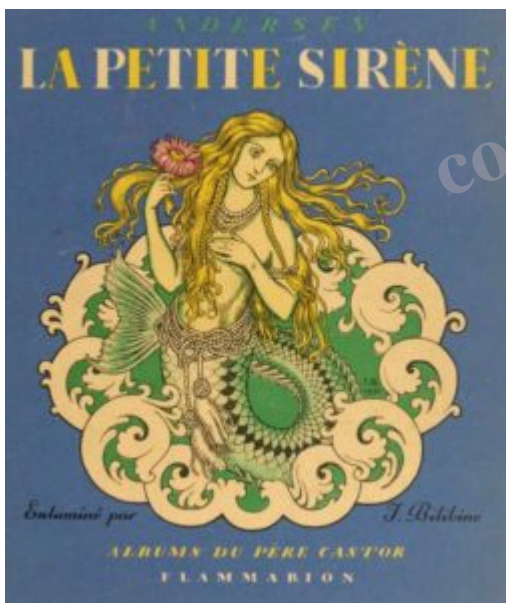




The little mermaid

Description

Conte de Hans Christian Andersen, Version de Contesdefees.com. Illustrations by Ivan Âkovlevi? Bilibin (1876-1942).



Once upon a time there was a king who had six beautiful daughters. But this king did not belong to the human world. His kingdom was under the sea, in a remote place, where the fish sparkled like little jewels among the steep rocks and reefs.

The king and the six princesses lived in a marvelous palace, built of glittering coral and shining conchs. The mother of the girls had died, but the grandmother took great care of her granddaughters.

The youngest princess was also the prettiest. Her long hair puffed up like a golden cloud and her tail glowed with green, blue and silver sparks.



If there was one thing the princesses loved, it was listening to their grandmother tell them stories of the world above the sea. « There, » the old woman told them, « human beings walk with strange things called legs. And strange fish called birds swim through the air waving their long fins. The more the old mermaid talked about this mysterious world, the more the little mermaid wanted to go see it.

When you are fifteen, » the grandmother promised, « you will go and see it.

When the older sister turned fifteen, she swam to the surface, and the next day she returned to tell of the wonders she had seen.

-There are cities dazzling with lights and human laughter, she said. There are huge ships, as high as castles, that sail the sea in the sun.

The princesses grew up and each year, one after the other, they all reached the age where they could swim to the human world. They all came back and told strange and beautiful stories. Finally, the youngest of the little mermaids was fifteen years old and could finally realize her dream like her sisters.

When she went up to the surface for the first time, the setting sun painted the sky pink and gold. Near her, a beautiful ship was slowly gliding across the ocean as the wind was light.



While the little mermaid was looking at the boat, a handsome prince came out on deck to gaze at the sea. He didn't know that the little mermaid was looking at him, unable to take his eyes off her face.

Soon it was dark, and soon the wind grew stronger, and the ship began to pitch.

A horrible storm arose, and tore away the sails and rigging, and gigantic waves crashed against the deck and broke the hull. As the ship sank, the little mermaid saw that the prince was drowning.

She supported him and swam carefully to the nearest shore. In the morning, when the wind had died down and the sun rose, the little mermaid stood there at the water's edge watching over the sleeping prince.



Soon after, she saw a group of girls from the nearest town coming to see the sea. When they reached the beach where the prince was, he woke up and smiled as they helped him walk. The little mermaid,

hiding behind a rock, felt very sad because she was afraid she would never see him again.

After that day, the little mermaid often came to the surface, because she wanted to see the prince again. She looked at his beautiful palace and could sometimes see him walking among his courtiers. She became sadder and sadder, and one day she decided to go to the sea witch and ask her advice.



This witch lived in a deep, dark place in the ocean, where sea snakes terrorized the icy water. Seeing the little mermaid, the witch burst out laughing.

« I know why you are here! » she said. You want to go to the human world to see your prince. You want me to turn your mermaid tail into human legs, as ugly as they are. Do you know the price?

« No, » whispered the princess, « but I would give anything to become human. »

« You will have to give me your voice, with which you sing so well, » said the witch. Then I can turn you into a human, with ugly legs to walk on. But remember that if the prince does not love you with all his heart and take you as his wife, you will turn into sea foam and disappear forever. You won't be able to go back to your father. « Okay, » said the little mermaid. It was already decided.



Then the sea witch gave the little mermaid a magic potion to drink. As she drank, a deep sadness came over her as she realized what a great sacrifice she was making. When she surfaced and swam to the prince's palace, her sadness disappeared as soon as she saw the young man she loved. She now had beautiful legs but was unable to speak because the witch had taken her voice. The prince immediately wanted to receive the beautiful stranger, and although she could not speak, he liked her company and wanted the girl to be always by his side.

Every day the little mermaid loved the young prince more, but she realized that he had no intention of marrying her. Yet he enjoyed her company and felt that they were united by something.

-You remind me of a girl I once knew, » he told her. She had saved my life, She is the only woman I could ever love.

The poor little mermaid tried to gesticulate and mime, but she couldn't explain to him that this girl was in front of him. And she couldn't write. She was really unhappy but fate seemed to have decided so.



After a few months, the king and queen urged the prince to find a bride. After refusing many times, he finally agreed to meet the princess from a neighboring country. The little mermaid, of course, boarded the royal ship with him, although she was heartbroken.

When the prince stepped ashore and met the neighboring princess, he was so fascinated by her beauty that he convinced himself that she was the girl who had saved him from the shipwreck.

-It's you! » he exclaimed, « my savior! I found the girl I will love all my life. Will you marry me?

Soon the preparations for the magnificent wedding began, with thousands of flowers, silk dresses and jewelry. Everyone was full of enthusiasm and shouted with joy to see such a happy couple. Only the little mermaid remained silent and from her eyes, for the first time, fell tears that nobody saw.

That night, when the prince and his wife went to their cabin on the royal ship, the little mermaid stood on the deck, staring out at the dark water. At dawn, she would turn to foam and never be able to see, hear or love again.



But at that moment, her sisters rose to the surface of the sea. Their hair was cut almost flush.

« We gave our hair to the sea witch, » they said, « in exchange for this knife. If you kill the prince with this knife during the night, you will be freed from the spell and can return to the sea kingdom with us. »

The little mermaid took the knife, but when she found herself next to the sleeping prince, she realized that she could never hurt him. Crying, she threw the knife and threw herself into the sea.

But to her surprise, the little mermaid didn't turn into foam, but floated away; the boat was moving quickly away. Around her, she saw wonderful creatures of golden light.

We are the daughters of the air, » they told her. We are happy doing good around us. Now that you are one of us, little mermaid, you can finally be happy. »

So the little mermaid looked one last time toward the sun, gazed at the prince and his wife, who were on the deck of the ship, and for the first time in a long time, she smiled.



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