



CHAPTER ONE

“I did it! I turned ten somersaults without stopping!” Amber exclaimed, swooshing to a stop in a cloud of bubbles and steadying herself with a flick of her tail. Her cheeks were flushed and her hazel eyes were sparkling. “That makes me the winner, unless anyone else wants another go?”

Pushing her long plait back over her shoulder, she looked at her friends from Moon Pearl dorm. They were messing about in The Singing Circle – a circular courtyard enclosed by the majestic coral walls of Mermaid Academy. Stone benches, statues, and orange and red sea fans were



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dotted around. Large open windows led into the classrooms and dorms, and on the pedestal in the centre was an enormous golden harp. Shoals of tiny, brightly coloured fish swooped around the groups of students who were relaxing after their day's lessons.



Amber and Flash

“Well?” Amber demanded.

“Not me. I’m out,” said Maya, laughing.

“Me too,” added Cora.

Isla grinned. “And me. Congratulations, Amber. I declare you the winner of Moon Pearl’s turning-somersaults competition!”

Everyone cheered and Flash, Amber’s dolphin, swished up beside her and kissed her nose.

Amber beamed. She was naturally good at sport, just like she was naturally good at most things, and she loved competitions. “How about a swimming race next? First to swim three times round the golden harp and reach the dining hall wins. Who’s in?”

“Me!” Flash whistled eagerly.

“Hang on, Amber!” said Maya. “What about your homework? Have you finished the assignment on *The Healing Properties of Ocean Plants* yet?”

Amber shrugged. “Not yet.”



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Maya looked anxious. “But you promised Mr Wakame you’d hand it in before dinner. You’ll get a behaviour mark if it’s late again and then Moon Pearl will lose a sea-star point. It’s only four days until the end of term, when the dorm with the most sea-star points will get the trophy. We’re two points below Lilac Star. We could still beat them but not if you start losing us marks!”

Amber sighed. Sometimes Maya fussed way too much! “Maya, chill! It’s not that big a deal. I just need to collect some sea herbs and label them. I’ll do that after dinner. Mr Wakame won’t care. Now,” she grinned. “Who’s ready for a swimming race?”

“Er, Amber, isn’t that Mr Wakame? I think he’s looking for someone. Could it be you?” Isla asked, pointing across The Singing Circle to where Mr Wakame, the Ocean Botany and Mer Medicine teacher, had swum out of one of the classroom



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windows and was looking around.

Amber groaned. She had a sinking feeling Isla was right. There was only one thing to do – hide! But where? She darted behind a nearby sea fan but realised it wasn’t big enough to conceal her properly. *Clattering clams!* she thought, smacking her tail on the seabed in frustration as Mr Wakame swam over. *If I lose us a sea-star point, Maya will be so upset!*

Mr Wakame reached the group. “Ah, Moon Pearl. Where’s Amber? She owes me an assignment.” His gaze passed over both Amber and the sea fan. “Have you seen her?”



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Amber was puzzled. Why was Mr Wakame pretending he couldn't see her? He was a kind but serious teacher, not one for making jokes, especially about overdue work.

Her friends glanced round. "Um, sorry, Mr Wakame," said Maya, looking surprised. "She was here a moment ago but she seems to have gone."

"Maybe she went back to our dorm," Isla put in.

Mr Wakame sighed. "Well, please tell her I expect her assignment on my desk before bedtime. If it's not handed in by then, I will have to give her a behaviour point."

Amber blinked, astonished, as the teacher swam away. What was going on? "Well, that was weird," she said, popping out from behind the coral.

Cora squealed. "Jumping jellyfish! Where did you spring from?"

Maya gaped like a guppy. "How did you do that, Amber? Where were you hiding?"



Amber and Flash

"Duh! Behind this sea fan, of course," said Amber. "You must have been able to see me."

Her friends exchanged confused glances. "Nope," said Isla.

"Seriously?" said Amber, her forehead wrinkling. "I mean, come on! It's not exactly the best hiding place ever!"

She darted behind the sea fan again, and this time she noticed a strange sensation. It felt like a ripple of water was flowing over her, from her tail fin up to her head.

"Amber, you've disappeared!" shrieked Isla.

"What are you talking about? I'm here," said Amber, poking her head out from behind the fan.

They all gasped.

"We ... we can see your head," breathed Cora, her green eyes as wide as clamshells. "But nothing else!"

"Amber!" Flash whistled, his eyes shining with





Amber and Flash

excitement. “I think you’ve found your magic at last! You’ve got camouflage magic. It means you can blend into backgrounds so that it looks like you’ve vanished.”

As her friends squealed in delight, Amber felt stunned.

All merfolk could pull mermaid fire from the seabed, which gave them enough magic to make things like bubble tunnels, but each mermaid also had to discover their own unique magic power. Isla, Maya and Cora had already found theirs. Isla could make bubbles, Cora could conjure whirlwaves and Maya could heal. Amber had been wondering if her magic would ever appear!

“Whizzing whales!” she cried, turning a delighted somersault as she thought of all the tricks she could play. “Camouflage magic will be awesome!”

“Look at your tail!” said Cora.



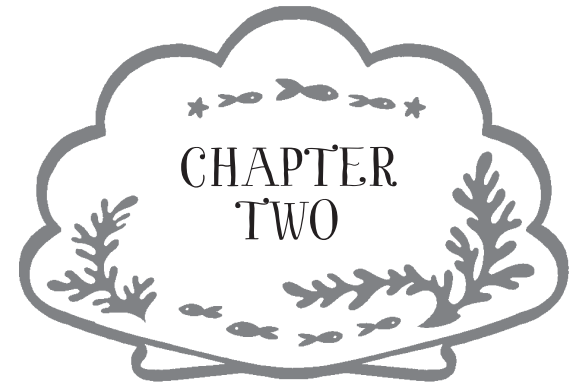
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Amber glanced down. When someone discovered their magic, a symbol appeared on their tail in gold scales.

“It’s half a mermaid beside a rock!” said Isla, inspecting it. “Only half her tail is showing because some of it is camouflaged.”

Flash whistled. “If you practise, you’ll be able to camouflage me as well, or anyone else who’s near enough to you and—” He broke off and frowned. “Amber, where did you go?”

“BOO!” shouted Amber, leaping off the seabed where she had been lying, camouflaging herself against a barnacle-covered rock. Her friends shrieked out loud. Clutching her middle, Amber doubled over with laughter. “I don’t need to practise, Flash. I’m brilliant at it already! We’re going to have so much fun with my camouflage magic!”



Amber spotted two prefects from the final year swimming along together. “Look,” she said. “There’s Marianna and Tinto. Let’s give them a fright.”

“Amber, no! You might get into trouble,” said Maya.

But Amber couldn’t resist showing off her new talent. She swam quickly over to a statue of a seahorse and imagined herself the same colour. She felt the same weird rippling sensation she’d felt before and then waved at her friends with both hands. Their gazes slid over her as if she

