

DRAGON GIRLS

Grace the Cove Dragon

by Maddy Mara

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Grace had been at sleepaway camp for only a few days, but she already loved it. For two whole weeks she would get to do her favorite thing in the world: swim! At this special camp, kids could have coaching sessions in their favorite water sport. Some kids were learning to water ski; others were doing diving, surfing, or

wakeboarding. Grace was training in the pool. She was already one of the fastest swimmers on her team. After camp, she'd be unbeatable!

Grace was sharing a cabin with an awesome surfer named Zoe and a champion diver named Sofia. The three girls had very different skills. Their personalities were different, too. But they had one thing in common: They all loved being in the water.

After training ended each day, everyone had free time. Some kids went for hikes in the forest or read in their cabins. But Grace, Zoe, and Sofia always joined the group headed to the small cove near camp.

"You've been in the water all morning," teased

Emily, their counselor, as the girls spread out their towels on the golden sand. “Isn’t that enough for one day?”

“No!” Grace, Zoe, and Sofia cried at the same time.

“Who wouldn’t want to be here?” Grace gazed around the beautiful cove. The sun hung low in the sky and a soft golden light danced across the water. All around the bay, palm trees swayed in the gentle breeze. Small children ran in wild circles around their parents, and a group of teenagers played ball by the shore. A salty sea smell wafted through the air.

Emily laughed. “I can’t argue with that. Okay, you three know the rules. Make sure you stay

within sight of the lifeguards, and don't swim past that red buoy."

"Who's coming in?" Grace asked her new friends.

"I might lie here for a few minutes," Zoe said, stretching out on her towel.

"I'll just check out the pier first," Sofia said. "I want to see if the water is deep enough for me to dive off."

"Okay! I'll see you out there," Grace said, standing up.

Swimming in a pool was great. But there was something about swimming in the sea that Grace couldn't resist. She just had to go in! It was like being under a magic spell.

Grace ran across the sand and splashed into the sparkling water. Small waves broke against her legs as she waded out. Even though she had been practicing all morning, Grace still felt excited to swim. The red buoy floated up and down on the gentle waves. Emily had told them not to swim past it. She didn't say not to swim to it, though!



Grace turned back to shore. Emily waved and Grace waved back. Then she plunged into the water and began to swim.

Swimming in the sea was way more challenging than swimming in a calm pool. But Grace loved it. Sometimes she swam over the top of a newly forming wave. Other times, when the wave was about to break, she ducked underneath.

Before long, Grace was in a rhythm. Her arms curved through the shimmering water. Her head turned for air. *One, two, three, breathe.*

As she swam, Grace sang to herself. But soon she realized it wasn't just her own singing that she could hear.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore . . .

Grace stopped swimming. Treading water, she looked all around. Who was singing about a magic forest out here in the water? Had Zoe or Sofia swum out to join her?

But no one was nearby. How odd! *I must have imagined it*, Grace decided.

The red buoy was just up ahead now, bobbing cheerfully on the waves. A strange feeling bobbed inside Grace, too. *Something magical is about to happen.*

Once again, Grace heard the strange song.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore.

She was certain she hadn't imagined the music this time. But where was it coming from? The buoy? It seemed unlikely, but she was almost there. She would check if there was a speaker on it somewhere.

Still treading water, Grace looked back at the shore. She waved to Emily again to let her know she was doing fine. Then Grace swam the last few strokes to the red buoy. Her heart beat fast as a new line of the song swirled around her.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, hear my roar!

What did that mean? Grace had no idea.

Grace's fingers made contact with the

smooth plastic of the buoy. She swam in place for a moment, waiting. But for what, she wasn't sure. Grace counted to five. Nothing happened. She counted to ten.

Still nothing.

Grace burst out laughing. For a moment there she'd really thought that something magical was about to happen!

I'll swim back to shore and see if Zoe and Sofia are ready to join me, she decided.

Pressing against the buoy, she flipped backward, diving under the water. Bubbles whirled around her, tickling her skin. Grace closed her eyes, twirling as she glided through the frothy seawater.

Was it her imagination, or did the water feel different now? Warmer and somehow softer. When Grace surfaced for air, her eyes widened in surprise. It wasn't just the water that had changed. Everything had!