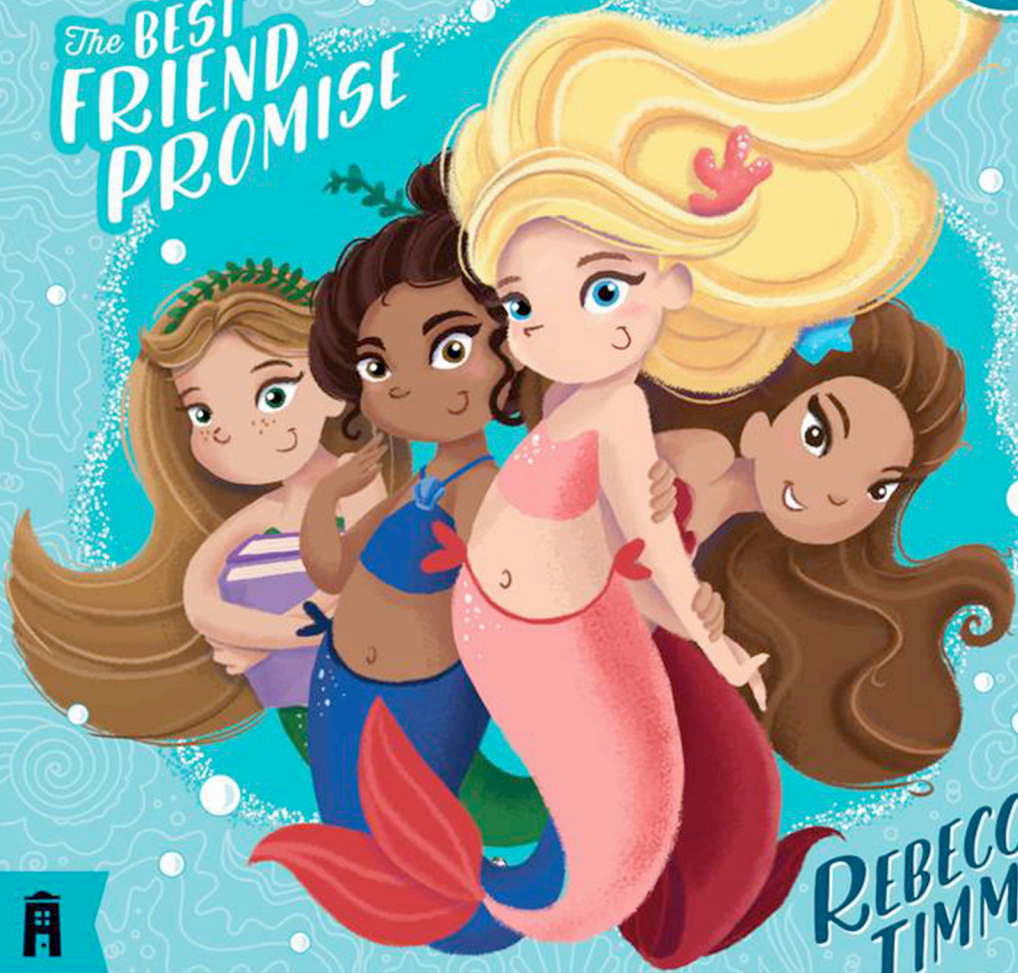


MerTales

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For Kate, Shauna and Rochelle,
the best mermaids in the seven seas.

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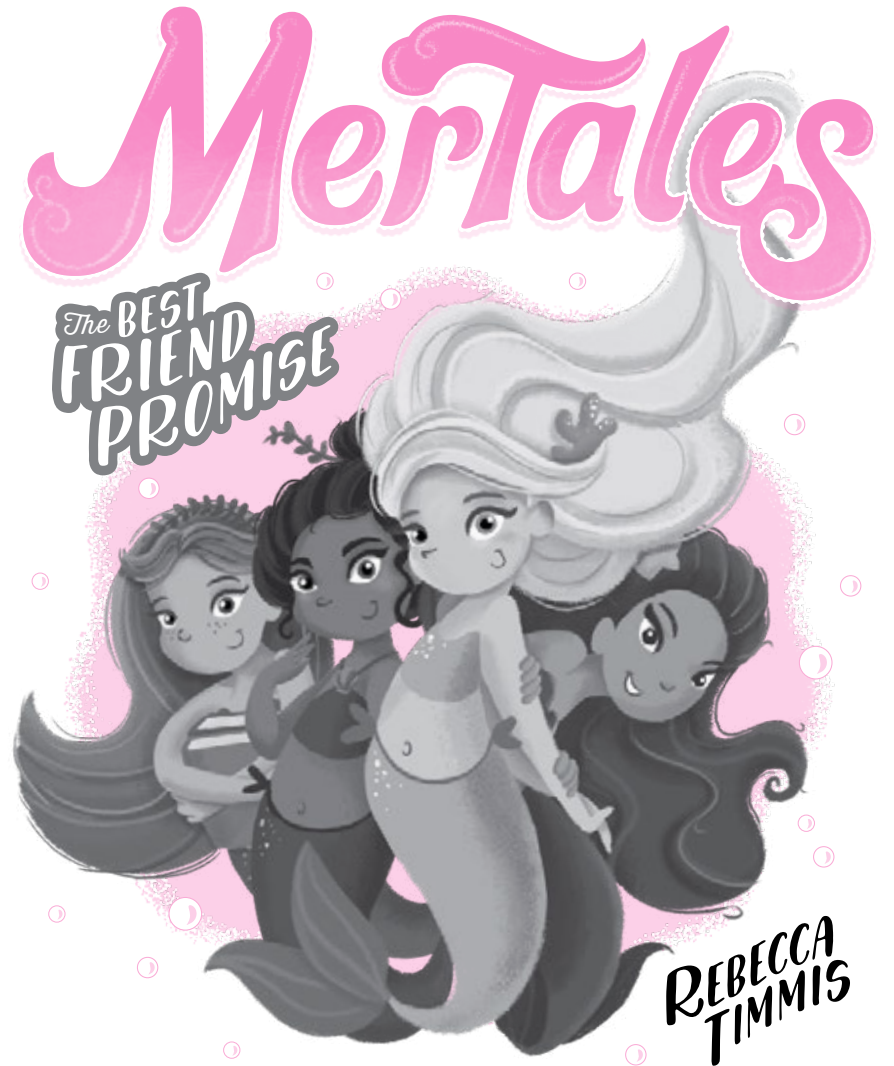
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ONE

The Shooting Star



Pearl Periwinkle flipped and twirled down the curling tunnel of her conch-shell house. Her pink mermaid tail shimmered and shone, and her coral comb sparkled. Most days, Pearl's blonde hair floated about her head like sea-fairy floss. But today it was smooth and shining.

Pearl smiled brightly. Today was her ninth birthday, and it was going to be a **sea-sational** day.

She sailed into the kitchen. Her father, Seaborne Periwinkle, was waiting with a special breakfast. Seaborne had a deep purple mermaid tail and a flowing red beard.

'Pearl!' he beamed. 'Ready for your big party tonight?'



Pearl nodded excitedly as she munched on a stack of sea-cakes. They were **sea-licious!**

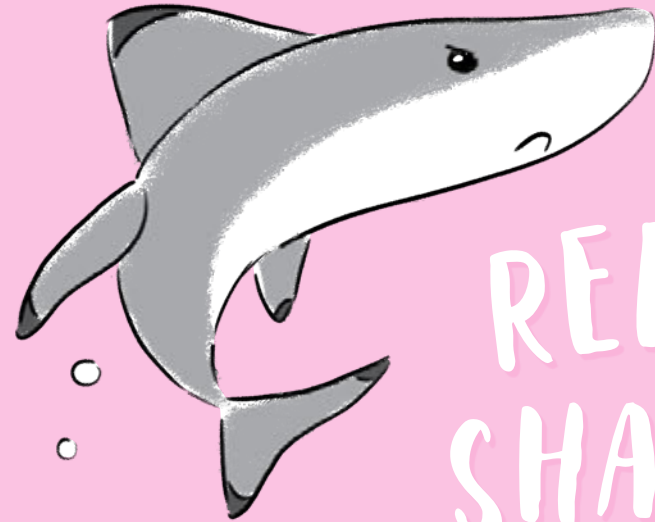
Pearl's father checked his clamshell watch. 'Maybe you should take your breakfast to go,' he said with a wink. 'You don't want to be late for merschool again.'

'Oh, no!' Pearl cried. 'I can't be late *today!*' She grabbed some sea-cakes from the table and swished out the front door.

Outside, Pearl looked up at the reef beside her house. Maybe she could take a shortcut. Mermaids weren't supposed to swim over the reef, but Pearl couldn't quite remember why.

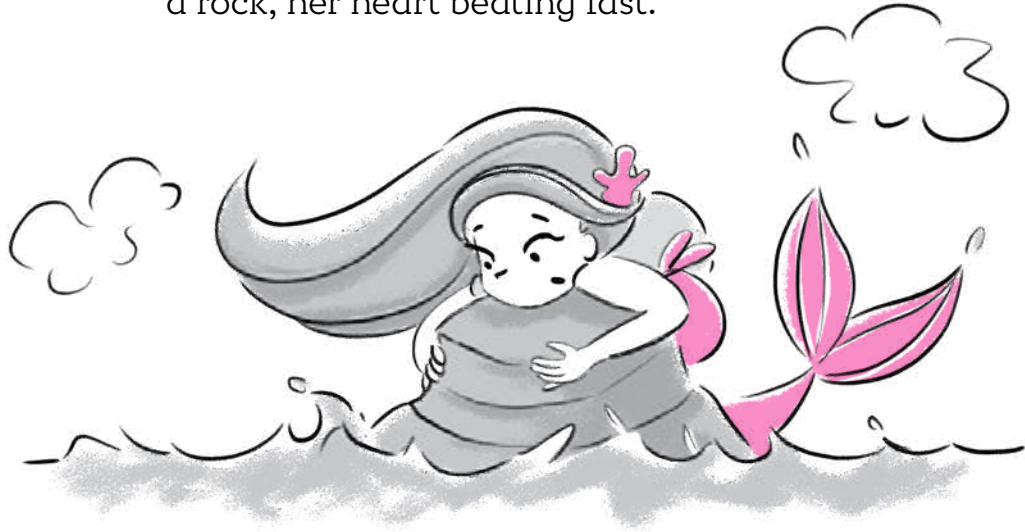
Pearl shrugged and swam up to the reef. The water was warm and clear. Pearl weaved around the colourful coral. She ducked under the shallow waves.

A shadow lurked up ahead. It had a **pointed nose** and **sharp fins**.



REEF
SHARK!

Pearl darted to the surface and climbed onto a rock, her heart beating fast.



'Phew,' she sighed. Now she remembered why mermaids weren't allowed on the reef – reef sharks!

Pearl waited for the shark to swim away. She was about to dive back into the ocean when something caught her eye. It was a bright green star, streaking across the sky.

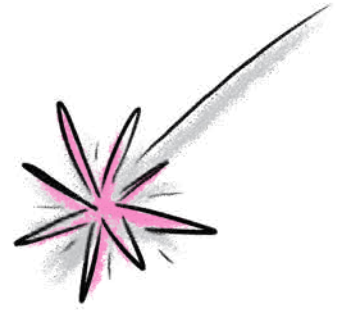
It seemed to be getting bigger.

And *closer*.

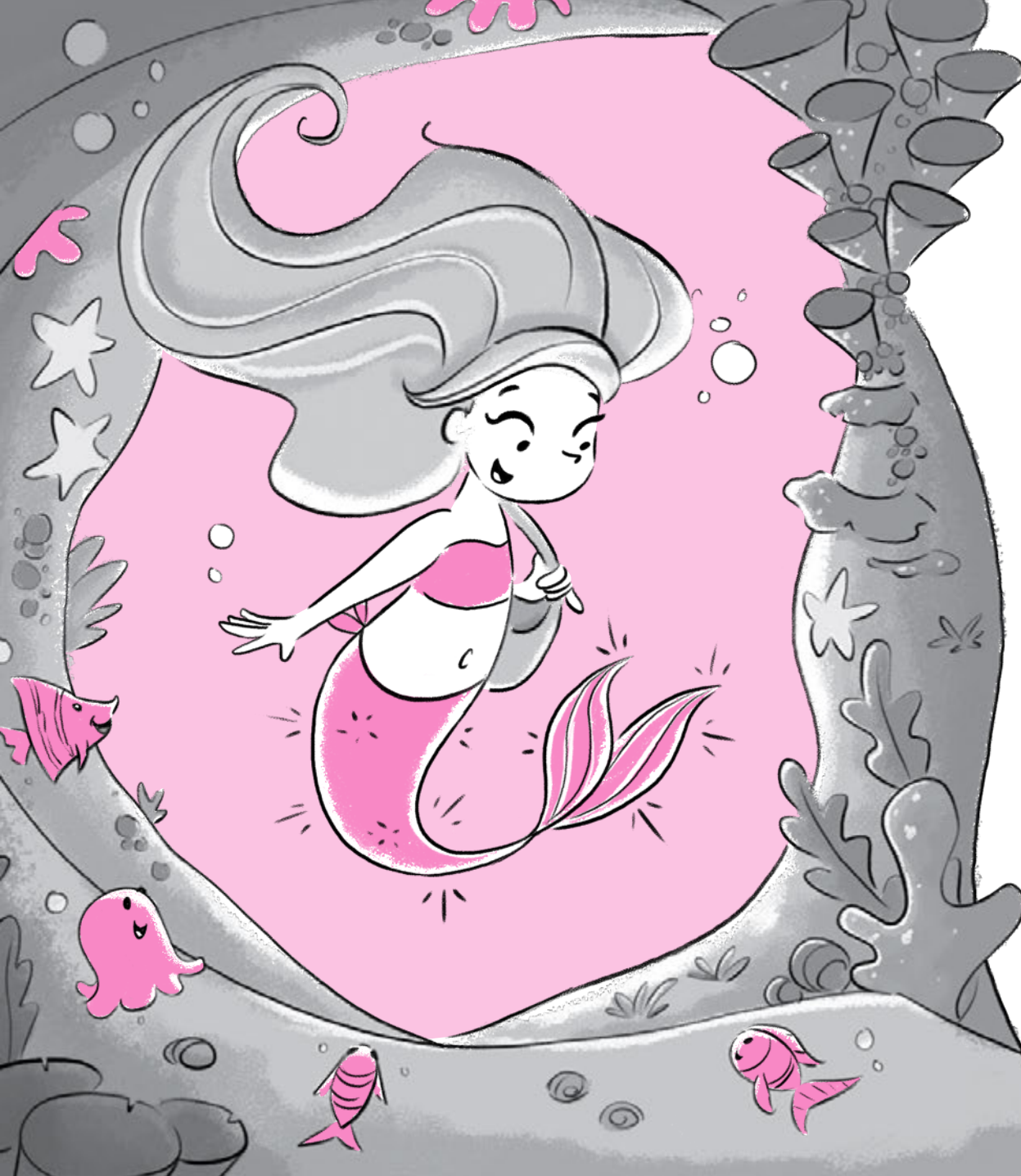
'**Eeek!**' Pearl squealed.

She dove beneath the waves.

The shooting star **rocketed** into the ocean behind her.



SPLASH!



Pearl looked through the clear water. She frowned. The star had **vanished**.

Then something *amazing* happened.
Something *magical*.

Pearl's mermaid tail began to tingle. She looked down.

Pearl let out a gasp. She couldn't believe her eyes.

Her tail was GLOWING!

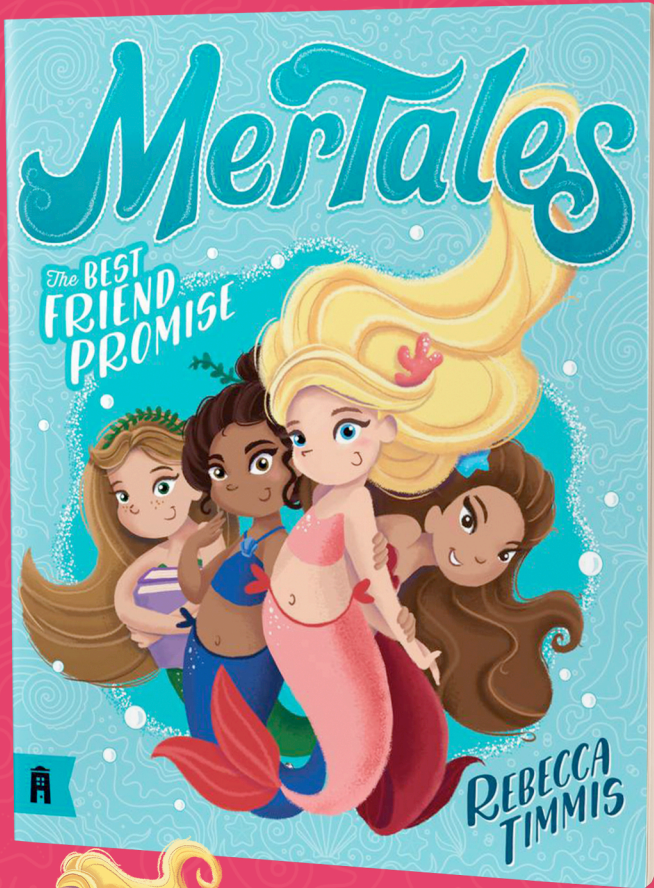
It shimmered and sparkled until it was so bright Pearl had to shut her eyes. When she opened them again, the glowing had stopped.

Pearl shivered. Her mermaid tail had never done anything like *that* before. What did it mean? Maybe her best friend, Coral Clearwater, would know. Coral was super smart.

Pearl sped across the reef towards Cockleshell Cove, bursting with questions.



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