**Version 23**

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| **Ariel** | **Triton** | **Eric** | **Scuttle** | **Ursula** | **Ursula (transformed)** |
| they | he | he | they | he | they |

Far beneath the ocean waves, in the realm of the merpeople, lived a curious young merperson named Ariel. Their home was an undersea palace. Although it was quite magnificent, Ariel never spent time there. They preferred to go exploring with their little friend Flounder, the fish.

Ariel loved to collect objects from the world above the sea. The Little Merperson and Flounder would swim in and out of sunken ships, picking up whatever they found interesting.

Ariel’s father, King Triton, ruled the undersea kingdom. He was very proud of Ariel’s many gifts, especially their beautiful singing voice. He had arranged to give a special concert to show his child’s wonderful talent to all the merfolk.

Ariel’s siblings sang to begin the concert. Then they sang a special song to introduce Ariel.

But Ariel wasn’t there!

Triton was not pleased. How could Ariel have forgotten to show up for their own debut?

As usual, Ariel was off exploring. They had found a sunken ship to play in and had forgotten all about the concert. By the time they returned home, the guests had left. Triton was so angry that he ordered Sebastian, a crab who was his court composer, to follow Ariel and keep them out of trouble.

Later that day, Ariel slipped away again, with Sebastian following close behind. They hadn’t gone far when a huge shadow darkened the waters above.

“It’s a ship!” Ariel gasped with delight.

Ariel swam to the surface to get a closer look. There were humans on board! One of them was very handsome. Ariel heard the others call him Prince Eric.

But as Ariel watched, a sudden storm took them all by surprise. To their horror, the ship began to sink. Most of the people on board were able to climb safely into a lifeboat. But the handsome young prince was hit by a falling spar and thrown into the churning water.

Ariel knew that humans could not live under the sea. They had to save the unconscious prince. There was no time to lose!

Ariel darted through the waves to the prince as their friend, Scuttle, watched anxiously.

Using all the strength Ariel had, they dragged the young prince to shore. Scuttle was waiting for them. The silly bird put his ear close to Eric’s boot!

“Sorry, Ariel, I can’t make out a heartbeat,” said Scuttle.

Ariel placed their head on the prince’s chest.

“Oh, he is breathing, Scuttle!” they cried.

Ariel was so happy that they began to sing to the prince. At the sound of Ariel’s lovely voice, Eric’s eyelids began to flutter.

“He’s going to be all right,” Ariel said excitedly. “Now I’d better get back before Father finds out I’ve left.”

When the prince opened his eyes, all he saw was his faithful dog, Max, running up to him.

Ariel returned home, but couldn’t forget the human prince. As they sat thinking about him, two evil eels named Flotsam and Jetsam watched Ariel with their cunning eyes.

“Come with us,” they coaxed sweetly. “We know someone who can help you.”

Ariel followed the slippery eels. Before they knew it, they were inside the deep, dark cave of Ursula, the Sea Witch!

Ursula knew how much Ariel missed Eric. She told the young merperson that she could help them visit him – for a price!

“I will make you human so you can visit the young man,” Ursula said. “But you must get him to fall in love and kiss you before the sun sets on the third day. If you fail, you will turn back into a merperson and return to the sea as my slave!”

Then Ursula laughed wickedly. “Oh, and one other thing. You must leave your voice with me!”

Poor Ariel! They would have done anything to see the young prince again. So they signed the agreement! Then the evil witch locked Ariel’s beautiful voice inside a magic seashell that she wore around her neck.

Flounder and Sebastian watched in amazement as Ursula’s magic powers changed Ariel into a human. Suddenly Ariel could no longer live underwater. Luckily, Ariel’s two friends rushed them to the surface so they could breathe.

Ursula cackled with glee. She intended to make sure Ariel did not get their kiss!

Once Ariel was safe on the beach, Scuttle said, “There’s something different about you, Ariel. I just can’t put my foot on it.”

Ariel showed him their two legs. They wanted to tell Scuttle about what had happened. But since Ursula had taken Ariel’s voice, Sebastian had to explain.

When Ariel tried to stand, they found that balancing on their new legs was harder than it looked. “You can do it,” said Scuttle. “Just watch me.”

Sebastian shook his head in disbelief. “How am I going to tell the king about this?” he wondered.

Meanwhile, Eric had not forgotten about the mystery person who had saved his life. Although he hadn’t seen their face, he had fallen in love with the wonderful voice he heard. Eric would have given his entire kingdom to find that person! Then, as he was walking with Max, he saw Ariel on the beach.

“Have we met before?” Eric asked, his heart skipping a beat. But his hopes were soon dashed when he found that Ariel could not speak. *They can’t be the one*, he thought.

Still, the prince felt sorry for Ariel, so he brought them to his castle. His servants fed Ariel and gave them nice clothes to wear.

The next day, the prince took Ariel for a coach ride through his kingdom. “They’re so fun to spend time with,” Eric said to himself. “If only this were the person I’ve been searching for!”

The next day, the prince took Ariel for a boat ride.

*There isn’t much time*, thought Ariel. *If he doesn’t kiss me soon, I will become Ursula’s slave*.

Although Ariel didn’t know it, the prince was falling in love and was just about to lean forward for a kiss.

But Flotsam and Jetsam had been watching them. They tipped the boat over and sent the young couple tumbling into the water before they could kiss!

Ursula had been watching the couple in her magic bubble. She decided to trick Eric so he would never kiss Ariel. The witch transformed herself into a beautiful girl.

With Ariel’s voice locked inside the seashell necklace, Ursula would sound just like Eric’s true love!

The following day, as Ursula walked along the beach, the sound of Ariel’s beautiful voice filled the air. Eric could hardly believe his ears! His savior had finally come back to him!

Quickly, the Sea Witch put a spell on Eric, and he decided to marry her right away.

Ursula’s nasty trick had worked. She and Eric were to be married on his ship that very day!

In her cabin, Ursula laughed as she looked at her true reflection in the mirror. Luckily, Scuttle saw Ursula’s real reflection, too.

Scuttle and Flounder rushed off to find Ariel and tell them all about the Sea Witch’s latest trick.

“Don’t worry, Ariel. We’ll help you!” said Scuttle, as Flounder pulled them out to the ship. Then Scuttle flew to the ship.

With the help of sea lions, pelicans, and other birds, Scuttle stopped the wedding. As Ariel climbed over the railing, the birds tore at Ursula’s clothing and pulled her hair. The seashell fell from Ursula’s neck. When it broke, Ariel’s voice returned to its rightful owner instantly. Ariel called out to warn the prince.

Then Eric knew he had been tricked. But time had run out. The sun had started to set, and Ariel was already turning back into a merperson.

“You belong to me now!” gloated Ursula, who had turned back into her mean, ugly self. She grabbed Ariel and slithered into the sea.

But Eric was not about to let Ariel slip away this time! Grabbing a harpoon, he dived into the sea and hurled it at the Sea Witch!

That made Ursula angrier than ever! She transformed herself into a huge monster and tried to crush poor Ariel and the prince with her black tentacles.

Eric and the Little Merperson clung to each other, trying to protect each other from the witch’s fury.

Eric knew he had to do something, and fast! Climbing aboard a ship that Ursula’s angry thrashing had raised from the bottom of the sea, he grabbed the wheel. He aimed the ship’s prow at Ursula and sailed full speed ahead! As the boat struck the witch, she let out a terrible scream. Then she was gone.

Everyone was glad the Sea Witch was gone, but Ariel was still unhappy. Even Triton could see that Ariel was truly in love. So, using his magic powers, he granted Ariel their dearest wish – he made them human again.

Triton watched as Eric and Ariel walked back to the castle.

“I’m going to miss Ariel,” King Triton said to Sebastian, “but I know they’ll be happy.”

Soon after that, Eric and Ariel were married in a splendid shipboard wedding with all the merpeople looking on. And just as King Triton had predicted, they lived happily ever after!