

# The Little Manatee

by Catherine C. Shafer

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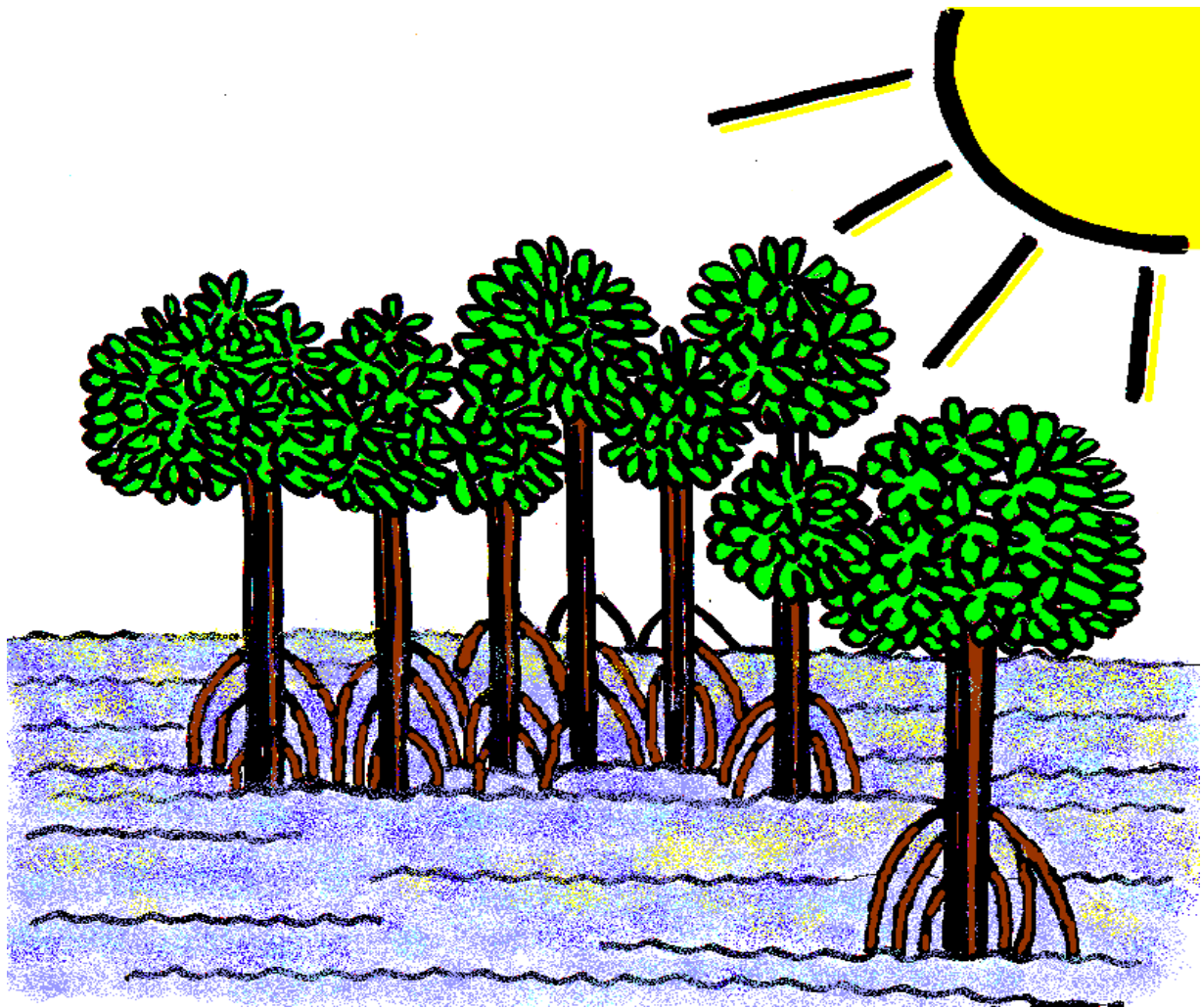
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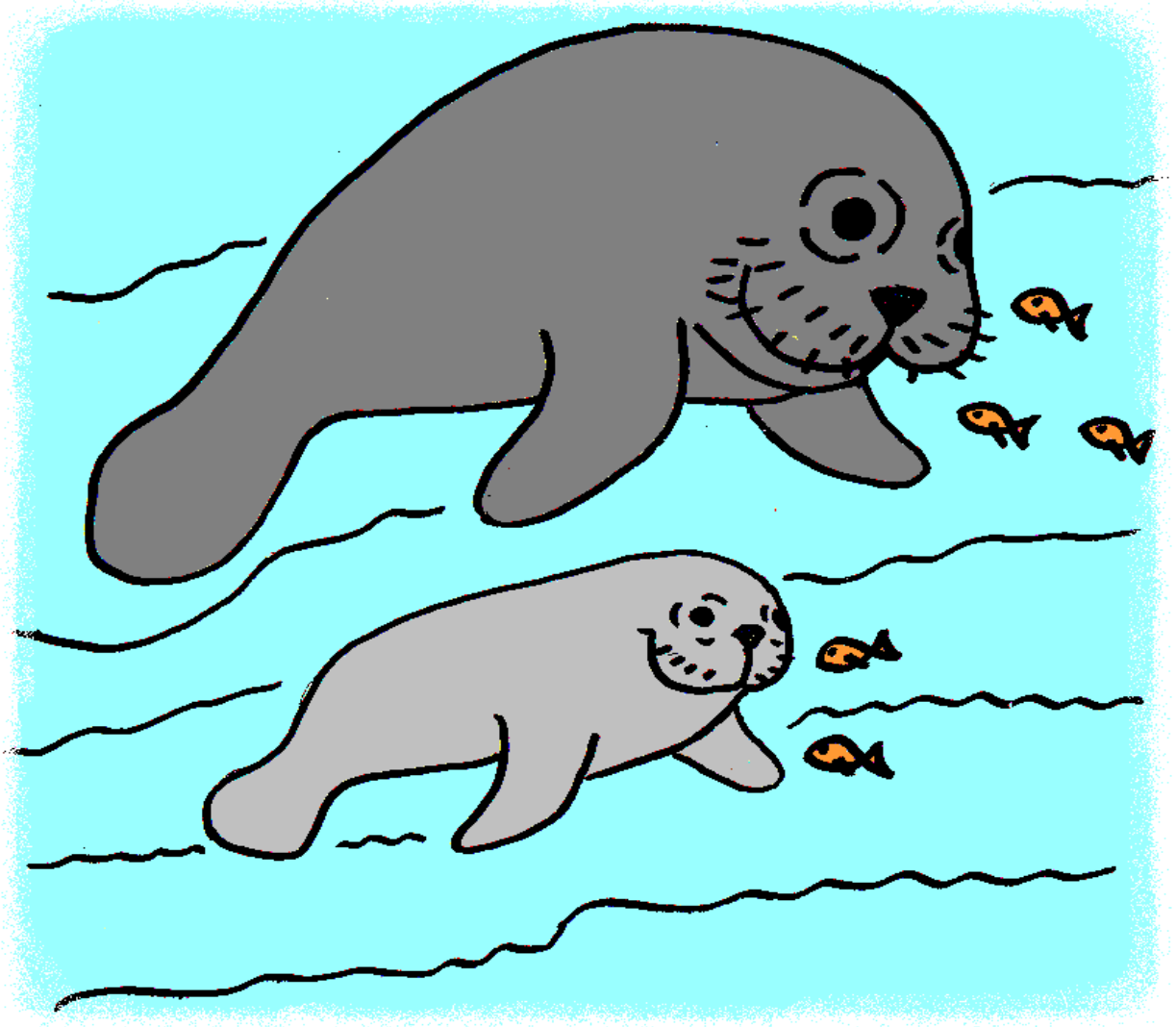
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**In the land of mangroves and cypress trees  
Whose sun-lit waters never freeze.  
That's where you'll find the Manatees,  
Those wonderful creatures, the Manatees.**

**Awesome in size, they're ancient and wise  
Yet they gaze at you with childlike eyes.  
They came from a long-ago world that was meant  
To be unpolluted and innocent.  
They have no weapons, they hunt no prey  
But feed on plants that grow in the Bay  
Or in some narrow waterway.**

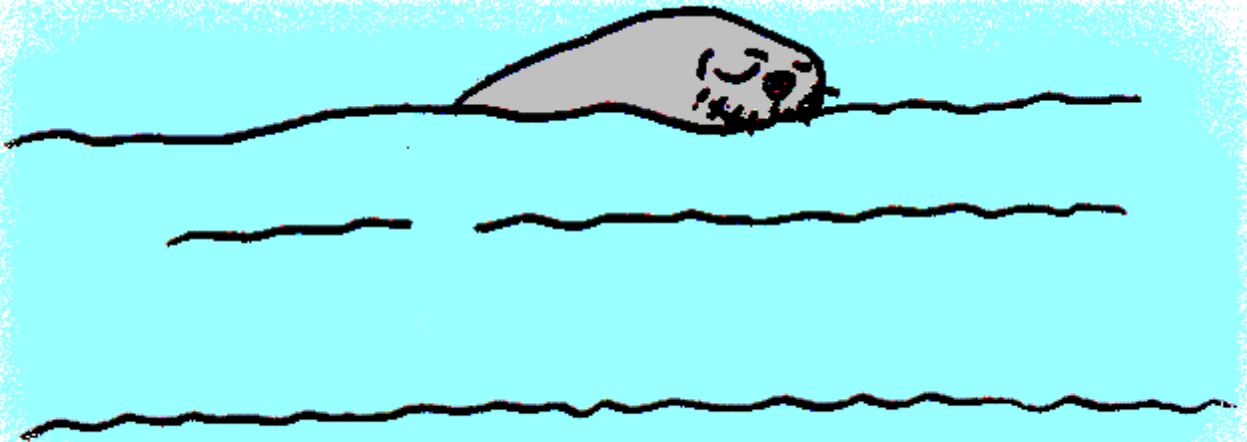


**A Manatee and her very small daughter  
Were sunning themselves in shallow water,  
Soaking up warmth and tranquility,  
Moving their flippers lazily.  
They were happy to lie side by side  
And slowly drift with the changing tide.**

**The little fishes that abound  
Off the Florida coast swam all around.  
The little fishes loved to tease  
Their gentle friends, the Manatees,  
By tickling their noses to make them sneeze!**

**Baby Manatee, half asleep,  
Drifted out where the Bay is deep.  
Confused, not hearing her mother's plea,  
She headed straight for the open sea.**

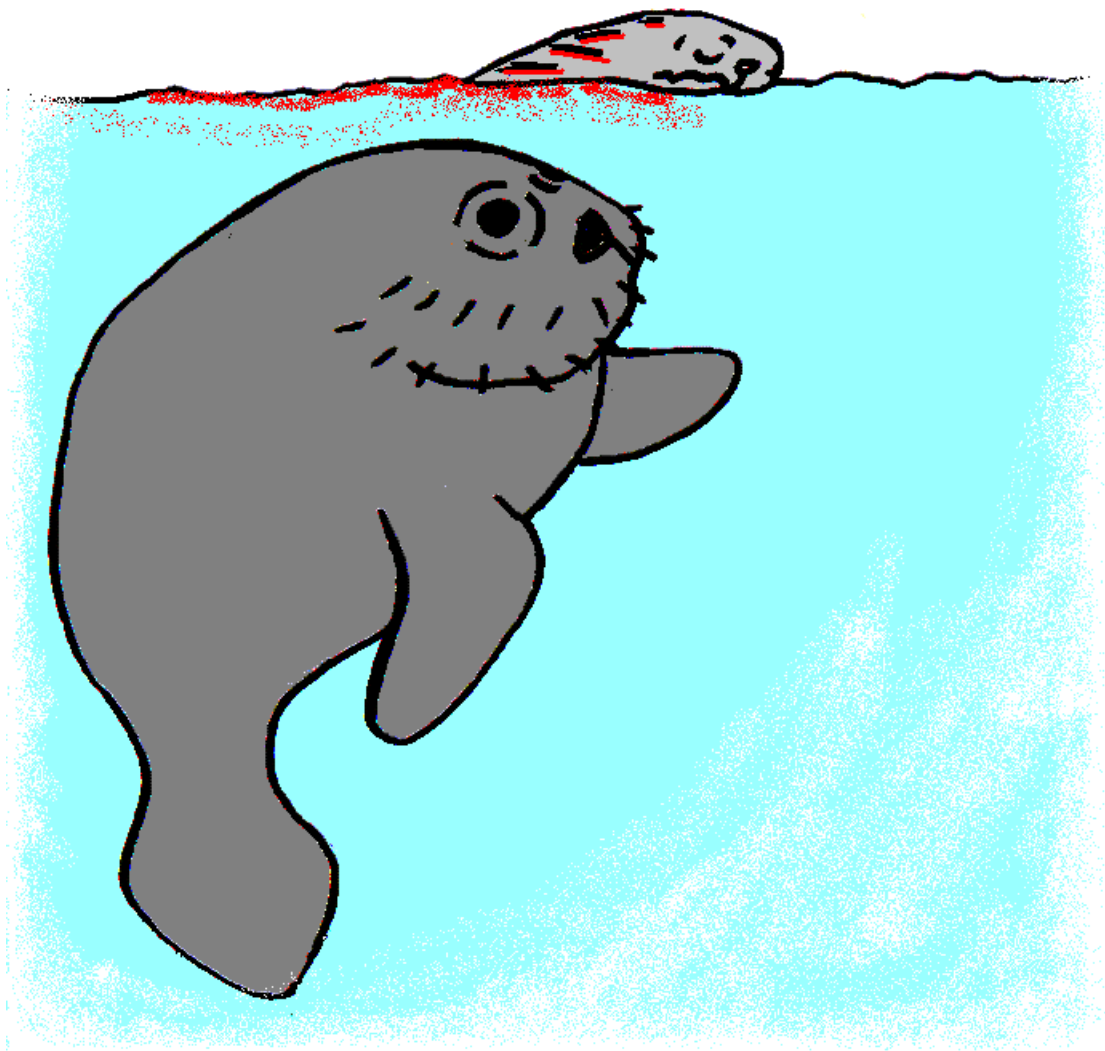
**Poor little Baby Manatee.**



**Just then the mother heard a roar,  
A dreaded sound she had heard before.  
A speedboat thundered through the Bay  
Leaving behind white clouds of spray,  
And careless of what was in the way.**

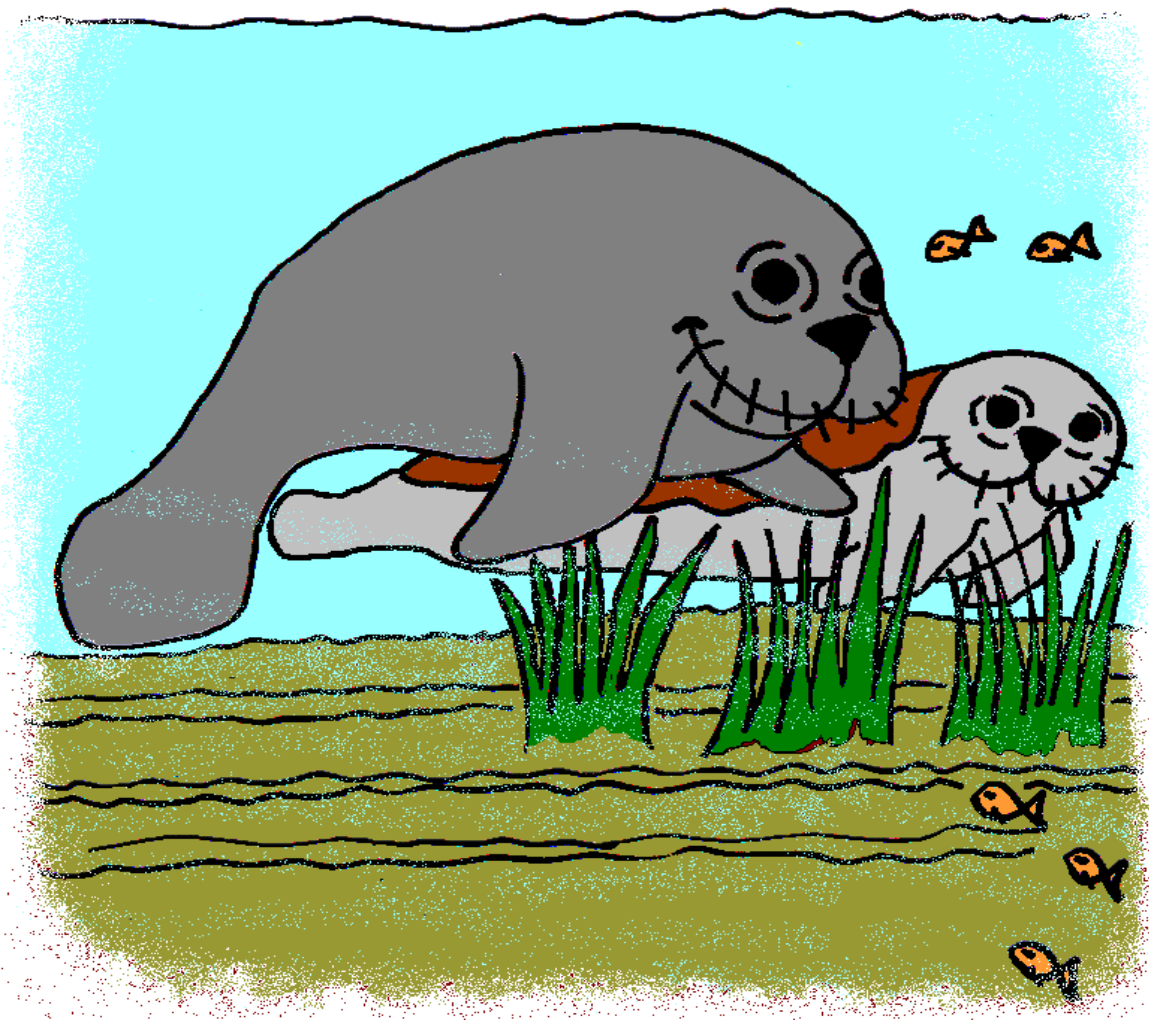
**The reckless Young Pilot, intent upon speed,  
Saw the object before him, but paid it no heed.  
He did not stop, but plunged ahead  
Through water that was suddenly red.**

**The horrified mother, frantic and wild,  
Swam out to save her wounded child.  
She found her baby barely alive,  
Unable to swim, unable to dive.**

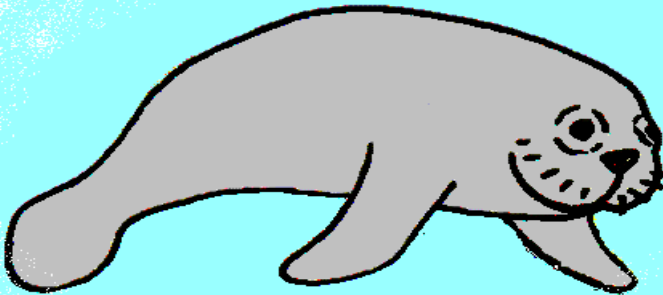


**Many creatures who lived in the Bay  
Came to help take Baby away  
To a secret inlet where no stranger  
Was likely to come and bring new danger.**

**Working together, they scooped up mud  
To plaster the wounds and stop the blood.  
Of loving care there was no lack  
But gashes were deep in the Little One's back.  
They worked all day and into the night  
Then Baby stirred with morning's light.  
When they saw she had ceased to bleed  
They brought fresh grasses so she could feed.  
Mother thanked them. They left her alone.  
But her heart was bitter and hard as stone.**



**She almost felt that she could kill  
The Man who, for sake of a thrill,  
Had run her defenseless Baby down.  
And left the Little One to drown.  
But months went by and Baby grew stronger.  
She also grew wider and very much longer.  
She was bright and playful. She and Mother  
Spent happy moments splashing each other.**

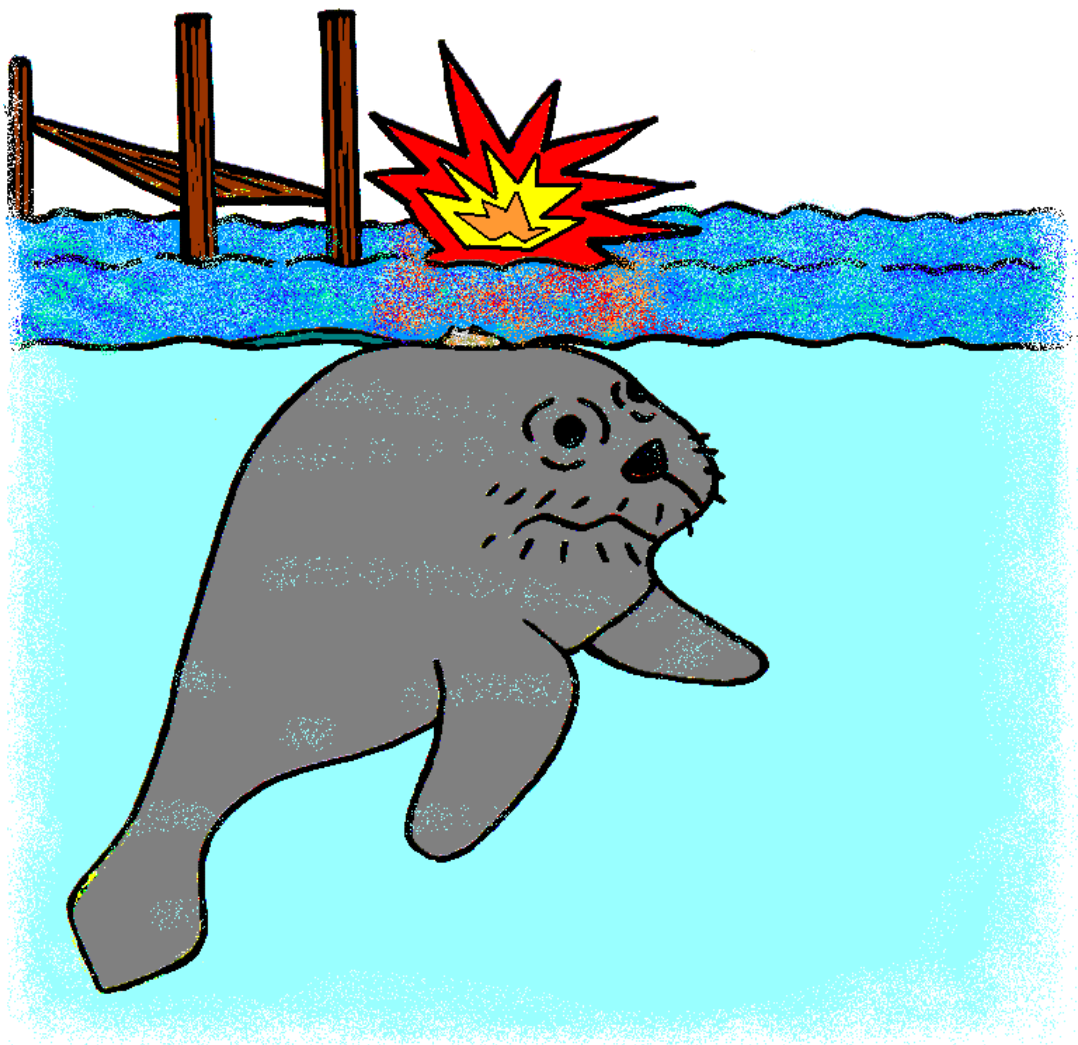


**But Mother continued to watch and wait,  
For she was still angry and filled with hate.**

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**At last, on a foggy winter day  
A Speedboat thundered through the Bay.  
Mother Manatee saw it, and recognized  
The reckless Pilot whom she despised.**

**She wanted to punish this wicked young man  
But she didn't know how, and had no plan.  
Half-hidden by grasses, she waited her chance  
But the Pilot sped past her without a glance.**



**Then Fate, which none of us understands,  
Took her vengeance into Its hands.  
The speed-crazed Pilot who laughed at fear  
Was blinded by fog and crashed into a pier.  
His broken Speedboat overturned  
And in a moment exploded and burned.**

**But, as luck would have it, he was thrown clear.**

**Mother Manatee saw his body float  
Very close to the burning boat.  
Quick as a flash, without even thinking,  
She pulled him away and kept him from sinking.**

**And now she had a decision to make  
For her own and Baby Manatee's sake.  
Should she save the life of her enemy  
Or swim away and let him die?  
Which should it be? Oh, which should it be?**

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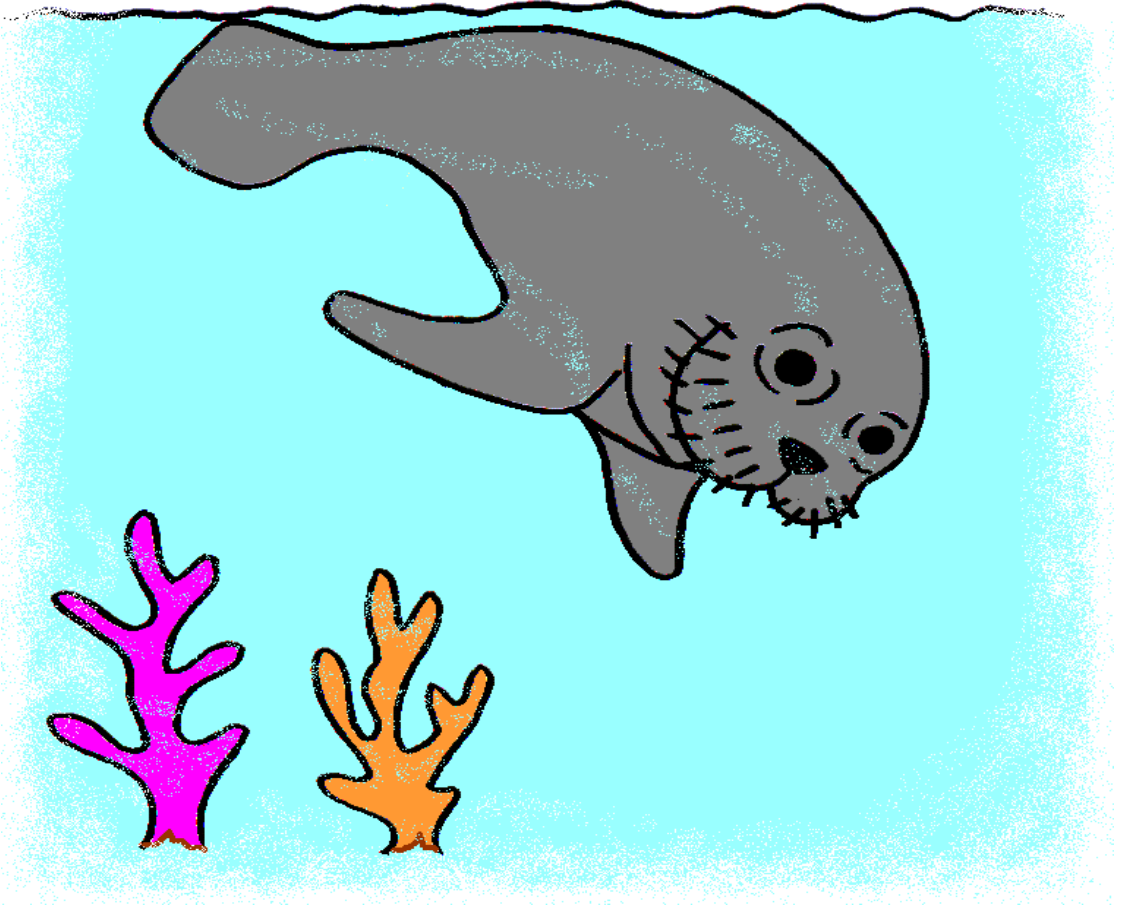
**He wasn't hurt badly, just battered senseless.  
How young he was, and how defenseless!**

**She looked at him closely and saw in his features  
The beauty common to all God's creatures.  
Her gentle heart became warm and forgiving  
And she wanted him to go on living.**

**She supported his head until help arrived  
And then she left him, and quickly dived.  
He would never know how he had survived!**

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**From afar, she watched the Speedboat burn  
And hoped the Young Pilot would never return.**



The End