

Deep Blue Fantasy

Margaret Clyne

THE sun pushed two lingering clouds apart and lovingly sprinkled diamond dust over millions of wavetops on the wide, wide ocean. How he glowed with laughter as the dancing lights awoke the sleepy mermaids inhabiting the grey rocks of Castle Reef!

They yawned lazily, stretched lithesomely, then dove into the turquoise waters to frolic and search for fresh blossoms or spiny seashell combs. All except two. Darka, the black haired beauty with purple scales (who was child of the night and the sea), shielded her slumbrous dark eyes from the glare as she arced into the shaded pool leading to the niche that was her special daytime retreat.

Mur-mur had opened her eyes just as a sea-gull near her untucked his head and flexed his strong white wings.

"Thank you for the rest in your home," said the sea-gull gravely. "I lost my way in the storm."

"Was it a terrible storm, sea-gull?"

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The other mermaids had all stared with wonder when Mur-mur first appeared at the rock. The waves had been very angry for a long time and the days had been as dark as nights when suddenly the ocean stilled and the sun shone fiercely. A gorgeous curve of colors stretched from one sea to the other and each mermaid raised her eyes in ecstasy over this new loveliness. As the beauty faded slowly from the sky, a cradle-shaped rock in the center of the pool was bathed in blinding iridescence. A whisper of laughter startled them as they beheld the newest mermaid.

She was exquisitely tiny, with wondering blue-violet eyes, and they reached toward her in delight as they saw dimples for the first time when she smiled. Instead of long hair, like the gleaming tresses of Gloda (child of the sun and the sea), she had tight pinkish curls framing her round little face and wore a circlet of bubbles that reflected the glory that had been above. The others had matching hair and scales but the newest mermaid's slightest movement made her scales glitter with every hue. They sounded like a chorus of fairy flutes as they greeted her while splashing through the pool.

Not knowing how she knew it, she told them "I am the child of the rainbow and the sea," in a voice so faint it was as though a vagrant breeze had brushed the smallest harp string.

Twila (child of the twilight and the sea), shook back her silvery blue hair and flicked her bluish silver tail as she clapped her hands and cried "Let us call her Mur-mur! She speaks with the voice of the least wavelet!" So it was that Mur-mur joined the mermaids who lived in the fantastically carved oasis in the blue green ocean. While the others spent hours sunning themselves, combing long wavy hair

and teaching soft, new melodies to the winds, Mur-mur played with little things like bits of coral and the smallest of shells. But when it looked like a storm, Mur-mur would gather all the tiny fishes she could find and lead them to the pool for fear they would be dashed to bits by the rough waves.

The only humans who had come near Castle Reef had been in the ship whose black skeleton lay rolling in the sands at the foot of the rocks. Darka knew all about it and would sometimes tell of the strange creatures who had held out their arms to her even as their ship was being dashed to pieces. She would talk of it when the winds were howling and spray covering her perch on the tiptop of the reef. Mur-mur didn't like storms so she never found out what the other beings were like.

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So, on this shiny morning she asked timidly, "Was it a terrible storm, sea-gull?"

The sea-gull answered, "It was a bad time for ships. I and my brothers fly out to meet them but I am afraid there will be none to meet this day. I must go now, else they will think I have perished."

As he rose in the air, Mur-mur dove far out into the water and swam easily along with him.

"Tell me, sea-gull," she cried, "What are they like, the ones on the ships you meet?"

"They are like you and they are not like you, Mermaiden. But if you will follow me, I will lead you to where the strange beings are."

"Oh, sea-gull, I cannot! Dayla, she of the copper hair and tail (who is child of the day and the sea), has told me of the great nets and the trapping sands if one goes too close to the other world."

The sea-gull either didn't hear or didn't pay attention as he increased his speed and cried "Follow me!" So they went on, the bird in the air strong and sure of his direction and the little mermaid following with implicit faith in his wisdom.

Soon they came to a deep pool screened from the shore by jagged rocks. The sea-gull landed on one of these and said, "There, Mermaiden, as I promised. There are the ones from the other world."

Mur-mur stared and stared at the figure so like herself standing upright like a stone image braced against a storm. At her side was a chubby little being scarcely able to stand. On the little one's cheeks were drops of dew and it was making plaintive sounds like the winds when the tide runs away.

"What are they doing, sea-gull?"

"They are looking for a ship, mermaiden. One of their brothers must be on one of the ships that was fighting the seas."

Mur-mur covered her face. "I cannot look at them longer, sea-gull. I am not like me when I watch them. Oh, sea-gull, could we find their ship for them?"

But the sea-gull had winged toward his brothers who were small specks in the distance. There was no one about—just the two beings with divided tails standing quietly on the shore. Mur-mur dove deep to the ocean floor and after searching, found a large pink conch shell.

"I shall give you wings like a sailfish," she whispered. Gathering sea grasses, she wove a little sail to a stick of knobby coral and pasted it to the conch with a bit of froth from the rocks.

"Go, little ship, go to the one who waits on the sands for you."

Bouncing with the waves, the little boat sailed straight to the little one who, holding tight to the big one's hand, reached to the edge of the water and picked it up. Tinkling bells of baby laughter came over the water to the little mermaid peering between the rocks and she couldn't understand why it made her feel like cavorting just as the silly porpoises do.

Then the big being picked up the little one, ship and all, clasped them tight to her breast and Mur-mur didn't understand the whispered words: "It is an omen! The sea is going to give him back to me!"

The waters slid by silkily as the little mermaid streaked back to her haven, full of curious feelings. As she neared the Castle Reef, she could hear the others singing as they perched on their favorite pinnacles, tossing pearls to one another or making sea garlands. She swam slower and slower, knowing they would never believe her; but the wonder was still within her, so she made a little plan.

Now the others all smile at Mur-mur after a storm, as she gathers bits of driftwood and coral and shells to make the odd little boats that are launched with a whispered, "Go, little ship. Go to the one who waits on the sands for you." And the little ships sail down a rainbow path to the ones who need them.

One By One

Karel Kingham

As I sat up in bed I felt danger lingering in the room. It must be late; how long had I been asleep? It was too hot; no, too cold. "Why can't I think clearly?" I said as if speaking to one of the four posts standing guard at each corner of my bed. I chuckled, threw the covers down and climbed from the old sturdy structure. I walked to the French doors and looked over the room.

What was it they used to call these? Boudoirs? How strange it was to be standing in this room on the outskirts of London at this hour. The moon was almost full now and it cast eerie shadows over the canopied bed, the high old chest, the massive draperies and the many stiff backed chairs placed at intervals around the room. The strange designs in the Oriental carpeting seemed to dance. I shivered and remembered the caretaker's words just before I had gone to my room: "People say this 'ouse is 'aunted, but don't you believe a word