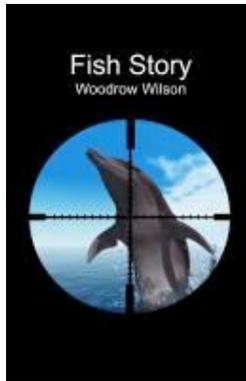


Fish Story

Woodrow Wilson





DOLPHINS: THE OTHER EARTHLINGS. What do their scientists want to know about you? What lengths will they go to for the answers? Fish Story is a role reversal adventure of people kept by dolphins. It is the story of people kept in their laboratories, of people kept in their zoos, and of people kept in their backyards. Dolphins live in a world more alien than the moon or Mars. Let a dolphin take you there...

Fish Story

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CHAPTER 1

A great gray dolphin rose up in the cross hairs. Lord of the Ocean, he stood on his tail and splashed over the waves, arms outstretched, silver belly glistening in the sunshine. He chirped and whistled a song—a hymn of joy for the tiny pup that splashed after him, and the sun and the sky and the sea.

Crack! The dolphin hung in midair. Blood spurted from a hole near his shoulder. “Eie!” he screamed as blood foamed from his mouth. He fell back into the water jerking spastically, thrashing in a spreading pool of his own blood. Thrusting himself high out of the water, he yelped a cry of pain and warning. He tumbled back into the water and floated lifeless in the spreading bloodstain.

“How about that, Scott!” Rob Coleman crowed. “One shot from—must be five hundred yards!”

The water grew still. The giant’s first scream had ended all frolicking. Here and there, a dolphin’s head bobbed up surveyed the horizon, then ducked. On his final cry, they all slunk low, silent with only their blowholes riding out of the water.

A lone frightened pup nudged his father’s still body. He bumped and poked, but his father did not respond. He took a run at his father and did his best flying leap right over him, but there was no response. He pushed himself up on his father’s great back and barked, but his father did not move. The young

dolphin's mother nudged him back into the water and squeaked something at him. Reluctant, the pup followed his mother. There was a chattering among the first cluster of dolphins they met, and the mother returned alone.

"Nice shot, Rob!" Scott Ryan shouted.

Of course, Rob thought.

"Let me try one," Scott asked. Rob slapped the rifle into his outstretched hands.

The great she-dolphin circled the body of her mate. She nuzzled close and wailed, then rose up high out of the water and screeched.

Crack! Her screech became a cough, then nothing. Burgundy red blood streamed over her breast as she slumped beside her mate. She thrashed a minute then lay still. The sea was quiet.

"Good shooting, Scott! One shot—one kill; you could have been a Ranger," Rob said. Yeah, right, he thought, not with those love beads and that long hair.

Rob heard Scott's wife yelling from the front deck. "Hey, what the Hell are you two doing?"

"A little dolphin shoot and target practice. See those two floating out there? We got them—one shot each with Rob's elephant gun here and some damn fine shooting. Five years out of Nam and we can still rock and roll," Scott bragged.

"You want to try?"

"God! No!" she shrieked at him. "You can't do that. Stop it!"

Prude! Rob was glad he wasn't married to a high school Latin teacher, like Devon. His gorgeous wife Candy came bounding around the cabin yelling, "Let me try." Tall, blonde and topless—what a sight! Eat your heart out, Scott.

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She cradled the gun like a firehose, and stared down its wobbling barrel. The dolphins hung low in the water. “Where are the little bastards? They’re sure playing hard to get.”

The pup slipped away from the pod to follow his mother. She was ahead with his father; she lay still, too. His mother wasn’t moving either. He nudged her and nipped her fins, but she lay still. He raised himself up out of the water as high as his young body would carry him. Something looked strange.

Crack! The rifle jumped in Candy’s hands, and the bullet sped off to maim whatever it happened upon.

“No, Candy, not like that. First, kneel down and rest the barrel on the gunwale. Now, hold the rifle tight,” Scott told her.

“No, not that way. Here, let me show you.” Rob watched Scott kneel and wrap himself around Candy. One hand squeezed hers on the barrel; the other grasped hers on the stock. He drew her close and whispered.

Bang! The bullet splashed near the pup. He squealed and dove under the protecting waves then swam back to the school.

Rob glared down; his wife knelt topless in Scott’s arms. Her eyes were closed, her lips pursed, her face relaxed. Scott’s hand had slid off the stock onto her breast. Candy arched her back and snuggled closer to him.

Rob snatched the rifle away from her. “If you guys are going to fool around, just give me that thing.” He wrapped the strap around his forearm, and raised the gun to his shoulder. “I’ll show you some shooting.” He squeezed the trigger. Bang! A blowhole spouted blood. Bang! A second ran red. Bang! “Eie!” a wounded dolphin rose up and screamed. Bang! It shuddered and dropped. Bang! Bang! Bang! ... The sea ran red; the air filled with shrieks.

Rob looked down again. Candy cowered in Scott’s arms; she didn’t look quite so comfortable any more. Her mouth wide open, she gasped in terror at the carnage.

She looked up at him and trembled. “More ammo,” he snarled.

“Yes, sir,” she stuttered and ran to fetch the whole box out of the cabin.

He reloaded. Bang! Bang! Bang! ...

Candy cowered into Scott’s arms and stared.

CHAPTER 2

A black dot in the sky exploded into a round object; its high pitched scream punctuated the gun's anger. "What's that?" Candy pointed at the black spec in the distance.

Scott shrugged. "Some kind of bird, I suppose." He could feel her trembling as she watched her husband unleash his rage; she buried her head in his chest. Scott stared at the shadow charging across the water. "Whatever it is, it's moving like a bat out of hell," he said.

Candy looked up. The thing was falling fast; it was faster than falling. It was in a power dive straight at them! "It's going to hit us. Let's get out of here," she screamed.

Scott sprawled Candy across the deck as he lunged for the cabin. She picked herself up and crawled after him.

He ground the starter. The engine coughed and stalled.

"It's still coming, hurry!" She jabbed her finger at the monster charging them.

Scott cranked it again; the engine caught. He opened the throttle full. The boat quaked then surged, scattering passengers. Candy tumbled under the mate's seat; Rob ricocheted off the gunwale into the stern. Up front, he saw Devon skid across the deck. She was pinned like a bug against the windscreen. Scott could see she was yelling at him; he could only imagine what she was saying. White knuckles on the wheel, he urged the boat forward with all his might.

The thing raced toward them. It got as big as the sun; then it filled the sky. He could hear Rob firing at the thing, Bang! Bang! Bang! ... but it kept coming. Bigger and faster, it filled the horizon. It was on them. Then it hovered in midair pacing them.

“Get us out of here!” Candy screamed at him.

“Hang on,” Scott yelled. He zipped the boat to starboard. He watched Devon sweep across the windshield in front of him. She smashed into the guardrail and grabbed on.

“It’s still there!” Candy shrieked. Scott zagged hard to port. Their stalker zagged too.

A new sound came from overhead. It explored the octaves: one moment, the shrill high-pitched sound reached the threshold of pain; the next, deep base tones vibrated the deck. Deafening, then still—gradually, it focused in on normal sound. A mechanical voice boomed “Halt!”

“No way, Jose,” Scott hollered back at it. He swung the boat about and floored it. He heard Rob firing point-blank at the dark sphere.

Something fired back. Zap! He heard Rob’s gun slam against the deck.

“Halt, or we shall be forced to sink you.”

“Oh shit!” Scott cut the engine. “We ain’t got a snowflake’s chance against that.”

Candy clutched for Scott and tried to bury herself in his chest. Scott didn’t respond. He just stared up at the black intruder.

Ignored, Candy ran out to Rob.

Devon freed one hand from the rail and rummaged through whatever hadn’t been thrown overboard. She located her bra and a towel. She put her top on before sidling hand-over-hand around the cabin.

“What was all that crap, Scott?” she snarled from the door. “You almost threw me overboard.”

Scott stood with his mouth open staring through her. He didn’t answer.

She turned to see what he was looking at. “What the Hell is that?”

“You will come aboard,” the mechanical voice boomed louder.

Scott stepped outside and wrapped his arm around his wife. Together, they watched the thing back off and hover like an angry cloud astern. The object that had come screaming out of the sky—and who knew where before that—was more a disk than a sphere from that angle. The top and bottom bulged like two black saucers face-to-face. A lighted dome sat atop the structure.

“Look at this.” Rob flourished his gun. “It’s trashed!” Scott could see there was a clean round hole through the barrel.

A matte black tentacle stretched out of the dark cloud toward them. Rob thrust Candy aside and charged—flailing at it with his ruined gun.

She landed in a heap and curled into a ball in the corner. “I’m scared,” she moaned. “Oh God! I peed myself—ugh!” She peeled her clammy bottoms off and wept.

Devon moved to comfort her. “It’ll be all right,” she said as she stroked Candy’s hair.

“Come aboard now,” the mechanical voice ordered.

“Easy on the deck, man,” Rob yelled as the tip of the tentacle crashed onto it. “That thing is some sort of gang plank, they must expect us to climb it.”

“Yeah right! Straight into the jaws of—” Scott hollered. He raised his fist. “Hell, no! We won’t go!” None of the others picked up the chant.

Devon shook her head. “We don’t have a lot of choices here. Look at that thing! It could crush us like a twig and we’d be just another oil slick in the Bermuda Triangle.”

“She’s right, man: we’re between a rock and a hard place. Get on the horn and get us some help,” Rob barked. “Call the Coast Guard then get this thing moving.”

“We ain’t in Nam anymore,” Scott objected, “we can’t just hunker down and call in an air strike.”

Splinters flew as the plank scraped across the floor. Rob sprang for the cabin. “I’ll do it—you stay here and keep that damn thing off my deck,” he yelled.

The plank rammed the boat, scattering its passengers. Scott peeled himself off the gunwale. He could see the two women piled against the stern; he couldn’t see Rob.

The boat was skewered. Slivers flew as the spear withdrew. The boat shuttered then listed. It was taking on water. “You will come aboard now,” the mechanical voice spoke without inflection, but clearly commanded. The black plank bounced on the deck and waited.

Devon and Candy crawled hand-over-hand along the rail to Scott’s side. He wrapped his arms around both and the three of them huddled together. “Where’s Rob?” Candy cried.

“He’s inside, calling the Coast Guard,” Scott told her.

The deck surged sideways and bucked them into the water. Scott surfaced beside the hull—keel-up and low in the water. Devon popped up, then Candy. “Are you all right?” he asked.

“I’m okay,” Devon coughed.

“Yeah, where’s Rob?” Candy said.

“I don’t see him yet,” he answered. “Let’s climb onto the boat. We’ll be able to see better from there.” Devon was the lightest; they’d push her aboard. She straddled the keel and pulled Candy’s arms while Scott pushed her bare bottom. The

two women pulled him up behind. They didn't see Rob in the water.

A hollow thud reverberated through the hull as the black plank slammed the keel at the stern. "You will come aboard, now," the mechanical voice repeated.

Scott shook his fist and shouted back at it, "No way I'm stepping on that thing!"

"There's Rob." Candy pointed at his head bobbing along side. "Where did you go, honey?"

Rob treaded water while he caught his breath. "I was trapped in the cabin," he answered. "The door wouldn't open until it flooded. I swam out as soon as I could." Candy helped Scott pull her husband aboard. He sprawled across the keel.

"Now what?" Devon worried.

"We sit and wait for the Coast Guard, honey," Scott said. He turned to Rob. "You did get hold of them, didn't you?" he asked.

"Lost the radio when the hold flooded."

"Now what?" Devon repeated.

Scott reached his hand out to hers. "We sit and wait until a patrol finds us."

The black plank sheared the props and rudders off as it sliced forward. "Do something!" Candy screamed. "They're getting ugly."

"This is just like Nam, Scott: when outnumbered, attack. Let's go get in their faces. Move out soldier." Rob pointed up the ramp. He took a step onto the plank; it held.

Rob hesitated then took another step. He inched forward like he was walking the plank at sword point. "God! I hate heights, and I've got the hangover from Hell," he said as he leapt back to the hull.

"Don't look down," Devon told him. "Watch where you're going, or close your eyes. Just don't look down."

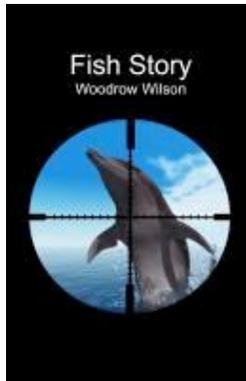
She turned to the others and said, "Sooner or later, we'll all have to go."

"All of us?" Candy shuddered. "I can't walk up that thing," she whined.

"Nobody can," Rob agreed. "No steps, no handrail, just a bunch of big pimples: more for slithering than for walking."

"Slithering! –God! I hate snakes!" Candy trembled.

"Thanks a lot," Devon snarled at him.



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