

## **DUMPLING AND THE MAGIC MERMAID**

*by Holly Smale, inspired by a picture by Janisha Paravastu*

It was a hot summer day and Dumpling the unicorn was at the beach, making a sandcastle.

Or trying to, anyway.

“Oh dear,” he sighed, because every time he made a turret his big unicorn horn knocked it down again. “This isn’t as much fun as I hoped it would be.”

Then he looked up enviously to where the mermaids were all splashing about in the cool water.

“It’s getting so hot: I wish I was a mermaid today.”

Kelpie the mermaid heard Dumpling, and splashed over to the shore so she could speak to him without shouting. “I can *make* you a mermaid,” she said with a big smile. “The magic is really very easy.”

Dumpling stood up in excitement, knocking his fifth sandcastle down again. “Would you?” he shouted. “Yes please!”

“Do you have any money?” Kelpie asked.

“I do!” Dumpling said happily. “Lots and lots! As much as you want!”

He was a very rich unicorn, but not a very smart one.

“Great!” Kelpie laughed. “Go get some then.”

Dumpling went home, put as many gold coins in his mouth as he could fit and then went back to the beach. Kelpie put a big air tank on his back and a tube in his mouth, and some goggles over his head (being careful not to spike herself on his horn).

“Now follow me!” she cried, and jumped into the ocean.

Dumpling the unicorn waddled into the water with the heavy coins still in his mouth, feeling quite silly and not at all like a mermaid yet. He wondered when his bright fish tail was going to grow, and whether it would be blue and purple like Kelpie’s or green and yellow like some of the others. He wondered if he would be able to speak to fish, and surf the waves like they did.

With his legs out, hopeful Dumpling sank and sank and sank, past all the fish to where a castle was, surrounded by a circle of smiling, waving mermaids. It was a bit like his sandcastle on the beach, except a lot bigger and not so easy to knock down.

“Put the coins here!” Kelpie said, pointing to the floor of the castle. “And you’ll be a mermaid!”

Excitedly, Dumpling dropped the coins out of his mouth and waited to be a mermaid.

He waited, and waited. Then he waited a bit more.

Finally Kelpie sighed sadly. "Oh dear, it looks like it wasn't enough coins. Maybe we need some more for the magic to work."

Nodding, Dumpling swam back up the surface and put some more coins in his mouth. Then he swam back down again, and dropped them on the castle floor.

He waited a few minutes, but nothing happened.

"I think we might need more," Kelpie said, shaking her head. "It's probably because it's so hot that the magic doesn't work."

So Dumpling swam back up, got coins, and swam down. And again, and again, and again.

He still wasn't a mermaid. It was very confusing.

Finally, when there was a big pile of coins at the bottom of the castle and not very many left at home, Dumpling got a bit annoyed. "I'm not a mermaid at all," he said crossly. "What's going on?"

"Wait!" Kelpie said, thinking carefully. "Can you breathe underwater?"

Dumpling nodded.

"Can you see really well?"

Dumpling nodded again.

"Can you swim with the fish?"

Dumpling looked around, at where the pretty fish were all flicking around him in reds and golds and greens. He nodded again.

"Then you're *already* a mermaid!" Kelpie laughed, clapping her hands. "The magic has worked!"

Dumpling felt a rush of excitement. He was a mermaid! An actual real life mermaid!

It was worth *every penny!*

Delighted, Dumpling the mermaid swam back up to the beach and trotted back on to the sand. His big horn knocked over his sandcastle again. Then a fairy fluttered past, looking very pretty and happy with her silver wings.

Dumpling looked wistfully up in the air, and then at the three gold coins he had left. He was bored of being a mermaid now, and flying looked really fun.

"I've had an idea," he said, putting the coins in his mouth. "I think I'm going to be a fairy instead."

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