

## **An Ocean in the City**

by Terri Mullholland

Amy and her mother were both born under the sign of Pisces. Water signs. Two fish swimming in an imaginary ocean.

Her mother was a true Piscean daydreamer, a storyteller of enchanting tales. Amy liked nothing better than curling up in bed, eyes closed, listening to the sound of her mother's voice transport her to another world.

Amy's mother always told her daughter that nothing was truly impossible.

When Amy was six, she went on a beach holiday with her parents and saw the ocean for the first time. While Amy and her father paddled in the shallows, flicking drops of sunlit water at each other and giggling in delight, her mother swam off into the distance and was soon just a tiny dot on the horizon.

'Your mother's gone to play with her fellow fishes,' said her father with a smile.

Amy told her father she wished she could take the ocean home with her, all of it, so she could roll it out whenever she felt like a dip.

'That would be a fine idea!' said her father.

There was another little girl, splashing in the water next to her, who turned to her mother and said, 'that's impossible, isn't it mummy!'

And the little girl's mother agreed, 'completely impossible, darling?'

The little girl gave Amy a smug, self-satisfied look.

Amy's father leaned down and whispered in her ear, 'nothing's impossible. I'll take the ocean home for you.'

Then he reached down and filled his empty plastic water bottle.

Amy didn't have the heart to explain that wasn't what she meant.

A week later, Amy was back in their cramped high-rise apartment in the city. Her mother was staring out of the window at the rain falling on the litter-strewn streets. 'I'd love to be back at the ocean,' she said. Amy told her mother about wishing she could bring the ocean home and father filling up a bottle with ocean water.

Her mother stroked her daughter's hair as she listened. Then she disappeared into the bedroom, emerging with raincoats and umbrellas. Amy thought she saw the top of a water bottle poking out from her mother's coat pocket.

'It's not raining that much,' said Amy's mother. 'And a drop of water never hurt a Piscean! Let's go out and have an adventure, cheer ourselves up.'

They went down the eleven flights of stairs to the courtyard between the high-rises, playing a game where each flight would take them to a different country, and they had to name as many things from that country as they could in the time it took to descend to the next level.

'Italy,' said Amy's mother on the sixth floor. 'Pizza, gondolas, ice cream...'

'Australia,' said Amy as they clattered down the final flight of stairs. 'Kangaroos, sunshine, the ocean...'

They pushed open the door.

'It looks like we gave the rain time to stop,' said Amy's mother.

In the courtyard was a children's play area with swings and climbing bars and a blue plastic dolphin on a giant spring that you could sit on and bounce back and forth.

Amy's mother wiped the raindrops off the blue plastic seat with her sleeve and lifted Amy onto the dolphin. Then she told her to shut her eyes and imagine the apartments disappearing and the ocean in front of them, blue and shining and stretching on forever.

Amy's mother muttered a few words that sounded vaguely magical, opened the bottle of water, and emptied it over the dolphin.

Amy screamed as the water hit her and opened her eyes. She and her mother were clinging onto the back of a dolphin, whose sleek skin felt nothing like plastic, riding through the waves.

'You did it! You brought the ocean home,' said Amy.

Her mother smiled down at her happy daughter and then, with a flick of her damp sleeve, gently erased the rest of the city skyline from the horizon.