For vampires, fairies, humans
and MERMAIDS everywhere!
And for Bonnie Ocèa.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
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First published in 2023

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN:978-0-19-278397-4

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in China

Paper used in the production of this book is a natural,
recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable forests.
The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

EMERALD

and the Ocean Parade



Harriet Muncaster

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Chapter ONE

TRRRRINGGGG went my clamshell alarm clock.



I sat up in bed feeling confused for a moment before I remembered where I was—in my bedroom in the royal palace! A few months ago, my mum and King Auster

got married, which I suppose makes *me* a princess. I have two houses because I spend half my time at the palace and half with my dad who lives in a small pearly pink house on the other side of Scallop City. I was still getting used to living in two different places and I was still getting used to being a princess. I didn't feel like one at all yet. I don't look anything like my graceful stepsister Delphina. My hair is all spiky and wild (which is exactly how I like it) and I have a wriggly little octopus for a pet!

I slipped out of bed, uncurling my tail. Tiny bubbles danced in the water.

'Come on Inkibelle!' I said to my pet

octopus who was still snoozing soundly on my sea-sponge pillow. ‘Time to get up for school!’

Inkibelle does not like getting up for school.



I poked her but she only curled up tighter so I left her snoozing while I swam out of my bedroom and down the shell-studded corridor to the bathroom. On my way, I bumped into Delphina.

'Emerald,' she cried. 'Good morning!' Then she stretched her arms out wide and I knew she was coming in for a hug. Delphina is a very affectionate mermaid. I found her a tiny bit annoying when I first moved in to the palace a few months ago, but



I am getting used to her now.

'I'll race you to breakfast!' she cried, and then swished away in a flurry of bubbles.



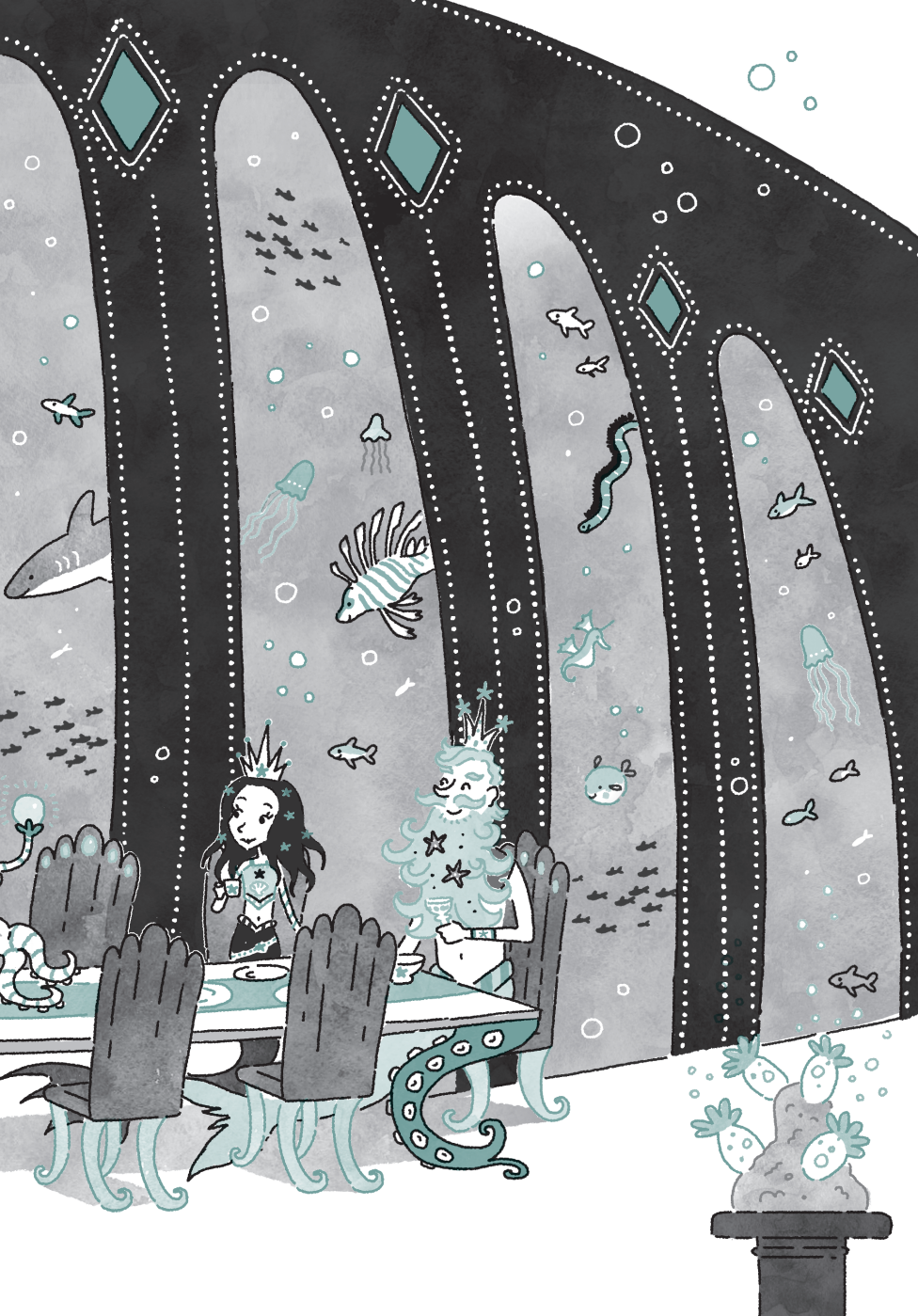
'You're late!' said Mum when I finally made it down to the grand dining room, with Inkibelle swimming along behind me.

'Sorry!' I said. 'Inkibelle just didn't want to get up this morning!'

Inkibelle poked me crossly with one of her tentacles and pouted.

'Well it's *true*!' I said as I sat down next to Delphina, who was already tucking in to some sea-crunch cereal.





I pulled a slice of mermaid toast towards me and spread it thickly with pale green seaweed butter.

'We've been talking about the Ocean Parade!' said Delphina excitedly. 'I can't wait!'

Immediately I felt my insides fizz with excitement. I *love* the Ocean Parade! It happens every year to celebrate the new summer sea season arriving and I've been to it since I was a tiny mermaid. There's lots of delicious food, music and dancing, and everyone dresses up. Dressing up is my favourite part! A stream of pretty floats parade through the streets of Scallop City, including the royal carriage.

Last year I went to the parade with my school friends and it was the best day ever! We dressed up in all our spangles and sparkles, ate crispy-kelp and sea-flower floss and danced to music as the floats paraded by. I smiled as I remembered all the fun we'd had.

'I can't wait either!' I said.

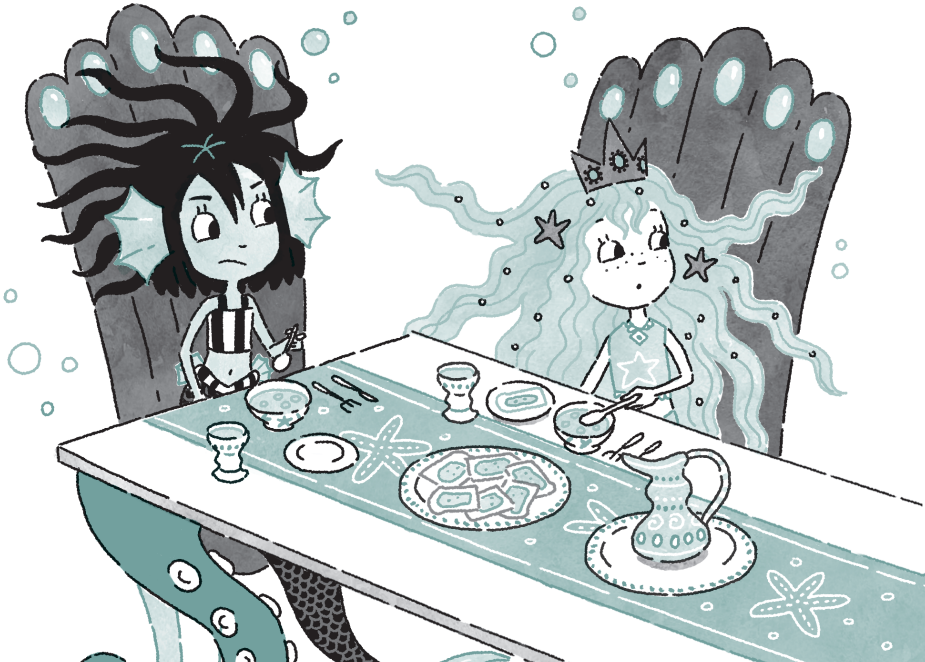
Delphina grinned happily at me. 'What kind of headdress will you wear Emerald?'

'Well, last year me and my friends bought sea-flower crowns from a stall and . . .'



'I mean which *royal* headdress will you choose!' said Delphina. 'You'll be in the carriage with the royal family this year remember! It's tradition for us all to wear big fancy headdresses!'

I frowned and looked at Mum and Auster but they both just smiled and nodded.



‘Your first parade in the royal carriage!’ said Mum. ‘Won’t that be exciting!’

‘Um . . .’ I said. It hadn’t occurred to me that I would have to ride in the royal carriage during the parade, but I supposed that I would have to, now I was a mermaid *princess*.



It was taking some getting used to.

'But the royal carriage rides through the centre of Scallop City and then ends up back at the palace,' I said. 'We won't have time to join in any of the fun!'

'There will be a special party back here at the palace,' smiled Auster. 'With very fancy food!'

I thought back to the crispy-kelp and sea-flower floss I had bought from a stall last year. I doubted there would be anything like that served at the palace. I don't think I'm really cut out to be a *proper* princess, I thought despondently.

I didn't look like one.

I didn't *eat* like one.



And I definitely didn't *feel* like one!

'Do I *have* to go in the royal carriage?' I asked. 'I'd much rather hang out with my school friends.'

Delphina's face fell and Auster looked a bit disappointed.

'I *mean*,' I said hurriedly. 'I don't think anyone will want to see *me* in the carriage,'

'Of course they will!' said Auster. 'You're a mermaid princess now! You absolutely have to be there.'

'You do,' agreed Mum firmly.

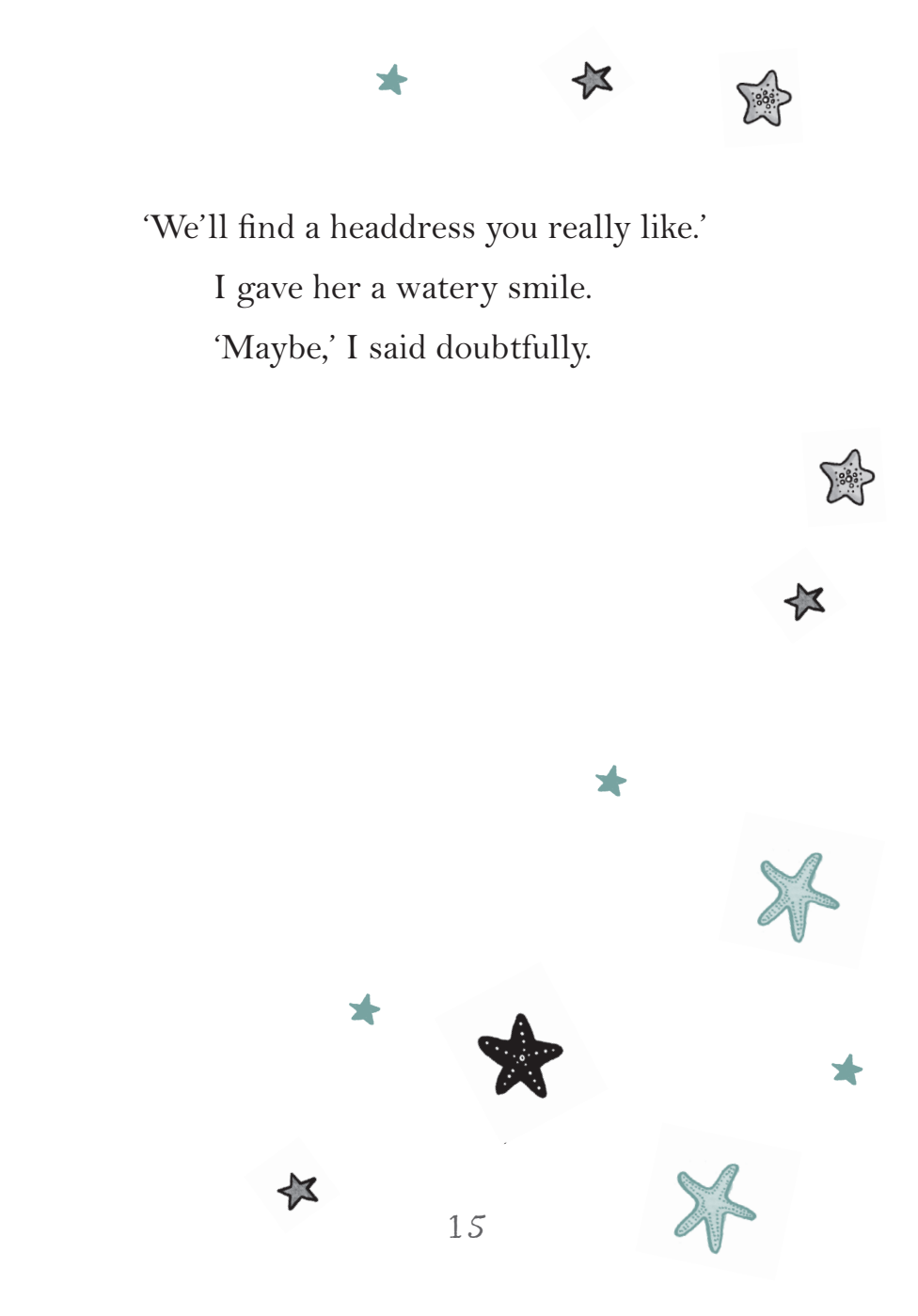


I sighed, putting my piece of toast back onto my plate. Suddenly I didn't really feel very hungry. The thought of not being able to go to the Ocean Parade with my friends was not a nice feeling. And the thought of having to sit in the royal carriage and be on show to everyone in the kingdom was even worse! I was nothing like Delphina. She looks and acts like a proper princess. I'm just . . . *me*.

'There's a headdress fitting this afternoon after school,' said Auster. 'It'll be fun, I promise.'

I nodded glumly and Mum tried to reassure me with an encouraging glance.

'Don't worry Emerald,' she said.



‘We’ll find a headdress you really like.’

I gave her a watery smile.

‘Maybe,’ I said doubtfully.