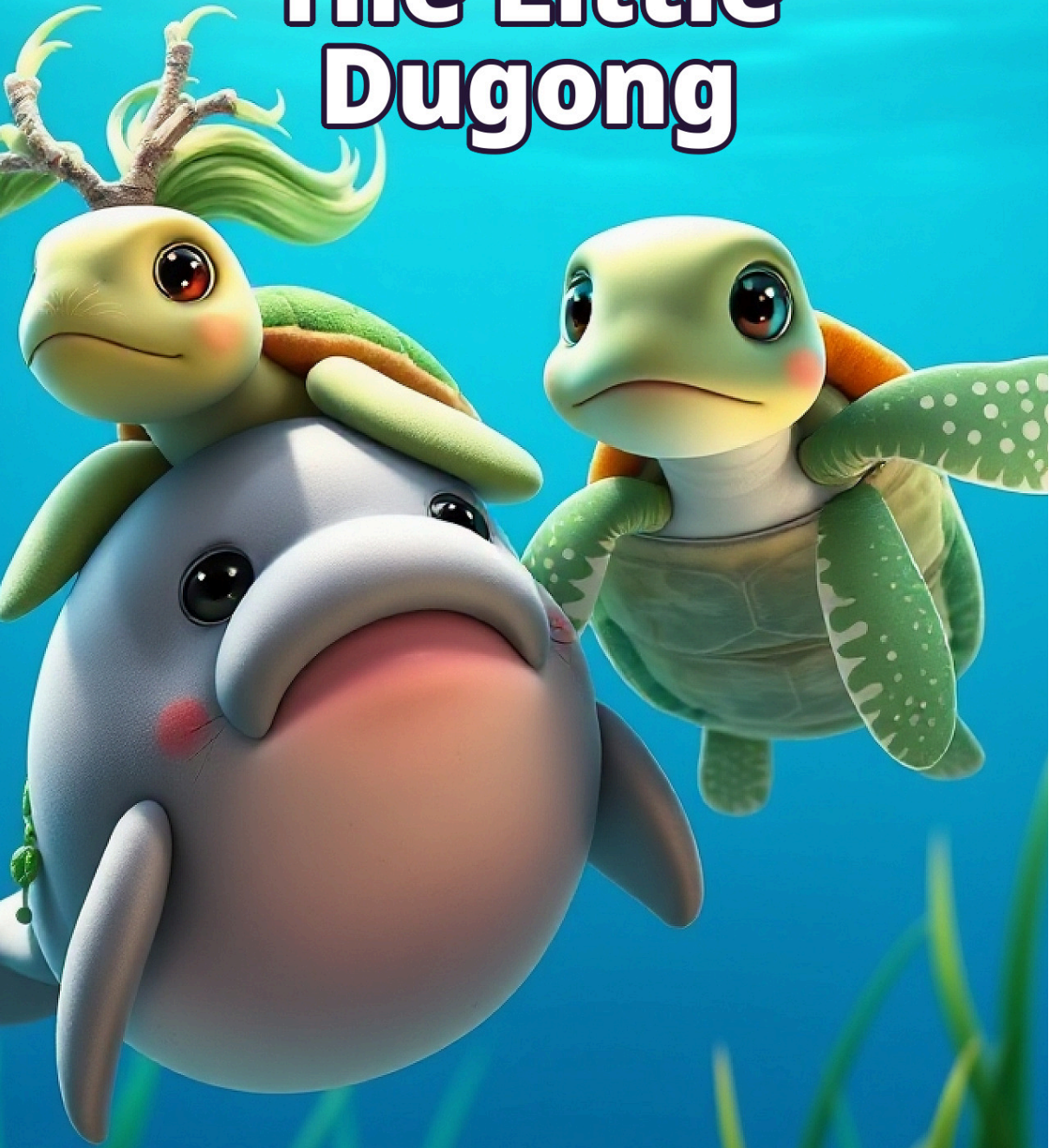


The Little Dugong



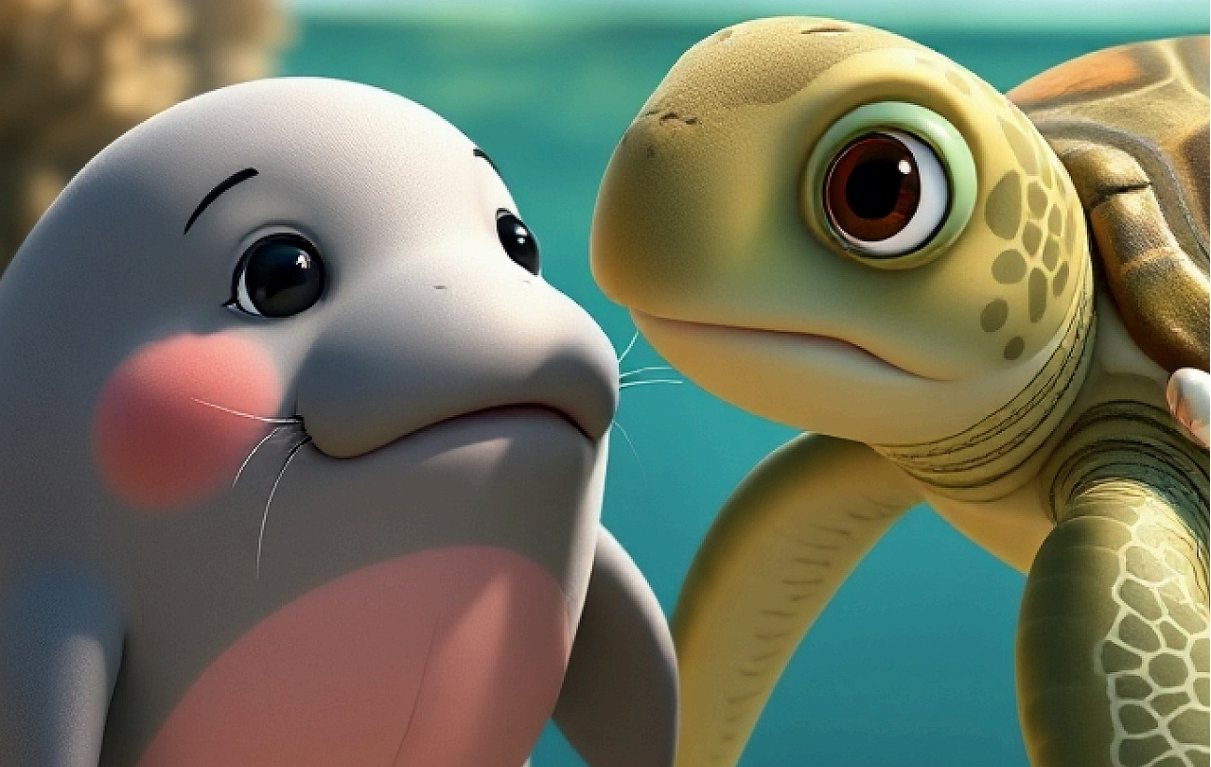
Aysel Banu YAVUZAL

The Little Dugong

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In the warm, shallow ocean, where sunlight danced on the waves, lived a little dugong named Dazzle. He had soft grey-brown skin, a pinkish belly, and tiny whiskers on his round snout. Every morning, he swam through the bright blue water, munching seagrass and humming a happy tune. Dazzle loved his home, and he loved exploring every corner of the reef.



One sunny day, while nibbling seagrass near a coral arch, Dazzle heard a soft splash. A sea turtle glided toward him, her green and amber shell sparkling like a jewel. 'Hello!' she said with a warm smile. 'I'm Tilly.' Dazzle wiggled his flippers. 'I'm Dazzle! Do you like seagrass?' Tilly laughed. 'I love it! Let's be friends.' And just like that, they were.



Dazzle and Tilly spent every day together. They played hide-and-seek among the coral and raced through the seagrass meadow. Dazzle carried his woven seagrass satchel, filling it with tasty shoots. Tilly wore a bracelet of tiny shells on her flipper and told funny stories about the open sea. The two friends were as happy as two fish in a coral garden.



One morning, as they swam farther than ever before, the water grew murky and the seagrass looked brown and broken. 'Oh no!' gasped Dazzle. 'What happened here?' Tilly peered through the gloom. 'It looks damaged,' she said. 'The meadow is sick.' Dazzle's dark eyes filled with worry. 'We have to help!' he said. 'But how?'



Just then, a shimmering light appeared among the broken blades. Out stepped a small, translucent creature with flowing seagrass hair and glowing turquoise eyes. She held a driftwood staff topped with a glowing shell. 'I am the guardian of the seagrass meadow,' she said gently. 'A storm and dirty water have hurt my home. Will you help me restore it?'



Dazzle and Tilly looked at each other and nodded. 'We will!' they said together. The guardian smiled, and tiny pearl-like lights danced around her. 'First, we must clean the water,' she explained. 'Then we plant new seagrass. It will take teamwork and care.' Dazzle opened his satchel. 'I'm ready!' he said. Tilly flapped her long flippers. 'Me too!'



The guardian led them to a pile of broken seagrass and tangled weeds. 'We need to clear this away,' she said. Tilly used her strong flippers to push the debris aside, while Dazzle scooped up bits of trash with his snout. They worked side by side, humming a cheerful rhythm. The water began to sparkle again, and the guardian's eyes glowed with hope.



Next, they gathered fresh seagrass shoots from a healthy patch nearby. Dazzle carefully placed each shoot into his satchel, and Tilly carried a bunch on her shell. 'Plant them in the soft sand,' the guardian instructed. 'Pat them gently and sing them a growing song.' Dazzle giggled. 'I know just the tune!' He hummed a wiggly melody as they planted.



All day long, the friends planted seagrass. Dazzle's flippers grew tired, and Tilly's shell felt heavy, but they didn't stop. 'Just a few more,' Dazzle said, wiping his snout. Tilly smiled. 'We can do it!' The guardian drifted among them, her staff glowing softly, and the little pearl lights danced around their work, making the muddy water bright.



As the sun began to set, the last seagrass shoot was planted. Dazzle and Tilly floated back to admire their work. The meadow looked neat and tidy, but the seagrass was still small. 'It will grow,' the guardian said. 'With sunshine and clean water, it will flourish. You have done a wonderful thing.' The friends hugged each other with their flippers.



Days passed, and Dazzle and Tilly visited the meadow every morning. They pulled away any new bits of trash and checked on the little shoots. Slowly, the seagrass began to grow taller and greener. Fish returned to swim among the blades, and the water grew clear and bright. 'Look!' Tilly cried. 'It's coming back to life!' Dazzle twirled with joy.



One day, the guardian appeared again, her seagrass hair flowing like a gentle wave. 'You have saved my meadow,' she said. 'Your friendship and hard work have brought it back to life. I will always be grateful.' She touched her glowing shell to their heads, and a warm feeling spread through them. 'Remember,' she said, 'together, you can do anything.'



Dazzle and Tilly promised to keep caring for the meadow. They invited other sea creatures to help—a shy seahorse, a busy crab, and a school of silvery fish. Everyone wanted to keep the water clean and the seagrass healthy. The meadow grew lush and green, and it became a happy home for many creatures. Dazzle and Tilly were proud of their teamwork.



From that day on, Dazzle and Tilly were known as the guardians' helpers. They taught others how to plant seagrass and keep the ocean clean. 'Friendship makes everything better,' Dazzle said. Tilly nodded. 'And when we work together, we can take care of our world.' The two friends swam happily through the sparkling meadow, their hearts full of joy.



The magical guardian watched over them, her turquoise eyes twinkling. She knew the meadow was in good flippers. And whenever Dazzle and Tilly needed help, she was there, a shimmering light in the blue. The ocean stayed healthy and bright, a perfect home for everyone. And Dazzle and Tilly remained the best of friends, forever and always.



So if you ever swim in a seagrass meadow and see a little dugong and a sea turtle planting shoots, stop and say hello. They might ask you to join in! For the ocean is our home too, and with friendship and care, we can keep it beautiful for all. The little dugong and his best friend showed that even small helpers can make a big difference.