

# Frankie's Tree House

## "The Day of the Dolphins"

Frankie looked up into the tree. Above her head was a platform resting on the fork of two strong branches and tied onto the trunk with rope. Round the edge of the platform was a low fence made of twigs cut from the forest that stretched for acres from the bottom of her garden. Her father and big brother, Tom, had spent all morning making the tree house for her.



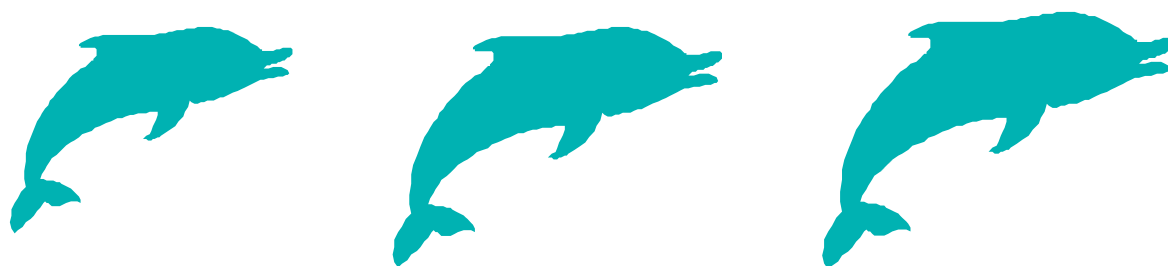
She put a foot on the rope ladder that hung down to the ground, and it swung to and fro as she slowly climbed up it. As she got further up the tree, the sound of her father chopping wood in the yard and the beat of Tom's guitar from the house became fainter and fainter. She thought she heard her mother's voice calling to her, "Be careful, Francesca! Don't fall!" Frankie reached the top of the ladder and crawled onto the platform.



The leaves of the tree surrounded her like a green cave. A blackbird hopped onto a higher branch and looked at her with bright, beady eyes. Frankie kept very still and they looked at each other for several minutes. A shaft of yellow sunlight shone through the branches like a golden path and the bird hopped

along it, stopping every now and then to pause and look back at Frankie. Frankie stepped onto the golden path, her eyes fixed on the blackbird. A leaf fell on her nose and made her blink.

When she opened her eyes again, the bird had vanished and the path had become a golden sea with dolphins leaping in the sunlight.

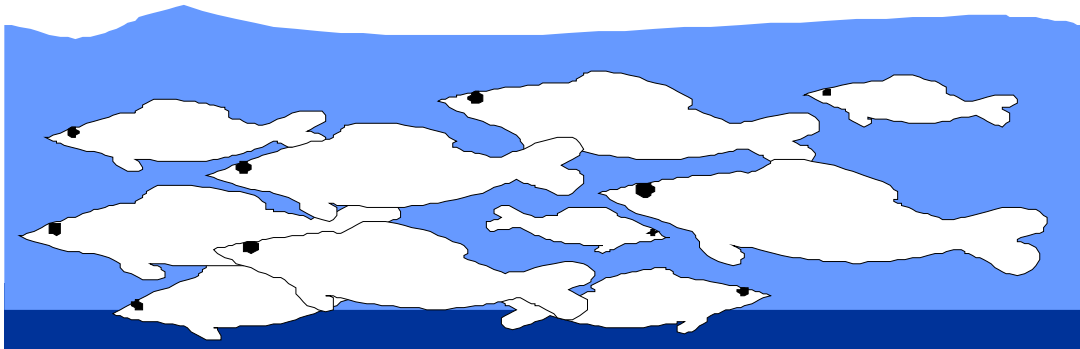


Frankie jumped onto the back of one of the dolphins and hung on tightly as it raced through the waves. Suddenly it dived under the water. At first Frankie held her breath, but then she was surprised to discover she could breathe quite easily, just like a fish.

The dolphin dived deeper. It became difficult to see anything. A greenish light glowed overhead, while down below it was almost black. Frankie heard high calls and clicks coming from a clump of seaweed somewhere to her right. She strained her eyes and saw something move. As the dolphin swam in small circles, struggling against a strong current, Frankie reached out her hand to feel what was below. Something felt large and smooth. Then she felt a mouth. It was another dolphin. It rested its snout in the palm of Frankie's hand.

"He's trying to tell me something," thought Frankie, and wished she understood dolphin language. As the dolphin she was riding swerved away in the strong current, she also wished she could see better. Then she felt her dolphin turn and swim back. Gripping with her knees so she did not slide off, Frankie reached out both hands as she came near to the dolphin lying in the seaweed below. She felt the smooth skin, then something sharp and hard. It felt like a piece of wire.

The next time Frankie came near the trapped dolphin, she reached out with both hands again and grabbed wildly, hoping to get hold of the wire and wrench it free. Her fingers curled round the wire. She pulled with all her might. The wire slipped off the rock where it had been caught. The dolphin slid forward – and so did Frankie. She was pulled along, still holding to the wire, which was now hanging loosely round the freed dolphin's neck. She sped through the dark water, seaweed flapping in her face and jagged rocks scraping her elbows and knees. She hung on for dear life as the dolphin swam



with her through a shoal of fish, scattering them in all directions. They passed monk fish and sea cows and pop-eyed halibut. They flew through the water and up to the surface.

When they came to the top, the dolphin rolled on its back in happiness. Frankie quickly scrambled onto its stomach. Then she heard a far-off shout. A fishing boat was in the distance and one of the sailors, his mouth hanging open in astonishment, was pointing at Frankie and the dolphin. At that moment, the dolphin flipped in an arc through the air. Frankie's stomach turned upside down as they landed in the sea again and bounced like a fairground ride over the waves. She could hardly breathe for excitement.



The dolphin dipped its head to dive down

into the sea once more, and Frankie felt herself flying off its back, up a ray of sunshine that was making a golden path through the sky. She landed in a pool of warm sunlight on the platform of the tree house and heard her mother calling her for dinner.

“What’s that?” asked her mother, when Frankie appeared sleepy-eyed at the kitchen door. She was looking at Frankie’s hand. Frankie looked down and saw she was holding a circle of wire.

“That...,” she began, then stopped. She knew no-one would believe her. “It’s...,” she stopped again. “It was wound round a dolphin,” she mumbled, disappearing into the bathroom to wash her hands.



“You heard the sound of a dolphin?” asked her mother, not hearing properly what Frankie had said. “That’s wonderful!” She couldn’t hear Frankie’s reply above the sound of running water.

“You’ll never guess what I saw when I was out fishing this afternoon!” said Frankie’s big brother, Tom, as they all sat down for their meal. “A dolphin!” He hesitated, knowing it would sound daft. “With a girl on its back!”

“Really, Tom!” exclaimed his father. “You are too old to be telling such stories! Even Frankie wouldn’t believe that!”

