

## **The Mermaid Story By Ben Oldfield**

On the pale sand, the solitary cave was just a stone compared to the blue monstrosity of the ocean. There were a few abandoned broken shells and the decayed seaweed showed that they failed to thrive. The only living things were the mermaid, Callia, and her son (Moe) hiding in the cave. Sirens migrate around the ocean, mostly in separate family groups to avoid being massacred by predators. Especially from the sharks that were earlier orbiting deadly around the cave. Callia's head peeped out as she kept her purple hair from expanding. She believed it was clear. Her ears stretched out to hear the North's singing.

***"I'm singing the North's song, swim forth and follow my voice."***

The siren's song was coming from an aquatic tower in an ocean village. Callia remembered that it was an ocean chasm dotted with shell huts and a tower with a golden plate to echo the song further. They use their ears as a compass and the North's song as a direction point. The problem was that it could only be played during the day but never at night. Callia sang back.

***"I can hear your singing..."***

She didn't know what else to say. She doubts that they would follow her voice to them and take them to the ocean village. They would have followed the singing earlier but sharks were nearby.

"We can come out." she uttered. "They're gone."

They each carried their small bags and Moe gripped her hand in fear of being left behind. "We'll have to swim faster before dark."

"Okay." whispered Moe.

Throughout the journey, Moe looked back at the cave, slowly shrinking into a pebble and then to dust. Callia grew worried.

"Mummy, how long will we have to swim for?" Moe said.

"Just a bit longer." Callia tried to sound positive. "Don't worry, if we don't arrive at the chasm. We will have to camp in a cave somewhere." Somewhere, that's the word that Callia didn't know where to start with. How can a flat seabed- she wondered, stretching for miles and miles act like a complex maze? Using the song as a piece of string that (at some point) will be pulled out. Or

find that the other end of the piece is cut out. Callia raised her ears and carried on following.

***“I’m singing the North’s song, swim forth and follow my voice.”***

The summer evening was close to twilight as was the song and it was close to silence. Callia couldn’t see a cave or even a hole to use as shelter. Just a deserted land of sand. Subtly a colossal shadow fell over them like a blanket. A sudden spark of worry tipped Callia to think it was night. Moe’s eyes looked up in amazement.

“Well at least we have seen a whale during our journey.” she said, noticing .

“It’s a ship.” A dark wooden ship sailed above them in all of its might.

“Yes it is.” Callia said, looking concerned. ‘What is that?’ Callia thought.

There was a bulb flashing red floating far ahead, at Callia’s eye level. She turned to Moe but he was distracted by something ahead. She went closer to it. The crimson, hypnotic had hooked her curiosity. She didn’t know why.

“What are those squares.” Moe pointed. She glimpsed.

“There aren’t any squares Moe?” Callia spoke, still staring at the bulb. There was a green winged fairy laying in the bulb. She was glowing crimson like a dying heart.

“Yeah there it is- look!” Her eyes looked ahead and squinted..

Appearing and disappearing, she saw a square, then two-five squares which connected each other forming L-grids, T-grids and X-grids.

This was a fishing trap.

“Swim back!” She yelled, crushing Moe’s hand and they shot back to the cave. Like salmon, they’re fins flapped rapidly. Moe saw the cave blow up like a pufferfish. The flashing squares began to shine silver around them. Accelerating slowly. The wire net was closing in

and the corners magnetically coupled to each other. Together they won't make it on time. Only one of them will. The X-grids erupted slowly out of the sand and she realized that the net would envelop them both. The net formed a mouth and slowly closed to devour Callia and Moe

"Just get into the cave and leave me!" She let go of Moe's hand and swung him forwards.

"What!" He yelled. The cave was just a few metres away.

"Just do as I say!" She swam deeper into the net.

He hesitated a bit but felt the squared on his hair and shot out of the net's mouth and dived into the darkness of the cave. Moe watched Callia's head clash onto the net with great force and just shoved the net back- just missing Moe's tail. The magnetic wires tangled around her, cutting the blood vessels in her arms and choking her tail.

"I'll come back. I promised."

"MUM!" cried Moe with eye-cutting tears. The net scrunched up and engulfed Callia and pulled her up to the dark ship as it sailed away.

As the net dragged Callia up to see the sky bled red, she bashed her head on something solid and saw the planks slide into each other. she could taste smoke in the air. Grinding cogs were stretching the net up.

'I must escape.' She thought. Clawing the heavy wires....too heavy. Bits of scales from her black tail were chipped off. She saw two dark men, overlapping each other and holding on to the handle. CLICK- CLICK!

"I thought I would catch a siren." The (now one) dark man said. He took wire cutters out of his pocket and knelt over Callia's weakening body.

"My red catcher was my favorite trick." His voice was deep and cold.

*Maybe this is a nightmare* Callia hoped as she tried to slap her tail and wriggle her hips out. She moved a little but not enough to escape. His boots crushed the net. It has to be. 'I'll wake up from

fright....then revive in the cave with Moe.’ Her eyelids slid down. “I must stay awake to escape this dream.” she whispered. The dark man didn’t hear her. He just cut the final wire and saw a knocked out mermaid.

She woke up in a locked glass coffin rimmed with rusted metal and filled with cold water. Questions sparked across her mind: Where am I- Is Moe okay- How am I going to get out? Her purple hair clouded around her face and she put it back. She lifted her ear. Silence. As quiet as the night stars in the window. She pushed the coffin with growing strength. But it was no use. Her fists bashed the glass till it bruised. The glass didn’t crack. She can’t escape. Not right now. All she could do was wait and look for an opportunity. She realized that she was in a cabin. There were more shadows than the scattered candles with ghostly glows could hide. At the far end of the room Callia saw the dark man at his desk. He was calm. she hit the glass with fury. He turned. Then ginned. He was a bald man with a creased face. He turned to continue reading his papers. Just turning the pages and reading- as if bodies in coffins were blankets in boxes.

On the left there were Stuffed ligers, unicorns and other abnormal heads hung above the door. ‘He’s not a common pirate’ Callia thought. ‘With a good knowledge in magic.’ On the other side there were shelves filled with potions, poisons and sea creatures imprisoned in jars. Behind her head had a closed chest with a few papers sticking out. There was a frame on it with a fairy pinned to the board. ‘Maybe I won’t escape.’ She believed. Callia turned around and stared hopelessly outside of the window above her. A starless night with growling waves slithering past the ship.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Callia jumped and turned to see the dark man more clearly. His eyes were as the cold ocean outside. He cracked the lock open and rested the lid below the window.

“Who are you- what do you want?” she cried. Without a reply his hand dived past her face and gripped her hair. Causing a stinging pain in the hair roots.

“Your soul has great value for the king.” his coiled fingers gripped harder.

“Please don’t...I need it for my journey.” The stranger didn’t react. Just a cold stare, seeing the mermaid as a fish. He held a green bottle with copper tripod pipes sticking out like legs.

“I beg you...I..I’ve-ve got a ss-son.” Tears bled out of Callia’s eyes in sharp diamonds. He pulled her head further back and then pressed the tripod at her face. Two pipes dug into her eyeballs forcing her eyelids to open. She choked on the third pipe and screamed like a crow.

Blue and white cells obliterated the darkness in a stinging pain. Her hand jumped behind her like an escaping mouse. The man held her down. Callia’s memories sparked in flashes, and poured away like dreams. She tried to think of Moe but concepts dissolved and she lost the grasp of human instinct. Her hand weakly gripped something. As this was going on the dark stranger felt nothing. Just the fascinating stare children would feel when they saw a fly in a spider’s web. The bottle began to glow white. He noticed that it was saying something. Or rather singing something quiet.

BASH! Callia collapses back in the coffin as the frame did on the floor. Shards in his eye and face made him scream. He dropped the bottle on the floor and the tripod and container broke in two. The glass rolled between two chests. He wandered backwards and then knocked his desk and the candle hopped off. Callia’s skin turned grey and her eyes turned white like moons. Her eyes were bleached white. She saw the man discover the fire who swiftly consumed the wooden shelves. He grabbed the door and leaped off. Callia gazed at the fire. She saw a goblin made of fire ignite a barrel and it blasted the walls. The ocean grew higher than the ship and the fire growled.

“Is this death?” She whispered the final words to herself. Callia gazed at the phoenix rising to the ceiling that obliterated the night.

In the lonely cave, Moe shivered in cold fear throughout the night because life became a bad dream. “The only way you can escape the nightmares (he remembered his mother telling him.) is by waking up. So don’t worry. If you have a bad dream. You know you will wake up.” Moe pinched his hand till it turned red. He never left his nightmare.

Early in the twilight in the calm sea. Yet he heard a bubbling thunder. He peeped out of the cave and saw a colossal burnt ship crash into the sand with white foam flying up. White particles swam around the wreck like flies feeding on a corpse. When the sand rested, Moe no longer saw a burnt ship but a skeletal wreck as if it lived as a dinosaur. Moe waited in the cave for a while to see what would happen next. Nothing. A whispered song spoke to him.

***“Come and try and find me, ‘till summer twilight bleeds, Or you’ll have to spend eternity decaying on the sand.”***

It sounded like his mother. Maybe she’s fine. Moe’s left brain said that he should move closer, ignore the words. She’s your mother. His right brain opposed the view and told Moe to stay in the cave until help arrived....If help arrives....No, Moe will swim to the ship.

***“Come and try and find me, ‘till summer twilight bleeds, Or you’ll have to spend eternity decaying on the sand.”***

He fanned his tail and swam closer to the ship. Making out parts of the ship that have broken up.

***“Or you’ll have to spend eternity decaying on the sand.”***

That song was coming from the circular window, that looked like a shark’s eye. The window’s room was on its side. Moe realized that it was a broken glass window and he pushed the tiny shards off the edge.

***“Come and try and find me, ‘till summer twilight bleeds”***

“Mum?” Moe said. “Are you there?”

He looked in the window and saw a woman in the room's abyss. Clawing objects. She was looking for something. A blade of sunlight stabbed through the door and across the room to a wall.

"Mum?" Moe said. His voice echoed in the room and it was Callia...was Callia. She turned into the blade of light and Moe's heart began to shiver. Her skin was as grey as the sand and grew blood like crimson seaweed. Callia heard him.

"SILENCE!" She hissed and then shot up. Moe turned to escape but it was too late, she grabbed his blue tail. Moe's heart clutched and rattled his rib cage as he screamed. She was strong. She pulled him deeper to the darkness. Her hand gripped tighter like a python. There was a bottle of green liquid. Moe grabbed it, his chin was below the rim of the window. He hit the bottle into her face. She didn't let go. His hand slapped tightly round the window before he got any lower. He raised the bottle up and smashed it onto her zombified mermaid face. She released and Moe fired himself out of the window and swam away without looking back.

Callia could hear that song as well. It was her soul. She could finally hear it and look for it. The soul. She must find it because the body must die with the soul. In a tick- tock way her paranoid neurons wouldn't stop saying I can hear it- It must be here- I can hear It must be here- I can hear it must be here.

***"Come and try and find me, 'till summer twilight bleeds,  
Or you'll have to spend eternity decaying on the sand."***