

The Little Mermaid: a small scale ballet

Synopsis

Based on the Hans Christian Andersen's 1836 short story The Little Mermaid

Act One

Scene One ~ Mermaid Family Home, Mandurah

The ballet opens in a working-class family home in the underwater suburb of Mandurah, the day before The Little Mermaid's birthday. He and his sibling, The Middle Mermaid, tease each other about this excitedly until their single mother, The Sea Queen, unfairly punishes them after The Little Mermaid accidentally knocks over their breakfast.

When he is alone, The Little Mermaid indulges in a secret infatuation with a local human celebrity – a prolific young home-owner in the Western suburbs, dubbed "The Prince" by local newspapers. He is confused by his feelings, and wonders whether the surface is a more accepting place for queer love.

The Little Mermaid is excited to learn that he will be allowed to join his mother and sibling on land for the first time now that he is old enough. The Sea Queen gives him specific instructions on how to walk and what to wear in order for their family to look good in the city.

Scene Two ~ Surface, Elizabeth Quay

On the surface, The Little Mermaid wanders out alone and runs into a yacht belonging to the object of his affection, The Prince, and the two share an immediate connection.

The Prince is also celebrating his birthday with two friends, The Captain and The Theologian. He is disillusioned by the festivity and excited by the genuine connection he experiences with The Little Mermaid. The meeting is interrupted by a storm which damages the yacht and throws The Prince into the ocean.

The Little Mermaid is unbothered by the rough sea because he lives in the ocean. He carries the Prince safely to the shore where he notices his feelings again, and leaves two pearls for the Prince as an anonymous gift.

The Captain and Theologian find the Prince, and he and Theologian both discover one of the pearls and are confused about their origins.

Scene Three ~ Mermaid Family Home, Mandurah

Back underwater, The Sea Queen is irate that The Little Mermaid has not come home. When he arrives, he tells his family about his adventures finding a group of people he felt connected to, but his mother decides that for making them wait, she and The Middle Mermaid will celebrate his birthday without him, much to The Middle Mermaid's dismay.

Scene Four ~ Near Surface, Perth Underwater Train Station

Feeling ignored, The Little Mermaid decides to run away from home and goes back to the surface to pursue his connection with The Prince. He finds the Prince's watch on the sea floor and picks it up, planning to return it. In an attempt to fit in with the humans and conform to the expectations of their world, he code-switches his rattier clothes, removes his gills, and leaves his walker at a streetlight.

Act Two

Scene One ~ Wine Store in Claremont & Prince's House, Western Suburbs

In the human world, The Little Mermaid comes across a Claremont wine store, which he enters thinking he might learn more about The Prince's world, but is shocked to learn how expensive everything is. The Prince, The Captain, and The Theologian unexpectedly enter the store and reminisce about their childhood together.

The Little Mermaid returns the Prince's watch, which endears him to the group and the Prince invites him to join them at the Prince's house. Following energetic dances shared by the Captain and Theologian, the Little Mermaid bravely shares a slower and more soulful dance, which strikes a vulnerable chord in the Prince. They then learn that the thunderstruck yacht has been repaired, decide to go back to it and the beach.

Scene Two ~ Sea Shore, Cottesloe Beach

While there, the Captain homophobically makes fun of the Prince's walk, and the Prince tells the Captain to leave him alone. The Prince then tells the Little Mermaid that he's struggling with thinking about the person who saved him from drowning and left the pearl - feeling a genuine connection with this person but not knowing who they are. The Little Mermaid tries to figure out how to share his feelings with the Prince - the two share a dance, but this is cut short when the Prince feels rejected and argues about the Little Mermaid's boundaries. The scene cuts back to when the Little Mermaid is thinking about what to do - the romantic then disrespectful event all having been an anxious daydream in the Little Mermaid's head.

The Theologian and the Captain re-enter with the Prince's birthday presents, and the Theologian gives the Prince a pair of pearl cufflinks, which remind the Prince of his pearl again. Hearing this, The Theologian shows him a matching pearl, revealing that she was the one who found him on the beach.

Believing her to be the one who saved him and to whom he feels so cared by, the Prince proposes - shocking and concerning the Little Mermaid. The humans celebrate on the yacht, when The Sea Queen arrives and asks The Little Mermaid to kill the Prince to bring his money back to his mother and family, and gives him a knife. The Little Mermaid refuses and tells her to leave.

The human friends fall asleep on the boat, but after waking up and seeing the Theologian and Prince sleeping close together, the Little Mermaid takes out the knife and feels confused about whether the Prince actually liked him or not. Wrestling with his feelings in an unfamiliar setting he chose to assimilate to, he realises what he needs most is to accept his differences, and throwing the knife into the sea before dancing in celebration of his queerness. In the process, he accidentally falls in too and cannot breathe underwater without his gills.

The humans wake up and see him struggling, but the Prince refuses to help - wanting to distance from his own feelings for The Little Mermaid so close to his engagement, and the Captain follows suit and turns his back while the Little Mermaid struggles to be heard. The Theologian feels conflicted between wanting to help and wanting to maintain the Prince's comfort and her own status quo with him. Eventually she decides to throw the Little Mermaid a rope, but he is already gone. Believing him to be dead, the Theologian gets angry at her friends for their immorality, then questions her own ties to a group of people who have never truly respected her. She sheds the conformity she has outgrown, and throws her engagement ring into the sea.

Scene Three ~ Near Surface, Perth Underwater Train Station

Back under water, the Middle Mermaid finds a knife on the sea floor and recognises it from their family home. They confront the Sea Queen about why it was there and learn that she has tried to get the Little Mermaid to murder someone with it. Upset by this, the Middle Mermaid finally asserts herself to their mother and decides to leave home.

On their way, the Middle Mermaid runs into the Little Mermaid who is exhausted and heartbroken after his ordeal on the surface. The two talk and the Middle Mermaid gives him a birthday present - a rainbow necklace, implying that they accept him for his sexuality and whoever he wants to be, on land or under water. Though the Little Mermaid rejects their kindness at first, the siblings connect over their shared experiences and the Little Mermaid gives the Middle Mermaid money he stole from the Prince to help them start their new life.

Bolstered by each other's support, the siblings go their separate ways. The Little Mermaid discovers a wheelchair which he uses to replace his walker, eventually untying his long hair and setting out on a new path.

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