



On the Reclaim

by Janice Marriott

"What you doin', Lance?"

He didn't say anything. We were lying on the grass near a battered cabbage tree on the reclaim while our dads fished. The reclaim is this blob of land that sticks out into Wellington Harbour by the motorway, right next to where the ferries come in.

Lance was so doing something. I could tell because he was staring up at the sky really hard. And he kept wiggling his head to get a better look at something.

"There's nothing up there except blue," I said, and I shook him.

"Hey, you ruined it!"

He was annoyed. He said he'd discovered that, if you wrap your arms around your head and then look up at the sky through the clumps of cabbage tree leaves, it's like you're looking up at a bunch of palm trees nodding around a blue lagoon.

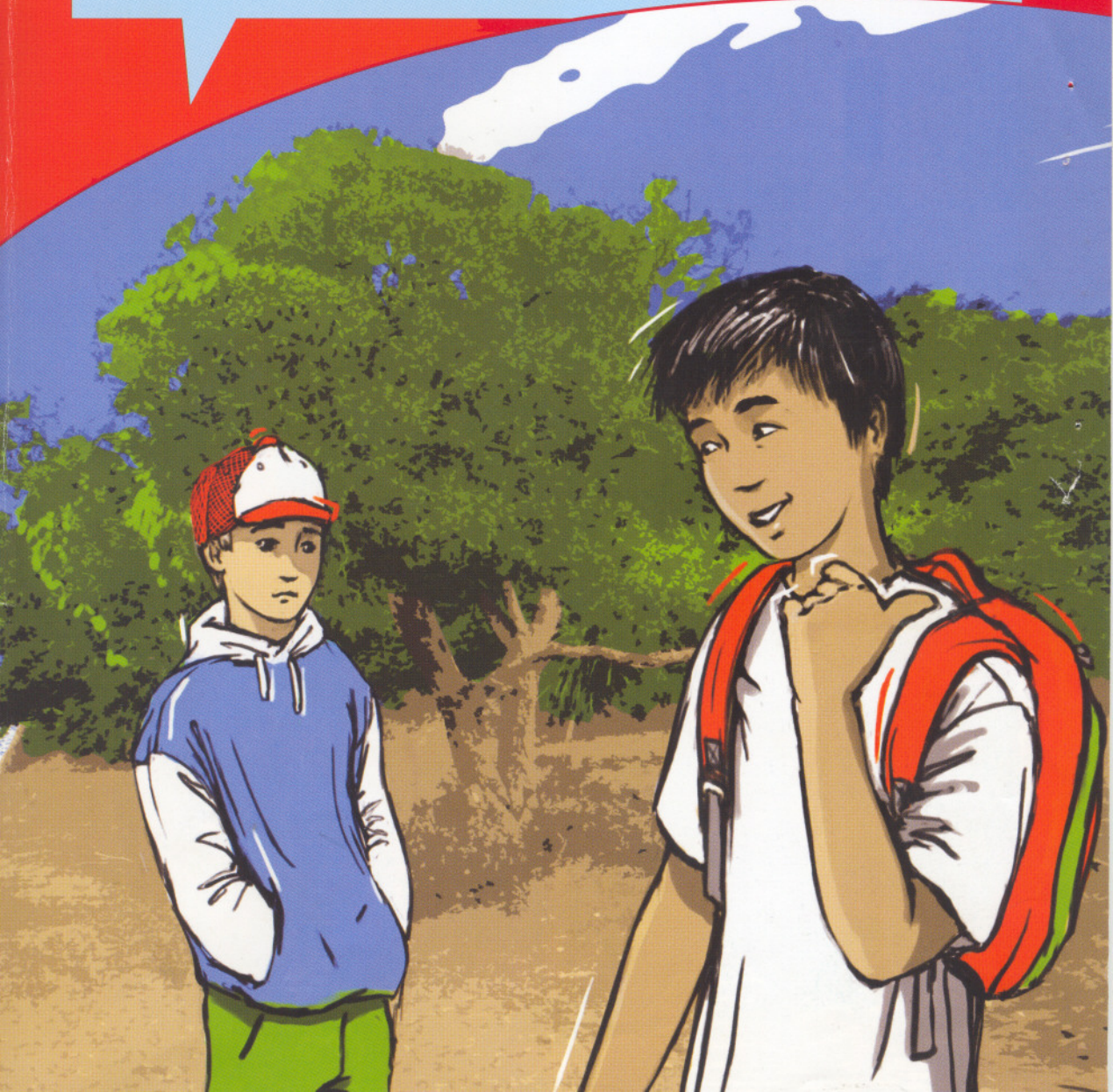
"Better to pretend you're on a hot Pacific island," he said, "than be stuck on this lump of phoney land – this rubbish heap."

"I like it here," I told him.

Ever since we got these email friends on the class computer, Lance has wanted to be in Sāmoa – that's where his email friend, Filo, lives. Lance always says he hasn't got anything cool to write to Filo about. He says to our teacher, "I never climb up trees to collect coconuts or go snorkelling or spear fishing. I've got the boringest life."

"Come on," I said, ignoring him. "Let's walk round the reclaim."

The reclaim isn't reclaimed land at all. It's just a lot of rock and stuff that some bulldozers must have pushed into the harbour when they were making the motorway and the ferry terminal. From the top, we can watch the trains and containers going onto the ferries. We know all the guys who work in the traffic booths, directing cars onto the boats, and the guys on the shunters. It's cool. But Lance doesn't think so, not any more. He emailed Filo about the reclaim, but Filo hasn't replied. Lance says it's because life on the reclaim is so boring.



I dragged him up, and we went to see if our dads had caught anything. Nah, they hadn't. But they did have some cold chips for us, and an orange.

We walked to the end of the beach nearest to the motorway so we could count the four-wheel drives as they buzzed past. The roar of the traffic was so loud we had to shout when we spoke.

"That makes seven!" I screamed.

"This is such a pathetic game."

[That was Lance.]

"You're not even watching the road!" I shouted. Then I stopped. I stared in the same direction as Lance.

In the water, not far from shore, there was something grey. Then it was gone. I wasn't sure what I'd seen. I hoped it was a submarine.

"Did you see that?" Lance yelled, pointing. "A dolphin!"

We ran into the sea and stood, wobbling, on the stones. The cold water chopped at our knees.

We both stared hard again, and a while later, just when I was going to back out because my legs were so frozen, a fin cut through the water.

It was going real fast.

"There!"

"Where?"

"Wow!"



"He's looking at yer," said Lance's dad, rushing over to where we were.

We watched the fin shoot through the water, fast, like a cursor across a computer screen. It went from one end of the little beach to the other. Then it turned and did the same thing, going the other way. When it got to that point right in front of us again, it shot into the air, spun round, and smashed back into the water.

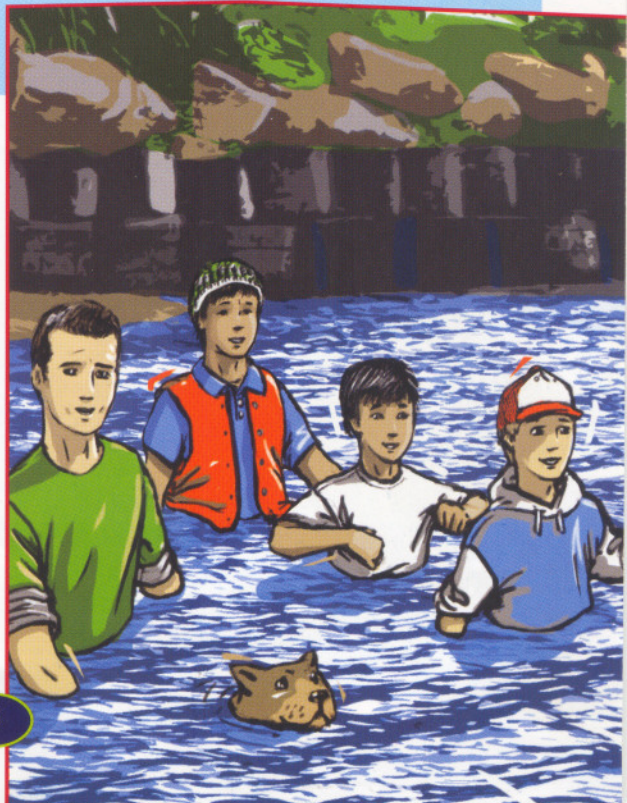
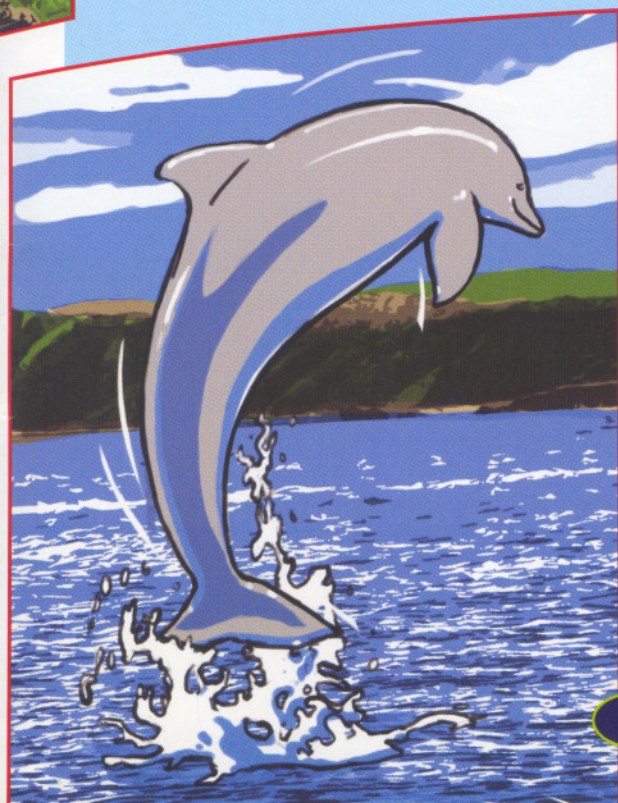
"Wow!" we all shouted at once.

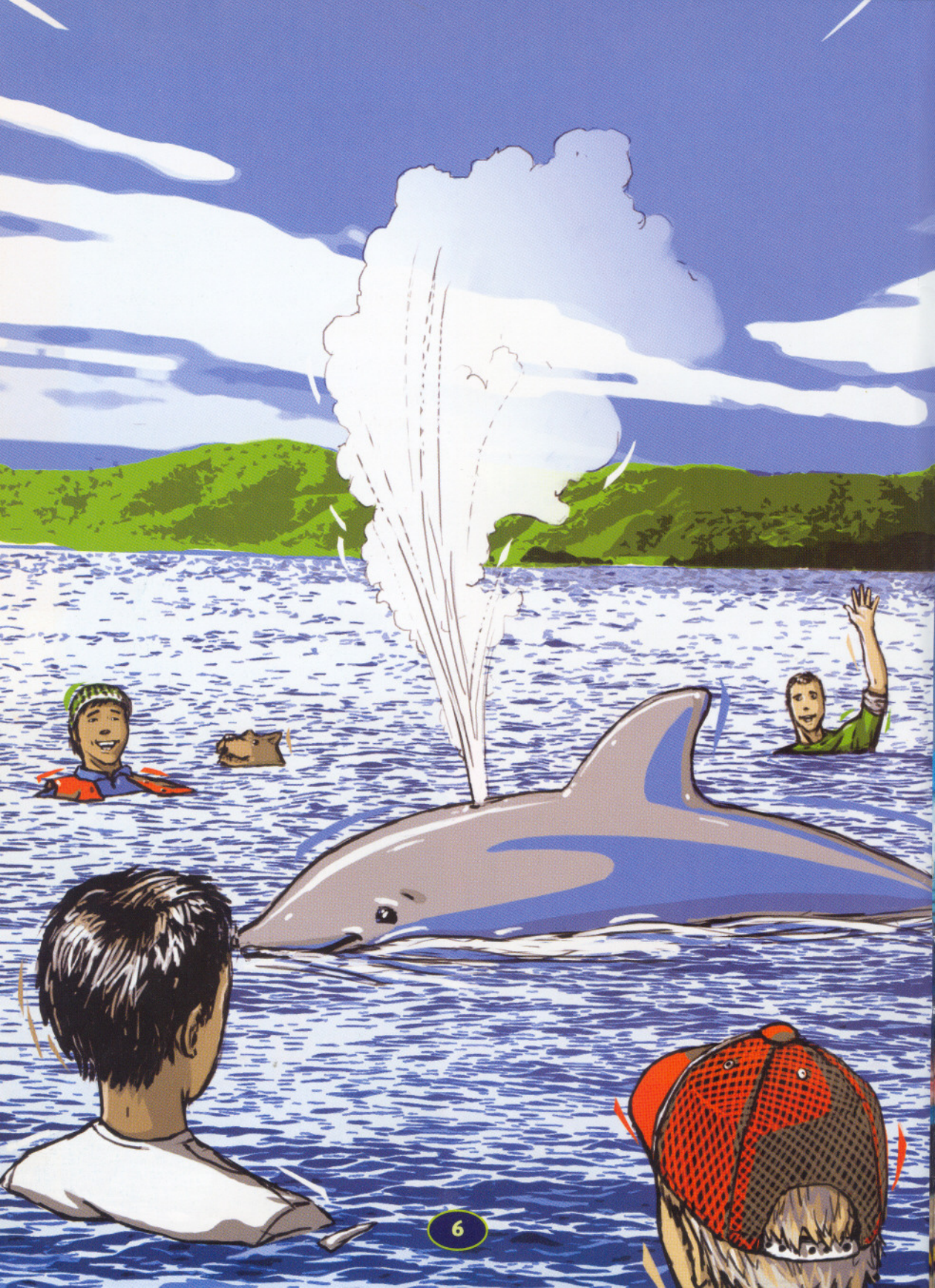
"Yeah," said Lance's dad slowly. "He's a dolphin all right."

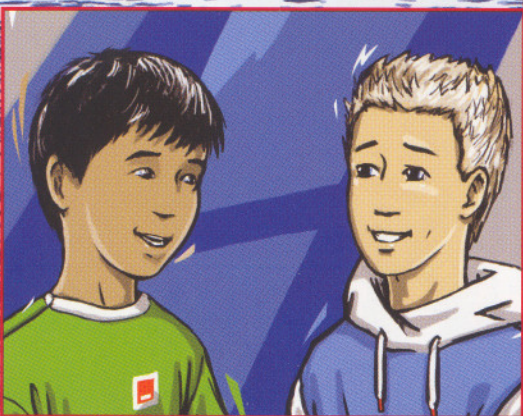
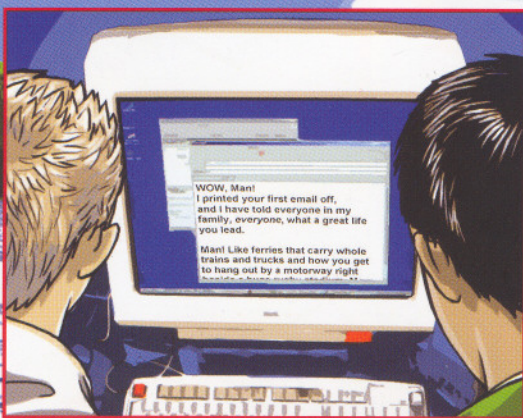
We all stood looking at it: a beautiful, shiny, fast dolphin, doing acrobatics in our sizzly old bay on the reclaim.

We looked at each other. We were grinning from ear to ear. Then all of us walked further out into the sea! We did! It was amazing. Even Dad's dog came with us. We walked into that sea, and we waited for that leaping, diving, spinning dolphin to come and check us out.

It was scary at first. When you're in the sea, on the same level as the dolphin, you don't see it coming. One minute, I was treading water beside Dad, and the next, we felt the push of water as the dolphin muscled past us and shot away. The best bit was when I was swimming and the dolphin swam past me on the surface, and I saw his eye, and I saw the way his blowhole opened. After he'd looked at me, he dived and disappeared.







We walked out of the water and stood there, soaking and shivering in our clothes. None of us could stop smiling.

The next day at school, Lance was still pumped up about the dolphin. He emailed Filo about our swim. He spent ages thinking of the right words to describe it. He wrote "Big News" in the subject bar.

The day after that, he finally got an email back from Filo. He pulled me close to the screen, and we read it together. It said: "Wow, man. I printed your first email off, and I have told everyone in my family, *everyone*, what a great life you lead. Man! Like ferries that carry whole trains and trucks and how you get to hang out by a motorway right beside a huge rugby stadium. Man, I am blown away! Tell me more about having a father who drives trains."

"Hey!" said Lance. "What about the dolphin? Filo doesn't say anything about our dolphin."

"Probably sees them every day," I said to Lance.

He didn't answer. Then he asked, "Wanna go down to the reclaim after school?"

"Sure thing," I said.

"Cool," said Lance.