

## **Extract from 'Whale Boy' by Nicola Davies**

As the sun began to sag towards the west, Michael headed home. A school of dolphins surfaced fifty metres from his bow. The low light on the calm water caught the vapour of their spouts, turning them to little puffs of gold. Their round foreheads broke the surface, and the sharp sickle curve of their dorsal fins followed, slicing the water into slivers of light. They were too small to be bottle-nosed dolphins and too big to be spinners. Michael counted ten, twelve, sixteen; there might be twice as many under the surface each time he saw them blow. They swam closer, and he saw the spots freckling their skins, confirming that they were spotted dolphins. He speeded up in the hope that they might bow-ride, but they were heading out to sea, ready for a night's hunting in deeper waters, and they disappeared like a dream. A few moments later he glimpsed their fins cutting the surface far off; it was always amazing to see how fast dolphins could swim.

It was the first time since his dad left that Michael had been so close to dolphins. A bubble of longing to share this moment with Samuel rose up, but he pushed it down; this was business now. He took a bearing – on Pointe Maron, Soulant Head, and a third on the needle-like summit of Morne Matin, to be extra sure – and wrote it down with the date and time next to SPOTTED DOLPHIN in the log book Spargo had given him. It was a fine first day's work.

Inside a week Michael had established a new routine for himself. He had decided for the time being to keep the boat moored at Golden Cove. That way it was easy to say that the boat wasn't his, or not to mention it at all. He could still get back into town at the end of the day in time to visit Gran.

He Left Rose Town before dawn on the first minibus running up the coast towards Northport. That early, there were no school kids around, and nobody else he knew to ask awkward questions. He wore an old checked shirt of his father's and pulled a baseball cap down low on his forehead. That was enough for the other passengers to assume he was an apprentice working on one of the building sites that dotted the coast. He got off at the rise in the road before Golden Cove and walked the rest of the way, down the mile of dirt track to the half-built hotel. He was aboard the Louisa May and casting off just as it got light, before the construction workers had wiped the sleep out of their eyes.

Her two outboards were small engines and her hull was broad and homely. She was a steady fishing platform, but no speedboat, making his progress slow. Each day he surveyed a different bit of coast, looking out for dolphins and leaving time for fishing in the best spots his father had showed him.

Michael revelled in the new rhythm of his days and the moods of the ocean: the dawn coming up from the far side of the island and the dreamy stillness of the water close to the shore; the hot mid-days, two miles out, with the breeze picking up and the water choppy and deep blue; and the sweetness of dusk, coming back to land, and the green smell of trees.