

Lanterns at Low Tide

A night-time beach survey teaches Priya that careful observation can be a form of courage.

Priya had expected the turtle survey to feel adventurous. Instead, the beach was cold, the wind kept lifting sand into her shoes, and every shadow looked like a moving shell. She followed Ranger Sol along the high-tide line while the rest of the volunteer team spaced themselves behind them. Their red-covered torches gave only a dim glow because bright white light could confuse nesting turtles.

Near the dunes, Priya noticed a wide track leading towards the sea. She raised her hand, certain that she had found the first turtle. Sol crouched beside the marks but did not celebrate. The track was too narrow, and tiny claw prints crossed it. A goanna had dragged its tail through the sand. Sol explained that good fieldwork began with a possibility, not a conclusion.

An hour later, they found two matching tracks that curved above the tide line. This time, Sol asked Priya to describe every detail before naming it. The sand was pressed flat in broad strokes, and one track ended beside a patch of disturbed ground. Together they marked a wide circle around the site so nobody would step on it.

The turtle had already returned to the water, leaving its eggs hidden beneath the sand. Priya recorded the location while Sol checked the distance from the tide. The nest was safe for now, but a king tide was expected later in the week. Wildlife officers would decide whether it needed a protective barrier or careful relocation.

Walking back, Priya realised the survey had been adventurous after all, just not in the way she had imagined. Nothing had chased them, and there had been no dramatic rescue. The challenge was to move slowly, notice small differences and resist turning the first clue into the answer she wanted.