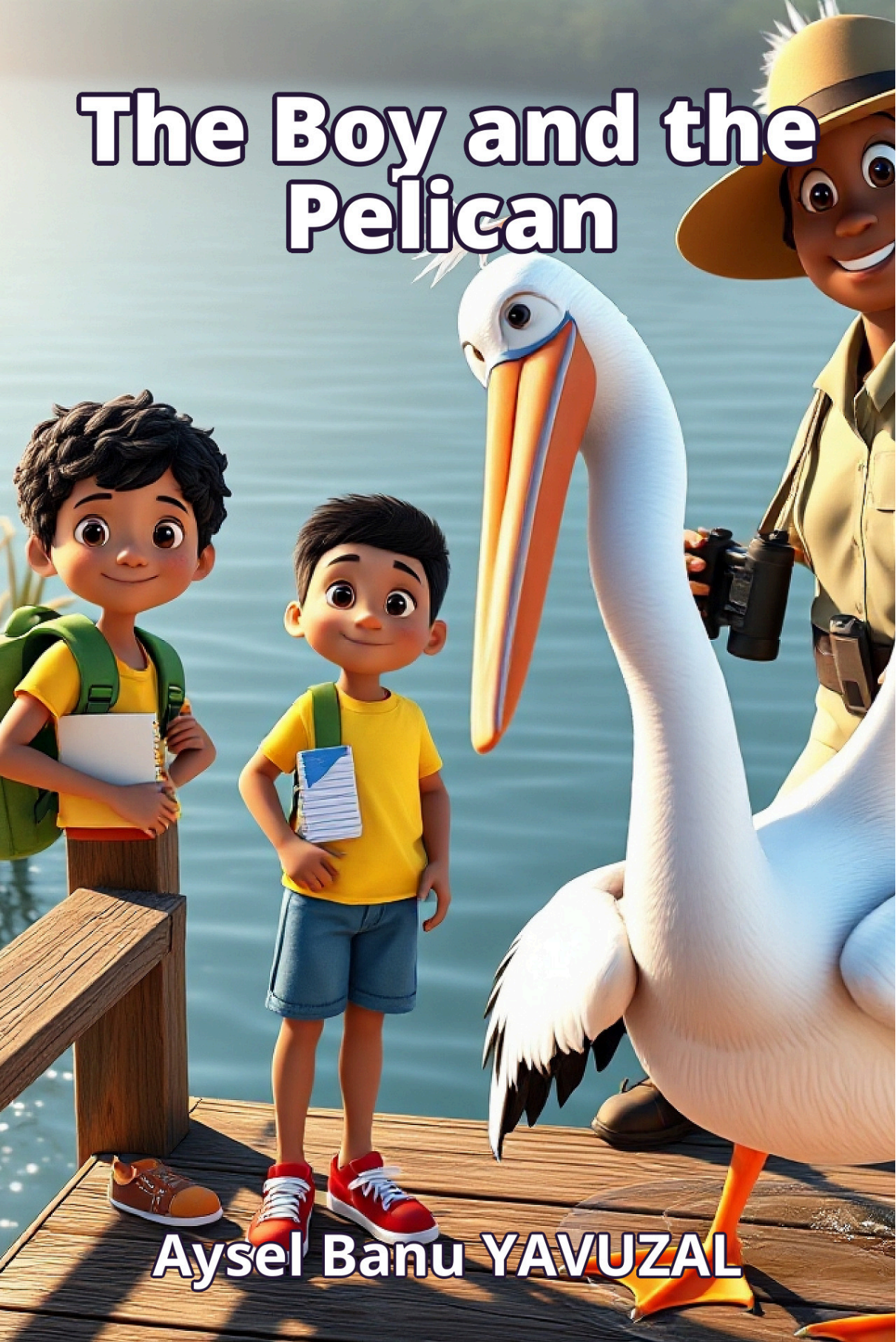


The Boy and the Pelican



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On a bright Saturday morning, Sam packed his green canvas backpack with a notebook and a pencil. He was going to visit the wetland reserve for the first time. His red sneakers crunched on the gravel path as he followed the signs. Tall reeds waved in the breeze, and birds called from the water. Sam felt excited. What would he see today?



At the visitor center, a ranger with a wide smile greeted him. She wore a khaki green uniform and a sun hat, and binoculars hung around her neck. "Welcome to the wetland reserve!" she said. "I'm Ranger Maya. Would you like to see something special?" Sam nodded eagerly. His dark-brown eyes sparkled with curiosity. He couldn't wait to explore.



Ranger Maya led Sam to a wooden viewing platform. Below, the water shimmered under the sun. Suddenly, a large white bird glided in and landed with a splash. It had a long orange beak and a huge pouch underneath. "That's a pelican," Maya whispered. Sam stared in wonder. The pelican was bigger than he had imagined, with wings wider than he was tall.



The pelican waddled to the edge of the water and stood still, watching. Sam opened his notebook. "What is it doing?" he asked. "Just wait," Maya said with a smile. The pelican's small dark eyes focused on the water. Its blue leg band glinted in the sunlight. Sam held his breath, ready to write down everything he saw.



Splash! The pelican plunged its beak into the water. When it lifted its head, the pouch was stretched wide like a net full of fish. Water dribbled out of the sides. Sam gasped. "It's scooping up fish!" he cried. Maya nodded. "That's how pelicans feed," she explained. "They use their pouch like a big fishing net." Sam quickly sketched the pelican in his notebook.



After a moment, the pelican tilted its head back and swallowed the fish. Its throat bulged comically. Sam laughed. "It looks so funny!" he said. Maya smiled. "Pelicans are gentle giants," she said. "They share the wetlands with many other animals." Sam watched as the pelican paddled slowly, its webbed orange feet pushing through the water.



Maya pointed to the reeds. "Look closely," she said. Sam saw a turtle sunning on a log and a frog leaping into the water. Dragonflies zipped by, and a heron stood still as a statue. "Wetlands are homes for so many creatures," Maya said. "They're like a busy neighborhood." Sam wrote 'wetland = animal home' in his notebook. He felt like a real explorer.



Sam learned that wetlands clean water, prevent floods, and give birds a place to rest. "But wetlands need our help," Maya said. "Pollution and draining can harm them." Sam frowned. He didn't want the pelican to lose its home. "What can I do?" he asked. Maya thought for a moment. "You could teach others about this place," she suggested.



Sam's round face lit up. "I can make a poster!" he said. He pulled out his notebook and started planning. He would draw the pelican scooping fish and write a message about protecting wetlands. Maya gave him a big piece of paper and some colorful markers. "That's a wonderful idea," she said. Sam got to work right away.



Back at home, Sam spread his materials on the kitchen table. He drew the pelican with its long orange beak and big pouch, just like he remembered. He added a blue leg band. Then he wrote: "Pelicans scoop fish with their pouches. Wetlands are their home. Please help keep wetlands clean!" He decorated the poster with reeds and dragonflies.



The next day, Sam brought his poster to the reserve. Ranger Maya helped him hang it in the visitor center. "This will teach people why wetlands matter," she said. Sam beamed. His poster showed the pelican in action and reminded everyone to protect wildlife. Visitors stopped to read it. One little girl said, "I want to see a pelican too!"



Sam felt proud. He had learned so much and shared it with others. "You've made a real difference," Maya said. "Protecting wetlands benefits wildlife and keeps pelicans happy and safe." Sam looked out at the water. The pelican was there again, scooping fish with its pouch. It seemed to nod at him. Sam waved. He knew he would come back often.



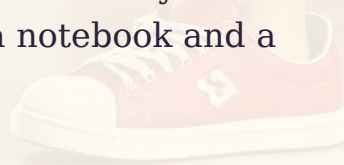
From that day on, Sam became a junior wetland guardian. He visited whenever he could, always with his notebook. He drew pictures of turtles, frogs, and dragonflies. He even made more posters about other animals. His friends at school wanted to help too. Together, they made a big display about wetlands. Sam's teacher said it was the best project of the year.



One afternoon, Sam sat on the viewing platform with his sketchbook. The pelican swam close, its white feathers glowing in the sun. Sam drew quietly. He felt calm and happy. The wetland was full of life, and he was part of it. He wrote in his notebook: "Pelicans are my friends. Wetlands are our treasure." He smiled. The world felt full of wonder.



Sam's poster stayed up for months. Many people read it and learned about pelicans and wetlands. Some volunteers joined clean-up days. Sam's small idea had grown into something big. He realized that even a kid can make a difference. All you need is curiosity and a little courage. And maybe a notebook and a pencil.





As the sun set, Sam walked home with a happy heart. The pelican had taught him that wetlands are precious. His poster had taught others. Protecting wetlands benefits wildlife and keeps pelicans happy and safe. Sam knew he would keep exploring and protecting. He couldn't wait for his next visit to the wetland reserve.