

The Selkie

On Midsummer nights the selkies come to the shore. They slide out of the sea, shrug off their skins and then dance on the sand in the silver half-light. Their dance is wild and beautiful and very few have ever seen it.

One such person was a fisherman who, wending his weary way home along the cliff path, caught down below the ghost of a movement, a swirling of shadows. Curious, he crept down the cliff side to the beach. And there they were, twirling and whirling, weaving and spinning, as wild a reel as he had ever seen. He could have watched forever but his foot slipped and a tiny shower of stones tumbled down the rocks. The dancers fled so swiftly they were but a blur of movement as they grabbed grey bundles from beneath the rocks and slid silently back into the sea.

All but one. There she was, darting from rock to rock with piteous cries of distress. The fisherman took a step towards her and his foot found something that wasn't rock or sand. He bent to pick up the grey shapeless pelt, still damp and chill from the sea. The girl saw him and saw what he had. She came towards him and as she did he was lost.

'Please,' she said, and all the music of the sea was in her voice. 'Please, I need that. I can't go back without it.'

Never taking his eyes from her, the fisherman stepped back. And though she pleaded and she begged and cried for her skin so she could go home, he carried the seal skin back to his house and there he hid it.

And so she stayed with him. Well, what else could she do? But she went as often as she could down to the shore to sit on a rock and stare out to sea, and call in a high plaintive voice to the wind and the waves and the seals far out in the bay.

The fisherman loved the selkie and in time perhaps she came to love him too. He was kind to her and he cared for her. They married and had children and the children she did love, but still she went as often as she could down to the shore to sit and to stare and to cry to the seals far out in the bay.

The children grew and became curious, as children do. They explored every corner of the tiny cottage and the morning came when they brought to their mother a grey shapeless cloth. They watched as she held it to her face and they watched her face change. She hugged them tightly, but her eyes were far away. They followed her down to the shore and she threw the grey coat around her shoulders and slid silently into the sea. And there their father found them, sitting on a rock, staring out to sea and listening to the calls of the seals far out in the bay.