



THE LITTLE MERMAID

Once upon a time, deep in the ocean, right at the bottom of the sea where even the sun couldn't reach, there was a vast kingdom. It was beautiful, with coral walls and algae of every colour. Everyone lived in peace in this kingdom – small fish, big fish, sea urchins, mermaids, and all the other ocean creatures. The kingdom was ruled by a great mer-king, who lived in a beautiful palace with his mother and his five daughters. His wife had died when his daughters were very young, so his mother helped to raise the girls.

They all lived happily in the kingdom, but there were certain rules everyone had to follow. The most important rule of all was that no merpeople could go near the water's surface until they were at least fifteen years old. If they were younger than fifteen, they had to stay in the kingdom, where they would be safe.

The girls longed to see the world above, but none of them longed more than the youngest. She would sit with her sisters in their garden, imagining what it might be like on the surface and admiring a statue of a human man she had found on the ocean floor. Sometimes their grandmother would come to the garden and tell them stories about all the beautiful things above the ocean, and though she always made sure to tell them that the most beautiful places she'd

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ever seen was right there in their watery home, the little mermaid still couldn't wait to see the world above.

When our story begins, the little mermaid was just turning fifteen. For years she had listened to her sisters tell her stories about what it was like above. Her oldest sister was five years older than her, and on the day of her fifteenth birthday went to the surface and returned with stories of a night sky filled with stars and constellations of the gods. The next sister saw a magnificent sunset, filled with colours she'd never even imagined. The third swam toward shore and found tall green trees and towering cliffs. The fourth swam North and saw enormous icebergs and their northern cousins, the walruses. The youngest daughter couldn't wait to go above the surface. She dreamed of seeing humans – she'd heard stories of their legs and wanted to know what it would look like to see a person walk. As she cleaned her statue, wiping tiny algae off the marble, she would examine the legs and wonder what it must feel like to have a pair of them.

On the day of the little mermaid's first excursion to the surface, her grandmother gave her a big hug, put a wreath of flowers on her head for this special occasion, and decorated her tail with exquisite pearls.

"Oh, you have grown up so fast, my darling!" said her father, but it felt like ages for the little mermaid, who had looked forward to this day for so long.

"Look how beautiful you are!" her grandma said, putting the last pearl on her tail. The little mermaid couldn't wait to finally lay her eyes on the world above. She swam as fast as she could, her pearls clicking against each other as she swiftly approached the surface. She broke through and looked around in amazement for a whole minute before the joy swept over her and she started jumping cheerfully out of the water and whooping. Dolphins, hearing her happy laughter, swam over and joined her dancing. It was even better than she'd dreamed!

After a while, the little mermaid saw a ship in the distance. She'd heard tales of ships and knew that they could be dangerous, but she also knew that there would be people on the ship and she couldn't help herself. She had to get a glimpse of a real human being, legs and all!

As she got closer, she could see crowds of people on the deck of the ship. It looked

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like they were celebrating! Carefully she swam closer, and right as she was about to turn around, she noticed a little window on her level. Inside, she saw a boy sitting in a room, wearing a small crown and stretching his glorious legs out. She watched him silently, unable to take her eyes off him. He was beautiful! In fact, she thought, he looked exactly like the statue in her garden.

The little mermaid stayed much longer than she should have, watching the party unfold. Everyone on the ship was in terrifically high spirits, but at midnight, under a dark sky, the people shot off fireworks. The little mermaid was terrified at first – she'd never heard anything like that before! – and she ducked under the water to hide, but when she peeked back up she saw the most beautiful colours and patterns, like the humans were creating their very own constellations. Then, suddenly, the sky clouded over and a bolt of lightning struck. A storm was starting! The storm grew and grew and soon enough the huge waves started rocking the ship. The wind was so strong that it seemed like it would blow the ship apart, and with another strike of lightning the main mast broke in two. The ship rocked even harder. Water splashed over the deck and the wild, raging sea split the ship in half. All that was left was wreckage and people lost in the water. The little mermaid was so scared and was sure that the prince would die. Without a thought she swam frantically around the broken parts of the ship, and when she found him took him in her arms and carried him all the way to the shore. She put her head to his chest – he was still breathing! And, knowing well that she couldn't stay out of the water, she gently kissed his forehead and hid behind a rock at the edge of the water.

She watched over him for hours, until it became morning and a group of people passing by found him. One of the people was a very pretty princess, and as soon as the prince opened his eyes and saw her, he smiled warmly and said, "My angel! You saved my life. I will be grateful to you until my last breath."

The little mermaid was distraught. She was the one who saved the prince, but she couldn't say a word. She just sat there and sobbed quietly, knowing the prince's smile should have belonged to her. The people helped the prince onto his legs and helped him walk away, and when they were gone the little mermaid swam

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back to her kingdom. When she returned she went straight to the garden and sat quietly and sadly by her statue.

Her sisters noticed she'd returned and immediately began peppering her with questions. "What did you see, little sister? Did you like the above world?" And then, noticing her tears, "Why are you so very sad?"

The little mermaid didn't want to tell her sisters anything at first, but she looked up at the statue and suddenly the whole story poured out of her. They were very loving, and then her eldest sister told her she knew where to find the prince. He had a vast kingdom next to the ocean. Suddenly the little mermaid had hope! The next day she went to visit the prince, and every day after that she returned to watch him from afar. Slowly but surely, she began to feel that she knew him, and soon she realized that she had fallen head over tail in love with him.

One day, there was a great celebration in the ocean realm. All five sisters dressed up and combed their beautiful long hair. They could cover themselves in it as if it were silk. The eldest had hair red as flames, the second black as coal, the third grey as silver and the fourth brown as chestnuts. The youngest daughter had locks that looked like gold. They were all well known for their beautiful voices, and their father had made sure that they would sing at the celebration.

The littlest mermaid sang first, and it was the most beautiful song of all. Everyone was having a wonderful time, but all the little mermaid could think about was her prince, and she felt absolutely miserable.

"If only the prince knew I existed," she thought. "I would give anything to spend even one day by his side." When she finished her song, an idea struck her. She had heard tales of an old sea witch who lived in the dark gorge. It was full of black mud and sea snakes that lurked in the shadows, waiting for anyone daring to swim by, but the little mermaid knew the witch was the only one that could help her. And so she snuck away from the celebration and swam into the deep, dark ocean until she reached the witch's caves.

There were strange noises in the dark – clicks and murmurs and growls that the little mermaid had never heard before, but she swam on until she saw the witch. "Please, I want to become a human," she said. "Can you help me?"

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“I know why you are here, dearest,” the witch replied. “You want a prince to fall in love with you and marry you. Then you can have an immortal soul that will exist even after you die.”

The little mermaid hadn't known that humans had everlasting souls – unlike her kind. Mermaids lived long, for three hundred years, but when they died, they changed into seafoam and vanished without a trace. She just wanted the prince to love her, but an immortal soul sounded kind of nice, too.

“Well.” The witch said, looking at the mermaid. “It's possible, of course. But there's a catch. Once your tail turns into legs, every time you step on the ground it's going to feel like a hundred needles are poking into your feet. And that's not all. If the prince your heart desires marries another woman, their first morning together will be your last and you will die. And lastly, once you become a human, there's no going back. You won't ever be able to return to the ocean. Are you still interested?”

The little mermaid didn't even pause.

“Yes. I'll do anything to be with him.”

“Well, alright, then. Oh, I should mention that it's going to cost you a little something. You just have to give me your voice.”

“My voice?” The mermaid didn't believe her. “But how then would I talk to the prince and tell him I love him?”

“Well, you'll have to charm him in other ways, won't you! I'm afraid this is non-negotiable, dear. No voice, no legs.”

The little mermaid felt as though she already couldn't speak. She nodded, then looked up at the witch and said, firmly,

“Alright. It's a deal.”

The witch began to concoct a magical elixir that bubbled menacingly. Once it was ready, she bottled it up and gave it to the girl with instructions.

The underwater kingdom was still and quiet when she returned. Everybody was asleep. Quietly, she kissed her dad, grandma and sisters goodbye, and then she swam up to the surface near the prince's castle. When she got to the shore, she climbed out onto the sand, drank the elixir, and fell asleep.

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When she woke up, she wasn't a mermaid anymore. She felt a hand on her arm and when she opened her eyes she saw the prince leaning over her, a worried look on his face.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I found you lying here on the beach. I just want to help you."

She opened her mouth to say that she wasn't afraid, that she was the one who had saved him, but no sound came out. She had no voice!

The prince took her to his castle and had a beautiful dress made for her. She was a lovely girl now, but every step she took hurt like a thousand needles were being driven into her feet. When she looked at the prince, though, all her pain and worries melted away.

As time passed, the little mermaid and the prince became wonderful friends. She was slowly getting used to walking on her legs, and though she missed her family and the freedom of the ocean and, of course, her voice, still she did not regret her decision. Every day she did something new and exciting. The prince took her everywhere, to feasts and celebrations, horseback riding and sailing.

Over time, her relationship with the prince grew stronger and stronger. She tried over and over again to make him recognize her as the girl who had saved him, but he never did. And then, one summer night, as they were watching stars together, he told her a secret.

"On the night I turned eighteen," he said, "my ship got caught in a huge storm and almost everyone on board perished. I washed up on shore, but all I remember is that a beautiful princess saved me. She was there when I woke up and I fell in love with her the moment I laid my eyes on her. I've hoped ever since to meet her again and ask her if she would marry me, but the fates have denied me this, so I've decided to act. Please, would you go and look for her with me? We will travel to all the kingdoms I know. I have to find her. Except for her, you are the closest to my heart, and I need you by my side on this journey.

The little mermaid didn't know what to do. She tried one more time to tell him that she was the girl who had saved him, but he didn't notice or understand. So, finally, she nodded and left with him to search for the princess he was in love with.

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They had sailed for weeks and visited four kingdoms when they arrived in the most distant kingdom the prince knew of. He had almost lost hope of finding his lost princess, and the little mermaid was just beginning to have hope that they wouldn't find her, when they arrived at the kingdom and the prince finally saw the girl he'd been looking for. Little did he know that, at that moment, he had sealed his friend's fate.

Soon, the day of the wedding had been chosen. There was nothing the little mermaid could do to change it. She could have tried to tell the prince one more time that he had the wrong girl, but he was so happy all of a sudden that she knew she wouldn't be able to make him believe her. All she could do was watch silently and pretend that she was happy for the prince. All throughout the wedding ceremony, she held the bride's white train and smiled through tears. Before long, the ceremony was over and when the evening came, the little mermaid excused herself and went for a walk on the beach. She knew that, in the morning, she would no longer be alive. Suddenly she heard the soft hum of voices calling her closer to the ocean. She walked to the edge of the sea and saw her beloved sisters, but something was wrong - all their beautiful hair was cut short!

"The witch told us everything," they said. "She says you have given up everything for the prince, and that you'll soon die because he married someone else. We made a deal, though, and we gave her our hair in exchange for this magic dagger. All you have to do is stab the prince in the heart with it, and then your tail will grow back and you can stay alive. It's either your life, or his. Please, little sister, do it." They held out the dagger and hummed, "Do it, do it, please, do it."

That night the little mermaid snuck into the prince's chamber, where he was peacefully sleeping beside his new wife. She took a few steps to the bed and raised the dagger above his chest. She stood there for what felt like minutes, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She had saved him once, and she would save him again. She loved him too much, and so she gently kissed his cheek and crept out.

The little mermaid stayed on the beach with her sisters that night, and as soon as the chirping birds announced the new day and the sun began to peek out, the

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little mermaid began dissolving into seafoam. Her sisters wept as she started to melt, but suddenly her human soul rose out of her body. It looked like a ray of sunshine, and her sisters watched as it soared up to the sky and joined the clouds. When a human dies, you see, their soul becomes one with the wind and they live forever, but when a mermaid with a human soul dies, she turns into a nymph. The little ray of light grew wings and suddenly the little mermaid had her voice back. To anyone alive wind nymphs only look like sunrays, when the wind blows you can smell their pleasant scent or hear their soft whispers.

The little nymph was so happy that she had her voice back that she danced in the clouds and sang a beautiful song. Then she flew down to her sisters and bathed them in light and whispered,

“Don’t be sad, sisters. I’ll be here forever. I’m happy now, and I love you.”

The prince never understood what had happened to his friend, but as we know, he was never that bright to begin with. He had a feeling she was happy, though, and every now and then the light would glint in his eyes and for just a second he would think he’d seen her.

And so the little mermaid became a nymph and sang songs with the birds and danced in the clouds forever.