

HEARTS

The dolphin pod had already made one melodious pass by the time I awoke tearfully before dawn in my cozy tent on the beach. Here I was on day five of a solo photo shoot at Makua beach, writhing in agony from lower back spasms and shooting pains down my left leg.



Dismal memories of being a bedridden invalid with only a mountain of Vicodin for comfort scrolled before me - a grim reminder of my four-month stint with ruptured disks years before. Had I reactivated the pain I asked myself? True, I had spent the past few days engaged in marathon photographic swims halfway to Japan, moving at full speed alongside Spinner and Spotted dolphin pods, but this much pain seemed undeserved! I breathlessly searched through my medicine bag, found some panther juice, and slathered it on. Painfully, I crawled, snail-like, tear by tear out of my tent into the sand.

My dreams of the amethyst crystal city materialized before me, miles below the ocean floor.



I could once again see the clear-cut, faceted structure emitting a bright white light from a gleaming violet center. Inside, gold-lettered volumes held drawings in sacred geometry. I ran my energy as fast as I could, but my body went limp and my hips and sacrum seemed to open wide, like the base of a pyramid. I felt as though the warm tropical waters were thrusting through my body and pouring out the soles of my feet with a heat that could have melted my fins. Then the nagging charley horse in my left leg released its grip, and I felt my spine lengthen. Finally relaxed, I was dangling like a jellyfish. Oh, thank you! I sighed silently.

At last able to kick hard, I almost succeeded in keeping up with my companions as they slowly headed back out to sea. We had not gone far when a peculiar-looking dolphin

The dolphins had made another flyby at that point, and were now about three quarters of a mile from the beach, flipping, spinning on their tails, then crashing back into the dark, wind-chopped water. The sun had not yet lightened the vast royal blue Pacific, which meant that it remained the rightful domain of sharp-toothed night feeders, wherever they may have been.

Oh, God, please help me make it to the water, I whimpered. A soothing voice from inside assured me that my back and leg would be all right if I could only reach the dolphins. I felt some relief - enough to wriggle into my wet suit and fins while still flat on my back in the sand. Grabbing the Nikon, which luckily I had loaded the night before, and biting the bullet, I slowly backed into the surf like an aching centenarian.

Once underwater I could feel the vibration of the persuasive dolphin songs. I raised my head above the surface for a moment and noticed, about a mile into the mauve horizon, a dolphin air-acrobatic competition. Accompanying the gymnasts was a chaotic chirping akin to thousands of hungry baby birds celebrating their first day of life. The roar of their vocalizations was almost deafening as the pod, speeding out to open sea, began performing Olympic

dropped back to swim by my side; his physical energy was not vibrant like that of the others. I had seen him from a distance several times before, but never did I notice the extent of damage to his right side. As the sun peeked out momentarily from behind the storm clouds above us, rays of light beamed onto his torn skin. My heart sank as I realized his wound had been caused by a shark bite. A long, thick layer of flesh had been savagely torn off, and he appeared jagged from dorsal fin to tail.



Nonetheless, he tended to move in rhythm with his mates at the extreme left end of the pod and with his lacerated side safely facing them. He was no doubt a valiant wounded warrior, I decided, who had been slashed while protecting his family.

He must have read my thoughts, for he looked straight at me and tenderly released through his blowhole a long string of little bubble kisses. Sensing that he, too, was weak and in need of a healing, I turned my shoulder his way so that we were facing the same direction, and

leaps.

I called to them, cooing my own dolphin song while painfully kicking through the coral reef and mist-topped frothy waves. I was dead set on a rendezvous - crippled or not - and nothing else mattered. Suddenly, out of the infinite blue-blackness of their underwater home came a hundred shadows, surrounding me on all sides. I was shocked to see how quickly the dolphins had raced in toward shore.

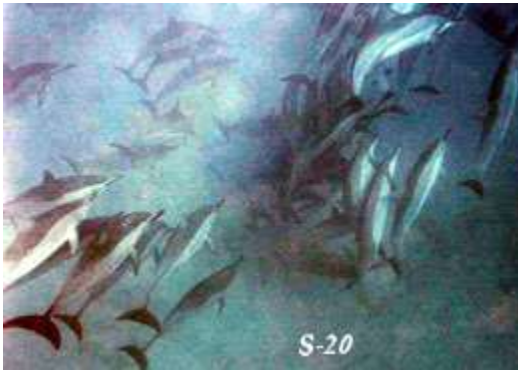
Against a background of yakking and squeaking chatter, they were immersed in festivities. I watched them dancing, teasing, nipping, rubbing their white tummies together, and spinning wildly upside down while chasing and gnawing on one another. One dolphin was even sweetly scratching a buddy's forehead with his pectorals-which I knew had the same bone structure as human hands. Observing the adults and calves playing together, I lost myself in their joyful chaos in what appeared to be a wild and free dolphin Mardi Gras.

began to kick harder. By then I had learned that swimming *with* dolphins was very different from swimming *at* them.



We traveled slowly at the rear of the pod, parallel to each other. Judging from the buzzing sensation I felt from his sonar, I guessed that he had been sizing up my improved condition. He turned his head and shot me a loving look, whereupon I shut my eyes and directed my energy into his wound. Once again, hot rushes surged through me and my breathing all but ceased.

Feeling a fleeting caress on my cheek, I sleepily opened my eyes to the still synchronized dolphins surging up for air and flying their colors on gleaming silver dorsals. As they blended into the blue, heading west into the deepest part of the South Pacific, it dawned on me that the wind velocity had increased dramatically and that I had best go back to land. At that point, the dolphin camp along the shore looked as tiny as a matchbox. The pod sent me a sweet



Marveling at their willingness to accept me into their intricately woven world, I began to run my energy down far beyond the bottom of the ocean, and then back up in an elliptical configuration. When the entraining curve intersected the dolphins, I offered them my heart, as pure as a dew-kissed rosebud, and asked them for a healing in my spine, then I humbly asked our guardian angels to help us all.



All the members of the pod turned away and disappeared playfully into the now aqua blueness - all, that is, except one. A full-grown smiling male spun around and swam up to my face. I was about to touch the gray stripe running down his side, but out

farewell and a telepathic promise: *See you in your dreams!*

Still acutely aware of their spin within my body, I kicked my way toward the beach. Gravity and dry land would be the true test of the healing I had received. When I reached the sand, I stood up tentatively, then straightened my spine without a grimace. Thank you, darling dolphins, I called to them. I love you! Waving to them, I dared to gratefully stretch my body to the limit. Not a twinge of pain did I feel!



The research team from the next camp over dropped their binoculars and clipboards and hurried toward me. Star, that pod was circling you for two and a half hours! How did you swim for that long? Doesn't your back still hurt, we saw you crying early this morning! the director boomed. One of them did a flip and almost landed on your shoulders! It looked like they submerged and then surfaced after twenty minutes all around you, said another researcher. Still, another spoke up with concern: Were they touching

of respect I withdrew my outstretched hand and began instead to entrain with him, blending our energies. With his vibration came a telepathic message: *I can take you to the crystal city!* How, I wondered, did he know about my recurring dream? I patted my big crystal pendant and knew I was home with my own.



I looked beyond him to what I thought might have been the crystal temple of my dreams. Then I blinked, and discovered that the entire pod had surrounded me again, forming a wide circle, with several rows stacked below me. Every pod member had become perfectly quiet, almost somber. They remained in formation, not even rising to the surface for air. Looking down about six feet I saw nothing but glowing gray backs positioned equidistant from one another, their streamlined muscles rippling. Their haunting songs had dwindled to a whispering whistle. Even the newborns stopped suckling and had taken their places in the triangular pattern, now pulsating

you? We couldn't even see your snorkel! What was going on all that time?

Unsure whether or not their young scientific minds would be able to comprehend the two-way healing that had taken place, I paused before answering. Oh, not much, I finally said, grinning. They were only showing me that there are two curves to a heart - one for giving and one for receiving - and they meet in the middle. Any of ya'll want to do aerobics with me?



with power.

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