

YVES AND YVONNE

Once upon a time there lived an old man and his two children, Yves and Yvonne. They owned a little farm, called Croix-Ruduno, and lived on whatever they could grow.

When the boy and girl were still young the old man died, and the children were left alone.

“I will go out and seek my fortune,” said Yves to his sister, one day.

“Alas, dear brother,” said Yvonne, “will you leave me alone?”

“Do not fear, little sister. I will soon come home rich, and I will find you a good husband.”

Yves embraced his sister, and bade her farewell, then set out for Paris. When he arrived he went to the King’s palace, and hammered on the door.

“Have you need of anyone here?” he asked the doorkeeper.

“Yes, we need a swineherd; our last one left us yesterday.”

So Yves became a swineherd, and because he was handsome, and kind-hearted and obliging, he became a great favourite with the cook, who took him under his protection.

One day he was with his pigs in the forest that surrounded the palace, when the King came walking by. He heard the young man singing, and stopped to listen. He asked the swineherd where he came from, and about his position, and Yves’s answers and appearance so pleased him that he made him his personal attendant. Soon he became the King’s favourite companion.

After a time Yves asked for permission to return home to see his sister.

“Certainly,” said the King. “But do not stay away more than a fortnight, for I need you here.”

So Yves set out, taking with him all the money he had, as well as presents and jewellery, to give to his sister.

She greeted him with delight, and begged him not to leave her again. The fortnight passed away, and when Yves left he took with him a portrait of his sister. Yvonne was the fairest girl that the sun ever shone upon – not only in Lower Brittany, but in the whole world.

The King welcomed Yves back to the court, and told him how keenly

he had missed him. With each day that passed, Yves's influence grew and grew. Whenever he had a moment he went to his room to look at his sister's picture, and he kissed and spoke to it as if it were Yvonne herself.

One day the King came unexpectedly into the room, and saw Yves kneeling down before the portrait.

"Tell me, who is the maiden in this picture?" asked the King.

"It is my sister, Sire," said Yves.

"Your sister? She is very lovely. I would like to see if she is like her portrait. Go back to your own land and bring her to me."

Yves left immediately, and soon reached his home.

"Dear brother, have you come back for good?" cried Yvonne, running out to meet him.

"No, dear sister," said Yves. "I have come to fetch you, and take you back to the court."

"To the court? Why, they will all laugh at me."

"The King himself has sent for you, little sister," said Yves. "And do not fear, no one will laugh at you."

So Yvonne and her nurse, and the nurse's daughter, set sail for Paris. The King had given Yves a glass chest, in which to put his sister during the voyage, so that her complexion would not be browned and chaffed by the sun and the sea air.

Yves himself had been given a message to deliver to the Prince of Normandy, and while the others went by sea, he went by land. The captain of the vessel was charged to take good care of them, and Yvonne stayed all day in her glass chest. However, in the evenings, when the sun had set, she would take a little walk on the deck, and enjoy the cool air.

Now, the nurse had taken a dislike to Yvonne, and she decided to do away with her, and replace her with her own daughter, even though she was ugly and bad-tempered.

One evening, after a very hot day, they were all three standing on the deck looking at the sea. The nurse was on one side of Yvonne, and her daughter on the other. Suddenly, the nurse cried:

"Oh, what beautiful golden fish. Look, Look!"

The two girls bent over the edge and the nurse seized Yvonne by the feet, and threw her into the water. A mermaid rose up immediately and carried the girl down to her coral palace, far beneath the water.

No sailor had been close by to see what had happened, and no one knew that the nurse's daughter had taken Yvonne's place in the glass chest.

The boat came into port, and was met by Yves, who was waiting on the

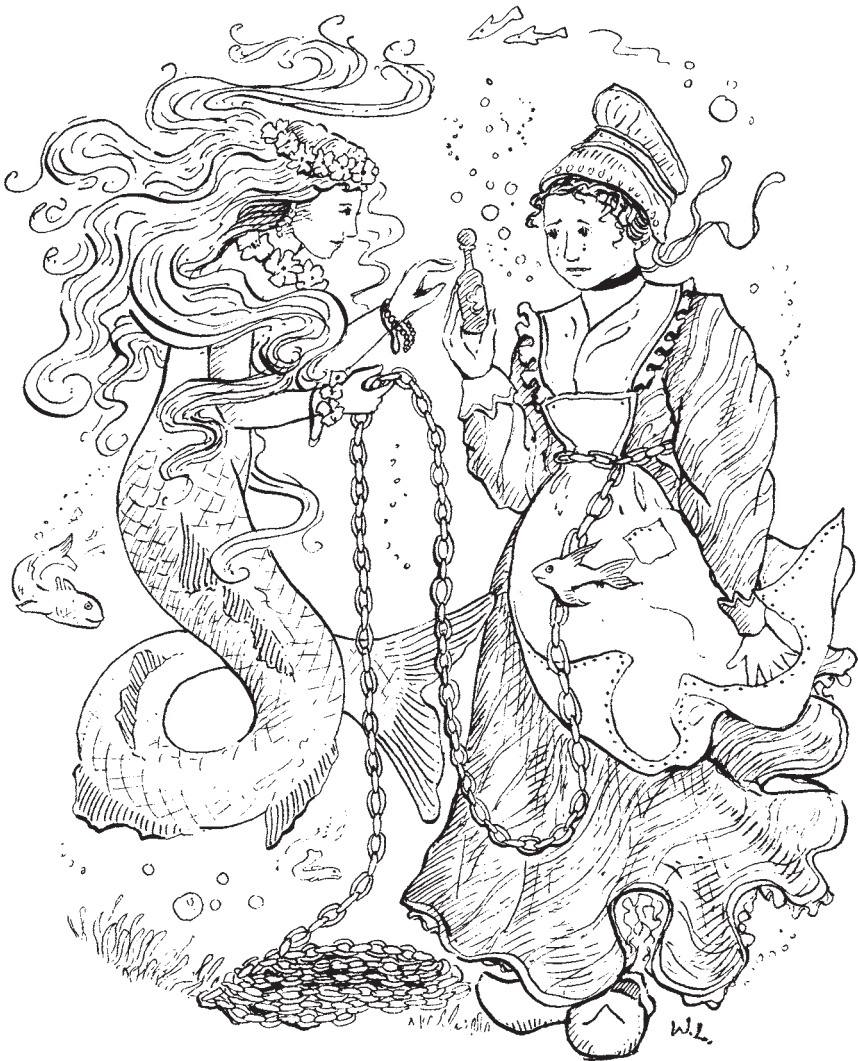
quay. The nurse told him that his sister had been blown overboard and died, during a storm. His grief was very great, but even though he suspected foul play he had no proof, and said nothing. At the court the nurse's daughter was presented to the King. He looked at her in dismay, and asked Yves if this was his sister.

"Alas, it is," said Yves. "She caught smallpox during the voyage, and that is why she is so changed."

The King sighed and said:

"How unfortunate! Still, a King must not break his word. I promised to marry her, and I will marry her."

So the wedding was celebrated with every festivity, and the King and the Nurse's daughter were married.



The King and Yves were very sad and nothing could raise their spirits. However, the nurse and her daughter were full of pride, and walked along with their heads held high. They criticised and scolded the servants and courtiers, and made themselves unpopular with everyone, but the King was too downhearted to restrain them.

They both disliked Yves, and the nurse began to plan with several of the courtiers how they could do away with him.

One day, two noblemen of the court invited Yves to come hunting with them. He agreed, never suspecting any harm, and when they reached a lonely place, they fell upon him and killed him. Then they took the body, and threw it into an old ruined chapel in the heart of the forest.

The mermaid at the bottom of the ocean knew immediately what had happened, and told Yvonne that her brother had been slain by two noblemen, at the command of the nurse and her daughter.

“But all is not yet lost,” she said. “I will allow you to go to the ruined chapel where they have thrown his body. Take this water of life, and for the next three nights go to him, and rub it upon his body. You must return when I pull upon the chain about your waist.”

The mermaid gave Yvonne a vial filled with water from the spring of life, and fastened a golden chain about her waist. She kept hold of one end, while Yvonne travelled to the ruined chapel. She arrived at midnight and fell weeping upon her brother’s lifeless body. She rubbed it with the water of life, and showered it with her tears, but he did not move. At daybreak the mermaid pulled upon the chain, and Yvonne had to leave.

“I will come back two more times, poor brother,” she said, “and I will bring you back to life.”

Meanwhile, the King had grown anxious about his friend and asked everyone where he was: he was told that no one knew, but no doubt he had lost his way, while out hunting in the forest.

The next day, a travelling knife grinder took shelter in the little chapel. He fell asleep on an old chest, and at midnight he was awoken by the sound of weeping and lamenting. Yvonne had arrived, and the light of her beauty filled the chapel. Once again she rubbed the body of her brother with the water of life, and did all she could to warm him with her kisses and her tears. At last, he did begin to stir a little. At daybreak, the mermaid pulled on the chain, and Yvonne once again had to return to the bottom of the ocean.

“Do not fear, poor brother,” she said, “I will return tonight, for the last time.”

The old knife grinder had heard and seen everything, and he went and knocked on the palace door.

“I want to speak to the King,” he said.

“The King does not admit everyone who comes,” said the doorkeeper.

“I have important news, which will please him.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“No, I want to speak to him in person.”

The old man was so insistent that he was shown into the presence of the King.

“Sire, you believe that you have married the sister of your friend, Yves, do you not?”, asked the knife grinder.

“Yes, is it not true?” cried the King.

“No, Sire. You have married the nurse’s daughter; the true bride is held prisoner by a mermaid, at the bottom of the ocean.”



“How can this be? Please tell me everything.”

The old knife grinder told the King all that had happened, and explained how he had overheard the whole story while he was taking shelter in the ruined chapel.

“The maiden comes there every night to rub the body of her dead brother with the water of life,” said the old man. “Her beauty is so bright that it fills the chapel like a lamp.”

“And how can we rescue her from the mermaid?” said the King.

“Give me twelve soldiers, Sire, each armed with a stout axe, and we will hide ourselves tonight in the chapel. When Yvonne has come, and brought her brother back to life, and is preparing to return to the mermaid, I will give a sign, and the soldiers will each leap forward and strike the golden chain, breaking it into twelve pieces. Then the maiden will be free, and I will bring her to you with her brother.”

The King gave the old knife grinder the twelve soldiers, and they went and hid in the ruined chapel, armed with their stout axes.

At midnight Yvonne arrived. She finally brought her brother back to life, and he arose as well as ever. They embraced each other, and said the fondest farewells, for dawn was approaching. Suddenly, the mermaid pulled upon the chain, and Yvonne, said:

“Alas, dear brother, I must leave you now – perhaps for ever.”

The knife grinder cried:

“Stand firm, comrades!”

Immediately the twelve axes fell, and broke the chain into twelve pieces. The mermaid gave a cry and when she pulled upon the chain and did not bring back her prisoner, she set the sea tossing and heaving.

The brother and sister returned with the knife grinder and the twelve soldiers to the palace, where the King met them with the greatest joy.

The nurse and her daughter, and the two noblemen who had slain Yves were duly punished, and the King finally married Yvonne. He made Yves the head of his armies, and set the old knife grinder to take care of his wine cellars.

The festivals and rejoicing were magnificent, and lasted a whole month.