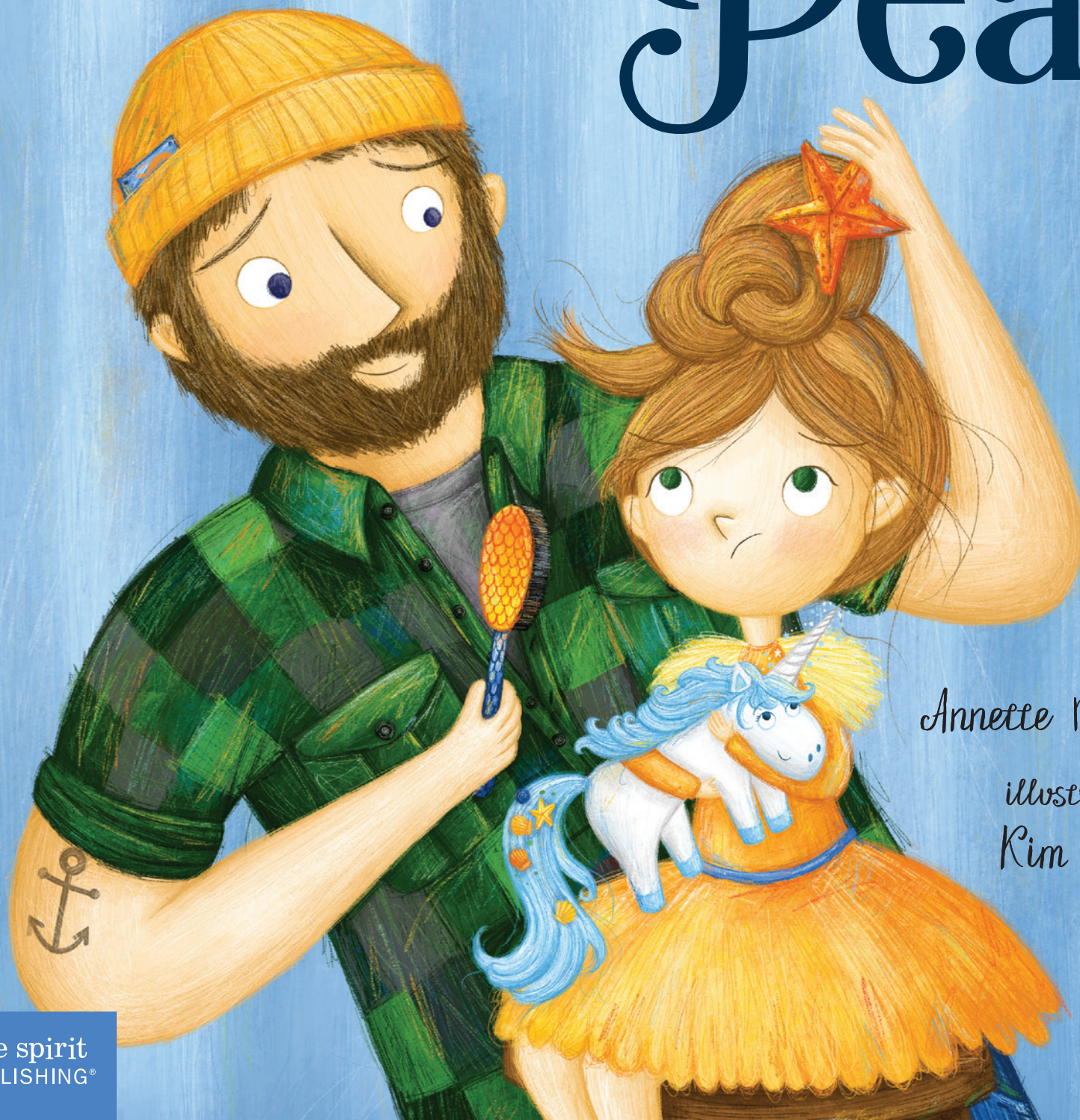


PAPA ^{and} Pearl





Annette M. Clayton

illustrated by
Kim Barnes

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 A Tale About Divorce, New Beginnings,
and Love That Never Changes 

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free spirit
PUBLISHING®



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For Avery and Noel, my little mermaids—you are so loved.

—AMC



To my husband, the best dad to our children
I could have wished for.

—KB



Toot-toot goes Mama's horn. "Have a great week, princess!
I'll see you on Saturday."

I wave goodbye to Mama.

And say hello to . . .

"Papa!"





His new house isn't what I imagined.



But the backyard is spectacular.

“Want to see your room?” Papa asks.
I don't think I'll like having two bedrooms,
in two different houses. But I nod anyway.

“Wow!” A room under the sea, just for me.

Papa reads me my favorite princess story.
Soon, my eyelids grow heavy. “Sweet dreams,” Papa whispers.



A Note to Kids

If your parents are getting divorced, this is likely a difficult time for you. It was for Pearl. She didn't want anything to change, but changes happened anyway. She felt mad, confused, sad, and worried—sometimes all at the same time.

Maybe you feel this way too. Lots of kids whose parents are getting divorced feel these things. You are not alone. There are many kids like you with changing families. And there are adults in your life who care about you and want what's best for you, especially your parents.

Here are some things you can do when you're feeling mad, confused, sad, or worried about big changes.

Talk to adults about your feelings. You might feel angry, sad, or scared about all the changes that are happening. Talking about your feelings may seem impossible. Your feelings are important, so take your time. If talking is difficult, writing your feelings or drawing a picture may help you find the words. Sharing how you feel with a parent or another adult you trust is a good way to help some of the mad and sad inside you shrink.

Ask questions. You probably have a lot of questions about the divorce and what it means for you. They may be big, like *Why is this happening?* Or they may be smaller, like *Will my bedtime be the same at*

Daddy's house? It's okay to ask your parents any questions you have so you can understand your changing family better. If you're not sure where to start, here are some ideas: *How often will I see mom/dad? Will we move? What changes will there be?*

Speak up. Share your feelings and what is important to you. Do you have ideas for what would help you feel better? Do you want to keep one special stuffed animal at each parent's home? Do you want to pack your own overnight bag? Are you going back and forth too much, or do you feel like you're not seeing one of your parents enough? Even if your parents can't put your ideas into place right away, sharing your thoughts and asking for what you need is a good way to let adults know how to support you.

It's true that lots of things will be different after a divorce. But some things will stay the same. No matter what changes, always remember that your parents' divorce is not your fault. You are wonderful, special, and loved, just as you are. That will never change.



A Note to Caregivers

A divorce affects the whole family. Separated parents may be feeling the stress of new financial obligations, communication barriers when co-parenting, and the pressure of meeting their children's emotional needs. Children, especially younger children, may struggle to understand why their parents can't work through their issues and stay together.

With trying to manage new family dynamics and heal mentally and emotionally, successfully navigating this new chapter of life can feel insurmountable. It may seem as if nothing could ever lighten the heavy burden. But even through difficult times and family change, adults can focus on maintaining strong relationships with their children.

Tips for Parents Experiencing a Divorce

Although your family is changing, the bond you have with your children is not. And you can take steps to build more trust during this time. The following tips can be a starting point toward navigating a complicated present and building a healthy future.

Keep an open dialogue. Any divorce, even an amicable one, can feel overwhelming for a child and like a big loss. It's important that you sit down with your children and encourage them to discuss their feelings and ask questions. It likely won't be an easy conversation. Children may blame one or both parents. It may be tempting to try to "solve" a child's challenging feelings, but avoid doing so, as this minimizes their emotions. Instead, focus on being an active listener, and thank children for sharing. Let them know you are an open door they can always come to. You can also share how you cope with the feelings they are experiencing. For example, you could say, *When I'm feeling sad, I like to ride my bike or bake cookies. Would you like to try one of those activities with me?*

Build a strong relationship. One of the easiest ways to maintain a strong bond with children post-divorce is to spend quality time with them. While it may seem like you have to be the "fun" parent when it's your day, remember that what children really

want is *you*. Instead of going all-out, try simple activities, such as cooking, reading a book, or going to the park. One-on-one quiet time together will mean more to children than expensive outings or gifts. Make sure to attend your children's sporting events, performances, and school activities, too, even if it's not your day with them. Showing up and being consistent is key. If you tell your child that you will pick them up at a certain time, for example, make it a priority to be on time. Try not to miss dates. If you really can't make it to an event or see your child on a scheduled day, let them know ahead of time and tell them yourself. Don't leave it to an ex to explain your absence.

Avoid blaming your ex. You may be upset with your former partner, but commenting on them negatively in front of your children is harmful. Do your best to maintain a high-functioning co-parenting relationship. As a result, your children are more likely to:

- Be emotionally and mentally healthier. Children who witness negative co-parenting relationships and conflict are at a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression.
- Have healthy relationships. Even though you are divorced, having a positive co-parenting relationship with your former partner provides your child a model of a healthy relationship. It's likely they will carry that knowledge with them into adulthood.
- Feel secure. Children who understand and believe that both parents love them have higher self-esteem and are likely to adjust more quickly to the divorce.

Practice self-care. Through a divorce, you have to be resilient for your children. But part of resiliency is knowing when you need to recharge your batteries. Take time to care for yourself. Surround yourself with family and friends who love and support you.



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