

THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE



JESSIE ATKIN - SARA CLETO - PEYTON DUPREE
HENRY HERZ - PAUL HIMMELEIN - ELLEN HUANG
KELLY JARVIS - BRITTANI JENEE' CAL
AMANDA KESPOHL - ANNIKA BARRANTI KLEIN
MADISON MCSWEENEY - MARISA MONTANY - ESTHER RA
J. S. ROGERS - MARCIA SHERMAN - BRITTANY WARMAN

SONG OF THE SEA ISSUE
JUNE 2023



Pressed Flower Fairy Art



Have you watched the fairies
When the rain is done
Spreading out their little wings
To dry them in the sun?

I have, I have! Isn't it fun?

Rose Flyeman



My original fantasy flower FAIRY art was fashioned entirely
from fresh flower blossoms and greenery grown in
my own Enchanted Gardens.

This magical artwork began with planting the seeds, taking care of the
flowers as they grew, and then picking and pressing the petals to
lovingly create each FAIRY. I call this unique art form

"PETAL PAINTING"

I am excited to offer many of my original pressed FAIRY flower designs
as beautiful 8 x 10 giclee prints.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello Enchanted Friends:

Welcome to the accidental “Song of the Sea Issue.” That’s right, we never intended this to be a watery issue, but after I’d chosen the authors for the March and June issues, I discovered that I’d bought a lot of mermaid/water-focused works. So Amanda and I got together and created this dreamy issue that you have before you. We’re very proud of it, and it’s timed just right for the live-action version of *The Little Mermaid*, and that too is accidental!

We don’t just have brand new stories, poems and nonfiction in this issue—fantastic though they are. We also have items for the Best of *Enchanted Conversation* series. Plus, Amanda has gathered some antique fairy tales you may never have read before from old books. We truly are offering an ocean of delights in this issue.

In other news, if you are a writer, don’t forget that we have a writing contest fundraiser going on right now. After June 2, the contest will be the last chance to submit anything for publication in 2023. [Here](#) are the details. We’ve also officially welcomed Kim Malinowski as our tech coordinator and Madeline Mertz as our editorial intern. We’re excited to have them aboard.

Have you been reading the fabulous serialized novel *Glass and Feathers*, by Lissa Sloan? Only full-year subscribers can, and we’re almost finished serializing it. We are so proud of it that we’re publishing it in print next February. Because of that, we are pulling it as a bonus for new subscribers after the last section is sent. But subscribers who’ve joined so far will still get to keep it in the serialized form.

There’s lots of art and beauty and stories and poetry here to enjoy, and I hope you will. As the days grow ever hotter in the Northern Hemisphere, our stories, nonfiction and poems will offer a delightful way to visit the water without leaving your easy chair. And for our more Southern Hemisphere fans, this issue will make you long for warmer days that bring *you* to the water’s edge too. Enjoy!

Kate Wolford
Editor / Publisher

P.S. One of our contributors, Brittani Jenee' Cal, has a very special message to go with her poem on page 72. We thought we’d share it here:

“As a child, it was easy to see the women around me as other-worldly. They were magical beings with all the right answers and the power to keep me safe from the dangers of the world. When my grandmother passed away, my mother chose a photo of her as a young woman for her headstone. She said it was important that the woman she had been before she became a mother be honored, too. It was that moment I realized my mother had also lived a life beyond being just my mother, and I wondered who that woman had been. Her dreams. Her fears. Her loves. Who was she before me? And what sort of magic a love between a mother and daughter must be to drown oneself for.”



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FORMERLY ENCHANTED CONVERSATION

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LOOK FOR ME WHEN THE TIDE IS LOW

by MARISA MONTANY

*I*f I was very lucky, I would go out once in a season. Out to sea. When the tide was pulled high, when the moon was black and near, when the sky had whipped itself into a froth and swollen the sea. On these nights, the door opened. On these nights—on *this* night—I kissed my starry husband goodbye and went to my black pool at the bottom of the cliffs. Carefully, I climbed down, thrilling and trembling with the crashing waves below.

In my pool, I found last season's seawater muddled with rain. The dregs of storm and tide. There was a little life there—skating bugs, yellowing leaves—but the water itself was dying, having left its salt in lonely rings on the wall to mark its dwindling days. Waiting.

Waiting with me for a night such as this. I undressed, hid my clothes beneath the scrubby brush, and prepared to meet the sea.

Was there any sweeter thing? I marveled as the spray misted my lashes, as my eyes slid up the flint faced waves, the rocks sharp at my back. *Any sweeter thing than to know the sea yet need not fear it?*

I tilted my cheek into the palm of the wind as I unbound my hair. Carefully, I stepped over the rocky lip and down into my tide pool. I clutched a satchel of airy treasures to my chest and leashed it to my bicep for good measure. The sea is a rogue and a pickpocket, after all, and from the unwary it takes what it wants.

The water was only ankle deep as I reclined and settled myself. Digging my toes into sand and silt, I parted my lips and closed my eyes. I could hear the waves crashing closer. Their roar pressed around me, building a pressure in my chest, until a large wave crashed over the pool's edge and welled up around me, purging the silt, the yellowing leaves. I smiled and felt my teeth go sharp in the starlight. The water came faster then, crashing again, and again, until I was washed out to sea with those yellow leaves swirling in my wake.

Just as I thought my lungs would be burned away in their desire, I felt my neck split open beneath my ears and the sea hit my blood. My body shimmered green from waist to fin. I had been pulled out to the relative calm beyond the breaking waves, and with a last look at the dark mirror of the moon, I dove down into the deep.

Below me, the reef dropped off into luminescent blackness. The daylight fish were fast asleep in their coral castles, like jewels locked away in a courtesan's chest. Seaweed winked and waved like quicksilver in the current.

I swung beneath a familiar ledge to gather the sole possession of my sea-self—a bow of rippling cuttlebone strung with the sinew of a leviathan long dead. The grizzled eel who kept guard for me loomed up from the shadows like ink. I scratched him gently beneath his chin.

I went to the Witch's Market in its living cathedral and traded the sea centaurs three bottles of sweet smoke—rose, myrrh, and frankincense, as coiled as their tails—for six abalone arrows to feed my bow of bone. A pearl caught my eye as I turned to leave, luminous and full, fallen from the heavens when the world was young, they said. It sat heavy as a lodestone in my palm. It came with me, for the price of a firefly lantern, orange blossom honey, and a dozen stone fruit.

As I nestled the pearl in my satchel, I met the gaze of a plum hued mermaid. The stall she floated in front of overflowed in a jumble of corners and angles. Two-dimensional tools for a two-dimensional world, artifacts from the land above. She held a green frosted astrolabe in one hand absently, and I saw the doors of her eyes shut even as she looked at me. I knew from long experience that no one, whether of land or sea, welcomed the weed that grew between paving stones. This, and many things besides, they held in common.

I set out for the open sea. With the help of the West Wind, I tracked down the spirits of those carnivorous currents that thirst for sun-warm blood. Three of these I killed. One I left limping as a lesson and a warning. I pulled its intended prey, a man, still breathing, onto a rocky beach and sang until his comrades came. One day, those comrades will tell their wide-eyed grandchildren of the mermaid whose fins they saw slip beneath the waves.

For the lives I had taken and the life I had saved, I sought the blessing and forgiveness of the Lady of the Drowned Well. Her hair floated around her in a halo, serene. Her bones settled her on the well's round wall. I lay my head in her lap and wept, compassed all around by her garden of slowly ringing bells.

I swam alone through the streets of drowned cities listening for footsteps, the laughter of sidelong glances that had long dispersed like sand.

I lay on the skin of the ocean, between the mirrored abysses of sea and sky. I rolled like a dancer in a trance, watching the brindled stars wheel above and the deep creatures wink below.

I watched my brothers and sisters laugh as I hid in the blood red dark of a coral grotto. They sang and danced joyously, and I longed to be with them. My heart strained in my chest, but I could lift neither finger nor fin to join them.

I broke into mussels, clams, oysters with my pointed teeth and dined upon their flesh alone.

I commiserated with a tawny seal maiden, herself of either no worlds or two, and we shared grief between us like bitter herbed wine. To the pain of separations and lines left in the sand. To the family we would never hold again, and to the family we would.

And then, like a seismic shift, I felt the tide begin to turn and turned my face to the world above.

After stashing my bow, I pulled the starry pearl out from my satchel and set it in my palm. I smiled. It was perfect, round and whole, a little world unto itself without cracks, or fissures. The old eel nudged it gently with his snout. I kissed his smoky eyes, my most faithful friend, and tucked the pearl safely away.

I swam over the shallowing reef, the sharpening rocks, and let the swell carry me into my shining black pool. And as the last of the waves drained away, the moon set and split my tail in two.

When my legs were steady, I untangled my clothes from the berries and the thorns and dressed. I walked up the thundering cliffs and through the whispering trees until a cottage, glowing like copper, emerged from the misting rain.

A shadow stood in the brightening door, "Welcome home."

With each step, stardust shook from my husband's hair as he led me to a bronze bath steaming with lavender and rock salt. The window was swung wide so I could hear the low piano of the sea, the silver rustle of the leaves.

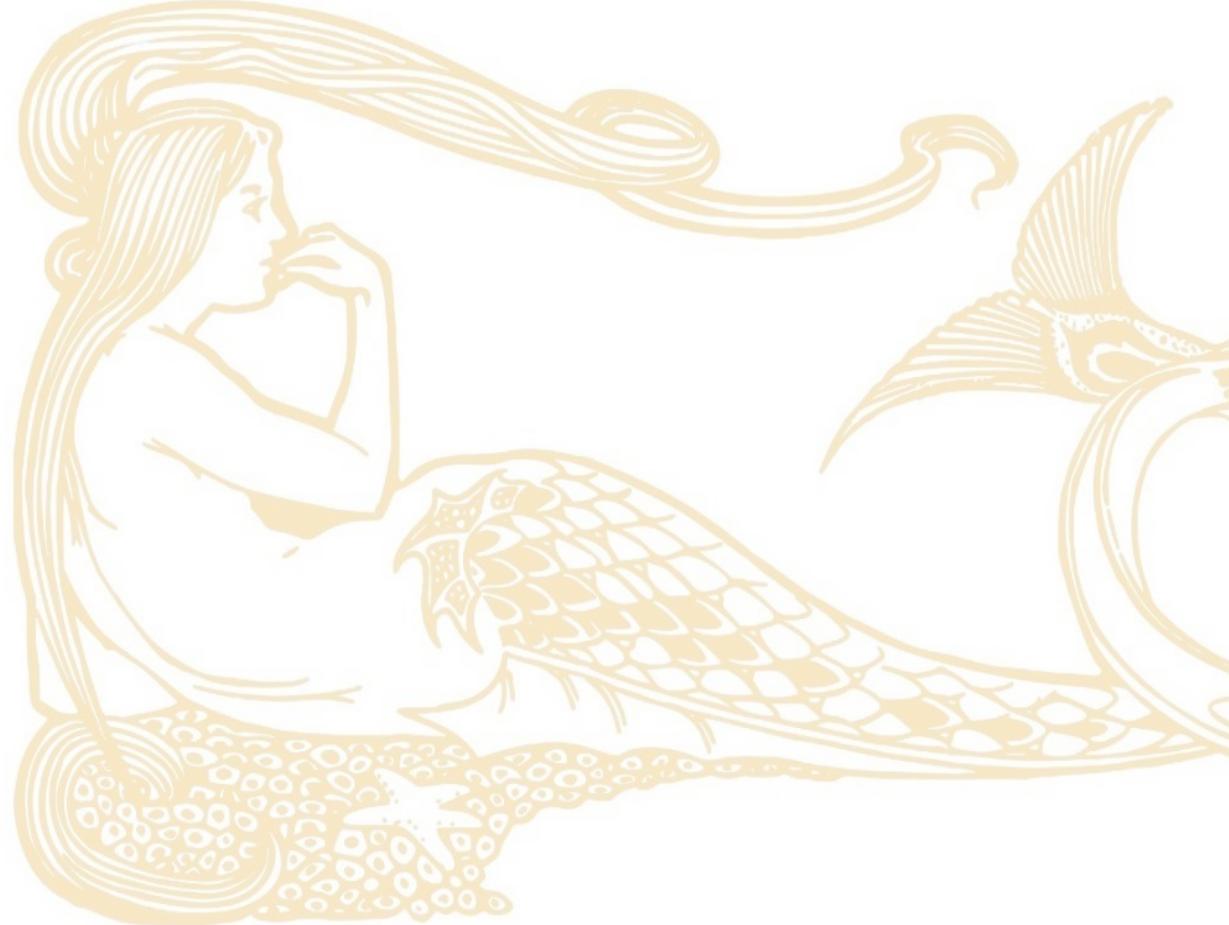
Washed, dried, and wrapped in old linen, the firelight set my husband's hair twinkling as he spoke, "What trifle have you brought me today, my love?"

I opened my palm, "A pearl, as old and full as the moon, to light your way at night." I smiled, "And what have you brought me?"

He twined his fingers through the air and a shred of shining mist appeared, "A wisp of another world's clouds, fine as sea foam, to make all your burdens light." I could smell the wind that blows between the stars on his skin.

He kissed the last of the seawater from my lips as the trees sang and swayed. As the waves crashed against the cliffs.

We cooked our food with iron and fire and washed our dishes with rain. We let saucers, and plates, and silverware lay as we slept the day away.







Classics from Around the World

SEA-HOARDINGS

by CALE YOUNG RICE

My heart is open again and sea flows in,
It shall fill with a summer of mists and winds and clouds and waves breaking,
Of gull-wings over the green tide, of the surf's drenching din,
Of sudden horizon-sails that come and vanish, phantom-thin,
Of arching sapphire skies, deep and unaching.

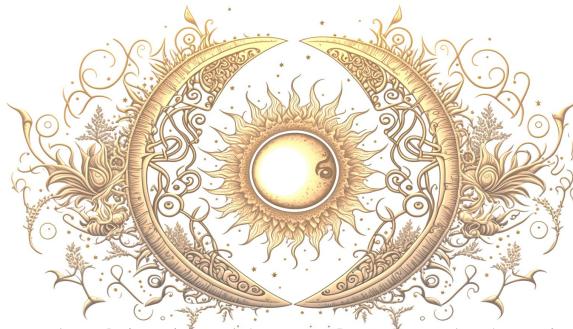
I shall lie on the rocks just over the weeds that drape
The clear sea-pools, where birth and death in sunny ooze are teeming.
Where the crab in quest of booty sidles about, a sullen shape,
Where the snail creeps and the mussel sleeps with wary valves agape,
Where life is too grotesque to be but seeming.

And the swallow shall weave my dreams with threads of flight,
A shuttle with silver breast across the warp of the waves gliding;
And an isle far out shall be a beam in the loom of my delight,
And the pattern of every dream shall be a rapture bathed in light—
Its evanescence a beauty most abiding.

And the sunsets shall give sadness all its due,
They shall stain the sands and trouble the tides with all the ache of sorrow.
They shall bleed and die with a beauty of meaning old yet ever new,
They shall burn with all the hunger for things that hearts have failed to do,
They shall whisper of a gold that none can borrow.

And the stars shall come and build a bridge of fire
For the moon to cross the boundless sea, with never a fear of sinking.
They shall teach me of the magic things of life never to tire,
And how to renew, when it is low, the lamp of my desire—
And how to hope, in the darkest deeps of thinking.





THE LAST ENCHANTRESS

by HENRY HERTZ

*H*ear now of the Last Enchantress, a tale of love, heart-rending woe, and mighty deeds.

Long ago, when the stars were brighter and the hills taller, noble Lord Trent lived in a high castle by the sea. His beautiful wife, Lady Valeria, was the most powerful enchantress in the wide world. Perhaps it was not by chance, then, that the trees of their lands always bore sweet, juicy apples, the goats multiplied unblemished, and a hillside mine yielded peerless rubies.

The pair ruled their prospering province wisely, treating the farmers and villagers like members of an extended family. The lord faithfully paid the king's annual taxes, and the lady used her powers to help others—healing a badly broken leg here, ensuring a waterproof roof there. All were content... except the king.

For the king had a heart as dark as his royal pennant—a red skull upon a black field—a heart filled with distrust, even of the trustworthy. So he thought, “Trent's people are loyal to him, and his ruby mine makes him wealthy. Wealthy enough to hire mercenaries to some day overthrow my rule.”

His craven counselors advised him to banish the pair, seizing their castle, their land, and all the riches it bore.

When the royal banishment order arrived, Trent knew well that if he disobeyed, the king's soldiers would soon arrive to enforce the unjust decree. His loyal folk would fight for him, though armed only with woodman's axe and farmer's scythe. But Trent loved them, and did not wish harm to befall them, neither from resisting the king's soldiers nor slaving under a tight-fisted tyrant.

Valeria proposed to her husband a strange but clever plan.

The following day, Trent held a gathering of all the people of his province, for he would only be accompanied into banishment by the willing. As with one voice, his guards, servants, and townsfolk proclaimed their loyalty. They would follow him to the ends of the world.

Trent and Valeria exchanged somber smiles. “So let it be,” he declared. “Return to your homes and there remain until the Lady's enchantment is complete.”

Valeria ascended to the loftiest room in the castle. She mixed rare herbs with a drop of her blood. Into the evening she chanted, tracing glowing symbols in the darkness. At midnight, she released a potent spell, the mightiest magic ever summoned, before or since. Such was her exertion, she fell into a deep slumber.

A tremendous rumbling like a thunderstorm shattered the night's stillness. The land fissured as if by an earthquake. Trent's entire province, from the fishing village on the coast to the nearby castle to the hills and eastern orchards, rose from the earth. As if scooped by a god's shovel, a gargantuan slab of dirt and bedrock drifted seaward like a fog bank. With it went Trent, Valeria, six-hundred and eleven loyal



subjects, and all their buildings, crops, and livestock. People gaped at a crater twenty miles long, five miles wide, and a hundred yards deep, left in their wake.

When news of the thaumaturgy reached the king, his face flushed. "Trident has taken what is rightfully ours! We cannot allow him to flout our rule, for other lords could follow his faithless example." He swore a terrible oath for himself and all his descendants, 'til vengeance be wrought or the world end. His court shuddered to hear it.

Valeria awoke with the colossus well out to sea. She eased the mass onto the calm ocean surface, her spell imbuing it with buoyancy. It rode the water like an enormous raft. Valeria caused three-hundred-yard-long tentacles to burgeon like seaweed around the underside of the floating island. These mighty limbs steered and paddled in response to her magic. She named the land Cyanea.

Life went on mostly as before. Valeria wrapped the villagers in a cloak of love. She kept Cyanea far from the king's lands in temperate regions with plentiful rainfall to drink and to irrigate their fruit trees, vegetable gardens, and lush pastures. Small ships fished with nets and harvested kelp. The herd of goats provided milk and meat, the chickens, eggs. The only food the Cyaneans lacked was flour, for grain fields would have covered too much of their arable land. It became a jest between Trident and Valeria that in saving the province, she had cast their bread upon the waters.

Valeria bequeathed magic to her eldest daughter, and in time, she to hers, though the sorcerous powers diminished with each generation. Successive first daughters commanded the swaying of enormous tentacles to keep Cyanea in calm seas far from the king's shores.

Meanwhile, the evil king bequeathed his grudge to his son, and later, he to his. Their wrath grew with each generation. So the centuries winged.

One clear-skied day, six galleons flying pennants with a red skull on a black field anchored off Cyanea's shore near the castle. They launched squadrons of rowboats filled with soldiers.

The ruling Lady of Cyanea ordered the castle catapults to hurl rocks, but their numbers were too few and the distance too great. She shared a knowing look with her husband. They nodded. Love for their people left them with but a single option. A tear rolled down her cheek.

The lady ascended to the loftiest room in the castle. She mixed rare herbs with a drop of her blood. She traced glowing symbols. Her feverish chanting evoked no response. Pain blazed in her arms, but she would not halt, for her people's lives depended upon her. Through a desperate effort of will, the enchantress mastered Cyanea's mighty tentacles. Upward they writhed, a tempest smashing rowboats and galleons to flotsam, drowning soldiers and sailors.

The lady's soul departed her flesh at the effort far beyond her strength.

The last enchantress saved Cyanea. But without a lady to steer, the island drifted on the currents, never again to be seen.

The king's descendants ordered ever more warships built to hunt Cyanea, until an invading army of fur-clad barbarians from the north conquered their undefended lands.

Thus did vengeance extract its heavy toll upon all.

End

Author's Note: Cyanea is a genus of jellyfish, a fitting name given the appearance of the floating island.



*The Best of
Enchanted Conversation*

THE LITTLE SEA MAID

by ANNIKA BARRANTI KLEIN

Deep in the sea, Maris, youngest daughter of Amphitrite, dreamed of the surface.

Sometimes, when little rays of sun made their way down through the water, Maris imagined what it would be like in the shallows, where she would be able to feel the warmth of the light, to see with her eyes and not just her whiskers.

Maris's sisters did not want to go to the surface. Up there, they said, the sun would burn you and the wind scrape against your skin. Up there, they said, there was no cold, thick sea to hold you and protect you. Up there, they said, people had no tails and no blubber and shaved off their whiskers.

Maris did not believe her sisters. How could all of those things be true? So she swam up to the surface to see for herself.

Maris's pale skin became hot and itchy, her blubber heavy; the bright sun hurt her eyes and her gills hurt in the thin air. She was shocked to see people walking on spiny legs. She wondered at their pale hair and dry skin. They had no blubber or whiskers to protect them and wrapped themselves in weeds instead. Maris did not like it on the surface.

Maris kissed her beautiful sea and dove deep, deep down, where she stayed and was happy for all of her days until one day she joyfully became sea foam again.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark, flowing dress, is leaning against a rough, textured stone wall. She is looking over her shoulder with a slight smile. The background is a dark, moody landscape with some foliage and a path.

Enchanted Creators

THE FAIRY TALE SCHOLARSHIP *of* MARIA TATAR

by KELLY JARVIS



*F*aairy tales have long been considered a simple form of storytelling, but with the wisdom and insight of literary scholar Maria Tatar, readers can peel back the layers of fairy tales to marvel at their complex messages.

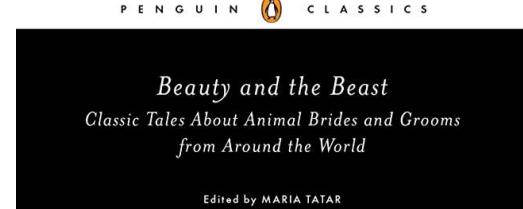
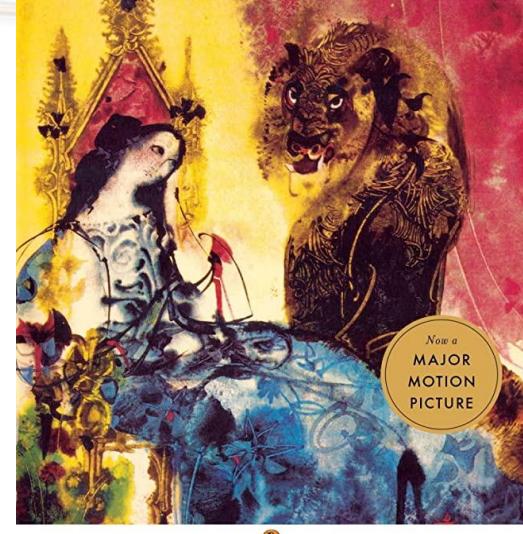
An expert in German literature, children's literature, and folklore, Maria Tatar earned her doctoral degree from Princeton and serves on the faculty at Harvard University. Her books, which explore fairy tale, mythology, literature, and popular culture have informed scholars and their students around the world. In this exclusive interview with The Fairy Tale Magazine, Dr. Tatar shares her brilliant scholarship and personal experiences with our readers. Enjoy!

What inspired you to focus your research interests on children's literature, folklore, and fairy tale? Have any of your students at Harvard been surprised by the depth of scholarship written about stories that are popularly regarded as children's tales?

Sometimes I believe that my path to children's literature and folklore was written in the stars. My interest in that body of literature and storytelling happened slowly, then all at once. First, an invitation to be on a panel on fairy tales, with Bruno Bettelheim, the psychologist who wrote *The Uses of Enchantment*, as the keynote speaker. I retrained myself in a matter of four nervous months to become a folklorist. After that, there was bedtime reading with my children, and the discovery that most of the tales in the Grimms' collection were anything but child friendly. Presto! I felt the need to figure out why we tell tales about cannibalism, homicide, and incest to the young. What kept me passionate, when I began presenting papers on fairy tales, was the sparkle in the eyes of those who came to hear about stories they had once loved. And then came their questions, full of velvety recollections about the power of stories in childhood.

For many years I worked in the field of German Romanticism, always with great enthusiasm but also with the inescapable recognition that my topics seemed to end conversations rather than start them. My interlocutors were a small number of specialists, most of them living abroad, in places like Heidelberg, Berlin, and Zürich. We corresponded, to be sure, but always by snail mail in an era before electronic communications. I began to heed the call of fairy tales, teaching courses on childhood and children's literature or on myth and fairy tale, despite stern warnings from my colleagues that my courses might attract "bottom-feeders." The students who enrolled were anything but that. Impassioned readers eager to revisit childhood stories, they developed what we soon came to call bifocal vision. They could still immerse themselves in the wonders of secondary worlds, but they also began to read closely and critically, conscious of implied audience, cultural context, and narrative technique. Some feared, at the start, that the work of interpretation would have an unsettling effect on their childhood memories, disenchanting the books read in childhood. But they came to realize that the magic did not have to fade. Instead, the stories grew richer and deeper as they went "further up and further in," as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* put it. By the end of each term, no one was surprised by the wealth of scholarship on fairy tales and children's literature, instead students were astonished that our culture pays so little attention to the formative stories of childhood and delegated their analysis to schoolteachers and librarians. The academy was just not interested.

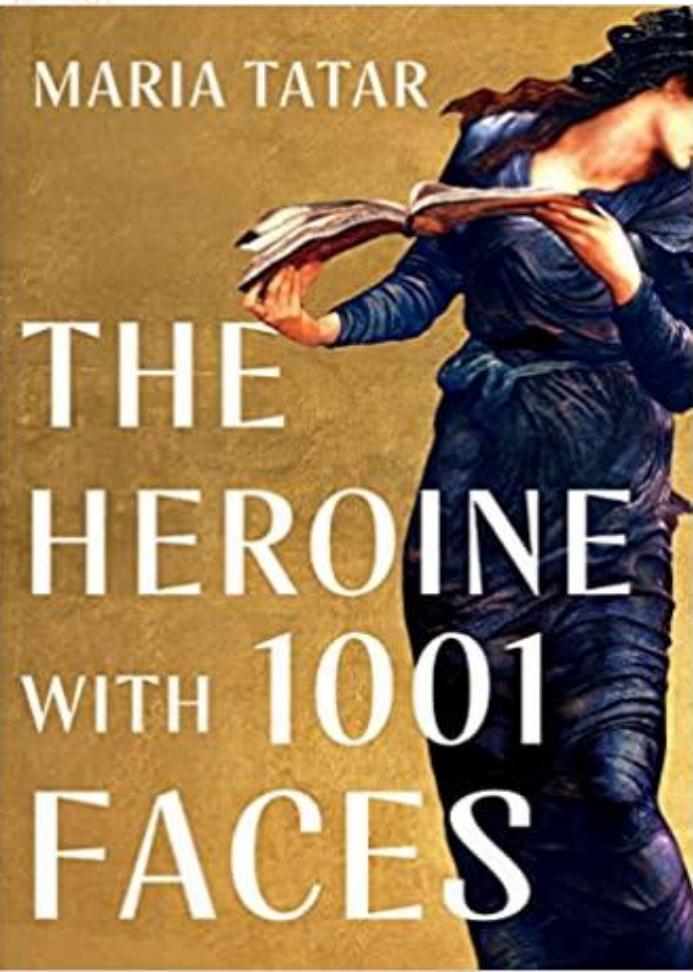
Although many of your books cover a range of tales, you have written a few books which compile and explore individual tale types ([Secrets beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and His Wives](#), [Beauty and the Beast: Classic Tales About Animal Brides and Grooms from Around the World](#), and [The Fairest of Them All: Snow White and 21 Tales of Mothers and Daughters](#)). Why did you choose to work with these three tale types and why do you think these three tale types continue to enchant readers?



Busted! Oddly, I don't recall making conscious choices about these three tale types, although I feel sure that "[Bluebeard](#)" was the most important one in the trio. There it was: a story about a marriage haunted by the threat of murder, and who gets a scolding but the curious wife? Never mind that her husband has decorated a forbidden chamber in the marital home with the corpses of previous wives. Happily ever after is possible only when women curb their innate curiosity, a trait that is bound to get them in hot water. It's an instinct they inherited directly from Eve and Pandora, both of whom are credited with bringing sin and evil into the world.

Then there is "[Beauty and the Beast](#)," a story about monstrosity and alterity. How do we conquer our fear of the other but with compassion, care, and kindness, traits that we value highly in our culture? Empathy has become the virtue we fervently promote at home, in classrooms, and now even in the boardroom. As I reflect on "Bluebeard" and "Beauty and the Beast," it dawns on me—only in hindsight—that those tales foreground curiosity and care. The traits are semantically linked (once your curiosity is aroused, you pay attention and begin to care), and they are also two of the features in the parade of women in my book, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*.

And now comes "[Snow White](#)," a story that highlights the third trait of heroines: craft in both senses of the term, that is, skill in the domestic arts and ingenuity. "Snow White" is a tale told all over the world, with a girl who is innocent but by no means always fair-skinned. In versions told in Asian and African regions, we often hear nothing at all about her skin color. [Snow White, along with her folkloric cousins, is usually an expert in the domestic arts and crafts, sewing, keeping house, cooking meals, and, in general, making things tidy, tasty, and beautiful.](#) Her antagonist, the wicked queen, is also a master of craft (this time it takes the form of duplicity), cooking up toxins in an underground laboratory decorated with skulls and inhabited by ravens.



In an alchemical miracle, fairy tales blend curiosity, care, and craft to create heroines who are themselves invested in creating beauty and securing justice in the world. Hansel and Gretel use their wits and poetry (Gretel summons a duck with verse) to defeat the forces of evil and return home with jewels. Doves avenge Cinderella as she leaves a church dressed as the most beautiful of them all. Allerleirauh restores the natural order of things by sewing, cooking, and creating miniature works of art. Aesthetics and ethics are conjoined in fairy tales in the service of a new utopian social order.

Your most recent publication, [The Heroine With 1,001 Faces](#), perfectly blends scholarship, mythology, fairy tale, literature, popular culture, and personal narrative to explore the unsung heroines who have shaped our world with their curiosity, perseverance, compassion, care, and thirst for justice. What inspired you to write this book and what message do you hope your readers will find in its pages?

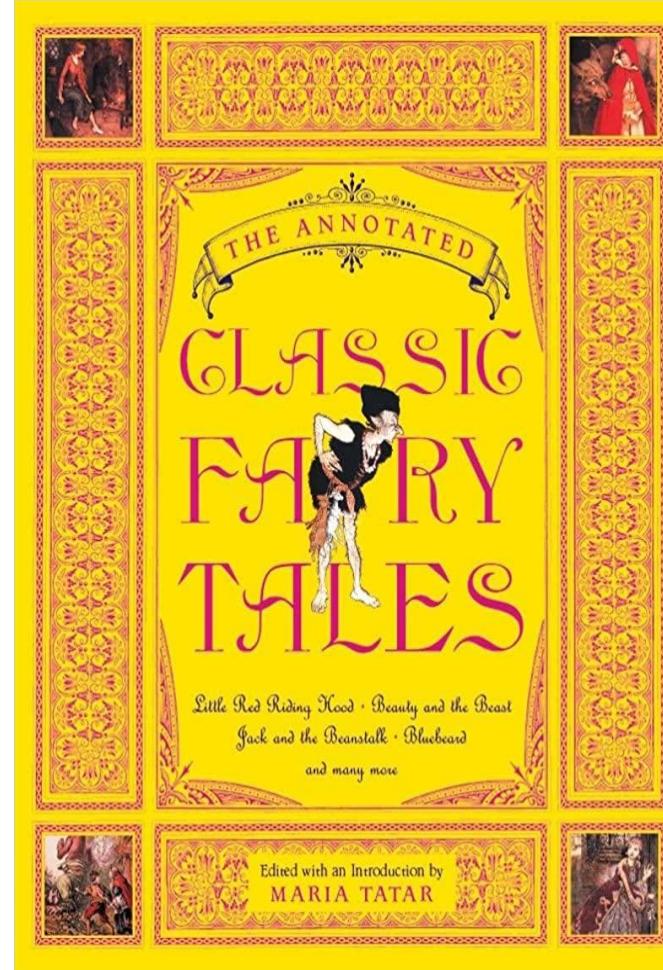
In graduate school, we were taught to think hard about the distinctive features of each literary genre: poetry, drama, fiction, and so on. What were the rules and regulations, the normative features, the cultural work done by each form? And then I read J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "[On Fairy Stories](#)" and learned about the Cauldron of Story, which has "always been boiling," and to which we add new bits and pieces as we adjust the recipe to our own taste, all the while adding zest and flavor. That was when I gave up thinking about genre and focused on story. And presto! that decision led me to think across genres, worrying less about formal analysis and more about the culture that produced the story.

Something else happened—an event that led me to think back on a lifetime of reading and to challenge the basic assumptions that had been part of my academic education. It's March 2020, and we are moving into what feels close to lockdown mode. I'm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Harvard Square, once a magical place overflowing with students, tourists, and shoppers, has emptied out. All my friends talk about living in a ghost town. During the first months of the pandemic, we were told that the best thing to do was to stay home. Any possibilities for heroic actions, even in their most modest forms, seemed shut down as silence descended upon us.

Many astonishing things happened during the pandemic, and one of them was that we rebooted our concept of heroism, defining it in new ways. All those heroes from times past—soldiers, generals, warriors, and spiritual leaders—lost status and we began honoring heroic survivors, the disenfranchised, marginalized, and enslaved, all those who had managed to survive under the most oppressive social conditions.

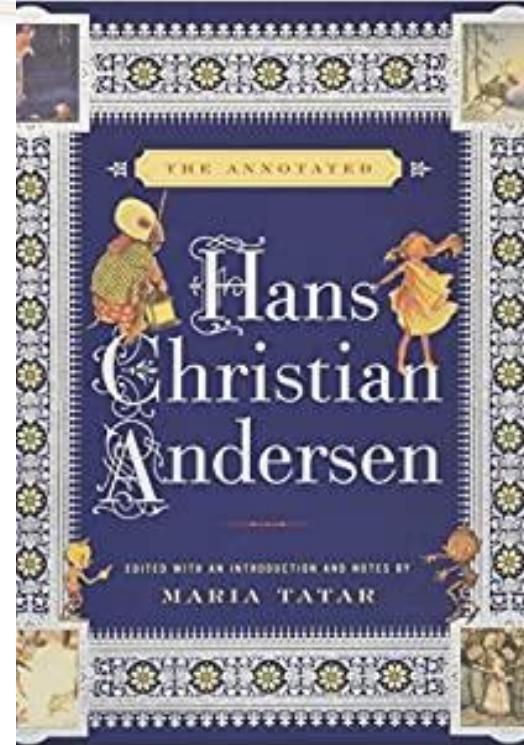
Who were our new heroes? People invested in healing: nurses, doctors, first responders, and all those health care workers trying to save lives. They were driven by compassion and care. There were scientists too, driven by curiosity and care, searching for ways to inoculate us and to manage Covid. And then there were heroines like Darnella Frazier, a young Black woman whose curiosity about a victim of police brutality, a man named George Floyd, led her to care about the harm done and to use the craft of filmmaking to produce evidence of criminal behavior.

I hope that we can finally abandon the gendered forms of heroism from times past and think hard about what it takes to be heroic today. I recall being stumped, many years ago, by an essay question on an Advanced Placement test in high school. "What is a hero?" those were the words on the otherwise blank page that required a 250 word answer. I could name names, but once I drew up the inventory in my mind, I realized that they were, like Achilles, Hector, and Hercules, all natural-born killers. I'm hoping that we



begin to understand the many unrecognized forms of heroism from times past and install new models for all of us, models with many of the features we enshrined as heroic during the pandemic.

Several of your books (including your annotated editions of [Classic Fairy Tales](#), [African American Folktales](#), [The Brothers Grimm](#), [Hans Christian Andersen](#), and [Peter Pan](#)) feature fairy tale illustrations alongside your scholarship. Why do you think so many famous illustrators have been inspired by fairy tales, and how does the inclusion of illustrations help to shape and enhance your readers' experience? Do you have any favorite fairy tale artists or illustrations? Do you have a favorite fairy tale that is close to your heart?



Your question brings back good memories and bad. When I embarked on the project of collecting illustrations for Annotated Classic Fairy Tales in the 1990s, I spent long afternoons raiding collections found in libraries and archives (the internet was not yet the major resource it has become), ordering photographs from imaging services. Then came the longer evenings at home, tracking down rights holders and requesting permissions. The invoices arrived (as author I was responsible for permission fees) and before long I found myself waking up in the middle of the night with anxiety attacks. How could I possibly pay the \$25,000 fee that Harvard's Houghton Library was charging me? After much pleading, the fee was reduced to \$5,000. What if [Kay Nielsen's](#) estate was not in the public domain? Why was their no answer to a query about [Edmund Dulac](#)? I was falling down what one academic pal called the rabbit hole of permissions hell.

It was worth it. [Artists have been drawn to fairy tales because they are something of a blank canvas, with very little by way of description. A girl is beautiful; a horse is faithful; or a giant is angry.](#) That means that [great artists like Arthur Rackham, Gustave Doré, Walter Crane, and Jessie Wilcox Smith had a free hand and could imagine the fairy-tale universe in their own unique ways.](#) I have always looked at the illustrations as bursts of beauty or horror, accompanying readers and in dialogue with them as they make their way through the fairy-tale woods.

I have rarely met a fairy tale I did not like. The same holds true (almost) for illustrations, though I confess that some cartoonish versions leave me cold. Is there a favorite illustration? [Arthur Rackham's portrait of Catskin, swaddled in furs, barefoot and brave, her worldly possessions tied into a bundle, comes to mind.](#) Framed by an inhospitable landscape of bare trees and barren mountains, she boldly flees her home in search of a better place.

As for a favorite fairy tale, "[Hansel and Gretel](#)" takes first prize, perhaps because I discovered it as a child and loved its portrait of sibling solidarity, with Hansel doing the heavy-lifting in the first part of the story and Gretel outwitting the witch in the second half and finding a way back home.

Sometimes it feels as if my favorite fairy tale or myth is the one I happen to be reading that day, and I think back with joy to making my way not just through [the great collections by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Andrew Lang, and Alexander Afanasev, but also the many high-octane rescriptings](#)

by authors like Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, Toni Morrison, and Margaret Atwood. All of these authors tap into the mythical imagination, reminding us of how folklore forms a golden network connecting us to each other, a vast web of storytelling that reminds us of how much we share. As Tyrion put it in *Game of Thrones* (and maybe the line is too good to be true), “There’s nothing in the world more powerful than a good story. Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it.”

In The Fairest of Them All, you write that the best fairy tales deliver “magic and transformation” (45), and in your beautiful poem, “Valediction”, which concludes the Norton Critical Edition of The Classic Fairy Tales, you write “let the world grow calm / As you lean into stories and dream” (508). After a lifetime of studying the hard facts beneath fairy tales, do you still find magic, transformation, and dreams within them?

I’m reminded of what Octavia Butler, that powerful fabulist, once said about moments in which she felt dispirited. What did she do but remind herself that she always had two things: “her desire and access to aisle upon aisle of books.” One of the first e-mail messages I received when Harvard University shut down in March 2020 was from the chair of the German Department, who hoped that I had a nice tall stack of books by my side. In times of crisis, storytelling, the art of sharing experiences and imagining the future, become more valuable than ever.

The great virtue of fairy tales lies in their power to get us talking about all the great What If’s. These stories refuse to back away from taboo subjects and instead face them down, broadcasting cruelty, injustice, and harm, refusing to let them flourish in silence. And they always side with the underdog.

Even as the fairy tale is expansive in its treatment of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, and incest and always larger than life, it also provides listeners and readers with powerful tools for navigating

reality. If Jack, Snow White, and Rapunzel lived to tell their story, so can you. These are stories with tough characters, figures that are resilient and resourceful in the face of persecution, exile, abuse, and isolation. And where else can you be assured that all will end well, especially if you are courageous and resourceful. Fairy tales, like much of children’s literature as well, provide us with the consolation of “happily ever after.” Even “[The Juniper Tree](#),” a fairy tale filled with all the mythical violence and horror of a Greek tragedy, ends with magic and transformation. A boy decapitated by his stepmother and served up to his father in a stew returns as a bird, bringing beautiful song and scents into the world. And his story ends with a scene of reconstitution, reparation, and reunion, with the boy and his father and sister sitting down at a table and sharing a meal in a world where justice has been served at last.



THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE'S WRITING CONTESTS

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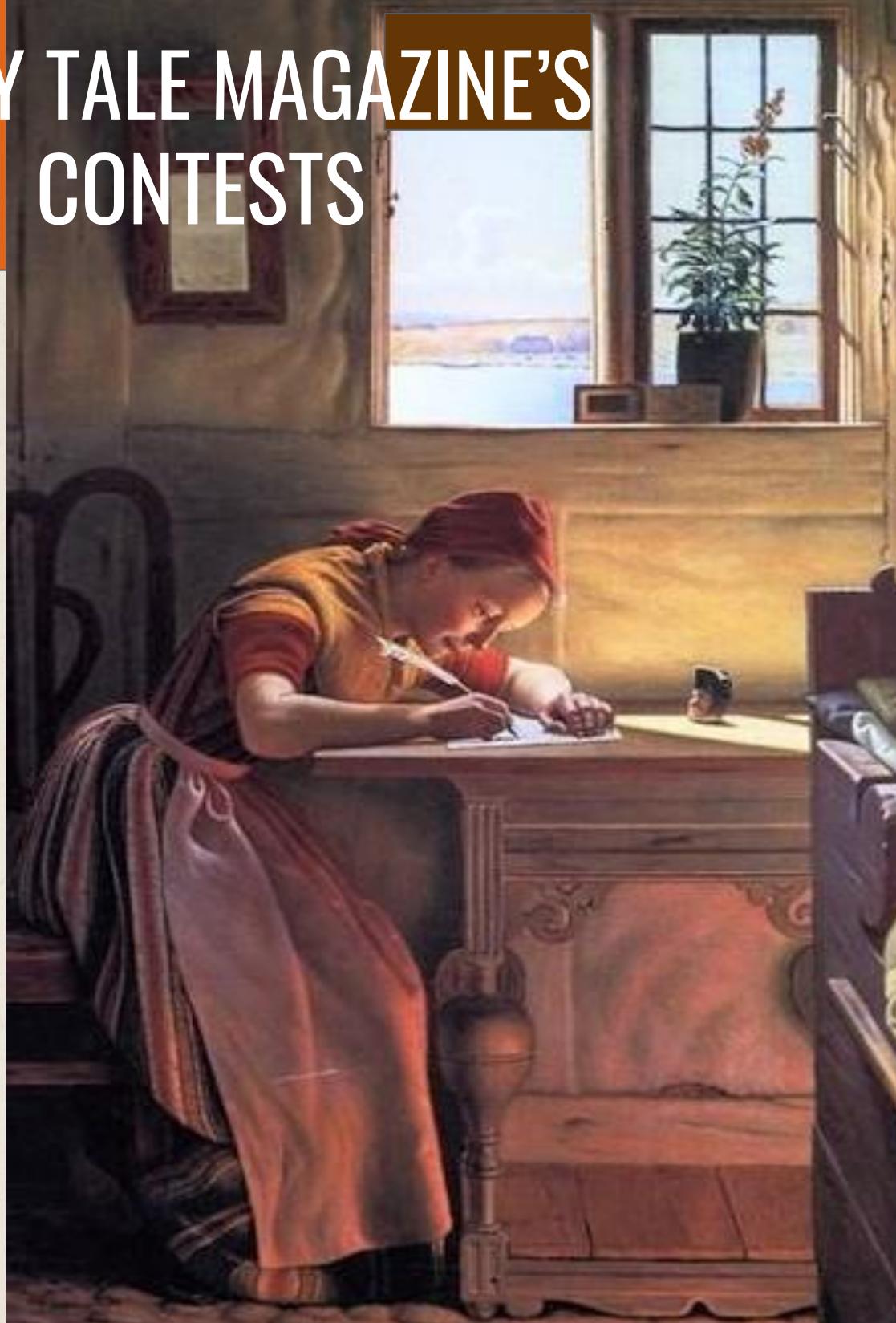
Up to 1,000 words
and

POETRY

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Entry Fee: \$5.00
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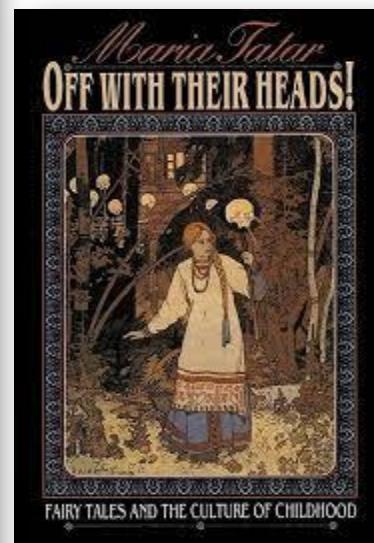
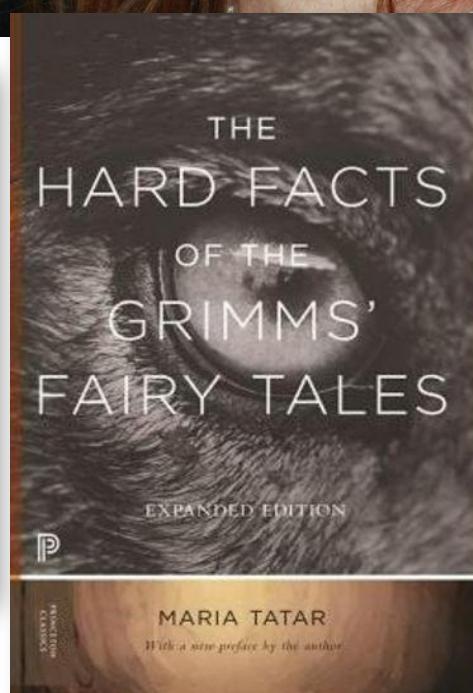
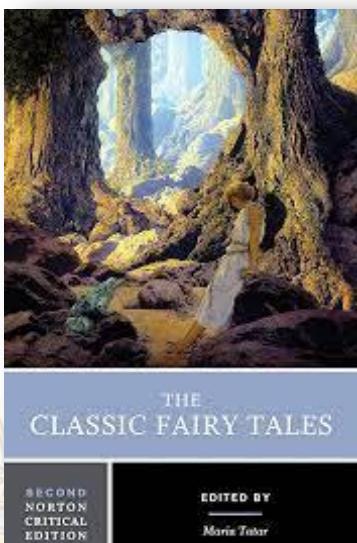


The current contest ends June 30th
Details on our website, plus new upcoming contests!

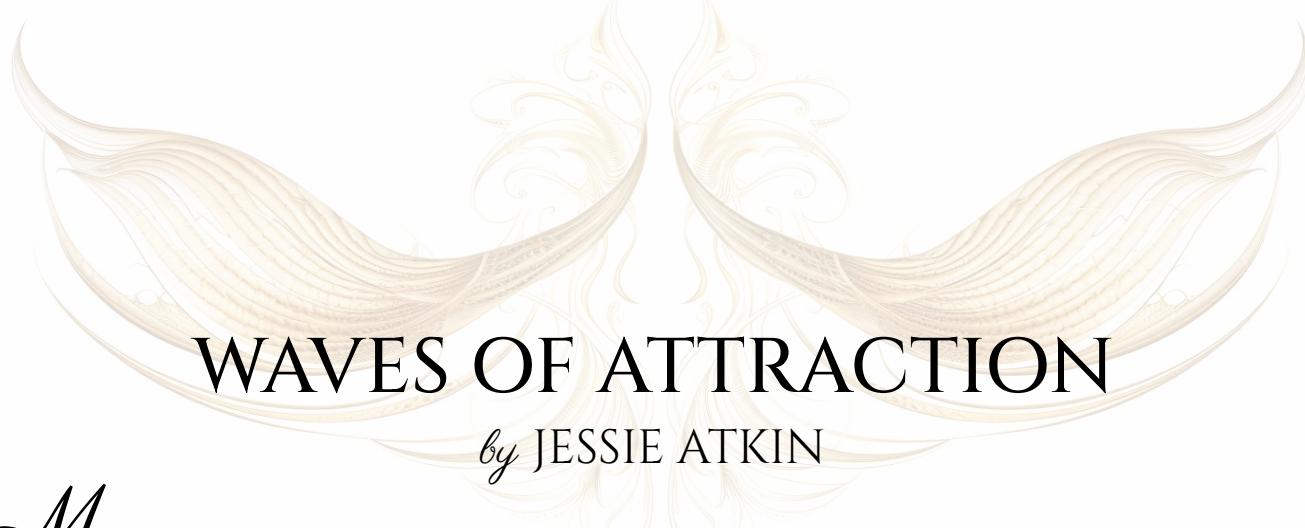
www.fairytalemagazine.com

In addition to the books mentioned in the interview, Maria Tatar has also penned [Off with Their Heads!](#) [Fairy tales and the Culture of Childhood](#), [Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood](#), [The Hard Facts of the Grimm Fairy Tales](#), and [The Grimm Reader: Classic Tales of the Brothers Grimm](#).

The joy we get from reading fairy tales is made richer through scholarly knowledge and deep contemplation, and The Fairy Tale Magazine recommends Maria Tatar's books to everyone who would like to learn more about literature, folklore, storytelling, and humanity.







WAVES OF ATTRACTION

by JESSIE ATKIN

*M*any upon many times ago, there was a boy who lived on a ship and could not find his way home. He had wished for an adventure before marrying, and his request had been granted, though not in the way he might have imagined.

He left behind a king and a queen who lamented each day since their son had disappeared, “Would that we had our strong boy back!” and yet none had succeeded in returning their son to them.

It just so happened that one day, while the queen stood weeping on her balcony, a maiden came out of the trees carrying a bow in her hands. She looked up, and said,

“Queen, why are you crying?”

“Dear maiden,” the Queen replied, so distraught she did not notice the maiden’s weapon, her strange dress of breeches and tunic, or even the fact that she neither bowed nor curtsied, “I wish my son, my foolish boy, stolen from me by our court fairy’s magic, could be returned to our kingdom. He was set aboard a treasure ship in search of his one true love, but we know not where.”

Here the Queen’s crying increased. And the maiden stepped backwards until she was hidden in the trees once more.

When the maiden reached the cottage she shared with her three younger sisters, she sprang through the door and told them all of her meeting with the Queen. Not one of her sisters looked up from their spindles. As the eldest, the maiden’s refusal to marry had left each of her sisters waiting for their turns to take husbands.

“A treasure ship,” the maiden repeated, for treasure had never been offered in return for rescue before, “If we were rich, you would not need to wait for me to take a husband. When you are rich you can make your own rules, and everyone will want to marry you.”

At this pronouncement her three younger siblings looked up and simpered,

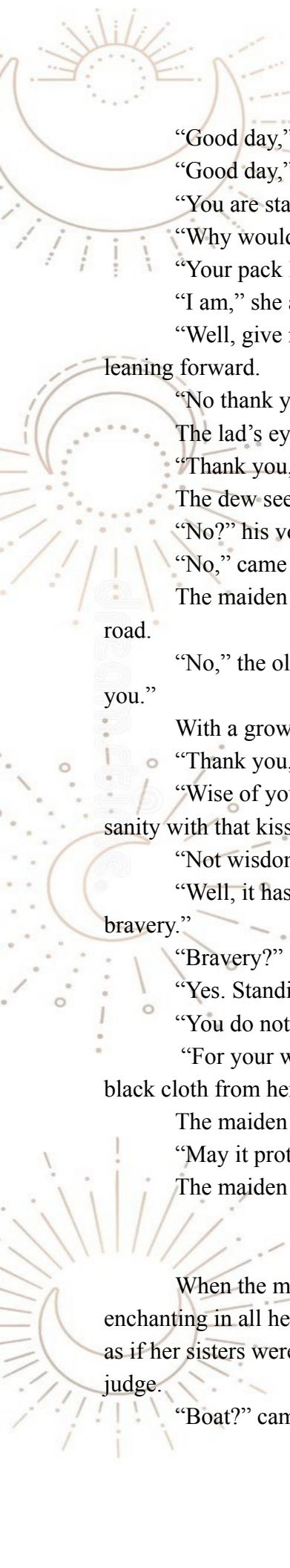
“We could have our own rooms, our own cottages.”

“Of course,” the maiden promised. “Whatever you like.” And she would be able to avoid spinning and watching them starve. They could live in whatever comfort they chose for the rest of their lives.

“Go! Hurry!” her sisters urged. And the maiden did.

With a pack on her shoulder and a spring in her step, the maiden began the trek through the dark forest for the nearby ocean.

She had not been walking long before she heard footsteps coming nearer. Out of the dimness appeared a lovely lad whose skin seemed kissed by dew. Despite the coolness of the day the lad wore not a stitch of clothing.



“Good day,” he said, bowing his head.

“Good day,” she replied, trying to look everywhere but at the lad.

“You are starting out on a journey?”

“Why would you say so?”

“Your pack looks heavy enough for the beginning of a journey, rather than the end,” he said.

“I am,” she agreed.

“Well, give me a kiss and you will be guaranteed success,” he told her, closing his eyes, and leaning forward.

“No thank you,” the maiden replied.

The lad’s eyes snapped up. “No?”

“Thank you,” she repeated.

The dew seemed to disappear from his cheeks.

“No?” his voice dropped.

“No,” came the reply from behind them.

The maiden spun to find an old woman, her head covered in a tattered black rag, standing in the road.

“No,” the old woman repeated. “You heard what she said, you sprite. Be gone or I shall do it for you.”

With a growl and a pop, the lad disappeared in a puff of smoke and the sound of wings.

“Thank you,” the maiden said.

“Wise of you to refuse him,” the old woman replied. “He would have taken your pride and your sanity with that kiss.”

“Not wisdom,” the maiden admitted. “Only lack of desire.”

“Well, it has served you well, being able to turn away from the first kiss offered you. As has your bravery.”

“Bravery?”

“Yes. Standing before me with no fear in your eyes. That is brave.”

“You do not frighten me.”

“For your wisdom and your honesty, I offer you a gift.” She reached up and pulled the tattered black cloth from her head. “Take this with you.”

The maiden took the cloth and tied it around her middle.

“May it protect you in moments of doubt,” the old woman said.

The maiden nodded. And, looking up again, found herself alone.



When the maiden finally gazed upon the sea, she was certain she’d never seen anything so enchanting in all her life. Her heartbeat quickened, as if she were running in the woods. Her face flushed as if her sisters were offering her kind words. The water spread before her was clear, clean, and did not judge.

“Boat?” came a voice from near her feet.

The maiden jumped and found a small green man seated on the shore, his torso out of the water, his legs bathed within. His arm lay on the gunwale of a small fishing boat bobbing at his side.

“You’ve come in search of a boat?” he asked. “A look like that in your eyes,” he grinned with pointed teeth, “there’s nowhere for you but the sea. I am Nix.”

The maiden stared.

“I can get you a boat for free,” the green man said, rising from the water, his limbs wet, his toes webbed like those of a frog. “All you need do is give me a kiss.”

The maiden stepped back. “Why does everyone want to kiss me?”

“Not such a high price if you are in need of a boat.”

But even with a treasure ship in her future, the maiden feared this price might be too high. “Perhaps I can trade you something else,” she offered, pulling her pack into her hands, the old woman’s sash falling to the ground.

Reaching down to pick up the sash the maiden caught sight of Nix through one of its tattered holes. Through the hole he appeared, standing before her, except now he had wings, and there was a body floating in the water beneath him.

She straightened up, tightening the sash again about her waist.

“Excuse me,” the maiden called, raising her hand and her voice.

Another girl, pulling traps from the water, turned from her labors at the greeting. She let her skirts fall from her clenched fists. She did not reply but picked up a stone near her bare feet and strode toward the maiden.

The girl raised the stone. The maiden cowered. Then the rock flew from the girl’s hand to land at Nix’s feet.

With a great watery howl Nix fell to all four limbs, and dove into the sea.

Straightening up, the maiden caught sight of the stone that seemed to have saved her. It was not a stone but rather a piece of glass, with smoothed edges.

“He can’t stand to see himself,” the girl explained. “So, he has to slip back to where he came from, with no new slave to follow him and do his bidding.”

“Thank you,” the maiden said.

“You were doing alright on your own,” the girl assured her.

The maiden turned to the sparkling sea, though her heart sank when she realized that when the Nix had disappeared so had his boat.

“It’s nothing to be upset about,” the girl assured her.

“It’s only, now I don’t know where to find a boat.”

“What do you want a boat for?”

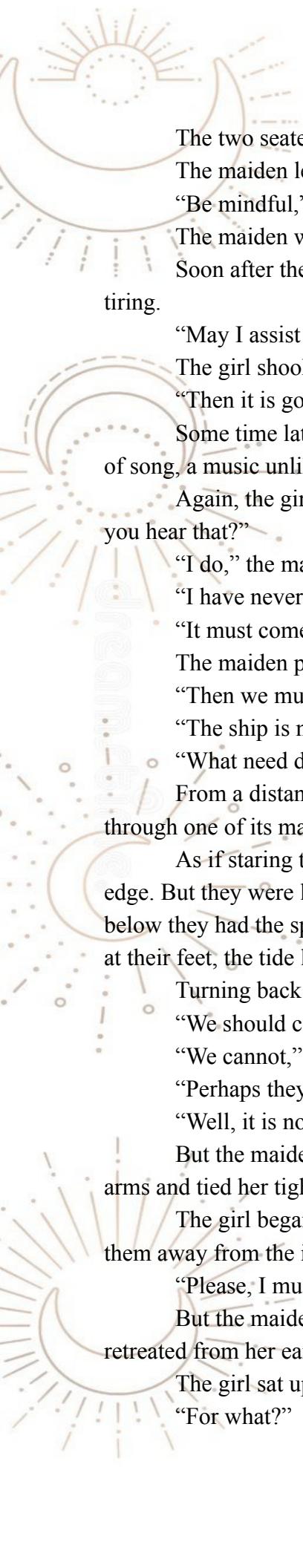
“I am going to rescue the sleeping prince.”

The girl frowned. “Not one of the men who has gone after that prince has come back to tell of it.”

The maiden looked out at the water. “Perhaps I will fail like all the rest, but at least I will have set out on the ocean once in my life.”

The passion in her voice stirred the other girl’s heart, for she understood the draw of the sea.

“Then,” the girl declared, “I shall take you in my father’s boat.”



The two seated themselves in the girl's fishing boat, and the maiden was glad of the company. The maiden let her hand fall into the waves over the boat's side.

"Be mindful," the girl warned. "The mermaids would gladly shake your hand and drown you." The maiden withdrew her arm.

Soon after the warning, the girl's rowing slowed, and the maiden wondered whether she was tiring.

"May I assist you?" the maiden asked.

The girl shook her head. "I am not tired, it is only ... I have never sailed farther than this before."

"Then it is good you will not have to sail unknown waters alone."

Some time later, the air was suddenly filled not only with the splash of the waves, but the sounds of song, a music unlike any the maiden had heard before.

Again, the girl slowed the movement of the oars, her eyes moving from the sea to the sky. "Do you hear that?"

"I do," the maiden assured her.

"I have never heard a song so beautiful."

"It must come from that island."

The maiden pointed north, where land had come into view.

"Then we must proceed there."

"The ship is not on an island," the maiden told her.

"What need do we have of a treasure ship when the island is filled with such sweet melodies?"

From a distance the island seemed no threat, but the maiden raised the sash to her eyes, peering through one of its many holes.

As if staring through a spyglass, she saw the beach, dotted with women, singing at the water's edge. But they were like no women she had ever seen before. Their hair hung long past their waists, and below they had the spindly limbs of birds. More horrifying than this was the wreckage clear in the water at their feet, the tide littered with broken beams, sails, and oars.

Turning back to her companion, the maiden lowered the black sash.

"We should continue straight," she said, gently.

"We cannot," the girl spat. "We must go to the island. They are calling for us."

"Perhaps they are calling, but it is not for me," the maiden replied.

"Well, it is not your boat," the girl cried, beginning to turn the rudder.

But the maiden had a solid frame and the strength of years of hunting. She took the girl in her arms and tied her tight in the black sash.

The girl began to cry and beg as the maiden took the oars in hand and, clumsily, began to row them away from the island.

"Please, I must see them. I must go to them."

But the maiden set her eyes on the horizon and rowed until the island disappeared and the song retreated from her ears. Finally, the girl stopped struggling. The maiden untied her.

The girl sat up. "I am sorry," she said.

"For what?"

“For reacting the way I did. I don’t know what came over me. But, in that moment, all I wanted was to go to that island. Didn’t you hear the singing?”

“I heard it. But I suppose it didn’t entice me the way it enticed you. Not everyone admires the same things.”

“Still, I acted selfishly. I made a promise, and at the first distraction I was ready to abandon you for something else I fancied.”

“I will forgive you if you agree to row again,” the maiden smiled.



At last, another shape appeared on the horizon, not an island, but a ship. As they approached, the waves lessened, and they rowed on water still as glass.

The girl steered the boat up to the ship’s hull. A great rope ladder hung over its side. The maiden rose, taking the lowest rung in her hands.

“Will you wait for me?” she asked the girl.

“Of course. We have come this far together, haven’t we?”

With a smile the maiden began to climb.

The ship creaked as she climbed and hauled herself onto the deck.

But before she could get her bearings, a golden arrow slammed into her shoulder.

Groaning, the maiden fell into a sitting position, her back pressed against the railing. She reached up with her right hand to test the wound. She drew her fingers away, stained with blood.

A gnarled old man with a great gray beard stood, wearing a black eye-patch with hands on his hips.

“Welcome my love,” he said. “I have waited long for you to reach me.”

“You shot me,” the maiden said.

“You are only dazed, my beauty, my darling, by the potency of the arrow’s power.”

“No. It just hurts,” she insisted.

He offered her a hand. She ignored it.

“I am Eros,” he continued, “Deity of passion. And you are my love, as promised, through my arrow.”

With clenched teeth the maiden pulled the golden arrow from her shoulder. She threw the weapon over the side of the ship.

“I don’t really care who you are,” she said, getting to her feet.

“Immune to the power of Eros? Impossible.”

“Apparently not,” the maiden said, taking a step around the god.

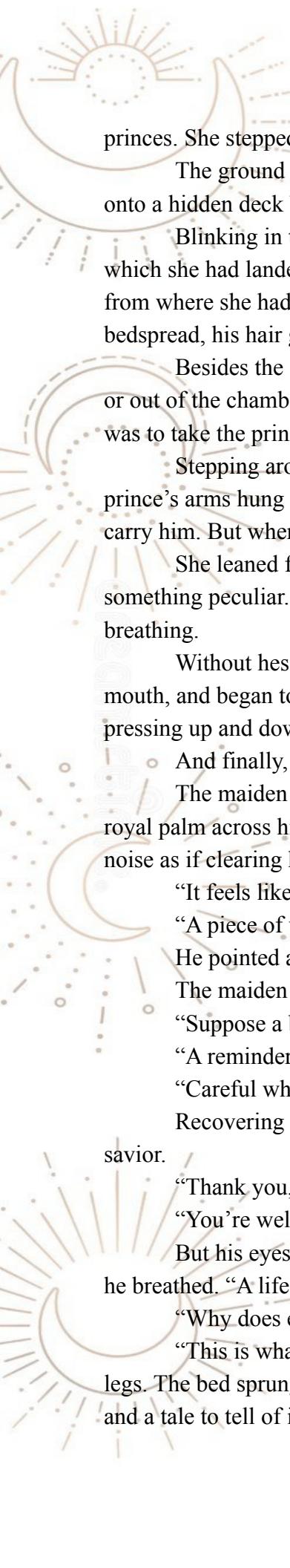
“Wait.” He seized her wrist in one crooked hand. “Kiss me,” he demanded.

“Every time,” she muttered, before wrestling her hand from his weak grip.

“Wait,” he called again.

She did not. She took her first step down into the ship’s hold. As her foot hit the stair a roar of despair erupted behind her, and Eros split apart into a shower of salty sea mist.

In the dimness below deck the maiden saw the hold was empty of cannons, treasure, or princes.



princes. She stepped tentatively forward.

The ground beneath her dipped, a weight lurched toward the ceiling, and the maiden slid down onto a hidden deck below.

Blinking in the dimness, the maiden's eyes widened at the gold pieces and piles of treasure on which she had landed. Looking up, the hidden hatch in the ceiling closed behind her. But, lying only feet from where she had fallen, was the sleeping prince. His cheeks were pale above a maroon velvet bedspread, his hair golden and unbound over his closed eyes. His head rested on a silk pillow.

Besides the door in the ceiling, which she could not reach, the maiden could see no other way in or out of the chamber and, she assumed, the only way to free herself with any treasure in her pockets, was to take the prince with her.

Stepping around the piled gold and gemstones, the maiden approached the bed. One of the prince's arms hung down toward the floor, the core of a very old apple lay at his side. Perhaps she could carry him. But where?

She leaned forward to try and get her hands around the prince's shoulders, when she realized something peculiar. Despite the warmth of his skin, and the pulse of blood in his veins, the prince wasn't breathing.

Without hesitation the maiden dipped her head, put her hands on the prince's chest, her lips to his mouth, and began to breathe for him. She counted to six, her arms, with the strength of an archer, pressing up and down, and then bent to his mouth again.

And finally, he coughed.

The maiden stepped back, and the prince sat upright. He continued to cough before pulling a royal palm across his chin to remove the spittle now dangling there. Then he began making a guttural noise as if clearing his throat.

"It feels like a piece of it is still in there," he wheezed.

"A piece of what?"

He pointed at what once was an apple, on the floor beside him.

The maiden stepped forward and pounded the prince's back.

"Suppose a bit of apple in your throat is a good reminder."

"A reminder of what?"

"Careful what you put in your mouth."

Recovering enough to use a normal speaking voice, the prince, his eyes glistening, looked at his savior.

"Thank you," he said.

"You're welcome," she said, pleased he would live.

But his eyes held thanks that seemed to reach beyond the life she had restored to him. "A kiss," he breathed. "A life giving kiss."

"Why does everyone want a kiss?" The maiden shook her head. "It was life giving, I suppose."

"This is what I wanted," he continued, swinging his feet over the side of the bed, and finding his legs. The bed sprung open at his back, revealing a hidden stairway. "What I've been waiting for. A kiss, and a tale to tell of it."

“I suppose that makes one of us. Though I don’t see why you had to stray so far for either.”

The prince fell to his knees. “Eros said if I took a bite of his apple my true love would find me. You have defeated Eros and restored to me my senses. Marry me,” he said.

“We just met.”

“Yes?” said the prince.

“And I don’t think I love you, like that.”

“Who do you love?” he asked.

“The sea, I think,” she told him.

“I am glad someone does, I could live all my days without seeing it again. It did not treat me as I thought it would.”

“I suppose there is a difference between wishing for something and doing it,” the maiden said.

“It would seem so. But you must be rewarded.”

“Well, I would like to feed my family.”

The prince stood and stretched out a hand. “The treasure is yours.”

She nodded in thanks.

“But that cannot be all. You have rescued me. What else can I offer you?”

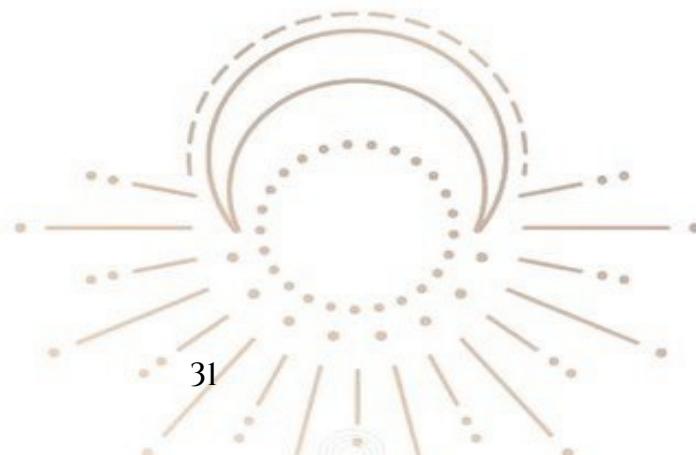
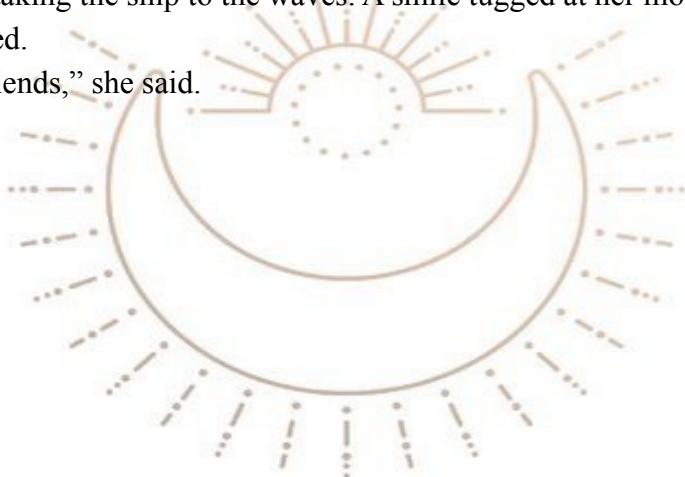
“Can I have this ship? After getting you home, of course.”

“Yes. It is yours!” he beamed.

She wondered if the fisherman’s daughter might know enough to sail it. She imagined turning the treasure over to her sisters and then taking the ship to the waves. A smile tugged at her mouth.

“But what about us?” he asked.

“I think we should just be friends,” she said.







Classics from Around the World

WHY THE OCEAN IS SALTY

A TALE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

A few years after the creation of the world there lived a tall giant by the name of Ang-ngalo, the only son of the god of building. Ang-ngalo was a wanderer, and a lover of work. He lived in the mountains, where he dug many caves. These caves he protected from the continual anger of Angin, the goddess of the wind, by precipices and sturdy trees.

One bright morning, while Ang-ngalo was climbing to his loftiest cave, he spied across the ocean—the ocean at the time was pure, its water being the accumulated tears of disappointed goddesses—a beautiful maid. She beckoned to him, and waved her black handkerchief: so Ang-ngalo waded across to her through the water. The deep caverns in the ocean are his footprints.

This beautiful maid was Sipnet, the goddess of the dark. She said to Ang-ngalo, “I am tired of my dark palace in heaven. You are a great builder. What I want you to do for me is to erect a great mansion on this spot. This mansion must be built of bricks as white as snow.”

Ang-ngalo could not find any bricks as white as snow: the only white thing there was then was salt. So he went for help to Asin, the ruler of the kingdom of Salt. Asin gave him pure bricks of salt, as white as snow. Then Ang-ngalo built hundreds of bamboo bridges across the ocean. Millions of men were employed day and night transporting the white bricks from one side of the ocean to the other.

At last the patience of Ocean came to an end: she could not bear to have her deep and quiet slumber disturbed. One day, while the men were busy carrying the salt bricks across the bridges, she sent forth big waves and destroyed them. The brick-carriers and their burden were buried in her deep bosom. In time the salt dissolved, and today the ocean is salty.





DREAMS OF THE OCEAN

by ESTHER RA

*B*etween the tides of dreams, the ocean stains my sleep with liquid blue (*sshshh* fragrant breath of kelp forests swirling, sand cooling to hard pearls beneath).

Everything here (*sshshh*) a stark reminder of home: maple leaves—anemones; snow—sea-foam. The sky is full of fish tonight, everything bright as bioluminescence (wreaths of plankton floating).

Housed in this pale mudflat of flesh, my notched scales bristle at every whiff of storm-wind. Saltwater stings in the crease of my lips, and onshore, I shiver

as I watch the spindrift fly. My beloved (a fisherman in his weatherworn keel) drags sunburnt thumbs over his scars, his lips twisting to a ripple of doubt.

Ocean for him means flash waves, bloated corpse. Loneliness and a breathless demise. My mermishness, my longing, strikes him with alarm. I see jewels



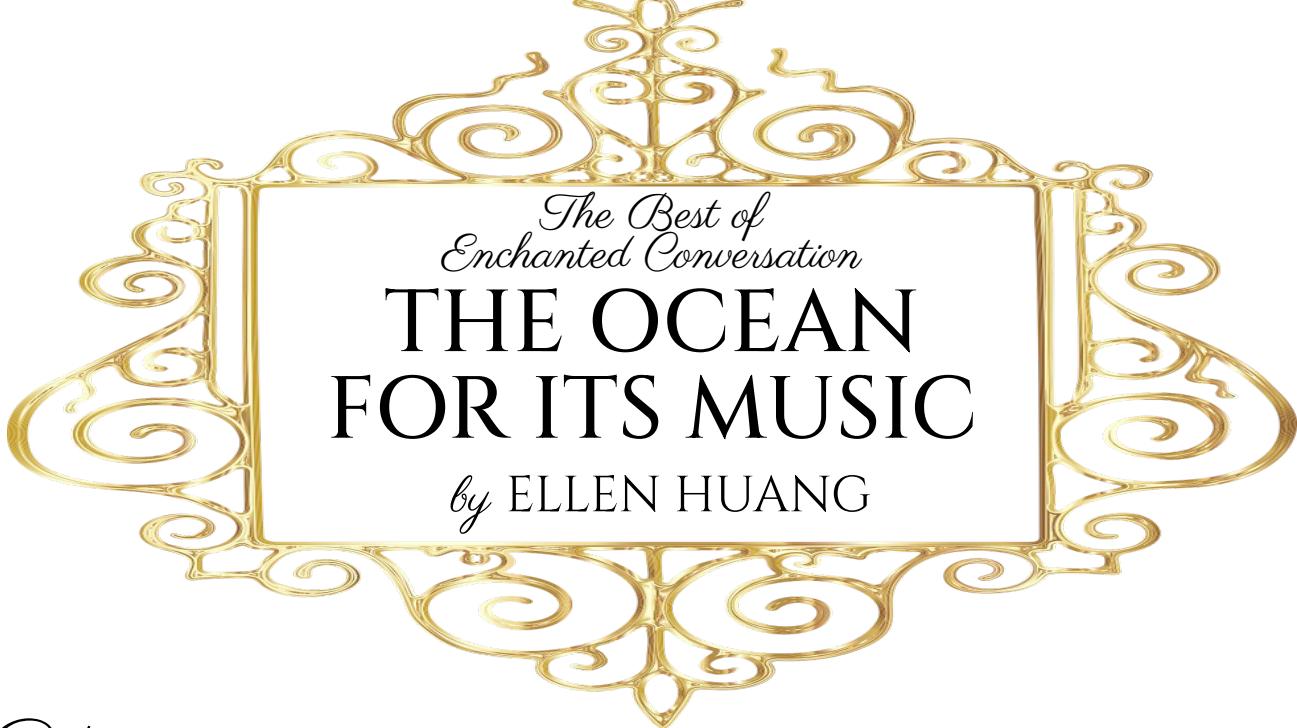
where he sees jaws. *Iridescence*,
he says, *blurs the coldness of death*.
Hands corrugated by years
and the roughness of death

weave me closed wells
of stagnant freshwater. He burns fire
into the dawn. This, I know,
his language for *stay*: smell of smoke,

baked chestnuts and sparks.
Yet, sea-sprayed, my eyes an abyss,
I back into the roar of the ocean.
From my wells, my sealed gardens,

my trembling flame—I plunge into
glissandos of glass. *Imagine*, I say,
not ever exploring, until well
past the age one could swim.

*Imagine never once hearing
the ululations of whales
until I have no tears left to shed
for sadness other than mine.*



*The Best of
Enchanted Conversation*

THE OCEAN FOR ITS MUSIC

by ELLEN HUANG

*W*hat can match the ocean for its music, thought the piper. He had tried fleeing its sound by moving as inland as possible, and yet the ocean's mourning echoed everywhere. He had tried getting rid of the pipe, carved from mermaid bone and siren voice. But like a tremendous returning tide, it kept showing up in his hands when he awoke.

It was as if, long after the siren was slain, her powers still moved him beyond death. Sometimes his hands were muddied and he knew he had been called to sleepwalk out to where he buried it. Sometimes he'd wake in a cold shiver, clothes heavy and soaking wet, and realize he had dived into the depths of the lake in his sleep to fetch the cursed pipe.

There was no escape for him. He survived everything, as if the watery creatures figured the one human sacrifice he could immediately offer was too merciful a punishment. He was to live out all his years, shaped and made puppet by the siren voices.

You have only destroyed our temporary bodies, the pipe seemed to say when he played it to stop the ocean sounds in his mind. You, then, shall embody our will.

Things weren't supposed to happen this way. When he had gone out to sea, wax in his ears and dagger in his belt, he dreamed of being a hero like the others. When he cut the mermaid's throat and heard the scream in his very bones, his hand shook with the rush of victory. When the large, avenging birds with heads of women attacked from above, tearing out the wax from his ears and screeching in his face, to strike one dead made his heart race with tremendous pride.

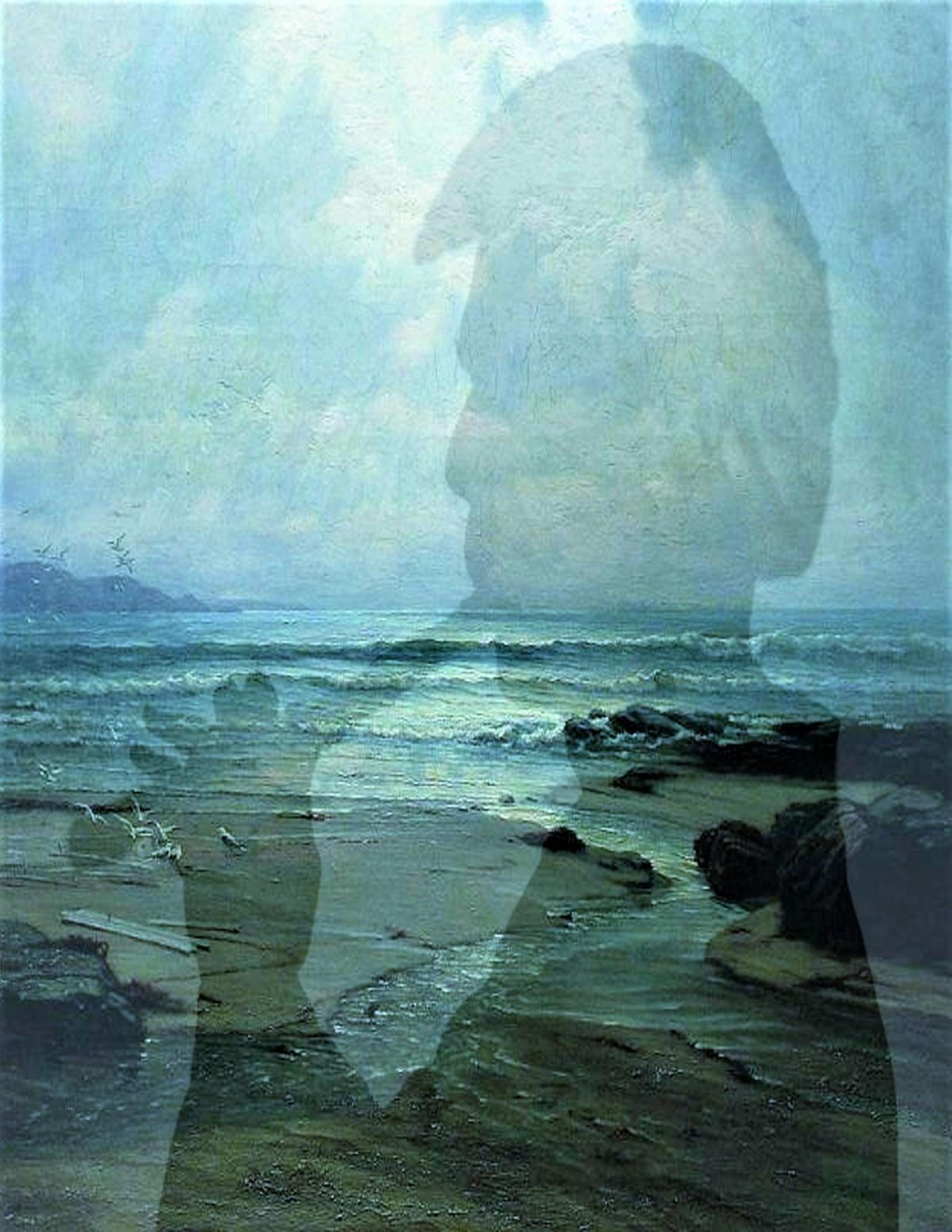
When they retreated, he thought he had won.

Now their songs wouldn't leave him alone. They were like haunted harps, enchanted and alone, playing by the eerie calm of a babbling brook.

He never thought he would find a peaceful brook eerie.

But perhaps he was a hero, he thought, for enduring the creatures' torment so the world wouldn't have to. So fewer sailors and fishermen would perish by a mermaid's song. So fewer men would be devoured by the monstrous harpies that encircled the misty island.

But no one considered him a hero. The seaside villages suffered harsher storms, as if some force of nature were offended.



"But it's not their fault," he heard a mother hushing her children. "They forget they affect the world with their grieving sometimes."

So he decided not to mention slaying the mermaid to them. They would not appreciate it.

He traveled without a destination in mind, trying to escape the sound of sorrow that always found him. He didn't know what else to do. Giving the bone back to the world of waters never seemed to work. It was as if the forces that be refused to take back something ruined by human hands.

He tried even lying facedown in a foot of water, hoping to be soothed by an eventual silence. The music only intensified, encircled him as if the harpies were right there, dragging him back into the depths of the scene.

It was no use. How could he ever make peace with them again?

One day's peace, he begged. Give me one day's peace, please!

Then he saw the nix. Her eyes were wide and almost electric as the skies in stormy weather. Her head pulsed and glowed, even jiggled with her movements, as it was topped with a jellyfish. Stinging tentacles swirled around her as she looked up at him, curiously.

With a scream, the piper jumped up and ran from the water. But he didn't get far, as if some weight held his foot in place. The jellyfish girl was stopping him, with elongated arms that ended in sticky, webbed fingers. Despite looking like a child, the jellyfish girl was strong, and willful. She kept looking at him, cocking her head, blinking, observing.

"Don't move," said the nix, in a simple child's voice.

"Go ahead, drown me," the piper said, almost nodding eagerly. "I can't take the voices any longer."

The nix's brows furrowed, as if she didn't know what he was talking about.

"You wish for peace," she said. Her eyes wandered past him, and her lips pursed. "If you give me a taste of your world, I will grant your wish."

"Oh, anything!" the piper exclaimed, nodding fervently.

The nix brightened, her bobbing head pulsing with light, her tentacles for hair moving almost as if alive. Her smile almost seemed to split her face in two. "There is a human village nearby, plagued with rats. I want to see what that's like. Take me there tomorrow, and peace will find you."

The piper agreed to her terms and the nix grinned as she let him go. For the rest of his time by the brook that evening, he and the nix shared stories. The piper was careful to leave out details of killing mermaids, because he was trying to have a new start after all, and no one would be expected to introduce themselves with their mistakes. Instead, he told stories of places he had been, what long hikes with tall grass were like, what baked bread and hot soup tasted like.

The nix shared stories of all the creatures of the deep that no man had ever discovered yet. But because she did not have much language for comparing to what humans have seen, she demonstrated that she could change shape. Her jellyfish tentacles would thicken and coil, or her face would droop and turn translucent, or she'd unhinge her jaw and sparkle her skin with silver and rainbow.

The piper acted delighted, because for once his mind was distracted from the voices, and here was something new and perhaps fascinating.

But when the nix slept, in her little girl form, head resting on the moss and fish tail stretched out

on the rocks, the piper frowned. The voices didn't return yet, but he wondered what he had gotten himself into.

Was he really expected to take her into a human village and expected to be treated well?

Why would she want to be taken to a plagued and suffering town, anyway? What kind of morbid curiosity did the creature have? His mind trembled, as he lay awake there that night, wondering if he had just promised to do something he would regret even more.

He could ask her to turn human for the town visit. But what if she refused? The piper remembered her tight, solid grip sticking to his skin and feared the worst. He couldn't refuse her if she were awake.

So before she awoke, he left for the nearby village she spoke of, to take his chances himself.

He played music on his way, on the very pipe he had cursed before. Something guided him to play the most beautiful song he had ever heard, as if by magic. He silently thanked the slain mermaid for her voice, for this granted sliver of peace. He wouldn't take it for granted.

The village was indeed plagued with some sort of pest, in every nook and cranny, devouring every scrap of food in sight the moment it was on display. People were crazed, starved, sick, and wailing. They were also incredibly cautious, staying in their homes and whispering wildly of the invisible creatures that stole their food.

But a sense of peace washed over the piper and told him exactly what to do.

"Allow me to get rid of the pests," he boldly offered the mayor of the town. "If you'll let me live with you."

So desperate were the people that he was immediately promised a place among them, and a bag of gold so he could even live like royalty among them. The start of a new life shone before him.

The piper listened for the music to play in his mind, and he followed the tune. He piped his music and felt the clamoring presence of some sort of sentient shade follow behind him. He felt as if little beasts were following him, enraptured by the siren song in his hands. He could not see them, but he could feel forces of greed and chaos trail behind him.

The music in him told him not to look back. So he didn't, and faithfully played his pipe away, out of the village and into the brook where the nix lived. He felt as if he were driving out demons and putting them into pigs. He was a hero at last.

He played the music, peaceful and enchanting, light and lilting, and led the little darknesses into the water until they were no more.

Too satisfied for words, the piper leapt up and got ready to go into the village for his reward. A new life, a new story for his life, was beginning, he knew it!

But something would not let him go. He struggled against whatever mud or weight held him, and turned and his heart nearly leapt out of his chest as he met eyes with the electric, jellyfish-haired nix. Her eyes were cross, her mouth straight.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" she said. She sat upon the mossy rocks, her shimmering arms crossed, her fishtail coiled like a snake.

The piper bit his lip, but knew he owed the nix for the grace of this good day. The peace he had felt while piping for the village wasn't of his own power, after all, but of merfolk similar to her. But

there had to be a way to satisfy all his debts and still earn that peace. Taking a creature like her into the village wouldn't be right. They'd call him the exchanger of plagues, introducing a new monster into their town. They'd shun him, perhaps kill him.

"I brought them to you for a taste, as you asked," the piper said. "What good is rushing into another world without knowing what to expect? The humans are crazed and afraid, they might not understand you as I have gotten to. So I brought a taste of it to you, so that you may see for yourself, and then decide."

To his surprise, the nix began to smile, and her grip loosened. "Oh! Thank you for that, then. I don't know what you know about us, but we gladly feast on human worries. When we finish, humans are left with nothing but peace."

The piper's eyes widened, and he couldn't believe his luck. "Well, that's very interesting." He tried to back away before the nix tasted the worries and decided she'd like to see their source.

But the nix looked up from the waters again, her mouth dribbling with shades of dark water. "You play almost as well as mermaids sing. It reminds me of home."

"Why are you so far from home?" the piper asked, cautiously. He didn't want to stay long, but he realized he had never seen a jellyfish in fresh waters before.

"Storms of siren grief," she sighed. "The picture is not pretty."

The piper's whole body was now trembling, wondering if the nix knew of his murder all along, and plotted vengeance. He had done their bidding. He had befriended one and done their bidding.

Yet, he had rid the human village of their worries, so what if it was not malevolent?

So why was he still here, unable to move with the grip of the shape-changing nix? Did she not trust him enough to let him go?

Then he felt her grip only tighten. "You *will* take me to see the village now, won't you?" He looked into her eyes, and though it only took a simple answer for his release, simple trust for peace at last, he wavered, unable to answer. Meanwhile his new beginning slipped out of his mind's grasp, like gold lost to oceans above his head.

She simply watched, as if for his answer, she had infinity.

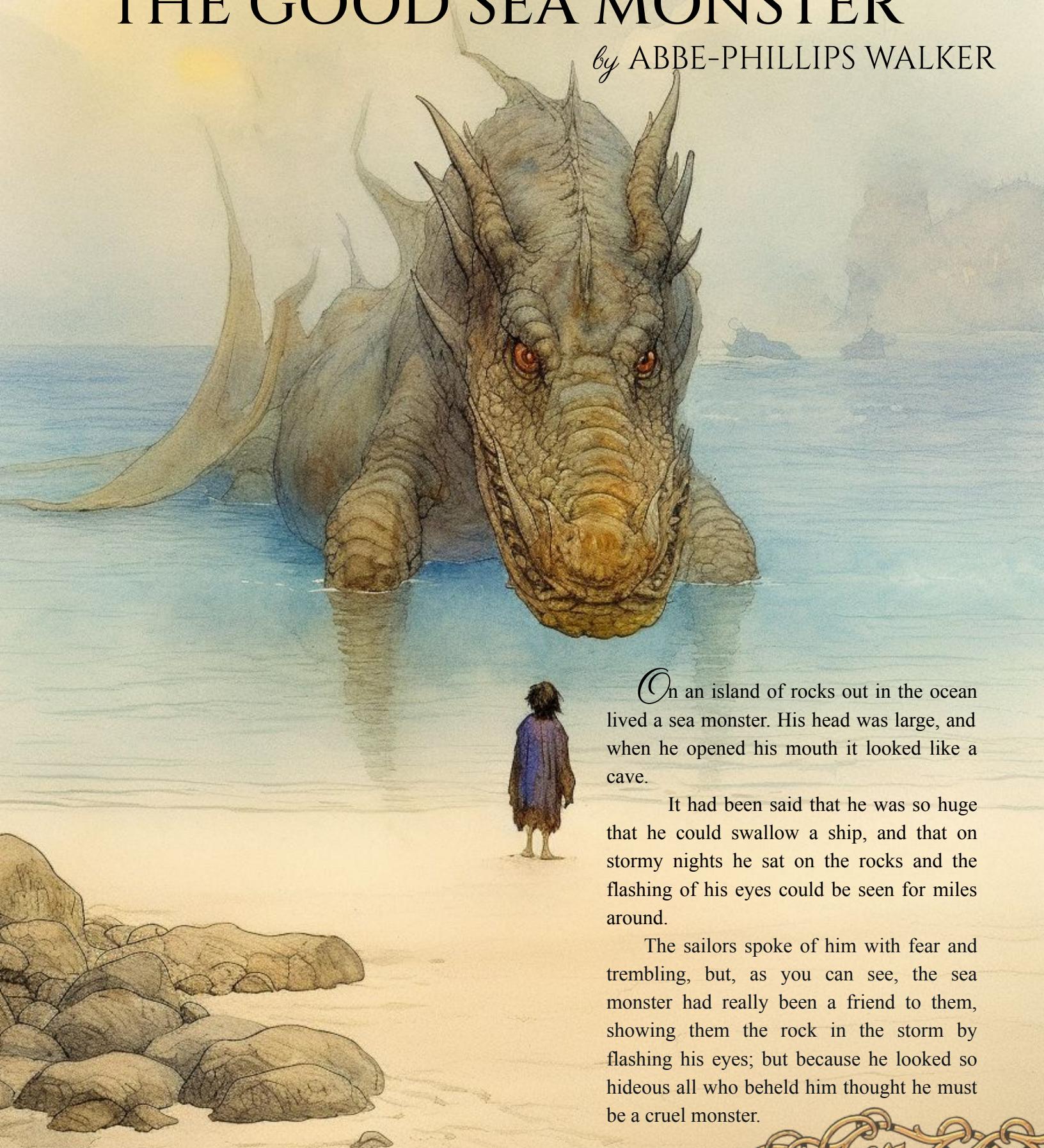
Feeding off his overflowing worries with eerie childlike laughter, she had infinity.



Classics from Around the World

THE GOOD SEA MONSTER

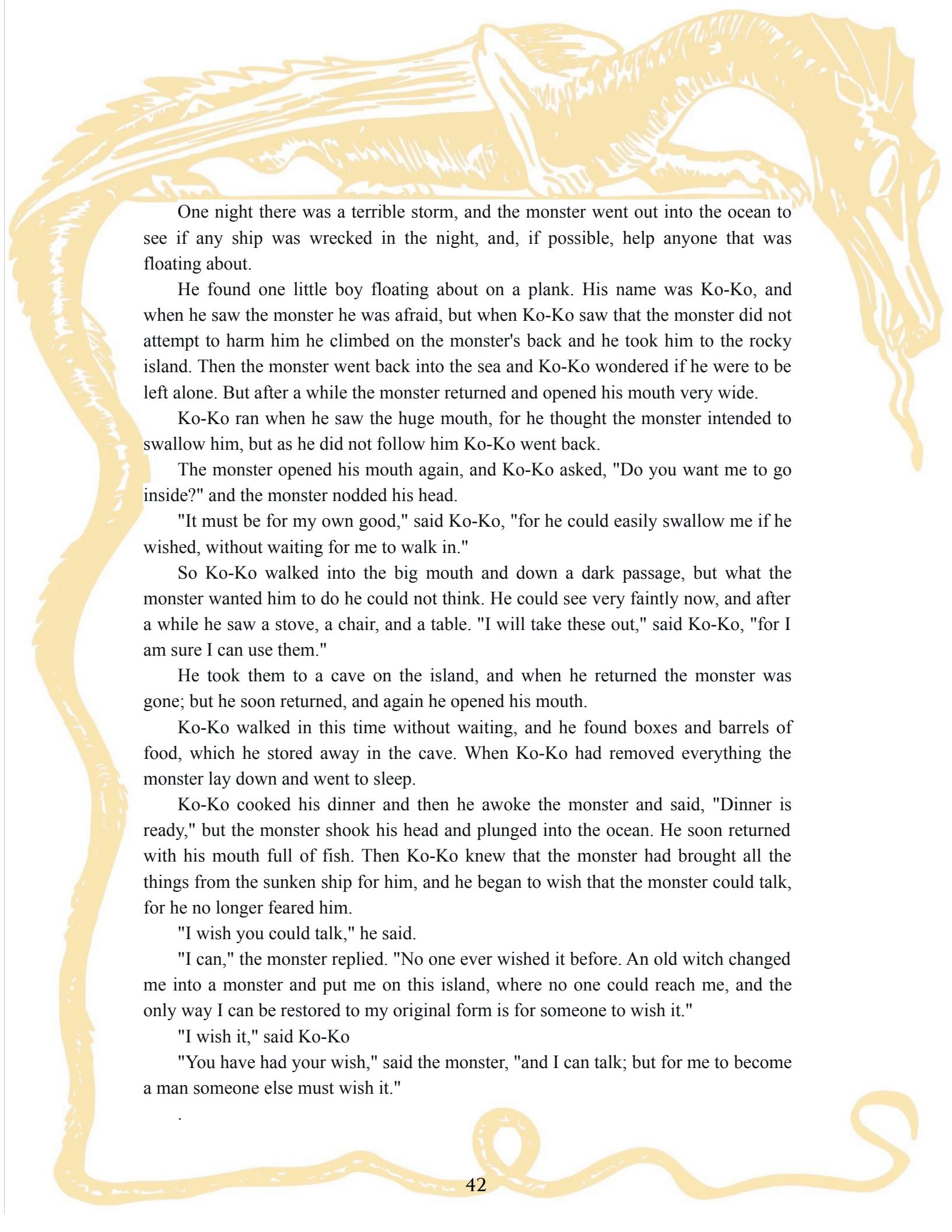
by ABBE-PHILLIPS WALKER



On an island of rocks out in the ocean lived a sea monster. His head was large, and when he opened his mouth it looked like a cave.

It had been said that he was so huge that he could swallow a ship, and that on stormy nights he sat on the rocks and the flashing of his eyes could be seen for miles around.

The sailors spoke of him with fear and trembling, but, as you can see, the sea monster had really been a friend to them, showing them the rock in the storm by flashing his eyes; but because he looked so hideous all who beheld him thought he must be a cruel monster.



One night there was a terrible storm, and the monster went out into the ocean to see if any ship was wrecked in the night, and, if possible, help anyone that was floating about.

He found one little boy floating about on a plank. His name was Ko-Ko, and when he saw the monster he was afraid, but when Ko-Ko saw that the monster did not attempt to harm him he climbed on the monster's back and he took him to the rocky island. Then the monster went back into the sea and Ko-Ko wondered if he were to be left alone. But after a while the monster returned and opened his mouth very wide.

Ko-Ko ran when he saw the huge mouth, for he thought the monster intended to swallow him, but as he did not follow him Ko-Ko went back.

The monster opened his mouth again, and Ko-Ko asked, "Do you want me to go inside?" and the monster nodded his head.

"It must be for my own good," said Ko-Ko, "for he could easily swallow me if he wished, without waiting for me to walk in."

So Ko-Ko walked into the big mouth and down a dark passage, but what the monster wanted him to do he could not think. He could see very faintly now, and after a while he saw a stove, a chair, and a table. "I will take these out," said Ko-Ko, "for I am sure I can use them."

He took them to a cave on the island, and when he returned the monster was gone; but he soon returned, and again he opened his mouth.

Ko-Ko walked in this time without waiting, and he found boxes and barrels of food, which he stored away in the cave. When Ko-Ko had removed everything the monster lay down and went to sleep.

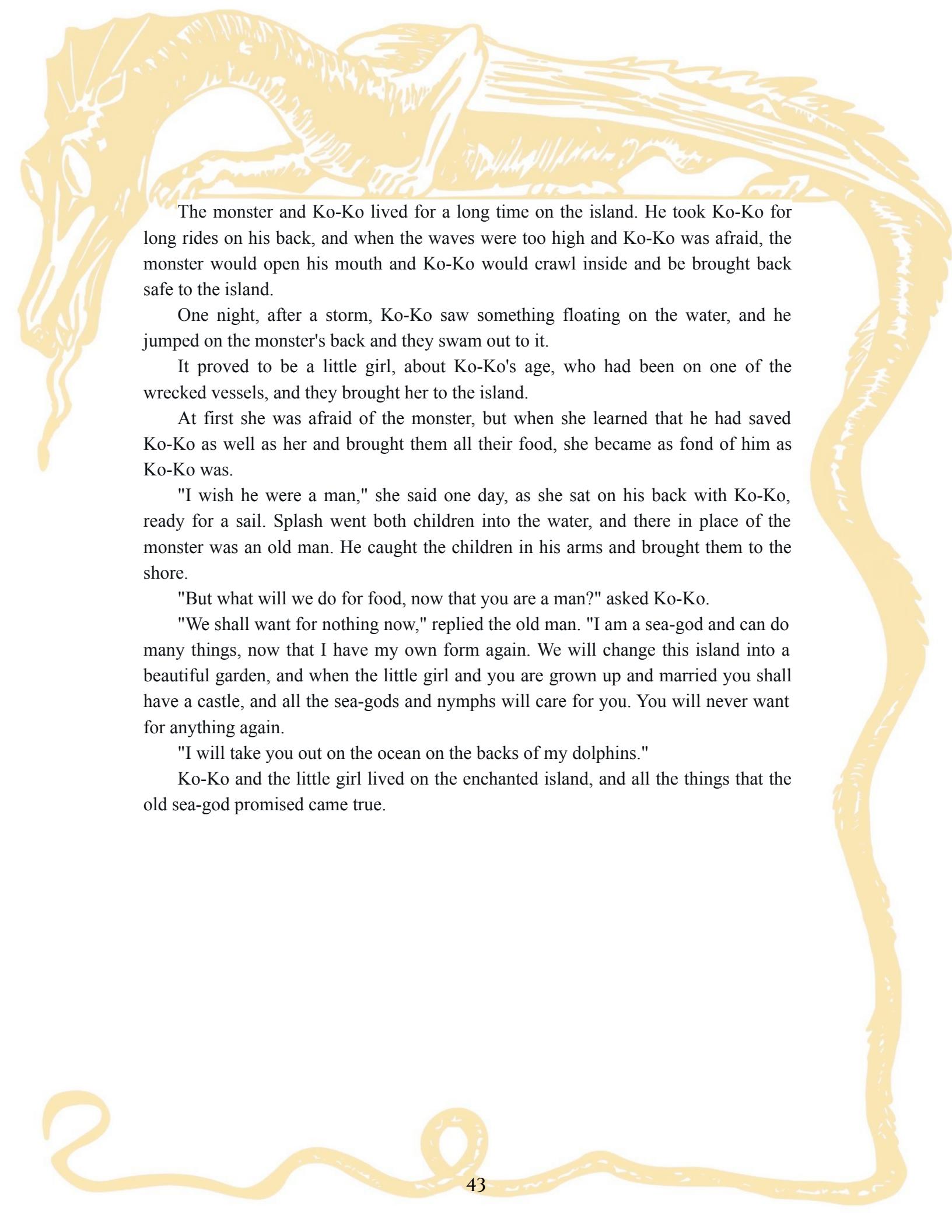
Ko-Ko cooked his dinner and then he awoke the monster and said, "Dinner is ready," but the monster shook his head and plunged into the ocean. He soon returned with his mouth full of fish. Then Ko-Ko knew that the monster had brought all the things from the sunken ship for him, and he began to wish that the monster could talk, for he no longer feared him.

"I wish you could talk," he said.

"I can," the monster replied. "No one ever wished it before. An old witch changed me into a monster and put me on this island, where no one could reach me, and the only way I can be restored to my original form is for someone to wish it."

"I wish it," said Ko-Ko

"You have had your wish," said the monster, "and I can talk; but for me to become a man someone else must wish it."



The monster and Ko-Ko lived for a long time on the island. He took Ko-Ko for long rides on his back, and when the waves were too high and Ko-Ko was afraid, the monster would open his mouth and Ko-Ko would crawl inside and be brought back safe to the island.

One night, after a storm, Ko-Ko saw something floating on the water, and he jumped on the monster's back and they swam out to it.

It proved to be a little girl, about Ko-Ko's age, who had been on one of the wrecked vessels, and they brought her to the island.

At first she was afraid of the monster, but when she learned that he had saved Ko-Ko as well as her and brought them all their food, she became as fond of him as Ko-Ko was.

"I wish he were a man," she said one day, as she sat on his back with Ko-Ko, ready for a sail. Splash went both children into the water, and there in place of the monster was an old man. He caught the children in his arms and brought them to the shore.

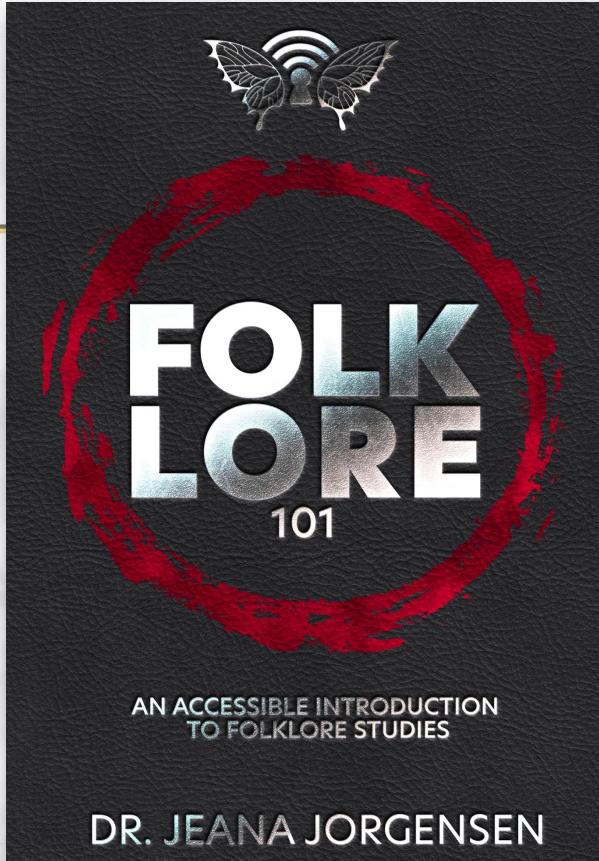
"But what will we do for food, now that you are a man?" asked Ko-Ko.

"We shall want for nothing now," replied the old man. "I am a sea-god and can do many things, now that I have my own form again. We will change this island into a beautiful garden, and when the little girl and you are grown up and married you shall have a castle, and all the sea-gods and nymphs will care for you. You will never want for anything again.

"I will take you out on the ocean on the backs of my dolphins."

Ko-Ko and the little girl lived on the enchanted island, and all the things that the old sea-god promised came true.

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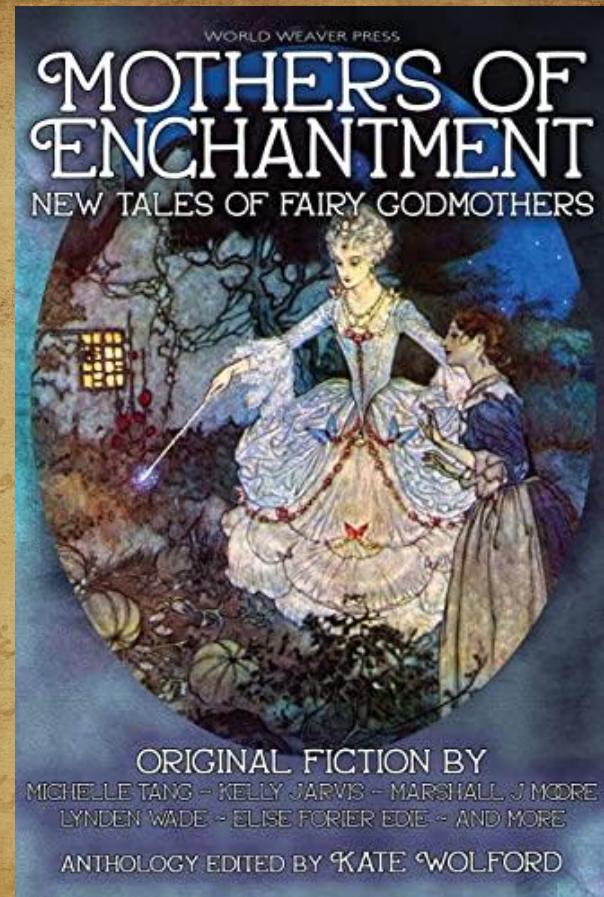
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LOVE, LOSS & THE MERMAID

by SARA CLETO & BRITTANY WARMAN

*W*hile almost every story about a mermaid is a love story, they tend to end with heartbreak rather than a happily ever after. In folklore, mermaids are beautiful, dangerous, threatening, alluring... and impossible to hold on to. Like sirens, they are creatures that can never be fully domesticated or integrated into human society, though they're often less overtly bloodthirsty than their siren cousins! A mermaid is not inherently sinister—she might rescue a drowning sailor just as easily as spelling doom for a ship with her mere presence. She can be a symbol of hope or destruction, but either way, she is something that can never be wholly known or controlled. Mermaids represent freedom—freedom from the rules and constraints of society—but that freedom comes at the steep cost of alienation and loss.

These creatures from legend have crept into our fairy tales (thanks, Hans Christian Andersen!), but they bring their legendary baggage with them.

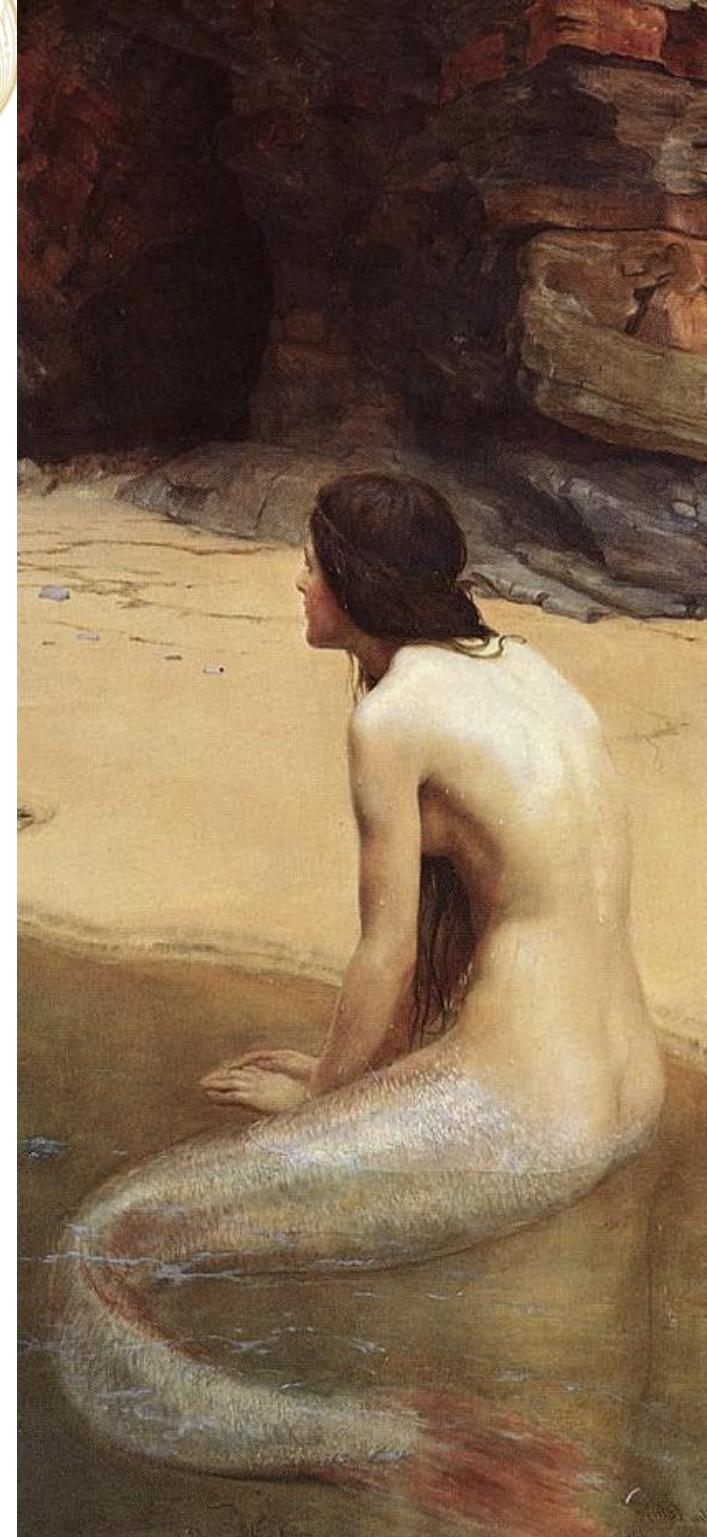
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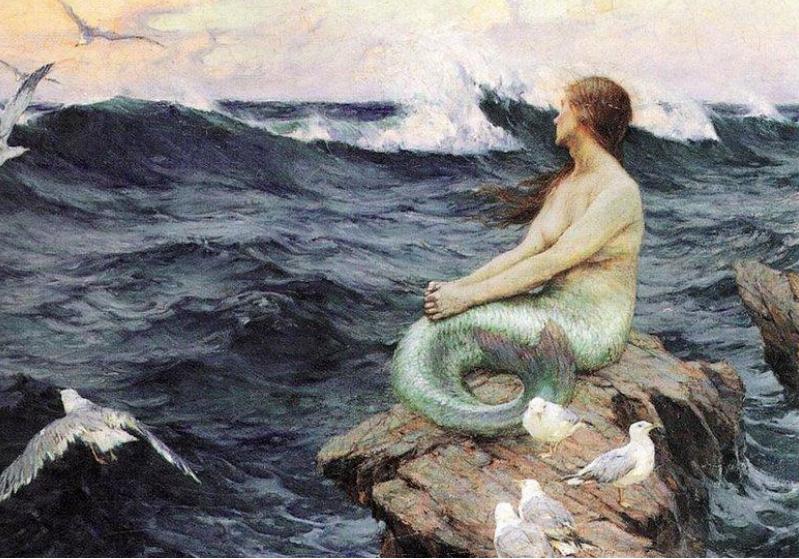
Legends are stories rooted in real locations and settings, and their superpower is revealing the anxieties of the society that creates them. And mermaids, even as they move into fairy tales, have a lot to say about our fears surrounding romance. What happens when you love someone unattainable or out of your reach? What happens when the one you love cannot stay? Mermaids have their own answers for us.

The heart of most stories of mermaids is longing. Longing for land, longing for understanding, and, of course, longing for love. The mermaid represents the call of the sea and the dangers there, but she also represents the beautiful, the uncanny, and everything that seems just out of reach. These are tales of what [Cristina Bacchilega and Marie Alohalani Brown](#) in their wonderful book [The Penguin Book of Mermaids](#) call “human experiences with the mysterious, nonhuman, aquatic other”—creatures that are us, but are not us, at the same time. Because of this, mermaids become canvases onto which we paint our deepest desires and most terrifying anxieties of loss and disconnection.

[Child ballad #289, “The Mermaid,”](#) shows us how anxieties about the ocean were associated with mermaids. A sea shanty, or work song, “The Mermaid” includes a scene where the crew of a ship sees a mermaid and interprets her as a sign of an impending wreck, a prediction that ultimately comes true. [As folklorist Stephen Winick argues](#), “[i]t’s pretty obvious from ‘The Mermaid’ that mermaids weren’t considered good luck. On the contrary, seeing one almost always spelled disaster [...] One explanation sometimes given for mermaids being unlucky is that they are female, and that sailors considered it bad luck to have a woman aboard most ships. Many explanations have been given for this belief. One is the possibility of jealousies arising among sailors who fall for the same girl (which seems plausible).” Here, the mermaid represents a deadly threat to the survival of the ship’s crew, but even this danger is tinged with the threat of romantic competition, jealousy, and loss.

[Bacchilega and Brown](#) remind us that “[o]ur anxieties about water beings are magnified by our attraction to them, which in many stories results in the human’s loss of control, self, and even life. [Embracing a water spirit can prove lethal.](#)” While mermaids may frequently resemble beautiful





humans from the waist up, beneath they are something else entirely. Bacchilega and Brown go on to comment that “[t]here is something deeply unsettling about a being whose form merges the human with the nonhuman. Whether they dwell in fresh or salt water, aquatic humanoids raise questions about what it is to be human and what lies beyond a human centered world. Physically, they are both like and unlike us. They eat, sleep, and breathe in a realm that we can access only temporarily, but they can live among us, as they are often able to shed the nonhuman portion of their bodies and infiltrate the human world.” Like love itself, they can be at once familiar and strange, and it is perhaps this inherent distance that seems to make most mermaid stories of love so heartbreakingly tragic when they cannot stay.

One of the keys to **understanding why mermaid romantic tales are so often melancholy** is **the concept of liminality**. Liminality is one of our favorite words—it’s super useful (and it’s also really fun to say out loud!). **It means being on a threshold, being not quite one thing or another.** Dusk and dawn are liminal times, not quite day or night. Being in your teens is a liminal time because you’re no longer a child but not yet quite an adult. **And hybrid creatures, like unicorns, harpies, and, yes, especially mermaids, are inherently liminal.** They possess the characteristics of multiple species in one, defying simple categorization. They cannot be pinned down as either this or that; they are instead challenging,

complex, and representative of infinite possibilities and longings.

Bacchilega and Brown write that “humans do not deal well with betwixt and between — liminality makes us anxious. We prefer our world organized into well-ordered and sharply defined categories, and we prefer to be in charge of it. Nonetheless, we are strangely drawn to the other who is in part a mirror image of us and appears within reach, even if mentally ungraspable.” And this is why love between humans and mermaids is often so fraught and ephemeral. The liminality of the aquatic other is attracting, repelling, and threatening all at once, which is perhaps why so many stories about them position them as dangerous creatures that we can only (failingly) attempt





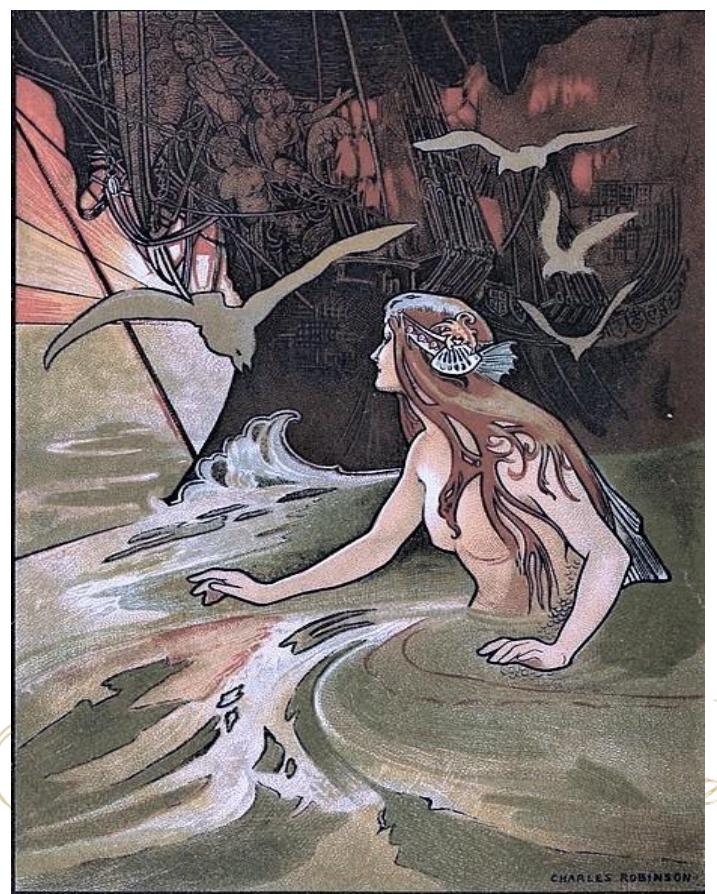
to control.

Let's look at "The Little Mermaid" as a test case. The best-known version is definitely the 1989 Disney film (and related merchandise!), and, here, we do get a happily ever after, though Ariel has to give up her life in the sea and her close connection with her family to achieve it. The source material, however, is a whole different story.

In 1837, Hans Christian Andersen published "The Little Mermaid" in Danish. Like Disney's Ariel, Andersen's nameless mermaid trades her superlative voice for human legs and a chance at romantic love, but that's where the stories largely depart. Andersen's mermaid's story is bleak, and she suffers in a way Ariel is never required to. Andersen's mermaid experiences bodily mutilation and chronic pain as the cost of her wish. The sea witch cuts out her tongue, and "every footprint felt as if she were walking on the blades and points of sharp knives." She not only has to leave behind her

home and risk her life, but she has to pay every moment with physical pain. While Ariel's gamble ultimately pays off with marriage to Eric and the recovery of her voice, Andersen's mermaid dies when the prince fails to love her the way that she needs. Instead of seeing her as a potential romantic partner, Andersen's prince never sees the mermaid as anything more than an amusing pet. She dances for his entertainment, and that of his court, and she even sleeps outside his bedroom door! Her story is one of loss—of her home, her voice, and the hope of romantic love.

And yet, **the depth of the mermaid's feelings is never questioned. She loves the prince because she loves humanity**, loves a world completely unlike her own, and, above all, she wants to obtain a human soul. (Mermaids do not have souls in Andersen's tale.) Her sisters offer her the chance to come back to the sea, to resume a life of soulless enchantment, and she chooses death instead. It is always her longing that underpins the story and, ultimately, makes its heartbreak so powerful and enduring. The mermaid might be different from us, but her desire and pain is something we humans know all too well.





Andersen's story was inspired by another literary mermaid tale, "Undine" by [Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué](#), in which a water spirit falls in love with and marries a man who later leaves her for another human, triggering her transformation into water itself. In this story, it's not that the human man never loves Undine, it's that her otherness ultimately becomes a barrier between them. He begins to see her as a kind of witch, a supernatural entity whose liminal magic is too much for him, another relatively common unhappy ending for mermaids who attempt love on land. While there are, of course, also stories of evil mermaids who drown lovelorn humans for fun, it seems more common to represent them as misunderstood and/or "outside of human grasp," as Bacchilega and Brown put it.

Despite the sadness that lingers in so many of their stories, the mermaid remains wildly popular, and for good reason. There are people today who dress up as professional mermaids for entertainment venues, attend mermaid parades (such as the big one on New York's Coney Island each year), and wear fashion inspired by mermaids. At the time of this writing, Disney's new, highly anticipated live-action remake of their version of *The Little Mermaid* is just days away from opening in theaters. As much as we like to show mermaids longing for human worlds, we are the ones who repeatedly bring them into ours, allowing their enticing song to tell us who we wish to be and how we hope to be loved.



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*The Best of
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THE RESCUE

by AMANDA KESPOHL

A boat capsized, tumbling a slim raven-haired girl into the sea. She hovered near the surface, surrounded by a hazy cloud of skirts like some sort of exotic jellyfish. Her legs thrashed against the currents that tried to draw her down. Her hands stroked futilely against the waves that tried to bury her. But the ocean was tireless, and she was not. In the end, it would swallow her whole.

Below her, the mermaid's heart stirred with sympathy. With a flick of golden fins, she swam toward the place where the wind roared and the sky wept. Her strong white arms encircled the girl's waist. Very gently, she pulled her down into the depths.

Bubbles erupted from between the girl's lips in a silent scream. Her hands clawed toward the surface as if she could pull herself up on her fingertips, like climbing a cliff face. But the mermaid was much stronger than any human girl. Crooning in her musical language, she drew the girl down among the colorful coral formations and held her until her struggles ceased. When the girl lay wilted like a crushed flower in the mermaid's arms, the mermaid let her go.

Up, she floated, like an angel rising to heaven. Indeed, she glowed in the flash and flare of lightning. Only, the light did not subside as the rumble of thunder faded into silence. It intensified until the mermaid was forced to look away.

When she looked back, the girl's eyes were open, studying the rainbow iridescence of her new tail. Shrugging out of the cumbersome cloud of her dress, she swam in experimental circles.

"Now isn't that better?" the mermaid asked in her singsong tongue.

"Yes," the girl burbled, her dark hair an inky halo around her pale face. "Much better. I'm not afraid anymore."

Together, they swam along the ocean floor, the mermaid keen to show her new friend the wreck where she, herself, was born.





WHAT THE PRINCESS WISHES

by PEYTON DUPREE

*T*ea parties. Royal investitures. Child-bearing. Seated on the fountain's marble coping, Princess Amelia felt frustrated. And withdrew her delicate hand from its moon-dappled waters. Jeweled drops fell like tears.

If only, she wished. If only a proper prince... (not the pompous, pomaded prats her father encouraged). A dashing prince on a white stallion. No, a unicorn... (She tried to imagine a proud unicorn bridled and saddled. Failed. No matter: her prince commanded the gracious animal with gentle words.) If only a prince astride his unicorn would sweep me up in his arms and bear me away. To his castle... (Of course. Remaining here where Father and Mother would corrupt him with the extraordinary boredom of their ordinary royal lives would be...tragic.)

As she debated whether she would allow her relatives to visit, a flight of eleven swans eclipsed the moon. One broke off and descended. Skirting the plashy fountain, it bellied into the pool and, breasting the waters, paddled towards her—a bird of luminous beauty, feathers like living silver, bill cast in ruddy gold. Tender-eyed behind a mask of midnight velvet...

Amelia's heart leaped. This is how wishes come true! she thought, her body thrilling. The swan was surely a prince in disguise.

Coyly, she giggled behind her palm. It bowed its sinuous neck.

“Oh,” she said, and extended the back of her hand, demurely inclined. It nuzzled her knuckles.

Laughing—an effervescence of spirit—she twisted her body, knelt on the coping and, mimicking the swan's neck with her arm, playfully pecked. The swan kissed her fingertips in return.

A prince! No ordinary swan would so amorously entwine its neck with her arm's arabesque.

“I wish you could take me away with you,” she murmured, thinking of her prince astride his unicorn. An impossible dream.

The swan turned its back, spread its wings—their span was huge, and she wondered... Dared hope they might bear her weight. And with the impulse of enchanted evening, sprang onto the bird's back, and was caught up in the thunder of its wings. Found herself aloft, arms wrapped around its broad chest, head hard against its plumage as its neck coiled above her. From its bill burst a trumpet call of triumph.

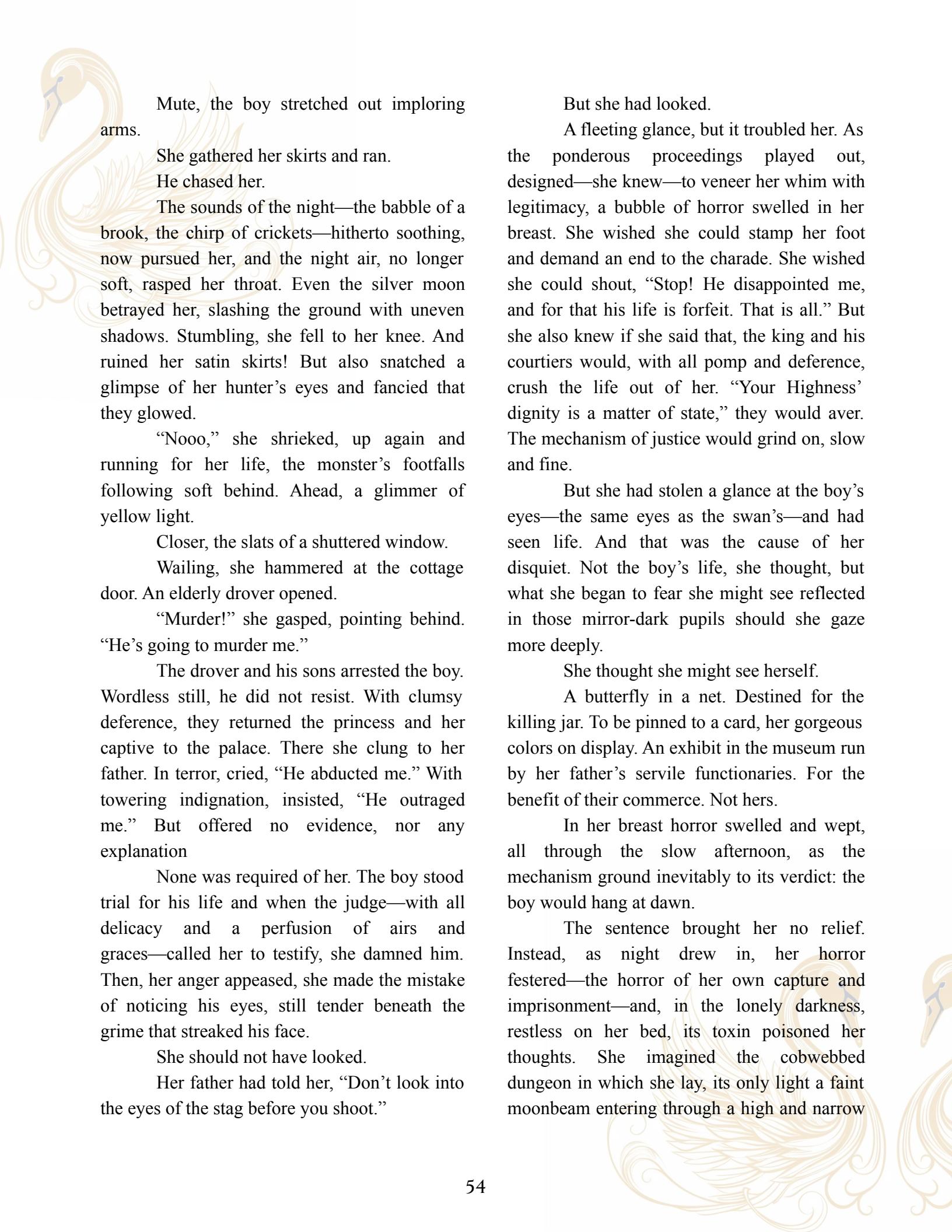
It did not take her to a palace.

It took her to a copse of breeze-ruffled trees and there transformed into a short, thin-legged boy, poorly dressed.

“You're not...” she breathed. Dismayed.

Outraged.

“You're not what I asked for!”



Mute, the boy stretched out imploring arms.

She gathered her skirts and ran.
He chased her.

The sounds of the night—the babble of a brook, the chirp of crickets—hitherto soothing, now pursued her, and the night air, no longer soft, rasped her throat. Even the silver moon betrayed her, slashing the ground with uneven shadows. Stumbling, she fell to her knee. And ruined her satin skirts! But also snatched a glimpse of her hunter's eyes and fancied that they glowed.

“Nooo,” she shrieked, up again and running for her life, the monster's footfalls following soft behind. Ahead, a glimmer of yellow light.

Closer, the slats of a shuttered window.

Wailing, she hammered at the cottage door. An elderly drover opened.

“Murder!” she gasped, pointing behind.
“He's going to murder me.”

The drover and his sons arrested the boy. Wordless still, he did not resist. With clumsy deference, they returned the princess and her captive to the palace. There she clung to her father. In terror, cried, “He abducted me.” With towering indignation, insisted, “He outraged me.” But offered no evidence, nor any explanation

None was required of her. The boy stood trial for his life and when the judge—with all delicacy and a perfusion of airs and graces—called her to testify, she damned him. Then, her anger appeased, she made the mistake of noticing his eyes, still tender beneath the grime that streaked his face.

She should not have looked.

Her father had told her, “Don't look into the eyes of the stag before you shoot.”

But she had looked.

A fleeting glance, but it troubled her. As the ponderous proceedings played out, designed—she knew—to veneer her whim with legitimacy, a bubble of horror swelled in her breast. She wished she could stamp her foot and demand an end to the charade. She wished she could shout, “Stop! He disappointed me, and for that his life is forfeit. That is all.” But she also knew if she said that, the king and his courtiers would, with all pomp and deference, crush the life out of her. “Your Highness’ dignity is a matter of state,” they would aver. The mechanism of justice would grind on, slow and fine.

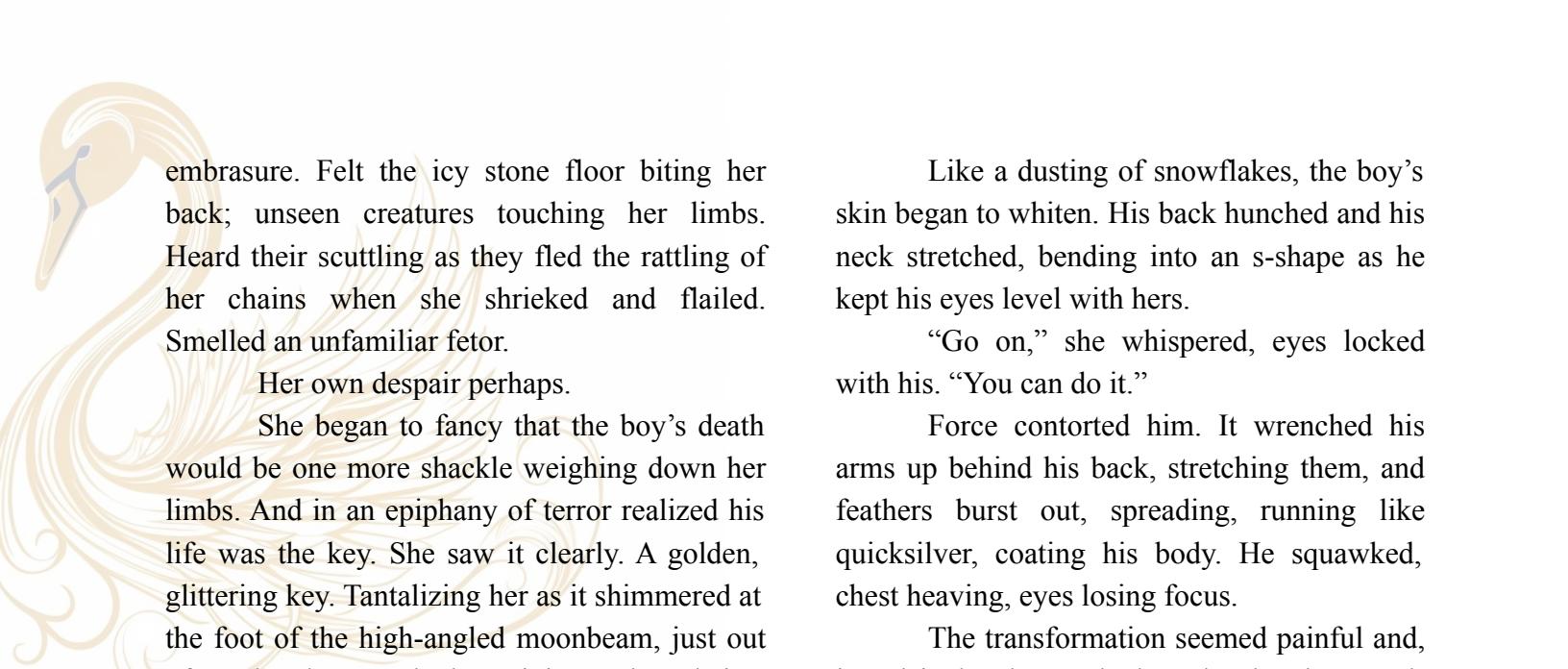
But she had stolen a glance at the boy's eyes—the same eyes as the swan's—and had seen life. And that was the cause of her disquiet. Not the boy's life, she thought, but what she began to fear she might see reflected in those mirror-dark pupils should she gaze more deeply.

She thought she might see herself.

A butterfly in a net. Destined for the killing jar. To be pinned to a card, her gorgeous colors on display. An exhibit in the museum run by her father's servile functionaries. For the benefit of their commerce. Not hers.

In her breast horror swelled and wept, all through the slow afternoon, as the mechanism ground inevitably to its verdict: the boy would hang at dawn.

The sentence brought her no relief. Instead, as night drew in, her horror festered—the horror of her own capture and imprisonment—and, in the lonely darkness, restless on her bed, its toxin poisoned her thoughts. She imagined the cobwebbed dungeon in which she lay, its only light a faint moonbeam entering through a high and narrow



embrasure. Felt the icy stone floor biting her back; unseen creatures touching her limbs. Heard their scuttling as they fled the rattling of her chains when she shrieked and flailed. Smelled an unfamiliar fetor.

Her own despair perhaps.

She began to fancy that the boy's death would be one more shackle weighing down her limbs. And in an epiphany of terror realized his life was the key. She saw it clearly. A golden, glittering key. Tantalizing her as it shimmered at the foot of the high-angled moonbeam, just out of reach. She stretched, straining at her chains, fingers brushing...

But here came horror, reaching out its hooked claw to snatch it.

"No!" she convulsed, leaping from her silken bed. "I will not be robbed."

She dressed. Passed, ghost-like, through the palace's passages. Imperiously commanded the jailer to entrust her with his keys.

"I will have words with the prisoner."

"But Your Highness is alone."

"The prisoner is shackled, is he not?"

The jailer assented.

"Then delay no more. Give me your keys and remove yourself. I will summon you when I am done."

The jailer went. He hadn't survived so long as he had without realizing that things were often not as they seemed.

She unchained the boy, led him out. He followed her, mute, trusting still. She led him to the inner courtyard. All but pushed him into the pool. "Go on," she hissed. "Change back into a swan. Fly away."

Nothing happened.

"For heaven's sake!" she fumed. "Hurry. We'll be caught." Then, worried, "You can do it, can't you. Oh please God!"

Like a dusting of snowflakes, the boy's skin began to whiten. His back hunched and his neck stretched, bending into an s-shape as he kept his eyes level with hers.

"Go on," she whispered, eyes locked with his. "You can do it."

Force contorted him. It wrenched his arms up behind his back, stretching them, and feathers burst out, spreading, running like quicksilver, coating his body. He squawked, chest heaving, eyes losing focus.

The transformation seemed painful and, impulsively, she reached out her hand to touch his narrowing face.

The quicksilver tide ran up her arm.

Soon she too was hunched over, sprouting feathers, squawking.



When the change was done, the world was made fresh. She bobbed on the water, paddling with webbed feet, thrusting, gliding. Spreading huge white wings she tested the waft of air. But only tentatively.

First, she paddled to the swan, who was quietly watching her. Her velvet masked eyes met his velvet masked eyes. Orange bill caressed orange bill. Sinuous necks intertwined.

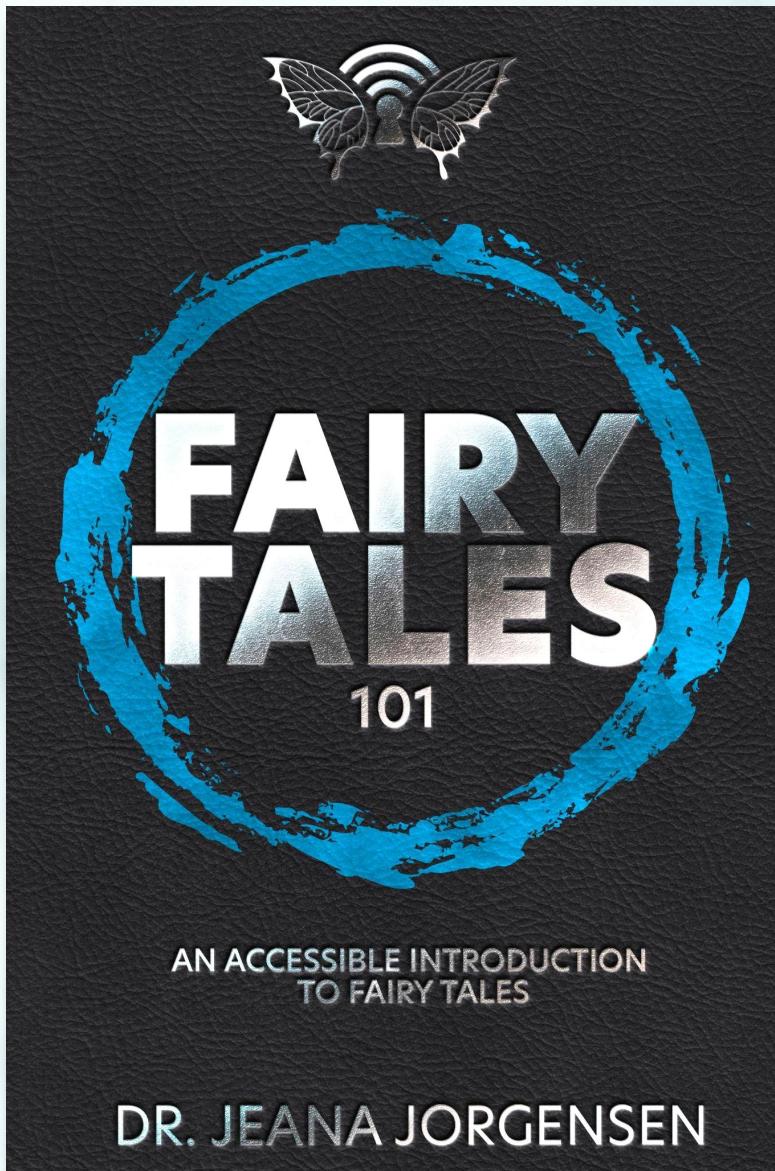
Backing up a little they looked at each other as if asking, "What next?"

Trumpeting a call of triumph the swan began its take-off run. Princess Amelia followed, first arcing, then stretching her long, elegant neck, running on the water, thrusting with webbed feet as her wings gripped the brisk air, pulling her skywards. And then she was airborne, honking her farewell to the palace as it fell behind and below. Quickly she caught up with her mate and together they flew, two swans in the eye of the moon.

Wild and free.



What exactly are fairy tales and how did they get their name?



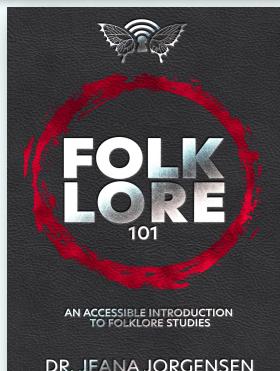
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HY-BRASAIL

THE ISLE OF THE BLEST

AN IRISH FAIRY TALE POEM

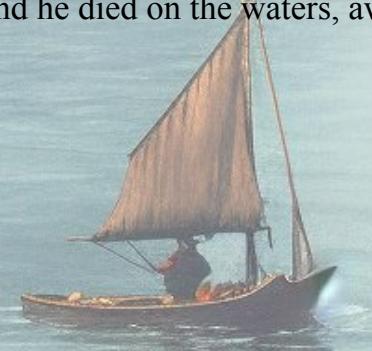
by GERALD GRIFFIN

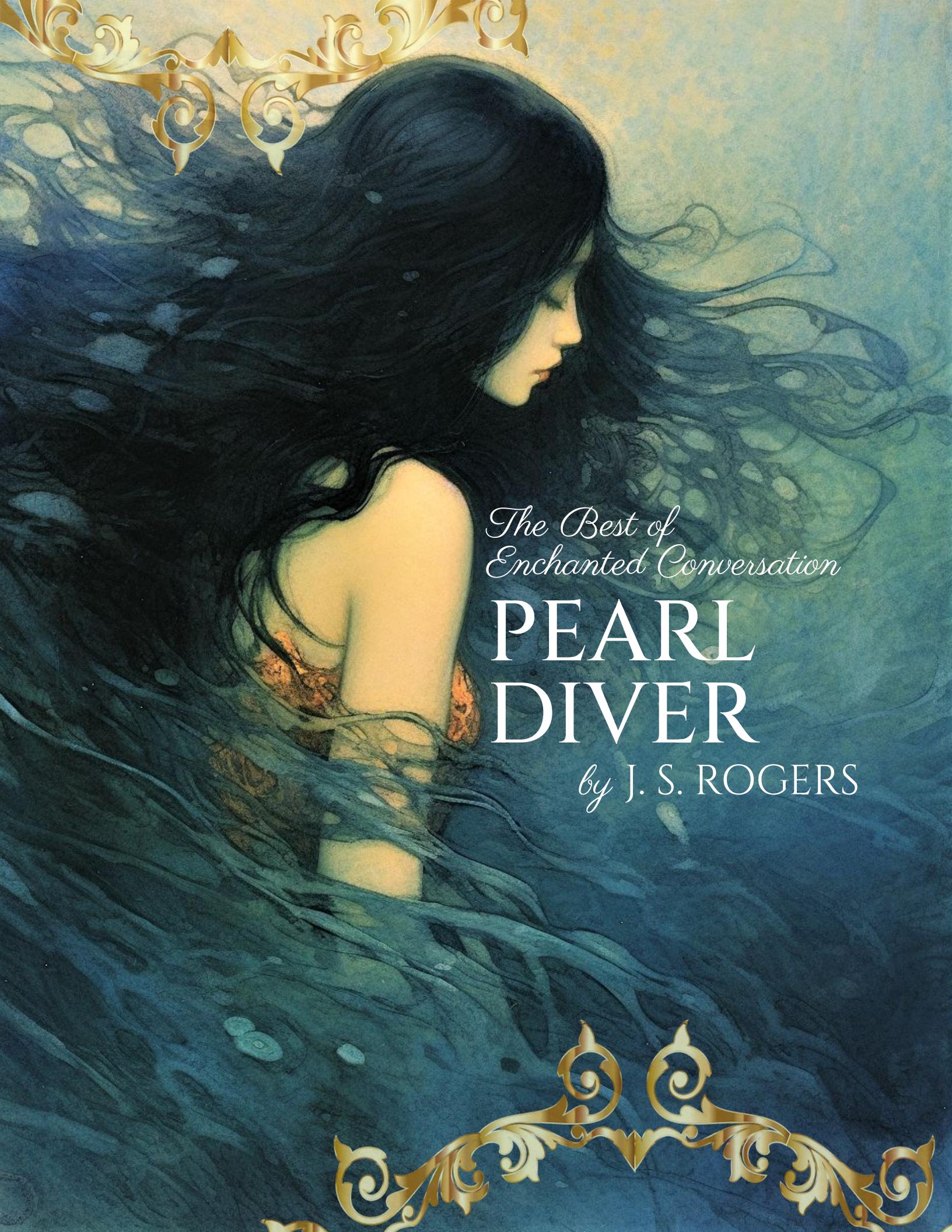
On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell,
A shadowy land has appeared, as they tell;
Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,
And they called it Hy-Brasail, the isle of the blest.
From year unto year on the ocean's blue rim,
The beautiful spectre showed lovely and dim;
The golden clouds curtained the deep where it lay,
And it looked like an Eden, away, far away!

A peasant who heard of the wonderful tale,
In the breeze of the Orient loosened his sail;
From Ara, the holy, he turned to the west,
For though Ara was holy, Hy-Brasail was blest.
He heard not the voices that called from the shore—
He heard not the rising wind's menacing roar;
Home, kindred, and safety, he left on that day,
And he sped to Hy-Brasail, away, far away!

Morn rose on the deep, and that shadowy isle,
O'er the faint rim of distance, reflected its smile;
Noon burned on the wave, and that shadowy shore
Seemed lovelily distant, and faint as before;
Lone evening came down on the wanderer's track,
And to Ara again he looked timidly back;
Oh! far on the verge of the ocean it lay,
Yet the isle of the blest was away, far away!

Rash dreamer, return! O, ye winds of the main,
Bear him back to his own peaceful Ara again.
Rash fool! for a vision of fanciful bliss,
To barter thy calm life of labour and peace.
The warning of reason was spoken in vain;
He never revisited Ara again!
Night fell on the deep, amidst tempest and spray,
And he died on the waters, away, far away!





*The Best of
Enchanted Conversation*

PEARL DIVER

by J. S. ROGERS

*M*ai dove for pearls with her sisters and the other girls from the village, though she did not want to. Every morning the boats took them out to the reefs and they slid beneath the waves, breathing deep the precious air and then kicking down and down and down.

The world beneath the waves was quiet. The salt water stung Mai's eyes and pushed in against her nostrils. Fish scattered as she kicked by, flitting away. The coral grew in strange shapes, and brilliantly colored anemones waved stinging tentacles at them. The oysters nestled among them, and Mai pried them loose with her knife, shoving them, one after another, into the bag at her waist.

She worked without paying attention, her eyes ever on the deeper water, where the reef dropped away and the water grew murkier and, sometimes, they saw the merfolk.

*M*ai grew up hearing about the merfolk; all the pearl divers saw them, sooner or later, it was the one benefit of the work. They were strange creatures, almost human, save for their long, beautiful tails. Mai loved to watch them, swimming through the deeper waters, always staying far from the divers. She loved to imagine the freedom of diving deeper, finding out what existed in the depths.

She had swum out towards one, only once, after the creature lingered and lingered. She had not gotten very close at all before one of her sisters grabbed her and pulled her back up to the water's surface. Ayumi had told Father that night, and Mai still remembered his thunderous disapproval.

Sensible girls did not go out to the merfolk.

It wasn't safe.

Everyone knew that.

But Mai watched them and wondered.

*H*aruna lived alone far along the beach, where the trees grew down into the water, in her own little hut, without a man or any sisters. Pieces of bone, all knotted together, hung in the trees around her home, making soft music when the wind blew. She did not dive for pearls like the other women, or fish like the men. She made her living through other means, through the payments of villagers who snuck out to her hut when the moon was dark, and the night was quiet.

She had the longest hair of anyone Mai had ever seen, dark and black against her pale skin, though all the other women wore their hair short. She had small, thin fingers and a small, thin smile. They said she had swum out to the merfolk, once, her hair fanning out across the surface of the water.

Mai stared at her hut, far away on the horizon, sometimes.

Sensible girls did not visit Haruna.

It wasn't safe.

Everyone knew that.

But.

*T*he men fished, catching up the fish disturbed by the pearl divers. Mai used to beg to go with them, before her father told her, calm and cold, that he had no sons; there would be no place in the boats for Mai, no matter how much she wished for the kiss of sun on her shoulders, or to wear her hair long and free.

The men dragged their nets through the water and sometimes they hauled up strange things, monsters out of the deep. It was always exciting to return to shore to find them gathered around a boat, yelling at one another and calling to the others in the village.

Mai hurried over to the boats, memories of half-glimpsed merfolk temporarily forgotten.

Half the village huddled around the boats, but at a distance. Mai found a place at the edge of the crowd, peering around shoulders, wondering what fascinated them so, and freezing.

One of the merfolk lay tangled in fishing net in the bottom of a boat. He—for it had to be a boy—lay limp, his eyes closed. He was bigger than Mai had imagined, his tail alone longer than she was tall. Scales of orange and white and black covered his tail and stretched up his stomach. Gills, pale slits, curved under his arms and around to his back. Bloody wounds, punctures that Mai recognized from pearl divers who were unlucky enough to attract the attention of a shark, marred his side and one of his arms. The boat was half full of water. He lay in it.

“He was tangled in the nets,” Kaito said, standing at the head of the boat. “We didn’t know what to do with him.”

“Is he alive?” Mai asked, creeping forward, leaning over the boat. As though to answer her, he moved, his tail twitching and rocking the boat. The others drew back; someone cried out. Mai drank in the sight of him. She said, “We have to help him.”

“We have to do nothing,” her father said, the crowd parting to allow him past. He surveyed the scene, his eyes narrowing on Mai. “Come here, daughter.”

Mai lowered her eyes, moving around the boat. But the man groaned, slightly, as she did, and she said, “We can’t just let him die, father. Please.”

Her father stared down at her, and she had never been able to read his dark eyes. But then he sighed and nodded. “Very well,” he said, and continued, before she could smile, “take him to Haruna.”

Haruna waited for them as they pulled boat along the shore, her hands hidden in her sleeves, her hair long and black. She gazed

across them as they explained and then said, “I will require aid. From you.” She pointed a sleeve at Mai.

“No,” Father said, his hand closing on Mai’s shoulder.

Haruna stared back. She said, “Then he will die.”

Father said nothing, and then he turned Mai aside. “That is unfortunate,” he said, and when Mai opened her mouth to protest he said, preemptively, “No.”

Sensible girls did not go to the merfolk or Haruna.

It wasn’t safe.

Everyone knew that.

But Mai slipped from her room that night and stole on silent feet to Haruna’s hut. Haruna waited outside and said, “Come.”

The man looked worse. The water in the boat had turned red. His flesh felt cold when Mai pressed a foul-smelling mixture into his wounds under Haruna’s direction. But his eyes cracked open when Mai lifted his head and poured tea mixed with strange herbs between his lips. He raised a hand, as the sun started to rise, and his fingertips against her cheek sent shivers down Mai’s spine.

“Good,” Haruna said. “Return tonight.”

Mai’s thoughts wandered throughout the day. She stared into the deep water, careless with her knife, staying beneath the waves for so long that her lungs felt near to bursting each time she rose. She gulped at the air when she broke the surface, ran her fingers over her ribs, and imagined the feel of gills the way she used to imagine hair heavy down her back.

She shivered and shivered again her father frowned at her over dinner and said, “It is time that you married.”

Mai stared at him, her thoughts

suddenly floundering. She said, "No." Father's head snapped up, fire in his eyes, and she said, "I mean, Niko and Himari are still young, they—"

"They are old enough to care for themselves," Father said. Mai's mouth filled with bitter spit. She thought of the boys in the village, with their dark eyes and rough hands. She wanted to work beside them in the boats. She had never wanted to lie beside one at night. "I need a son," he said. "I am growing old. I will arrange a match for the spring."

"Of course," Mai said, staring at nothing, and that night she ran to Haruna's hut, heedless of all sensibility.

The merman looked worse. He barely stirred under Mai's hands. Heat radiated out from his flesh. Mai treated his wounds and poured water in his mouth, and he grabbed her, then, his smooth fingers closing around her wrist. Patterns of scales ran down the back of his arms.

Mai cried out, tried to pull back, and images flooded her mind. She saw other merfolk, ranks and ranks of them, wrapped in the skins of seals. Their fins were pierced with barbed hooks and they carried long, thin weapons with sharp edges. Beside and around them swarmed sharks, great beasts. She felt a wash of pain in her side. She saw a construction of coral and kelp, other merfolk swimming through it, eating, caring for their young.

The merman's hand fell away from Mai's wrist, leaving behind understanding. She stared down at him; his eyes rolled back in his head. His chest no longer rose or fell. "Well," said Haruna. "Go home."

Mai shivered. She said, "I saw something. He showed me something. With his thoughts."

She expected Haruna to laugh, but Haruna, with her long hair and her hidden

hands, only said, "Did he?"

"I think it was a warning," Mai said. "A warning for his people."

Haruna said, "They will not get it now. Not from him."

Mai listened to the waves beating against the shore. She dipped her fingers into the salt water in the boat. She said, "Someone has to carry it to them." Haruna looked at her, then. Looked at her slow and long. Mai said, "I can't."

"But if you could," Haruna said, like a question. "If you had the ability. Would you?"

Sensible girls did not come to Haruna's hut.

It was not safe.

Mai thought of the ocean and marriage. She licked her lips. She stood and looked out across the endless waves, dark and deep. She said, "I would."

"There will be a price," Haruna warned. Mai looked back and found her holding a ball of green-blue light, the same color as water in the ocean at midday. In the boat, half-submerged in the water, the merman's body changed, turning soft and small, his tail splitting into legs, until Mai's face looked back up at her.

Sensible girls did not visit Haruna, much less make deals with her. Perhaps Mai had never been a sensible girl.

Mai looked away from the body that had been hers, that had never fitted properly. The waves pulled at Mai's ankles, calling her into the ocean, into the form she'd always craved. Madness and adventure awaited, and a world she did not understand. But all of that would be worth it. Any cost would be worth it. She let out a shivery breath and said, "I will pay it."

I MARRIED A MERMAID

HISTORIC LINEAGES TIED TO OUR FAVORITE WATER-FAIRIE

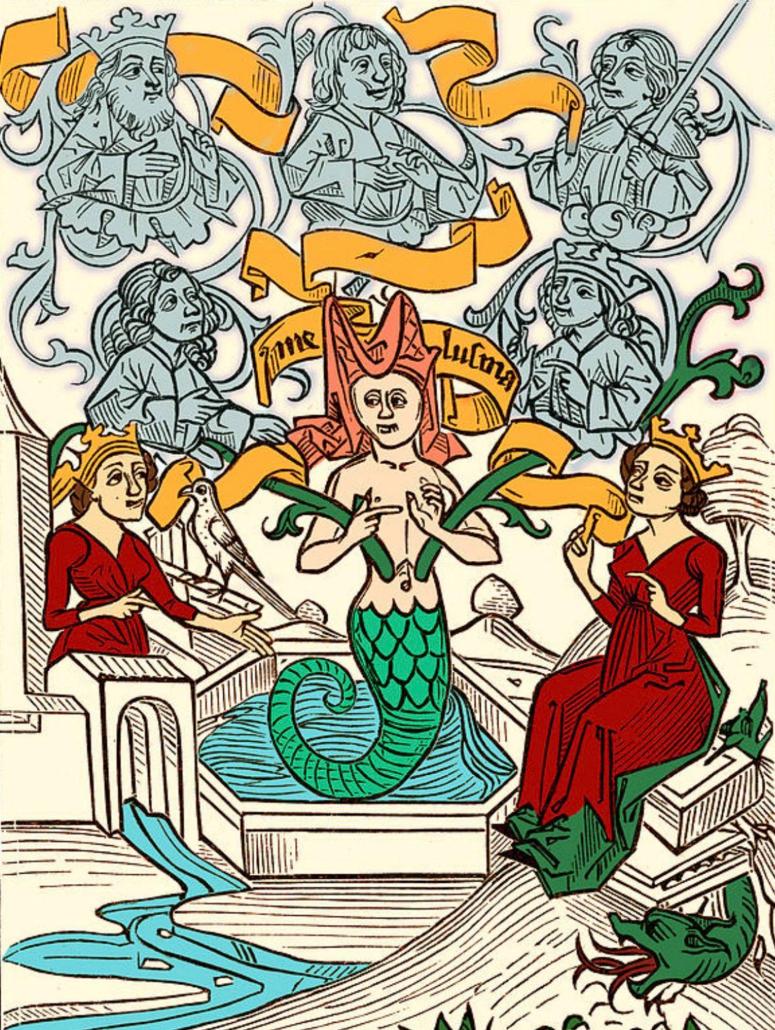
by PAUL HIMMELEIN



We all know the stories of mermaids and sirens luring men to their demise, dashing their ships upon the rocks, or pulling sailors to the bottom of the murky sea. But there are other stories. Stories of mermaids coming on land in search of love. Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid" is one such tale, however, her love is unrequited, and she fails to wed the prince of her dreams. In the tale of Undine, a water spirit manages to marry a human, but this marriage doesn't last and ends in tragedy before any children are born. However, if we cast a wider net, we can find tales of mermaids and water spirits that do end with a mixing of human and faerie blood. Amazingly, some of these unions are branches of family trees whose descendants walk among us.

Shouts of "long live the king" were heard frequently this past May 6th at the coronation of Charles III when the United Kingdom celebrated the crowning of its new monarch, the first in 70 years. As the eldest son of Queen Elizabeth II, Charles, the prince of Wales, ascended to the throne upon his mother's death. As a member of the royal House of Windsor, most would agree that Charles

ha



daughter of a duke or earl.

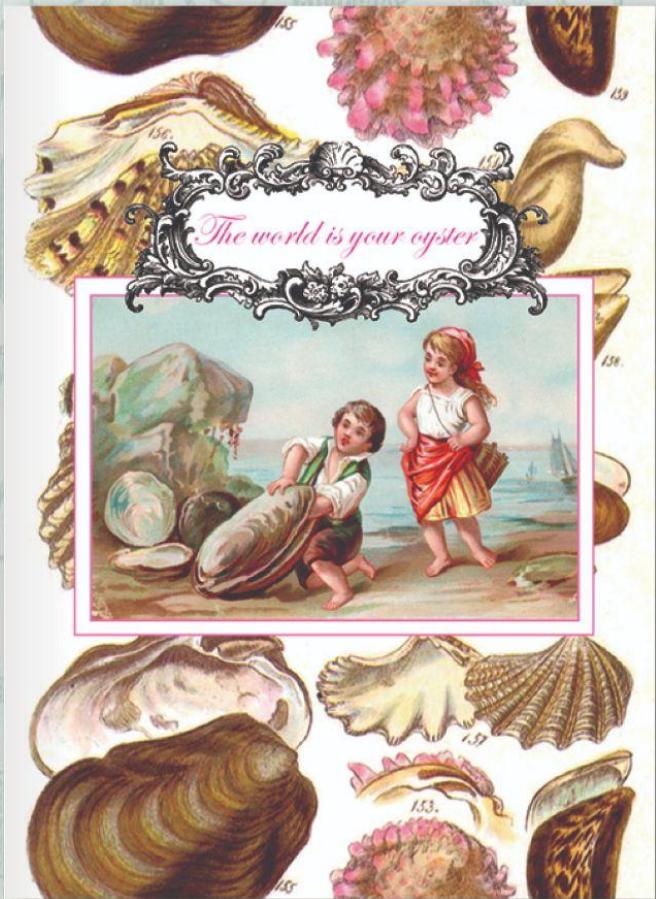
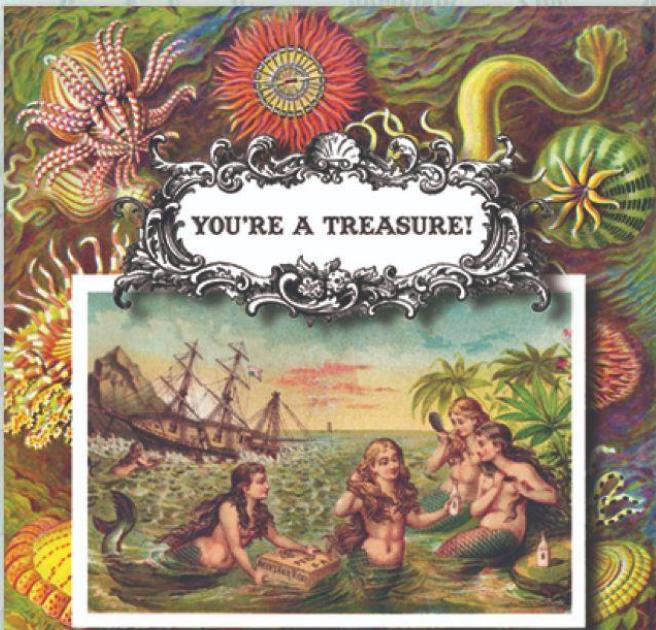
Some nobles believed that magic must've been at play to make the king fall prey to such poor judgment. Many started to blame Elizabeth's mother, Jacquetta of Luxembourg. Jacquetta, also known as the Dowager Duchess of Bedford and Countess Rivers, proudly traced her family's lineage back to the shapeshifting faerie mermaid Melusine. This made her an easy target. Jacquetta was eventually accused of witchcraft and brought to trial, but the charges didn't hold, especially when one of the accusers was himself charged with treasonous activities and exiled.

This story of Jacquetta's ancient mermaid relative, Melusine, dates back to the Middle Ages. Committed to prose in 1393 by Jean d'Arras, the popular legend tells of the founding of the French Lusignan dynasty by Melusine. Like King Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, this story also begins with a meeting in the woods only under more tragic circumstances. Raymond, the son of the Count of Poitou, was boar hunting in the forest when he accidentally killed his uncle with a spear. Full of anguish, he wandered deep into the forest until nightfall where he came upon a strange fountain. Illuminated beneath the milky light of the moon, he saw three women sitting on the edge of the fountain. The most beautiful of the three was Melusine. It was love at first sight for Raymond, and that was even before Melusine promised to smooth things over with the hunting accident. Raymond was relieved and grateful to have happened upon so wonderful a woman. When she made good on her promise, he asked her to marry him. She agreed if only he vowed to leave her alone on Saturdays—undisturbed, no questions asked. He made an oath to prove his trustworthiness, pledging never to interrupt her privacy on that day.

Raymond did not know the cause behind Melusine's odd request, nor did he ask her why. He also

has the proverbial "blue blood" running through his veins. What the vast majority don't know is that a medieval legend claims that mermaid blood also pulses in those same veins!

Indeed, it's said that all British monarchs from Henry VIII to the present share this distinctive trait. This water-faerie or mermaid connection started in the 15th century during a series of English civil conflicts known as the War of the Roses. King Edward IV (King Charles III's 15th great-grandfather) married the widow of a commoner in 1464. Her name was Elizabeth Woodville. They supposedly met in the forest while she was out walking and he was hunting. She was famous for her beauty and was said to have "heavy-lidded eyes like those of a dragon." Even though the king loved Elizabeth, it was not a popular betrothal and most likely the reason the couple married quickly and in secret. His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council told the king that Elizabeth was beneath him as she was not the



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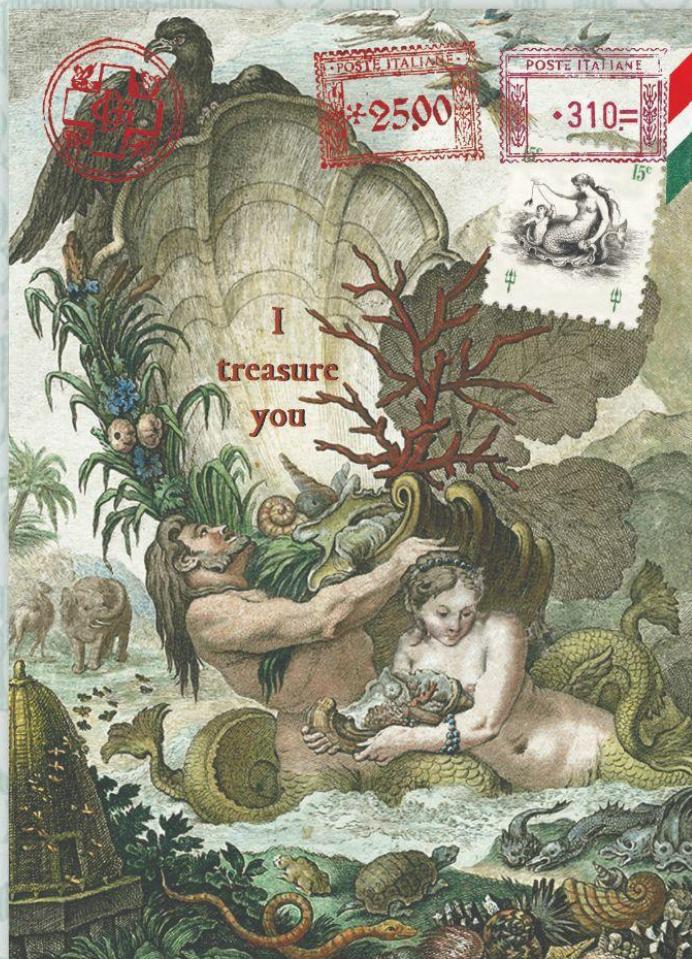
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didn't know that she was part water faerie. Her father, Elinas, an ancient Scottish king, had married her mother, Pressina, a water spirit he had met at a fountain in the woods—not unlike Raymond and Melusine. Raymond also didn't know that Melusine had been punished by her mother with a curse that made her turn into a mermaid with a full fish's tail (some versions say serpent's tail) every Saturday. The spell could only be broken if she married a man who would promise to never see her on Saturdays and stay true to his word.

Melusine was anxious to put an end to her Saturday shapeshifting and thought the loving Raymond was just the man to help her. Things were off to a good start. Melusine gave him a grand castle and made Raymond the greatest lord in the land. As the years progressed, Melusine gave birth to ten children. Whether it was a byproduct of her mother's curse or the mixing of human and faerie blood, eight of the ten children were born with some kind of monstrous deformity: one had three eyes, another had a flat face and big ears, another was covered in hair and had saber-like claws, and there was a son named Geoffrey the Tooth, due to his giant tusk-like, you guessed it, tooth. Yet none of this altered Raymond's love for Melusine.

Then the rumors started. Raymond's cousin began needling him about why Melusine had to be alone each Saturday and started planting the seeds of jealousy in Raymond's mind; perhaps she was being unfaithful to him. It didn't take long before Raymond's fears grew. One Saturday, he stealthily crept up to Melusine's chamber and peered through a crack in the door. He was not prepared for what he saw. There was no other man, just his wife bathing alone, but he was stunned and horrified when he realized that her shapely legs had transformed into the iridescent tail of a mermaid.

Bewildered by this discovery, Raymond managed to keep it to himself, not wanting to reveal he had broken his promise. He continued life as before without Melusine suspecting a thing. The secret, however, could not stay hidden forever. When Raymond learned that his son, Geoffrey the Tooth, had murdered one of his brothers for becoming a monk and had then burned down the entire monastery killing all 100 monks inside, he was grievously distraught. When Melusine tried to comfort him, he shouted in front of all the courtiers present that it was her fault; she was an odious monster that had tainted his children's blood.

Melusine was appalled that Raymond had broken his promise and revealed her secret publicly. Standing before the astounded crowd, she morphed into her mermaid self, grew dragon's wings and flew off, never to be seen by her husband again, though there were reports she returned at night to suckle her two youngest infants. It was also said that Melusine could henceforth be heard above the castle of Lusignan crying out just before each ruler was about to die.

During the Middle Ages, this story had been translated into several languages and adapted to fit more comfortably with various regions, local legends and folklore. Several aristocratic families co-opted this tale of the Lusignan lineage and incorporated it into their own family trees to add power and legitimacy to their bloodlines. Raymond was sometimes the count of Anjou, other times the duke of Aquitaine, depending on which family was adjusting their tree to align with the mermaid Melusine. Aristocratic families ruling in Europe, Cyprus, Antioch and Armenia claimed Melusine as one of their own. The noble houses of Luxembourg, Rohane and Sassenaye all doctored their pedigrees to prove that their ancestors could be traced back to Melusine through one or another of her sons. Henry VII of the

Holy Roman Empire and Count of Luxembourg was pleased he had a mermaid ancestor. In the Luxembourg version of the tale, Raymond is replaced by Count Siegfried and Melusine creates the Bock fortress of Luxembourg instead of the castle of Lusignan. The count is given the same marriage stipulation as Raymond and fails just as miserably.

Jacqueta of Luxembourg was proud to announce she had a mermaid in the family. Being a descendant of Melusine gave her family power, mystery and a connection to the faerie realm. If the royal houses of the Middle Ages could tweak their family histories to include a mermaid or water-faerie, why shouldn't we? Perhaps there's a little Melusine in us all. Long live Melusine!



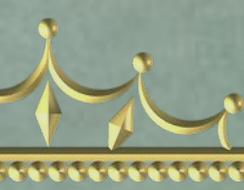
SELKIE RELATIONS

There are other water sprites that have had reputed intimacies with mortals that have supposedly given rise to families of mixed human and faerie blood. Along the shores of Britain, Ireland and the Western Scandinavian countries of Iceland and the Faroe Islands, there are tales of water spirits called selkies that were thought to be fallen angels. They have the appearance of seals while in the sea but could shapeshift into humans on land. Some stories say when the selkies take human form, their seal skins lay on the rocky shore and should a human steal away with one of these skins, its owner will be bound to him until they can reclaim it.

The clan MacCodrum of Scotland had such ancestors. According to a legend that has been memorialized in a Hebrides folk song, a MacCodrum man had discovered a selkie skin along the beach and had snatched it up while the sea maiden was dancing on the shore. The selkie was compelled to become his wife and begin a new life with him, leaving her selkie husband and family in the ocean. After many years and giving birth to many children, one of her sons happened to see his father move the magic seal skin to a new hiding spot deep within a haystack. The boy led his mother to where her seal skin lay hidden. She immediately ran with it to the shore, slipped it on and departed for the deep and her selkie family. She was never seen again by her terrestrial kin. Heartbroken at their loss, the MacCodrum children and their descendants refused to ever kill or harm a seal as it could easily be a relative of theirs. The McPhees of Colonsay claimed they too were descendants of a selkie as well as several Irish families such as the O'Sullivan's and the O'Flaherty's of Kerry. The Macnamaras of Claire claim they are also descended from seals and abstain from killing them as well.

In the Orkney Islands of Northern Scotland, there's a story of Ursilla, the daughter of a laird who was unsatisfied in her marriage and sought out an affair with a male selkie. She shed seven tears into the sea—the secret by which to call forth a selkie. When he appeared, he asked how he might be of service. Ursilla told him what she desired. He explained to her where and when they'd meet and came to her in his handsome human form. Ursilla and the selkie's continual meetings led to the birth of several babies all of which had webbed hands and feet. The midwife delicately snipped the thin membranous tissue between the newborns' fingers and toes, a task that needed repeating often as the children grew. Eventually the clipped areas took on the appearance of horny growths. Subsequent generations occasionally had children who exhibited the very same thickened skin on their palms and soles or the random webbed toes. This apparently proved their lineage went back to Ursilla and her selkie lover.

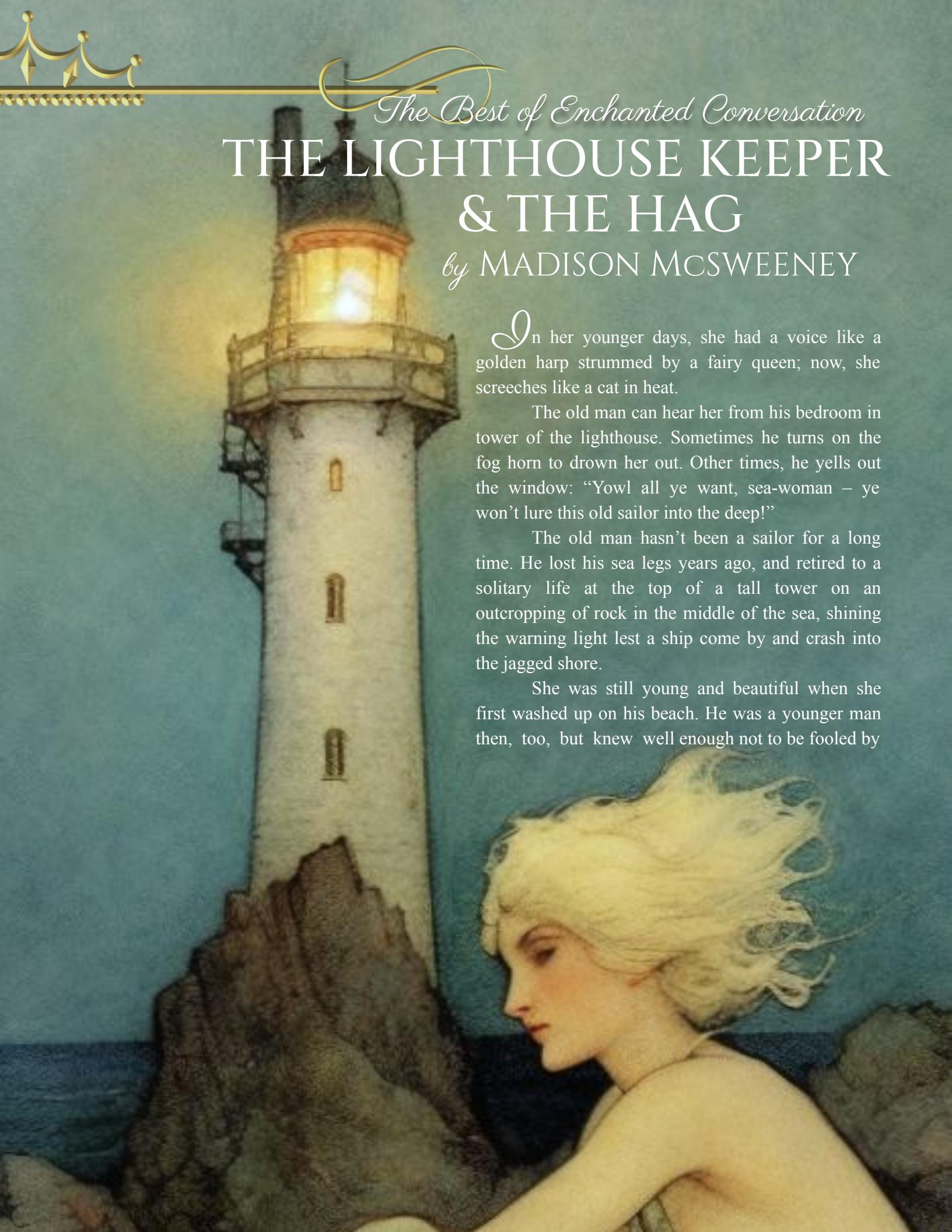




The Best of Enchanted Conversation

THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER & THE HAG

by MADISON MCSWEENEY

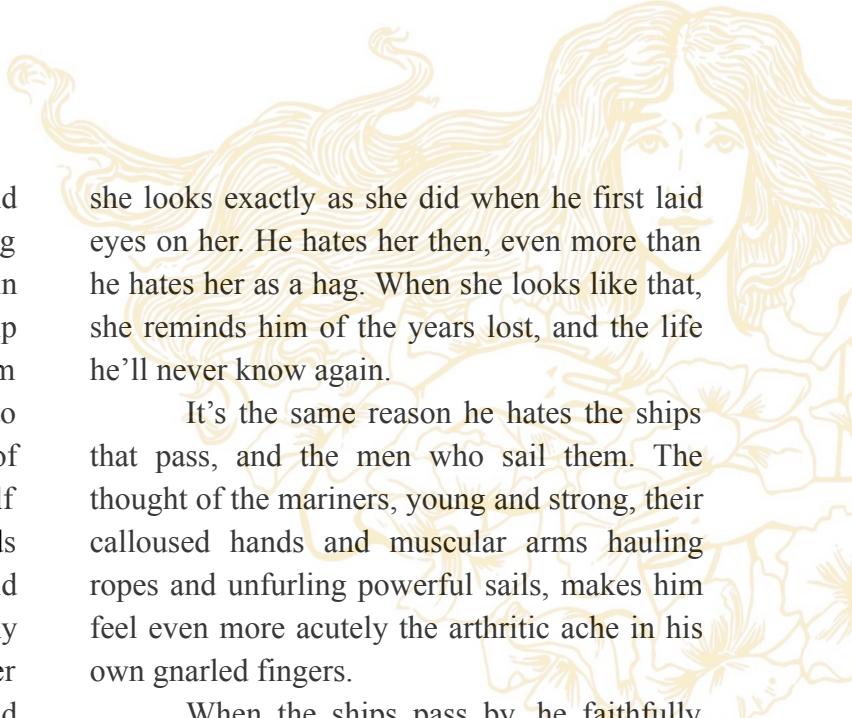


*I*n her younger days, she had a voice like a golden harp strummed by a fairy queen; now, she screeches like a cat in heat.

The old man can hear her from his bedroom in tower of the lighthouse. Sometimes he turns on the fog horn to drown her out. Other times, he yells out the window: “Yowl all ye want, sea-woman – ye won’t lure this old sailor into the deep!”

The old man hasn’t been a sailor for a long time. He lost his sea legs years ago, and retired to a solitary life at the top of a tall tower on an outcropping of rock in the middle of the sea, shining the warning light lest a ship come by and crash into the jagged shore.

She was still young and beautiful when she first washed up on his beach. He was a younger man then, too, but knew well enough not to be fooled by



her siren song. Granted, some nights he would find himself gazing out his window, watching her splayed out on the rocks, bathed in moonlight, clear water lapping up against the tip of her silver tail. Inevitably, she'd see him observing her, lock eyes with him, and start to croon some wordless lullaby from the bottom of the ocean. And inevitably, he'd feel himself drawn to her, compelled to run his rough hands up and down her pale flesh, convinced he would rather drown himself to be with her than deny himself another day. On those nights, whether there was a ship passing by or not, he would turn on the beacon and send her scurrying back into the sea.



The dance went on for five years before he finally approached her. She was sunning herself on the beach when she saw the top of his head over the edge of a cliff. She smiled and sat up straighter, throwing her long red hair over her shoulder so her whole body was on display for him. Smiling, she opened her mouth to sing. The man grunted, and something glinted in the sun; no later than the end of her first verse, a spear sailed through the air and pierced her glistening tail. The sea woman screamed and tried to pull the spear from her flesh, but its tip was firmly lodged between her scales. The more frenzied her attempts to free herself, the more damage she did. By the time she'd dislodged the weapon, she was paralyzed.

Thirty years she's been trapped here. She's long since lost her beauty, her voice, and her charm. All that's left is a creature of rage and hunger and unfulfilled lust.

They say mermaids never grow old, but that's a myth.

Or maybe they never truly do. Sometimes, when the sky is clear and the moon is full, the old man looks at her and can swear

she looks exactly as she did when he first laid eyes on her. He hates her then, even more than he hates her as a hag. When she looks like that, she reminds him of the years lost, and the life he'll never know again.

It's the same reason he hates the ships that pass, and the men who sail them. The thought of the mariners, young and strong, their calloused hands and muscular arms hauling ropes and unfurling powerful sails, makes him feel even more acutely the arthritic ache in his own gnarled fingers.

When the ships pass by, he faithfully turns on the light for them. But on some of those nights, when the old man is in an especially black mood, he yearns to keep them in darkness and let them crash against the rocks.



The fog that crowds the rocks is thick and oppressive, but dissipates along the beach where the old man checks his fishing nets. It's a small haul today, but enough to last him for a week or so.

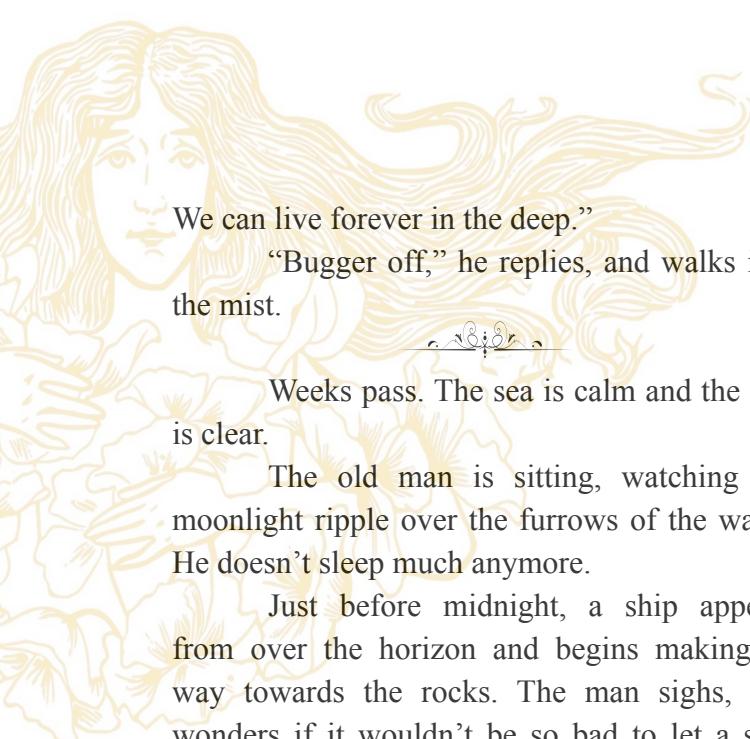
As he drags the nets ashore, the hag yowls to be fed.

"Get yer own fish," the lighthouse keeper snarls, but tosses her one anyway. She sinks her teeth into its flesh and eats it raw. He winces, straining to tune out the munchings and slurpings.

The hag finishes her meal and watches as he trudges away. "You did this to me," she says, marking his contempt. He ignores her. "If I could swim, I'd be far away right now. You ruined me. But you can still save me."

"Save yerself, hag," he mutters.

She lowers her voice, speaking as softly as her parched throat will allow. "If you would come to me, I would be made well again. Young again. And you could as well, old man.



We can live forever in the deep.”

“Bugger off,” he replies, and walks into the mist.

Weeks pass. The sea is calm and the sky is clear.

The old man is sitting, watching the moonlight ripple over the furrows of the water. He doesn’t sleep much anymore.

Just before midnight, a ship appears from over the horizon and begins making its way towards the rocks. The man sighs, and wonders if it wouldn’t be so bad to let a ship navigate itself for once. At last, he extinguishes his pipe and stands. The springs of his chair screech as he rises; his muscles groan with exertion as he lumbers down the stairs. He is old, he knows – perhaps too old even for this.

The foghorn blares and the beacon flashes across the water. This is usually enough to correct a wayward captain; he leaves the light on but lets the horn go silent.

As he watches the sea, the Lighthouse Keeper becomes increasingly puzzled. The boat is not changing course. He shouts at the vessel, his voice overpowered by the roaring of the sea. And this is when he sees the sea-woman, perched atop one of the jagged rocks, her body obscured in shadow. Faintly, over the noise of the lapping waves, he can hear her singing.

“Do they still warn the youths against the songs of the sirens?” he muses to himself. “Or have today’s seamen outgrown the superstitions of old?”

Surely, they’ll change course, he thinks. Someone will see to it. Even at the height of her powers, a siren could never transfix an entire crew. He sets off the foghorn again, momentarily drowning out the song. The crew snaps from their spell, but it’s too late – they’ve already drifted into rough waters. The ship

lurches to a halt as the hull wedges itself between two massive rocks.

The lighthouse keeper smiles slightly in spite of himself. The ship is stuck, not damaged, and he can’t help being amused at the thought of the chaos breaking out on the decks.

The beacon sends out another burst of illumination, and the Lighthouse Keeper catches a glimpse of a young man leaning over the gunwale, his eyes rivetted to the hag. The Lighthouse Keeper’s face falls. The rotation of the beacon sends the ship into shadow again; when the light returns, the sailor is lifting his leg to step onto the ledge.

“What ar’ye doin’?” the Lighthouse Keeper mutters. He assumes that one of the other crew will set the boy straight, but no one does, and soon the sailor has one foot on the ledge.

Let him jump, the old man thinks. It’d serve him right.

For what? For being young?

For being foolish, he replies, more to comfort himself than anything. For he knows he cannot stop this man from plunging to his death. Even if he could, his tired legs will not carry him to the shore quickly enough.

As quickly as he accepts that rationale, he moves to defy it.

The sailor could have jumped a thousand times in the time it takes the old man to drag himself down the stairs and limp to the foot of the tower; however, when he emerges, the sailor is still standing on the ledge – with both feet now, but firmly planted. Motionless, watching the siren sing.

The Lighthouse Keeper can hear it now. The hag is singing her sweetest song, and in the harsh light she looks as lovely as she did in the peak of youth.

“Stop!” The old man shouts, but the

youth does not heed him. The sea-woman flicks her head ever so briefly towards the beach, flipping her hair and locking eyes with the Lighthouse Keeper.

She rejects him, turns again, and continues to croon to the sailor.

There's something about the way a siren sings. In reality, her voice is no louder than the roar of the waves crashing against the hull, but when it reaches your ear, it sounds like it comes from all the ocean. The wind around you begins to feel strangely oppressive, and above you the whole sky seems to shimmer.

If you listen and watch them long enough (for the listening and the watching go hand-in-hand), it will start to feel like you're staring through a mist, and the woman is the only thing visible at the other end. Once you reach that point, it's only a moment before the siren is the only thing at all. The past seems distant, irrelevant, and your future seems non-existent without her in it. The only option, then, seems to be to hurl yourself into the sea.

The lad must be feeling that way now. Even the Lighthouse Keeper is beginning to feel stirrings of it, and he's been long immune to her charms.

The old man cries out again, hoping that some miracle will send his voice across the water. But no one hears. The youth bends his knees, preparing to jump. He's under her spell now, and there is no breaking it. On the rocks, the beautiful hag smiles, tensing her body to pounce. She'll have her man tonight.

Frantic, the Lighthouse Keeper dashes across the sand.

For the old man, there is no sound save the smacking of his bare feet against the sand. Time seems to have stopped. "This is what you really want, sea-woman!" he howls, and runs headlong into the cold water.

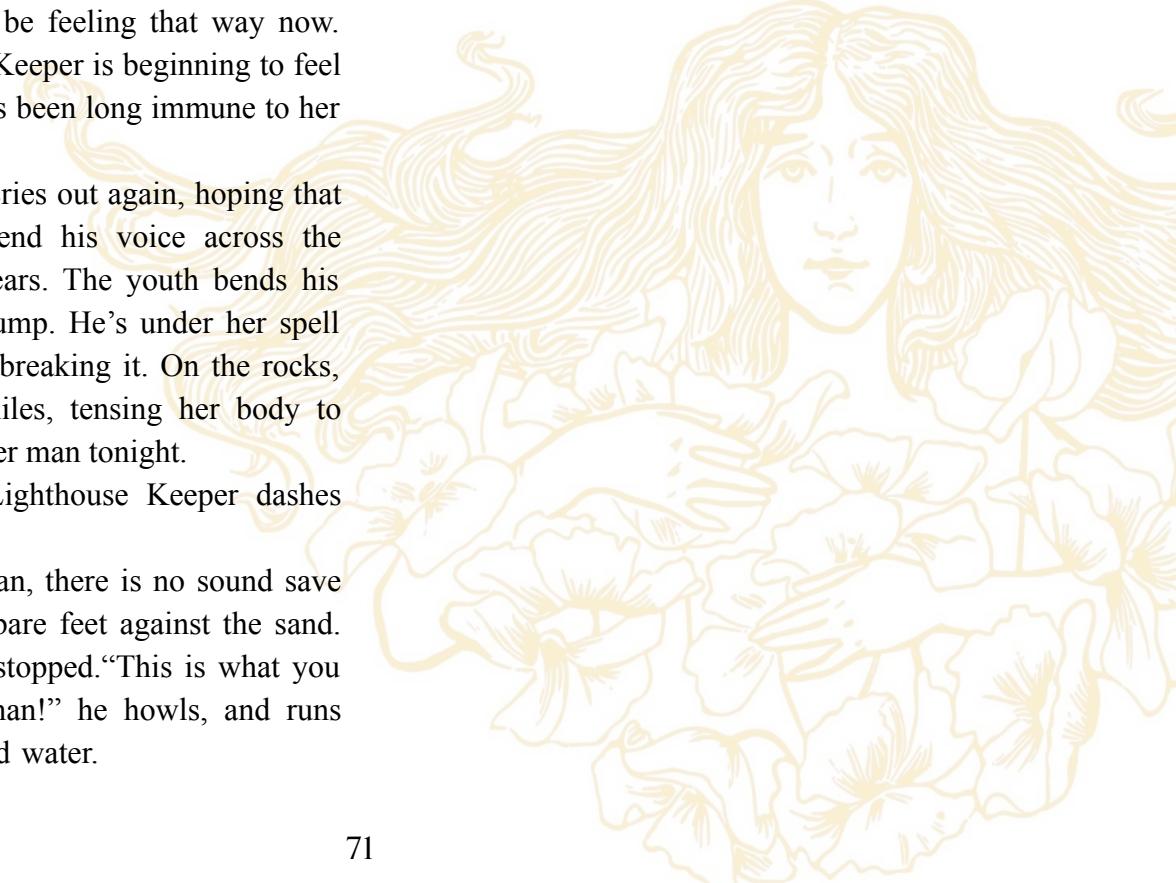
The woman meets his eyes.

She smiles at him, and to his surprise, there's no malevolence in that smile – just lust, unsullied by any of the old hate. The man's mind is whirling, and it occurs to him that she has waited thirty years for him – and he, for her.

He wades further into the water, and is soon up to his knees, his hips. When the water is at chest-level, the woman dives off her rock and emerges to embrace him.

The woman is radiant, all the hopes and mysteries of the sea personified. Her fingers linger lovingly on his flesh, and he opens his mouth in ecstasy. For a moment, as the sea woman pulls him under, the old man feels very, very young.

He feels his throat fill with seawater as his body is submerged. Around his waist, her fingernails sharpen into talons, and at his throat, her lips curl to reveal her fangs. The Lighthouse Keeper gurgles a soundless scream, and the water that caresses his flesh turns red.





SELKIE MOTHER

by BRITTANI JENEE' CAL

*M*y mother pulls me close to her,
wrapping the sheets tightly around us. I press into her,
folding myself into pieces of a silver sun.

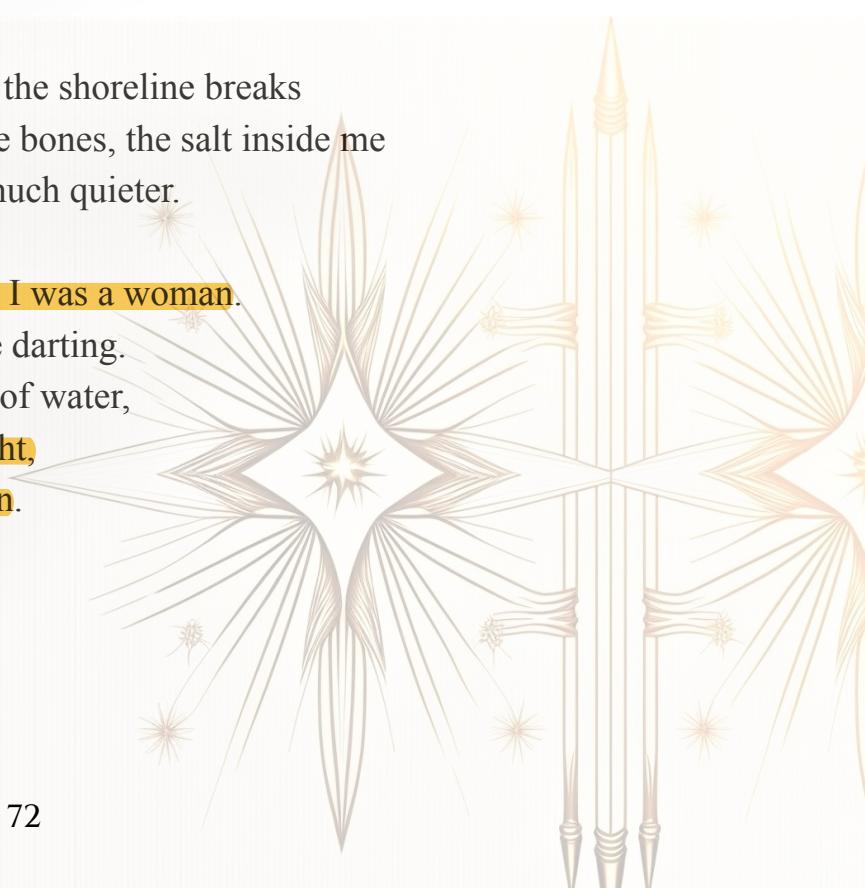
Her curves are like rivers, I float and drift
along as they become rainbows of shimmering
salt in her sunlight.

Fluorescent orange fades to pale yellow
around her edges, and she shines like precious
metals spread across the sea.

Like the sun, it is hard to stare into her.
Around us, even the waves
come up for air.

When the coral along the shoreline breaks
beneath her like brittle bones, the salt inside me
breaks, too, but it is much quieter.

I was an ocean before I was a woman.
Orange and neon blue darting.
drowned in this body of water,
bound by skin and light,
led astray by the moon.



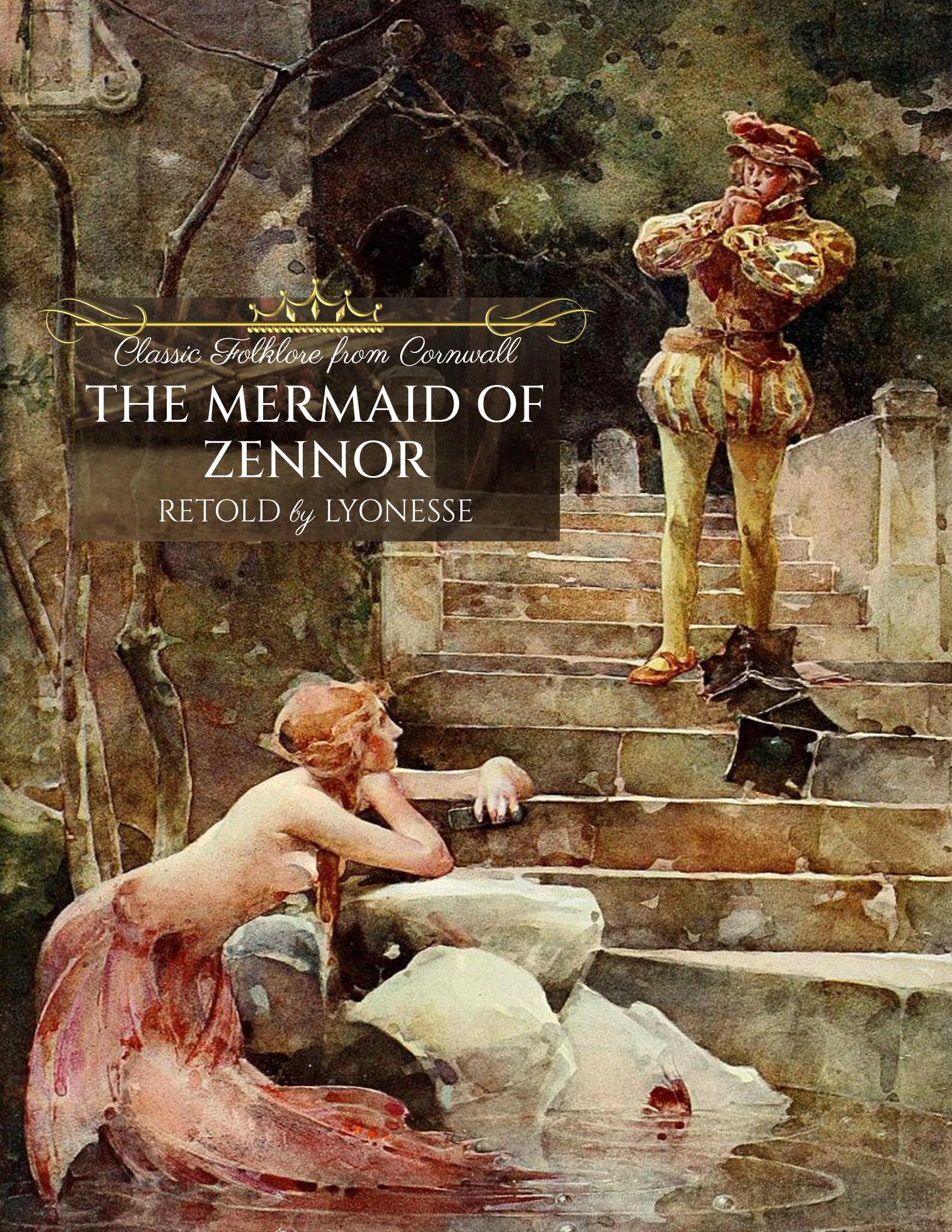




Classic Folklore from Cornwall

THE MERMAID OF ZENNOR

RETOLD by LYONESSE





Zennor is a lovely moorland village in the neighborhood of some of the wildest scenery in Cornwall. To the south-west rugged moors stretch away to the Land's End. To the north a quarter of an hour's walk brings you to the coast with its sheltered coves and its cruel cliffs. Gurnard's Head, one of the most famous of all Cornish promontories, is less than two miles away. Grim, remote, yet indescribably fascinating, the country around Zennor is typical of that far western corner of England which is swept continually by the great health-giving winds of the Atlantic.

It is there in the church of Zennor, that a strange figure of a mermaid is carved on one of the pews. Depicted with flowing hair, a mirror in one hand and a comb in the other, the Zennor folk tell a strange story about her.

Years and years ago, they say, a beautiful and richly dressed lady used to attend the church sometimes. Nobody knew where she came from, although her unusual beauty and her glorious voice caused her to be the subject of discussion throughout the parish.

So attractive was she that half the young men of the village fell in love with her, and one of them, Mathey Trewella, a handsome youth and one of the best singers in the neighborhood, determined that he would discover who she was.

The beautiful stranger had smiled at him in church one Sunday, and after service, he followed her as she walked away towards the cliffs.

Mathey Trewella never returned to Zennor, nor did the lovely stranger ever attend church again.

Years passed by, and Mathey's strange disappearance was almost forgotten when, one Sunday morning, a ship cast anchor off Pendower Cove, near Zennor. The captain of the vessel was sitting idling on the deck when he heard a beautiful voice hailing him from the sea. Looking over the side he saw the mermaid, her long yellow hair floating all around her.

She asked him to be so kind as to pull up his anchor, for it was resting upon the doorway of her house under the sea and she was anxious to get back to Mathey, her husband, and her children.

In alarm, the captain weighed anchor and stood out to sea, for sailors fear that mermaids will bring bad luck. But later he returned and told the Zennor folk of Mathey's fate, and they, to commemorate the strange event, and to warn other young men against the wiles of the merrymaids, had the mermaid figure carved in the church.

And there it is to-day for all the world to see, and to prove, to those who do not believe the old stories, the truth of poor Mathey Trewella's sad fate.





MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

by MARCIA SHERMAN

*I*t was advertised as free, but there is no such thing as free. There is always a payment of some sort. The fee for this treatment might be considered steep by some. She was not told that until after she had arrived and been settled in.

Oh, there was the usual escape clause. The first week she was free to leave at any time. But then, of course, she would have remained as she began. And wasn't that the whole idea? To end as different? The reason she was doing this was to better herself, to become what she wished for. To become what he needed.

Her family had tried to talk her out of it. Only one other in her community had ever gone all the way through the treatment, and he had never been seen again. Afterwards, it was said, he and his love went away and were married. So it was told. Every argument about it ended with this: They would all be better off because all her sorrow, and the sadness they felt for her, would stop. Even if her family did not support her, the look in his eyes when she told him of this possibility was all the encouragement she needed.

The first night she lay in the bed under the window, so like a child's bed with sides up to prevent falling, and she looked at the stars. Waves lapped the shore outside while she contemplated her options. Three nights she listened to the sea. On the morning of the fourth day, she was sure. Even as she decided there was a tap at the door and they entered.

The two of them: check here, check there, mark this. You will be able to read the entire contract later. Here are your copies, witnessed and notarized. A few explanations of the rules and they left her alone again, with one big surprise. She was to be paid, and handsomely so. She thought her reward was the treatment. But no, they actually paid for leaving behind old ways. How about that? That took a little of the sting out of it.

It was not painful; well, not too painful. Sure, some adjustments. Dizziness, bone tired, thirst-water never tasted so good. A little nausea. By the end of the tenth day she was able to walk steadily to the toilet. A few days later she could make it to the kitchen without hugging the walls like a barnacle. Clothing was provided, clean and soft. Cotton lined shoes, as light as sea foam. Nice of them to realize her skin would be sensitive. Any and all wants and needs had been thought of. Naturally, for they had been doling out these treatments for ages.

Daily exercise was required in the contract. She walked barefoot up and down the beach in front of the weathered little house. She rested on the porch and watched the storms over the ocean—they looked

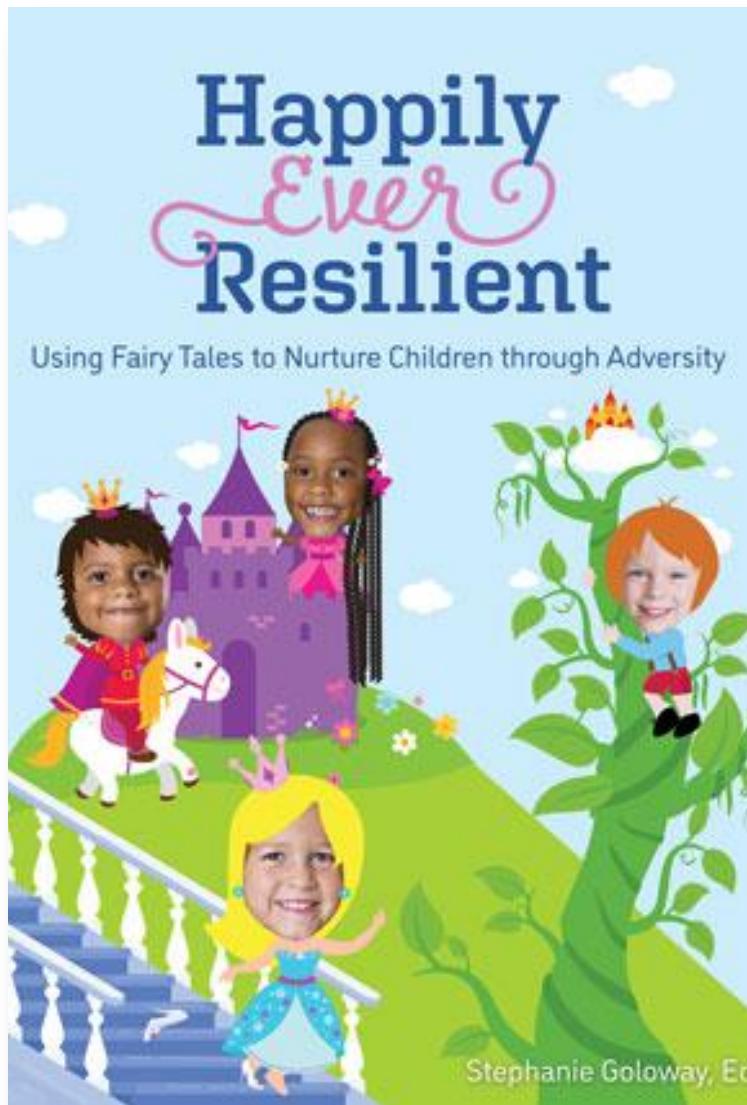


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Co-author of *Trauma and Young Children*, *Making Lemonade*, and *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*

different somehow. Three weeks in, her appetite returned. The food in the larder was fresh and plentiful. She grew especially fond of salad greens and fruit. The fish she discovered to be too oily. The sweets made her teeth ache.

To pass the time, she read the books left for her. One morning she discovered a journal and pens. At first she found it almost as hard to write as it had been to get out of bed. Soon, however, she began to record her day's events. Every day, almost every waking moment, she thought of him. Every night in her dreams they talked and kissed and touched. She wrote to him, letters full of promises and longing, and counted down the days until they would be together. Finally, after many, many weeks that day came.

In preparation for leaving, she cleaned and put the house to rights. A satchel appeared and she packed clothing and shoes, journal and letters, a few books, and her shell collection. One hour before he was scheduled to arrive she sat in her favorite spot on the porch, and with her best pen she composed a letter to her family. They needed to know the treatment was successful; she was healthy and whole.

When he appeared on the rise behind the house, how her heart leapt. He ran down the dune, laughing, and engulfed her in his arms. Her kiss told him all he needed to know.

“Speechless with happiness, my pearl?”

She pressed the contract into his hands, when he finished reading he looked in her eyes with concern and compassion.

“So, this was the payment. I feared it was not so simple as advertised. I can walk with you now. I can admire your strong lovely body. But never again can I hear you say my name or whisper your love. Oh sweet, little fish—I will just have to do the talking for both of us. Wait..What’s this bottle? Ah, I see...” and he threw it far into the ocean “...only way to get a message to your family now. Time and tide should act as any land-bound mail service, for sure.”

Allene looked out at the bobbing glass and, for just one second, thought she saw a tail fin. A single tear fell, then she and Cameron turned and walked up the dune to their happily ever after.







Classics from Around the World

THE MERMAID

by ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

I.

Who would be
A mermaid fair,
Singing alone,
Combing her hair
Under the sea,
In a golden curl
With a comb of pearl,
On a throne?

II.

I would be a mermaid fair;
I would sing to myself the whole of the day;
With a comb of pearl I would comb my hair;
And still as I comb'd I would sing and say,
"Who is it loves me? who loves not me?
I would comb my hair till my ringlets would fall
Low adown, low adown,
From under my starry sea-bud crown
Low adown and around,
And I should look like a fountain of gold
Springing alone
With a shrill inner sound,
Over the throne
In the midst of the hall;
Till that great sea-snake under the sea
From his coiled sleeps in the central deeps
Would slowly trail himself sevenfold
Round the hall where I sate, and look in at the gate
With his large calm eyes for the love of me.
And all the mermen under the sea
Would feel their immortality
Die in their hearts for the love of me.

III.

But at night I would wander away, away,
I would fling on each side my low-flowing locks,
And lightly vault from the throne and play
With the mermen in and out of the rocks;
We would run to and fro, and hide and seek,
On the broad sea-wolds in the crimson shells,
Whose silvery spikes are highest the sea.
But if any came near I would call, and shriek,
And adown the steep like a wave I would leap
From the diamond-ledges that jut from the dells;
For I would not be kiss'd by all who would list,
Of the bold merry mermen under the sea;
They would sue me, and woo me, and flatter me,
In the purple twilights under the sea;
But the king of them all would carry me,
Woo me, and win me, and marry me,
In the branching jaspers under the sea;
Then all the dry pied things that be
In the hueless mosses under the sea
Would curl round my silver feet silently,
All looking up for the love of me.
And if I should carol aloud, from aloft
All things that are forked, and horned, and soft
Would lean out from the hollow sphere of the sea,
All looking down for the love of me.



CONTRIBUTORS



LOOK FOR ME WHEN THE TIDE IS LOW - 7

Marisa Montany is from the Big Island of Hawaii but considers Tennessee to be her second home. A retired ballet dancer, she recently graduated from Middle Tennessee State University with a double major in history and English. She currently lives and works on Maui with her husband and bobtail kitty.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: SEA HOARDINGS - 11

From *Sea Poems* (1921) by **Cale Young Rice**.

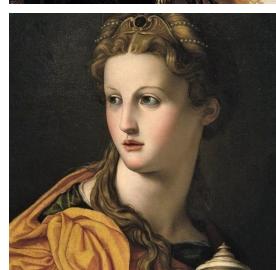
Image: George Elgar Hicks



THE LAST ENCHANTRESS - 12

Henry Herz's short stories appear in the HWA and SFWA qualifying markets: Metastellar, Daily Science Fiction, Albert Whitman & Co., Blackstone Publishing, Air and Nothingness Press, Brigid's Gate Press, Highlights for Children, and Ladybug Magazine. He's edited five anthologies and written twelve picture books, including the critically acclaimed *I Am Smoke*.

Image: Angelo Bronzino



BEST OF ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: THE LITTLE SEA MAID - 15

Annika Barranti Klein lives in Los Angeles in a tiny apartment full of books and people. Her poetry has been in Fireside and Kaleidotrope, and her short fiction has recently been in Asimov's, Weird Horror, The Future Fire, and Fusion Fragment. She is a member of SFWA, a former roller derby referee, and an erstwhile knitter. Find her online at AnnikaObscura.com.

Image: Pixabay



INTERVIEW: THE FAIRY TALE SCHOLARSHIP OF MARIA TATAR - 16

Kelly Jarvis is the Special Projects Writer and Contributing Editor for The Fairy Tale Magazine. Her work has appeared in Eternal Haunted Summer, Blue Heron Review, Forget-Me-Not Press, Mermaids Monthly, The Chamber Magazine, and *Mothers of Enchantment: New Tales of Fairy Godmothers*. She teaches at Central Connecticut State University.

Image: Valentine Cameron Prinsep



CONTRIBUTORS



WAVES OF ATTRACTION - 25

Jessie Atkin writes fiction, essays, and plays. Her work has appeared in The Rumpus, Writers Resist, Daily Science Fiction, Space and Time Magazine, and elsewhere.

She can be found online at jessieatkin.com

Image: Caley Hall, Picryl



CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: WHY THE OCEAN IS SALTY - 33

A tale from the Philippines from *Filipino Popular Tales*. (1921)

Image: Pixabay



DREAMS OF THE OCEAN - 34

Esther Ra is the author of *A Glossary of Light and Shadow* (Diode Editions, forthcoming) and *book of untranslatable things* (Grayson Books, 2018). Her work has been published in *Boulevard*, *PBQ*, and *Korea Times*, among others, and received awards including the Pushcart Prize and 49th Parallel Award. estherra.com

Image: Amanda Bergloff

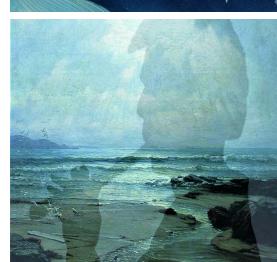


BEST OF ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: THE OCEAN FOR ITS MUSIC - 36

Ellen Huang (she/her) wears the occasional cape and writes lots of fantasy. She is published in *K'in*, *Sword & Kettle Press*, *Apparition Lit*, *Awkward Mermaid*, *Sirens Call*, and more. She has a few simultaneous projects in her tentacles, including a fairytale chapbook, a diverse fantasy collection, and an ace horror anthology.

Follow if you wanna: worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com

Image: Amanda Bergloff



CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: THE GOOD SEA MONSTER - 41

From *The Sandman's Hour* (1867) by Abbe-Phillips Walker.

Image: Picryl, Amanda Bergloff



ARTICLE: LOVE, LOSS, AND THE MERMAID - 45

Dr. Sara Cleto and Dr. Brittany Warman are award-winning folklorists, teachers, and writers with over 150 publications. Together, they founded [The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic](http://thecarterhaughschooloffolkloreandthefantastic.com), where they teach creative souls how to re-enchant their lives through folklore and fairy tales. Their fiction and poetry can be found in *Uncanny Magazine*, *Apex Magazine*, *Gingerbread House*, and others. Images: Amanda Bergloff, John Collier, Charles Murray Padday, Elisabeth Baumann, Unknown, Unknown, Arthur Rackham, Unknown



CONTRIBUTORS



BEST OF ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: THE RESCUE - 51

Amanda Kespohl is a fantasy writer and attorney from Jacksonville Beach, Florida. Her short stories have been featured in anthologies such as *Hear Me Roar* (Poise and Pen Publishing 2020) and *The Death of All Things* (Zombies Need Brains, LLC 2017). She currently resides in Tallahassee with her beagle, Bailey. Check out her website at <https://amandakespohl.wordpress.com/>.

Image: Picryl, Amanda Bergloff



WHAT THE PRINCESS WISHES - 53

Peyton Dupree spent a good deal of his young life as a professional jazz musician in African nightclubs. One evening a lightning bird gave him three words in exchange for a melody. He hasn't stopped writing since.

Image: Walter Crane



CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: HY-BRASAIL THE ISLE OF THE BLEST - 57

An Irish fairy tale poem (1803) by **Gerald Griffin**.

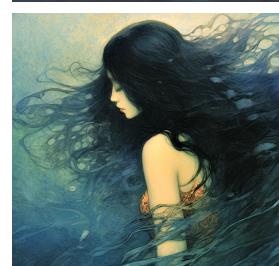
Image: Pixabay



BEST OF ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: PEARL DIVER - 59

J.S.Rogers has been writing since she could get her hands on a pencil and paper. These days, she writes as a freelancer for her day job and pens fiction by night. Her fiction has previously appeared in *Untethered: A Magic iPhone Anthology*.

Image: Public Domain Review



ARTICLE: I MARRIED A MERMAID - 82

Paul Himmeltein is co-author of *Bohemian Manifesto: A Field Guide to Living on the Edge*, which the *The New York Times* called an “exultation of a state of mind.” He’s received a Hawthornden Fellowship for fiction and is completing his first novel. He is also cofounder of Ivory Tower Studios cards and stationery.

Images: "The Fair Melusine" painted by Julius Hübner, 1844 - Family tree of the House of Lusignan carried by the fairy Melusine, illustration from the Roman de Melusine, published in Augsburg, Germany, 1480 - Medieval coat-of-arms with Melusine supporters from St. Martin's Church in Brux, France, not far from Lusignan - Selkie statue in Mikladalur from Wikimedia Commons



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BEST OF ENCHANTED CONVERSATION: THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER & THE HAG - 68

Madison McSweeney writes horror and dark fantasy from Ottawa, Ontario. She is the author of the horror comedy *The Doom That Came to Mellonville* (Filthy Loot), the folk horror novelette *The Forest Dreams With Teeth* (Demain Publishing), and the gothic poetry chapbook *Fringewood* (Alien Buddha Press). She blogs at www.madisonmcsweeney.com and tweets from @MMcSw13.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



SELKIE MOTHER - 72

Brittani Jenee' Cal is a multiracial writer of Black, Japanese, and Scottish-Irish descent. Her fiction and poetry are inspired by fairy tales and folklore from around the world. When her muses are playing hard to get, she enjoys forest bathing, birdwatching, and stargazing. She currently lives in Okinawa, Japan.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: THE MERMAID OF ZENNOR - 75

A folktale from Cornwall from *Legend Land Vol 1* (1922) retold by **Lyonesse**.

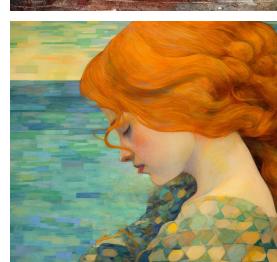
Image: John Reinhard Weguelin



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE - 76

Marcia A. Sherman writes alternative fairy tales, folklore, and mythology. Other works include a children's picture book *The Splendid, Blended Family* and essays for Llewellyn Worldwide. Marcia is currently compiling her fiction for a book and continues work on her novel of a Wiccan family set in the distant future.

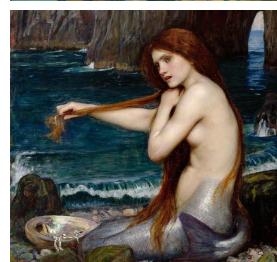
Image: Amanda Bergloff



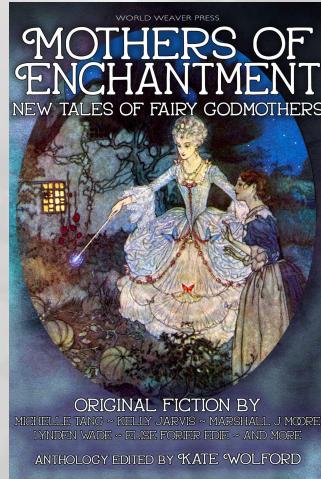
CLASSICS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: THE MERMAID - 81

From *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Image: John William Waterhouse

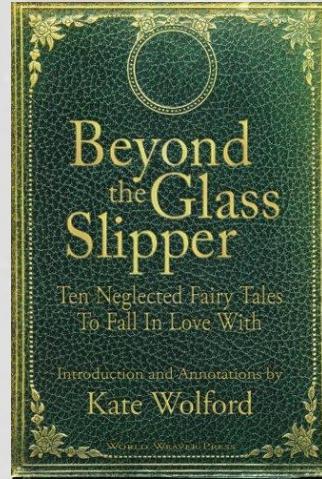


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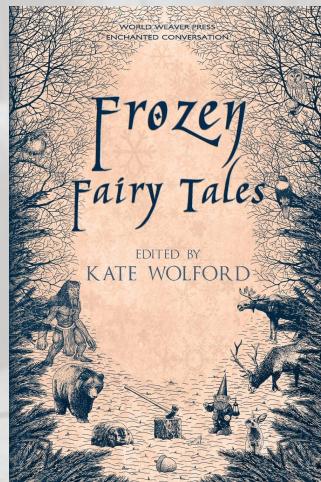
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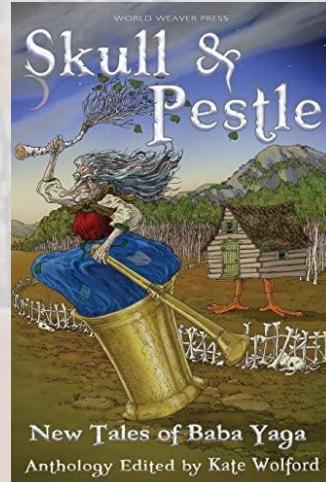
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ART DIRECTOR

Amanda Bergloff is a graphic designer and digital/mixed media artist whose cover and interior art has been published in the Jules Verne Society's *Extraordinary Visions*, *Tiny Spoon Literary Magazine*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Sprawl Magazine*, *200 CCs*, *The Horror Zine*, *Crimson Dreams*, and other publications.

Twitter: [@AmandaBergloff](https://twitter.com/AmandaBergloff)

Image: Amanda Bergloff



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kate Wolford is the publisher and editor of *The Fairy Tale Magazine*. She's been publishing new fairy tale inspired poems and stories for over 15 years. Kate is a grandmother of two and lives with her husband, Todd, and beagle, Clementine, in the Midwest.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



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