The walrus and the carpenter

Once upon a time, on a long sandy beach, something quite remarkable happened. It was the middle of the night, and yet, as the story goes, the sun was still shining happily; shimmering in the sea while the moon sulked.

“That sun has got no right to be here after the day is done. He’s come to spoil the fun,” the moon grumbled.

But the sun wasn't the only strange thing out that night. The sea may well have been wet and the sand, soft and dry but there wasn’t a cloud or bird in the sky. What’s more, it came to pass that a walrus and a carpenter appeared, walking hand in hand down the beach.

“Such quantities of sand,” sobbed the carpenter. “If only we could clear it all away. How grand would that be.”

“If seven maids with seven mops, swept it for half a year, do you suppose they could clear it?” the walrus pondered aloud.

“I doubt it,” said the carpenter, wiping away a tear.

They stopped by a rock pool and, gazing down into the shimmering waters, saw, amongst all the creatures bathing there, a family of oysters.

“Oysters! Come and walk with us!” called the walrus, “but we cannot do with more than four, to give a hand to each.”

The eldest Oyster looked up at him and shook his head.

“I'm staying here in the oyster bed,” he replied, his voice babbling in bubbles to the surface. “I'll ask the kids if they want to go with you.”

Within moments, four young oysters, their hair brushed, their faces washed, were standing alongside the walrus and the carpenter, eager for their treat.

“That’s odd,” said the carpenter, examining their tiny sparkling shoes.

“Oysters don’t have feet.”

But then another strange thing happened. Oysters, lots and lots of them, were coming thick and fast, hopping through the frothy waves and scrambling to the shore. When they were all assembled, the walrus and the carpenter walked with their eager oyster friends for a mile or so down the beach.

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This story text is based on Adam Guilain’s own oral ‘telling’ of a short episode from this classic children’s book Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. There are many readings of the original text available on CD. ©The Story Museum SM0410
Finally, the walrus and the carpenter rested on a low rock while all the oysters stood and waited in a row.

“The time has come,” the walrus began, “to talk of many things:
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
Of cabbages and kings
And why the sea is boiling hot
And whether pigs have wings.”

“But wait a bit,” the oysters cried,
“Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!”
The carpenter thanked the young oysters for their poetic refrain.

“We need a loaf of bread,” the walrus said, admiring the charming plump crowd of oysters. “And pepper and vinegar besides.” He looked into his bag to see what he could find.
“You're not eating us,” cried the oysters, turning a little blue. “After such kindness, that would be a dismal thing to do!”
The walrus smiled kindly and gestured to the sea. “The night is fine,” he said with a smile. “Do you admire the view?”
The carpenter said nothing but took a slice of bread.
“It seems a shame,” the walrus whispered to his friend.
“To play them such a trick.
After we've brought them out so far, and made them trot so quick!”

The carpenter said nothing except, “The butter's spread too thick!”

A while later, while thinking of the young oysters, the walrus got out his handkerchief and wiped his streaming eyes.
“I weep for you,” he sobbed.
“Oysters,” said the carpenter,
“You've had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?”
But answer came there none....

And this was scarcely odd, because the walrus and the carpenter had eaten every one.