

The Boy and the Sea Grass



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Leo loved the sea more than anything. One sunny morning, he stood at the edge of a marine park, clutching his red backpack. A magnifying glass hung from the zipper, ready for exploring. His yellow t-shirt had a tiny green leaf print on the pocket. 'Today I'll find something amazing,' he whispered. The waves sparkled like scattered diamonds, and a gentle breeze ruffled his messy chestnut-brown hair.



A tall ranger with a calm smile walked over. Her teal uniform shirt had a seagrass badge stitched on the pocket. 'Welcome to the seagrass meadow,' said Ranger Mira. 'I'm Mira. Would you like to see our underwater garden?' Leo nodded so fast his round glasses slipped down his nose. He pushed them back up and followed her along the wooden boardwalk, his green sneakers squeaking softly.



Mira led Leo to a shallow pool filled with wavy green blades. 'This is seagrass,' she said. 'It's not seaweed. It's a flowering plant that grows underwater.' Leo peered through his magnifying glass. The blades swayed like a slow, green ballet. Tiny bubbles rose between them. 'It looks like a forest,' Leo said. 'A busy, hiding forest,' Mira agreed.



Mira pointed to a golden-orange seahorse the size of Leo's thumb. It had tiny white speckles and a long snout. Its curled tail was wrapped around a seagrass blade. 'Meet Pip,' Mira said. 'Seahorses hold on to the grass so they don't drift away.' Leo watched Pip bob gently. The little seahorse blinked its dark round eyes and clung tighter, as if to say, 'This is my home.'



Next, a juvenile sea turtle glided over. Its olive-green shell had brown patterned scutes, and tiny barnacles dotted the edge. 'This is Shelly,' said Mira. 'Turtles nibble seagrass like a salad bar.' Shelly nibbled a blade with her small beak-like mouth, slow and happy. Leo giggled. 'She's hungry!' Mira nodded. 'Seagrass feeds her and helps her grow strong.'



Mira lifted a clump of seagrass gently. Tiny silver fish darted out and back in. 'Small fish hide inside the blades,' she explained. 'The grass is their safe place.' Leo watched them flicker like little sparks. 'So the seagrass is a home, a restaurant, and a hiding spot,' he said. 'All in one,' Mira smiled.



Leo sat on the boardwalk and opened his notebook. He drew a seahorse clinging to a blade, a turtle nibbling, and tiny fish hiding. His chestnut hair stuck up in tufts as he worked. 'I want to build this,' he said. 'A little model of the seagrass home.' Mira's dark eyes twinkled. 'That's a wonderful idea. Let's gather some safe materials.'



Back at the visitor centre, Leo found a shallow tray, blue paper for water, and green pipe cleaners for seagrass. He twisted the pipe cleaners into wavy blades. He made Pip from orange clay, curled the tail, and added a thin strand of green for the seahorse to hold. 'Hold on tight, Pip,' Leo whispered.



For Shelly, Leo shaped an olive-green shell from a paper bowl and painted brown scutes. He added a few tiny beads for barnacles. 'Nibble, nibble,' he said, pretending the turtle munched a pipe-cleaner blade. Mira watched and smiled. 'You're a careful builder,' she said. Leo's gap-toothed grin spread wide across his freckled face.



Leo cut tiny silver fish from shiny paper and tucked them between the green blades. He clipped his magnifying glass to the tray's edge so visitors could look closely. 'Now everyone can see the busy home,' he said. Mira pinned a small seagrass badge on his shirt. 'You've made a habitat model,' she said. 'And you've shown how everything connects.'



Later, Leo walked back along the shore. He saw a piece of plastic bag tangled in real seagrass. 'This doesn't belong here,' he said. He pulled it out carefully and put it in a bin. 'If the grass is dirty, the animals can't live there.' Mira nodded. 'Protecting plants protects animals. You just helped Pip and Shelly.'



Leo looked out at the meadow. He thought of Pip clinging, Shelly nibbling, and the silver fish hiding. 'The seagrass is like a tiny town,' he said. 'And we're the helpers.' Mira gave him a high five. 'Exactly. Big helpers can make a big difference, even when they're small.' Leo stood a little taller.



On the drive home, Leo held his model on his lap. The pipe-cleaner blades swayed as the car moved. He imagined Pip safe and Shelly full. 'I'm going to tell my class about seagrass,' he told his mom. 'And how to keep it clean.' His hazel eyes shone behind his round glasses. He felt proud and warm inside.



The next day, Leo set his model on the classroom shelf. He showed his friends how the seahorse holds on and the turtle nibbles. 'Tiny fish hide inside,' he said. 'And if we protect the grass, we protect them all.' His teacher smiled. 'You've taught us something important, Leo.' The class clapped, and Leo's freckled cheeks turned pink.



That weekend, Leo and Mira planted a small patch of seagrass in a protected spot. 'It will grow and become a home,' Mira said. Leo patted the sand gently. 'Grow strong, little grass,' he whispered. He thought of Pip and Shelly and all the tiny fish. 'We'll take care of you,' he promised.



Leo stood on the boardwalk, watching the green blades wave. He knew that under the water, seahorses held on, turtles nibbled, and fish hid safely. 'Protecting plants protects animals,' he said softly. His leaf-print shirt fluttered in the breeze. The sea whispered back, and Leo smiled his gap-toothed smile, ready to care for the meadow every day.