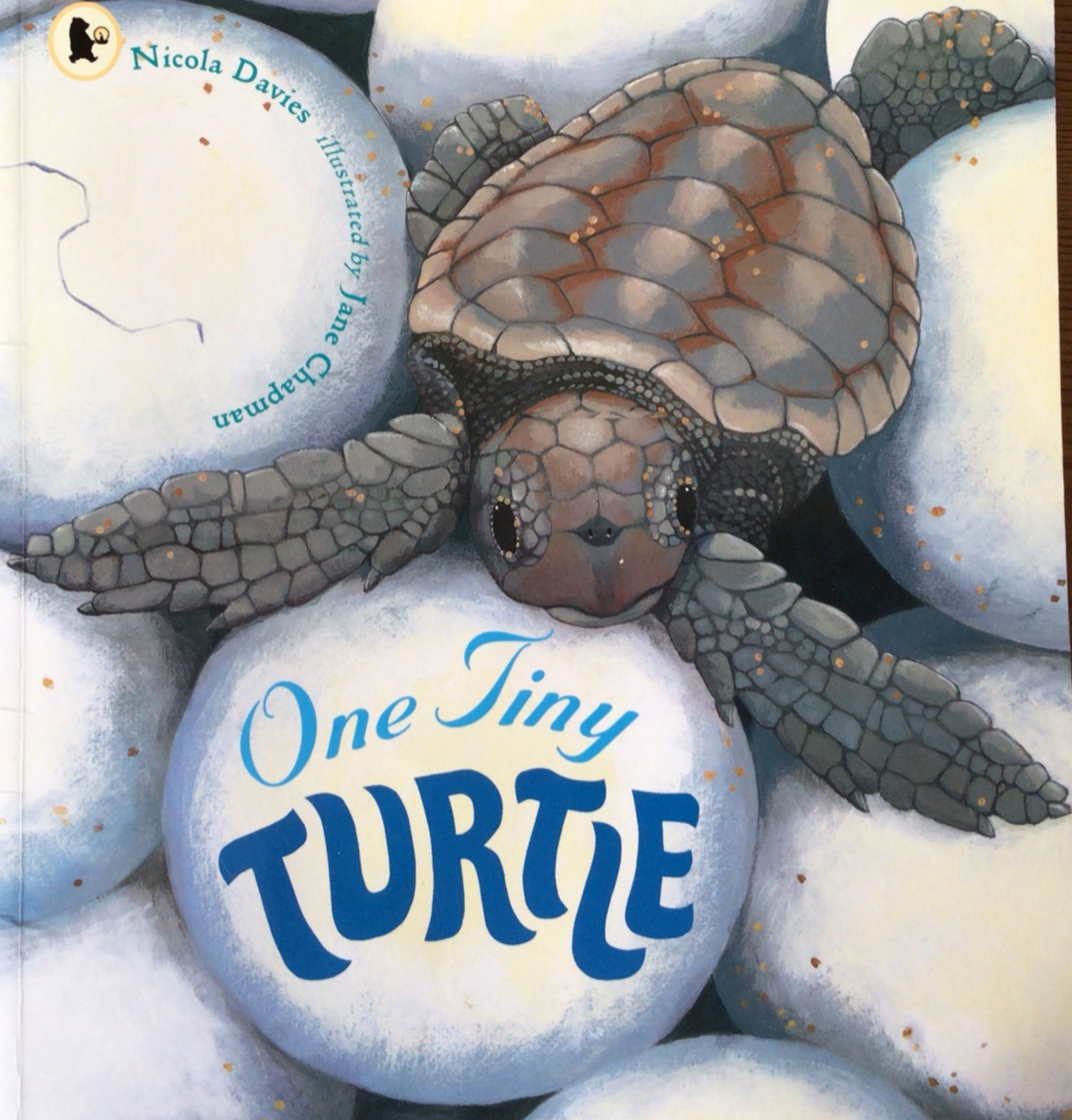


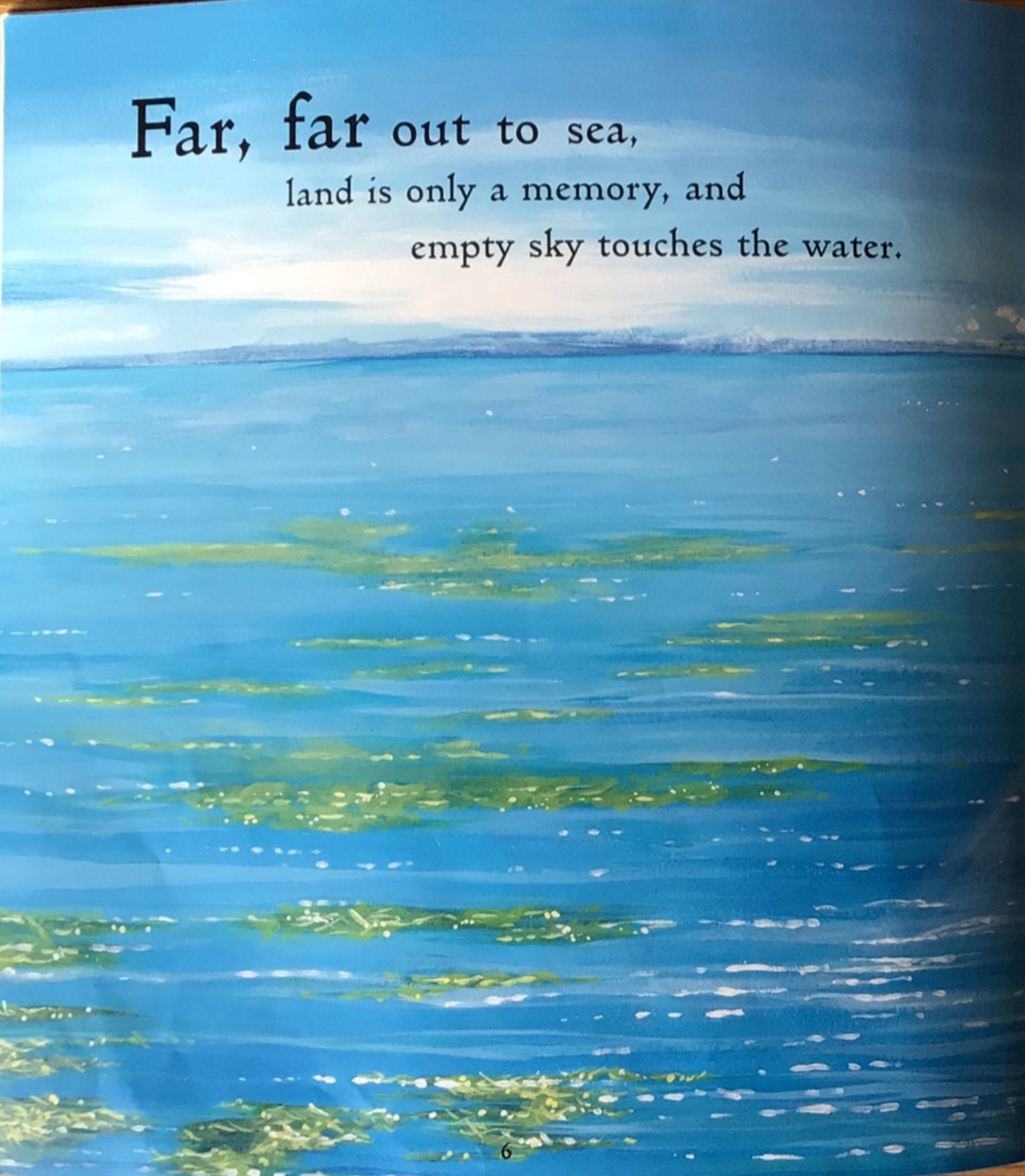


Nicola Davies

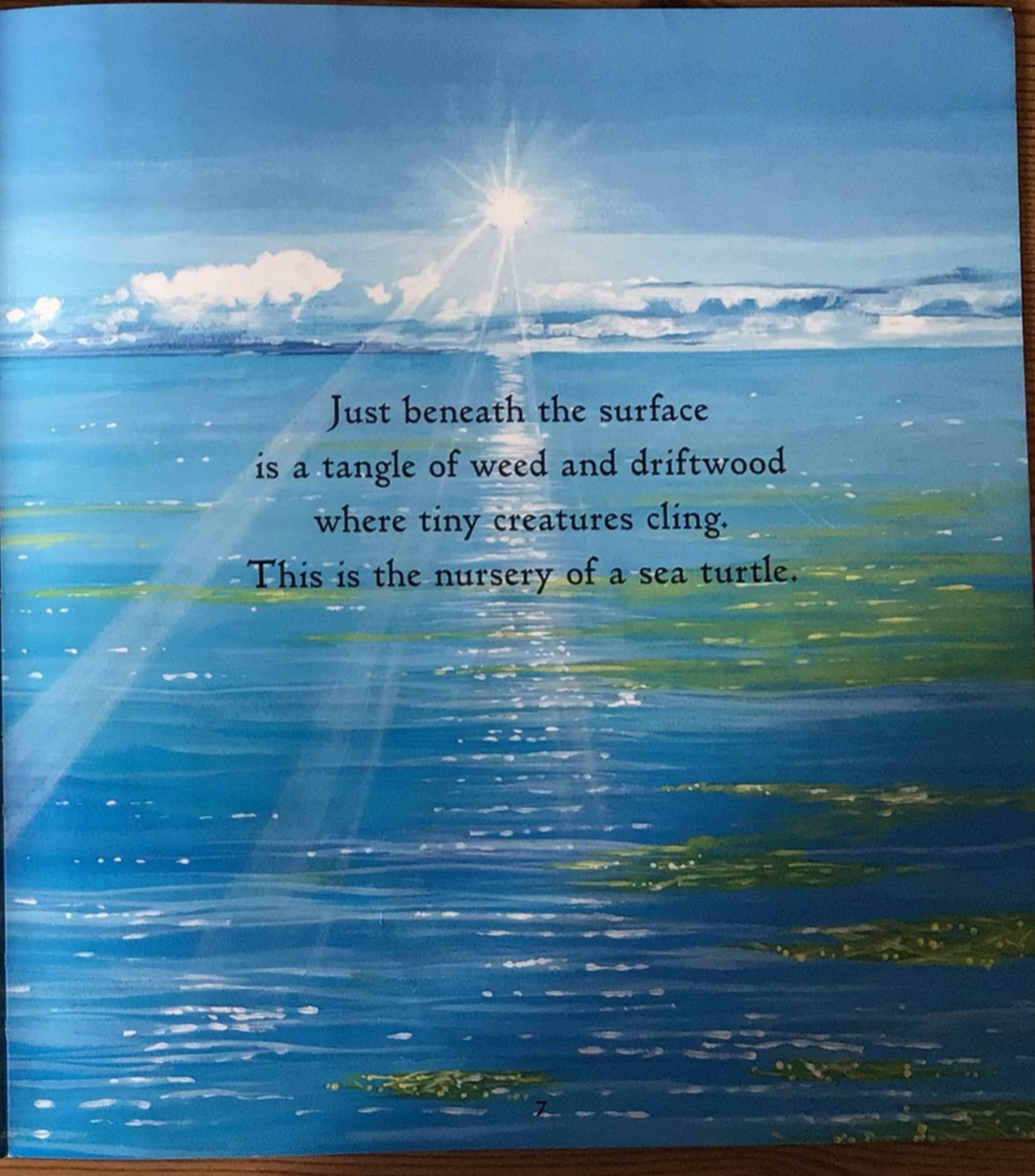
illustrated by Jane Chapman

One Tiny
TURTLE





Far, far out to 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.

*Turtles have a shell covering their backs and one covering their tummies.
The shells are made from bony plates which get bigger
and harder as the turtle grows.*

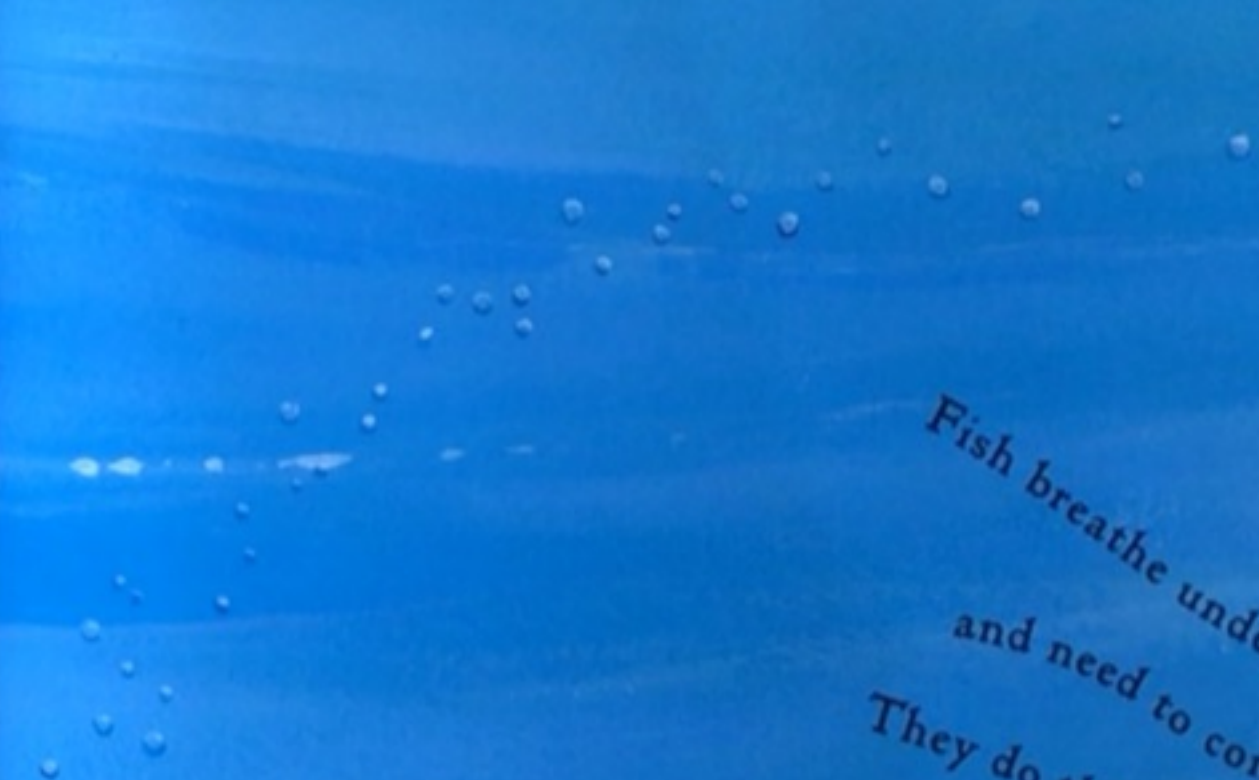




Turtle swims about,
flapping her long front flippers
like wings: she is underwater flying.



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



*Fish breathe underwater, but turtles are reptiles
and need to come up to the surface for air.
They do this every four to five minutes when they are active.
When they are asleep, they can stay underwater for hours.*

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



For three or four years,
maybe more, Turtle
rides out the storms



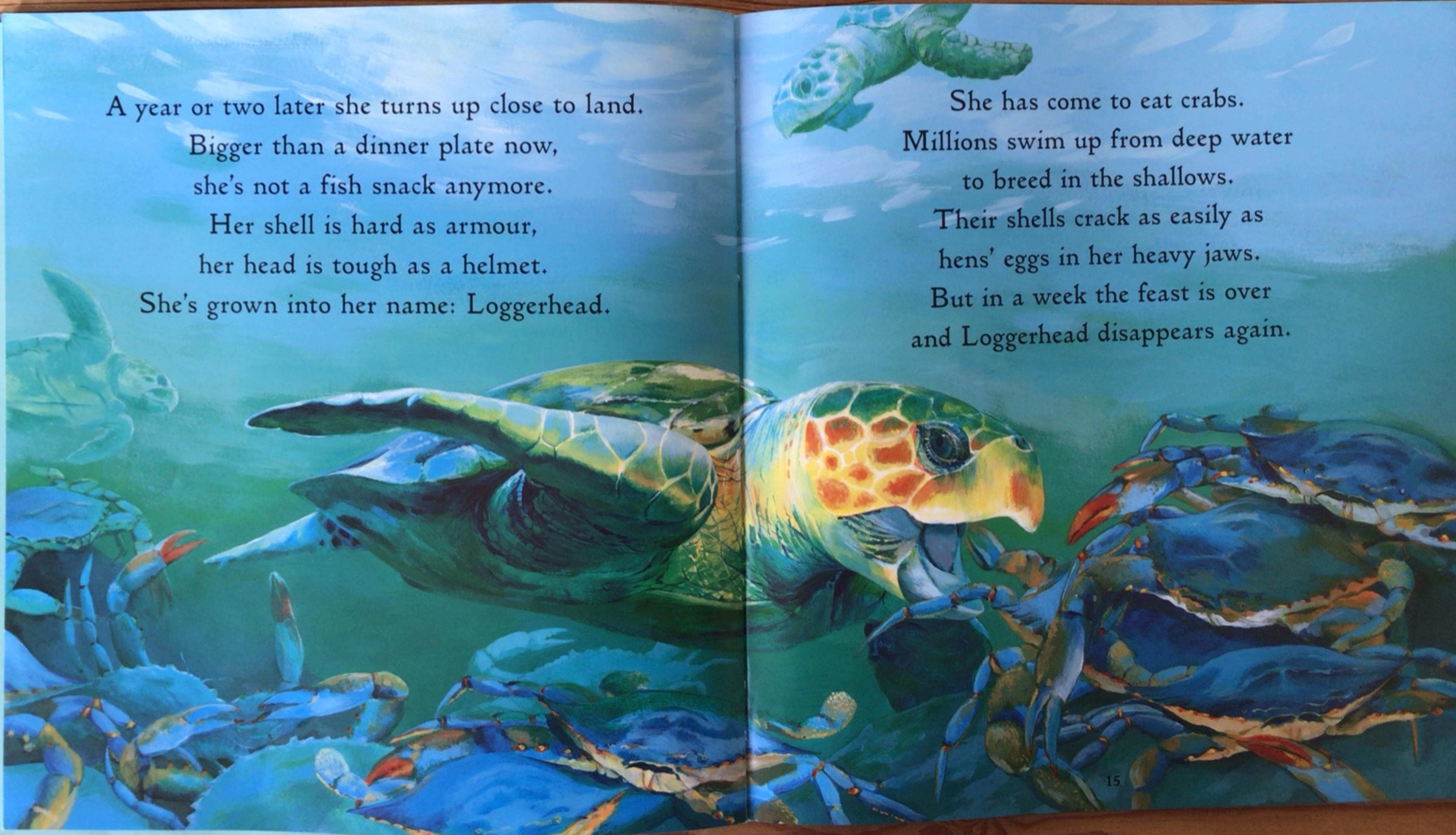
and floats through
the hot calms.



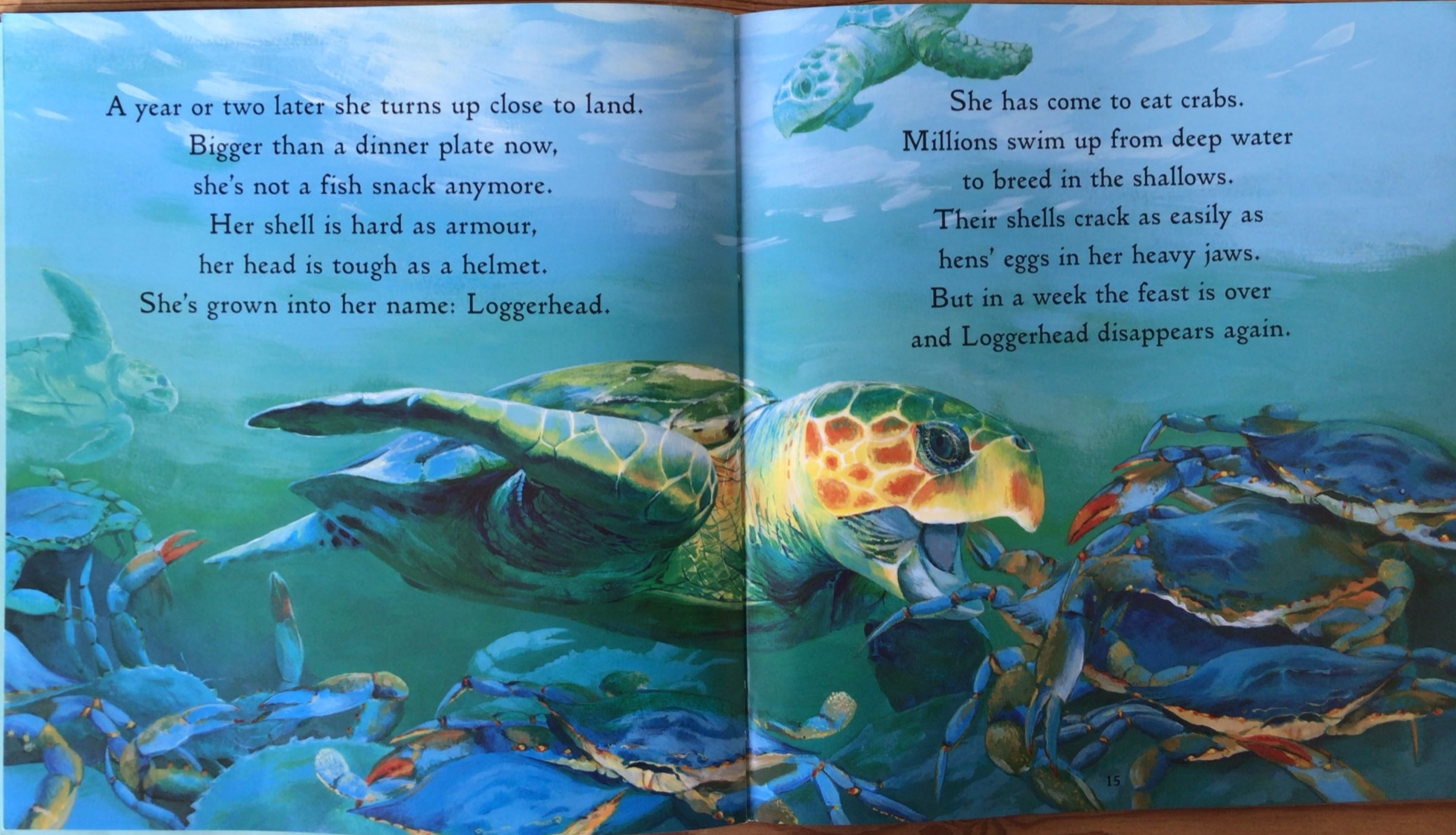
Steadily she outgrows her nursery.



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

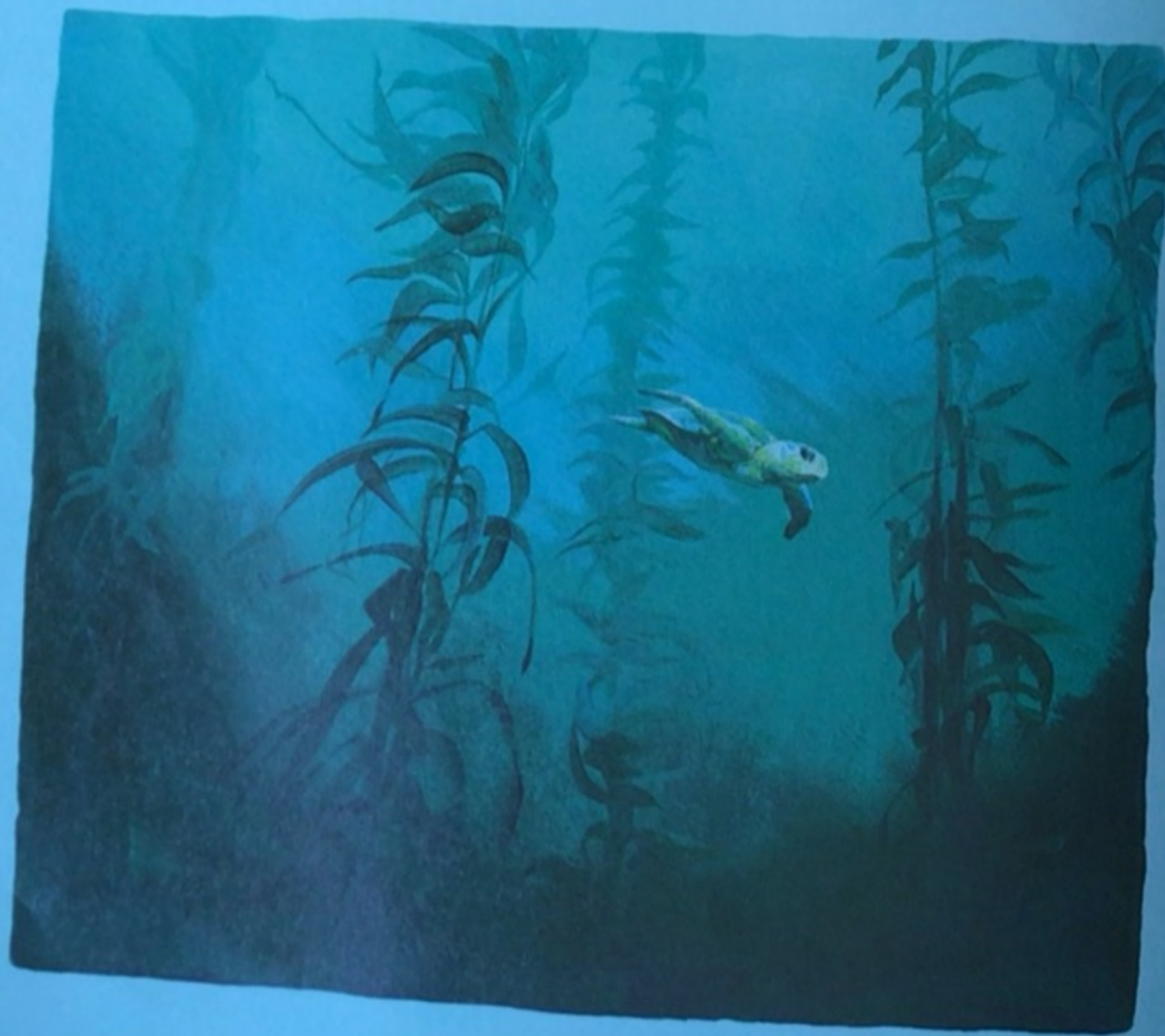


A year or two later she turns up close to land.
Bigger than a dinner plate now,
she's not a fish snack anymore.
Her shell is hard as armour,
her head is tough as a helmet.
She's grown into her name: Loggerhead.



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:

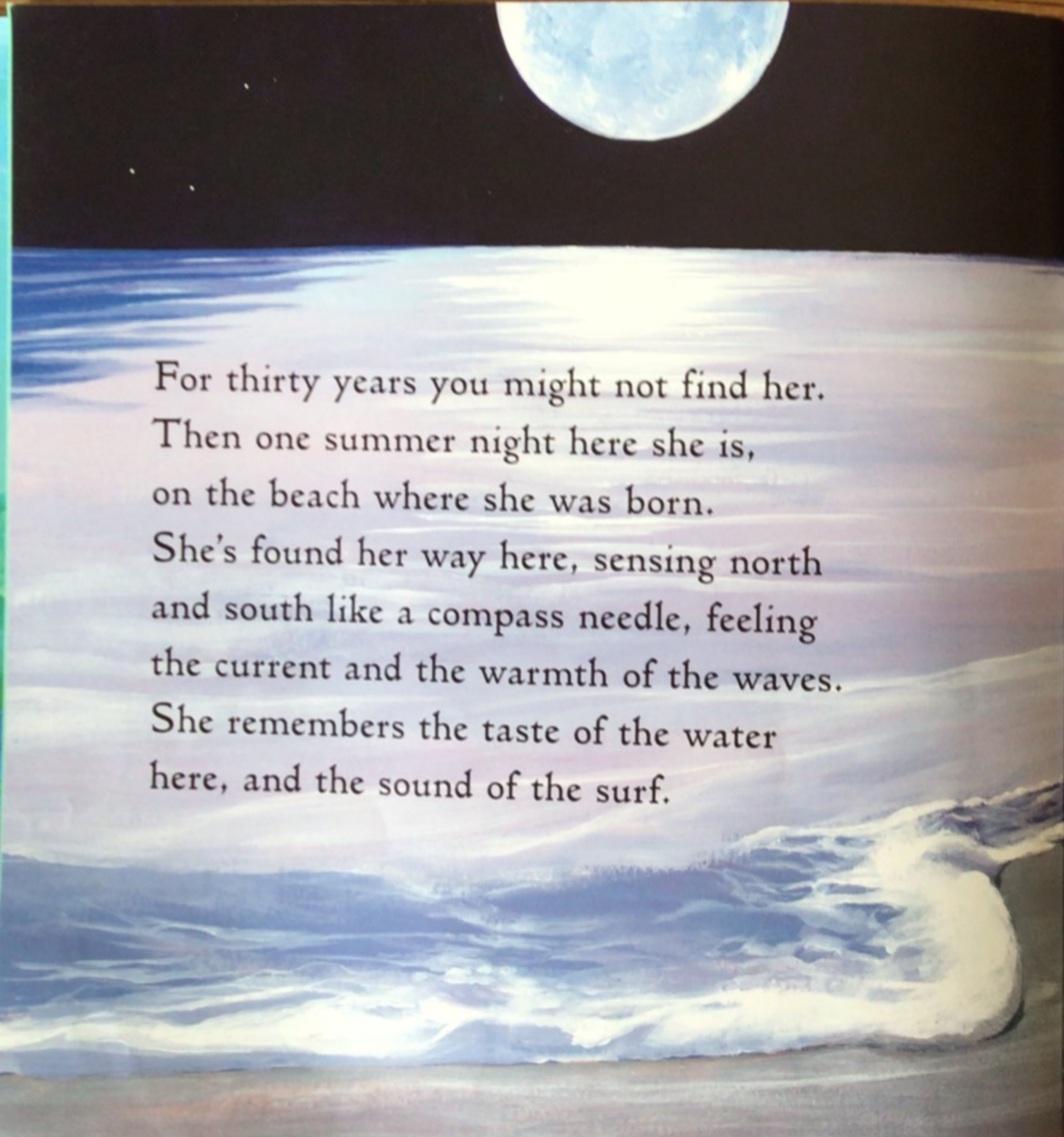


in summer, to cool seaweed jungles, where
she finds juicy clams and shoals of shrimps.

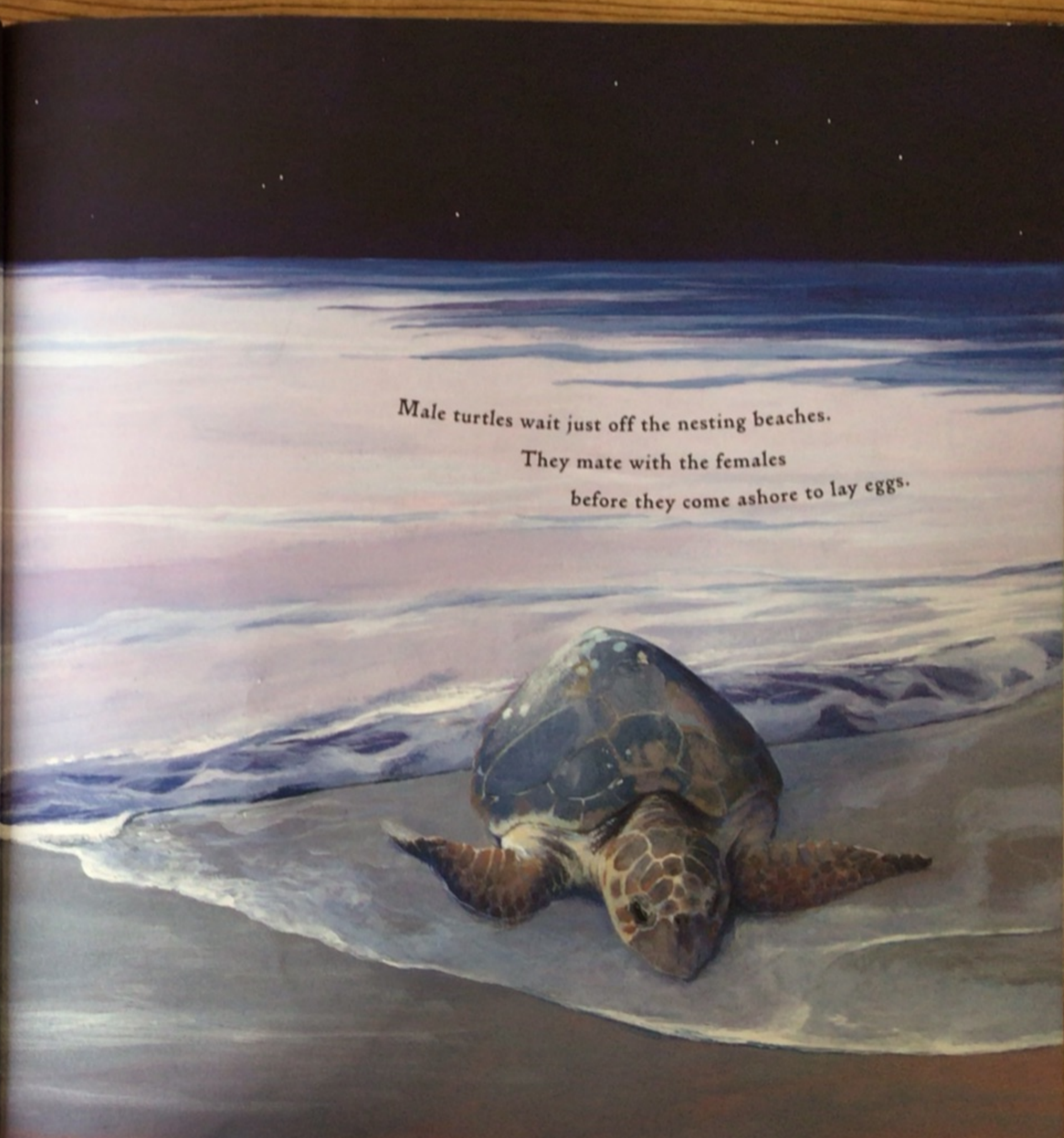
And in winter, to turquoise lagoons, warm as
a bath, where she can munch among corals.



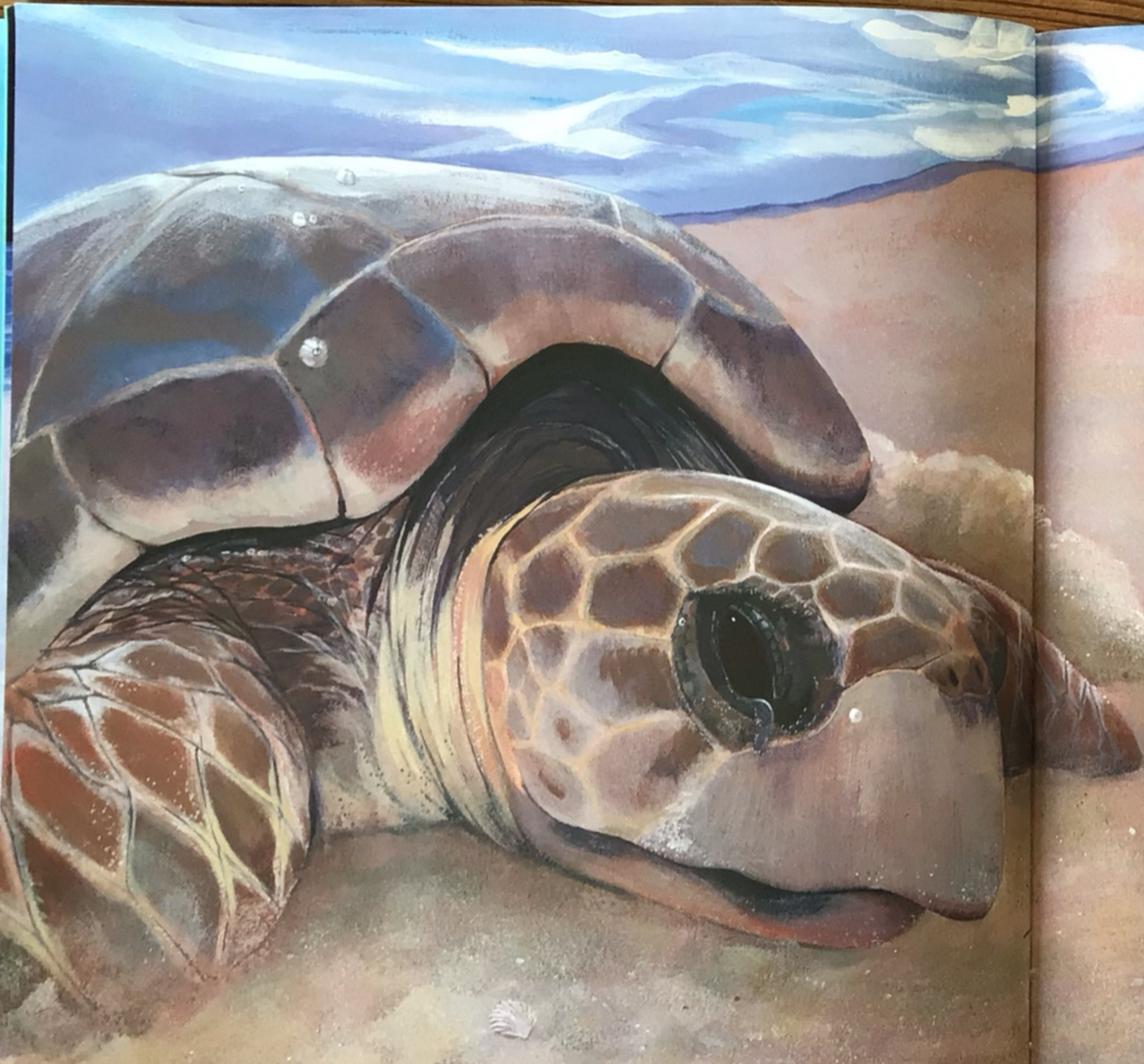
Loggerhead may travel thousands of miles, but
she leaves no trace or track for you to follow.
Only good luck will catch you a glimpse of her.



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.



*Male turtles wait just off the nesting beaches.
They mate with the females
before they come ashore to lay eggs.*



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.

*Coming ashore is very risky for sea turtles – they can easily
overheat and die. So they only nest at night or in cooler weather.
Then they get back to the sea as soon as possible.*



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.

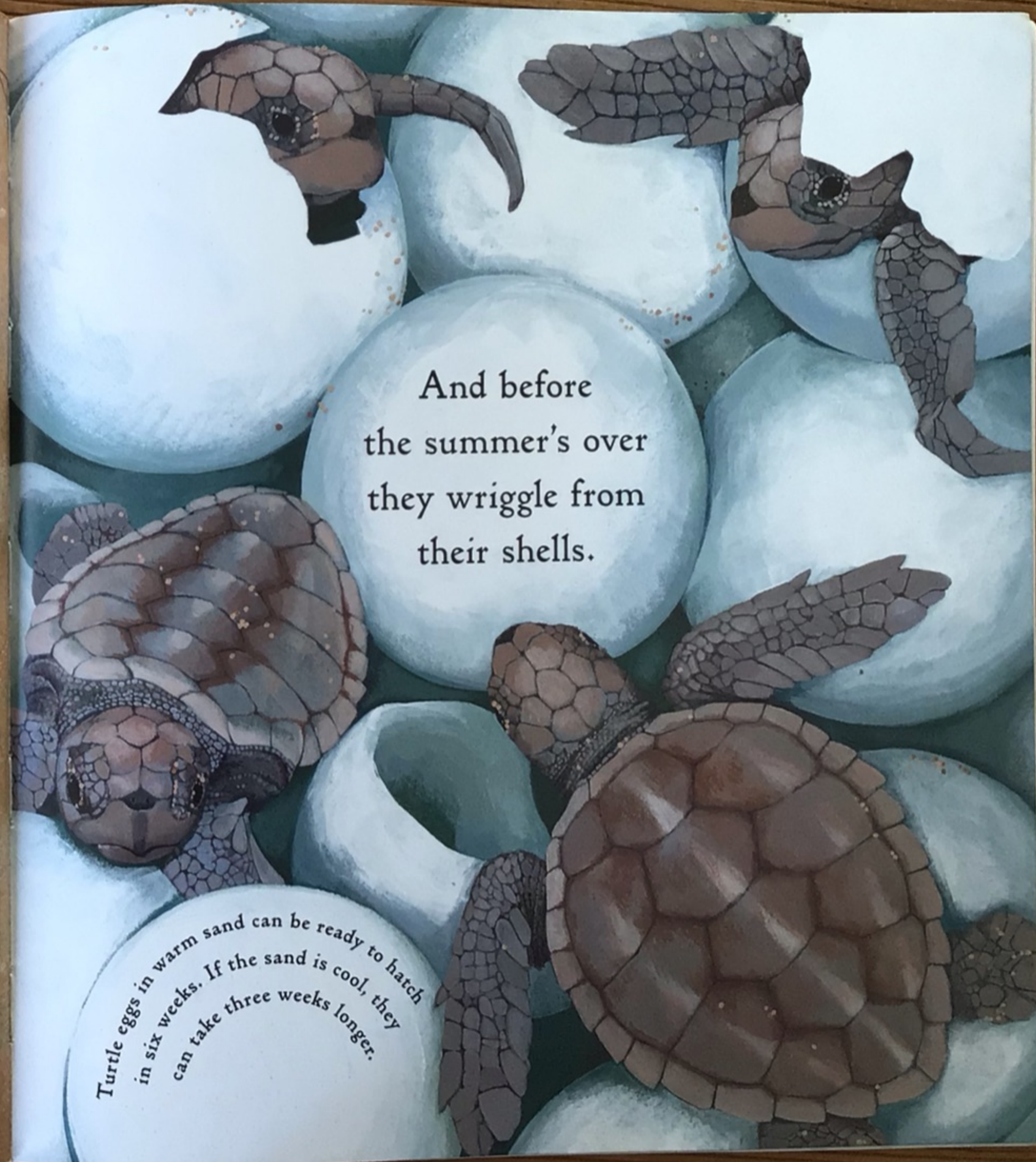
Then Loggerhead is gone again,
back to her secret life.



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

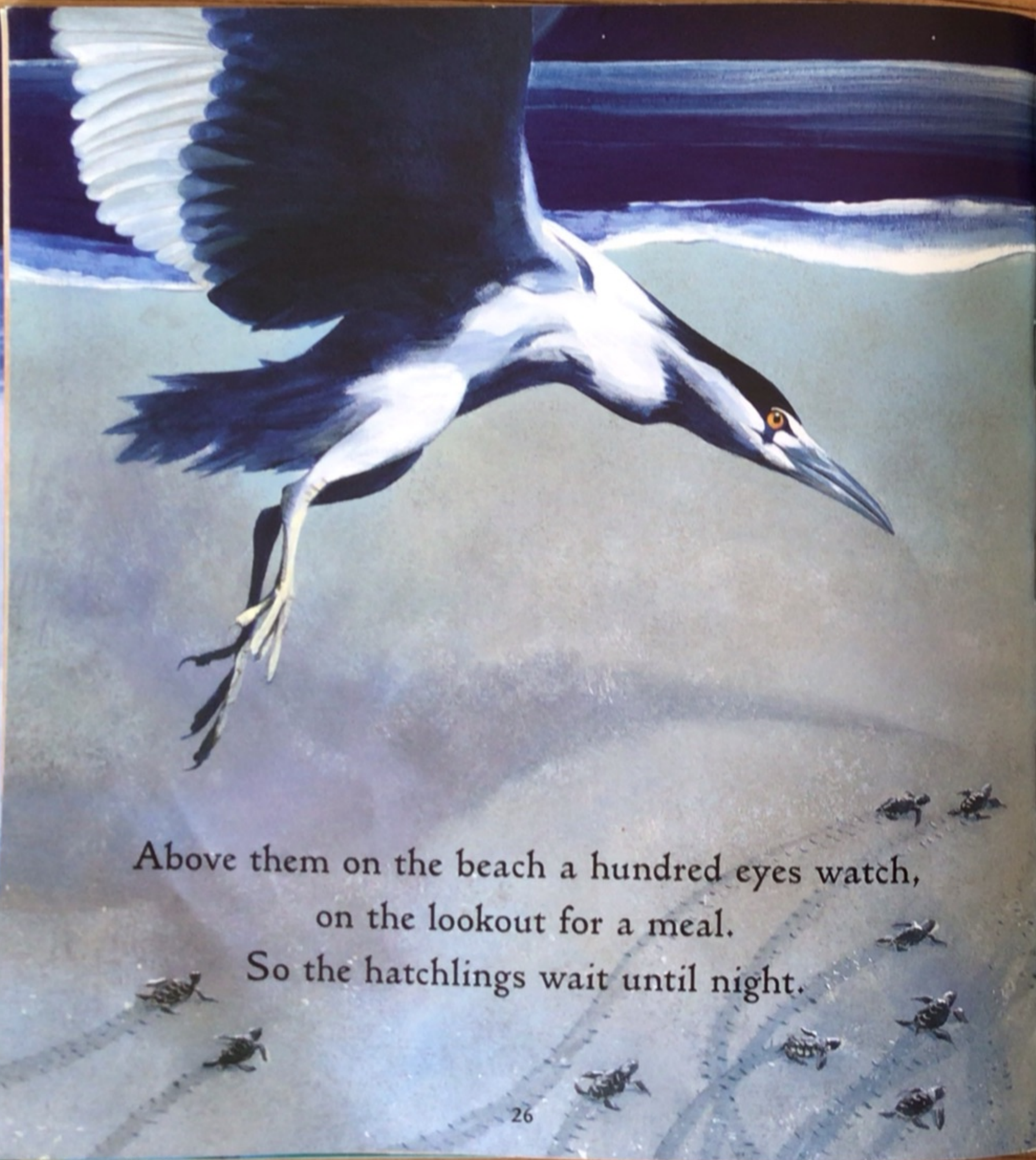


*Females stay close to their nesting beach for several months.
In that time they usually make at least four nests,
and sometimes as many as ten.*

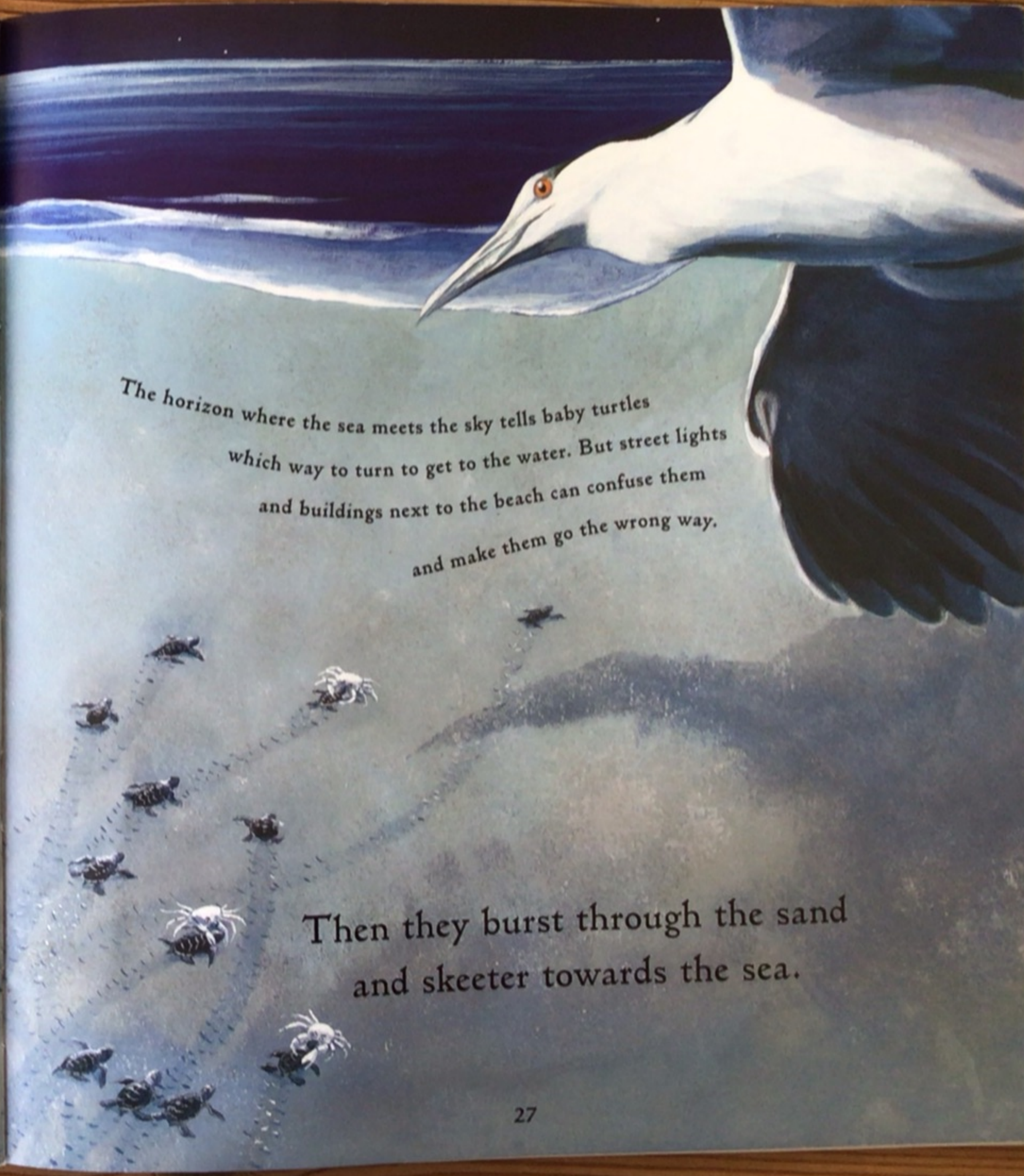


And before
the summer's over
they wriggle from
their shells.

*Turtle eggs in warm sand can be ready to hatch
in six weeks. If the sand is cool, they
can take three weeks longer.*




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

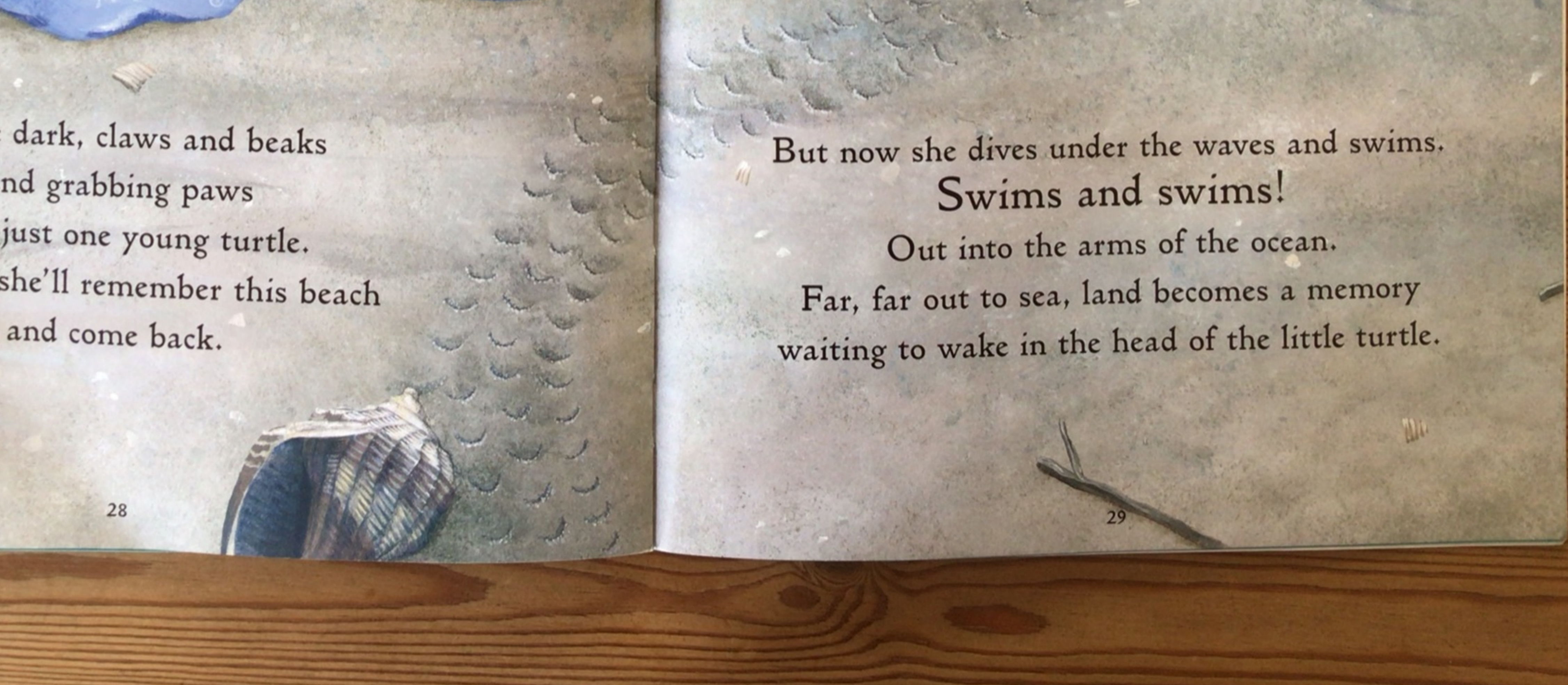


The horizon where the sea meets the sky tells baby turtles
which way to turn to get to the water. But street lights
and buildings next to the beach can confuse them
and make them go the wrong way.

Then they burst through the sand
and skitter 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 to sea, land becomes a memory
waiting to wake in the head of the little turtle.

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