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DUBAI MUNICIPALITY



AMANI THE TURTLE



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It was a warm spring day at the Jebel Ali Marine Sanctuary. Amani the turtle raised her head out of the water to watch as the waves lapped the warm sand on the shore. She took a deep breath in and dived downward.

She was looking for breakfast. “Yum!” exclaimed Amani “My favourite! Seagrass!”.

After happily munching on the seagrass bed for a while, Amani was full and needed a breath of air, so she surfaced again and stayed there for a while, enjoying the warm sun on her shell. She smiled to herself.

Today was Amani’s 20th birthday, and to celebrate she’d swum through the clear Arabian waters to the very same beach she was born on. Because today wasn’t any ordinary birthday.

Today, Amani had eggs of her own to lay. She was nervous – she’d never been out of the water before since entering it as a baby. What was out there? Would she be strong enough to pull herself along the sand? Would she pick the right spot to lay her eggs?

Amani's instinct told her to check the beach carefully before leaving the water. She looked right, she looked left, then right again. "It looks safe I suppose" with a big sigh she told herself "Come on Amani, you can do this!".

She swam slowly to the edge of the shore, she paused for a moment as she felt the bottom of her shell touch the sand – she'd never felt this before. She reached her flippers forward and pulled herself onto the sand.

"Gosh! I never realized how heavy I was!" Amani puffed "perhaps I shouldn't have had all of that seagrass for breakfast!". In the water she always felt so weightless, she never imagined how difficult it would be to pull herself along the sand. After a few feet, she paused to catch her breath. She was already exhausted. She looked back at the tracks she was leaving behind her in the sand and smiled to herself. Today, she felt so grown up.

Amani's friends had told her to lay her eggs high enough on the beach so that the waves wouldn't reach it. She kept looking back, hoping she'd made it further than she had and was disappointed each time by how little progress she'd made. But she didn't stop, she kept pulling herself forward, determined to make it.





Suddenly, she felt something around her back flipper. She pulled forward, trying to get away from it, too afraid to look back. But she couldn't move forward! Something was completely wrapped around her back flipper! "Ok Amani, don't panic!" She'd told herself, already in a panic. She turned around slowly, scared of what she'd see.

There it was – a plastic shopping bag, caught on a rock on the beach, had completely twisted itself around her flipper! Amani knew exactly what this was. She'd seen some underwater before.

"Someone must have littered, and their bag ended up on the beach!". Amani couldn't control herself and began to tremble in fear.

“Help!” she screamed, looking around for anyone to help her. “Someone please!” she shouted again. It was hopeless, she thought, “there’s no one here!”. Just as she fell silent, feeling alone and scared, she heard a scurry. She whipped her head up to see who was there, but still she saw no one. Again, she heard scurrying “hello? Is anyone there?”. Suddenly, out of a tiny hole in the sand, popped a crab. Amani yelped “ah! Who are you!”. The little crab had startled her, appearing as if out of nowhere.

“What’s all the shouting about? You woke me up!”. The angry crab lived in a home he’d made inside the sand. He was an old (and grumpy!) crab who did nothing much but sleep all day.

“Oh thank goodness! Please help me, my flipper is caught on this plastic bag and I can’t free myself!” exclaimed Amani desperately.

“If I help you, will you stop all the noise so I can go back to sleep?!” Asked the angry crab.

Amani paused for a moment, wondering if maybe he was joking. But judging by his stern, angry face, she realized he was most certainly serious. "Yes! I promise!" said Amani earnestly "no more noise. I'm so sorry to wake you".

The angry crab nodded before scurrying behind her. He was so small, she couldn’t see him over her shell. “What is he doing?” she thought to herself. But she dare not question him, as he was her only way out! “Ouch!” She yelped, as she felt a pinch on her flipper.

The angry crab paused for a moment. Without saying a word he continued his scurrying and pulling and pinching. Suddenly, he appeared in front of her, he nodded, before scurrying back into his hole. “Is he done?”

Amani asked herself. She slowly tried to move her back flipper, she couldn’t feel anything around it. Then slowly, she brought her front flippers in front of her and tried to pull herself forward. To her surprise, she could move. “I’m free!” she shouted with delight “I’m free!”.





“SHH!” The angry crab’s grumpy voice echoed from his hole.

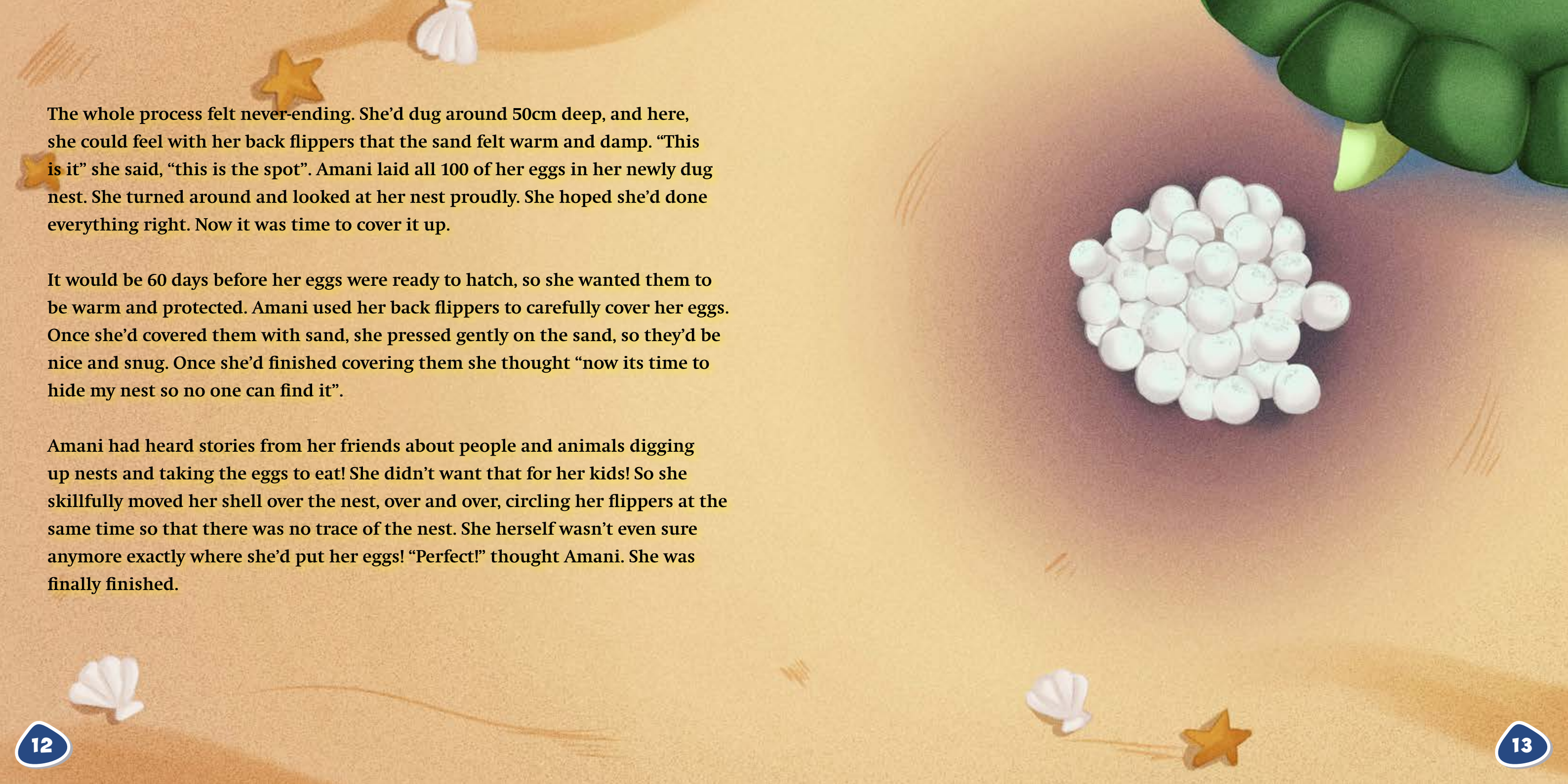
“Sorry! Thank you! Thank you so much!” Amani squealed with delight.

“SHHHH!” he shouted again.

Amani laughed to herself as she continued on. She’d never met such a grumpy fellow, but she was so happy she had!

Amani finally reached a spot she felt would be suitable for her nest. The sand was warm and dry, and even the strongest waves weren’t reaching it, but it was close enough that her hatchlings wouldn’t have too far to go to get to the water. “They’ll be so tiny” she said to herself “I want them to have the best chance”.

Amani began digging a hole with her back flippers. She was so exhausted from her ordeal. She would dig for a while, then rest for a while. Sand flew up everywhere as she dug, and she wondered if she was doing it right – is it always this messy?



The whole process felt never-ending. She'd dug around 50cm deep, and here, she could feel with her back flippers that the sand felt warm and damp. "This is it" she said, "this is the spot". Amani laid all 100 of her eggs in her newly dug nest. She turned around and looked at her nest proudly. She hoped she'd done everything right. Now it was time to cover it up.

It would be 60 days before her eggs were ready to hatch, so she wanted them to be warm and protected. Amani used her back flippers to carefully cover her eggs. Once she'd covered them with sand, she pressed gently on the sand, so they'd be nice and snug. Once she'd finished covering them she thought "now its time to hide my nest so no one can find it".

Amani had heard stories from her friends about people and animals digging up nests and taking the eggs to eat! She didn't want that for her kids! So she skillfully moved her shell over the nest, over and over, circling her flippers at the same time so that there was no trace of the nest. She herself wasn't even sure anymore exactly where she'd put her eggs! "Perfect!" thought Amani. She was finally finished.



She wasn't sure she could make it back to the water because she was so tired. Everything out of the water was such hard work! She slowly turned herself around and headed back to the sea, she felt even heavier now. She crawled cautiously, afraid of getting herself caught again, until finally, she reached the water.

"Oh thank goodness!" she exclaimed "I made it". From the start of this journey until now, it had taken her over an hour. She could feel the wet sand beneath her and the water was now touching her shell.

She looked back at her nest one final time before entering the water and smiled, knowing that in 20 years from now, some of her babies may return here to make their own nests. She entered the water and began her long journey back to her feeding grounds. "Goodbye Jebel Ali. I'll see you again soon".



THE END

Written by:

