



ANEMONE & CORALINE

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

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TWO very pretty mermaids sat side by side on a rocky seat in the Royal Seaweed Park of Ultramarine. There was not a dry spot to be found anywhere, either in the town itself or in the pleasure grounds which surrounded it; for Ultramarine lies at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, at its deepest part. It is, therefore, a very damp and chilly place for ordinary people, although the mermaids and mermen who live in the town and its suburbs enjoy the very best of health.

One of the mermaids already mentioned was reading a waterproof novel, bound in sharkskin, and entitled "Miss Turbot's Tail." Her companion was more industriously engaged in the manufacture of a fancy seaweed basket for sale at a charity bazaar, which was shortly to be held in the Town Hall.

"Dear me!" sighed the first mermaid, looking up from her book, and yawning so widely that a baby shrimp darted into her mouth ere she could place her tiny white hand before it. "Dear me! What a stupidly dull town this is, to be sure."

The other mermaid whisked her tail with a quick gesture of disapproval.

"I am sure it's a very pretty place, Coraline, dear," she said gently. "The seaweed forests are lovely; and the streets are of beautifully firm sand, which is much cleaner

and healthier than deep sea mud. What else do you wish for?"

"Life, bustle, excitement!" was the impatient reply. "Something to look at beyond a stupid forest of pink seaweed and a sandy street without a single shop in it; something to wear besides a shell necklet and a mother-of-pearl locket."

"You are forgetting your engagement ring, Coraline," said the other. "You are far better off for clothing than I am, for I haven't even a shell necklet!"

"Clothing!" snapped Coraline. "I don't call rings, and necklets, and locket clothing! I mean mantles, and hats, and smart jackets, such as are worn by the air-breathing people, and by a small proportion of our own folks in the larger towns of the Submarine. Hats and jackets are often to be found in the cabins of sunken wrecks, Anemone."

The little sea lady addressed as Anemone laughed merrily.

"I once saw a mermaid dressed in a waterproof cloak and a bonnet, and she looked a perfect fright!" she remarked. "And the silly little merman who accompanied her wore a tall black hat almost as big as his head, and a long coat which reached from his shoulders right down to his tail; each of them carried a tiny black tent, which they held over their heads, in



ONE OF THE MERMAIDS WAS READING A WATERPROOF NOVEL, BOUND IN SHARKSKIN.

exactly the same manner as the land folk do when it rains. It was really one of the funniest sights in the world! I'm sure your sweetheart, Mr. Sea Kale, wouldn't care to see his lady love dressed up in that hideous fashion, Coraline."

"How do *you* know what Sea Kale likes, or what he doesn't like?" demanded Coraline, angrily.

Anemone bent her head still lower over her seaweed basket.

"You forget that he loved *me* once," she said, with a pitiful shake in her voice. "But that was long ago," she added, more firmly, "before he met you."

Coraline laughed cruelly.

"You are such a simple little thing," she remarked, rather contemptuously. "You are actually content to live in a middle-class cave, and to spend your time in making silly seaweed baskets for poor people, instead of trying to improve your manners and expanding your mind by means of travel, as I have done. I don't think you've ever swum more than twenty knots away from Ultramarine in your life!" she concluded, scornfully.

"Well, that's a pretty long swim for a maiden, isn't it?" asked Anemone, innocently.

"A pretty long swim, indeed!" repeated the other, jeeringly. "Why I swam round to the Mediterranean last summer and watched the people bathing in the shallow water of the bays. It was one of the funniest sights I ever witnessed. The ladies screamed loudly as soon as their little white feet touched the water, and the gentlemen dived down a few feet into the sea, and returned to the surface gasping like so many dying salmon! Yet all the bathers pretended that they were enjoying themselves!"

"What else did you see, Coraline?" asked Anemone, who was greatly interested in the strange manners and customs of the land folk.

"I peeped out into the daylight near one of the piers, and saw no less than fifty solemn-looking creatures all standing in a row, with long lines in their hands. They were actually trying to catch fish, Anemone! I saw a poor little infant whiting swallow the worm which was tied on the submerged end of one of the lines, and in another moment

he was jerked into daylight, and lay gasping and struggling on the pier. Then all the other fishermen gathered around the tiny fish, and made as much fuss as if they had landed a sea serpent! So while all this excitement and commotion was going on above, I dived down to the sandy bottom and tied every one of their fifty fishing-lines together!"

"What happened then?" asked Anemone, breathlessly.

"I left the spot as quickly as possible after I had seen a great crowd of angry fishermen struggling with a hundred fathoms of tangled cord, and calling each other the most horrible names I've ever heard," replied Coraline, with a merry laugh. "On the same day I visited one of the Mediterranean deep-sea bazaars, and bought myself a marine bicycle, with two giant oyster shells for wheels. It is really a beautiful machine, Anemone, with best conger eel tyres, and a framework of real Whitby jet. But I must say good-bye now," she concluded, hastily. "I promised to meet Sea Kale at five o'clock, and he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

So Coraline swam rapidly away in the direction of the Sea-weed Forest, and little Anemone returned home to one of the smallest caves of Ultramarine.

But although Anemone's cavern was very tiny, it was prettily furnished with a mother-of-pearl table and two chairs of the finest pink coral. A beautiful harp, which had been recovered from a sunken wreck years ago, stood in the corner; and on this instrument Anemone was wont to play the accompaniments

to several very pretty songs, which she herself had composed. So while Coraline was swimming through the forest with fickle Mr. Sea Kale, her humble little friend sat in her lonely home and sang the song which pleased her most:—

In a pretty little village,
At the bottom of the sea,
There dwelt a handsome merman,
Who was very fond of me,
Till he met another maiden,
With a salmon-coloured tail,
Who is highly educated
And can read the *Ocean Mail*.

She can ride upon a cycle,
With giant oyster wheels;
She can flounder on a sand-bank,
And tell you how it feels;
She can entertain the mermen,
And invite their wives to tea,
In a cave of seven stories,
At the bottom of the sea.



TIED EVERY ONE OF
THEIR FISHING LINES
TOGETHER.

I have never seen a city
Of the mighty Submarine;
And when people speak of 'fashions,'
I don't know what they mean!
So I'm but a simple mermaid,
Who can never understand
Why girls wear shoes and stockings
To walk about on land.

I cannot read a novel,
By the Dickens of the deep;
Or play a weird sonata,
To lull my friends to sleep;
I cannot trim a bonnet,
Or button up a glove;
The only thing I've practised
Is simply how to love!

Anemone had scarcely finished her song before the cavern became suddenly dark, as though night had already descended and extinguished the last of the sunlit ripples on the transparent roof of the Submarine.

"This is very extraordinary," murmured our little mermaid, switching on the phosphorescent light to a crystal lamp which

hung from the rocky ceiling of the cavern. "A minute ago there was bright sunshine above, and now it's just as black as the darkest of nights! Perhaps there's a big vessel



BOUGHT A MARINE BICYCLE WITH TWO GIANT OYSTER SHELLS FOR WHEELS.

passing over the town, and if that is the case the light from the silver ripples will come back just as quickly as it went away."

But the light did not return for quite a long time, for a great iron ship was slowly sinking down to its last resting-place in the

Royal Seaweed Park of Ultramarine. And as the huge hull of the vessel sank lower and lower into the depths of the ocean, the mermen and maids sought the shelter of their caves with all possible speed, for they knew not the meaning of that great black cloud which was descending on the town. Then the shadow passed, like a giant phantom, slowly and silently downward until it fell with a crash on to the slender branches of the coral forest in the deepest valley of the Park; and for a while the inhabitants of Ultramarine swam about helplessly and blindly, for the usually clear water was now black with deep sea mud, which had been disturbed by the sunken wreck. And strange marine creatures, which had dwelt for centuries in the green depths of the coral forest, rose in shoals towards the higher streets of the town and crawled into the caves of the terrified people. These dreadful monsters became visible when the sunlight

had again reached the darkened city, and many a handsome merman was badly wounded during an encounter with a giant crab or sea spider which had taken possession of

his home while the waters within were still black with drifting ooze from the deep valley.

It was a terrible day for the tiny townsfolk of Ultramarine; but when the dark waters had cleared, and the last of the intruders had been expelled, terror gave place to great

rejoicing and gladness, for a sunken wreck in any one of the towns of the Submarine gives to the inhabitants a long period of prosperity and importance, which can never be enjoyed by the less fortunate citizens of the deep sea.

The vessel which Ultramarine claimed as its own contained scores of tiny cabins, and a grand saloon which was beautifully furnished with long tables and swivel chairs, and lounges richly upholstered in red velvet. So the saloon of the ill-fated steamship *Spray*, of London, became the concert hall and theatre of the mermaids of Ultramarine, and the smaller cabins were quickly transformed into dwelling houses for the richer inhabitants of the town, while the poorer people built houses for themselves, in the neighbourhood of the vessel, from the tons of coal which the hull contained. So for many weeks the residents of the town were busily engaged in building, decorating and furniture removing, and a huge coal cathedral was erected by the city architect and his assistants.

But in the midst of this excitement little Anemone dwelt in her tiny cave, which, in her eyes, was much more beautiful than a villa of coal or a mansion of rusty iron. Only yesterday she had seen some giddy young mermaids swim past dressed in the strange garments of the land dwellers, which had been found in the sunken wreck. Her friend, Coraline, was among them, and she wore a bright green blouse and a heavily-beaded skirt which completely hid the salmon-coloured tail so much admired by her sweetheart, Sea Kale.

"It is all so strange and so ugly," Anemone murmured—"the rusty old ship, and the coal houses, and the stiff dresses which were never made for water wear. Perhaps I'm out of date, but for me there is now nothing pretty left in Ultramarine."

And, with a deep sigh, Anemone struck a chord on her harp and sang :—

In a pretty little village,
At the bottom of the sea,
There dwelt a handsome merman,
Who was very fond of me,
Till he met another maiden
With a salmon coloured—

"And who was the handsome merman?" interrupted a voice at this moment.

Anemone blushed right to the roots of her lovely black hair, for the speaker was none other than Sea Kale himself.

"I'm sorry to interrupt the song, Anemone," he said, entering the cavern and seating himself upon a water-worn chair,



ANEMONE STRUCK A CHORD ON HER HARP AND SANG.

"but I am very curious to know the name of the handsome merman to whom you refer. Won't you tell me?"

"I meant you, of course," said Anemone, who was never ashamed of speaking the truth.

"But I am no longer considered handsome in these days," said Sea Kale bitterly. "The handsome mermen are those who dress up in hats and coats made for land people—old-fashioned folk, like myself, haven't a chance now-a-days. I am leaving Ultramarine to-night, and I shall never return."

"And Coraline? Is she going, too?" faltered Anemone.

"Coraline declares that she won't leave the town for all the stupid old Sea Kales

in the Submarine!" replied the merman sorrowfully. "Those were her very words, Anemone; and she's dressed up in an ugly costume of wet rags at this moment!"

Sea Kale lashed his tail so furiously at the remembrance of Coraline's rudeness that the roof of the cavern was white with foam.

"Don't you like fashionable mermaids, then?" asked Anemone softly.

"Like them!" thundered Sea Kale. "Why I can't bear the sight of them! I'd rather marry a decent-minded oyster any day."

"Is Coraline sorry to lose you?" asked Anemone gently.

"Not at all, Anemone," answered Sea Kale with something like a sob in his voice. "As a matter of fact, we've had a quarrel just because I wouldn't wear a stupid jacket to play tennis in! She said I ought to be ashamed of myself for going about like a sea savage, when I might have a dozen suits of clothes simply for the asking. Then I lost my temper and called Coraline a fright, and she flew into an awful rage and called me



SWAM AWAY, HAND IN HAND, TO FIND A NEW HOME.

Anemone laughed heartily. She felt brighter and happier than she had done for many a long day.

"The town isn't fit for even a respectable porpoise to live in," continued Sea Kale; "in fact, one seldom meets any of the better class of fish in the streets now-a-days; it's quite a hard matter to find a dogfish to do my retrieving for me when I'm out for a day's shark shooting. And now that sea tennis is all the rage in the Royal Park, even the whiting and herrings are fighting shy of the place, because they so often become entangled in the nets. This is what they call civilisation and progress!"

an Atlantic ass (whatever that may mean). I said 'All is over between us,' and she answered 'A very good thing, too!' So I swam away to find the only really good little mermaid left in Ultramarine."

"Did you succeed?" asked Anemone.

"Fortunately, she has not left the town yet, but I believe she will to-night, if I ask her," was the softly-whispered answer.

And the same evening Anemone and Sea Kale swam, hand in hand, past the windows of the brilliantly-lighted saloon of the sunken *Spray*, and then away into the darker waters beyond to find a new home in the lonely waters of the Western Atlantic.