

Skeleton woman

Father and daughter stand on the top of the cliff. Beneath them the water breaks on the rocks. The Father's eyes are angry. He holds his daughter's neck, her eyes wide with fear, shouting at her. She screams.

Maybe she was pushed, who knows? Maybe she slipped. What is known is that she fell from the cliffs, her body twisting and turning as she fell through the air, crashing and cracking against the rocks like limp, lifeless puppet, breaking her neck on the rocks below. And the sea came and drew her in, out into the bay and down to the bottom of the ocean where she lay. The fish came and feasted on her flesh until there was nothing left but her bones, swaying back and forth amid the seaweed. And from that day fishermen avoided *that* place. They believed it to be haunted. Cursed. And were forever mindful of the power of legend.

And then it came to pass that a fisherman, new to this part of the coast came to find work and build himself a home. He rowed out to that bay, hooked on his bait and cast out his line. He waited all day but no fish took his bait, until, as the sun went down, the line suddenly tightened. His rod bent under the weight of his catch. What kind of fish was it? A shark? Surely something rich in meat. He imagined the faces of the locals when he showed them his catch, the money he would earn, the admiration from everyone, especially the women. For, living alone, the fishermen did hope that one day he would catch himself a pretty girl and make her his wife. He looked into the water and there, in the twilight, saw the dancing skeleton at the end of his line. Terrified, he turned away, grabbed his oars and began to row. He got back to the shore, looked over his shoulder and saw the skeleton, still dancing at the end of his rod. He grabbed his rod and ran up the beach, turning around to see the skeleton twisting and crashing against the rocks, all the time following him.

He reached the door of his cabin, threw it open and collapsed into a chair. He sat in the darkness, his heart beating like a drum, terrified. He sat there for a while, then got up and lit a tallow lamp in the wall. He saw the clutter of bones and staggered backwards until his back was against the wall, frozen with fright. He waited but nothing happened. Then, intrigued, he gingerly walked over and touched the bones. They are cold and wet from the sea but something deep inside him wanted to make things right. With great love and care, he started to move the bones, slowly into place. He gently took a foot, stuck inside a rib, and with great skill untangled it. He went on in this way until there before him was the skeleton of a woman. And when he was done, he slipped into bed, pulled his sealskin blanket over his body and fell asleep. He dreamed - who knows of what? And as he did so a tear ran down his face. Skeleton woman turned to watch the tear running onto his cheek. She started to move, stood and walked over to the bed, bent down and tasted his tear. And then she started to sing. She sang for her flesh to return, for legs so that she could dance, arms to cook, hair so that she might be beautiful once more, lips so that she could speak and kiss - a belly so that she might give birth. In this way, she sang and sang herself back onto her bones. And when she was done, she lay down next to the fisherman. And in the morning, when they awoke, he took her for his wife.

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