

The Ballad of the Angel Fish

By

George E. Merrick

Says uncle Simon Pinder:...
”...The only fish that used to be
Within the seas o’Flor-i-dee,—
Were Angel-Fish:
They all were women fishes, too!

And angel lives those fishes spent
In our rich seas, above the coral floor.
...Not one e’er knew what sorrow meant—
—They swam about on angel-fins—
Sparkling, gauzy, fairy fins—
That brightly glistened above that coral floor;—
And all was one fish ’armony!

“Tis true each had o’fins—
Another plainer uglier set,—
That grew some where beneath
—Those sparkling gauzy fairy fins,
Those other fins were but for use
In case a fish should ever choose
To leave its happy angel home.

Above the coral floor.

And there was a law — that no fish knew —
(Because no fish yet had thought to do) —
Aught else but swim
On angel fin —
O’er gleaming glistening coral floor.

Once they met — to have a grand “to-do:”
And after they had played “hi spy;” and then a few
Like trials o’ swimming skill: —
...A thin old scraggly angel fish, —
— She had a bill that all but joined her chin —
...She raised one scrawny fin: —
And Shrilled: —
“Us women fish — we’ve lived this sea
For nigh a million cen-tu-ree, —
And — just to think! — That yet have we
Never tried to find some better sea!
...Some better broader richer Sea —
That waits our finny grasp!

At this deep thought
— This deep — deep thought; —
(Fifty fathoms deep or more) —
Those erstwhile angelic women fish

...Gave all an Awful Gasp!

Their angel-fins — with one unclasp
They threw down on the coral floor.

...As one Mighty chattering Pour
They rushed away from Flor-i-dee
To find that Sea: —
That better broader richer sea!

(Their Angel Fins they all did leave
Down deep upon the coral floor —)

Those pretty sparkling angel fin —
— That ne'er had led them into sins —
Those lovely glistening gauzy fins
On which they could but joy receive!

Their Angel Fins they all did leave
Down deep upon the coral floor, —
Along the coast of Flor-i-dee

...If ever those poor fishes found a flow
Of richer deeper fairer Sea —
I can not tell!

...But I know well,—
That,—

—As in the sea do fish-lives go—
It was no lengthy spell,—
Before,—
Along the coast o’ Flor-i-dee
Those Fishes ‘gan to homeward flow!

...But Ah!—the Change!
Where all had angel fishes been
(As though by touch of Magic Sin)
—’Twas but the Touch o’ Ocean’s Strange—
—Those fishes once of angel fin—
...Came now so sad with gills sagged low,
—Came twisting back’—so mournful—slow
...O’er each sick head regretful glow
For the fin that might have been!

...For it is sad—but it is true!
That old fair fin—
Might still have been
Their dear prized fin—
But for their sin!
...But now no more
No, ...nevermore:—

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Will angel fishes find their fins—
Those precious sparkling Angel Fins—
...That they did cast on coral floor!

For when each came and searched around
No trace of fins could then be found—
...No trace of those fair Angel Fins!

They searched for days;—
But ne'er a trace
...Of glowing sparkling Angel Fins!
They searched for years,—
In bitter tears—
—Of fishly woe.
But I do know
—That to this day they have no more
Found slightest trace of fairy fins—
They once did leave upon the coral floor!

And that is why off Flor-i-dee
The fishes ne'er will leave it's see!

They each do hope to find once more
Their Angel Fins on coral floor.”