

## Ruben and His Selkie-Wife

### NOTES

In a small seaside village lived a man named Ruben. He was a good man, but somewhat hard-hearted, and he had not yet married. Although many of the village women showed interest in him, Ruben opted to live alone and go about his sea-faring business. One day as he was returning from his boat, he spotted four beautiful creatures frolicking on the rocks. As he walked toward them, he realized they had human forms, but of a greater beauty than he had ever seen. When the creatures saw Ruben approaching, they scattered and slipped into smooth sealskins and retreated into the ocean.

One of the creatures, however, was not quick enough and had forgotten her sealskin, which lay upon the rock. Ruben took the skin and waited for the beautiful creature to emerge from the water to retrieve it. When she did, Ruben was entranced by her large black eyes and smooth skin. He refused to return her skin to her, as he had fallen in love and wanted to marry this beautiful creature.

The woman-creature, a selkie she was called, married Ruben, and remained reasonably happy. However, she could not help but dream of returning to the sea in her sealskin. Over many years, she gave birth to seven children, who grew up healthy and robust in the salty air and sun-filled skies. One day, while Ruben was out fishing with the four boys, the smallest girl-child found her mother searching through the house. She asked what her mother was looking for, and the woman-creature lied and said she was looking for some fabric she had lost. The girl-child told her of a deep-gray fabric she had seen her father fondling the day before, and she showed her mother where he had hidden it.

The woman-creature, overjoyed, followed her daughter to the cupboard and took hold of her long-lost sealskin. She embraced her daughter, and fared her well as she skipped to the sea-edge. She let out a cry of happiness as she slipped into her sealskin and leapt into the sea that had been her home all along. As she paddled out into the water, she passed her husband and their children returning from their fishing trip. Ruben gasped as he spotted his wife. The woman-creature, now a true selkie once again, raised her smooth head above the waves, looked at Ruben with her round black eyes, and dove under the water.

*Irish folktale*

## Questions

- Why does King Maghan marry Sogolon?
- Why does Sassouma place a curse on Sogolon's offspring?
- Describe Sundiata's condition at birth.
- What mistake does King Sumanguru make based on Sundiata's physical abilities?
- When the king gives Sundiata a griot, what is Sundiata finally able to do?
- Describe Sundiata's physical transformation.
- How was Sundiata's outward appearance as a child deceiving?