

The Mermaid Who Loved Daisies

By Pamela Freeman

Georgia loved daisies. White daisies, in particular. Little white daisies with yellow centres. There was one long green hill which curved down to the sea – it was covered with them, like stars had fallen down from the sky and lay scattered on the grass.

They had a scent, too. Not sharp like seaweed, or rounded and soft like squid ink. This was a *green* smell, with earth and grass underneath it. It made Georgia feel happy and alive.

‘I’d like some daisies,’ Georgia said to her sister Sophia. ‘I could dig some up from that hill and grow them.’

‘You can’t.’ Sophia flipped her tail and dived down to pick up a pretty cowrie shell. ‘You have to have legs to go on the hill.’

And that was the problem. Georgia was a mermaid. She couldn’t get out of the sea and walk up the hill to find her daisies.

‘Besides,’ Sophia said, throwing Georgia the cowrie shell. ‘Where would you grow them? They’d die under the sea.’

Georgia sighed. Sophia was very practical about things like that. But she was right, again.

If she brought land plants under the sea, they would die.

It was a very pretty cowrie shell. She and Sophie played with it for a while, throwing it up in the air and letting their pet dolphin, Pearl, catch it out of the air. Then it was time to go home, to their grotto just off shore, and have dinner.

Their grotto was under the sea, but inside it had fresh air, brought down by a long tube of coral, so they could breathe even though they were under the sea. Although they could stay underwater for a long time, mermaids need to breathe, just like dolphins.

Dinner was kelp salad. It was Georgia’s turn to get dinner, and she thought very hard about the daisies while she sliced and twisted the kelp into pretty shapes.

Maybe she could find a place in between the land and the sea, where the daisies could grow and she could get close enough to enjoy them.

‘You’d still need the daisies,’ Sophia pointed out as they ate their dinner.

‘I have a plan for that.’ But she wouldn’t tell Sophia what it was, just in case it didn’t work.

So, the next day, after their morning hair-combing session, the sisters set out to find the perfect place.

‘If you can have daisies, can I have Neptune’s necklace?’ Sophia asked as they looked over their fourteenth little cove, hoping to find a small spit of land which came down close enough to the sea.

‘Sure.’ Neptune’s necklace was a special type of seaweed, which was the same shape as a necklace of beads. Sophia loved it, because you could put your fingers behind each of the beads

and squeeze – and then the bead would shoot off like a bullet! It was lots of fun. Pearl loved that game. She jumped and tried to hit the beads with her snout, giggling loudly.

This meant that they needed a small spit of land which ended in a rock pool, where Sophia could grow Neptune’s necklace.

So they kept looking. They stayed away from places which had humans, of course – that was just part of being a mermaid.

They found some wild and wonderful places. Blowholes which sent the sea swell spurting up higher than Pearl could jump. Deep caves with tunnels which ran back into the hills. Ships, wrecked on the rocks, with coral and barnacles growing on their old, pitted wood.

And, once, a giant manta ray which reared up in front of them, hissing. The sisters turned tail and swam away as fast as they could.

‘That was scary.’ Sophia panted, holding onto Pearl’s dorsal fin for balance once they’d got into clear water.

‘Yes.’ It wasn’t any use trying any more. They would *never* find the right place. Two clear, big drops of water swelled in Georgia’s eyes and fell, turning into pearls as they went. Sophia caught them and tucked them into a special pocket she’d made in her seaweed belt. Mermaid tear pearls were rare, and worth a lot, because mermaids weren’t sad very often – they had too much fun to be sad. They could trade the tears for new combs and shell clothing.

‘I’m sorry we haven’t found your special place.’ Sophia patted her sister on the back.

‘It’s okay.’ Georgia sighed. ‘Let’s go home.’

Pearl nosed at her, and squeaked consolingly.

‘You can ride Pearl home, if you like,’ Sophia said. Normally they didn’t ride Pearl, because there was only one of her and two of them.

‘Thank you.’ Georgia’s voice was very small and sad, but she tried to cheer up. Sophia and Pearl were being so nice. Did it really matter if she couldn’t have daisies?

Riding Pearl meant lying along the dolphin’s body and holding onto her fin. It brought Georgia up out of the water, like she was flying. And it meant she could see things on the sea shore, that she hadn’t been able to see before.

And there, half way home, she saw a tiny little cove, tucked in beneath high cliffs – so high that no humans were in sight.

‘Look!’ She pointed to the cove, and Pearl and Sophia turned towards it. As they got closer, Georgia slipped off Pearl and swam forward, her heart pounding. Could this be the place?

‘It’s the right size,’ Sophia said.

‘It’s got dirt up next to the cliffs,’ Georgia said.

‘There’s a rock pool I can have Neptune’s necklace in.’

‘I can reach the land from the rock.’

They looked at each other.

‘IT’S THE PLACE!’ they both yelled. Then they dove and leaped and shimmied through the waves all the way home.

It was Sophia's turn to get dinner. She made sea lettuce salad with nori fingers.

'I can find Neptune's necklace in the big rockpools once the humans go home to sleep,' she said. 'But how are you going to get the daisies?'

'I have a *plan*.' Georgia nodded with determination. She got two big flat shells from the coral shelf. 'We'll ask the King of the Crabs for help.'

The King of the Crabs lived far off shore, deep under the water. It was a long, dark dive to where he sat, splayed out on a big rock, his courtiers bringing him fish after fish to eat.

'Why should I help you, eh?' he demanded.

'Please, sir,' Georgia said. 'It's only a very little help. And we have this to trade with.'

Sophia produced one of Georgia's pearl tears. But only one. They'd agreed to hold back the other one, in case the King would help them for just one.

'Hmm. Let me see.' The King examined the pearl carefully. 'Who got sad?'

'I did,' Georgia said. 'Because I want these daisies *sooooo* much.'

'Two eyes, don't you? Two pearls. If you want them sooo much.' He grinned nastily at them.

Georgia and Sophia looked at each other. Of course he would have figured out that there were two. Who ever heard of just one eye crying?

Sophia took the other pearl out and held both of them flat on her hand. They glowed, shining with all the pastels colours of the rainbow.

'Hmmm,' the king said. 'One morning's work, you say?'

Georgia nodded. 'An *evening's* work, your majesty. So the humans don't see.'

'Done!' The king put out a huge pincer and snapped the pearls up from Sophia's hand. She flicked back in fright, but he just laughed and waved a front leg.

Immediately, a small army of crabs lined up to follow the sisters out of the king's court and back to land.

They waited until it was dark and the moon was riding high in the sky before Georgia pointed out to the crabs which clumps of daisies she wanted. They marched up the hill and dug with their pincers, sending dirt flying, and then carried the daisies on their backs, down the hill to the sisters.

Some of them stopped along the way to find Neptune's necklace in the big rock pools at the base of the hill.

Georgia and Sophia held out a big flat shell each, and the crabs piled the daisies and seaweed onto them.

Then, with Georgia carefully holding her shell *out* of the water, and Sophia carefully holding her shell *in* the water, they swam to the little cove. Georgia wriggled up the little beach, the sand grating under her scales, and planted the daisies in the dirt at the bottom of the cliff. They shone pure white in the moonlight, and smelled of green and growing. There were little streams of fresh water trickling down the cliffs which would water them.

Sophia helped her seaweed attach itself to the little rock pool.

Then they both went back to the water, and started to sing. Mermaid magic is in their songs, and they have songs for almost everything. Georgia was pretty sure that the song to get seaweed to grow would work for daisies, and it did!

By the time the morning sun peeped over the horizon, the daisies were blooming happily, and the Neptune's necklace was green and flowing in the rock pool, swaying with each movement of the tide.

And from then on, when they wanted to be happy, Georgia and Sophia would go back to the little cove. Georgia would smell the daisies. Sophia would pop the Neptune's necklace under her fingers, and Pearl would leap and dive in the water just offshore.

It meant that it was a long time before they got any more mermaid's tears – but that is another story.