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Once upon a time, when wishing still mattered, a princess lived in a land neither here nor there. Her eyes sparkled like sun on the water, a smile played upon her lips, and her hair flowed in waves all the way to her feet. She was the youngest of the king's thirteen daughters.

In that land, from time immemorial, all princesses had extraordinary singing voices which emerged in their throats on the day they turned sixteen. Each voice was unique, each incredibly beautiful. One voice glistened like morning dew, another bloomed like a scarlet poppy, still another pattered like a rainy afternoon, and one rang as deep as midnight in a secret garden. On the day her voice emerged, each princess

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sang in public for the first time to share her gift, and suitors came from far and wide to hear her song and to extend offers of marriage.

The first twelve princesses had made their debuts and had charmed all who were lucky enough to hear them. Each had been chosen by a noble prince whose love she had awakened by the power and beauty of her singing.

And so, on the day she turned sixteen, the thirteenth princess stood before her suitors, who were stunned by her tremendous beauty and eager to hear what wondrous voice she would bring forth. The king and queen leaned forward upon their thrones. All the court stood in anticipation. Like her sisters before her, the princess opened her mouth, as curious as the audience to know what extraordinary song she would sing, but alas, she was unable to produce even one note. She blushed, cleared her throat, and tried again. Nothing.

The king and queen gazed at each other in consternation, and the rest of the court stared at their feet in an agony of embarrassment. A princess without a singing voice! Why, that was like a morning without a sun or a night without a moon! The

princess was overcome by great shame. Her tender dreams of love and marriage to a noble prince fled from her heart, and she felt herself grow deathly cold. The suitors began to edge away. Obviously, the unlucky maiden was cursed. The king and queen must have offended some powerful fairy or great wizard, and the princess had been punished for their wrongdoing, as often happens.

The palace hall emptied, and she was left standing alone, unchosen.

The royal physician was called at once. He could find nothing wrong with the princess—she was in perfect health—and he was mystified. At last he suggested, rather timidly, that perhaps she had been enchanted. She was, after all, the thirteenth princess, and everyone knew how unfortunate that number could be.

The king sent for the greatest wizards and fairies in the realm for help with the disenchanting. The princess swallowed elixir after elixir, rubbed powdered butterfly wings upon her throat, and slept with daffodils beneath her pillow, but still she was unable to sing a note.

A year passed. Every morning with great faith

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and terrible longing, the princess opened her mouth to sing, but to no avail. Her voice remained locked inside of her like a treasure in a chest without a key.

Finally, the king offered half of his kingdom and the princess's hand to the man who could disenchant her, but not one suitor presented himself. The king and queen were heartbroken for their youngest daughter, but they were grateful that she would neither sleep for a hundred years nor be transformed into an animal, as often happens to enchanted princesses. Not being able to sing was sorrowful, but at least she remained awake and human.

But the princess could not accept this strange affliction. She wanted nothing more than to marry a handsome prince whom she had charmed by the power and beauty of her song. She would have been far happier to sleep a hundred years or be turned into a wild animal! At least those enchantments had remedies. After a certain time, an eager prince would ride through the hedge of briar roses and wake the princess, or an unwilling prince would cut off the head and paws of a fox, which would instantly transform into a princess. Difficult, yes, but not impossible, as her case seemed to be.

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To make matters worse, one terrible day the princess overheard the ladies of the court speculating that perhaps something was wrong with her heart, for it was common knowledge that singing came from the heart. “A princess without a heart is a frightening thing,” one of the ladies said, and they all shivered. “Terribly unnatural!” said another. This was more than the princess could bear.

“Could it be that I have no heart?” she asked herself. And she wept to think of her emptiness and wondered why she had been punished so.

That night, after one final, fruitless attempt to sing, the princess realized that she no longer wished to live in a land where she would never be loved but only pitied or feared. She wrapped herself in a cloak and stole away from the castle.