

ONE TINY TURTLE

Far, far out the sea, land is only a memory, and empty sky touches the water.

Just beneath the surface is a tangle of weed and driftwood where tiny creatures cling. This is the nursery of a sea turtle.

Passing in a boat, you might not notice Turtle. Not much bigger than a bottle top, she hides in the green shadows.

She's a baby, so her shell is soft as old leather. Just a little fish bite could rip it open. But Turtle is safe in her world of weed, and snaps her beak on tiny crabs and shrimps.

Turtle swims about, flapping her long front flippers like wings: she is underwater flying.

She pokes her pin/prick nostrils through the silver surface to take a swift breath – so fast, blink and you'd miss it!

Then she's gone, diving down into her secret life again.

For three or four years, maybe more, Turtle rides out the storms, and floats through the hot calms.

Steadily she outgrows her nursery.

Nobody sees her leave, but when you look for her, she has vanished all the same.

A year or two later she turns up close to land. Bigger than a dinner plate now, she's not a fish snack anymore. Her shell is hard as armour, her head is tough as a helmet. She's grown into her name: Loggerhead.

She has come to eat crabs. Millions swim up from deep water to breed in the shallows. Their shells crack as easily as hens' eggs in her heavy jaws. But in a week the feast is over and Loggerhead disappears again.

Loggerhead wanders far and wide in search of food: in summer, to cool seaweed jungles, where she find juicy clams and shoals of shrimps.

And in winter, to turquoise lagoons, warm as a bath, where she can munch among corals.

Loggerhead may travel thousands of miles, but she leaves no trace or track for you to follow. Only good luck will catch you a glimpse of her.

For thirty years you might not find her. Then one summer night here she is, on the beach where she was born. She's found her way here, sensing north and south like a compass needle, feeling the current and the warmth of the waves. She remembers the taste of the water here, and the sound of the surf.

Loggerhead has grown in her wandering years. She's big as a barrow now. Floating in the sea she weighs nothing, but on land she's heavier than a man. So every flipper step is a struggle, and her eyes stream with salty tears, which help keep them free of sand.

Loggerhead makes her nest where the sea won't reach.

Scooping carefully with her hind flippers... she makes a steep, deep hole.

Inside she lays her eggs, like a hundred squidgy ping-pong balls.

Afterwards she covers them with sand to hide her nest from hungry mouths.

Then Loggerhead is gone again, back to her secret life.

Left behind, under the sand, her eggs stay deep and safe. Baby turtles grow inside.

And before the summer's over they wriggle from their shells.

Above them on the beach a hundred eyes watch, on the lookout for a meal. So the hatchlings wait until night.

Then they burst through the sand and skeeter towards the sea.

In the dark, claws and beaks and grabbing paws miss just one young turtle. One day, she'll remember this beach and come back.

But now she dives under the waves and swims. Swims and swims! Out into the arms of the ocean. Far, far out the sea, land becomes a memory waiting to wake in the head of the little turtle.