

MILLIE'S STAR

By Ann Strohmeier

Millie woke up from her daylong sleep as the sun was setting. She poked her nose out of the hole in her tree and sniffed. The evening was cool and inviting. There would be plenty of food for a hungry possum out there.

Millie dug for worms as she ambled along her solitary path. She found a bush full of delicious round red berries.

When she reached the edge of the forest, she looked out at the Big Water. Millie had her own nest now, but Mama had always told her not to go near the Big Water. Possums can swim if they have to, Mama said, but the Big Water was deep and cold. And the wide-open beach was full of dangers. Small forest animals, Mama said, should stay in the safety of the trees.

But tonight the water was calm. The moon shone and stars glimmered. Millie wondered how the sky would look without trees in the way.

Small shells slipped through Millie's claws as she shuffled through the sand. There were so many new smells! And a line of green grass to explore. Millie jumped as two crabs scuttled out of the grass, clicking their claws before scurrying off. Mama was right! Better go back to the forest.

But then Millie saw something glimmering in the wet sand. It was small, and had a strange shape. Was it alive? Was it dangerous?

Millie decided she had explored enough for one night. But when she looked up to say goodbye to the moon and stars, she saw an empty patch in the sky.

Suddenly, Millie realized what the thing in the sand must be. A star! A star had fallen from the dark spot in the sky.

“I’ll put it back before I go,” she said. She stretched up high and let go of the star. It dropped down into the sand.

“I need to get closer to the sky,” said Millie. She climbed on a piece of driftwood. Again, the star fell in the sand.

Large rocks edged out into the water. “I would be very close to the sky out there,” Millie thought. She crawled over the slippery rocks, holding tight to the star. “You have to be careful when you’re carrying something fragile,” she told herself.

Soon Millie was almost completely surrounded by water. But the star needed help.

When she reached the farthest rock, Millie lifted the star up as high as she could before letting go. It fell down into the water with a splash.

“Oh, no!” said Millie. The star was lost! Now it would never get back to its home in the sky.

Then she noticed glimmers of light reflected on the water’s surface. “Oh!” said Millie. “That’s why my star fell in. It’s a water star! That’s where it belongs. It’s not lost!”

Millie was happy as she slowly began the journey back over the rocks. The wind was picking up, and the forest was a long way off.

Suddenly, Millie slipped on a piece of seaweed and plunged down into the cold water. She struggled to the surface, but sank back under. She swam and swam as hard as she could. Finally she dragged herself, drenched and shivering, onto the shore. Her eyes stung, her throat burned, and sand clung to her fur.

Millie started for the forest. But now it all looked the same! Where was her path? Where was her tree? Now she was the one who was lost!

Then she saw the piece of driftwood she had climbed on earlier. She pulled herself up on it. And there were her very own paw prints, coming from the forest. Millie followed them to her path.

The sun was just coming up as Millie crawled into her nest. Now she was safe, and home at last. Mama would be proud of her for saving the star. Millie's heart felt big.

And, under the deep water, not far from the rocks, a small sea star moved slowly through the sand.

Now it too was safe, and home at last.