



“Ready, Splash?” Harper grinned at her dolphin, her green eyes sparkling with mischief.

Splash gave an eager nod. “I’m ready!”

Harper stifled a giggle as she swam along the outer wall of her dormitory tower and peeped through the window. There was no glass in the windows of Mermaid Academy so the students could swim straight through, and this meant she had to be extra quiet.

Inside Lilac Star dorm, Harper saw her dorm-mates, Millie, Aurora and Lyla unpacking. Everyone had just returned from holiday.



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Millie was carefully placing hair slides on a miniature coral tree. Lyla had emptied all her bags out and was staring at her heap of things in disbelief, while Aurora was curled up on her clamshell bed, reading a book.

“Three, two, one, go!” whispered Harper. She raised her voice and made it sound exactly like the school’s headteacher, Dr Oceania.

*“Come along, Crystal. We’ll start our surprise inspection with Lilac Star dorm. If they haven’t unpacked their things yet then there’s going to be serious trouble!”*

Splash whistled in agreement, pretending to be Crystal, Dr Oceania’s dolphin.

Hearing alarmed gasps from her friends, Harper struggled to hold back her giggles. Beside her, Splash shook with silent laughter.

She continued loudly, *“If the dorm is a mess, I will deduct ten sea-star points...”* When she heard Millie let out a horrified squeak, she gave up, exploding





with laughter as she looked through the window.

“Tricked you!” she cried.

“Harper!” shrieked Millie. “Don’t do things like that!”

“You’re much too good at mimicking people,” said Aurora, picking her book off the floor where she had dropped it in panic.



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Lyla nodded, heaving a sigh of relief. “I seriously thought we were going to start the term with negative sea-star points. Millie would never have forgiven us,” she said with a grin.

Lilac Star had nearly won the trophy for the dorm with the most sea-star points last term, until Moon Pearl leapt ahead at the last minute. Millie was determined to win it this time round.

Harper swam inside. “Have you missed me?” she asked, throwing her bag on her bed.

Everyone hugged her. “Definitely,” said Lyla. “Life is much quieter without you around.”

“I’ve missed everyone,” said Aurora.

Millie nodded. “It was fun to be home for a while. I loved seeing my little sisters, but it’s great to be back.”

“Did you have a good holiday, Harper?” Lyla asked.

Harper pulled a face. “Yes and no. It was nice



## Harper and Splash

seeing Mum and Dad, but my brother's fifteen now and he's a real boring barnacle. He won't hang out with me so I had no-one to play pranks on or do dares with which wasn't much fun. And I really missed Splash."

"I missed you too!" Splash whistled from outside the window. "Let's go and play. Jewel, Charm and Storm are in The Singing Circle."

"Sure! Come on everyone," said Harper happily. She darted back to the window.

"Harper, wait," called Millie. "We've already seen our dolphins. There's a school assembly soon in the Grand Cavern and after that, lessons start."

Harper spun round in dismay. "What? Are you sure?"

"Yes, our first lesson is Wildlife Studies with Mr Nori," said Millie. "Our timetable is up on the noticeboard. Didn't you check it?"

"But it's our first day back! I thought we'd be



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allowed to settle in and chill,” groaned Harper, who hadn’t even thought about checking the noticeboard. She gave Splash a longing look. Millie, Aurora and Lyla were great but Splash was her best friend in all the oceans and they had so much to catch up on.

A long note from a conch shell rang out around the school.

“Assembly is about to start,” said Aurora.

“Boring snoring!” grumbled Splash.

Harper swam over the window ledge. “We can swim down to the Grand Cavern together at least, Splash.” She grabbed the fin on his back. “Race you all!” she called to her friends. “Last one there’s a stinky skunkfish!”

She giggled at their indignant exclamations as Splash shot away, pulling her with him. When mermaids and dolphins linked their energy together, they could swim much faster than



either could alone. Harper made use of that magic a lot. Her tail fin was smaller than most of the other mermaids which meant she couldn't swim as fast. It didn't bother her. She just worked harder or found a different way to achieve her goals.



Harper held on to Splash as they zoomed down through the turquoise water and across The Singing Circle. There were stone benches to sit on, large sea fans, impressive statues and a pedestal with a giant golden harp. Two nibbler fish who had been snacking on a section of coral arch scattered as Harper and Splash raced past.

The school buildings all surrounded The Singing Circle. Some were made from coral



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and others from stone. The Grand Cavern where assemblies were held was a huge cave carved out of a rocky cliff on one side of The Singing Circle. Its entrance was covered by a thick curtain of seaweed.

“Winners!” said Splash, play-bumping Harper with his nose as they stopped in a cloud of bubbles outside it.

“Yaaay!” Harper said. “You’re the best, Splash. Meet me at the Wildlife Sanctuary at breaktime and we can catch up properly then.”

“OK,” said Splash.

“Don’t have too much fun without me!” Harper called as he swam away.

Her friends arrived and they entered the Grand Cavern with the other students. The rocky ceiling of the Grand Cavern arched high overhead, decorated by bioluminescent algae that sparkled like stars. Sconces of green mermaid fire flickered on the walls and a huge magical globe hung above

