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The Little Mermaid

Adapted from the story by Hans Christian Andersen

CHARACTERS

SEA WITCH

DAPHNE, a young hurricane

THE LITTLE MERMAID, 15 years old

MER SISTERS (2 or more, also teenagers but older)

THE PRINCE

THE PRINCESS

EXTRAS (optional, non-speaking) may play OTHER MER
PEOPLE, SEA CREATURES, MUSICIANS and
COURTIERS

TIME: During the Mer King's rule.

PLACE: Under the sea, on its surface and nearby. All locations may be indicated by minimum set pieces.

PLAYING TIME: about 45 minutes

The Little Mermaid

SCENE I

AT RISE: *Gentle music is heard, a lilting theme for the Little Mermaid and her sisters. Stretched across the stage, two shimmering sheets billow gently, representing a calm sea. After a moment, a HOWLING begins, followed by THUNDER and LIGHTNING. MUSIC stops. “Waves” snap and roll violently. The stage grows darker. DAPHNE enters in front of “waves,” followed by the SEA WITCH. DAPHNE is howling and whirling and flinging her arms about wildly.*

WITCH. Daphne! *Daphne!* Stop that howling and whirling and flinging yourself about.

DAPHNE (*still at it*). But I’m a hurricane, Aunt Verma. All hurricanes howl and whirl and fling themselves about.

WITCH. You’re not a hurricane yet. You’re just a tiny squall.

DAPHNE (*calming down, and as she does, LIGHTS come up and storm SOUNDS fade away. “Waves” go calm*). But I’m going to blow up to be a hurricane!

WITCH. And won’t you be something! But you still have a lot to learn.

DAPHNE. Such as?

WITCH. Such as not to howl and whirl and fling yourself about when you are near the palace of the Mer King.

DAPHNE. The Mer King?

WITCH. The Ruler of the Sea. He's very powerful.

DAPHNE (*with each of her following exchanges, she becomes more and more agitated, and this is reflected in the LIGHTS and heightened action of the “waves.”*)

More powerful than you are, Aunt Verma?

WITCH (*reluctantly*). Well...ah...you know, Daphne, some times these things—

DAPHNE. More powerful than my mother, the Witch of the Sev enth Sea?

WITCH. Daphne, you've just got to realize that life isn't always—

DAPHNE. More powerful than my father, the mighty thundercloud?

WITCH. Yes, more powerful than—

DAPHNE. More powerful than I'll be when I'm a full-blown hurricane? (*Her agitation at this point produces another round of THUNDER and LIGHTNING.*)

WITCH (*awed by her niece's power; speaks with some sadness*). Yes, Daphne, even more powerful than you.

DAPHNE. I hate this Mer King! Where is he? Where are his peo ple! I want to de stroy them all!

WITCH. Patience, Daphne, patience! (*DAPHNE pulls herself together: LIGHTS brighten, “waves” calm.*) Your time may come. But if you strike too soon, you're sure to lose. You must be as clever as you are bold.

DAPHNE. What do they have, Aunt Verma—this Mer King and his Mer people? What makes them so power ful?

WITCH (*evasively*). I have no idea.

DAPHNE (*riling up the “waves” again*). You have no idea? You've lived in these waters five hundred years and you have no idea?

WITCH. Ooze of an octopus! Whatever possessed your mother to send you to me, anyway?

DAPHNE. You know perfectly well why she sent me: to learn the wisdom of the ocean floor. So you mustn't keep anything a secret. Tell me the source of the Mer King's power!

WITCH (*shuddering*). I don't like talking about it.

DAPHNE. Why not?

WITCH. Because it disgusts me!

DAPHNE. It sickens you? You, who boil live eels in the juice of crushed porpoises? What in all the universe could sicken you? (*WITCH turns away.*) Tell me, Aunt Verma. What is it? (*She becomes agitated again and the LIGHTS and "waves" respond accordingly.*) Tell me! *Tell me! T-E-L-L-L-L M-E-E-E-E!*

(*SOUNDS of thunder; FLASHES of lightning.*)

WITCH (*her hands over her ears*). Oh, can't you hush up?

DAPHNE (*abruptly calm and coy: SOUND and LIGHTS respond*). If you tell me.

WITCH. All right, all right. (*A pause.*)

DAPHNE. I'm waiting.

WITCH. Love.

DAPHNE. What?

WITCH. *Love.* They have *love*.

DAPHNE. Are you joking with me? Are you making this up?

WITCH. No!

DAPHNE. "Love"? "*Love*"? I've never heard of such a thing.

WITCH. Of course you haven't. Neither had I until I met them.

DAPHNE. What is it?

WITCH. I'm not sure. It's kind of this...*thing*. It's sort of like...*stuff*. Whatever it is, it gives them their power. And it gives me the creeps.

DAPHNE. But what does it look like?

WITCH. I've never actually seen it.

DAPHNE. Then how do you know they have it?

WITCH. I hear them talking about it. Oh, they talk about it all the time.

DAPHNE. Then I'll spy on them and find out where they keep it and destroy it forever. (*LIGHTS dim and WIND howls slightly; "waves" grow rougher again.*) When I'm full-blown, I'll rip and tear and smash it to bits!

WITCH (*pleased and inspired*). Perhaps you will, Daphne! Perhaps you will.

DAPHNE. Do you really think so, Aunt Verma? You said the Mer King was more powerful than I.

WITCH. Perhaps we'll do it *together*.

DAPHNE. Together! (*She howls and whirls, her excitement echoed by SOUND, LIGHT and "waves."*) Yes! Yes! Together!

WITCH (*notices something offstage L; to DAPHNE*). Hush! Hush!

DAPHNE (*calms down; as do the stage effects*). What is it?

WITCH. The Mer King's daughters. (*In the quiet, the THEME MUSIC is heard, approaching.*) Come over here! (*Pulling DAPHNE R.*) Let's see what they're up to. Hush now, not a word out of you.

(DAPHNE and WITCH hurry off R as MER SISTERS enter L, pushing a throne. Their hair is long and silver. Their clothes have a similar shimmery, silvery appearance. If a larger cast is used, SECOND SISTER's dialogue may be divided among OTHER SISTERS, in which case FIRST SISTER remains the sensible leader while OTHERS are all in a tizzy, each in her own way.)

SECOND SISTER. Oh, these birthday parties get me into such a tizzy!

FIRST SISTER. I know...

SECOND SISTER. I hope we haven't forgotten anything.

FIRST SISTER. We haven't.

SECOND SISTER *(too frantic to hear her).* A mermaid's fifteenth birthday is so important! Where should she sit?

(Pointing in opposite directions.) Over here? Over there?

FIRST SISTER. In the center.

(SISTERS move throne to C.)

SECOND SISTER. Of course! This is perfect. *(Reconsidering:)* But you think we ought to move it—

FIRST SISTER. No! Leave it there. And please calm down!

SECOND SISTER. Do we have everything else? Decorations? Refreshments? The gifts?

FIRST SISTER & SECOND SISTER *(as FIRST SISTER points off L).* The gifts!

(SISTERS hurry off L. SEA WITCH and DAPHNE enter R.)

WITCH. So! The littlest mermaid's fifteenth birthday has arrived at last!

DAPHNE. What does that mean, Aunt Verma?

WITCH. It means our chance may be here sooner than we think. She's a dreamer, that little one. And perhaps a bit of a fool.

DAPHNE. Then she's no match for us, is she?

WITCH. Don't get overconfident, Daphne. That one has more "love" than all of the rest of them put together.

DAPHNE. Aunt Verma! Maybe that's where they hide it!

WITCH. What are you talking about?

DAPHNE. Their "love." Maybe they keep it inside the littlest mermaid.

WITCH. Hair of a seahorse! You may be right!

DAPHNE. Then let's get her first!

WITCH. Not so fast! There are ways and there are ways, and a witch's ways are always wily.

DAPHNE (*giggling*). And wicked!

(SISTERS enter L, carrying packages and unaware of WITCH and DAPHNE.)

SECOND SISTER. Don't drop anything. They're very fragile. All sunbeams and morning dew!

WITCH (*to DAPHNE*). Get back! Hurry!

FIRST SISTER. Don't worry. I've got them. (*SEA WITCH and DAPHNE exit R as SISTERS begin arranging packages around the throne.*) Let's put them here, around the throne.

SECOND SISTER. Oh, this is so exciting! (*As they finish arranging packages.*) She's coming! Oh, hurry! Here she is!

(LITTLE MERMAID enters. She may be followed by OTHER MER PEOPLE, who ad lib greetings to SISTERS and admire throne and packages. SISTERS rush to embrace LITTLE MERMAID. Again, SECOND SISTER's lines may be divided among OTHER SISTERS.)

FIRST SISTER. Happy birthday, little one!

SECOND SISTER. Happy fifteenth birth day!

MERMAID. Thank you! I really am fifteen at last, aren't I? I can hardly believe it. It seems as if I've been waiting for ever for this day to arrive.

SECOND SISTER. Come, sit on your throne—and open your gifts.

MERMAID (*sits; ALL arrange themselves to watch her. FIRST SISTER hands her a package. She tries to open it, but can't*). Oh, I'm so excited, I'm shaking. Maybe I'd better save my presents until after.

SECOND SISTER. After what?

MERMAID. Oh, you know! (*SISTERS exchange a puzzled glance, then look back at MERMAID questioningly*.) My first trip from the ocean floor to the top of the waves. My first chance to see the world of human beings!

FIRST SISTER (*without enthusiasm*). Oh, that.

MERMAID. Yes, that!

FIRST SISTER. I wouldn't get too excited about that, if I were you.

MERMAID. Why not?

SECOND SISTER (*tears apart a package and holds up a comb*). Look! A new comb for your hair!

(FIRST SISTER—and OTHERS, if used—ooh and aah in appreciation.)

MERMAID. It's very nice, thank you. (*Sets it aside and returns to her point:*) It is beautiful up there, isn't it? At the top of the waves?

SECOND SISTER (*hesitantly*). Yes.

FIRST SISTER. It's more beautiful down here.

MERMAID. I know. But it's also strange and wonderful up there, and different from anything I've ever known, isn't it?

FIRST SISTER (*hesitantly*). Yes.

SECOND SISTER (*tears open another package and holds up a necklace of seashells*). Look! A necklace of seashells!

(*FIRST SISTER—and OTHERS, if used—ooh and aah.*)

MERMAID (*accepts the necklace politely*). It's lovely, thank you. (*Putting necklace aside.*) Why shouldn't I be excited about the greatest adventure of my entire life?

SECOND SISTER (*blurts it out*). Because it doesn't always work out well for us Mer People.

MERMAID. What do you mean?

FIRST SISTER (*reluctantly*). As each of us has reached her fifteenth birthday and made her first trip to the top of the waves—

MERMAID. To sit on the rocks and see the lights of the town and great ships and green woods and fishes that fly through the trees—

FIRST SISTER. Yes, yes, all of that—

MERMAID. And more!

FIRST SISTER. Even so, we've each found that we're happier here at home with sea creatures we know and understand.

SECOND SISTER. It's so much safer for us down here.
MERMAID. But I'm not afraid! I want to know what's up there. I want to know all about everything in the whole wide world. Tell me again about the things you see when you float on the waves and sit on the rocks. Tell me about the very first time you went up, on your fifteenth birthdays.

SECOND SISTER. Oh, we've told you all about that a hundred times—

MERMAID. But I love to hear it! Please?

FIRST SISTER. Why? You'll be going up at midnight—

MERMAID. I want to imagine it all one more time before I see it for myself.

SECOND SISTER (*still reluctant*). Oh, dear.

MERMAID. It's my birthday, remember. You really must do as I say!

FIRST SISTER (*affectionately*). Oh, all right. The very first time?

MERMAID. The very first.

(The following may be sung to the tune of 'Frère Jacques' or set to an original melody, if preferred. The lines may be divided up among OTHER SISTERS, with OTHER MER PEOPLE chiming in as desired, with "You'll see sunrise," etc.)

FIRST SISTER.

I saw sunrise, I saw sunrise,
Fire and light, fire and light.
Humming birds and flowers,
Trees and sky and showers,
Stars at night, stars at night.

MER MAID (*and/or OTHERS*).

I'll see sunrise, I'll see sunrise,
Fire and light, fire and light.
Humming birds and flowers,
Trees and sky and showers,
Stars at night, stars at night.

SECOND SISTER.

I saw wild swans, I saw wild swans,
White as a cloud, white as a cloud.
Children gaily dancing,
Soldiers' horses prancing,
Strong and proud, strong and proud.

MER MAID (*and/or OTHERS*).

I'll see wild swans, I'll see wild swans,
White as a cloud, white as a cloud.
Children gaily dancing,
Soldiers' horses prancing,
Strong and proud, strong and proud.

FIRST SISTER (*or another SISTER*).

I heard thunder, I heard thunder,
Shake the sky, shake the sky.
Bolts of lightning flashing,
Stormy waves all crashing
Ten feet high, ten feet high.

MER MAID (*and/or OTHERS*).

I'll hear thunder, I'll hear thunder,
Shake the sky, shake the sky.
Bolts of lightning flashing,

Stormy waves all crashing
Ten feet high, ten feet high.

SECOND SISTER (*or another SISTER*).

I heard music, I heard music
From the town, from the town:
Drums and church bells ringing,
Trumpet calls and singing
All around, all around.

MER MAID (*and/or OTHERS*).

I'll hear music, I'll hear music
From the town, from the town:
Drums and church bells ringing,
Trumpet calls and singing
All around, all around.

(*MERMAID and SISTERS—and OTHERS, if desired—sing all of the above verses through again as a round. SISTERS sing each of their verses twice to equal MERMAID's four. As SONG FADES away, ALL stand quietly for a moment, then:*)

MER MAID (*in awe*). It's time, isn't it?

FIRST SISTER. Yes, little one. It's time.

(*BELL begins to chime midnight. ALL except MERMAID turn their backs to audience and wave their arms in slow motion, like sea plants, as they slowly move up-stage. MERMAID, arms waving gracefully, moves downstage to where the “waves” are beginning to rise.*)