

# *The Mermaid's Child*

An old woman went every day to search for shellfish on the coast. On the day of the spring tide, she said to herself, "Under the stones, maybe I'll find some crabs. I could sell them better than my clams."

She took them, put them in her basket, and went to lift a large flat stone. Then she was frightened: she heard *klok, klok* and she began to run towards a rock. There a woman, half woman and half fish, was untangling her hair and it was a mermaid. The mermaid said to her:

"Go quickly, unfortunate woman, to save what you have left under the rock and bring it to me."

"I'm afraid, *madame*."

"You don't have to be afraid. It's a child and he's of my blood; he has been lost for three months, and my daughter cries night and day. No one will harm you; take him into your apron and give him attention lest he leave. You will go yourself into the château that is under the rock and bring him back to my daughter, because she is sick in bed from her grief."

She was still very frightened by the mermaid and thought: "It doesn't seem like I'll be able to get out of here. I'm trembling from fear and I still have a stream to travel across; if he escapes me, I am lost."

She passed over a stream, went under a rock, arrived in the château, and saw a young mermaid who was lying down and who said to her:

"Might you have saved my child!"

"I have, *madame*."

The old mermaid arrived and said:

"For your happiness you have gone to search for him; without that, there would have been great unhappiness for you, for where you would have left him, you would have been swallowed by the sea."

The daughter said to her mother:

"If she would like to stay with us, she will be happy, and no longer wear herself out traveling the coast and running to sell."

The old mermaid replied:

"I'd like that, my daughter."

"Now my health has returned. She has nothing to do but guard the child and go with him onto the rock during the day for three hours each day, for, if she fails, one hour too late, my child is lost and so is she. They must not remain on the rock when the sun is going down."

This woman was pleased solely with the young mermaid. One day, it was raining and she said to herself that she could not go on the rock.

The sun burned for around three or four hours in the afternoon and she went onto the rock with the little mermaid. At the moment that the sun finished going down, two hands snatched the child and the woman.

The mother mermaid<sup>1</sup> and her daughter had left for their house a month ago and, the last time she saw them, said:

“I am in pain. I’m certain that my child is lost.”

“I’m in more pain than you,” the mother replied. “They have both been lost and we cannot find them before a year and a day.”

The mother and her daughter did not leave the rock and night and day, night and day, they sighed.

One night, the weather was bad, a great torment, and the mother said:

“Let’s go to our house. We cannot rest any better here.”

“Mother, let’s remain here until midnight, because it seems to me that at midnight, my heart guesses, my child and the woman will be thrown here.”

“I fear that you are tricking yourself, my daughter, because what took them from us is cleverer than we are,” the old mermaid said.

When midnight sounded, a wave threw the woman with the child in her apron onto the rock next to them, and they said to the woman:

“You have had difficulty and misery, and we have had just as much chagrin.”

“Now,” said the young mermaid, “go to your country, and I will give you what you need to live, and my mother and I will no longer leave the château. My mother is old and when my child is a little older, he will do as we do and go from rock to rock, and you, poor woman, you have been frightened and you will live old no longer.”

She gave her what she had to give her and the mother and the daughter accompanied the woman until she had passed the stream and then said to her:

“Go now and live in peace. If we see any member of your family in danger, we will save them. We will never forget you.”

Joseph Frison. “L’enfant de la sirène.” *Revue des traditions populaires* 29:2

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Translated by Michelle Collins.

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<sup>1</sup> *Er van siren.*