

# My Epic Fairy Tale

**FAIL**

**ANNA STANISZEWSKI**

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\*Disclaimer: By printing your name above, you hereby agree to become an Adventurer for life and vow to help *all* creatures of the magical variety (including angry, smelly mermaids).\*\* Failure to carry out your duties will result in a disciplinary hearing before the Committee. Do *not* bring a cell phone. They hate cell phones.

\*\*We are not responsible for injuries sustained on missions. Avoid trolls, sea monsters, unicorns, pitchfork-wielding villagers, wolves in workout gear, giant b—Well, you get the picture.



*“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.”*

—Muriel Rukeyser





**PART I**



# Chapter One

If someone tells you that you're being sent to a magical mermaid land, take my advice and spend the day at the aquarium instead. Then you can have a nice lunch, feed some dolphins, and not get caught in the middle of a mer-people war.

Mermaids are nothing like the gorgeous girls you see in movies. In reality, they're bitter creatures who hate the water because it turns their skin prune. Even though their tails don't transform into legs, that doesn't stop them from desperately wanting to live on land so they can spend their days basking in the sun. Which is why the Green Tails and the Blue Tails were fighting over an island the size of a school bus. And why I, Jenny the Adventurer, had been sent to stop them.

To be honest, I wasn't doing a very good job so far. If I'd been on this mission alone, things probably would

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have been fine. But my bosses—the all-powerful and all-annoying Committee—didn't trust me after I'd threatened to quit being an adventurer, so they'd found me a babysitter: Jasmine, the wimpiest girl in the universe.

“Jenny,” she said as the two of us huddled behind a sand dune. The mermaid armies were lined up on the beach, on opposite sides of the tiny island, balanced on their tails like trained seals. “I think our current position is overly exposed. Maybe we should relocate?”

We *were* right in between the two merpeople clans, but since the island only had three sand dunes and one puny palm tree, there was nowhere else for us to go.

“Relocate to where?” I made sure to keep my nose covered with my T-shirt as I spoke. Fun fact about mermaids: they smell like a bucket of old fish.

Before Jasmine could answer, a shout rang out among the Blue Tails: “Load the catapult!”

A second later, a bunch of sea sponges shot through the air.

Jasmine shrieked and covered her head. “I think this situation is getting too dangerous! We should call for our guides.”

I stared at her. Jasmine was only a couple years older

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than me, but she acted like a little old lady. Was she really afraid of some flying sponges? “Jasmine, we only just got here. And we can’t abandon an assignment.”

“Spray!” one of the Green Tails yelled. A shower of starfish sailed over our heads.

“There’s no shame in walking away from an adventure and trying again another day,” said Jasmine. “Better safe than sorry.” We adventurers sure love our cheesy sayings.

I guess I couldn’t blame Jasmine for being so cautious. Thanks to Klarr, the evil clown sorcerer, she’d spent days as a bear statue. Even now, weeks after I’d managed to defeat the crazy clown, Jasmine claimed that dust came out of her nose whenever she sneezed.

“We can figure this out,” I said over the dolphin-like war cries of the nearby clan. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way, right?”

Jasmine’s dark eyes narrowed. “Are you sure you’re not putting us in unnecessary danger so you’ll have a better story to share with your friends?”

I almost laughed thinking of how Trish and Melissa, my regular-life friends, would react when I told them what merpeople were really like. My friends couldn’t get enough of hearing about my adventures. Trish was even doing a

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huge English paper on magic, which meant she asked me about a hundred questions a day.

“Reload the catapult!” Something flew past that looked suspiciously like a flailing octopus. Okay, this was getting ridiculous.

“I have an idea.” I pulled off my sock and poured a handful of sand into it. Hey, if my plan failed, I could always stun the merpeople with foot odor.

“What are you doing?” said Jasmine, staring at me in horror. “You might get some type of foot fungus in a place like this!”

I resisted the urge to smack her with my sock. Instead, I jumped up and yelled, “Fish! Get your delicious fish! Whoever stops fighting first gets this super-amazing, tasty treat.” I waved my sock around like there was a fishy delicacy inside.

The fighting stopped and all mermaid eyes swung toward me. I couldn’t help smiling. Finally, I’d gotten their attention.

“What kind of fish?” one of the Blue Tails asked, sniffing the air.

“Not so fast.” I hid the sock behind my back. “First, we need to get you guys to stop fighting. Let’s sit down—er, I

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mean, float around, and talk about this. There has to be a way to work things out.”

“The only way is for the Green Tails to leave our land!” cried one of the mermaids.

“*Your* land?” demanded a blue-tailed merman as he shimmied forward, snake-like. “We saw it first.”

“Prove it, tuna breath!”

“No, *you* prove it, shark face!”

A chorus of chirps and clicks erupted, followed by sea-lion-like howls.

“Hey!” I yelled, swinging my sock over my head, but no one was listening to me anymore. Soon rocks and seaweed and shellfish were flying through the air again. I managed to duck to avoid getting hit in the eye with an oyster.

“*Now* can we go?” said Jasmine.

I opened my mouth to tell her we weren’t going anywhere until we figured out a way to settle this mess, but I was interrupted by a loud *Pop!* I turned just as my magical guide, Anthony the Gnome, materialized next to me.

“Hey there, Jenny-girl!” he said. “I have great news!”

“You know a way to stop these crazies from battling each other?” I said, emptying my sandy sock and pulling

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it back on. I really hoped Jasmine was wrong about the dangers of foot fungus.

Anthony's smile faltered. "Oh. No, I have no idea how to fix that. It's probably hopeless. In fact, you're both being taken off this assignment."

"What? Says who?" I asked, just as Jasmine let out a loud sigh of relief beside me.

"Says the Committee," said Anthony, tugging on his bright orange beard. "This mission is being put on hold."

That was weird. The Committee never let adventurers give up on missions. It was in our contract. "Why? What's going on?" I asked.

"Well—" Anthony began.

A broken oar sliced into the sand next to me like a javelin, causing Jasmine to let out an I'm-being-murdered scream.

"On second thought," I said, "Anthony, how about taking us back to my house before you tell me about it?"

The merpeople sounded deafening battle cries and started furiously slithering toward each other. Apparently, they were done throwing things. Now it was time for hair-pulling and tail-slapping. There was no way Jasmine could handle that without having a total meltdown.

"Anthony!" I said. "Get us out of here!"

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He harrumphed to himself. “Always being ordered around,” he said. “That’s the life of a gnome.” Then he snapped his fingers, and with a *Pop!*, we were out of there.