

Igor Bondar

DOLPHINS

4

Stressy

Fairy tale

**New adventures in the lives of our underwater friends
– this time, with a romantic outcome for dolphin Geo.**

The Missing

A working day at the office of *The Globe Agency* was about to end when suddenly, a new visitor appeared at the doorway. Three dolphins: Bin, Karen and Geo, as well as turtle Medky, turned their heads toward the guest with interest. The visitor turned out to be a young and a very attractive she-dolphin. She swam inside and started looking around with curiosity. Everyone was waiting patiently.

‘Can we help you?’ Medky asked politely after a while.

‘What?’ the she-dolphin startled and suddenly turning to the turtle, she slapped Geo’s nose with her tail. ‘Oh, yes, yes! I need your help. There are legends circulating about your agency in the ocean already. I’m sorry, I was just looking around here a little...’

‘Well, this is a big exaggeration,’ said Bin.

The she-dolphin turned quickly towards him, this time touching Karen’s nose with her tail.

‘Oh, you don’t say! I don’t think so,’ she smiled looking at Bin. ‘All the sharks keep talking about your victory over the poachers of the Galápagos Islands. By the way, my name is Stressy. I know your names already. The turtle’s name is Medky and the dolphins are: Bin, Karen and...’

‘Geo,’ a voice sounded behind her.

Stressy turned around instantly once again. This time, it was Bin’s nose that suffered. After that, everyone took precautions and swam a little back from her.

‘Right, you should be Geo, then!’ the she-dolphin said, looking at him with a smile. ‘You all look like I imagined you to be.’

‘What brought you here, Stressy?’ Medky asked her again, willing to get to the point.

‘A big trouble has happened,’ the young she-dolphin replied, turning towards him swiftly again.

This time, none of the friends suffered from her tail.

‘My father is missing and I don’t know where to look for him,’ said the visitor and her eyes became very sad.

‘All right, Stressy, let’s do it this way,’ Bin suggested, ‘you come back here in two hours. We’ll call the rest of our friends and then we’ll all listen to your story very attentively.’

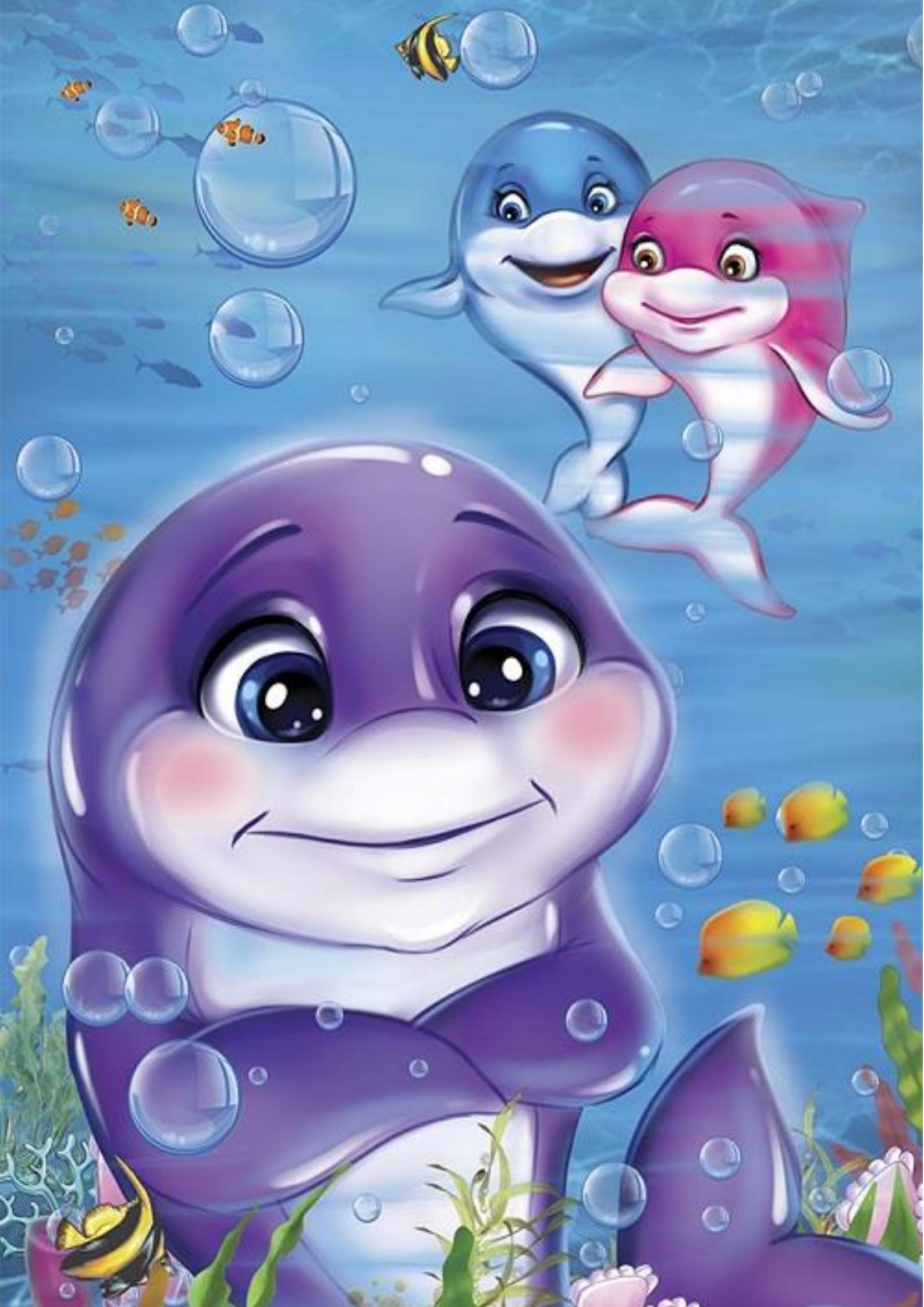
‘Will you help me?’ the she-dolphin asked him with hope.

‘We’ll do our best,’ Geo answered instead of Bin.

‘Thank you very much!’ Stressy brightened up. ‘Then, I’ll be back here exactly in two hours.’

She happily turned around for the exit, knocking down a globe with her tail and swam out. The friends thoughtfully followed her with their eyes.

‘How did she manage to come in here at all?’ Bin started thinking aloud. ‘Stressy... if we ever find her father, the first thing we must do is to ask whether he gave her that name on purpose or not. What do you think, Geo?’



His friend didn't answer. Bin turned to him and froze amazed: Geo was still looking with a weird shine in his eyes in the direction where Stressy had swum to. Bin had never seen such look on his friend.

'Geo, my friend,' he could only pronounce. 'Don't tell me you liked this *office devastator!*'

'She's so vulnerable!' Geo said in an unusual voice.

'Oh, Neptune!' the other three friends exclaimed at once.

* * *

Two hours later, all the members of *The Globe Agency* settled themselves on the upper deck of the ship. Having taken account of their new guest's clumsiness, they sat in a very wide circle. The pretty Stressy swam in exactly on time and greeted Ponty and Bolly who she was just seeing for the first time. Then, the young she-dolphin began her story.

'My case is not a big one and it's very personal. I quite understand that,' Stressy smiled sadly. 'It's very important for me. My father, who I love dearly, disappeared several months ago. He swam alone to see our relatives that live at the other coast of Australia; no one has seen him since then.'

'Why are you so sure about that, Stressy?' Bin asked her.

'I've recently come back from the places where my dad headed to,' the she-dolphin replied. 'He didn't return by all the reasonable time we expected him to; I became very worried and

decided to go there myself. But, none of our relatives who live on that coast saw him.’

A long silence fell on the deck.

‘Well, I don’t even know what to say, Stressy,’ Bin finally broke the silence with a gloomy voice. ‘Unfortunately, anything unpleasant can happen to a dolphin in the ocean: poachers, big sharks, ship’s screws. If an adult dolphin doesn’t return home for a long time, it’ll almost always mean that something bad happened to him, I’m afraid.’

‘Yes, I know that,’ Stressy nodded sadly, but then she lifted her head again. ‘But what would you do if your father was missing?’

Everyone there began to think.

‘Probably the same thing as you are doing now,’ Geo replied for everyone.

The others nodded their heads in agreement.

‘I’ve heard a lot of good stories about you,’ the young she-dolphin smiled guiltily, ‘so I’ve decided to use my last chance.’

‘You’ve done the right thing,’ Karen admitted. ‘It’s quite possible it won’t be in vain.’

‘Have you got any thoughts in this regard, my dear?’ Bin asked her with interest.

‘It’s more of an inkling, Binnie,’ she replied. ‘But first, we need to discuss it together thoroughly.’

Having said that, Karen looked at Stressy.

‘Your father wasn’t old, was he?’

‘Yes, he wasn’t, of course!’ Stressy smiled finally. ‘He was very young and absolutely healthy. Also, he loved travelling very much.’

Karen nodded satisfied.

‘That’s fine, Stressy! Then, we have something to discuss right now. Would you mind swimming back to us in about an hour?’

The visitor nodded her head slightly surprised.

‘Sure, sure. If that will help you to figure something out.’

Right after that, Stressy turned around quickly and swam away from the ship. This time, it was only Geo who received a slap on his nose – it was only him that was not afraid of staying near her...

‘So, my darling, tell us,’ manta Bolly started making a beautiful wave with her wings which started from one end of her wing and finished at another, ‘what has come to your smart pretty head?’

All the other friends looked at Karen with interest.

‘I’ll tell you straight off that we haven’t got much chance here,’ the she-dolphin smiled and began speaking her thoughts. ‘As you know, my profession on dry land was related to studying dolphins and I know quite a lot about it.’

‘But, how does it relate to Stressy’s father?’ a curious Ponty asked her.

‘Patience,’ Karen smiled again. ‘So, we were feeding wild dolphins from the shore of our island...’

‘And sometimes, you managed to do that quite well,’ Bin added.

Everyone laughed.

‘But the islands like those, Binnie, are not the only places where dolphins meet the people,’ Karen said. ‘People also have dolphinariums and aquariums for that.’

‘What are these?’ everyone wondered.

‘They are a sort of enclosed water bodies where the dolphins caught by people live in.’

‘Caught?’ the friends asked in one voice.

‘Well, yes. People, especially children, love communicating with dolphins’, Karen explained, ‘so to have such opportunity always, they build dolphinariums.’

‘I didn’t know anything about it,’ Bin reacted surprised. ‘What do they do with the dolphins there?’

‘Well, they feed them, teach them to perform some tricks in front of the public, jump high, do some stunts synchronously and many other things. By the way, apart from the dolphins, there are other sea animals too.’

‘It seems that I’m starting to understand something here,’ Geo said thoughtfully. ‘Do you think that Stressy’s father could have been caught and put in one of those dolphinariums?’

‘A small chance of that,’ Karen nodded, ‘but still, there is some. I guess it’s not quite a time for Stressy to know about my past life among the people yet and about our other capabilities.’

‘Now, this is all clear to me’, Medky said. Then he asked, ‘can the dolphins be freed from those dolphinariums?’

This time, it was Karen’s turn to spread her fins wide apart.

‘Who knows? But, I’m sure we can always devise something,’ she replied. ‘Yet, it’s too early to talk about it. First, we should check the dolphinariums. There aren’t too many of them in Australia. And then, if we are lucky, we’ll think further. These dolphinariums might be located right on the shore of the ocean, so we’ll be able to solve the problem with the help of good old pliers.’

‘I agree,’ Bin nodded. ‘Let’s start with checking the dolphinariums simply.’

‘Dear, do they sell pizza near the dolphinariums?’ Bolly’s sweet voice sounded.

‘Of course they do. There are many children there,’ Karen replied to the friends’ laughter.

Geo was pleased with such turn of events, smiling broader than all the others.

‘It means you’re swimming with me, my friends? That’s great! I’ve thought that I’d have to help her on my own.’

‘If you need pliers there, what will you do without me then?’ Ponty asked.

‘Also, these pliers need to be delivered to the place,’ Medky added and smiled cheerily. ‘Besides, saving someone with the help of Stressy only seems to be suicidal.’

‘And somebody needs a pretty good rest from all these endless jokes’, Bolly smiled, ‘preferably at a place where pizza is served. In fact, Bin’s parents really enjoyed working instead of me. They’ve got quite a talent for that.’

Everyone burst into laughter.

‘Great!’ Geo reacted. ‘May I tell Stressy all the information she needs to know?’

A new wave of laughter burst.

‘Well, well, my friend,’ Bolly said getting her breath back finally, ‘apparently, a harpoon of love has struck your poor heart.’

Actually, the joke – from which the manta borrowed this phrase – was about a Cupid's arrow that struck the heart of a boy named Johnny. But, a quick-witted Bolly converted it into sea language.

‘And also, take care of your nose,’ Bin added with a smile.

An hour later, Geo was about to finish telling the story to Stressy who had returned to them. The she-dolphin was so overwhelmed with the hope she had been given that she even kissed Geo in the cheek as he ended his speech. The dolphins don’t blush, but their tail always give them away! So, Geo’s tail gave him away completely, showing that he was on depth nine at that moment.

‘So, Stressy,’ Bin finally addressed the young she-dolphin smiling, ‘in a couple of days, my friends and I will set off and in a couple of months, we’ll bring back some news for you.’

Stressy looked at him in surprise.

‘What about me? Won’t you take me with you?’

‘This might not be an easy journey,’ Medky spoke. ‘You’d better stay at home and wait for us. It will be safer so.’

‘Safer?’ Stressy wondered. ‘But, my father may be somewhere there! I want to go with you to help him too. I think I’ll be of some help to you and I promise to obey.’

Everyone looked at her with a shade of doubt.

‘All right, let’s do it this way,’ Bin said after thinking for a while. ‘I suggest that all members of the agency vote *for* or *against* your participation in this search. If *for* prevails, you’ll join us, if not, take no offence. Agreed?’

The she-dolphin nodded contentedly.

‘Great idea!’ Medky reacted. ‘So, let’s start voting. Who’s *for*?’

Geo was the first to raise his fin up. Stressy smiled to him so tenderly that he raised his fin even higher.

Bolly and Ponty exchanged glances and raised their wing and tentacle as well. Most of all, they valued to have cheerful companions and good jokes on their way.

‘The score is three to three now,’ Bin commented.

Medky thought for a moment and spun his globe. When it stopped, Australia was right in front of him. He sighed and raised his fin.

First, Bin and Karen looked at each other, and then at the happy Geo. After that, they also sighed and raised their fins.

‘Unanimously!’ Stressy brightened up. ‘I’ve known that everything will be so.’

The friends burst into laughter.

‘Then, there’s just one tiny question left,’ Bin said. ‘Stressy, will you leave us alone for several minutes, please?’

‘Sure,’ the she-dolphin responded quickly and swam aside.

‘Does it concern me?’ Karen asked Bin.

‘Yes,’ he nodded. ‘Somebody will have to tell her everything about you and me, and about Aya. She’ll know it anyway, but it’d be much better if we make her aware of it in advance.’

‘Right you are,’ Bolly nodded and peeped at Geo cunningly. ‘So, which one of us can explain everything to her delicately?’

‘Perhaps, some of the dolphins will try?’ Ponty caught up. ‘They are so eloquent.’

Bin and Karen smiled with their eyes.

‘Well then, may I have a try?’ Geo suggested happily. ‘I’m always ready to help when needed.’

The others nodded their heads smiling. After that, Geo turned around quickly and, having brushed Bin’s nose with the tip of his tail, he swam to Stressy.



‘Good gracious!’ Bin uttered to himself. ‘It turns out this clumsiness may pass on to others.’

* * *

Soon, Geo caught up with Stressy and so they swam along the reef together.

‘Stressy, can you keep secrets?’ dolphin asked her.

‘Secrets? Of course, I can keep them very well’, the young she-dolphin replied without thinking, but then corrected herself, ‘though, I’ve never had one to keep yet.’

‘Mmm,’ then, it was Geo’s turn to think it over. ‘Well now, you’ll have some.’

‘Great!’ Stressy said and wondered, ‘what secrets will I have to keep now?’

‘Well, firstly’, Geo began, ‘Karen has been a human being and she can still turn into one at times.’

‘Wow!’ Stressy replied smiling. ‘Anything else?’

‘What? Aren’t you much surprised?’ Geo asked amazed.

‘No,’ she replied and, looking at the dolphin, she explained, ‘you know, my father loved telling me different stories he composed when I was little. I’m so used to them that now I can’t tell what is real in life and what is not. That is why I tend to believe in many things.’

Geo looked at his girl-companion with warmth.

‘So, what else is there?’ Stressy asked him curiously.

‘Else?’ Geo started thinking. ‘We also have Aya.’

‘Who’s that?’

‘It’s our extraordinary friend who will always come to help us in our hour of need.’

‘Ah!’ the young she-dolphin nodded in recognition. ‘What else?’

‘Mmm,’ Geo tried to remember. ‘Well, Bin also was a human being once in order to be closer to Karen.’

‘It’s so romantic!’ Stressy rolled her eyes and then, she suddenly added, ‘well, if everyone here becomes a human, maybe I’ll try it too?’

Geo looked at her and frowned.

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea, Stressy, you’ll probably be lost on the earth. I’m afraid we won’t be able to find you then.’

Stressy glanced at Geo warmly.

‘It has only been my father who worries I might be lost somewhere,’ she said with a smile and suddenly became sad. ‘And now, it’s he who is lost...’

Geo choked. Stressy looked at him with care.

‘Don’t worry too much about me, okay? I don’t want anything to happen to you because of this, too.’

Geo’s tail began to tremble lightly.

‘Okay. I’m only worried slightly,’ he said dropping his eyes. Stressy gazed at him for some time and then, she shuddered.

‘Are there any other secrets you’ve got?’

‘That’s all, seemingly’, Geo shrugged his fins and added, ‘don’t worry, I think your father will see his dear Stressy.’

‘Gless,’ the young she-dolphin smiled. ‘At first, my father named me Gless. But in a week or so, everyone started calling me Stressy for some reason.’

‘So, you mean you’ve got two names?’ Geo smiled in response.

‘You’d better call me Stressy,’ the she-dolphin said cheerily. ‘I’m not used to my first name.’

‘Okay,’ Geo said warmly. ‘I like name Stressy very much! So, let’s swim back to our friends now?’

‘Sure,’ the she-dolphin shook herself up and turned around quickly. This time, Geo’s nose was caught by her tail again, but he remained happy.

* * *

Two days later, the friends set off on their journey. They moved in a slightly different order this time. Bin, Karen and Medky swam in front of the group. On the turtle’s back as usually, there lay nippers and a sling cutter was attached with a nice car grid. Straight after them, there gracefully followed the manta

Bolly with the octopus on her back. Geo and Stressy swam at the end of the group.

For that, there were two reasons. Firstly, they had a chance to have a nice peaceful conversation and secondly, the young she-dolphin's tail was far enough from the noses of our friends.

A week later, the group of travellers was about to reach the first big city. As Karen had said, there was a big dolphinarium named *The Sea World*. Friends swam into a cosy lagoon situated not far from it and gathered for their first counselling.

‘So, my friends, what’s our plan of action?’ Bin addressed everyone there.

‘At first, we simply need to find out whether Stressy’s father is here or not,’ Geo spoke and looked at his girl-companion. ‘By the way, what’s his name?’

‘Onik,’ the she-dolphin smiled. ‘Also, he has got a scar on his back near the fin. He liked to joke that he once had bad luck playing around in his childhood. Perhaps, it will help you somehow.’

‘Fine,’ Karen nodded. ‘I think I’ll first go for a walk around there and look for your father.’

‘And when you go back, dear, don’t turn aside from local pizzerias’, Bolly smiled and added, looking at Stressy, ‘will you take an extra box this time, please? Something tells me that our new companion will like pizza too.’

‘What are you talking about here?’ Stressy asked, when she realized they were talking about her.

‘You’ll see in the evening,’ Ponty replied to her with a smile. ‘There’s no point of talking about it: you should try it!’

Everyone erupted into laughter. Then, the friends decided to observe the park a little. From the water, they could see some wagons with people inside rolling on high mounted rails, different Ferris wheels spinning and big fountains spouting water. They could also hear the sounds of wonderful music playing. Crowds of people were flowing into the park from different sides. There were a lot of children among them.

‘It is quite fun here,’ Bin reflected thoughtfully.

‘Yes, the people, especially children, like coming here to look at animals. They’ll often remember them after that and even draw pictures of them.’

‘What do they need that for?’ Medky asked her.

‘I don’t know,’ Karen shrugged her fins, ‘but, people have always tried to be surrounded by animals. In many houses, you can see dogs, cats and even aquariums. The last are big water reservoirs made of glass where beautiful fishes swim.’

‘I saw dogs and cats too when I was on the earth,’ Bin smiled. ‘I even stroked a cat. It was so fluffy and it nicely purred all the time.’

All of them smiled.

‘And what about dolphins?’ Bolly asked. ‘How do people regard them?’

‘They love the dolphins much – and the children – they just adore them,’ Karen said. ‘Do you see how many little ones are going to watch their performance?’

‘Quite many,’ Geo said and added, ‘it’s probably nice when so many children love you.’

‘Very well,’ Bin broke the discussion, ‘let’s carry on with our plan.’

‘Well, right,’ Bolly agreed. ‘My stomach’s starting to growl because it’s empty.’

‘This definitely means that it’s time for me to go ashore,’ Karen sighed in a playful manner. After that, all of them headed for a deserted sandbank situated near the park.

Soon, she lay down at a shallow and looked into the sky. In a moment, there it was – a girl who got to her feet at a sandy beach. She wore a T-shirt, shorts and flip flops.

Stressy looked at such an extraordinary event wide-eyed.

‘Is it you, Karen?’ she asked in surprise.

The girl laughed.

‘Of course, it’s me, Stressy. Who else can it be?’

‘You look very beautiful,’ the young she-dolphin smiled. ‘Particularly, I like this long piece of fur on your head.’

Everyone shook with laughter.

‘It’s called *hair*,’ Geo explained. ‘All the people have got it.’

‘Well, almost everyone,’ Karen made a correction and pointed to a bald-headed fisherman in the distance.

‘That man is obviously closer to us, the dolphins,’ Bin developed the idea while his friends laughed cheerily.

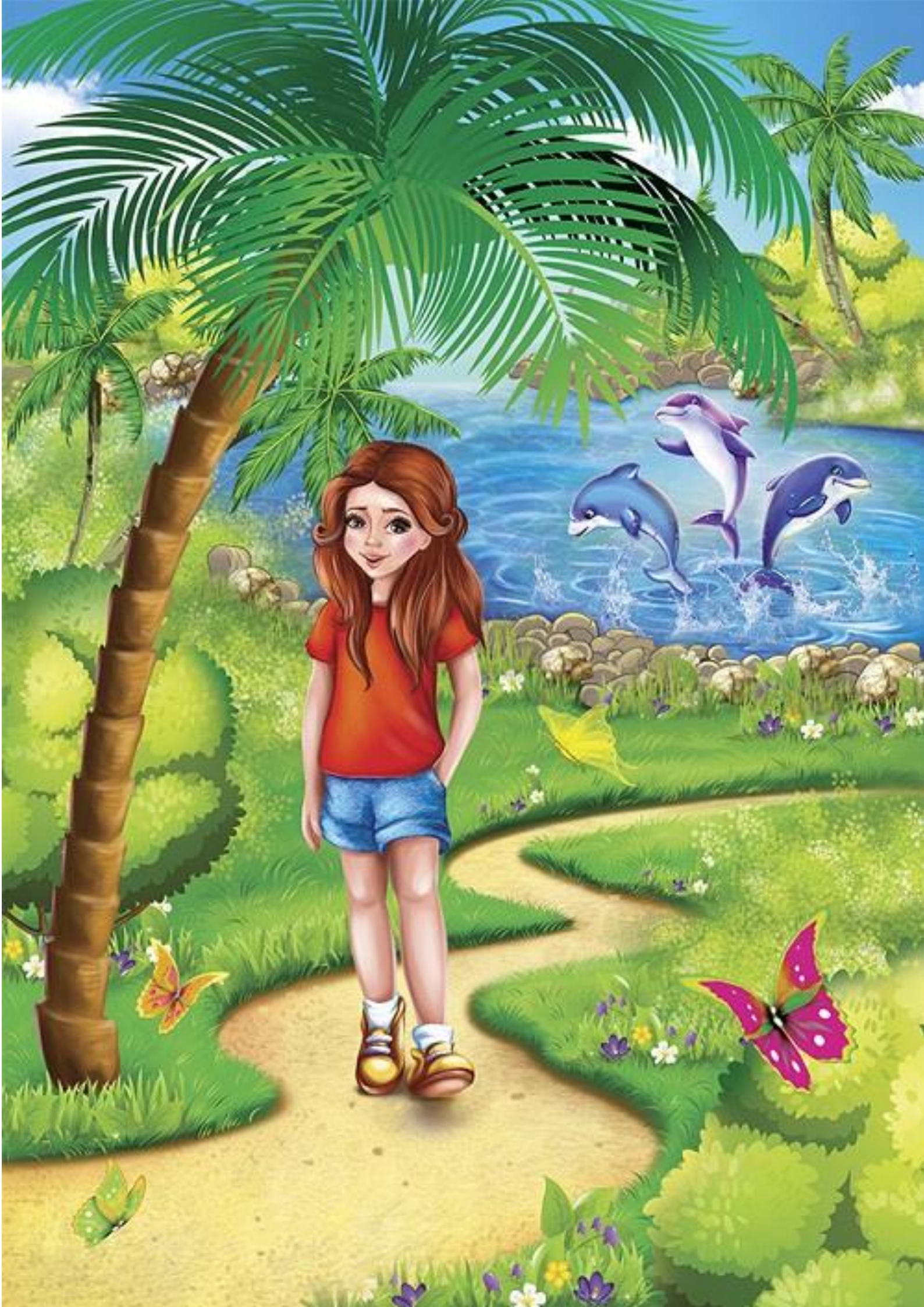
‘Well, guys, I’m off,’ the girl said and, having waved them with her hand, she headed towards the park’s entrance.

The Sea World

Soon after, Karen was walking along the beautiful alleys of *The Sea World*, looking around with interest. Pelicans with serious looks were walking closely to her and fur seals were swimming on the other side of the road. Many children were watching them with their eyes wide open and often photographed them.

In a little while, on a path, there appeared a sculpture of two pretty dolphins and the girl realized that she was somewhere near her goal. Right after the sculpture, Karen turned following the *Dolphin Bay* sign and found herself near large water reservoirs. Dark backs of the dolphins were flashing here and there inside them. Slightly further, there was the main lagoon where the performance was going on.

Karen watched it a little from the distance and approached a small backwater in which two dolphins were swimming peacefully. She sat by the water and began to talk to them.



‘Hello, guys!’ she said.

The dolphins looked at her sluggishly and continued their swimming: hundreds of the people would greet them each day here.

‘What are your names?’ Karen asked them.

‘Hear that, Glossy? She wants to know our names,’ one of the dolphins addressed his girlfriend idly.

‘Well then, tell her it’s not a problem,’ Glossy replied to him. ‘But, whether she understands us or not is not our business. We are polite dolphins, aren’t we?’

‘All right,’ the first dolphin said and, having looked at Karen, he prepared himself to speak.

‘Well, I’ve already heard about Glossy,’ the girl said smiling. ‘By the way, she’s very polite. What’s your name?’

The dolphin stopped open-mouthed. Glossy swam to him from behind and looked at Karen in amazement.

‘Do you understand the dolphin language?’ she wondered.

‘Yes, Glossy,’ the girl nodded and, looking at the second dolphin, she asked, ‘what’s your friend’s name?’

‘Stess,’ Glossy answered for him. ‘He’s good, generally, just a little grumpy.’

‘Hello, Stess!’ Karen smiled. ‘Will you talk to me at last?’

‘Good gracious!’ the dolphin found his tongue again. ‘It’s the first time I see a human being who understands our language.’

‘I’ve been studying it for two years now,’ the girl said, having decided not to go into the details.

‘Well done!’ Glossy smiled. ‘And what’s your name?’

‘Karen,’ she replied.

‘Nice to meet you, Karen!’ Stess said in a normal voice. ‘On your way back, will you please tell our trainer that we love snappers more than cod?’

‘Of course I will, guys,’ the girl nodded and switched to the main question. ‘I’ve come here for one matter. Have you met the dolphin called Onik? He’s from the Great Barrier Reef and he’s got a small scar on his back.’

‘Onik?’ Glossy and Stess asked again.

‘Yes,’ Karen said. ‘He might have got here several months ago.’

‘Then, he isn’t here for sure,’ Stess replied with certainty. ‘There haven’t been any newcomers here for more than a year.’

Karen sighed.

‘Thank you for the hint, guys,’ she said and rose to her feet. ‘Well then, I’ll go and tell your trainer about the snappers.’

‘Thanks a lot, Karen,’ Glossy smiled. ‘You can look around for Onik at some other place. We’ve recently heard our trainers talk about some new dolphins that were delivered to the next dolphinarium on the coast. I think it’s called *Magic of the Dolphins*.’

‘That’s a great news!’ Karen brightened up. ‘Thanks a lot, guys!’

The dolphins waved her goodbye with their fins. After that, the girl talked with their trainer for a while and then, she headed to a pizza house. She would not want her friends to be left hungry, listening to Bolly’s stomach growling.

* * *

Soon, Karen came to a deserted beach with a stack of pizza boxes in her hands. Her friends were still in the same place she had left them. Stressy was especially anxious, waiting for news.

‘Any news, Karen?’ she asked immediately, ‘is my father there?’

The girl shook her head negatively and Stressy turned sad.

‘But, I’ve got some good news too,’ the girl said and sat down on the sand by the water.

Everyone swam a little closer.

‘It’s been a long time since new dolphins were brought to this dolphinarium,’ Karen told them. ‘Though, I was told there that a couple of new dolphins had been brought to another dolphinarium. It’s located on the coast only a couple of days’ journey from here.’

‘Haven’t they heard about my father there, in that dolphinarium?’ the young she-dolphin asked showing some hope.

Karen shook her head.

‘We’ll get there very soon and find out everything ourselves,’ Geo patted Stressy on her back. ‘And now, you’d better try this pizza.’

‘What’s that?’ the she-dolphin asked with curiosity.

Karen smiled and began opening the boxes. As usually, Ponty started eating and feeding Bolly, while Karen was feeding the dolphins.

‘Mmm, so tasty!’ Stressy exclaimed amazed after she took a bite. ‘Do the people eat this every day?’

Karen nodded cheerily in response.

‘How could you have abandoned such a yummy thing for living in the sea?’ Stressy wondered again while swallowing the second piece of the pizza.

‘You see, I’ve found something better here than pizza there,’ Karen replied looking fondly at Bin.

‘Just a little better,’ he smiled.

There followed a gale of the friends’ cheery laughter.

After the meal, Karen lay down on the sand by the water and looked into the sky. In a moment, she became a dolphin surrounded by her friends again.

‘Geo’, Stressy asked the dolphin quietly, ‘who was she addressing in the sky? I saw it in her eyes.’

‘Well, the people have their own Neptune who they call *God*,’ Geo replied in the same low voice. ‘It’s He who helps

Karen to turn from a human being into a dolphin. I'll tell you more about it somehow later.'

'Wow! It's so interesting!' Stressy replied. 'Don't forget about it, please, because I'm always forgetting everything myself.'

Geo smiled.

'Alright, I promise.'

After that, the friends swam away from the shore and began preparing for sleep as they planned to cover a long distance the next day. Though, as the first star appeared in the sky, bright fireballs began lightening up over the sea life park accompanied by a loud pounding.

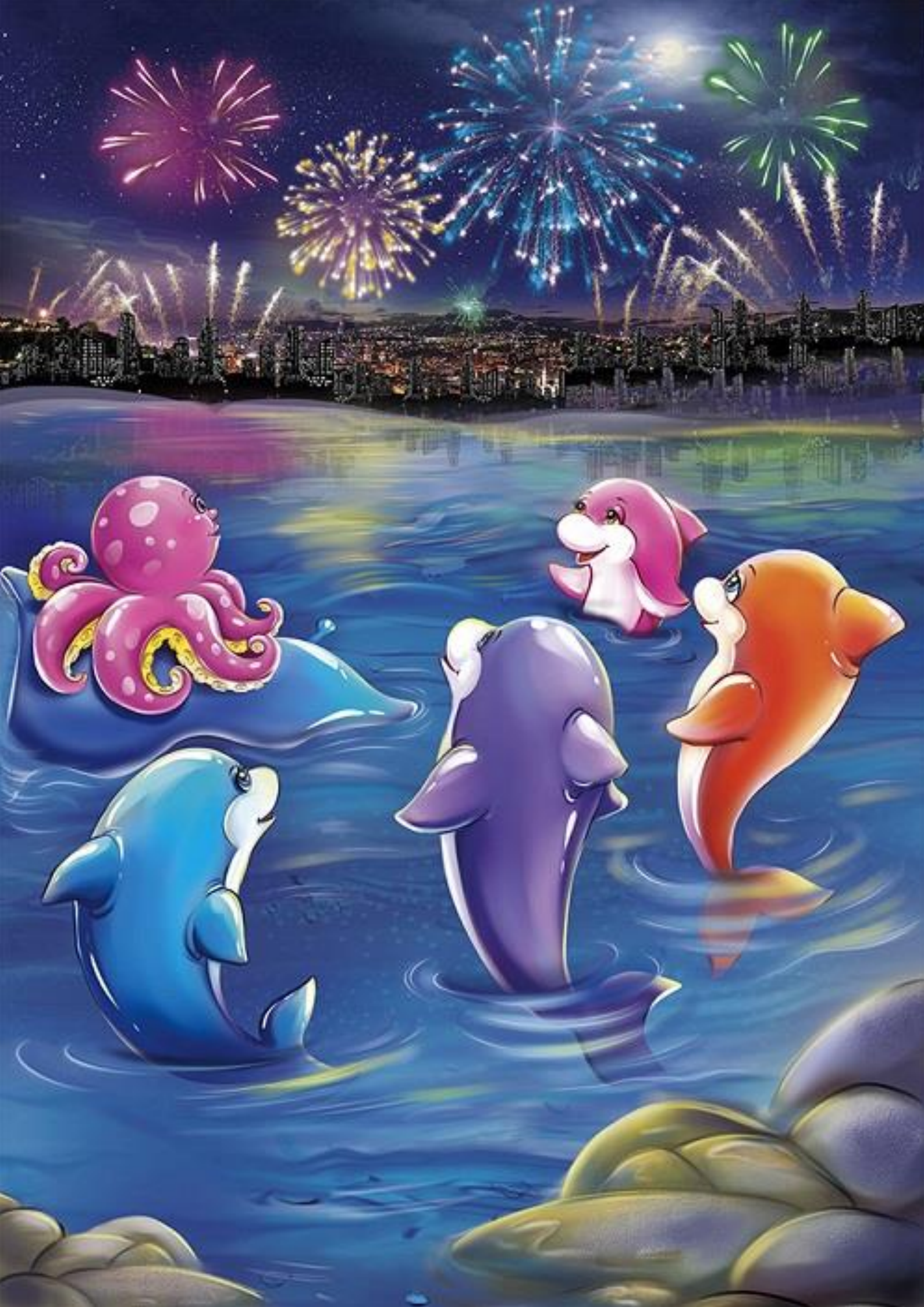
'What's that?' the friends, one by one, started looking around in surprise as the sky sparkled everywhere.

'These're fireworks,' Karen explained. 'People make them to celebrate something. They're probably celebrating something today, too'

'It's so beautiful,' Stressy murmured awesomely.

Soon after, the fireworks were over and the friends started falling asleep. This time, nothing disturbed them until the morning.

* * *



The next morning, the travellers continued their journey. They formed in the same order, except for Geo and Stressy who swam slightly behind as they wanted to talk to each other conveniently.

‘Geo, can I ask you something?’ Stressy asked and after the dolphin gave her an affirmative nod, she continued. ‘Why are you still alone, without the other half?’

‘Well, I think until now, I haven’t met the one who I would like to see by my side every day,’ Geo replied with a smile.

‘Until now?’ the young she-dolphin narrowed her eyes slyly.

At first, Geo became slightly confused, but then, he looked into her eyes with a smile.

‘You aren’t like the others. You’re so straightforward, yet very kind and caring,’ the dolphin laughed cheerfully. ‘It’s never boring to be with you for sure!’

Stressy smiled happily.

‘My father has always wanted me to find a true friend who will love me. He called him *the other half*.’

Geo stared at her in surprise.

‘I’ve always dreamt about my other half too...’ he said and kept silent.

For a while, they swam in silence.

‘Geo, what do you think happens when other halves meet each other?’ Stressy asked him.

‘I think the stars start pouring out of their hearts then,’ Geo laughed in response.

The she-dolphin kept silent for some time too, and then looked at him with her eyes shining.

‘You’ve said that so beautifully! I too think it must be namely so,’ she glanced at him curiously. ‘But, how do you know that?’

Geo stopped and, looking into her shining eyes, he gently touched her fins.

‘Because, the stars have already been pouring out from my heart for long!’

‘And from mine too, it seems...’ Stressy replied softly.

Having said that, they both became slightly embarrassed. Then, they swam on happily to catch up to their friends.

Onik

By the next midday, the travellers reached their destination. The dolphinarium was similarly located on the coast near a big water channel. The friends swam closer to it and gathered for counselling.

‘So, my dear,’ Bin looked at Karen warmly, ‘this time again, almost all the work’s to be done by you.’

‘That’s all right, Binnie, I’m not tired of it,’ Karen smiled. ‘The main thing is to help Stressy. So, shall we swim to the shore?’

The friends nodded and followed her. Soon, Karen lay down in shallow water near the shore and looked into the sky. A moment later, she rose to her feet.

‘You do it greatly!’ Stressy pronounced with some sadness in her voice. ‘I’d wanted to turn into a human for some time too, but Geo told me that I would be lost among the people somewhere.’

Everyone roared with laughter.

‘Don’t worry, Stressy,’ Karen calmed her. ‘I wouldn’t turn into a human unless it was necessary. So now, I’m off to look for your father.’

‘Look for him thoroughly, Karen, will you?’ the young she-dolphin gave her a look of hope.

The girl nodded, waved everyone goodbye and headed to the entrance of the dolphinarium.

The local sea animals’ park was similar to the previous one in some points: very green and with many pools filled with animals. Karen looked at the map she had been given together with a ticket at the entrance and went confidently in the direction she needed. Soon, she saw pools with dolphins inside.

Karen chose the most deserted place by the edge of one of them and started watching the dolphins. There were three of them in this pool. The girl examined each one of them, but none had a scar on its back.

Having decided not to talk to the dolphins yet, she proceeded to the next pool. There were also three dolphins inside. Karen was watching them carefully when suddenly her heart started pounding: on the back of a dolphin was a scar right near the fin. The girl sat down by the water and waited for him to swim near her. Several minutes later, the dolphin with the scar came very close to her.

‘Excuse me,’ the girl said, ‘is your name accidentally not Onik?’

The dolphin continued swimming as if he’d heard nothing. Karen sighed in disappointment. But a few moments later, he suddenly stopped and looked around in surprise.

‘Somebody’s called me Onik?’ he started speaking aloud, ‘here, everyone calls me differently...’

The girl leapt on the spot with happiness.

‘Onik, Onik! I’ve called you!’

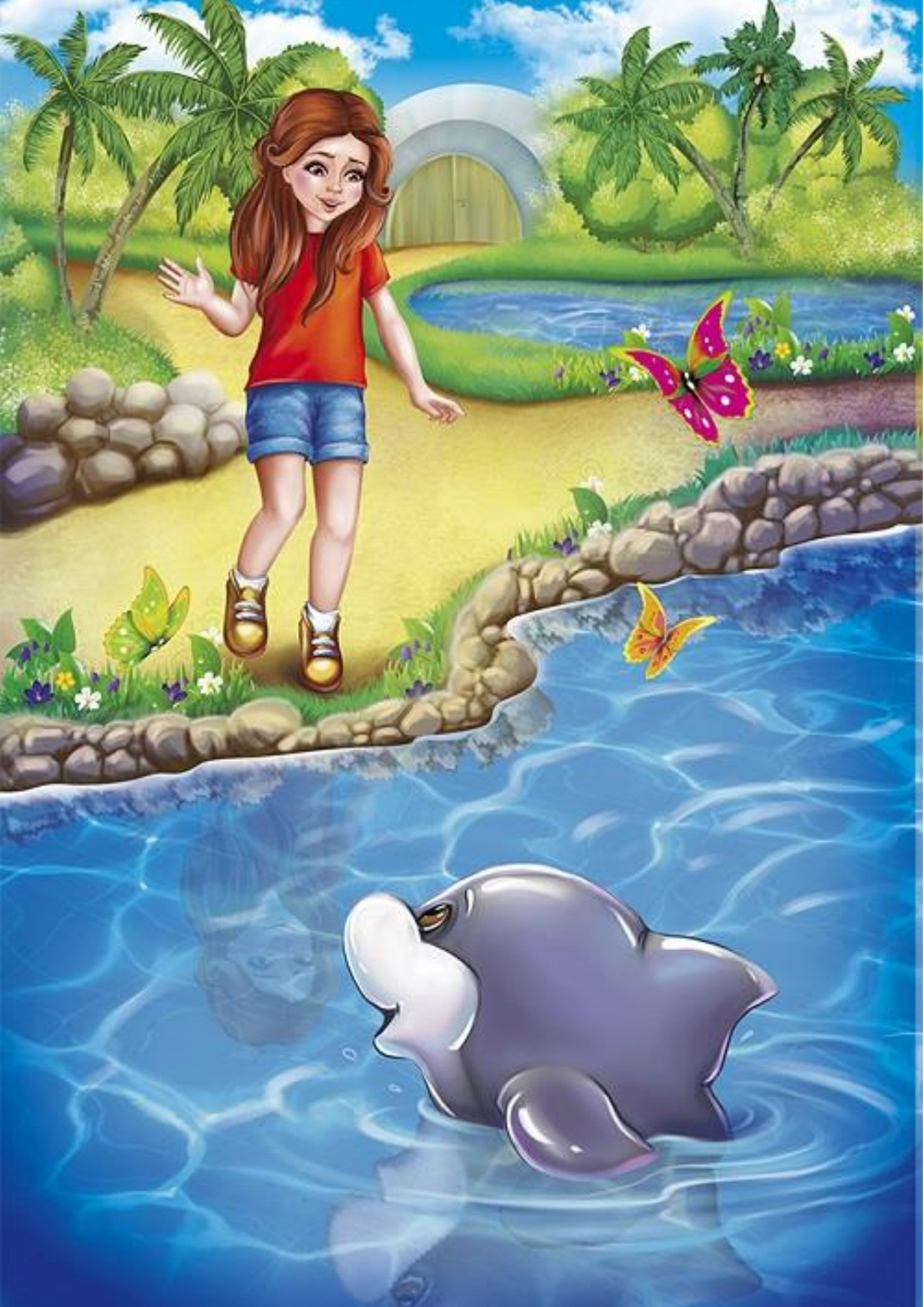
The dolphin, not understanding anything, looked at the happy girl and swam up to her.

‘Hello!’ he said just in case. ‘Right, my name’s Onik indeed, but how do you know my true name?’

‘Stressy,’ the girl answered cheerily, ‘your daughter told me.’

The dolphin almost choked from surprise.

‘You...’ he began slowly, ‘you understand the dolphin language? You know my daughter Stressy?’



Karen nodded him cheerily.

‘What happened to her?’ anxious Onik asked immediately.

‘She’s absolutely fine,’ the girl replied. ‘It’s her who organized this search for you. Currently, she’s in the lagoon not far from this dolphinarium.’

Then, there fell a total silence.

‘I can’t believe it,’ Onik found his tongue a minute later. ‘Somebody, bite my tail! I must be dreaming!’

Karen laughed happily.

‘No way, this all’s for real. We know that you had swam to the other coast of Australia to see your relatives but happened to end up here.’

‘Right,’ Onik began to recover gradually. ‘Then, I’ve got many questions to you. Your name is...’

‘Karen,’ the girl continued.

‘Nice to meet you, Karen,’ Onik smiled for the first time. ‘Tell me, please, how can you understand us? Where did you meet my daughter? How did you find out that I’m here? Also... Though, that’s enough for now, perhaps.’

‘Onik, I’ll tell you everything,’ the girl replied, ‘but first, let us move over to that isolated spot, so that no one will disturb us.’

The dolphin nodded and swam to the corner. An hour later, Karen finished her story.

‘Well,’ Onik said thoughtfully, ‘I’ve been inventing the most incredible tales for Stressy all my life, but it seems that my daughter has left me behind: her reality proved to be much more fantastic.’

Karen laughed cheerily.

‘It looks like so, Onik. She’s very nice and she loves you much.’

The dolphin’s eyes were filled with tears.

‘I so much want to see her!’

‘I think you will, very soon,’ the girl said in a convincing voice.’

‘But how?’ Onik wondered. ‘No one has ever managed to get out of here yet.’

‘I don’t know,’ Karen shrugged her shoulders. ‘We’ll figure something out for sure. Now, I must hurry back to tell good news to your daughter. She’ll be incredibly happy to know that you’re alive.’

‘Then, hurry,’ Onik smiled, and in a moment he added, ‘thank you, Karen, for helping us so much!’

The girl waved him goodbye and sped to the place where her friends were waiting. This time, she had some excellent news to share with them.

* * *

When Karen stepped on deserted seashore, her many friends' eyes were looking at her from the water with interest. Stressy's eyes were shining the brightest.

'I've found- I've found him!' Karen cried, not waiting to be asked.

And then, there it was! Stressy leapt out of water happily and, having made a spin in the air, she flopped with noise right on Geo's tail. The other animals laughed and congratulated each other as well.

'Your plan's worked, dear!' Bin smiled happily.

'It was a great luck, indeed, Binnie', Karen laughed in response and, having taken the map of the sea park from her pocket, she added, 'now, we must think well on how to get him out of there.'

'The most important thing is that he's alive!' Stressy exclaimed in a happy voice.

'And he looks quite well,' Karen added and handed the map to the octopus. 'Keep it until our counselling, Ponty. It shows the place quite well, where Onik is kept.'

After that, the girl was about to lie down on the sand to turn into the dolphin when suddenly Bolly made a loud and tactful cough.

'Dear, wouldn't we celebrate this wonderful event with a tasty pizza?' she asked somewhat amused.

Everyone there burst into laughter and the girl slapped herself on her forehead lightly.

‘Oh, Bolly, I’m so happy that I completely forgot about that.’

‘I see,’ the manta replied waving her wings, ‘but luckily, you’ve got a friend, who never forgets anything.’

‘What would we do without you, Bolly?’ Medky laughed cheerfully.

‘It’s hard to imagine even,’ the manta reflected.

Karen waved them and briskly headed for the nearest pizza house. An hour later, the friends, having fed themselves well, gathered for their counselling underwater. Karen showed the location of the pool with her fin, where Onik was.

‘Not very close to the shore,’ Bin said thoughtfully.

‘Karen, can he jump over to the nearby pool which is closer to the water channel?’ Geo asked her.

‘I haven’t thought of that,’ she said, ‘but, that’s quite possible. I can find out that tomorrow, if you want.’

‘Anyway, it’s nearly ten meters to the seashore from there, Geo,’ Medky argued doubtfully. ‘He can’t jump so far.’

Everyone nodded in agreement.

‘One might think of some trolley, of course, but again, there’s a fence and there are guards there,’ Karen spoke her thoughts, doubting. ‘It’s unlikely that somebody will help me to carry a dolphin out of the dolphinarium.’

The friends smiled ironically.

‘So, what shall we do?’ Stressy asked in despair.

Everyone glanced at each other.

‘So well, shall we call for Aya?’ Bin asked looking at his saddened friends.

Everyone unanimously nodded, but for Stressy.

‘Aya, our friend!’ Bin addressed to the sea. ‘We need you again.’

A few moments later, a glowing man-cloud began to appear near them. Seeing their old friend, everyone smiled; Stressy stared at him amazed.

‘Hello, my friends!’ Aya greeted them warmly. ‘How can I help you this time?’

‘Aya, we need to get Stressy’s father out of the dolphinarium somehow,’ Bin said and nodded pointing to the young she-dolphin. ‘We’ve found him, but the rest is beyond our powers.’

‘A dolphin, you say? Not a whale, at least,’ Aya smiled. ‘Does he want to leave that place indeed?’

‘Yes, I’ve talked to him recently,’ Karen replied. ‘He misses his daughter very much.’

Then, Aya looked at Stressy.

‘And I miss him too,’ the young she-dolphin said, looking at the man-cloud appealingly.

‘Well, all right then, if it is so,’ Aya nodded. ‘It’s very crowded there right now, so wait for him to come by midnight.’

Everyone smiled happily.

‘How will you get him out of there, Aya?’ Ponty couldn’t help his curiosity.

The man-cloud laughed.

‘I don’t know myself yet,’ he said and started disappearing slowly. ‘I’ll think up something by night time.’

The last words Aya said reached the friends from bare sea blue.

‘What a friend you have!’ Stressy whispered to Geo in surprise. ‘Does he help everyone like that?’

‘No. He only helps the kind and if the deeds are good,’ the dolphin explained.

‘Where did you meet him?’ Stressy asked once again.

‘In Atlantis where Bin and Karen travelled for their honeymoon,’ Geo replied and briefly retold the story of that journey to Stressy.

‘What an interesting thing – the honeymoon travel!’ the young she-dolphin spoke thoughtfully and peeped at Geo.

* * *

When the sky became completely dark, the friends gathered near the shore again and began to wait.

‘I wonder how Aya will get him out of there?’ Medky started speaking his thoughts.

‘Don’t even try guessing, my friend. He’ll surely come up with something unusual,’ Bin replied. ‘Do you remember how he

freed you from the poachers' strong net with a single movement of his hand?'

'How can I forget?' the turtle shuddered. 'That day, my shell turned a little grey from that, even.'

'Where?' Ponty asked surprised.

Medky pointed with his eyes to a white spot on his shell. Ponty climbed to that place and started rubbing the spot with his tentacle. Unexpectedly, it vanished soon.

'Turned grey, you say? I think you just need to wash yourself from time to time, my friend,' he said laughing. 'Okay, Medky, you've become young again now!'

The friends dissolved into cheery laughter.

'Quiet!' Geo interrupted them. 'Look, something's going on over there.'

Seven pairs of the eyes – not blinking – stared in one direction. What they saw exceeded all their expectations: some odd construction was moving towards them from the sea park over the sky.

On the top of it, there was Aya holding in his hand something resembling a fish net. Though, this net was made of thin shining beams. Inside it, there was Onik staring around in amazement.

The man-cloud with the dolphin glided slowly in the air over the park fence and started descending to the water channel. Stressy couldn't keep her eyes off her father. When they approached the water surface, she could not help crying out.

'Daddy!'



Onik instantly turned his head to her cry.

‘Daughter!’

In a few moments, they found themselves together again.

* * *

‘Thank you, our dear Aya, for everything!’ Bin said looking in the glowing man-cloud eye warmly.

The man-cloud smiled.

‘My pleasure, Bin. You opened this agency to help others’, he said, ‘that is why you should understand me quite well. The most important thing is that all our deeds are kind.’

After that, the man-cloud rose above the water, waved everyone goodbye and began melting away.

‘Goodbye, my friends! Call whenever you need me again,’ the friends heard his words.

Epilogue

Six months passed. It was wonderful and clear in the sea. That morning, Geo and Stressy decided to visit her father. When they arrived, they found Onik at home and in good spirits.

‘Dad, listen,’ Stressy said after they greeted each other. ‘You’re rightly glowing with happiness. What is it?’

‘Yes, my children. I would like to talk to you about that.’

‘What’s the matter, Dad?’ the daughter asked with interest. ‘Recently, you seemed to be a little pensive.’

‘I merely made an important decision yesterday, my children,’ Onik smiled. ‘Now, listen well to me attentively.’

Geo and Stressy settled themselves comfortably and prepared to listen.

‘We, the dolphins, love freedom. Also, deep in our hearts, we are big romantics. I’ve loved travelling and observing the world all my life too—’ at that moment, the dolphin made a short pause and looked at his daughter with warmth. ‘But, everything changed in my life when Stressy was born. Then, it was the first time I realized that our love for others can bring a lot of happiness. I loved to bring her joy, teach her everything and compose different funny stories for her.’

Stressy looked at her father lovingly.

‘But she’s grown up and now, she has got a wonderful friend – you, Geo. This is your family for your whole life, my daughter.’

‘You’re talking as if you are saying farewell, dad,’ Stressy spoke with suspicion.

‘I haven’t finished yet,’ her father smiled. ‘With Stressy, I realized that the biggest happiness in life is not freedom but bringing joy to others. It happened so that several months ago, I lived in the people’s dolphinarium. We brought joy to the children

who came to watch our performances there. Every day, hundreds of grateful children's eyes would look at us there. I felt such love coming from them that it is even difficult to express.'

Then, Onik sighed.

'It can't be that you want to go back there, can it?' Geo wondered.

'No way!' Onik reacted surprised. 'But, I loved much to bring joy for the little children with my performances.'

'So, what are you going to do now?' his daughter asked.

'I have an idea. I'm going to swim around Australia and make performances near the beaches with many children. Karen told me that the people call it *tour* or *round trip*. So their performers travel all around the world. I too learnt a lot of things when I was in the dolphinarium.'

'That's a great idea!'

'Yes!' Onik replied. 'You live here in friendship and happiness. I'm swimming to those who need me right now. I know this for certain.'

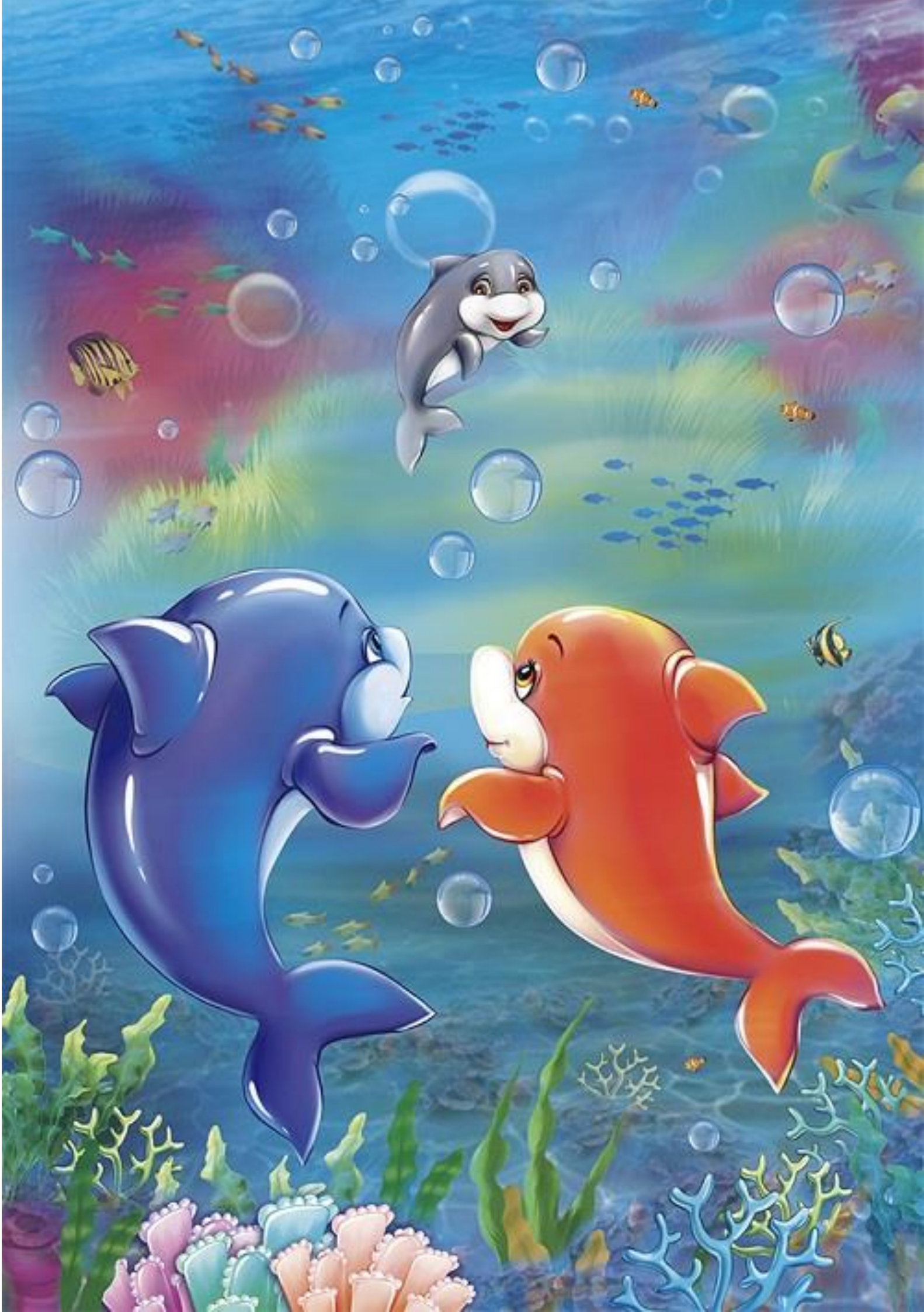
After that, Onik swam up to Geo.

'Take care of my daughter, please, she is so clumsy, you know,' he said.

Geo looked at him seriously and nodded.

Then, Onik swam up to his daughter and looked lovingly into her eyes.

'When will we meet again, dad?' she asked him.



‘I don’t know,’ Onik shrugged his fins. ‘First, I’d like to complete what I’ve thought up and then, we’ll see. But, I promise to come back to you anyway.’

Having said that, he smiled, waved his fin goodbye and slowly swam to the open sea.

‘Greetings to your wonderful friends,’ they heard his cheerful voice come from the blue of the sea. ‘Also, I would like to see my grandchildren when I come back!’

‘A good father you’ve got,’ Geo said with a smile.

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