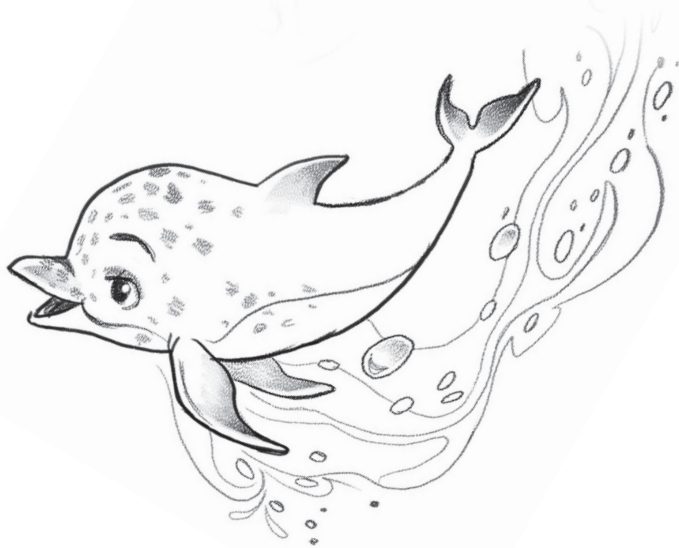




Flip's Surprise Talent



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Big News

“PEARL! WE’RE OVER HERE!”

Pearl was surprised to hear her friend Echo calling her. She was even more surprised when she saw that their other friends, Flip and Splash, were with her. The three of them were just inside the entrance of Coral Cove Dolphin School, floating in a patch of sunlight filtering down from the surface.

She swam toward them. “Good morning,” she said. “I can’t believe you’re all here already! I thought I’d be the first one to get to school today.” She smiled and flicked her

fluke. “My little sister, Squeak, woke me up extra early.”

Echo laughed. “Flip and I were ready to go early today, too.”

Echo and Flip were members of the same pod—a dolphin family. Some pods were quite small, like Pearl’s. She lived in a quiet lagoon with only her mother, father, and little sister. Other pods were much larger. There were more than fifty dolphins in Echo and Flip’s pod. Pearl couldn’t imagine living with that many other dolphins!

“These two even beat me here today!” Splash put in, doing a flip in the water.

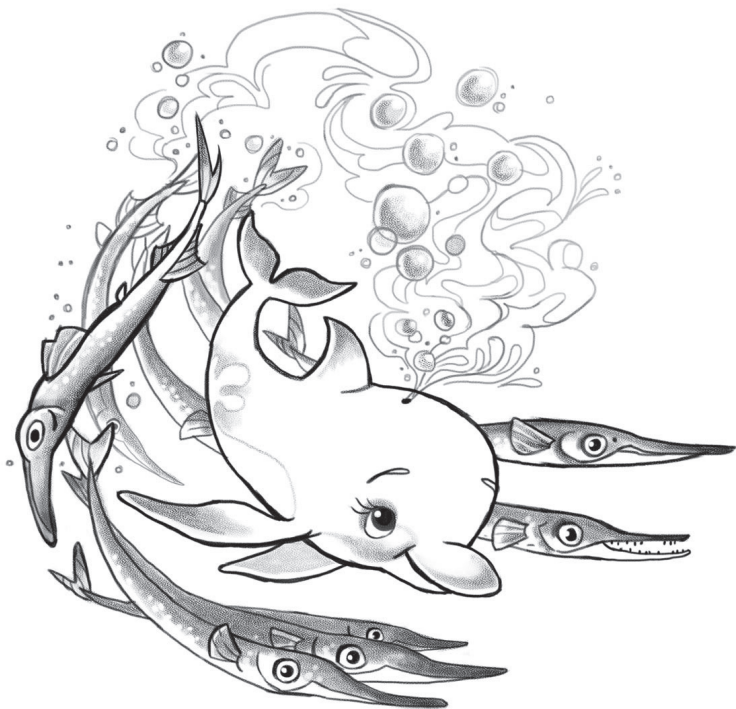
Pearl smiled. Splash was the fastest swimmer she knew. He was almost always one of the first students to arrive at school.

“It’s nice to get here early sometimes,” Echo

said. “It’s interesting to see what the reef is like without so many dolphins around.”

Pearl nodded and glanced around the school. It was protected by a colorful coral reef that reached all the way up through the shallow waters of the cove and into the air above. The reef was home to lots of different kinds of sea creatures, from fish to mollusks to jellyfish. Right now a school of needlefish was zipping through the middle of the cove. On the sand below, a blue crab scuttled along, dodging around a cluster of oysters.

“This place is great, isn’t it?” Pearl blew a happy stream of bubbles from her blowhole. “I wonder what we’re going to do in Magic class today. I hope we practice more healing skills—that was interesting yesterday.”



Young dolphins from all over this part of the Salty Sea came to Coral Cove Dolphin School to learn everything they needed to know, including how to use their natural magical abilities. Pearl and her friends were all in their first year there.

Splash laughed. “Why are you thinking about Magic already?” he said. “That class isn’t until the end of the day. Shouldn’t you be wondering about Music class instead? That comes first. Besides, you’re awesome at music, Pearl!”

“She’s good at magic, too,” Echo said. “When she healed that broken piece of coral in class, it looked as good as new.”

Pearl smiled. “Thanks. I know I’m not as good at magic as you are, though.”

“Nobody’s as good at magic as Echo,” Flip said. “Except maybe her mom!”

Pearl nodded. Echo’s mother had extra strong magic. She was famous throughout the Salty Sea for rescuing some Land Leggers when their boat sank. Dolphins were the protectors of the ocean, and that meant they were always willing to help all the creatures

who lived under the waves—or over them. Pearl was sure that one day Echo would be just as good at magic as her mother was.

“But nobody’s as good at Music as Pearl,” Splash said. “Anyway, I’m glad that Music and Magic aren’t our only classes. Otherwise they’d probably kick me out of school!”

Echo smiled. “Don’t worry, Splash,” she said. “Everyone knows you’re the best at Jumping and Swimming.”

“Or at least he’s tied for best,” Flip said, doing a flip just like the one Splash had done. “I’m just as good as he is.”

Pearl shared a smile with Echo. Flip bragged a lot about almost everything. At first that had bothered Pearl, but it didn’t bother her anymore. She liked everything about her friends.

“That’s one of the best things about school,” Splash said. “There are enough different classes so that everyone is good at something.”

“Except Ocean Lore, maybe,” Echo said with a giggle. “Nobody’s good at listening to Old Salty’s boring lectures on algae and barnacles!”

Pearl giggled, too. But she also looked around to make sure Old Salty wasn’t nearby. She didn’t want to hurt his feelings—even if his lectures were a little dull.

She didn’t see the Ocean Lore teacher anywhere. Instead, she spotted two other students swimming into the school.

Echo spotted them, too. “Uh oh,” she whispered. “Here comes Mullet.”

Mullet was a year ahead of them in school. He was friends with Splash’s brother. But that

didn't mean he was nice to Splash or the other younger dolphins. In fact, he liked to bully the younger kids every chance he got.

"I don't know why Shelly hangs out with Mullet," Pearl whispered, glancing at the dolphin swimming beside Mullet. "She seems really nice."

By then the older dolphins had reached them. "What are you babies doing here so early?" Mullet asked with a smirk. "Never mind, I know why. You're such nerds that you probably wish you could stay at school all the time."

"No, we don't," Flip shot back.

"We do love school, though," Echo added. "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," Shelly spoke up with a smile. "I like school, too."

“Yeah, but you’re not a nerd like them,” Mullet said.

Shelly laughed. “Oh, Mullet! You’re so silly!”

Pearl traded a look with her friends. Shelly never seemed to notice when Mullet was being mean.

Shelly was still smiling at them. “Anyway, I don’t blame you for wanting to get here early,” she said. “I can tell you’re all really good friends. Very compatible.”

“Compatible?” Splash said. “What does that mean?”

“It means we belong together, like fins and water,” Echo told him.

“More like algae and slime,” Mullet muttered as he swam off.

“Bye, you guys!” Shelly sang out, swimming after him.

“Mullet is so mean,” Flip said with a frown.

“Never mind him.” Echo blew out a stream of bubbles. “Let’s talk about something more fun—like all the cool stuff we’ll be doing in school today!”

And so they did. They were still talking a few minutes later when Old Salty swam to the middle of the cove and called for attention. Most of the other students and teachers had arrived by then.

“I have good news,” Old Salty said once everyone was listening. “It’s time for the school’s annual Show Off Day!”