The Sea Witch

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Summary

A spirit lives in the murky ocean, in the service of the sea witch. The spirit remains tied to Her and the dark, grim waters they inhabit together, satisfied with the life they lead, until one day they drift too far to the surface, only to become fascinated with a heavenly creature on land. The spirit begs the witch to allow her to leave her service to pursue her love on the surface. The witch allows the departure of her servant on one term; that if she fails to win the love of the creature on land, the spirit must return to the waters, and forever serve the witch, never to see her love again. Additionally, once on land, she must relinquish her spirituality, lose her magical powers, and forget that she ever lived under water with the witch.
Chapter 1

Once, on an island, in the very middle of the sea, there reigned a small kingdom. To rule that kingdom was a king. He had one daughter, and a wife, and she was the mother of his daughter, and afforded them more love than any human could contain within them. She burned with love, from a young age, she knew how to love. And it was a talent that not all possessed. This she did not know. Never once had it crossed her mind that the love she could bestow upon others marked her as odd, as gifted. She was certainly gifted. The first light was in her eyes. She came out from her own mother's womb with a red, wrinkled face, and cried loudly. She was ugly and unpleasant for a quite a while after that first, unceremonious moment in the world. It took months for the baby-redness in her face to fade out into something more palatable, and even then she was not much to look at. No one wants to say it of a baby. No one wants to call something which doesn't yet have even a year to itself a word as horrid and final as 'ugly.' So no one ever did. Although the baby princess was ugly, certainly, no one truly realized it until they had spent a good minute or two looking at her, and by then they were laughing, because the first thing they saw in the baby was her smile, the first light in her eyes. Her beauty would become second. The baby smiled and smiled and smiled. She smiled through all the chubby, wrinkled redness, and the wet nurse who rocked her back to sleep at night could not help but return the baby's happy gaze. The baby cried at night, and woke her nurse up at inconvenient hours. But upon being lifted up and rocked for a moment, the blessed little curl of her lips would return, and the familiar warmth of the infant's smile bought her forgiveness for the interrupted sleep of her nurse.

The sweet, awkward thing grew quickly, like all children do. She grew into her face, which became less wrinkled and more cherubic, into her legs and her arms, round, sweet little things that enabled her to get into all sorts of trouble around the palace, as she mastered the treacherous arts of standing, then walking, then finally running. She ran away from her nurses and maids, ran between her mother's legs and under her skirts, crawled under her father's throne and refused to come out at first, then laughed so sweetly when she did, that she was forgiven by her father and mother. She had grown into herself. She hadn't yet grown into her smile. Her sweet, innocent smile, one yet unfettered by loss or trauma, the radiation of joy emitted only by those who do not yet know of such things as fear, or pain. She knew only sweetness, exuded only such. She knew herself to be happy, as she felt happiness always, and thus shared her joy with all around her.

And by the time she was grown past her toddler years, she had become beautiful. Before she had been beautiful, she had been kind. She displayed kindness to all the living things in the castle. She smiled and laughed with the soldiers and house staff alike; she spoke sweetly to the elderly maids and danced with the cook. She always spoke very solemnly with the older ladies, who at the youngest were fourteen, oldest at eighteen; and worked as hand maids in the castle. These she quite revered, and called them as friends, but also tutors, and members of society that were to be respected. She called them miss and ma'am, and asked them softly about all the serious business of life, that esteemed ladies of fifteen should know. She asked them about the men they loved, and the jobs they performed, and came away feeling quite enlightened. Many of the ladies said they would one day be married. And the little girl thought nothing of that, for quite a long while.

Her father died on her fourteenth birthday. She couldn't ever remember too much of what happened that day. She remembered the doctors coming and going, and coming and going, and then the door to her room being jammed shut from the outside. She had sat very quietly in her room, thinking of her last birthday, and the magnificent feast, the dancing, and the princes who held her hand and whisked her away onto the ball room floor. The room felt very cold, or perhaps she only thought it did, because she herself shivered so violently. All she could do was hug her knees to her chest and think of what was best to do. And when she was finally out of her room, the door unlocked and the castle draped in black misery, she ran first to her mother and held her in her arms, not knowing what else to do. A golden instinct. A gift, really. As she lay in her bed, in the darkness, and rocked
with pain, she felt something in her reach desperately out to the curtain above her bed. She cried. She tried to keep it quiet, keep it blocked in her throat. But it bubbled up again just as sharp as before. She was in pain. Not in a way she had ever known she could be. She had had her childhood trials, her small and gentle introductions to the massive, weighted horror of the wave that overtook her now. She lay still, very still, the way she did with her broken leg of two years earlier, when she discovered that the less movement, the less hurt there would be. Like water, almost. Like walking down a staircase in darkness, only to miss a step. Her father would flash into her mind, a figure a constant and steady, and ingrained into every aspect of the every day of the castle. The wave would ride up again and she'd have to lie stiller, flat on her back in the heavy bed covers, and try to keep the pain back. She was hurting, and she didn't know what that meant. Only that she wanted never to hurt again. It took many quiet hours, spent curled into the nest of the tousled blankets lined silver with moonlight, for the princess remember her mother, and the kingdom, too. And the weight of her loved ones' pain came heavy over her, and threatened to destroy her. The gift was this. She decided for herself that night, that quiet moment, that if any one individual suffered, then so would we all.
There was not enough time between her father's death and her husband's arrival. Her marriage to the prince had been in the works since her birth. It was an inevitable union, and not necessarily an unhappy one. The new king was young and strongly built and very often silent. He never smiled too much, unless it seemed necessary for the situation. His still features would have made him seem very old, were it not for the smoothness of his skin. He had in his complexion all the colors of stone. Pale, Nordic tones that glinted white and shadowed grey. His nose was long and ungainly. It was crooked, but was so thick one couldn't see the bend. He smiled lovely when he did. It fit her well.

When her father died, the one-day queen found her home had become a place of darkness. Grief manifested in closed windows, shadowed hall ways, subdued attitudes in the castle's inhabitants. She took it upon herself to be the light within the walls, as she found none without. The castle believed she would make a wonderful match for the incoming king. It's human nature to want to compare and contrast, to measure one another and fit us in where we see fit. The Old queen looked at her daughter's lightness, her soft, rounded shoulders the back of her arms. There's exquisite beauty found in odd places, often where we'd never look. It's God's trick that our beauty will forever be visible to others, and never for ourselves. For the princess, it started, strangely, in the middle of her back. A point defined by a muscle hidden near the middle of her spine. Her soft back showed only the slightest hint of her spine. It lead carefully to the nape of her neck, often hidden by her long brown hair. When it was up, her neck showed only wispy strands of hair, and when it was down, it lead to her arms. They were the sort that began pale, until her reddish freckles began to sprinkle in, thicker and thicker, in odd patches of pinks and oranges and browns, a constellation of oddly-placed marks of pigment. Her mother wanted her to know the beauty she possessed. And so she never spoke of her hair, her rounded figure, or anything physical. She knew, deep in her gut, that beauty in the hands of the beholder meant nothing. Her daughter's beauty lay in the warmth in her heart, in her eyes. Her daughter's beauty lay in the joy she displayed upon seeing flowers growing through cracks in the cobblestone roads. Beauty is in the seeing only, in the feeling, not the having or knowing. But, know it or not, her appearance, too, was very beautiful. When strangers glanced at her, they saw her soft, heart shaped face, the deep, sweet brown color in her eyes, her silky skin, and thought her beautiful, told her so, and did not see the reason why.
Watch for The Ocean

"When did your mother die?"
Waves wash up over sand. Water spills between their toes, runs back down to the dip in the beach to the sea green line on the horizon. Two bare feet, pinky toes just touching one another, sink a little deeper into the silky grey sand.
"God, I can't remember."
Thick, rough strands of hair blow steadily in the current. Her shoulders are bare, the strap of crudely-spun cloth hanging just near her neck. Her skin is sweet and white as milk. His brown shoulder, tanned, sunburnt, rubbed red in the island sun, throws her stark visage into a strange contrast.
"I'm sorry," he says. His straight black brows furrow. Long, thick fingers brush gently against the back of her shoulders.
"I was only a baby," she says. She searches his eyes. She laughs. Pinkish, too-full lips curve upwards, and she grasps his hand in hers. "I can't remember her much."
Water runs up in between them, plunging their feet into a rush of sand, seawater and debris. Waves pull back out, dragging handfuls out of the beach with it. The ground beneath them slides and caves in, and the ocean sweeps two children, laughing, into each other's arms.

Deep beneath the water, two yellow eyes open slowly. They turn their gaze to the surface, let the strange light pass through them, and then close.

The book slams shut. Resting open on its edge, precariously balanced on the edge of the wooden desk, its balance fails and it tips over, landing heavy on the cold stone floor. The grey edge of a robe whisks behind the desk, chair grating harshly against the rock face as the old man jerks to his feet, startled out of a shallow sleep. He grimaces, the familiar dull aches, starting once more at the left of his forehead. Long, thin strands of hair fall gaunt against his face. He glances to the floor, sees the book lying on the ground, and rests back down into his chair. A low grumble sounds from his lips. The muscles in his jaw stiffen, and he presses his fingertips into his temples.

The sun begins to rise. Outside his stone tomb, streaks of warm, pink light trickle in through the cracks in the unevenly laid cobblestone. The crash of waves sound gently in the distance. Closer, and more distinct, are the sound of voices outside the tomb.
"GO!"
"GODDAMMIT, GET OFF!"
Scuffling, then a harsh thud.
"GET ON WITH IT. ITS YOUR JOB."
"SO WHAT IF I DON'T?"
"SO I'LL KILL YOU IF YOU DON'T."
More hitting. A slight smile forms on the corner of the man's lips.
"NO! Not this time."
The man waits for a second. Listens to the outbreaking fight outside his wall.
Something heavy slams against the wall. The stones rattle softly.
The man stands. He pulls his cloak over his shoulders and leaves the small office behind, slamming the wooden door shut. The voices freeze.
"CALIBAN,"
Two sets of frightened eyes glare at one another. The blue, pupilless eyes of the spirit narrow at the crouched, pale figure beside it.
"You couldn't have looked out for the wall?" The spirit hisses.
"You threw me into it!" The thing whispers back.
At the sound of gravel tumbling down the path, both figures turn forward. The blue spirit takes a step away from its companion. The paper body next to it remains frozen in place. The white cloaked figure appears from behind the stone building, long hair lifting slightly in the wind, hand wrapped around a long, metal staff. "Fantastic job, asshole," whispers the blue figure. Its companion only shakes its head, frightened into silence. "Well then," calls the voice from the top of the hill. "Have you got it started yet?"
The Old Man's Post

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The man pause at the foot of the slope.

"No answer from either of you?" The two creatures stare sheepishly back up the hill.

"So! What have you left undone this morning?"

"Look at the sky," the whisp of blue smoke said, "Does it look like they've finished it?"

The pale figure's head jerked up to the sky, then back at the old man. It shook itself, lank brown hair falling dimly across its bare chest. The man followed the creature's gaze.

"What do you say, Caliban?"

"What does it matter what I say?"

The man swings his staff out from the ground. He steadies himself, treading down the hill and meeting the spirits at its base. "

What Ariel said," says the monster. "Look at the sky."

"So you've held us here like this for how long?"

Caliban purses its lips. It glares at the ground.

"They stopped me before I could change it."

"Did they?" asks the man. "Why would they?"

Ariel's mouth opens in indignation.

"I didn't. It wasn't moving, I had to--"

"Enough, Ariel."

Ariel steps back, defeated. Their eyes drift to the open waters, almost grey in the soft, dim light. The old man leans lightly on his staff. His tired blue eyes meet with the monster's own pale visage.

"You could hold us here, couldn't you?" he says.

The monster only stares at him.

His face is lined, harsh, and grey, weathered by the salt water winds, the low light, the years of isolation. Long, orange-colored hair falls down to his collarbones, as lank as the monster's own dull colored hair. The morning is cold, the air still, and the sky frozen into a seeping pool of blues, pinks, and greys. Stars scatter like ice chips across the dawn sky. Faintly, a breeze sweeps the sorcerer's hair past his eyes. The circles under his eyes are as deep as those of his companion's.
"You're afraid of what will happen if you don't."

The monster feels its stomach drop. This calm, collected demeanor in the man before him is uncharacteristic and unnerving.

"Do you see this?" the man whispers.

His hand gestures towards the sky. The monster's yellow eyes follow upwards.

"You could keep us here forever, in the dawn. I don't believe you couldn't, Caliban."

The man finishes his sentence with a slight groan, as he turns away from the monster, ready to retreat back to his study.

"But you won't. I don't see it in you." The man grins. Then his face settles back into a gentle quietude. "It's missing from your eyes."

The pale figure stands silent, bony frame silhouetted against the ocean. The man makes his careful way back into solitude, and the creature watches him disappear into the cold, stone tomb.

The creature pauses. He waits for the door to close. On the horizon, the sun stands still, only its very tip visible on the ocean line. The creature turns to the water. Picks its way down the rocky slope to the beach. Walks out barefoot to the water's edge, and stops. Lowers itself to the ground. Digs it short fingers into the cool sand, feeling along until it touches the frayed end of the rope. The creature closes its fingers around the line, wrapping it tightly around its palm. It pulls tersely on the rope, testing its strength, then stands. Somewhere in the water, trailing deep into the gentle waves, the line travels and disappears, leading out deep into the sea. The creature rises. Pulls the rope its hands. It takes one look out across the gentle, gray waters, fading into the dim morning sky. It turns its feet towards the far end of the shore, takes one step back, and then launches out into a run, leaving deep footprints in the sand. /p>

Chapter End Notes

sorry about the formatting. love you.

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