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The Little Mermaid

The status of whether a woman will hold value to a man is defined by the modifications she has done to her body for him. Andersen conveys the message of gruesome body modification through the Little Mermaid's conversion of her fish tail to legs. This is significant as it shows that change of physical appearance is important to satisfy the person whom you are interested in being with.

In the section where the Little Mermaid finally encounters the sea witch, when the most important part of the story happens, the Little Mermaid finally is getting her legs. "But mind, it will hurt you as much as if a sharp sword were thrust through you." (121), this right here is when the sea witch is explaining the cost of having legs to the Little Mermaid. As the sea witch continues to explain the consequences of wanting to turn her fish tail into legs, the Little Mermaid does not care about the pain she will have to endure with every step she takes. She is not fully understanding or acknowledging of the pain but as she thinks about being on land with the prince, it seems almost worth it all if it means being with him. With the word choice that is being presented in this single sentence it is showing how painful changing your body truly is, one might not realize it in the moment since they are focused on the reason they are wanting this change, it will later on have severe pain. The Little Mermaid is blinded by her desire to be with the prince, and even though she did not have a true encounter with him, she had convinced

herself that he was the one she was destined to be with as it was almost love at first sight for the Little Mermaid.

The sea witch continues to describe the situation to the Little Mermaid and makes it clear the downside to this deal she is making with the sea witch, “And the very day after he will have married another, your heart will break, and you will dissolve into the foam on the billows.”

(121). Despite the sea witch warning the Little Mermaid that if she does not have the prince fall in love with her, marry her, and give the Little Mermaid an immortal soul then she shall move from the Earth as another form but not one in which she will return to the sea, but instead transform into another element in this world which then eventually is an air element. Knowing this, the Little Mermaid had yet to question or even think twice about her decision but instead continued to go forth with it as it promised her she would be with the prince once more and this time for longer than just saving his life and pulling him onto shore. No matter what warnings there were to prevent and scare her from making this insane and almost impulsive change to herself, she was doing so since all the warnings led straight to the prince.

Finally, having warned the Little Mermaid the sea witch now charges her fee and this is one of the most gruesome fees to acquire legs, “Come, put out your little tongue, and let me cut it off for my fee, and you shall have the valuable potion.” (122) . With this let alone showed the determination of having legs, that having legs was her destiny in life. The sea witch had charged this fee since the Little Mermaid was already beautiful and was going to become even more breathtaking as she walked on land, so there was no need for her tongue to converse with the prince but instead her looks should be more than enough to make him fall deeply in love with her. This shows the importance of physical beauty defining whether a man will choose to have

interest in you or not. The Little Mermaid was willing to give up her voice if it meant legs, in a sense it shows she was willing to stay quiet if it meant she would be with the prince.

The Little Mermaid is one character out of many that show the importance of changing one's self for the benefit of another, and this benefit would mean having a male counterpart. Although she was warned countless times by the sea witch, the Little Mermaid did not budge one bit as she knew this was her only way of being with the prince. This sets up for how women will be portrayed in society, almost as objects in which men would have full possession over but were only picked because of their appearance. Not once did the Little Mermaid talk to the prince, he did not even know her name, and yet he learned to love her but not in the way of marriage but in a pity love that made her into one of his personal followers. It is important to recognize this as one of the messages that this story provides as it sets up a way to think, and this is being that in order for any love interest to notice or possibly even consider you, you must change your physical appearance in order to satisfy their wants rather than your own.

Work Cited

Bacchilega and Brown, *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*, Penguin Books, 2019

Andersen, Hans Christian, *The Little Mermaid*, 1837