

Delightful Dolphins

“Mama, look over there! I saw a splash! Some big fish, or something is swimming!”

The girl pointed out as the boat sailed along the blue ocean. Amy and her family were on a trip to the south of Italy, to meet her grandparents for the first time.

“There are all kinds of amazing creatures out there in the water. There are some that we know about, and some that we don’t know much about,” mother said, looking carefully to see what else they could see.

“I think what you saw was perhaps a dolphin—oh, look there they are again, several of them,” Amy’s father spotted.

“Come sit on my lap and let me tell you about these amazing creatures. They are very special indeed,” her father said.

The family was sitting on the deck, since the sailing weather was particularly nice that day.

There was so much to see—and mostly just lots of wide open space, without anything obstructing the view. Even if most of the time there was just water and more water, still it was a pleasant and relaxing view.

The waves were calm, the sun sparkled on the water, and it was the right time for a story about sea creatures.

Father began,

“Did you know that though they look like fish, big fish, they need to breathe air just like us!”

“Really? I didn’t know that,” Amy commented.

“Yes, and what is more, the mama dolphins feed milk to their babies, even while they are under the water!”

“The dolphin mother is very caring—and not just her, but the other dolphins around try to help each other in different ways.

“They teach their swimming babies everything they can, so they can grow up safe and strong and know what is right and what is wrong to do.”

Amy was enjoying learning about these special creatures that liked to help and care for each other, and the babies.

Father added,

“And just like we know about them, did you know they are also aware of us? They know when humans are around.”

“Sometimes they have helped to protect people who are in the sea, or even in a ship. They have even been known to help guide ships through tricky places, where a shipwreck might occur,” Father said.

Amy started to sing a little song about sailing in the blue ocean. She kind of made it up as she went, and it told of their trip so far. When she was done, her father said,

“Did you know that dolphins sing too? Well, really it’s one of their ways of communicating, to make certain sounds under the water, to tell the others a message.

“When it’s recorded—as some people have done—it sounds a bit like music; special sea music.”

“But how can they hear anything under the water? Do they have ears? Do their ears get full of water?” Amy asked.

She was imagining how it must be hard for sound to travel without air.

Father replied,

“Actually, it might surprise you to know this, but sound can travel very well under water. —Even better than in the air!

“The water can take the sounds fast and far away, so dolphins and whales, and those that can communicate with sound, can hear each other just great.

“It’s an amazing realm under the water. There is so much left to be discovered.”

Mother said,

“I remember when I was a little girl I went to a show—a water animal show. I saw some dolphins in this big pool of water.

“They were doing all kinds of clever tricks, and responding to what the humans were trying to communicate. They had trained the dolphins to do certain things.

“Everyone clapped at how amazing it was that the friendly dolphins liked to do things together with the people. It seemed fun for the people, and for the dolphins.”

“What kind of tricks?” Amy asked.

Mother replied, “They would leap out and swim through hoops when they were asked to. Or they would beep a button with their nose to give the right answer to some question. They were very smart, though it took years of training.”

“And I remember, when I was a boy...” Father began to recall.

“My great-uncle was a sailor, and he had some interesting experiences, and great stories to tell. Let me see if I can

remember one of them.”

“Let me tell you a story before you go to take a rest.”

Amy was ready to hear.

“Not all creatures in the sea are friendly and pleasant, in fact there are some that are too aggressive to be safely around. These we need to watch out for. Even other fish need to look out for them.

“They weren’t always that way. But one day things changed in nature, and some creatures got harmful and rough,” Father began to explain.

“Yet, other animals, whose job it seems is to be a help to people, are nice and agreeable, or can be trained.

“Can you think of some that are harmful, and others that are helpful?” Father asked.

Amy thought a moment, then said,

“Like dogs—some kind help the blind people know where to go, or can be a friend to a lonely person.

“But some other creatures that are a bit like dogs, are not wanted around human dwellings—like wolves and foxes.”

“Yes. Those tend to come and take away things and to be rough and troublesome. And so it is in the sea as well,” Father commented.

Father continued with telling his story,

“Well, one time a sailor, who was a friend of my great-uncle, had fallen in the sea while trying to fix something on the ship. The wind and waves were rough and he slipped overboard.

“The other crew members were trying to get some rope and a

life ring out over to him, so he could hold on to it and they could bring him back.

“Meanwhile, my great-uncle saw something troubling. Coming through the water, nearer to his friend, were some unwanted guests; the kinds that just want to take away and not take care of.

Amy’s eye widened, listening intently.

“What happened?” she eagerly asked.

Father continued,

“Just then, to his happy surprise, wonderfully along came a few dolphins. These helpful, friendly creatures swam around and around him, forming a ring of protection.

“They put aside their own safety and comfort, and were a help to someone that was very different than they were. They just knew that is where they were needed, and what to do to protect him.

“The men on the ship were able to pull the man back again on board. Everyone was much relieved.

“They even thanked the dolphins for their help by tossing some over some of the fish they had caught. Then off the dolphins swam, and on the sailors went.”

“That’s a nice story,” Amy said.

“And did you know,” mother added, “Some some dolphins even help people catch fish? I heard of one beach where the fishermen take their nets at a certain time of day to go fishing.

“These men depend on this food from the sea for their

families and village. At the right time, some dolphins are able to get many fish to swim over to the fishermen.

“The dolphins also get to have some of the fish, too. The fishermen and the dolphins help each other. Isn’t that nice?”

Amy nodded with a smile, then yawned.

She went to lie down in her little bed on the ship, and fell asleep to the gentle rocking of the boat.

Soon Amy was enjoying a dream.

In her dream she had gone down into the water, along with some divers.

She was able to stroke the dolphin’s smooth and shiny coat. She swam along with them for awhile, and a dolphin even came up under her—like they do with their babies, and pushed her up to the surface, so she could see above and get air.

Even though it was a dream, and Elsie didn’t actually need to have air but could swim and swim in the ocean, still it was fun going up and up in the water.

When she woke, Elsie wanted to learn more about dolphins. She and her mother went to talk to some of the sailors, to see what they could find out.

Here are some things they found out: