

# *Sea Story*

*Written by Jenny Bateman and read at the Family Service on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017*

This story is about a boy called Tom who was nine years old. He lived with his parents and sister, Ellie, and every year in the summer, they went to the seaside for two weeks on holiday. Tom loved the beach, exploring the rock pools, seeing the little shrimps and crabs which scuttled away when he got too close. He liked to pop the seaweed which grew on the rocks and marvelled at how the tide went in and out, making everything look so different. But Tom would never go in the water because he had a great fear of it. Ellie, who was younger than Tom, used to tease him about it because she could swim well and liked nothing more than splashing about in the waves.

Tom's parents tried to persuade him to have swimming lessons but he was much too frightened even to try. So he would just stand at the edge of the sea, dipping his toes into the water and feeling very silly when he watched all the other children having such fun. He got quite upset inside because sometimes the other children used to call him names and were quite unkind. Tom pretended he didn't care and used to just go off on his own exploring, looking for beautiful shells and driftwood which had been fashioned by the sea into strange shapes. He sometimes watched the boats sailing out of the nearby harbour across the bay but somehow that made him feel uncomfortable but he just didn't know why.

One night, Tom had a very vivid dream. He dreamt that he was living somewhere quite different which was hot and sunny with beautiful sandy beaches and palm trees. He lived in a village on the shores of a very blue sea and his family were all fishermen. In Tom's dream, he often used to accompany his father on fishing trips and he felt very proud that he could be a help to his Dad. He knew that if his Dad caught lots of fish, then not only would his family eat well but his Dad could exchange some fish for things such as vegetables and fruits which some of the other villagers grew. Sometimes, because they had to go quite far out to sea to find the shoals of fish, they would be away for several days.

One night when they were a long way from home, a storm blew up. Tom wasn't afraid because they had been in storms before and his father had years of experience in handling the boat. However, this was a very fierce storm. The rain was lashing down, the wind was ripping through the sails and the huge waves were bearing down on them.

Suddenly an enormous wave crashed over the boat, almost overturning it and, for a moment, Tom couldn't see anything at all because of all the spray. Then it cleared but, to his horror, he realised that his father wasn't in the boat anymore. In panic, Tom looked all around and suddenly spotted him in the sea, waving his arms, shouting. Tom grabbed the tiller and frantically tried to turn the boat around but, although he used every bit of strength he had, the wind was too strong and he couldn't get the boat to go the way he wanted. He could still hear his father shouting but the noise of the wind and sea were so strong that, after a while, he didn't even know in which direction his father was. The shouting got fainter and fainter and Tom was left, alone and terrified in the boat. He began to cry, wondering what else he could do and aware that his father was drowning and that he seemed totally unable to help.

'He's dead and it's my fault' he kept thinking 'and I'm probably going to die too!' Suddenly another huge wave crashed over the boat and Tom didn't remember any more about the storm.

In his dream, it seemed that time had passed and he found himself inside an enormous shell, even bigger than his hut back in the village. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, with translucent pinkish sides curving away to meet far above him. He noticed that there were fish swimming all around him with wonderful patterns and colours on their bodies and there were other creatures too of all shapes and sizes, one of which looked like a little horse! He also saw plants with lovely colours gently waving backwards and forwards.

'I'm under water!' he thought. However, he wasn't a bit frightened as it was all so beautiful and peaceful.

Gradually he became aware that there was someone with him, a beautiful being with flowing, deep blue robes like mother-of-pearl and which seemed to be made of the water itself, flowing and moving. She was smiling at him and making him feel that he was really loved and cared for.

'Well Tom' this being said 'now you know that you can't really die and that the sea is a most wonderful place. You are in the shell temple which has been built by the angels of the sea. It is a marvellous place for you to go and explore and you will be quite safe.

Tom was puzzled and asked 'But how is it that I can breathe under the water?'

The sea being replied 'Because you are in your body of light, it was only your earth body that was lost at sea. Your father is fine too and you will be able to see him in a little while. Although you think it was your fault that your father

died, it wasn't at all. Everyone on earth has a time when they leave earth to go on to another existence and the time was right for both you and your father, so you needn't worry'.

Tom was so relieved and very happy that he was soon to be reunited with his father. As the beautiful sea angel had said, he had been convinced that it was his fault that his father had drowned and that he should have been able to save him but now he knew that no-one really dies at all.

Tom awoke from his dream and was back in his home. He could hear Ellie playing with her dolls in the bedroom next to his. He thought about the dream and, unlike other dreams he had had, this one wasn't fading away. He could still remember it very clearly. Now he knew with complete certainty why he was afraid of water. He knew that he had lived on earth before in the tiny village by the sea. He knew that he and his father had both drowned in that lifetime but that it wasn't a mistake or anybody's fault. God had other plans for them both and Tom knew that, one day, he would be able to know why it had happened but that everything was just as it was meant to be.

So, when his father called him that morning with a twinkle in his eye and asked if he would like to go boating with him, just the two of them, he looked into his Dad's eyes and knew him from the dream. And of course, with great joy, Tom said yes!

And that is almost the end of the story about Tom except to say that Tom went on to become a really good swimmer and never felt afraid of the sea again.