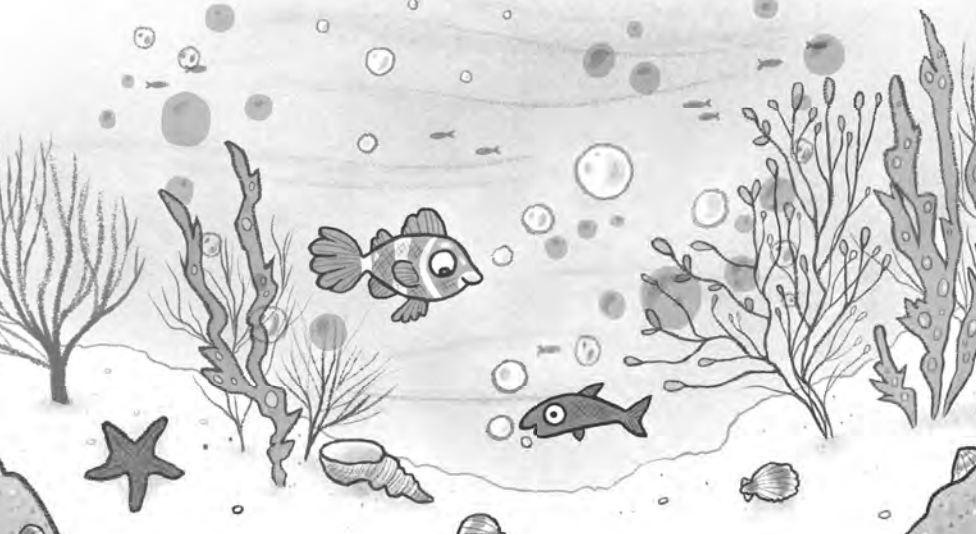




MERMAID SCHOOL





The Mermaid School series

Mermaid School

The Clamshell Show

Look out for more in the series!



MERMAID SCHOOL

LUCY COURTENAY
ILLUSTRATED BY SHEENA DEMPSEY

Ⓐ
ANDERSEN
PRESS



First published in 2020 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

The rights of Lucy Courtenay and Sheena Dempsey to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Text copyright © Lucy Courtenay, 2020
Illustrations copyright © Sheena Dempsey, 2020

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

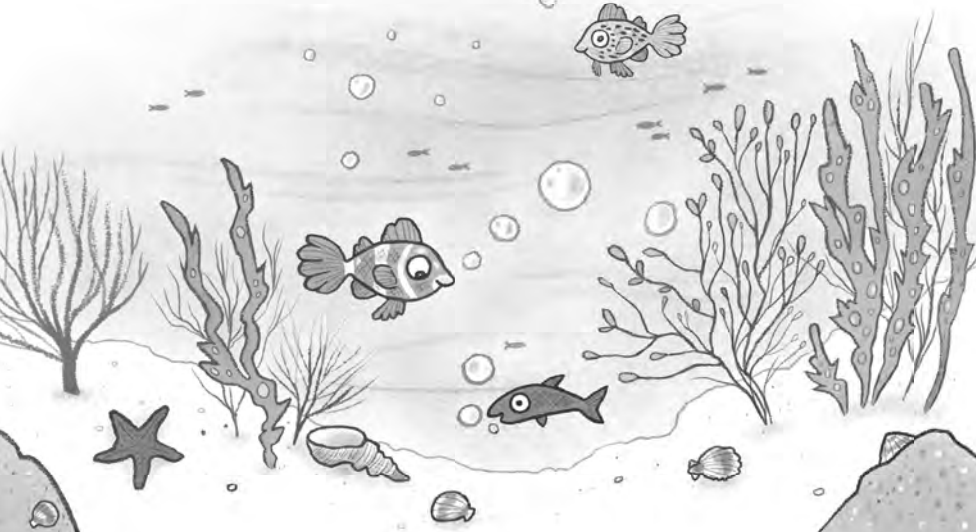
ISBN 978 1 78344 830 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

For
Mimi,
with love.
L.C.



For
Claire Spillane,
thank you.
S.D.



Pearl's House



Mermaid Lagoon

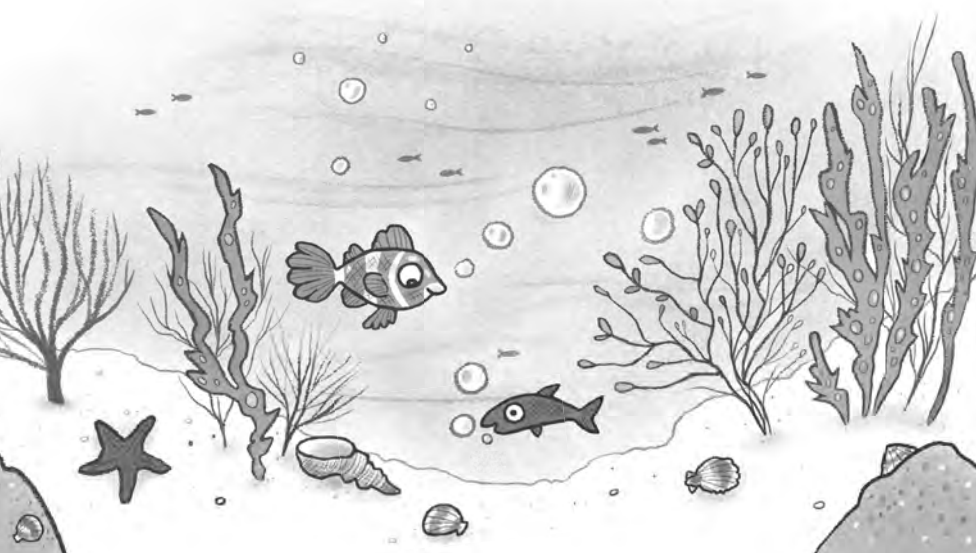
(Not to scale)



Marnie's House









It was easy to miss if you didn't know it was there.

'That's the point, Marnie,' said her mum. 'Lady Sealia doesn't want everyone to know there is a mermaid school in the middle of Mermaid Lagoon.'

On the other side of the kitchen table, Marnie's aunt, Christabel, peered over the top of her *Fishtales Monthly* magazine.

'All sorts of strange people could turn up,' Aunt Christabel said. 'Like me.'

Marnie laughed and took another mouthful of Coral Crunch (with seaweed milk) as she gazed out of the cave window at the large pink rock rising in the distance from the lagoon bed. It was hard to tell where the water ended and the rock began.



Today was Marnie's first day at Lady Sealia Foam's Mermaid School, and she had so many questions, she felt like she was going to burst. Was Lady Sealia fierce? What about her deputy, Ms Mullet? Would she have to ride a seahorse? Would everyone be annoyed or impressed that Christabel Blue, famous singer and radio personality, was Marnie's aunt? And most important of all: would she make any friends? That was the part she was really worried about.

'But what is it like?' she asked.

'Dreadful,' said Aunt Christabel.

'Perfectly lovely,' said Marnie's mum, at the same time.



Marnie felt anxious. 'It can't be both,' she said.

'Lady Sealia's is Perfectly Lovely,' Marnie's mum repeated, with capital letters. 'IF you are good and IF you stick to the rules.'

Aunt Christabel lowered her sunglasses. 'But Marnie isn't going to do any of those things, I hope,' she said. 'So it's going to be Dreadful.'

'I *will* do those things,' said Marnie firmly. 'I will be the perfect student.' She was very clear about that.

'Pity,' said Aunt Christabel.



'You're going to be fine,' Marnie told herself as she brushed her long silver-blond hair after breakfast, and polished her coral pink tail so it gleamed. 'No one will care that Christabel Blue is your aunt and you will be **NORMAL** and **FIT IN** . . . Oh!' she burst out. 'But I do hope I make friends and don't have to ride a seahorse!'



Her mum was waiting by the front door when Marnie returned to the kitchen. Daphne Blue's hair was in an untidy knot on the back of her head, and she had only put one shell earring on this morning. She was so different from Aunt Christabel, it was hard to believe they were sisters.

'It's very important that you make a good impression, Marnie,' Daphne began. Behind her, Aunt Christabel snorted.

'You won't have much to do with Lady Sealia,' continued Daphne, 'but watch out for Ms Mullet. She is fair and kind, but very strict.'

'She's a silly old crab,' said Aunt Christabel, turning the page of her magazine.

'She doesn't like mermaids to be late and she hates it when pupils forget things,' Daphne went on. 'I once forgot my homework and she wouldn't let me outside to swim at breaktime for three days.'

This was the worst thing Marnie's mum had done at school. It wasn't very impressive, to be honest. Marnie wrapped her arms around her fluttery tummy. 'I know, Mum,' she said. 'You've told me a hundred times.'

Daphne pushed a loose strand of hair away from Marnie's eyes. 'Have you got everything?'



Marnie had a moment of panic. Where was her bag with her shell pens and her seaweed hair bands for games lessons? She'd packed it ages ago, and she was sure she had put it beside the cave door last night.

'Looking for this?' asked Aunt Christabel, lifting a shimmering pearl-covered backpack with one of her perfect aqua-painted fingernails.

'Thanks, Auntie,' said Marnie in relief. 'I packed it days ago. Please can we go now?' If we don't leave soon, she thought, I'll lose my nerve and I'll never go at all.



Daphne wasn't finished. 'One last thing,' she said. 'Don't go near the East Lagoon Rocks. Ms Mullet will tell you all about it, I'm sure, but I've seen for myself the dangers of not listening to her. Your aunt—'

'—sat on the rocks and some humans spotted her and Mermaid Lagoon was almost discovered,' Aunt Christabel said. She dropped to the kitchen sofa with a heavy sigh. 'If I had a sand dollar for every time I've heard that lecture, I would be rich.'

'You ARE rich, Chrissie,' said Daphne.

'Is that new, Auntie?' asked Marnie, noticing the large sparkly ring on Christabel's finger.



Aunt Christabel beamed. ‘Isn’t it gorgeous? I love sparkly things,’ she said. ‘So does Garbo. Do you know, she stole my crystal mirror the other day? I found it in her bowl. So naughty.’ She smiled fondly at the snoozing goldfish in her lap. ‘Just like her mummy.’

‘I know Aunt Christabel was always in trouble, but I won’t be,’ Marnie said. ‘I promise.’

Daphne’s large blue eyes were worried. ‘Just be careful. You’re very like her, you know.’

Marnie didn’t feel at all like her glamorous aunt. Christabel wasn’t scared of making friends or riding seahorses. The only thing they had in common was their singing voices. Marnie’s voice was just like Christabel’s: high and pure and perfectly in tune. But that was all.

‘Christabel never meant to get into trouble, but somehow or other she always did,’ Daphne said. ‘Your grandfather once got so cross with her that he snapped his trident in half.’

‘Oh, fishsticks, Daphne!’ said Aunt Christabel. She was now lying full-length on the sofa with Garbo. ‘Some rules are meant to be broken, and Ms Mullet was a silly old crab. Still is. I wasn’t *that* bad.’

Marnie’s mum put her hands on her round hips. ‘Singing rude words at the Clamshell Show?’





‘A joke!’

‘Putting a razor clam in Ms Mullet’s shell purse so that it spat at her when she took out her lipstick? Stealing that school seahorse?’

Through her anxiety, Marnie felt a little stab of relief. She wouldn’t steal a seahorse in a million years. She was terrified of them. She wasn’t like Aunt Christabel at all.

‘You’ve made your point, Daffy,’ Aunt Christabel said, rolling her violet-coloured eyes towards the cave



ceiling. Garbo opened her golden mouth in a perfect O and closed it again. ‘Marnie, darling, don’t listen to me. Enjoy your first day at school. Be good in all your lessons.’ She gave a naughty grin. ‘Otherwise you’ll turn out fun and gorgeous like me, and not old and boring like your mother.’





Even close up, School Rock was hard to spot. If Marnie squinted, she could see the place where it broke the surface of Mermaid Lagoon, rippling in the morning light over her head. She clung to her mum with one

hand and clutched the strap

of her school backpack.

She'd never swum this far from the cave before, and it was a little scary.

'Don't steal food from the kitchen,'

Daphne was saying. 'Your aunt once stole some oysters from the school garden in case there were pearls inside. Monsieur Poisson the cook made a terrible fuss.'

'Were there?' asked Marnie, interested. 'Pearls inside the oysters?'



‘That’s not the point,’ said Daphne.

By now, Marnie could see caves and doorways all over School Rock. There were signs too, hanging on seaweed ropes, saying things like OCEANOGRAPHY, SEAHARMONIC ORCHESTRA and ART STUDIO. It was all so interesting that Marnie forgot to be scared.

The biggest sign of all hung above a large cave mouth filled with pale blue water and waving plants.



“*Nature canary essay*,” Marnie read. ‘What’s a canary?’

‘*Natare, canere, esse* means “Swim, sing, be”,’ explained Daphne. ‘It’s the school motto. Come along now, we can’t be late.’





There were other mermaids swimming around them now, with skin and hair and scales in every colour, all heading towards Lady Sealia's. Marnie realised no one else was holding hands with their mum.

'I'll be OK now,' she said, quickly pulling free. The last thing she needed was for everyone to think she was a baby. 'Bye.'

It felt strange swimming without her mum. Marnie tried to keep up with the other mermaids all moving towards the pale cave with the waving plants, but their tails beat the water and the currents swirled around and it was difficult to swim in a straight line.

'Oh!' she gasped as someone crashed into her.

She caught a glimpse of long black hair and a beautiful rope of pearls.

'Watch where you're going, minnow,' snapped the





black-haired mermaid, gliding past with a sweep of a long shiny tail and a flash of blue-purple scales.

‘Sorry,’ said Marnie.

‘What are you saying sorry for?’ said a voice beside her. ‘SHE crashed into YOU.’

Swimming beside Marnie was a small mermaid with long red hair, spectacles and pale, freckled skin. Her golden scales reminded Marnie of Garbo.

‘I’m Pearl Cockle,’ said the red-haired mermaid. She smiled suddenly, showing a gap between her teeth. ‘Who are you?’

‘Marnie Bl—’ Marnie stopped. She wasn’t sure if she wanted everyone to know her surname yet.

‘Pleased to meet you, Marnie Bler,’ said Pearl Cockle. ‘Are you new?’

Marnie nodded. ‘Me too,’ said Pearl. ‘Are you scared?’ Marnie nodded harder.





‘Me too,’ said Pearl again. ‘But school is just one of those things you have to do, isn’t it? If you want to go to university, I mean.’

Marnie was impressed.

‘Do you want to go to university?’

‘I’m going to be a marine biologist like my mum. She works in the Indian Ocean a lot of the time.’ Pearl Cockle lifted her chin. ‘I miss her when she’s gone

but her work is super-important.’

The crowd of mermaids around the pale blue cave mouth with the waving plants was beginning to break up into different lines.

‘First years!’ called a voice. ‘Over here please!’

The voice belonged to a large octopus with a chunky coral necklace and a shell-encrusted spectacles-case round her neck. She was using all eight of her arms to beckon the first years in the right direction. There was a lot of flapping around as everyone tried to line up straight. It was harder than it looked.





‘Good morning, first years,’ said the octopus.
‘I am Miss Tinkle.’

‘My sister Sheela says hello, Miss Tinkle,’ said someone at the front of the line. ‘She told me that you were the best teacher she ever had. I’m Orla. Orla Finnegan.’

With a sinking heart, Marnie recognised the black-haired mermaid.

‘Thank you, Orla,’ said Miss Tinkle warmly. ‘How is your extremely talented sister?’

‘She’s ever so well, Miss Tinkle. She’s got a job singing in the Gulf of Mexico.’

The first years gasped, and whispered together. The Gulf of Mexico was famous for its beauty, but

also for its dangers. Not many mermaids chose to work there.

‘Brave as well as talented, it seems,’ Miss Tinkle said heartily. ‘How is she coping with the hurricanes and cruise ships?’

Orla’s cheeks turned pink. ‘She doesn’t mind them a bit, Miss Tinkle.’

‘What a suck-up,’ Pearl whispered in Marnie’s ear.

Marnie giggled. Miss Tinkle gave her a sharp glance and she stopped. She didn’t want to get into trouble before she’d even set tail inside the school.

‘Into the Assembly Cave now,’ Miss Tinkle said, waving several tentacles. ‘Lady Sealia will address you all and then take you on your school tour.’

Marnie’s eyes widened as they all swam into the pale blue cave. It had no roof. They were so close to the surface of Mermaid Lagoon that if Marnie swam up a few metres, she would be able to put her head above the water. There was a wide stage at one end, and the walls were decorated with portraits of the same mermaid, over and over again.

‘Lady Sealia must really like having her portrait painted,’ Pearl whispered to Marnie.

Marnie stared at the long white hair and shimmering



silver-white scales
in each portrait.
She'd enjoy having
her portrait
painted too,
if she looked
as grand as
Lady Sealia.

The first
years swam
to a row of
coral seats
at the base of
the stage and
sat down.

'Register?'
said Miss Tinkle,
peering around.

A large scallop swam
towards the octopus, gracefully opening and closing
its fan-shaped shell, and sank into Miss Tinkle's
outstretched tentacle. The octopus readjusted her
spectacles on her beak. She peered inside the scallop's
shell, where Marnie could see a list of names.



‘Dora Agua?’ said Miss Tinkle.

‘Here, Miss Tinkle,’ said a brown-haired mermaid with a blue tail.

‘Mabel Anemone?’

Beside Pearl, Marnie felt worried. What would happen when everyone heard her surname? Her family were the only Blues in the whole of Mermaid Lagoon.

‘Lupita Barracuda?’ said Miss Tinkle.

Marnie heard a sneeze behind her and turned round.

‘Do you have a handkerchief?’ Pearl whispered. Her eyes looked red and puffy. ‘I’m terribly . . . allergic to coral.’

Marnie opened her bag to find a handkerchief for Pearl.

‘Marnie Blue?’ said Miss Tinkle.

A bright green sea snake shot out of Marnie’s bag. From the look on its face, it hadn’t enjoyed being inside there very much. It writhed irritably in the water, tying itself in complicated knots.

‘She’s got a SNAKE!’ squealed someone.

Suddenly everyone started shouting and screaming. Coral chairs fell over and broke on the cave floor, one of Lady Sealia’s portraits slid off its hook in the swirling water and disappeared into a bed of seaweed,





and the first-year mermaids splashed and squealed and tried to get as far away from Marnie as possible. The snake, meanwhile, untwisted itself and shot off into a dark corner.

‘MARNIE BLUE?’ repeated Miss Tinkle, raising her voice over the chaos.

Marnie put her hand up.

‘Here, Miss Tinkle,’ she said in a small voice.

