

1. - A New Adventure

Erin took a deep breath of fresh air. *Mmmmm. Summer*, she thought. Sleeping in and not rushing in the morning to get ready were two of Erin's favorite things about summer. The sun was shining in through her open window as she lay cozy in her bed. She looked over to her nightstand. On it, next to some books, was a bubble wand. She had found the wand the day before while cleaning the attic for her mother. But it was no ordinary bubble wand, she had found out. The wand had produced a bubble that transported her to a new world with a castle, a missing princess, and an adventure. She picked up

the wand and peered through the hole. She could see across her room, but the hole in the wand was empty. *Will there be another adventure?* she thought.

Erin got up and stretched. She pulled on a pair of comfy jeans and a light blue t-shirt, put the wand in her pocket, and went downstairs. Her mom was already up and in the kitchen. The smell of freshly baked muffins filled the room.

“That smells good!” exclaimed Erin.

“Oh! Good morning,” said her mom.

Erin pulled a box of cereal out of the cupboard and grabbed some milk. “What are the muffins for?”

“I’m bringing them to the pool for a snack after swim practice,” her mom said.

“That’s right!” said Erin. “I forgot it was starting up again today.”

Erin was excited. She loved swimming and had joined the swim team in the fall. The team had been taking a quick break before the summer session started up. Today was the first day back. Erin was looking forward to seeing her friends.

“After breakfast, can you pack your swim bag? I’d like to get to the pool early so I can catch Monica’s mom,” her mom said.

“Alright,” said Erin.

She ran upstairs and grabbed her swim bag from her closet. Her goggles, cap, and swimsuit were tucked neatly inside. She ran and grabbed a fresh towel from the bathroom. She changed into her suit and

packed her clothes. The bubble wand fell out of her jeans pocket. She took the wand and studied it. Still no film. She decided to tuck the wand into her swim bag.

She went downstairs. Her mom was still packing up for the pool.

“Need any help?” Erin asked.

Her mom shook her head. “You’re welcome to go outside for a bit while you wait.”

“Ok!” Erin said.

She pushed open the front door and smiled at the warm sunshine. She skipped from stone to stone on the walkway from her front door. At the end of the path, she dropped her swim bag and slipped off her flip-flops. She stepped off the pathway into

the soft meadow by her home, feeling the grass between her toes. She closed her eyes and listened to the wind blowing through the trees of the forest at the edge of the meadow. She imagined the sound of the wind was instead soft waves lapping on the shore. She wiggled her toes again and thought of a soft sandy beach. When she opened her eyes, she looked across to the forest and imagined it was an island off in the distance. She laid down in the grass and did her swimming strokes as she looked up toward the sky. Clouds were rolling in and she thought, *I must hurry to the island and find that treasure. A storm is coming.* She stood up and glanced at her bag. *I hope the map is still safe!* Then she paused. The bubble wand lay next to her bag instead of tucked away where she had put it.



“That’s odd,” she said out loud.

She went over and picked up the wand and breathed in sharply.

“No way, no way, no way,” she said.

A thin film covered the hole. She blew gently. A solid bubble came out. She caught it on the wand and studied it. She couldn’t see much in the bubble. It wasn’t like last time where there was a castle and village visible. The bubble was slightly cloudy and seemed to have more bubbles inside it.

She took a deep breath. “Well, here goes,” she said.

She touched the bubble. The world around went hazy and spun. Bubbles surrounded her. For a moment the whole

world seemed blue. She kicked her feet and felt for the ground but she could feel nothing. Her hair swirled up and around her as she felt a gush of water cover her. She kicked again and suddenly realized . . . there was no ground! She was completely underwater!

At first panic filled her mind. She tried to calm down and think of what to do. First, she tucked the bubble wand securely in her suit strap. She kicked her feet and stroked strongly with her arms upward, at least, what she thought must be upward. But nothing around her seemed to change. She was getting worried about running out of breath. She was a good swimmer, but she wasn't a fish! Suddenly, something poked her in the back. She pulled her body around and involuntarily gasped.

Two surprising realizations came to her mind. First, she was breathing or something like breathing underwater. Second, what had poked her was a long, sharp spear. Holding onto the spear was a boy. Or at least partly boy with a long green tail. A merman!

The boy's skin was slightly greenish in color making him hard to see in the water. His hair too wasn't exactly like human hair. Instead, it looked closer to sea grass floating in the water. His eyes were a deep, deep green, darker than any green Erin had ever seen. He stared at her fiercely and held her in a tight gaze. Behind him, two more merpeople swam up. One was another merman and the other was a mermaid. They varied in looks from the first boy. The merman had more brownish

skin and a brown tail. His grassy-like hair was also a brown color. He had deep green eyes but wore a seaweed tunic-type shirt. The mermaid had longer flowing locks of a grassy yellow. She has the same brownish skin and tail but her top seemed to be woven out of grass and lotus petals. She had a lotus flower in her hair. Both of them also held spears. They stared at Erin but more with curiosity, it seemed, than the fierceness of the first merman.

The second boy's mouth opened and to Erin's surprise, he spoke! His speech wasn't garbled like you'd think being underwater, yet it wasn't quite clear speech like you were used to hearing either. It was more muffled like when you try talking through a cardboard tube.

“What have you found, Kai? What is



this? A creature from above?” he said.

The first merman responded without removing his eyes or his spear off Erin. “I don’t know. I would guess so though.” And then louder directed at Erin. “What are you creature? Can you speak? Are you from above?”

At first Erin opened her mouth and water seemed to rush in. She choked and gasped a little, but in a moment it felt natural. Like she had always been underwater. She attempted again.

“I’m a human,” she responded. “I don’t know what you mean though by ‘above.’ I do usually live on land. But I’m from a different world, I think.”

Kai, the fierce-looking merman, didn’t seem at all impressed by her answer.

“What should we do with it?” asked the mermaid. “Doesn’t she look like . . .” her voice trailed. “Except those things.” She pointed down at Erin’s feet.

“She does,” agreed the second merman. “We should take her in. See what Cora says.”

Erin was starting to get a little annoyed. It was bad enough adjusting to being underwater. She was also getting a little tired of trying to tread water. And *very* tired of having a spear pointed at her.

“I’m not an *it*,” protested Erin. “I’m a girl, a human. My name is Erin.”

The mermaid gave Erin a small smile, but the two boys were having none of it. Both kept their spears raised.

“Come with us,” Kai said firmly.

Erin hesitated. It didn't look like she had much choice.