

Mernation

Episode 8

*The Big City*

By A. C. Zito

The Merpeople; I looked at everyone, surprised at what I saw. I felt scared. Yet, I felt excited. I was out in the open for everyone to see me. It was like I was naked. But I was still fully clothed.

"I want to buy something." I said out loud. I wasn't talking to anyone in particular. None of the vendors were around me. But I still felt like I knew I wanted something; but what? I felt confident; I knew that much was true. I felt ready for action; but what action?

"Flounder; get your fresh fish here!" A vendor yelled out, straight into my ear. I could hear him, clearly, but he still felt like he had to make his presence known. The vendors seemed to know what they were doing. They had their products out for everyone to see, and they definitely weren't holding back when it came to shoving it into everyone's faces. And I was a part of everyone. I had my eyes on scanning-mode. What could I buy? What could I get for fewer than 20 clams; or 20 barnacles; or 20 something? I knew wanted to buy something, that much was true; but what? I wanted to be a part of the consumer, product industry. I wanted to feel like I was a part of Mernation.

"A barnacle, ma'am; something to help get me by; I'm in need." I looked at the stranger, not knowing what to say. I was a part of her world now. I wasn't a part of Up Above. I was Down Under. And I didn't know how to handle it. So I just walked passed her. That's what I did for everyone who seemed to be in need; for I didn't know *how* to help them. I felt like I was in need too. But was I?

*Cece*, I whispered to myself. She took care of everything for me. I was in her debt. I was passed secure. I felt like I was blessed by Poseidon, himself. Everything looked brighter. Everything looked clearer as I was around the vendors and the people walking passed me. It was like I was in a big, scary city. But it wasn't all that scary. I felt a part of the thriving industry as I watched closely as a merchant sold colorful, soft blankets spun from extravagant underwater plants.

"I want to be an Under." I whispered to myself as the people rushed passed me.

"I need a shark tooth knife to cut those seaweed vegetables, babe." I heard a woman say to her significant other. He nodded in agreement as they looked down at their list and then rushed passed me into the crowd of people. People; there were so many people. I felt claustrophobic as I looked around, hoping I could just blend in. Could I actually be a part of them? Or was it known? Was it known that I was a newbie in this Big Fish world?

"Ma'am, I love your look. You could be a servant girl for one of the nines. The Dorchesters; they are the *best* family out of *any* of the nines, ma'am. They will keep you fed, happy, and secure for as long as you're down here. You won't regret it, ma'am. This nines family will be there for you for all your

needs. You won't ever have to worry again! I promise you, ma'am; don't go wrong with having a Dorchester. You might recognize them; they have the jellyfish on their back." I knew it was a servant boy. He looked desperate in trying to win me over. But I wasn't buying it. I wasn't stupid.

"Get away from me, creep!" I screamed at him as I rushed passed random people in hopes that he'd leave me alone. He seemed to be persistent but, then again, reluctant, to move on to some other poor wretch. After walking a couple more yards, he finally gave up and started pestering another random girl who didn't look at all too pleased to be picked out of the many as a target of harassment.

"The lost anchor of Black Beard, himself! I think I know what lies in the wake of your future, *missy!*" A rather old, graying woman put a hand on my shoulder and stopped me in my tracks.

"I'm not looking to have my fortune told by some old, broad who calls herself *Mernation's Finest Fortune Teller.*" I told her, looking up at her pathetic excuse for a sign as I shoved her away. She, suddenly, began hitting me with her cane.

"You shouldn't trust her! You shouldn't trust that girl, Cece! She'll put you away, that's what she'll do!" I looked back at her, speechless. How did she know about Cece?

"What?" I asked her.

"See the sea, that girl. See the sea." I began walking away as she kept yelling it out: "See the sea, that girl. See the sea." She wasn't saying Cece. I thought to myself, relieved. She was saying: *See the Sea.* I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself down. But I still felt tense.

*SHOVE PUSH SHOVE*

"Hey!" I screamed out. I felt my backpack *ripped* from my shoulders, and the sounds of feet hitting the hard ground as the thief disappeared into the crowds of heads.

*AHAHAHA!* An older man laughed out. He looked feeble and unhealthy but the fact that I was robbed so mercilessly showed to have brought laughter and life into his old, brittle heart. The only thing I had left was my belt. It still had certain objects equipped to its many sleeves and pockets but thieves still had been having their way with it as well while I've been pushing and shoving into the random people of Down Under. Suddenly, as I looked around at the strange marketplace of Mernation feeling like a hopeless never-ending pit of despair, what looked to be a nines shoved into me:

"Well, Kingdom of the Nines, you're Lady Gretchen Marseilles of the Starfish Family, are you not?" I looked at the older gentlemen, not knowing what to say. His stature: well built. His countenance: a mix between concerned, surprised, and, most of all, full of a wondrous glee that left me frozen in place; petrified, out of my mind; mortified to no end. I felt helpless just standing there. I wanted to run away from the encounter, but, from his higher up, worldly demeanor, I felt there was no use but to stay planted in place. "It's me, Gretchen; oh, you must not remember me. It has been so long since you left, all those years ago, for your trip to the Big City."

"Big City?" I asked, confused. He leaned in closer as he whispered to me while, at the same time, opening up his mouth to expose his tobacco-stained teeth:

"Atlantis, my dear girl; the Lost City, how was it?" I felt my mouth stuttering out unpronounceable gibberish, but the man, on the other hand, didn't seem to be concerned with what I had to say. He looked over at a nearby servant boy of his and motioned him over.

"Get the carriage, lad. I want Lady Gretchen Marseilles of the Starfish Family brought back to *my* castle before any of the other nines welcome her back." I looked at him, stunned:

"Your... castle?" I asked.

"Yes, why, yes! You're coming with me; back to Castle Swordfish!" And, before I could say anything else, the carriage pulled up being pulled by four abnormally large isopods. The lingering servant boys rushed me inside, and the strange man and I were off.