



‘I should have known you lot would have something to do with . . . well, whatever this is.’ Peri said as they reached the Gigglers.

Aziza shook her head as she looked at all the stuff that was piled up next to the giant

sandcastle. ‘How did you even make all this stuff come to you?’ she asked.

‘And why?’ Tiko added.

‘What are you going on about?’ squeaked Noon. ‘We haven’t done anything.’

Kendra put her hands on her hips. ‘Yeah, we’ve been busy building our epic castle. That’s it.’

Felly nodded. ‘All the flying stuff has absolutely nothing to do with us or the giant hole that we dug to make our sandcastle.’

Kendra groaned. ‘Felly! You really are rubbish at keeping a secret.’



‘Whoops,’ Felly said. ‘Well at least I haven’t told them that we’ve woken something u—’

The rest of Felly’s sentence was cut off by Kendra’s hand clamping over her mouth.

‘All right,’ Peri demanded. ‘Fess up.’

The Gigglers stared back mutinously until at last, Kendra sighed. ‘Fine. We might have been making too much noise with all our digging.’

‘Maybe we dug too deep,’ Noon added. ‘But there was some kind of creature down there.’

‘Not that we got a proper look before all

this stuff came flying at us,’ Kendra explained.

Felly bounced on the spot. ‘I got a proper look. It looked a bit like a tiny dragon, but it was covered in grey shells. Then it disappeared when all this stuff turned up.’ She pointed at the pile.

Kendra beat her wings and rose up into the air. ‘Anyway, you’re here now and you love sorting stuff out so we’re going to leave you to it. We’d hate to get in the way.’

Felly and Noon took flight also. ‘See ya, wouldn’t wanna be ya!’ Kendra yelled as the three fairies flew off.

‘That’s so typical of them,’ Peri huffed, glaring after the Gigglers. ‘They cause the problem and then leave it to us to sort out.’

Aziza sighed. ‘Well, at least it is not a big problem. Felly said it was a tiny dragon. Do you think it is under this pile of stuff?’

‘Maybe.’ Tiko sounded puzzled. ‘But I’ve never heard of a shell-covered dragon before.’

Suddenly there was a sneezing sound and the ground shuddered for a moment. A memory of something Tiko and Sirena had said tickled the back of Aziza’s mind. ‘Could it be a . . . a shell-walker?’ she asked.

Peri gasped. ‘No way . . . it couldn’t . . . could it?’ Her voice faltered.

Tiko gulped. ‘But they *never ever* come out in the day. My mum says they are super dangerous.’

‘But Felly said the creature was tiny,’ Peri said. ‘Shell-walkers are like . . . huge.’ Aziza was glad to hear this. She kind of loved the idea of meeting a baby dragon. Just then, a small tail flicked out of the pile of stuff. Immediately, a pink snorkel flew towards the heap and the whole pile seemed to move as things shifted about to make room for the snorkel.

Tiko's face creased into a grimace. 'Don't you see? The shell-walker is attracting all this stuff – that's what they do. That's how it got its shells in the first place. But as it grows in size, its grabbing force will get stronger, and it'll start attracting even bigger things!'

'If it doesn't go back to sleep soon, it's going to become huge,' Peri added. 'And then what if it leaves the beach? Shimmerton will be in real trouble.'

'It will grab all the houses in town,' Aziza gasped in understanding.

Tiko's little nose began to twitch. 'The

trees in the Wailing Woods.’

‘The rocks on the Ice Mountain,’ they all said at once.

‘We’ve got to stop it,’ Aziza cried. We need to—’

‘Ask Sirena,’ Peri finished triumphantly. ‘Think about all those amazing adventures she’s been on.’ Peri continued. ‘She’s always solving problems. I bet she’ll know what to do.’

Tiko nodded eagerly. ‘That’s a great idea. Let’s go before the shell-walker decides to leave this hole.’

‘All right,’ said Aziza.

Tiko and Peri raced back to the shoreline. Aziza followed but kept looking over her shoulder to make sure the shell-walker was still in the same place and under the ground. *We really don't have much time, Aziza thought.*



‘Hey, you’re back,’ Sirena said from her rock.

‘Sorry we took so long.’ Peri quickly filled her in on the situation with the shell-walker.

‘We need to find a way to get it back to sleep, or it will destroy Shimmerton,’ Aziza said.

‘And we thought you might have a plan,’ Tiko finished.

Aziza thought she saw a flash of uncertainty on the mermaid’s face but realized she must be wrong. Sirena was so confident, how could she ever be uncertain about anything?

Bobbing in the water beside her was a beautiful pink seahorse, whose bright eyes sparkled above her long snout.



Sirena tapped her chin for a moment, then her face lit up. ‘I know exactly what we need to do. My mum told me about this legend once . . . that there’s a magical conch shell somewhere that plays a special song that will help you solve any problem.’

‘Magic shell that plays a song?’ Peri

repeated. ‘That sounds perfect!’

‘We just need to go into the ocean and find it,’ Sirena finished with a confident smile.

‘If anyone can find it, it’s you!’ Tiko declared. ‘You’re the best treasure-hunter in all of Shimmerton. Remember the time you and Water Dancer discovered that cursed treasure in the cave of doom? I love it when you tell us about that adventure.’

Sirena’s confident smile slipped for a second. ‘Erm . . . yeah.’

Peri nodded. ‘Or that time you defeated the ship full of pirates? Looking for the magic

conch shell will be easy-peasy compared to that.'

'Sure, but I'd still love your help finding it,' Sirena said. 'We can all go on an ocean adventure together.'

'Yay! We love going underwater,' Tiko and Peri whooped with delight.

Aziza stared at her feet. She worked really hard at her swimming and she loved it, but somehow she didn't think she'd be able to keep up with a mermaid. *And how am I supposed to breathe underwater?* Tiko could shape-shift but could fairies breathe underwater?

‘Aziza, don’t look so worried,’ Sirena said.
‘I’ll help you swim underwater.’

Sirena’s smile was friendly but somehow that made Aziza feel even worse. Why was this mermaid so great at everything? ‘I wasn’t worried,’ she muttered.

‘Oh, OK,’ Sirena said breezily. ‘I just thought I’d use my magic to turn you guys into mermaids.’

‘You have magic as well?’ Aziza asked.

‘Yeah, it was a birthday gift from my mum a while back,’ Sirena said.

Peri squealed. ‘It’s so much fun, you get a

tail and everything.’ Her face creased into a frown as a crunching sound filled the air.

Aziza spun round to see that the shell-walker was on the move. It was the strangest sight. A huge pile of stuff waddled across the beach and towards the promenade. Alf, the Elf and Safety Officer, was standing a few metres away waving a red beach towel at the shell-walker as if trying to get its attention. Mr Bracken was on all fours, horn down. Pawing at the ground.

‘What are they doing?’ Aziza asked.

Peri frowned. ‘I think they’re trying to get



the shell-walker back into the hole. Looks like Mr Bracken is going to charge.'

'That's not going to work,' Sirena cried. 'Come on, follow me!' She slipped into the water, her seahorse bobbing next to her, then

traced a symbol on the surface that began to glow. ‘Don’t worry, it’s just my magic.’

Peri didn’t need a second invitation. With a loud squeal, she jumped into the shimmering water, disappearing beneath the waves. Then up Peri sprang, her feathery wings spread wide. Her new silver tail gleamed under the sun before she landed again with a splash. Droplets of water hit Aziza and Tiko, who were still standing on the shore.

‘Careful,’ Tiko grumbled.

Wow, Aziza thought. She loved swimming, and a part of her couldn’t wait to transform

into a mermaid, too. But another part of her was nervous. *What if I can't swim well with a tail? And will I really be able to swim underwater? How do I even breathe?*

'Let's go,' Sirena said, but Tiko shook his head.

'No offence, but I didn't love being a merperson last time,' he said. 'It's not easy to swim with that tail if you're not used to it.'

He took a deep breath then leapt into the air, his eyes shut and his face scrunched in concentration.

He's shape-shifting, Aziza realized. I wonder

if he'll turn into a seahorse like Water Dancer, or maybe a dolphin.

With a flash of sparkles, Tiko's furry body disappeared, replaced instead by a round scaly one, with sharp teeth, a dorsal fin and a strange thing between his eyes that glowed. He dropped into the water.

'An anglerfish?
Sirena said.
'When you
could have
been a
merperson?'



‘Oh dear,’ Peri said. ‘Did you mean to do that?’

‘Yes, I meant to,’ Tiko huffed. ‘Anglerfish are the coolest.’ Tiko shook his head and the lure between his eyes glowed brighter. ‘See? I even have my own light.’

‘That *is* pretty magical,’ Aziza replied, impressed. ‘But I’d much rather be a mermaid!’ She ran towards the water.