The Selkie’s Daughter
John Reinhard Weguelin: Mermaid (1906)

Lyrics and singing: Moira Waugh
Composition & Arrangement by Moira Waugh and Siobhan Dakay
Story: Moira Waugh, Rob Walker and Siobhan Dakay
Narration and pictures painted with words: Rob Walker
Cover Art: “The Siren Call” by Coles Phillips; 1929
Do you know what a Selkie is?

Today a Selkie is better known as “Mermaid”. Some people in Scotland still use the word Selkie or Seal.

There are a lot of stories about Selkies. Of course these are just stories to make you believe a Mermaid is not able to go to the land and return to the sea once she has decided to put her feet onto solid ground.

In reality Selkies can peel off their skin and go to the land and are still able to go back into the water where they belong.

Enough of what a Selkie is.

Let me tell you the story now.

Gottfried’s Histora Antipodum oder Newe Welt (1631)
It was in a **cold, cold** winter. A long time ago.

*So long ago that you were not born. Nor were your parents or their parents.*

It was a time when **houses were heated by only a single chimney** and the windows hardly kept the wintry cold outside.

At that time one year the **snow came early in November.** It was frosty and the land was covered in a thick blanket of snow. That year the winter planned to last a long long time.

But offshore in the warmth of the Gulf Stream, **deep down in the water, the Selkies live.**

*They live a life that is in no way like yours. Of course the surroundings are different from your life but also, given **the sheer size of the ocean**, a Selkie is a very rare thing to see. Young Selkies often never see a second Selkie of their age to play with.*
Instead of playing with friends, the young Selkies played at racing with dolphins or surfing on the flukes of whales. They dove deep through the sea to enchanted reefs or the old wrecks of sunken boats.

One of the Selkie daughters was a very curious one. Since there were so few Selkies it was common that they had no name.

*If you like, in your mind, just give her a name you like.*

She was fascinated by everything from the land. Human things attracted her like a magnet.

Whenever she could she left her cave to search for sunken boats and collect human things.
I am a Selkie’s daughter
A creature of the sea
When I’m in my silky, Selkie skin
I live so wild and free

I twist and turn and dive down deep
To where the bones of sailors sleep
To find my hoard of human things:
Coats and boots and dead men’s rings.
At the age of 12 it somehow wasn’t enough for her to just look for and collect the human things she was able to find in the wrecks. She felt she was too old for playing with the dolphins and whales.

She wanted more. But there were no other Selkie’s daughters around to share her feelings or to spend time playing with.

She was bored. She wanted, no she needed, a new excitement. So her thoughts started spinning around the human things she pictured in her fantasies. Her curiosity spun her thoughts further and further.

She knew a way to the coast. She knew the wintry nights were growing shorter and shorter. She knew no one would recognize her in the dark. Maybe she could peek, just a bit. “Just looking… no more…” she thought.

The next day she made a decision.
After the last flickering sun reflection on the bottom of the ocean left for darkness she swam all the way to the coast. The closer she got to the surface of the water the more it felt as if an unknown power were trying to drag her back into the deep sea.

The sea was troubled and foamy but she managed to reach the ripples offshore.

She had a short moment where her head was out of the water.

A very short moment.

To give you an idea of how short the moment was: imagine you say the word “twenty-one”. The moment she could get a view from above the surface was so short, that you might have managed to say:

“tw...”
For when December falls

And I surface through the foam

The land it pulls me back again

And I feel the urge to roam
But oh. When she was back in the water a snapshot of what she had seen rushed back into her mind.

Fireworks of impressions exploded in her head.

Diving back to her home the memory of what she had seen swirled through her head. It was by far more than she had expected. She had heard the sky would be blue but all she saw was a black one – with holes like lights in it.

What was behind these holes in the sky?

The more she liked what she had seen, the more she was telling herself how crazy the idea was.

“What a stupid idea” she thought. Hopefully her dad wouldn’t realize what she was thinking.
Perhaps one of the fishes had told him already?

What a risk - to end in the net of a fisherman!

“A Strange Catch” 1920

She was warned so many times - but her curiosity had won.

All went well. “And oh! - what beauty I have seen!”

After she reached her little undersea cave she struggled with herself. Worries took hold of her.

“Am I normal?” she thought. “Why did this happen to me?”

Her mind was torn between thinking of doing something forbidden and the thrill she got from that very moment she saw the sky and the stars for the first time in her life.
The stars so hard and bright
Bite holes in the sky at night

I’m torn to know where I belong
To leave the sea seems mad and wrong

I’m torn to know where I belong
To leave the sea seems mad and wrong
Have you ever been twisted in your mind like her?

Doing something you know is forbidden?

That you know is not a good idea?

But the attraction of that thing is so big you cannot resist?

This is exactly how the Selkie’s daughter felt that moment.

She was just too curious to know what it felt like to have her feet on solid ground. To know how humans live... Perhaps she might pick something up or even find a new home to play with other children?

She knew that it was the season of giving. A legend her dad told her was about a special day in the year when kids' wishes come true and every child gets gifts. She recalled that the season was called Christmas.

So she decided to swim to the coast line.

Once she reached the coast and her fin touched the ground while her head was above the water’s surface she slipped out of her fishy robe. It was very very cold outside and after she left the water completely her feet - released for the first time of her life - had contact with snow.
Soon her eyes were comfortable looking through air instead of water. She could see houses nearby.

No, it was more the silhouette of houses and warm yellow lights from the windows.

She walked directly there, her heart beating so fast and powerfully she was afraid it would explode in her chest.

And still there was this magnetic emotion to get close to people. The closer she got to the old houses the more she felt human.

The night was clear, frosty and rich with stars.

*Starry Night Over the Rhône* (September 1888) Vincent van Gogh
Suddenly she was able to peer into a window.

The window seemed to be painted with white flowers. She could see some candles and children playing around.

There was a fireplace where coals were burning.

There was a dad sitting on a sofa with a big book in his hand.

The selkie’s daughter had seen one of these square things only once in her life. It had come down to the sea-floor in a sunken ship. Its “pages” were like layers of kelp but it turned to mush when she had touched it.

It was said that it contained powerful human magic and could tell a story without making a single sound... There was a little boy sitting on his mother’s lap quietly listening to what the father was saying as he looked closely at the marks and flat scenes on the “pages”...

She was so close to this window, that she was able to touch it. It was as clear as the shallow sea in summer yet as hard as ice. The white painted flowers on the glass disappeared and changed to water when she put her warm hand on them.

“I want to be in there as well - I want to have a home like that and someone to play with!”
Yet I shed my silky, selkie skin
Walk soft along the frozen lanes

To peer in cottage windows
At scenes through frosted panes

Archip Kuindshi, Night on the Dnieper River 1882
She pressed her nose on the glass and enjoyed the freedom inside that was all decorated with green pine branches and angels.

There was a figure in a red cloak with white trim and big black boots on a sleigh right on the fence of the window inside.

“How to get in there? Will I be welcome?” she thought.

For her it was clear.

She would not return to sea.

She would no longer be a creature of the sea.
The beauty of the season

The flicker of fire and light

Change my selkie nature

And the lure of Man draws tight

Viggo Johansen – Glade Jul 1891
After a little while staring through the glass at the warm scene inside and thinking about her next steps she recognized that her fingers were getting colder. She must do something now not to turn to ice herself!

Right in that moment the father inside the house finished his story and closed the book.

And what she recognized at that very moment made her legs feel soft.

All the power in her legs was gone in the moment she saw the cover of the book.

She could clearly see a picture of a Selkie on it and black markings. How could she know that these were words which said “Tales of Mermaids”? 
Tears appeared in her eyes. Could these children ever feel the same as her? To want to go to the sea and look for a Selkie’s daughter to play with?
Oh how foolish she has been. A voice - a whispering voice - started in her head saying:

“Go back…

go back…

go back!”

In tears she turned around. With all the power left in her legs she ran back to where she left her silver costume.

And while she was running she was aching to be back in the water. To play with the whales, to dive in the streams down to the wrecks.

But most of all she missed her home and her dad and her mom.

Surely they had discovered she had gone and were filled with worry?
Then I remember my skin and my mother’s tales

Soft, salty mists and the crack of sails

Swaying with the swell, the song of whales

And I miss my watery home …..

Edmond Dulac – The Mermaid (1908)
She was back in the sea now, feeling the currents and the movement of the tide.

The memory of her day on land had already paled.

She was so relieved to be back in the ocean, proud to be a Selkie, back with her family.

She had learned so much from her experience on land. But she knew now where she really belonged.
For I am a selkie’s daughter
A creature of the sea

When I’m in my silky, selkie skin

I live so wild and free

I live so joyful and free

I live so wild and freeeeeeeeeee!
She climbed up onto the tail fluke of a passing blue whale and stood upright, surfing beneath the sea.

She was free...