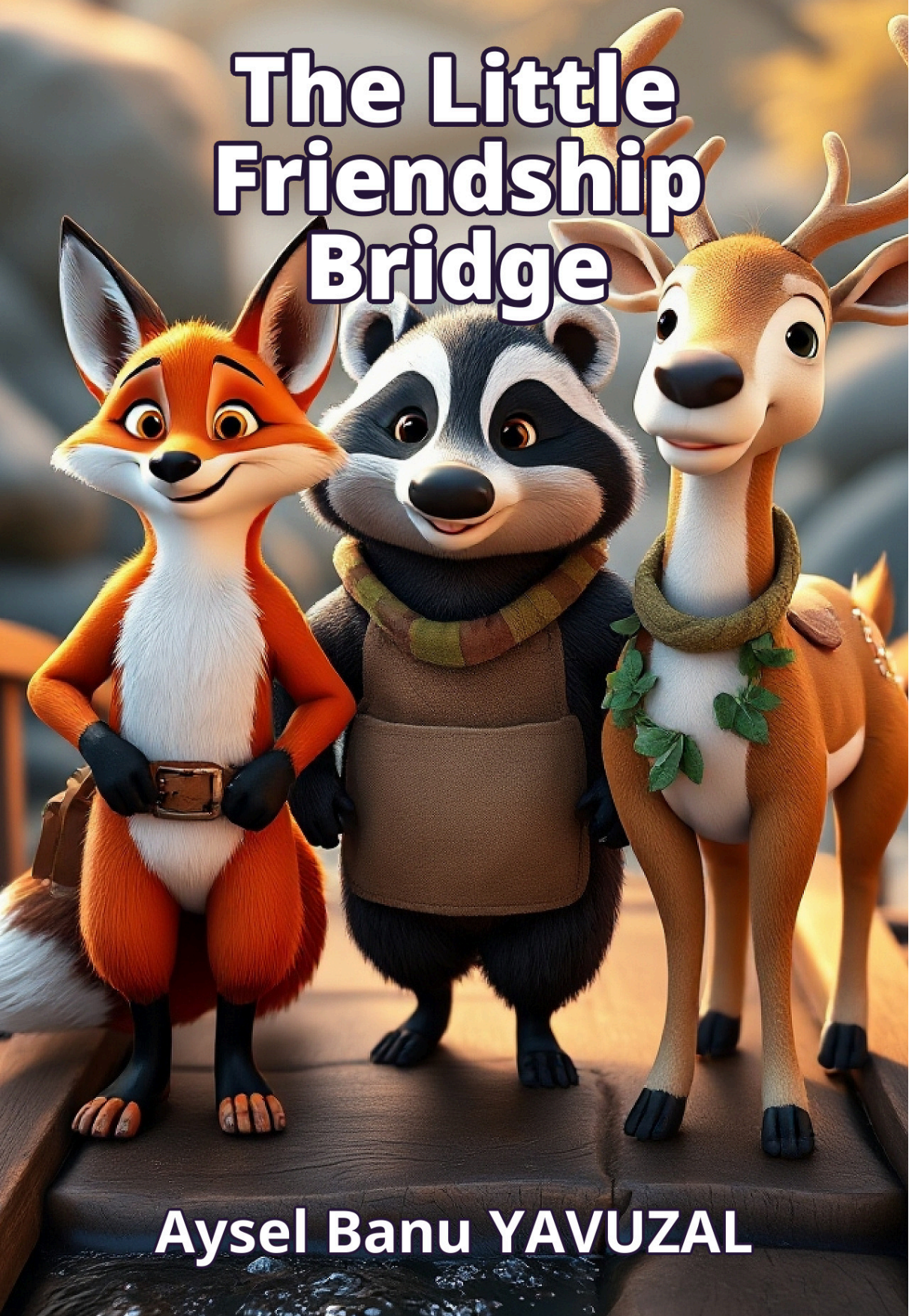


The Little Friendship Bridge



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On one side of a wide, sparkling stream lived a quick, clever fox with warm russet-orange fur and a bright white chest. Every morning he trotted along the bank, his bushy pale-tipped tail swishing behind him. On the other side lived a sturdy badger in a worn canvas apron and a tall, gentle deer with a soft green scarf. The stream was wide, but a wooden bridge joined the two sides, and the animals crossed it every day to visit and share stories.



Fox loved the busy mornings best. He would stand at the bridge and call, "Hurry over, Badger! Bring your shovel, and Deer, bring your long legs!" Badger would come plodding across with his small dark eyes twinkling behind his black mask. Deer would step lightly over the planks, her leaf garland rustling. Together they picked berries, told jokes, and watched the clouds drift by. Everyone on both sides of the stream felt like one big happy family.



One windy afternoon, the old bridge began to creak and groan. Crack! A plank snapped in the middle and splashed into the water below. Fox leaped back, his amber eyes wide. "Oh no!" he cried. "The bridge is broken!" Badger hurried over and peered at the gap. "The posts are rotten," he said quietly. Across the stream, Deer lifted her head, her long ears drooping. Now nobody could cross to visit anyone at all.



The next morning, Fox sat on the bank feeling glum. The stream rushed and gurgled between the two sides. He could see Badger waving from far away, but he could not hear a word. He could see Deer shaking her small antlers sadly. "This is silly," Fox said to himself, jumping up. "We are friends! A little water should not keep us apart." He tightened his brown leather tool belt and made a brave decision.



Fox hurried along the bank, gathering fallen branches and smooth planks. He tucked rope and small wooden pegs into his tool belt. "We can build a new bridge!" he called across the water, cupping his paws. "A strong one! But I cannot do it alone." Badger nodded slowly from the other side. Deer stamped her slender hoof. "We will help!" she called back. "Tell us what to do!" Fox's tail wagged with hope.



Badger crossed the stream at the shallow end, carrying his small shovel. "First, we need strong posts," he said, calm and practical. "I will dig deep holes on both banks." He set to work, his powerful digging claws scooping up soft earth. Fox carried wood and kept everyone laughing with silly jokes. Deer stood in the cool water, steady as a rock, ready to lift whatever they needed.



All morning, Badger dug. His worn canvas apron grew muddy, but he never stopped. "A little deeper," he mumbled, patting the soil. "A post must stand firm." Fox brought smooth planks and long branches, stacking them neatly in a pile. "Look at us!" he chirped, his russet fur dusted with sawdust. "A fox, a badger, and a deer—the best builders in the whole wood!" Deer smiled and nodded kindly.



Deer lowered her long neck and lifted the heaviest logs with care. Her green scarf fluttered as she carried each one to the water's edge. "Gently now," she said softly. "Slow and steady." She watched over her friends, nudging a wobbly plank back into place and shading Badger from the hot sun with her tall, gentle body. Whenever Fox grew tired, Deer would say, "Rest a moment. We have time."



By afternoon, the new posts stood straight and tall in the stream. "Now the planks," said Badger, wiping his brow. Fox scampered back and forth, carrying boards and tying them with rope from his tool belt. "This one here! That one there!" he called, his amber eyes bright. Deer placed each plank carefully while Badger checked every knot. Slowly, a brand-new bridge stretched across the sparkling water.



When the last plank was tied, the three friends stepped back to look. The bridge was sturdy, wide, and strong. "It is beautiful!" whispered Deer, her large dark eyes shining. Fox did a happy little dance on the bank. Even quiet Badger gave a small smile. "It will hold," he said proudly. "We built it together." The stream gurgled beneath them, as if it were clapping too.



Fox was the first to cross. He trotted over the planks, his bushy tail held high. "Come on!" he called. "It is safe!" Deer stepped across next, light and graceful. Then Badger plodded over, tapping each plank with his shovel to be sure. On the other side, the animals of the far bank gathered to cheer. Everyone wanted to try the wonderful new bridge.



Word spread fast through the woodland. "The bridge is mended!" cried the rabbits and the squirrels. "Come and see!" Soon animals from both sides were crossing back and forth, laughing and greeting one another. Fox, Badger, and Deer stood together at the middle of the bridge. "Look what we made," said Fox softly. "Not just a bridge," said Deer. "A way to be friends again."



That evening, the animals decided to celebrate. They hung tiny lanterns from the branches and spread berries on flat stones beside the stream. "A festival!" laughed Fox, his tool belt jingling. "A friendship festival!" Deer wove small leaf garlands for everyone to wear. Badger brought sweet roots from his cozy burrow. Music and laughter floated over the water, and nobody felt far away at all.



The festival was the merriest the wood had ever seen. Rabbits danced with owls, and squirrels shared nuts with mice. Fox told funny stories by the bridge, Badger taught the little ones how to dig, and Deer led a gentle parade across the planks. "Different animals, one big family," said Deer warmly. Everyone cheered, and the little bridge glowed in the lantern light.



From that day on, the friends met on the bridge every morning. "Good morning, Badger!" Fox would call. "Good morning, Deer!" And they would cross to share breakfast and stories. The other animals did the same, visiting freely from side to side. The stream still flowed wide beneath them, but it no longer kept anyone apart. The bridge had become a place for hellos, not goodbyes.



And so the woodland learned a happy lesson. When friends work together—one carrying wood, one digging deep, one lifting high—even the biggest problem can be solved. Fox, Badger, and Deer showed everyone that cooperation builds more than a bridge. It builds kindness, laughter, and friendship between all kinds of animals. And every year, they celebrated together on the little bridge that brought them close.