



## The Mermaid and the Rock

Once upon a time—and that was a long time ago—there was a little village close to the sea, and at the same time, positioned at the mouth of a river. A river with a shallow bed, made out of different sized sharp, broken rocks. Nobody could walk the river because of the stones. Nobody could go by boat because of the shallowness. Nobody could swim the river because at that time swimming was thought of as bad luck. Instead the little village built two small bridges which they could close and dismantle easily, and so in this way the little village was rather protected.

The little village was called “Brokenstone” by the neighbours, and “Broken” by the villagers themselves, due to the stones, and because they, the villagers, believed that they too were also broken pieces of one big stone.

Around the village there were some farms and lots of woods to provide food and heat, and everything else that could not be found or produced in the village. In all, they had everything what they needed, even a blacksmith, a carpenter and some fishermen. Everybody found something which one was skilled for. Even the women, because it was at a time when women were still allowed to run a business on their own. Of course every single one of the villagers had to work hard and many hours a day, as it was necessary at that time. Even the very young and the very old helped what they could. Most of the year it was a cold and snowy place. But during summer the sun was shining every day, and the nights were short.

Self-sufficient and independent of their surroundings, the little village was well protected so greedy travellers or neighbours couldn’t steal easily. Most of the time the little village was in balance. Naturally they had their little disagreements about rules for living, or who was to become a new citizen, if a

position or a place became vacant. And they had, from time to time, somebody who didn't know what belonged to him/her or the neighbour. For occasions when a disagreement occurred, they had established a procedure that was quite effective. They called in a meeting of all villagers, including the very old and the very young. They called it the "stone-meeting" for they gathered near the harbour, where the river joined the sea, and lots of rocks were scattered around to be used as seats. They talked about the matter of disagreement until everybody agreed, or got terribly bored, and the matter became tolerable and less urgent.

For years it was a kind of peaceful community, closed to outsiders, and content with the way of their life. The little village was lucky to experience no heavy accidents, no big quarrels, no fishermen (or -women) gone missing on sea, and the deadly diseases of that time passed by the village without taking somebody with them. They had their celebrations like the ice melting in spring, or the turning points of the sun during the year, and more. They cared for the young ones. Whoever felt like sharing a skill taught that to the children or they took turns to talk with them. They cared for the old people who couldn't manage their chores any more. They fed them and took them to attend celebrations or a village decision meeting (stone-meeting). And everybody with a pain, be it an injury of the body, hurt feelings or violated rights would find people who listened and helped them find a solution.

So the village was a peaceful place to be, and in general the villagers were happy.

But there came a day when in the house of the fisherwoman, a little girl was born. The fisherwoman was slender-built, with long dark hair that she kept secured in a knot at the back of her head. The knot she used was something between a Granny knot and a bowline, and was a riddle to her peers. They couldn't figure out at all how she did it. At sea or in an emergency, she was known to use this very long braid as if it was a rope. In later years, not long after she died, people started to describe distances as so and so number of knots, in reference to her knowledge concerning all matters of the sea. Often the fisherwoman was away for weeks and months out at sea and people were going on about whether she was actually leading a second life somewhere else. So when it started to show that she was *with the mermaid*—as it was called in those days when a woman got pregnant, and no man was living with her—people got nervous.

In the cases of children where the father was unknown, it was said that the mermaid protected these children, but in return asked for a substitute. The mermaid was known to grab someone close to the shore, or from another boat, indeed sometimes a whole boat. As long as nobody had disappeared in the sea, one had to watch out closely for people trying to snatch away the new one and give it back to the mermaid so that they would be safe again. So the cautious fisherwoman took her little girl everywhere she went, even out to sea while fishing. And the little girl loved it! First she crawled over

deck, later she learned to walk on a heaving boat in rough seas. Whenever she came into danger of rolling overboard, or stumble into the water, out of nowhere appeared a sudden wave, levelling the boat in the water so that she was safe again.

Since the day the little girl was born nothing seriously bad did happen to any of the villagers, but with the years going by, the fear of something bad happening to the villagers began to rise. Life in the village was shadowed by foreboding, and they took great care to not risk anything that would give the mermaid a chance to snatch one of them. Some even thought of leaving the village. But as the situation presented itself to them, the position of the fishermen and -women was the only position that allowed one to freely leave the village and come back again. Every so often—so it was told—somebody left out of curiosity, or for other reasons, but they didn't come back. Or if they did, they were not allowed to enter the village again. You had to stay for good, or leave for the outside world. That was one rule that was not spoken out loud but acted on.

So the change in the village atmosphere was felt by everybody. The reasons were talked about often and vehemently. The voices to evict the fisherwoman together with her daughter became louder. No wonder that these two stayed longer and longer out at sea fishing, living on the boat, visiting faraway harbours while selling their catch, but still feeling a little bit homesick. When it got stronger, the homesickness, they went back to the little village for some days. Most people didn't like to see them return, but there were still some friends left who were happy to have them back again.

Over the years the social atmosphere in the village became unbalanced without the source being obvious. It did not help that the boat of the fisherwoman was bigger than the other boats, and the only one that was suitable to fish the deep sea. If one listened carefully it was possible to detect a particular woman's voice behind the nagging. She was very busy spreading rumors in the form of twisted questions, or spreading lies about something she claimed to have seen. She was a big woman with thin yellow hair of average length. Though full in size around her middle, she was not generous in any other way. She was married to the blacksmith who happened to be rejected by the fisherwoman in his youth.

In the beginning people stood up in defence of the fisherwoman. But with years of constantly being talked down in argument, especially in absence of the fisherwoman, they got tired of the whole affair and just walked away. Some of them even started to blame the fisherwoman and her daughter for causing so much stress in the community. And the wife of the blacksmith spread her oral poison carefully, and without tiring. She also got help in her meddling from the carpenter, who thought of himself very highly and believed himself to be an important man, more wise than the average villager.

He treated everybody who crossed his path with his opinions, which in itself is not bad, though unfortunately his long speeches were lacking in meaning and tended to be repetitive.

Eventually the visits of the fisherwoman and her daughter became less and less frequent. But when they came, they brought gifts for their friends, or things that were needed for the village in general. People were grateful at first.

However, the tension became too much, and the villagers called a stone-meeting to bring them all together. The blacksmith's wife was doing her whispering behind the scene, and got the ambitious carpenter to repeat her words. After hours of blaming and preaching, preaching and blaming, some of the villagers left tired of the discussion, leaving the rest to decide that they had to do something to remove the threat—the fisherwoman and her daughter—from the village for good. They came up with a vicious plan. The next time the fisherwoman would visit the village, they would ask her to bring some things back for them. The fisherwoman according to her nature kindly would react to this request, and the plan made by the scheming villagers was to help her carry the boxes on board, and tie them down. It was a dreadful scheme. When the ship would be far out on the sea, the contents of the box would become known. A candle which had been placed and lit inside one of the boxes would have by that time burned down, ignited the box in flames, set fire to the wooden beams of the cargo hold, and sank the boat.

And so it was done. The fisherwoman took the boxes, not without suspicion it must be said, but she thought the villagers planned to rob her when she returned back with the goods. Her daughter who had just turned 6 years old warned her, but was not taken seriously. Though her name was Kivi she was mostly referred to as “the little one” or “the little girl”, so as to not increase the knowledge and threat the villagers were already exerting.

When the fisherwoman and her daughter Kivi started to smell the smoke coming from the boxes aflame, they were already too far out to sea to swim ashore. They stood no chance to douse the fire, and eventually the boat was filling up with water and started to sink. The boat was for sure going down to the bottom of the sea, and in these short seconds the fisherwoman called out for help, to the mermaid. And the mermaid did help.

With extraordinary power, the fisherwoman was thrown out of the water towards the little village. She missed the harbour narrowly, only just. But the power of the mermaid had turned her into a huge rock which not only blocked the harbour forever, but threw a wave over the village destroying most of the houses, before it merged into the river, and flowed back out to sea.

The wave's decreased force was still strong enough however to carry the little girl Kivi on the wooden plank she clung onto once the boat went down. She was picked up later by a friendly foreign fisherman. He took her home to his wife, and helped by raising her with his children. But the girl could not forget what happened. She stayed with her foster family for some years until she had learned as much as possible from them. She thought about it at length, and decided to search for the mermaid which saved her, for nobody had seen it since the day the fisherwoman turned into the rock. One night, actually a night close to the anniversary of the sinking, the girl went out into the sea and disappeared. She left a note with a drawing so her new family would know what she had decided, and that they should not search for her.

The girl as the new mermaid could not stop crying. She cried and cried and cried until the place of the village, and the huge stone that blocked the harbour was covered with water. By then the village was abandoned, and the villagers who had survived the huge wave went in different directions to live all over the country. None of them ever talked about what caused the end of their village. Although the story was lost quite soon, a deep and sometimes ruthless longing remained for the place where the little village once was, close to the sea, and at the same time, positioned at the mouth of a river.

But the girl who became the new mermaid did not forget one second of it. The land where the village once was, stayed unoccupied for hundreds of years. But slowly the land did rise, and the stone—no longer under water—became to lay in a forest, near the beach. The new mermaid still watched the place. Sometimes you could see a foggy shape swimming near the shore, looking out of the water. Most people would not realize they saw the new mermaid because it looks from afar a little bit like a goose. But if you listen carefully you'll hear that it is whispering the spell it put on the land and the shore: "If ever someone lights a deep fire, earth and sea will join their powers again and blow up together."

And if after that, it didn't die, it will live forever.

The END

This was the end of the story of the Mermaid and the Rock. That is until 2007. Now it starts all over again.

Once upon a time there was a small place located near a tongue of land, a peninsula which reaches into the Bothnian Gulf in the Northern part of the Baltic Sea, surrounded by a beautiful magical shore.

Sand beaches alternate with smooth rocks and green reeds, framing birches, mountain ashes, berries and grass in which live birds, ticks and mosquitoes. And right in the middle of the forest, there lies a huge rock surrounded by trees, grass and wet land.

Suddenly, from all over the country, energy companies join their powers to invade the peninsula. Within each company you could find someone with an ancient tie to Broken, the little village. Today they have no knowledge where their urge to invade especially this peninsula stems from. But we know.

The story will be continued...

... until near the rock an invisible glow radiates far over land and sea and the workers and everyone else has to leave – FOR EVER.

Note: This story was told to me during a long evening in front of an open fireplace with unobstructed view out over the sea in August 2013 by A. Z. who wants to stay anonymous.

