

The Great Manatee Rescue

A Quality Serials Story

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Chapter One: Some Unusual Creatures

Ali sat on the bank of a canal near her home. It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue and the sun was shining brightly. Ali didn't even notice. She was too upset. The young girl stared into the water. Tears welled up in her eyes. Ali tried not to cry, but it was no use.

"It's not fair!" she sobbed. "I want to go back home!"

Ali knew that she shouldn't be feeling like this, but she couldn't help it. Ali didn't have anyone to talk to about her problems. She hadn't even been able to tell her parents how she was feeling. She didn't want them to know how unhappy she was. So instead, Ali pretended that everything was going well. But things weren't going well!

Ali was having a very difficult time. She had been at her new school for a whole two weeks and hadn't made any friends. Imagine, the captain of the cheerleading squad having trouble making friends! Correction—the ex-captain of the cheerleading squad.

It had all started when her dad had come home from work early one day. Ali had never seen him so excited. Ali remembered back to that day that had changed her life forever...

"I have some fantastic news!" Ali's dad announced, grabbing Ali's mom and dancing her around the room.

"John, what on earth?" her mother cried in surprise.

"What is it?" Ali squealed, caught up in the excitement.

"You are looking at the new president in charge of plant operations!" he announced.

"Oh, John!" Ali's mom said. "Congratulations!"

"Wow!" Ali screamed.

"That's not all," her father continued, "the job comes with a huge pay raise. And Grace, I've been thinking... with more money coming in, we can finally afford for you to go back to school."

Ali's mom had wanted to finish her college degree for a long time. It had always been her dream to be a teacher.

Ali thought it was great news—at least at first. But then her father looked very serious.

"There's only one thing," he said quietly. "We'll have to relocate."

"To where?" Ali's mom asked.

"Florida," replied her dad. "Warm weather... Sunshine... Isn't that great?"

"It sure is!" Ali's mom was excited too. "I always thought I would like Florida."

“Well, what do you think?” her father asked, turning to Ali. He was smiling broadly. “You seem awfully quiet. Are you okay with this?”

Ali saw how happy her mom and dad looked.

“It’s great,” Ali said, giving him a weak smile.

“That’s my girl!” said her father.

But it wasn’t great! Outside Ali was smiling, but inside she was heartbroken. She didn’t want to move. She had never lived anywhere else! She had had the same friends since kindergarten. Ali felt like she would be leaving her entire life behind. Now, she would have to get used to a new school, a new town—even a new state!

Ali cried even harder as she thought back on that day. Trying to hold back her tears, Ali looked out over the water. She was so miserable! She hated her new school! At her old school, she had been one of the most popular girls—now she was an outsider. She just didn’t like it here at all. Nothing was the same!

Through her tears, Ali saw something very, very weird! Startled, Ali stood up. Two grayish shapes moved very slowly under the water. Then suddenly, right before her eyes, appeared the strangest creature that Ali had ever seen! Ali rubbed her eyes, not believing that what she was seeing was real!

The roly-poly creature was very big. It had two front flippers and a large paddle-shaped tail. The animal poked its head out of the water. It had a round, wrinkly face. Its eyes were small and squinty. It had whiskers on its nose. It was the funniest looking thing! Wiping away her tears, Ali laughed out loud.

Another animal came to the top of the water. It was much smaller than the other one. It was a little baby. It was so cute!

Ali looked into the gentle faces of the mother and baby. Instantly, she knew that there was nothing to be afraid of.

Ali stood at the water’s edge and watched the two animals. She just couldn’t take her eyes off them. Ali was very quiet and kept her distance so as not to scare them. She was so fascinated by the unusual creatures that she forgot all about her troubles!

“Look at you two,” Ali said softly. “I’ve never seen anything like you before! What are you?”

Ali thought and thought. She had never seen animals like this back home. She had never seen animals like this anywhere! What on earth could these strange creatures be?

Next Time...

Chapter Two: The Secret Place