

THE DIVER

“Which knight or esquire, which one will dare
To dive down in this deep gulf?
A golden goblet I throw now down there,
Devour’d it already the swarthy mouth.
Who can the goblet to me be returning,
He may thus possess it, it is his earning.”

The King thus speaks it, and hurls from the height
O’th’ cliff so abrupt and steep,
Which hangs o’er the sea stretched endless in sight,
The goblet in Charybdis’ howling deep.
“Who will be the brave one, again I wonder,
To dive far into these depths down under?”

And the knights and the vassals ’round him be,
They listen, but silent remain,
Looking below to the savage sea,
And none doth the goblet desire to gain.
And the King, for the third time his question bareth;
“To go down under then no one dareth?”

But all remain mute, knight and esquire,
And a noble squire, meek and rash,
Steps from the timorous vassals choir,
And his mantle throws he, tosses his sash,
And all of the men around him and women,
On the glorious youth their stunned-gazes fasten.

And as he steps to the rocky slope
And looks in the gulf below,
The waters that she so deeply did gulp,
Does Charybdis now howling backwards throw,
And as with the distant thunder’s uproaring,
They burst from her ominous womb outsoaring.

And it bubbles and boils and hisses and booms,
 Like when water with fire doth blend,
 To the heavens splutter the vaporous foams
 And flood on flood doth press without end,
 And wants to be drained and empty never,
 As would yet the sea one more sea bear ever.

Yet fin'ly, the power so wild has left,
 And black from the argent swell
 Opens downward a dark yawning cleft,
 Boundless, as though to the realms of Hell,
 And raging sees one the surge of the billows,
 Beneath in the twist of the rotating funnels.

Now swift, ere the breakers reappear,
 The stripling to God doth pray,
 And—is heard all around him a shriek of fear,
 And already the whirlpool has washed him away
 And clandestinely over the daring swimmer
 Locketh the jaws, appeareth he never.

And stillness falls over the water's gulf,
 In the deep doth a hollow roar swell,
 And trembling hears one from mouth to mouth:
 "Magnanimous stripling, fare thee well!"
 And one hears it howling duller and duller,
 And they wait still with worry, with moments of horror.

And should'st thou thy crown itself down there fling
 And say: "Who e'er brings me the crown,
 He shall then wear it, and be the King"—
 For this precious reward I no longing do own.
 What the howling there deep down under concealeth,
 To no fortunate soul of the living revealeth.

Well many a craft, by whirlpool held fast,
 Shoots quick to the depths of the wave,
 Yet while shattered to pieces, the keel and mast
 Emerge from the e'er inextricable grave,—
 And like tempest's howling, clearer and clearer,
 One hears its raging, e'er nearer and nearer.

And it bubbles and boils and hisses and booms,
 Like when water with fire doth blend,
 To the heavens splutter the vaporous foams,
 And wave on wave doth press without end,
 And as with the distant thunder's uproaring,
 It bursts from her ominous womb outpouring.

And lo! from the ominous womb atide,
 Something rises white as a swan,
 And an arm and a glistening neck are espied,
 And it paddles with strength and with diligence on,
 And 'tis he, and in his left hand swinging,
 Waves he the goblet, so joyfully bringing.

And breathed he long and breathed he well
 And he greeted the heavenly light.
 With joyfulness each to the other did call:
 "He lives! He is there! It stopped not his flight!
 From the grave, from the eddying water's shiv'ring,
 Hath this brave one rescued his own soul living."

And he comes, now encircles the crowd joyous so,
 To the feet of the King he falls,
 The goblet he offers him kneeling low,
 And the King to his daughter enchanting calls,
 Who fills it with wine to the border glist'ning,
 And the youth doth then turn to the King who's list'ning:

"Long life to the King! Rejoice in full,
 Who do breathe in the rose-colored light!
 For down below it's horrible,
 And let man not tempt the divinities' might,
 And desire never and ne'er to uncover
 What they kindly by night and by fear do cover.

"It ripped me down under with speed of light—
 Then thrust me in crag-covered shaft,
 Wild flooding a spring rushed with all of its might:
 It seized me in double stream's furious wrath,
 And like as a gyro gets dizzily twisted
 Drove me 'round, I could no longer resist it.

“Then God showed to me, to Him I did cry
 In that terrible need so great,
 In the déépness a rocky reef did lie,
 Which I grasped at quickly and from death escaped—
 And there hung too the goblet on coral appalling,
 Else would it in bottomless waters be falling.

“For ’neath me still lay it, mountain deep,
 In darkness of deep purple hue,
 And though to the ear ’tis like lasting sleep,
 The eye did with shudd’ring to the depths view,
 How the salamanders and dragons and monsters
 Do stir in the jaws of a Hell of terrors.

“A horrible mixture did swarm there in black,
 All balled up in hideous clumps,
 The rock fish, the ray fish with thorny back,
 The hammer’s dreadfully shapeless lumps,
 And threatening me with teeth all in motion
 The terrible shark, the hyena o’th’ ocean.

“And there hung I and was with great horror possessed,
 From the succor of man far apace,
 Among specters, the singular sensitive breast,
 Alone in this hideous, lonely place,
 Deep under the ring of man’s conversation,
 ’Mid the monsters’ melancholy desolation.

“And shudd’ring I thought, it’s crawling near,
 Moved a hundred limbs at once alive,
 While snapping at me—in nightmarish fear,
 I let loose from the coral I’d clutched to survive;
 Was seized by the whirlpool with furious raving,
 And it threw me back up, it was thus my saving.”

The King is now taken by wonderment,
 And speaks: “The goblet’s thine own,
 And to grant thee this ring’s my intent,
 Adorned with this exquisite most precious stone,
 Attempt thou yet once more and bring me tidings,
 What thou saw’st of the sea in the depths of thy divings.”

The daughter did hear this, with softness of heart,
 And with flattering words made her plea:
 “Leave, Father, enough with thine hideous sport!
 He hath just surmounted what none dared for thee
 And canst thou thy heart’s appetites not be taming,
 Then maybe the knights can the esquire be shaming.”

Then the King doth grasp for the goblet in haste,
 In the whirlpool he flings it aright:
 “And bring’st thou the goblet and here be it placed,
 Thou shalt be to me the most excellent knight.
 And shalt her today as thy loving wife marry,
 Who now doth thee mercy in tender pray’r carry.”

Then a heavenly force overcomes his soul there,
 And a boldness shines forth from his eye,
 And he sees as a blush paints her features so fair,
 And sees her then whiten, and sinking lie,—
 It drives him to capture the prize he doth cherish,
 And he dives down under to live or to perish.

Well hear all the breakers, well do they return,
 They’re proclaimed in a thundering call—
 They bow themselves under with gazes that yearn;
 They’re coming, they’re coming the waters all
 They rush on upwards, they rush on ever,
 The stripling they bring back never.

Sheila Anne Jones