Tuck & Hush

Leo and the Moonlight Ride Home



Ages 8-10 · a sample custom story

Leo and Grandpa head out past the reef, hook a shining mahi-mahi, let her go, and ride home under the moon.

With love from Grandpa

For Leo. Sweet dreams, from Grandpa.

Chapter 1: Out Past the Reef



The water out past the reef was a blue so deep it looked like ink. Leo sat in the front of Grandpa's boat with his life jacket zipped up to his chin and the wind in his face. Behind them, the tall buildings of Miami had shrunk to tiny blocks, and the beach was just a thin gold line.

Grandpa had let him help with everything that afternoon. Leo had checked the rods. He had counted the life jackets, one for him and one for Grandpa. He had filled the cooler with ice and water bottles and two of Grandpa's famous ham sandwiches.

"Keep your eyes open for a weed line," said Grandpa, slowing the boat. The engine went from a roar to a purr. "Gold seaweed, floating in a long row. Little fish hide under it. And big fish come looking for the little fish."

Leo knelt up on the seat, one hand on the rail, and shaded his eyes. The sun was getting low. The sea sparkled so brightly it was hard to look at. A flying fish skipped across the water, once, twice, and was gone.

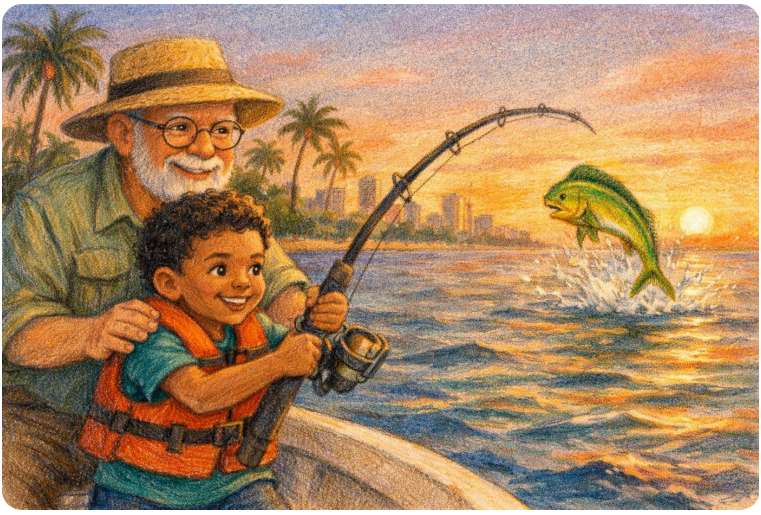
Then he saw it: a ribbon of golden seaweed, stretched across the water like a scarf.

"There!" he said, pointing.

"Good eyes, Captain," said Grandpa. He turned the boat so they drifted quietly alongside. "Now, nice and easy. Cast right along the edge."

Leo's heart was thumping. He had practiced this cast a hundred times in Grandpa's backyard, aiming at a bucket. The bucket had never once pulled back. Something told him this was going to be different.

Chapter 2: Something Big



Leo cast. The line sang through the air, and the bait landed with a soft plip beside the seaweed. He held his breath and counted. One. Two. Three.

Then the rod bent. Not a little bit. A lot.

"Grandpa!" Leo yelled. "I think it's huge!"

Far out, a fish jumped clear out of the water, flashing green and gold in the sunlight, then splashed back down.

"That's a mahi!" said Grandpa, one steady hand on Leo's shoulder. "Easy now. Let her run. Keep your tip up."

The reel buzzed like a bumblebee as the line raced out. Leo's arms burned. His fingers ached. For a moment, he thought about handing the rod to

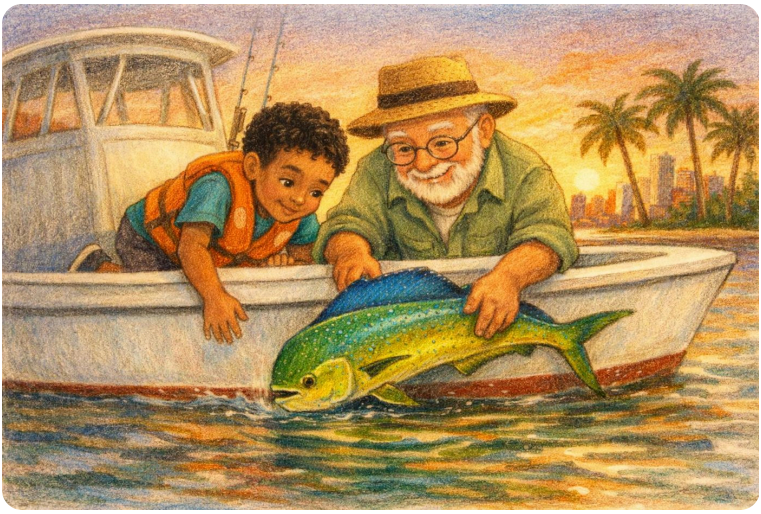
Grandpa. But Grandpa just stood beside him, calm as the evening, and said, "You've got this. Breathe."

So Leo breathed. He reeled when the fish rested and held on when it pulled, just like Grandpa said. Pull and reel. Rest and reel. Little by little, the line came back onto the spool.

The mahi jumped again, and again, shaking her head in the golden light. Each time she landed, she was a little bit closer. And then, slowly, slowly, she came alongside the boat.

"Look at that," Grandpa whispered. "Look what you did."

Chapter 3: Let Her Go



Up close, the mahi was the most beautiful thing Leo had ever seen. Her sides shone green and gold, with tiny blue spots like sparkles, and her back was a bright, electric blue. Her big, round eye seemed to look right at him.

"Some people call her a dolphin," said Grandpa. "But she's a fish, not the kind of dolphin that breathes air. Look at those colors. Nothing else in the sea shines quite like that."

Leo looked for a long time. He thought about how far she had swum to find the weed line. He thought about how hard she had pulled, and how strong she was. She was tired from the fight, the same as him.

"Can we let her go?" Leo asked.

Grandpa smiled. "I was hoping you'd say that."

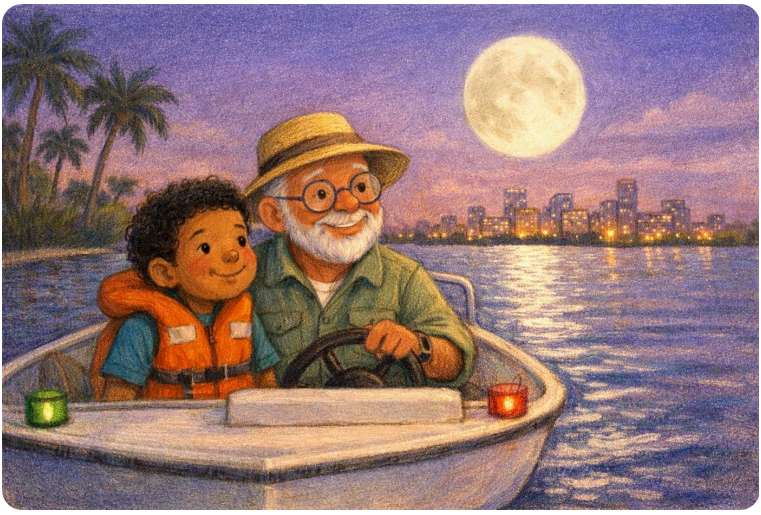
Grandpa wet his hands in the sea first. "Dry hands can hurt a fish's slippery coat," he explained. Then, leaning over the side, he held the mahi gently in the water beside the boat, so the water could wash over her gills and help her breathe. Leo stayed inside the boat, reached over the rail and, very carefully, slipped out the hook.

She rested a moment, gently swaying. Her colors glowed. Then her tail gave one strong flick, and she was gone, a streak of gold into the deep blue.

Leo watched the spot where she had been until the ripples were gone.

"Goodnight, mahi," said Leo.

Chapter 4: The Moon Road



They headed home slowly as the sun slid into the sea. The sky turned orange, then pink, then a soft, deep purple. Grandpa turned on the boat's little running lights, one red, one green, and the boat hummed along over the gentle waves.

Leo sat close beside Grandpa at the wheel and ate the last ham sandwich. It tasted better than any sandwich had ever tasted. A pelican flew low over the water beside them, then turned toward the shore to find its roost for the night.

By the time they reached the bay, a big round moon had come up, and its light lay across the water like a silver road. The city lights twinkled at the end of it, and the breeze smelled like salt and warm night.

"Grandpa," said Leo, "where does the mahi sleep?"

"Fish don't have eyelids," said Grandpa, "so they can't close their eyes. But they rest. She'll swim slow and quiet tonight, way out in the warm blue water."

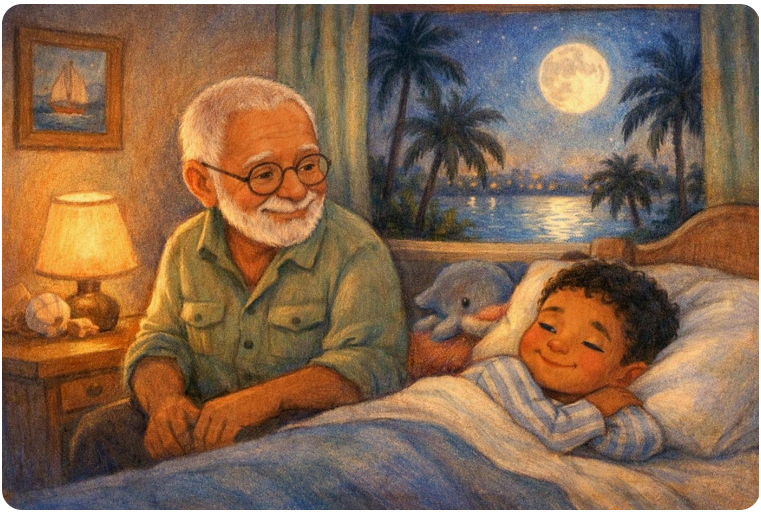
"Will she remember me?"

Grandpa thought about it. "I don't know," he said. "But I think the ocean remembers when someone is kind to it."

Leo looked out at the moon road and pictured her out there, resting, glowing a little in the dark. He yawned a huge yawn, the kind that starts all the way down in your toes.

"Somebody's ready for bed," said Grandpa, and he steered them gently toward home.

Chapter 5: Goodnight, Ocean



Back at Grandpa's house, Leo washed the salt off and pulled on his softest pajamas. His arms still felt a little tired from the big fight, in the good way, the way you feel after a whole day of doing something you love.

He brushed his teeth. He hung his life jacket on its hook by the door, ready for next time. Then he climbed into the bed by the window.

From his bed, he could see the moon on the water. He could hear the palm leaves whispering and, far away, another boat coming home. The sound got softer and softer until it was gone.

Grandpa came in and sat on the edge of the bed. "Proud of you, Captain," he said. "You were patient, and you were kind to that fish. Those are the two things that make a real angler."

"You taught me," said Leo.

"Somebody taught me, too," said Grandpa. "A long time ago. That's how it works. One day, you'll teach somebody."

Leo smiled into his pillow. He thought about the golden seaweed, the green-and-gold flash, the strong flick of her tail. He thought about the silver road on the water and the little red and green lights.

"Goodnight, mahi," he whispered. "Goodnight, ocean. Goodnight, Grandpa."

"Goodnight, Leo," said Grandpa. "Same time tomorrow?"

But Leo was already asleep, dreaming of the moonlight ride home.

Goodnight

Leo and Grandpa head out past the reef, hook a shining mahi-mahi, let her go, and ride home under the moon.

Fun fact: Mahi-mahi are also called dolphinfish, but they're fish, not dolphins. They're one of the fastest-growing fish in the ocean, and they love to hunt under floating golden seaweed called sargassum.

Goodnight, from Grandpa