

THE CHILD FROM THE SEA

NARRATOR: Centuries ago, on a cloudless, moonlit night, there is a change in the air. A gentle breeze stirs the grasses just off the shore of Ireland. The waves lap the shore drowsily.

A silver shape leaps out of the water and dives back in, a porpoise. The water is still. Then, something else appears on the water, floating. But no, it is moving too fast to be floating. Something beneath the water is pushing it. The long snout of a porpoise gently pushes the object ashore. Then, as suddenly as the animal appears, it is gone.

MAGGIE: (Walking on the beach looking for clams for soup. Sees the object a little ways off, squints and walks faster. Stops by basket. Leans down and gasps)

“A child! Oh, you poor dear!” (Picks up baby and carries it to other side of stage.)

“John, look what I’ve found! It’s a baby!”

JOHN: (Runs onto stage and looks around.)

“Dear, did you just say you found a baby? Where did you find it? How did you come upon it? Oh Maggie, the Governor won’t be happy at all ‘bout this!”

MAGGIE: “Well, look on it this way, I’ve got a new servant for him. He won’t mind that so much now will he? What do you say John? She’ll be our little child! Besides, we can’t just toss her out in the cold now, can we? We can’t have any children of our own, so why don’t we just take this one?”

JOHN: (looks skeptical)

MAGGIE: “Oh, look at us! We are indeed getting old!”

Standing here like old fools while this poor babe is hungry and cold. Get some blankets and a basket and I will fetch some milk”.

(Lights fade away)

NARARATOR: Over the years, many ships had been sunk, and in every tavern, stories were told of the merfolk and of how they had been offended and were now taking revenge on the creatures of the land. No children were allowed to go to the beaches to collect shells, lest they be tempted into the water and taken to be the children of the merfolk. When the men were sailing their fishing boats, they would suddenly hear a bewitching song, and only a few would survive it. The rest were never heard from again. But on land, away from the sea, the child grew up to become a beautiful girl, like none you have ever seen, with eyes as dark as the sea with a storm coming and hair as silver as moonlight. Her skin was pale, but beautiful, and her voice was unearthly. She had grown up as the daughter of the cook and the gardener in the governor’s household.

(Thirteen years later)

LAUNA: (leaning against the window in kitchen, looking out at the sea, and humming.

When Maggie begins to yell, Launa turns around)

MAGGIE: (Runs in) “Launa? Dear me, it is almost time for supper, and you haven’t scrubbed the potatoes or polished the silver. You have not swept the kitchen floor or plucked the goose! What have you been doing?”

LAUNA: (Looks down at her feet) “I’m dreadfully sorry, Mother! Just the sea! It’s so beautiful! May I please walk down to the shore? I will be so careful!”

MAGGIE: “No you may not! It isn’t safe!”

LAUNA: “You told me the stories about the merfolk weren’t true! It must be safe if they aren’t real!”

MAGGIE: “You don’t have time. Your chores have been waiting for an hour. Get to work this instant! The governor will have my head if dinner isn’t especially fine this evening!” (Launa turns and begins to scrub a bowl. Maggie shakes her head)

MAGGIE: “That child! All she cares about is the sea!”

(Shakes head again and exits)

(End of scene. Next scene, in kitchen. Night time)

LAUNA: (Laying on bed on the floor. Maggie and John laying nearby. Launa sits up in bed. Hears sad mournful music.) “What is that? I’ve heard it before, as if in a dream!”
(Stands up and walks to the window. Looks back at sleeping forms of John and Maggie. Picks up shawl on the floor and slips out the door.)

JOHN: (after Launa exits, sits up in bed and looks at the door)

(Next scene- on beach)

LAUNA: (walking along the beach looking for the source of the noise. Stops and gasps. Off in the distance, sitting on a rock is a mermaid, singing a sad song in a different language. Launa steps toward the sea with a hypnotized expression on her face.)

MERMAID: (stops singing when Launa approaches.)

JOHN: (Runs on stage yelling.) “No, Launa, come back! She will take you!”

LAUNA: (Launa snaps out of daze and turns around)

JOHN: (Grabs Launa's arm.) "No, she will not take you from us!"

MERMAID: (Jumps off of rock wailing and comes forward to the shallows of the beach.

Reaches her hand out to Launa)

JOHN: (Holding onto Launa's arm, watches the mermaid warily.)

LAUNA: (Strains forward trying to reach the mermaid, their fingers touch for an instant)

JOHN: (Jerks Launa away from the mermaid and drags her back up the beach)

(Next scene in the morning in the kitchen. Launa is washing dishes. John is sharpening a pair of scissors. Maid Polly walks in with a pile of dishes.)

LAUNA: "Good morning Polly! How are you?"

MAID POLLY: "Morning Launa. Oh, I'm just fine. How d'ya sleep last night?"

LAUNA: "Just fine. I heard something in the middle of the night, and do you know what it was? It was mermaid, and she was sing..."

JOHN: (Jumps off of his chair) "Launa, you'd best get on your work, and the same to you Polly"

(Next scene, dinner time in the kitchen)

LAUNA: (Hasn't touched her food, sitting there with a dreamy expression on her face.)

JOHN: "This is a lovely dinner, Maggie! Thank you!"

MAGGIE: "Well, it wasn't all me. It was Launa as well."

JOHN: (Raises up his hands in mock sorrow.)

"Well of course! Please forgive me, my dear."

ALL: (Stare at Launa expectantly.)

MAGGIE: "Launa?"

JOHN: “Sweetheart?”

MAID POLLY: “Are you all right?”

LAUNA: (Looks up at them.) “Oh, yes, indeed. I’m fine, thank you. Just... thinking.”

MAGGIE: “About the sea?”

LAUNA: “Well, no, not exactly. About something *in* the sea.”

MAID POLLY: (Looks intently at Launa.)

MAGGIE: “Oh?”

LAUNA: “Well, last night I heard something...”

JOHN: “Umm Maggie, perhaps we had better finish this conversation in private!”

MAGGIE: “Oh John, what can be so private about something she heard last night?”

JOHN: “But dear, it is...”

MAGGIE: (Interrupts) “Launa darling, please continue.”

LAUNA: “Well, I was awakened from sleep last night by a noise, a beautiful noise, a sad noise. I wanted to know where it was coming from, so I slipped out the door, and it led me to the beach!”

MAGGIE: “You went to the beach without my consent?”

MAID POLLY: “Shhh!”

JOHN: (Puts his face in his hands.)

LAUNA: “As I was saying, the song led me to the beach. At first, I did not see anything, but, as my eyes got used to the darkness, I saw it!”

MAID POLLY: “Saw what?”

LAUNA: “A mermaid! She was beautiful, and she was singing!”

ALL: (Gasp.)

MAGGIE: “What happened next?”

LAUNA: “When she saw me, she stopped singing. She stared at me, and I stared at her. I heard father yell at me to come back, but I didn’t want to. She began to talk to me, telling me a sad story, a story about a merchild who had gotten lost and how the dolphins had taken her to shore. She was found by a human and had been raised as a human. She said that once the child’s fins had touched the shore, they turned into feet. Then she told me something else, too. She told me that I was that merchild.”

MAID POLLY: (screams and jumps off her chair.)

“I knew it! I knew it! There was always something strange about you! You have cursed us all!” (Runs out of room.)

MAGGIE: (Looks at Launa in horror) “No, it can’t be, I found a merchild? No!”

LAUNA: “Mother?”

MAGGIE: “No!” (Runs out of room crying.)

LAUNA: (Crying.) “Father? Please, Father, what is it?”

JOHN: “Oh, my child. Just as the story said, we found you on the beach when you were just a mere babe. We took you in and raised you as our child. Surely, we did not know you were a merchild!”

LAUNA: (Stands up.) “You never told me? Why? The whole town will hate me, because I have brought a curse upon them!”

(Next scene, in a shop)

SHOPKEEPER: (Glaring at her as she walks in.)

LAUNA: (A basket on her arm, walks into store.)

“Good morning to you, sir. How are you this fine morning?”

SHOPKEEPER: (Arms crossed over his chest.) “We do not sell food to the likes of you!”

LAUNA: (Steps back in surprise.) “What? The likes of me? Whatever do you mean?”

SHOPKEEPER: “Ha! You don’t know what I mean, do ya? You are the reason my father died. He was fishing one day, and the mer sang their evil song to him. So, out of my shop with ye!”

(Grabs her arm and pushes her out the door. Slams the door in her face)

“That will teach you to curse your own village!”

(Next scene, kitchen. Maggie washing dishes. Launa plucking a chicken.

Maid Polly walks in carrying a big basket of laundry.)

LAUNA: “Oh Polly, let me help you carry some of that!”

MAID POLLY: (Sticks her nose up in the air and doesn’t stop walking.)

MAGGIE: (Comes to stand by Launa. Puts a hand on her shoulder.)

LAUNA: (Looks down at the ground.) “It’s because I came from the sea, isn’t it?”

MAGGIE: (Looks down at her feet.)

LAUNA: “That’s what I thought” (Exits.)

(Next scene, kitchen. Maggie sitting at table, eating. Launa standing and stirring.)

JOHN: (Walks in holding letter) “I’ve got a letter here.”

MAGGIE: (Stands up.) “A letter? This is wonderful! Who is it from? Oh, do let me see...”

JOHN: “It’s for Launa.”

MAGGIE: (Stops and looks at Launa.)

LAUNA: (Pauses, turns around.) “A letter? For me? Who sent it?”

JOHN: (Shuffles his feet.) “Launa, it’s from the governor.”

LAUNA: (Gasps, takes the letter, opens it, and reads it. Pauses, and puts it down.)

MAGGIE: “Well? What did it say?”

LAUNA: (Wipes a tear.) “He said to go back to where I came from!” (Bursts into tears.)

MAGGIE: (Hugs her.)

JOHN: “He cannot do this! We will leave if he forces you to go away!”

MAGGIE: (Looks at John.) “Shush, she is already upset!”

(To Launa.) “Look at me dear, do you love the village? Do you love the... the land? Or do you wish to go back to the sea?”

LAUNA: (Looks up and wipes a tear.) “I do not love the land like the sea, but you, dear Mother and Father, you are the ones I love!”

JOHN: “Then you will stay?”

LAUNA: “I will stay.”

(Next scene, kitchen.)

LAUNA: (Packing her belongings. Hears shouting from outside, looks out the window.)

MOB: “There she is! Look at her! She is evil!”

LAUNA: (Gasps and pulls her head back in.)

MAGGIE: “Oh, you poor thing! They are cruel and unjust!

We will only stay one night longer in this dreadful village!”

JOHN: (Runs in.) “The whole country has heard the news! It has spread like wild fire! Why did you go out on the beach that day and find that bundle with a child in it! We will never have peace...”

(Stops as he sees Launa.)

“I thought you were in the dining hall cleaning up dinner...”

LAUNA: (Shakes her head.)

JOHN: “Oh my dear, I didn’t mean it! I just meant that...”

LAUNA: “It’s all right, Father. I understand. You’re tired and strained.” (Launa exits.)

MAGGIE: (Hands on hips.) “How could you, John! How could you say something like that about your own, adopted, daughter!” (Follows after Launa.)

JOHN: (Hangs his head.)

(Next scene, kitchen, night time. John and Maggie both asleep on the floor. John is snoring loudly. Launa gets up out of her bed, quietly grabs a bundle under her bed, puts a shawl on, and leaves a note beside the snoring form of John. Exits.)

(Next scene, beach still dark but faint glows of light on the horizon.)

LAUNA: (Stops and turns around facing the town.)

“Good bye. I will never see you again, except in my dreams, oh, my home town that threw me out in the cold. I was found on this very shore, thirteen years ago. And now, I will go back to the place from where I came, and to where I belong. For truly, I am a child from the sea!”

(The sun is coming up now. Launa steps into water and keeps on walking. Mermaid comes up beside her, stretches out her hand, and Launa takes her hand. Together, they wade into the sunrise.)

(End of scene.)

THE END