

The Girl and the Dolphin



Jane MEADOW

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Every summer, Maya visited her grandmother's little house by the sea. She wore her wide yellow sun hat and red sneakers and spent hours watching the ocean. The waves rolled in and out, sparkling like spilled diamonds. Maya loved the salty breeze on her face and the warm sand between her toes. She felt happy and free beside the big blue water.



One morning, Maya saw a young dolphin leap high above the waves. Its smooth grey skin shone in the sunlight. On its left side, behind the dorsal fin, was a white marking shaped like a crescent moon. Maya gasped. "Hello, little dolphin!" she called. The dolphin arched its back and leaped again, as if it were waving just to her.



Maya named the dolphin Pearl because the white crescent looked like a tiny pearl in the sea. Pearl was smaller than the adult dolphins and very playful. Each day, Maya sat on the warm sand and watched her new friend. Pearl splashed and twirled and seemed to smile. Maya's hazel eyes sparkled with joy. This was the best summer ever.



One afternoon, a tall man in an orange safety vest walked along the beach. His name was Mr. Rivera, and he carried a clipboard and a litter-picker tool. "Hello there!" he said kindly. "I'm the cleanup supervisor. Do you know that trash can hurt dolphins?" Maya shook her head. "Fishing line and plastic can trap them," Mr. Rivera explained. "We need to keep the ocean safe."



Maya thought about Pearl. She imagined the little dolphin tangled in old fishing line and felt a lump in her throat. "I want to help!" she said. Mr. Rivera smiled warmly. "Great! We're doing a beach cleanup tomorrow. Bring gloves and a bag." Maya nodded. Her wavy dark brown ponytail bounced. She couldn't wait to protect her friend's home.



The next morning, Maya arrived with her canvas tote bag and thick gloves. Many grown-up helpers were there, too. Mr. Rivera handed out litter-pickers and showed everyone how to stay safe. "Never touch sharp objects," he said. "Wear gloves and work with a partner." Maya felt proud to be part of the team. She was ready to make a difference.



Maya picked up plastic bottles, crumpled wrappers, and bits of old rope. Each piece of trash she collected meant one less danger for Pearl and other sea animals. The sun was hot, but Maya kept going. She found a long tangle of fishing line and carefully put it in her bag. Her red sneakers left little footprints in the sand. She worked hard all morning.



While Maya worked, she saw Pearl swimming in the distance. The dolphin seemed to watch the busy beach with curious dark eyes. Maya waved, and Pearl leaped joyfully. "We're cleaning your home!" Maya called. Pearl splashed her tail as if to say thank you. Maya's heart swelled with happiness. She felt close to her dolphin friend, even from the shore.



After the cleanup, Mr. Rivera gathered the volunteers. "You all did a wonderful job," he said. "But the best way to help is to stop trash from reaching the ocean in the first place." Maya raised her hand. "I can tell my friends!" she said. Mr. Rivera nodded. "That's a great idea, Maya. Education is powerful." Maya smiled, determined to spread the word.



Back at home, Maya drew colorful posters with pictures of dolphins and clean oceans. She wrote: Keep our beaches clean! and Fishing line hurts animals! Her little brother helped her color them. The next day, she hung the posters around the neighborhood. Friends stopped to read them. "Wow, I didn't know that!" said her friend Leo. Maya felt proud to teach others.



A few days later, Maya saw Pearl again. The dolphin leaped higher than ever, her white crescent marking shining in the sun. Maya noticed that Pearl seemed to swim closer to the shore now. It was as if the dolphin trusted her even more. Maya's eyes filled with happy tears. She knew that her small actions had made a big difference.



Mr. Rivera visited Maya's house and brought her a special certificate. "For outstanding ocean friendship," he said with a warm smile. Maya's parents clapped, and her grandmother gave her a big hug. Maya hung the certificate on her wall. She felt proud but also humble. Protecting animals was a job for everyone, and she was glad to help.



That evening, Maya sat on the beach and watched the sunset paint the sky pink and gold. Pearl swam near the shore, leaping and twirling. Maya whispered, "You're safe now, Pearl." The dolphin clicked and whistled, as if she understood. Maya knew that true friendship meant taking care of each other. She promised to always protect the ocean.



When summer ended, Maya had to go home. She hugged her grandmother and waved goodbye to the sea. "I'll be back next year, Pearl!" she called. As if in answer, Pearl leaped one last time, her white crescent flashing. Maya smiled, knowing that her dolphin friend would be waiting. She carried the memory of that joyful leap in her heart all winter long.



Back at school, Maya started an Ocean Club with her friends. They read books about dolphins and made craft projects from recycled materials. Maya told everyone how litter can harm sea animals. Her teacher invited Mr. Rivera to talk to the class. The children listened with wide eyes. Maya felt happy to share what she had learned.



Maya learned that friendship with animals is a precious gift. By picking up trash and teaching others, she showed that even small hands can make a big difference. Pearl the dolphin still leaps in the waves, a white crescent shining on her side. And Maya knows that protecting animals is a wonderful way to show love. The ocean is safer because of a kind girl and her dolphin friend.