

## *The Little Mermaid – extract abridged by Gabbie Chant*

*Far, far away from here, there once was an ocean that was deeper than man can measure. Above the surface, the water looked as dark as ink and as cold as glass, and it seemed a lonely and dangerous place. But deep beneath the waves – ah, that was a different story. Right down in the depths of the water, a thousand times deeper than any living human had ever dived, there lay a castle.*

*The castle was hidden behind forests of tangled seaweed, and guarded by fish of such curious and startling colours that you and I would gasp to see them. Its walls and turrets were fashioned from shells and crab claws and coral, and within its halls there stood a throne carved from an enormous pearl – and on that throne there sat a sea-king. He was a good and wise ruler, but a great sadness lay heavy on his heart: his queen had died, many years before. All that he had left to remember her was their six lovely daughters – six sea-princesses, who, just like their father, had no legs. Each of their bodies ended in a fish's tail.*

*Now, it was a custom of the kingdom that when each of the sea-princesses had their fifteenth birthday, they were permitted to swim to the surface of the ocean, to look upon the world above the water for a single day. The five eldest sea-princesses had each already had this privilege. They had returned to the castle with stories of feathered fish that swam through the air, and of strange wooden whales that floated on the surface of the water, and of a huge round shell that burned in the sky as brightly as lava that bursts from underwater volcanoes.*

*The littlest sea-princess listened to her elder sisters' stories, and she longed for the day that she too would turn fifteen and be able to rise to the ocean's surface. She spent her days using stones and seaweed to make pictures on the seabed of all her sisters had told her, and at night she dreamed of feeling the warmth of that bright round shell on her skin.*



*At long last, the little mermaid's fifteenth birthday arrived. Up, up she swam through the water, as light as a bubble. The higher she rose, the brighter the blue of the ocean became, and the water grew less and less cold - until at last, the tips of her fingers broke the surface of the water and she emerged, glittering with salt water, into the mild sea air.*

*And - oh! - what was this gigantic dark shape before her? A huge floating creature made of wood, just as her sisters had described, with vast white fins! And what a great noise it was making! The creak of its bones as it moved towards her! And its voice - like a hundred different voices, all shouting at once!*

*Would it eat her?*



*The little sea-princess shrank back into the sea until just her eyes and the top of her head peeped out above the surface of the water. She looked as sleek as a seal, bobbing there in the waves, with her hair wet against her skull. She held her breath and watched with a fast-beating heart as the creature drew ever closer.*