

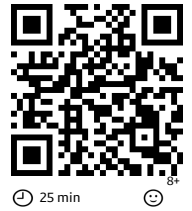


The Little Mermaid

Love

One of Andersen's most famous and beautiful fairy tales.

A touching story about the love of a little mermaid who falls in love with a prince. Because of love, the mermaid becomes human and sacrifices not only her voice, but ultimately her own life.



🕒 25 min

😊 8+

Deep in the ocean, where the water was blue and **crystal clear**, and no sun beam could pierce the surface to the bottom, there was a vast kingdom. It was beautiful, with coral walls and algae of all colours. All the ocean creatures lived peacefully together: small and big fish, plants, sea urchins, and mermaids. The mer-king had five daughters. His mother helped him rule the kingdom and raise the girls, because his wife had died many years before.

Everyone in the kingdom followed the rules, and that's why they all lived well. One of the rules stated that no mermaid could go near the water's surface until she turned fifteen years old. Until then she had to stay in the kingdom to be safe.

The king's eldest daughter was about to turn fifteen. The youngest, who longed the most to see the world above, had to wait five years more. She would sit for hours in her garden (the girls each had their own gardens) and imagine all that fun she'd have on the surface. In the center of her garden, there stood a marble statue of a human prince. She had found the statue on the ocean floor, and liked it so much that she even talked to it.

Their granny would tell them stories about all the beautiful things **above the ocean**. She always made sure to add that the most wonderful things that could be found were in fact not above, but right here in their watery home. But the little mermaid still couldn't wait to **see the world above**.

Time passed and the youngest was about to turn fifteen, too. For years she had listened to **her sisters' stories** about what it was like up above. Her eldest sister was five years older. On the day of her fifteenth birthday she had returned from the surface with stories of a night sky filled with stars and constellations of the gods. The other sister had seen a magnificent

colourful sunset. The third one had swum toward shore and found tall green trees and towering cliffs. The fourth liked to swim in winter to see large glaciers and walruses. While all the other sisters had started to get bored of that other world, the youngest hadn't even tried it yet. Humans were something she wanted to see the most - and above all to see them walking. As she was wiping tiny algae off her marble statue, she would examine the prince's legs and wonder what it must feel like to have a pair of them.

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

"Oh, you've grown up so fast, my little girl!" said her father. She just smiled back at him as it felt to her as though it had taken ages for that day to come.

"Look how beautiful you are!" her grandma said, putting the last pearl on her tail.

The little mermaid was all excited. She swam as fast as she could, her pearls clicking **against each other** as she swiftly approached the surface. She broke through and looked around in amazement for a whole minute before joy swept over her and she started jumping cheerfully out of the water and whooping. **Dolphins, hearing her happy laughter**, swam over and joined her dancing. It was even better than she'd dreamed!

After a while, she noticed a ship and headed for it. Grandma had warned her that the ship might be dangerous, but she couldn't miss the chance to catch a glimpse of a real human being, legs and all!

Having got closer, she saw crowds of people on the deck. It looked like a celebration! Carefully she swam around, and she suddenly noticed a little window on her level. Inside, a boy with a crown was sitting in a room, stretching his glorious legs out. She stared, unable to take her eyes off him. He was beautiful! And he looked exactly like the prince statue in her garden.

The little mermaid stayed, watching the party unfold. A good spirit was in the air. But at midnight, under a dark sky, they shot off **fireworks**. The little

mermaid ducked under the water to hide as she'd never seen anything like that before. When she peeked back up, she saw the most beautiful colours and patterns, like the humans were creating their very own constellations. Then, suddenly, the sky clouded over and a **bolt of lightning struck**. A storm was starting!

At once, waves crashed against the ship, which was barely standing in the strong wind. Another strike of lightning broke **the main mast in two**. Water splashed over the deck and the raging sea split **the ship in half**. The ship was a wreck, and the people were scattered all around in the dark churning water. The little mermaid was terrified, but still wanted to save the prince. Without a thought she swam through the wreckage. And when she found him, she took him in her arms and carried all the way to the shore. She put her head to his chest - he was still breathing! Sadly, knowing well that she couldn't stay out of the water, she gently kissed his forehead and hid behind a rock.

She kept an eye on him from behind the rock until dawn. Then a group of people came and found him. One of them happened to be very pretty princess. As soon as the prince opened his eyes and saw her, he smiled warmly and said,

"My angel! You saved my life. I will be grateful to you until my last breath."

The little mermaid felt sorrowful. She was the one who saved the prince, but she couldn't let out a sound. She just sat there and **sobbed quietly**. The prince's smile belonged to her and she knew it. When the group and the prince disappeared from the rocky shore, the little mermaid swam back to her kingdom. When she returned disappointed, she went straight to the garden and sat quietly by the statue.

Upon her return, her curious sisters immediately began peppering her with questions. "What did you see, little sister? Did you like it out there?" And then, noticing her face: "Why are you so sad?"

At first she didn't want to reveal to her sisters the truth, but the little mermaid trusted them. They were very caring, and it was a relief to tell them

about the prince. The eldest knew where to find him. The prince had a vast kingdom next to the ocean. Suddenly the little mermaid **had hope!** The next day she went to have a look at the prince, and every day after that she returned to watch him from afar. Slowly but surely, she began to feel that she knew him, and soon she realised that she had fallen head over tail in love with him.

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

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

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

It wasn't easy to get to the witch, and there were lots of obstacles on the way. However, the dangerous journey didn't scare the girl. It was only when she reached the gorge itself that she got a little nervous.

"Please, I want to become a human," she said in a trembling voice. "Can you help me?"

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

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

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

The little mermaid didn't hesitate.

"Yes. I'm ready to do anything for him."

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

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

"Well, you'll have to charm him in some other way. I'm afraid this is non-negotiable, dear. No voice, no legs."

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

"Alright. I'm ready."

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

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

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

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

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

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

As time passed, the little mermaid and the prince became wonderful friends. The pain in her legs was more bearable now and it reminded her how much she missed her family. Still, she never regretted losing her voice, nor exchanging her previous life for the one she had now. Every day here was exciting. The prince showed her places, took her to feasts and celebrations, **horseback riding and sailing.**

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

"On the night I turned eighteen," he said, "my ship got caught in a huge storm and almost everyone on board perished. I washed up on shore, but all I remember is that a beautiful princess saved me. She was there when I woke up and I fell in love with her the moment I saw her. Ever since I have cherished hope of meeting her again to ask her to marry me, but fate has never let me, so I've decided to act. Please, would you come and search for her with me? We will travel to all the kingdoms I know. I have to find her. Except for her, you are the closest to my heart, and I need you by my side on this journey.

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

They had sailed for weeks and visited four kingdoms when they finally arrived at the most distant kingdom the prince knew. He had almost given up hope of finding the princess, and the little mermaid was finally beginning to feel that it wasn't over for her yet. But when they arrived at the kingdom, the prince finally saw the girl he'd been looking for. Little did he know that, at that moment, he had sealed his friend's fate.

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

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

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

would save him again. She loved him too much, and so she gently kissed his cheek and crept out.

The little mermaid stayed on the beach with her sisters that night, and as soon as the chirping birds **announced the new day** and the sun began to peek out, the little mermaid began dissolving into seafoam. Her sisters wept as she started to melt, but suddenly her human soul rose out of her body. It looked like a ray of sunshine, and her sisters watched as it soared up to the sky and joined the clouds.

When a human dies, you see, their soul becomes one with the wind and they live forever, but when a mermaid with a human soul dies, she turns into a nymph. The little ray of light grew wings and suddenly the little mermaid had her voice back. To anyone alive, wind nymphs only look like sunrays, when the wind blows you can smell their pleasant scent or hear **their soft whispers**.

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

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

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

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