Willa and the Big Splash

By James Shang | Raffy's Ocean Friends



"One more race!"

Willa's silvery sides flashed beneath the surface.

"You said that last time!" called one of her friends.

"And this time," said Willa, "I mean it!"

They lined up in a sandy channel beside the beach, a place the fish called the gutter.

A strong sweep carried water along the shore. Above them, waves broke across the sandbank.

BOOM!

Willa waited for the whitewater to pass. Today's surf was no place for a beginner.

She looked at her two friends.

"Ready?"

Three tails twitched.

"Go!"

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Willa raced ahead as a wave folded over the sandbank.

CRASH!

Her friends vanished behind the bubbles. Willa slowed and looked back until two silvery faces appeared through the foam.

Still together.

Then a much bigger shadow swept across the sand.

A dolphin raced along the next wave, turned towards its curling lip and flicked his tail.

WHOOSH!

Up he went. Willa looked up.

The dolphin looked down.

"WHOA!"

Willa darted aside. The dolphin twisted.

SPLOOOOSH!

She tumbled through the bubbles, flicked her tail and steadied herself.

A grey face peered through the foam.

"You all right, little mate?" asked the dolphin.

"I think your wave landed on me," said Willa.

"Sorry! Didn't see you underneath."

"I noticed!"

Her friends swam beside her, and Willa checked that everyone was all right. Then she caught the dolphin's sheepish look and began to laugh.

"Do you always arrive like that?"

"Usually there's less apologising."

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"I'm Dazza," said the dolphin.
"Willa."
"You're quick."
"That wasn't even my quickest," Willa replied.
Dazza glanced at the next waves.
"Let's find a bit more room."
They moved into deeper water beyond the breaking waves, where the swell lifted them gently and lowered them again.
Willa turned her silvery side towards the sunlight.
Flash!
"What was that?" asked Dazza.
"A shiny hello," Willa explained. "My friends and I use sounds and movements. Oceanese."
"Don't think I've got a shiny side."
He rolled over a little to check.
Willa giggled. "What could you do?"
Dazza lifted a flipper.
"Hello?"
Flash!
"Hello!"
This time, his greeting hardly made a ripple.

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"Ooh," said Dazza. "Watch that one!"

A green wave rose beyond them, its top curling forwards to make a shining tunnel.

"That's a barrel. Imagine riding through there!"

Willa watched the shining opening.

"Better than winning a race?"

"Come out of a good barrel and you feel like you've won everything."

The tunnel folded shut.

CRASH!

"And if you don't come out?" asked Willa.

"Washing-machine treatment."

"I've had some of that today."

"Yeah," said Dazza. "Sorry again."

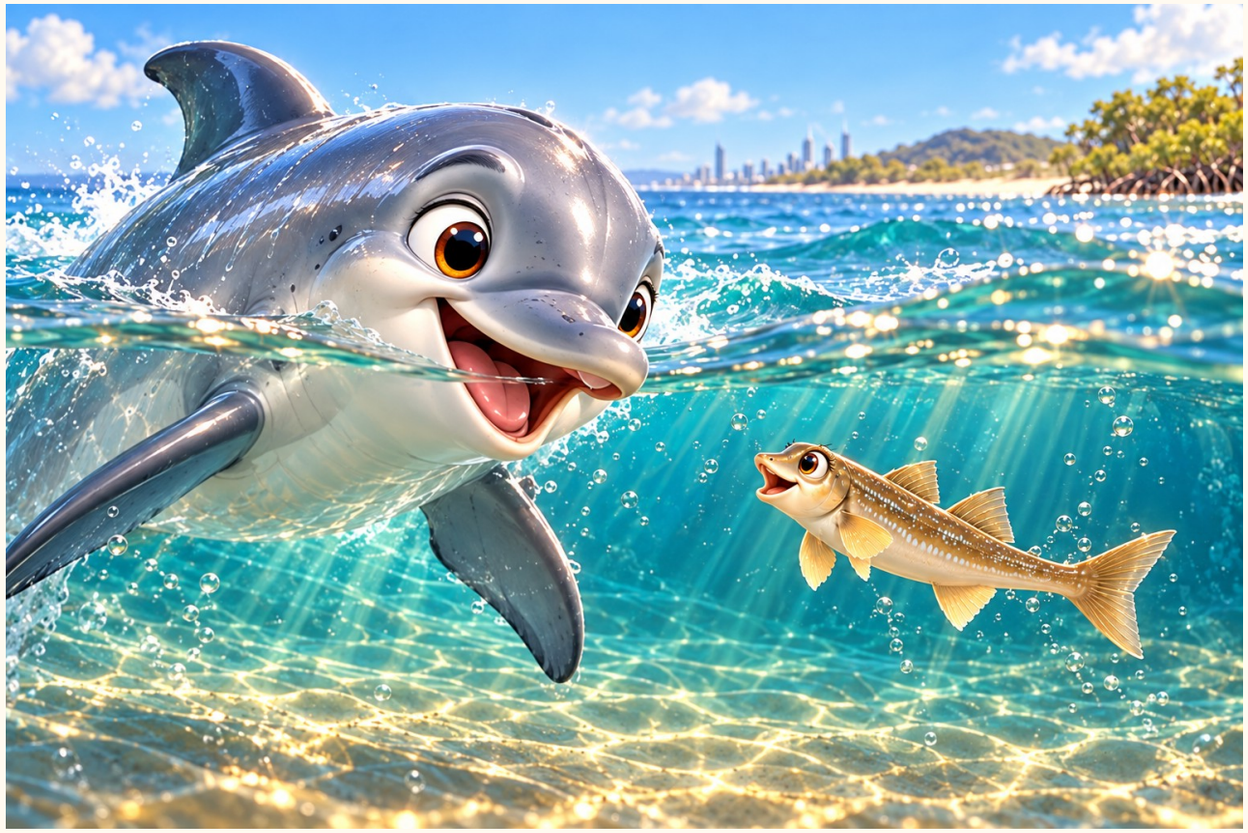
He stayed beside her as the next wave passed.

"What do you do when you're not racing?"

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"I go home to the estuary," said Willa. "It's quieter there."
"Quiet sounds good," said Dazza.
"Unless Raffy's sliding."
"Who's Raffy?"
"A mudskipper. He swims with us, then climbs out onto the wet mud."
"Out of the water?"
"And down the mud slides."
"On purpose?"
"Usually."
Dazza grinned. "What a legend! Reckon he'd like surfing?"
"I reckon you should ask him."
Dazza looked towards the waves, then back at Willa.
"Could I meet him?"
"Yes. There's a deep channel with room for you."
Willa waved goodbye to her racing friends.
"Another race?" one called.
"Not this time!"
She had someone to introduce.

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Willa led Dazza into the estuary, leaving the roar of the surf behind them. Ahead, little ripples slipped between mangrove roots.

Dazza slowed.

"So this is your place."

"One of them," said Willa.

"I like it."

She turned towards Raffy's bank.

"Wait here. He might still be asleep."

Dazza stayed in the deeper channel and lifted a flipper in a little wave.

Hardly a ripple.

Willa flashed back, then swam ahead.

"Raffy! There's someone I want you to meet."

Dazza could hardly keep still, so he tried to make a little splash.

He was much better at big ones.

Our ocean. Our planet. Our friends.
Let's look after them together.

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A little more to share

By James Shang | Raffy's Ocean Friends

A hidden friend: Murray



Murray is tucked beside the mangrove roots. Can you spot him in picture 6? What helps him blend into the bank?

Oceanese to share

Dazza: "Hello?"
Willa: "Hello!"

Choose a wave, nod, sound or another comfortable greeting. Tell your partner what it means, then take turns greeting and answering. You can point, choose or watch, too.

Raffy and his friends invented Oceanese so different animals could talk to one another. In their make-believe world, they use sounds, movements and expressions, with time for each friend to reply.

Our ocean. Our planet. Our friends. Let's look after them together.

Enjoy watching wildlife with a grown-up. Give animals space, leave their homes undisturbed and take your belongings and rubbish home.

Story and characters by James Shang. Illustrations created with generative AI and developed through author-directed revisions. Raffy's Ocean Friends is a fictional series inspired by Australia's animals and waterways.

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Thank you for reading!

By James Shang | Raffy's Ocean Friends

We hope you enjoyed our story and your reading time together.

Visit raffysoceanfriends.com for songs, games and colouring in. There's more fun to share with Raffy and his friends!



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