepaper. Would he do Mrs. Warbeck the 'favour' of looking in before ten to-night? No explanation of this unusually worded request; and Thomas fell at once into a tremor of anxiety. With a hurried glance at his watch, he began to make ready for the visit, struggling with drawers which would neither open nor shut, and driven to despair by the damp condition of his clean linen.

In this room, locked away from all eyes but his own, lay certain relics which Thomas worshipped. One was a photograph of a girl of fifteen. At that age Alma Warbeck promised little charm, and the photograph allowed

her less; but it was then that Thomas Bird became her bondman, as he had ever since remained. There was also a letter, the only one that he had ever received from her--'Dear Mr. Bird,--Mamma says will you buy her some more of those \_jewjewbs\_ at the shop in the city, and bring them on Sunday.--Yours sincerely, Alma Warbeck'--written when she was sixteen, seven years ago. Moreover, there was a playbill, used by Alma on the single occasion when he accompanied the family to a theatre.

Never had he dared to breathe a syllable of what he thought--'hoped' would misrepresent him, for Thomas in this matter had always stifled hope. Indeed, hope would have been irrational. In the course of her teens Alma grew tall and well proportioned; not beautiful of feature, but pleasing; not brilliant in personality, but good-natured; fairly intelligent and moderately ambitious. She was the only daughter of a dubiously active commission-agent, and must deem it good fortune if she married a man with three or four hundred a year; but Thomas Bird had no more than his twelve pounds a month, and did not venture to call himself a gentleman. In Alma he found the essentials of true ladyhood--perhaps with reason; he had never heard her say an ill-natured thing, nor seen upon her face a look which pained his acute sensibilities; she was unpretentious, of equal temper, nothing of a gossip, kindly disposed. Never for a moment had he flattered himself that Alma perceived his devotion or cared for him otherwise than as for an old friend. But thought is free, and so is love. The modest clerk had made this girl the light of his life, and whether far or near the rays of that ideal would guide him on his unworldly path.

New shaven and freshly clad, he set out for the Warbecks' house, which was in a near part of Brixton. Not an imposing house by any means, but an object of reverence to Thomas Bird. A servant whom he did not recognise--servants came and went at the Warbecks'--admitted him to the drawing-room, which was vacant; there, his eyes wandering about the gimcrack furniture, which he never found in the same arrangement at two successive visits, he waited till his hostess came in.

Mrs. Warbeck was very stout, very plain, and rather untidy, yet her countenance made an impression not on the whole disagreeable; with her wide eyes, slightly parted lips, her homely smile, and unadorned speech, she counteracted in some measure the effect, upon a critical observer, of the pretentious ugliness with which she was surrounded. Thomas thought her a straightforward woman, and perhaps was not misled by his partiality. Certainly the tone in which she now began, and the tenor of her remarks, repelled suspicion of duplicity.

'Well, now, Mr. Thomas, I wish to have a talk.' She had thus styled him since he grew too old to be called Tom; that is to say, since he was seventeen. He was now thirty-one. 'And I'm going to talk to you just like the old friends we are. You see? No nonsense; no beating about the bush. You'd rather have it so, wouldn't you?' Scarce able to articulate, the visitor showed a cheery assent. 'Yes, I was sure of that. Now--better come to the point at once--my daughter is--well, no, she isn't yet, but the fact is I feel sure she'll very soon be engaged.'

The blow was softened by Thomas's relief at discovering that money would not be the subject of their talk, yet it fell upon him, and he winced.

'You've expected it,' pursued the lady, with bluff good-humour. 'Yes, of course you have.' She said "ave," a weakness happily unshared by her daughter. 'We don't want it talked about, but I know you can hold your tongue. Well, it's young Mr. Fisher, of Nokes, Fisher and Co. We haven't known him long, but he took from the first to Alma, and I have my reasons for believing that the feeling is \_mutual\_, though I wouldn't for the world let Alma hear me say so.'

Young Mr. Fisher. Thomas knew of him; a capable business man, and son of a worthy father. He kept his teeth close, his eyes down.

'And now,' pursued Mrs. Warbeck, becoming still more genial, 'I'm getting round to the unpleasant side of the talk, though I don't see that it \_need\_ be unpleasant. We're old friends, and where's the use of being friendly if you can't speak your mind, when speak you must? It comes to this: I just want to ask you quite straightforward, not to be offended or take it ill if we don't ask you to come here till this business is over and settled. You see? The fact is, we've told Mr. Fisher he can look in whenever he likes, and it might happen,

you know, that he'd meet you here, and, speaking like old friends--I think it better not.'

A fire burned in the listener's cheeks, a noise buzzed in his ears. He understood the motive of this frank request; humble as ever--never humbler than when beneath this roof--he was ready to avow himself Mr. Fisher's inferior; but with all his heart he wished that Mrs. Warbeck had found some other way of holding him aloof from her prospective son-in-law.

'Of course,' continued the woman stolidly, 'Alma doesn't know I'm saying this. It's just between our two selves. I haven't even spoken of it to Mr. Warbeck. I'm quite sure that you'll understand that we're obliged to make a few changes in the way we've lived. It's all very well for you and me to be comfortable together, and laugh and talk about all sorts of things, but with one like Alma in the 'ouse, and the friends she's making and the company that's likely to come here--now you do see what I mean, don't you, now? And you won't take it the wrong way? No, I was sure you wouldn't. There, now, we'll shake 'ands over it, and be as good friends as ever.' The handshaking was metaphorical merely. Thomas smiled, and was endeavouring to shape a sentence, when he heard voices out in the hall.

'There's Alma and her father back,' said Mrs. Warbeck. 'I didn't think they'd come back so soon; they've been with some new friends of ours.' Thomas jumped up.

'I can't--I'd rather not see them, please, Mrs. Warbeck. Can you prevent it?' His voice startled her somewhat, and she hesitated. A gesture of entreaty sent her from the room. As the door opened Alma was heard laughing merrily; then came silence. In a minute or two the hostess returned and the visitor, faltering, 'Thank you. I quite understand,' quietly left the house.

For three weeks he crossed and recrossed Blackfriars Bridge without meeting Mr. Warbeck. His look was perhaps graver, his movements less alert, but he had not noticeably changed; his life kept its wonted tenor. The florid-nosed gentleman at length came face to face with him on Ludgate Hill in the dinner-hour--an embarrassment to both. Speedily recovering self-possession Mr. Warbeck pressed the clerk's hand with fervour and drew him aside.

'I've been wanting to see you, Tom. So you keep away from us, do you? I understand. The old lady has given me a quiet hint. Well, well, you're quite right, and I honour you for it, Tom. Nothing selfish about you; you keep it all to yourself; I honour you for it, my dear boy. And perhaps I had better tell you, Alma is to be married in January. After that, same as before, won't it be?--Have a glass of wine with me? No time? We must have a quiet dinner together some evening; one of the old chop houses.--There was something else I wanted to speak about, but I see you're in a hurry. All right, it'll do next time.'

He waved his hand and was gone. When next they encountered Mr. Warbeck made bold to borrow ten shillings, without the most distant allusion to his outstanding debt.

Thomas Bird found comfort in the assurance that Mrs. Warbeck had kept her secret as the borrower kept his.

Alma's father was not utterly dishonoured in his sight.

One day in January, Thomas, pleading indisposition, left work at twelve. He had a cold and a headache, and felt more miserable than at any time since his school-days. As he rode home in an omnibus Mr. and Mrs. Warbeck were entertaining friends at the wedding-breakfast, and Thomas knew it. For an hour or two in the afternoon he sat patiently under his landlady's talk, but a fit of nervous exasperation at length drove him forth, and he did not return till supper-time. Just as he sat down to a basin of gruel, Mrs. Batty admitted a boy who brought him a message. 'Mother sent me round, Mr. Bird,' said the messenger, 'and she wants to know if you could just come and see her; it's something about father. He had some work to do, but he hasn't come home to do it.'

Without speaking Thomas equipped himself and walked a quarter of a mile to the lodgings of a married

friend of his--a clerk chronically out of work, and too often in liquor. The wife received him with tears. After eight weeks without earning a penny, her husband had obtained the job of addressing five hundred envelopes, to be done at home and speedily. Tempted forth by an acquaintance 'for half a minute' as he sat down to the task, he had been absent for three hours, and would certainly return unfit for work.

'It isn't only the money,' sobbed his wife, 'but it might have got him more work, and now, of course, he's lost the chance, and we haven't nothing more than a crust of bread left. And--'

Thomas slipped half-a-crown into her hand and whispered, 'Send Jack before the shops close.' Then, to escape thanks, he shouted out, 'Where's these blessed envelopes, and where's the addresses? All right, just leave me this corner of the table and don't speak to me as long as I sit here.'

Between half-past nine and half-past twelve, at the rate of eighty an hour, he addressed all but half the five hundred envelopes. Then his friend appeared, dolefully drunk. Thomas would not look at him.

'He'll finish the rest by dinner to-morrow,' said the miserable wife, 'and that's in time.'

So Thomas Bird went home. He felt better at heart, and blamed himself for his weakness during the day. He blamed himself often enough for this or that, knowing not that such as he are the salt of the earth.

From: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11603/11603-8.txt>

## The legend of the sea Salt

Once upon a time there lived by the great sea two brothers, named Klaus and Körg; the elder inheriting the rich estates of his ancestors; the younger a woodchopper, and so poor that it was oftentimes a difficult task for him to provide bread for his wife and little children.

Hard as life often seems it may be even harder; and so bitterly realized Körg when, nigh on to one merry Christmas-tide, an accident deprived him of his strong right hand, thereby cutting off forever his slender means of livelihood. There was but one resource, and, with crushed spirit Körg betook himself to his elder brother to crave some mercy for his starving babes.

Klaus was a harsh man, with love only for his yellow gold. He frowned impatiently when Körg interrupted his selfish dreams, and, for answer to his pitiful story, threw him a loaf of bread and a pudding, bidding him begone and be satisfied. And Körg went forth with a heavy heart, his faint hope dead.

His homeward path followed the raging sea. The night was dark and stormy, the waves bellowed and lashed at the shore like an army of infuriated beasts; but Körg heeded it not, only clutched his bread and pudding, and walked on with a white despairing face. Suddenly, as he emerged from a thick bit of woods, he became conscious of a strange light encircling him, and halting, quite terrified at the phenomenon, he beheld a little old man, snow-haired and bearded, standing plump in the path before him.

"You seem in trouble, friend," he ejaculated, with a chuckle. "Something twists in your world, I trow."

Körg was not slow to recognize a `_geist_`; his knees shook, and he dared not utter a word. The elf looked down upon him half displeased, yet chuckling merrily withal.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he continued, sweetly. "I am the guardian of the honest poor. This night I come to reveal to you a secret, which, rightly used, will bestow upon you riches, life-lasting and unlimited."

Körg, bewildered, could not yet yield simple faith. He clutched desperately his bread and pudding. He found no joyful words.

The little man frowned scathingly on the gift of Klaus, then burst into a scornful laugh.

"It is always thus, friend, with the money elves; they deal niggardly, even at the full. But, care not, since this meagre chip will prove to you a barter for millions. Follow me! The great estates to Klaus; the treasures of the sea Körg shall know, to-night!" And, with a hand-wave, the elf led the way over the rough cliffs, Körg mutely following.

He paused at the base of a hillock, shaped like a horseshoe--a spot which Körg knew well--a place of rocks, reefs, and general ill-report.

"The time is favorable," muttered the little man, "my children are hungry, to-night." And, turning to Körg, he continued: "Take the gift of Klaus and go down into the sea. A crowd will swarm upon you, as persistent and voracious as any in this upper world. Ask for the wonder-mill, and sacrifice your treasures only in its exchange. I will await you here."

A spell immediately enwrapped the senses of Körg. Calm and fearless, he descended into the deep, floating dreamily downward to the glittering caves from whence, exactly as the elf had depicted, swarmed forth troops of mermen and mermaids, with eyes and arms voraciously extended towards the bread and the pudding he held tightly clutched to his breast. But Körg, spurred on by the elf, resisted them all, nor parted with a single crumb till the wonder-mill lay safe in his embrace. The little man stood waiting on the brink.

"I dedicate this to the honest poor," he said, softly. "Yes, Körg, it is yours. Ask of it what you will, and it shall never fail you--gold, silver, hundreds of loaves and puddings. But--" and here the little man paused, a shudder quivered through his frame, and he continued, solemnly--"remember, that by no hand but yours can it be controlled. Guard it carefully, for the day you part with it your portion shall be ashes, and mine annihilation."

When Körg dared lift his eyes the elf had disappeared.

Rahel sat at home with the children, weeping. She knew well the heart of her brother Klaus, and how vain would be Körg's last effort to save them from starvation. A step sounded on the path without. Rahel and the babes stopped to listen. It was not dull and heavy as they had expected, but blithe as the jingle of sleigh-bells, and, in a second, Körg burst in upon them, dimpling all over with merry laughter. Rahel regarded him, amazed.

"You bring no bread to our starving babes, and yet you laugh," she said. "Oh, Körg! Körg! trouble has made you mad!"

Still chuckling he slipped the wonder-mill from beneath his coat and said, softly:

"Hush, Rahel! A geist has been with me to-night. I have brought endless fortune from the depths of the sea." And, plump in the eyes of his astonished wife, he began turning out loaves and puddings with such a gusto that the room was soon filled, and Rahel fain to implore him to cease his elfish work.

From that night, just as the little man had said, riches unlimited came to the house of Körg. No treasure too great for the mill to produce; and, though the woodchopper strove hard at secrecy, its fame spread far and wide from the mountains back to the sea, and folks flocked by thousands to view the magic engine that Körg had fished up from the the ocean's depths. And though, always good humoredly, he tested its powers and loaded his guests with princely gifts, yet he rested night after night more uneasily upon his pillow, remembering the solemn words of the geist:

"The day you part with it your portion shall be ashes, and mine annihilation."

One day, after the space of a year, there came to the woodchopper's door a captain from far-off lands.

"I am here," he said, "to see the famous wonder-mill that blesses the house of Körg."

There was a simplicity about the old tar that completely dismantled Körg. With less than ordinary caution he brought forth the mill, and displayed it, in all its phases, before his astonished guest.

"It is a clever trickster," finally he quoth. "I wonder if it could grind so common a thing as salt."

Körg chuckled contemptuously, and speedily spurted right and left such a briny shower as made the old tar blink spasmodically and walk hurriedly away.

But, alas! that night Körg missed the mill from his side; and when, pale and shivering, he sought the golden treasures hid 'neath the floor, he found only an ashy heap, heard only the mournful words:

"The mermen and mermaids are dead. The \_geists\_ have ceased to reign."

Far out on the blue bosom of the sea the jolly captain rode, shouting uproariously over the treasure he had secured.

"Precious wonder-mill," he sang, "I will try thee in all thy ways. First salt for savor, then ducks for food, and gold to the end of my days." And he started the tiny wheels, and clapped his hands frantically at its ready compliance to his will.

Forth poured the sparkling, crusty grain in one buzzing maze of whiteness. Thick gathered the milky drifts from bow to stern. Still shouted the captain his savage joy till--a-sudden he paused, gazed as if spell-bound on the mill's mad work, with a cry of terror sprang forward and grasped the check. But, in vain. There was no surcease to its labor. Higher and higher up lifted the mighty salt banks, and, in a twinkling, both destroyer and destroyed sank helpless into the depths of the sea.

And, down amid the green sea-weeds, the wonder-mill still stands, pouring forth salt the whole day long--no hand to check its raging; for the mermen and mermaids are all dead, and the \_geists\_ have ceased to reign.

And this is why the sea-water is salt.

From: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16576/16576-8.txt>

## Why the sea is salt

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there were two brothers, the one rich and the other poor. When Christmas Eve came, the poor one had not a bite in the house, either of meat or bread; so he went to his brother, and begged him, in God's name, to give him something for Christmas Day. It was by no means the first time that the brother had been forced to give something to him, and he was not better pleased at being asked now than he generally was.

"If you will do what I ask you, you shall have a whole ham," said he. The poor one immediately thanked him, and promised this.

"Well, here is the ham, and now you must go straight to Dead Man's Hall," said the rich brother, throwing the ham to him.

"Well, I will do what I have promised," said the other, and he took the ham and set off. He went on and on for the livelong day, and at nightfall he came to a place where there was a bright light.

"I have no doubt this is the place," thought the man with the ham.

An old man with a long white beard was standing in the outhouse, chopping Yule logs.

"Good-evening," said the man with the ham.

"Good-evening to you. Where are you going at this late hour?" said the man.

"I am going to Dead Man's Hall, if only I am on the right track," answered the poor man.

"Oh! yes, you are right enough, for it is here," said the old man. "When you get inside they will all want to buy your ham, for they don't get much meat to eat there; but you must not sell it unless you can get the hand-mill which stands behind the door for it. When you come out again I will teach you how to stop the hand-mill, which is useful for almost everything."

So the man with the ham thanked the other for his good advice, and rapped at the door.

When he got in, everything happened just as the old man had said it would: all the people, great and small, came round him like ants on an ant-hill, and each tried to outbid the other for the ham.

"By rights my old woman and I ought to have it for our Christmas dinner, but, since you have set your hearts upon it, I must just give it up to you," said the man. "But, if I sell it, I will have the hand-mill which is standing there behind the door."

At first they would not hear to this, and haggled and bargained with the man, but he stuck to what he had said, and the people were forced to give him the hand-mill. When the man came out again into the yard, he asked the old wood-cutter how he was to stop the hand-mill, and when he had learned that, he thanked him and set off home with all the speed he could, but did not get there until after the clock had struck twelve on Christmas Eve.

"Where in the world have you been?" said the old woman. "Here I have sat waiting hour after hour, and have not even two sticks to lay across each other under the Christmas porridge-pot."

"Oh! I could not come before; I had something of importance to see about, and a long way to go, too; but now you shall just see!" said the man, and then he set the hand-mill on the table, and bade it first grind light, then a table-cloth, and then meat, and beer, and everything else that was good for a Christmas Eve's supper; and the mill ground all that he ordered. "Bless me!" said the old woman as one thing after another appeared; and she wanted to know where her husband had got the mill from, but he would not tell her that.

"Never mind where I got it; you can see that it is a good one, and the water that turns it will never freeze," said the man. So he ground meat and drink, and all kinds of good things, to last all Christmas-tide, and on the third day he invited all his friends to come to a feast.

Now when the rich brother saw all that there was at the banquet and in the house, he was both vexed and angry, for he grudged everything his brother had. "On Christmas Eve he was so poor that he came to me and begged for a trifle, for God's sake, and now he gives a feast as if he were both a count and a king!" thought he. "But, for heaven's sake, tell me where you got your riches from," said he to his brother.

"From behind the door," said he who owned the mill, for he did not choose to satisfy his brother on that point; but later in the evening, when he had taken a drop too much, he could not refrain from telling how he had come by the hand-mill. "There you see what has brought me all my wealth!" said he, and brought out the mill, and made it grind first one thing and then another. When the brother saw that, he insisted on having the mill, and after a great deal of persuasion got it; but he had to give three hundred dollars for it, and the poor brother was to keep it till the haymaking was over, for he thought: "If I keep it as long as that, I can make it grind meat and drink that will last many a long year." During that time you may imagine that the mill did not

grow rusty, and when hay-harvest came the rich brother got it, but the other had taken good care not to teach him how to stop it. It was evening when the rich man got the mill home, and in the morning he bade the old woman go out and spread the hay after the mowers, and he would attend to the house himself that day, he said.

So, when dinner-time drew near, he set the mill on the kitchen-table, and said: "Grind herrings and milk pottage, and do it both quickly and well."

So the mill began to grind herrings and milk pottage, and first all the dishes and tubs were filled, and then it came out all over the kitchen-floor. The man twisted and turned it, and did all he could to make the mill stop, but, howsoever he turned it and screwed it, the mill went on grinding, and in a short time the pottage rose so high that the man was like to be drowned. So he threw open the parlor door, but it was not long before the mill had ground the parlor full too, and it was with difficulty and danger that the man could go through the stream of pottage and get hold of the door-latch. When he got the door open, he did not stay long in the room, but ran out, and the herrings and pottage came after him, and it streamed out over both farm and field. Now the old woman, who was out spreading the hay, began to think dinner was long in coming, and said to the women and the mowers: "Though the master does not call us home, we may as well go. It may be that he finds he is not good at making pottage and I should do well to help him." So they began to straggle homeward, but when they had got a little way up the hill they met the herrings and pottage and bread, all pouring forth and winding about one over the other, and the man himself in front of the flood. "Would to heaven that each of you had a hundred stomachs! Take care that you are not drowned in the pottage!" he cried as he went by them as if Mischief were at his heels, down to where his brother dwelt. Then he begged him, for God's sake, to take the mill back again, and that in an instant, for, said he: "If it grind one hour more the whole district will be destroyed by herrings and pottage." But the brother would not take it until the other paid him three hundred dollars, and that he was obliged to do. Now the poor brother had both the money and the mill again. So it was not long before he had a farmhouse much finer than that in which his brother lived, but the mill ground him so much money that he covered it with plates of gold; and the farmhouse lay close by the sea-shore, so it shone and glittered far out to sea. Everyone who sailed by there now had to be put in to visit the rich man in the gold farmhouse, and everyone wanted to see the wonderful mill, for the report of it spread far and wide, and there was no one who had not heard tell of it.

After a long, long time came also a skipper who wished to see the mill. He asked if it could make salt. "Yes, it could make salt," said he who owned it, and when the skipper heard that, he wished with all his might and main to have the mill, let it cost what it might, for, he thought, if he had it, he would get off having to sail far away over the perilous sea for freights of salt. At first the man would not hear of parting with it, but the skipper begged and prayed, and at last the man sold it to him, and got many, many thousand dollars for it. When the skipper had got the mill on his back he did not stay there long, for he was so afraid that the man would change his mind, and he had no time to ask how he was to stop it grinding, but got on board his ship as fast as he could.

When he had gone a little way out to sea he took the mill on deck. "Grind salt, and grind both quickly and well," said the skipper. So the mill began to grind salt, till it spouted out like water, and when the skipper had got the ship filled he wanted to stop the mill, but whichsoever way he turned it, and how much soever he tried, it went on grinding, and the heap of salt grew higher and higher, until at last the ship sank. There lies the mill at the bottom of the sea, and still, day by day, it grinds on; and that is why the sea is salt.[1]

[1] Asbjornsen and Moe.