

The Glass Hearted Princess

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Once, long after the time before, a princess was born upon a ravaging sea. The exiled Queen had no vestments to wrap the infant in, but her companions in the wind-tossed boat rejoiced at the new life among them, and each contributed a piece of their own scarce clothing to protect the beautiful child from the numbing wind and stinging salt spray.

One man gave his soft goat-wool scarf to wrap her nut-brown legs, another his worn woven cap to shield her shining obsidian eyes. A third donated his fraying mittens, which sheathed the infant's coral pink digits. Finally, she was wrapped tight in the Queen's blue cotton skirt. Bound to her mother's warm breast, her mewling laughter filled the castaways with hope.

But a storm was coming.

The wind blew fiercely and the waves towered above the tiny boat. The passengers clung tightly to each other, singing the songs of their disparate homelands to drown out the whistling wind, but the storm was too strong. One by one, they succumbed to the wild rocking of the surge, slipping into the hungry brine, until only the Queen and the Princess remained, huddled together at the mercy of the world.

The impoverished queen held her first borne child and prayed to the Sky, the Sea, and the Earth, to spare her daughter. The Sky screamed, mocking the women's cries. The Sea roared, ignoring the women's tears. The Earth murmured, fathoms below them, too far away to help.

Still the Queen prayed.

"I will sacrifice anything to save my daughter."

The Sky paused. Knowing only the harsh scream of the gull and the cracking boom of thunder, it longed for a kinder, warmer sound to flow through its cloud-garlanded void. At this moment, the Princess - enthralled by the colourful swirl of her mother's beaded necklace - let loose a peel of bright and sonorous laughter that filled the Sky with joy.

"Give me the child's laugh," the Sky said, "and I will blow you to kind earth."

The Queen had no other choice but to agree the terms. At her nod, her daughter fell silent in her arms as the wind calmed and the sky lightened.

But still the boat rocked, threatening to tip the mother and baby into the unforgiving ocean.

"What can I give you, to calm your waves?" the Queen beseeched the Sea.

Unlike the Sky, the Sea had no wish for warmth or comfort – its nature was frigid and icy - but its waves envied the curve of the Princess's pink lips.

"Give me your daughter's smile and I will cease to rock," it said.

Once again, the Queen had no choice but to agree, and at her nod, the white foamed surface dissolved to a calm black mirror, while the arch of the Princess's smile fell, reflecting the sadness in her mother's cheeks.

The boat ebbed towards a distant and lonely beach, borne by gentle swells onto the rocky shoreline. The Queen found herself on the forgiving Earth once more, where she placed her daughter to her breast. While the infant fed, she neither smiled nor laughed, but cried, face crumpled, wrapped in the garments of the dead.

In desperation, the Queen prayed to the Earth to heal her daughter but the Earth was powerless against the Sky and Sea.

"I cannot restore your daughter," the Earth said. "My siblings' power outweighs mine. If I cross them, they will bite at my bones and fill my arteries with salt."

The Queen offered her own laugh, her own smile, to be granted to the princess, but both had long been lost, buried in a cold grave, leagues away.

For days the Queen lamented, until even the sand grains upon the beach pitied her. The grains were the child of the Sea and Sky and they feared neither. They burrowed into the child, through translucent flesh and ruby red blood, to her beating heart, bonding into an impervious glassy shield. Her heart encased, the princess would no longer weep. She would never anguish. She would never grieve.

Never feel.

The Dystopian Journalist