The Selkie Bride
as told by Bea Ferguson

Long ago, on the west coast of Scotland, a fisherman had spent all day at sea, but he had only caught a few very small fish. So as night began to fall he rowed to shore and beached his little boat.

As he walked toward his cottage across the pebbly beach, he heard beautiful voices singing a song more beautiful than any he had ever heard. He turned toward the sound and there, near the water, a dozen Selkie folk were laughing and playing and singing. The fisherman could not believe his eyes. Very few people ever saw the seal folk who now and then cast aside their skins and took on human forms to play onshore. He stood and stared but when the Selkie folk noticed him, they quickly dived into the sea, and slipping beneath the rolling waves, they disappeared.

'I must have been dreaming,' said the fisherman aloud, and again he turned toward his cottage. But something nagged at him, so he turned again, and this time he noticed something sleek and shiny lying on a rock. He walked closer, and now he saw: it was a seal skin.

'No one will ever believe I've seen the Selkies unless I show them this,' he said, and he leaned over and picked up the skin and slung it over his shoulder.

'I could make a pretty penny if I sell this', he said.

Just as he spoke, he heard footsteps close behind him and he quickly turned to look. There was an exquisitely beautiful young woman, but she was weeping so hard, it nearly caused the fisherman's heart to break.

'Beautiful lady,' he said, 'why do you cry?' She sniffed and looked into his eyes.

‘Kind sir,’ she said, choking back tears, ‘you have my sealskin. Please give it back, for I belong to the Selkies, and I cannot live under the sea without my skin.’

The fisherman could not stop staring. You see, he had fallen in love at first sight, and because he was a young man, and terribly headstrong, he thought he must keep her with him. So, he clutched the sealskin hard to his chest.

‘Dear lady,’ he said gently, ‘be my wife, for I have fallen in love with you, and without your sealskin, you'll have to live on land. I'll make you happy, I promise.’

‘Please sir,’ she cried, ‘I could never be happy on land, and my folk will be so worried. I must go home.’

But the young man was stubborn. So, he smiled as sweetly as he could, bowed his head and bent down on one knee.

‘Dear woman, I have a cozy little cottage; I'll keep you warm by the fire; I'll feed you all the fresh fish you could ever wish to eat; I promise you will live a happy life on the land. Please agree to be my bride.’

The young woman was helpless without her skin. She was trapped on the land and couldn’t get back to her home in the sea, so she took his hand and he led her home. Surely, she would manage to get her skin back from him soon, she thought.

For many weeks the fisherman kept the sealskin with him for he feared his bride-to-be would steal it and slip away. But after a while, the selkie began to settle into life on land, and when the fisherman saw this, he pushed the skin inside a crevice in the chimney. ‘She will never find it there,’ he said to

himself.

Another month went by, and they got married. They were very happy and the fisherman was kind and generous. He truly loved his wife, and he always worked hard to make her happy, although he was still very stubborn. After a while the Selkie woman grew to love her stubborn husband, and sometimes she would sing to him. Those nights he thought he was the happiest man in the world.

As the years passed, the couple had seven children, and the Selkie wife loved these lads and lassies with all her heart. Occasionally, the children would find their mother on the beach, gazing wistfully out to sea.

'Mother, why do you look so sad?' they would ask.

'Oh, I've only been dreaming too long,' she would say and then she would shake her head and kiss their foreheads.

One day the fisherman and the three eldest children went out in their boat to catch fish. The next three walked to the village to buy some bread and milk and the mother and her youngest son stayed home alone.

Now the mother looked out the window and watched the waves crashing onshore. Far in the distance she noticed, on the slick, black rocks, a band of seals playing and barking. She sighed deeply, and her eyes filled with tears. Her youngest son ran to her side.

'Mother, what's wrong?' he asked. 'Whenever you look out to sea, you grow so sad.' Without thinking she turned and said,

'I'm sad because I was born in the sea. It's the home to which I never can return because your father has hidden my sealskin.'

Now the boy, like all children in Scotland, had heard tales of the Selkie folk, so right away he knew that's what his mother must be. He ran to the fireplace, reached up and pulled the sealskin from its hiding place and held it out to his mother.

'Is this it?' he asked.
'How did you find it?' she asked, astonished at the sight of her skin.

'One day I was here alone with father,' said the boy, 'and he took this from its hiding place and stared at it. He said it was special, and now I understand what it is.'

The woman embraced the sealskin, and then she reached for her child and embraced him.

'My darling,' she whispered, 'I will always love you,' and then, clasping the sealskin to her heart, she ran outside and down to the sea. She slipped into her skin and dived into the water.

Soon after that, the fisherman and his children were heading home, and they rowed past a group of seals. The fisherman noticed a sleek young seal gazing at the boat, a strange expression on her face and then he heard that seal cry, a plaintive sound as she disappeared under the water.

When the fisherman arrived home, his youngest son told him what had happened, and he felt his heart break in two. But he understood that his son was a loving boy who was braver and more generous than he himself had ever been.

The fisherman and the children missed the Selkie Woman for the rest of their lives, but they knew that she was back and happy in the world where she belonged. But after that time, a seal would often spend ages swimming

close to the shore, and they never went hungry for the fisherman's net was always full of large, gleaming fish.