

If You Lived in the Sea,
Who Would You Be?

Julie Honan Johnston



Illustrated by Meg Sodano

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Web of Life
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

If you lived in the sea, do you think you'd live deep
in the cold, murky water where glowing fish sleep?



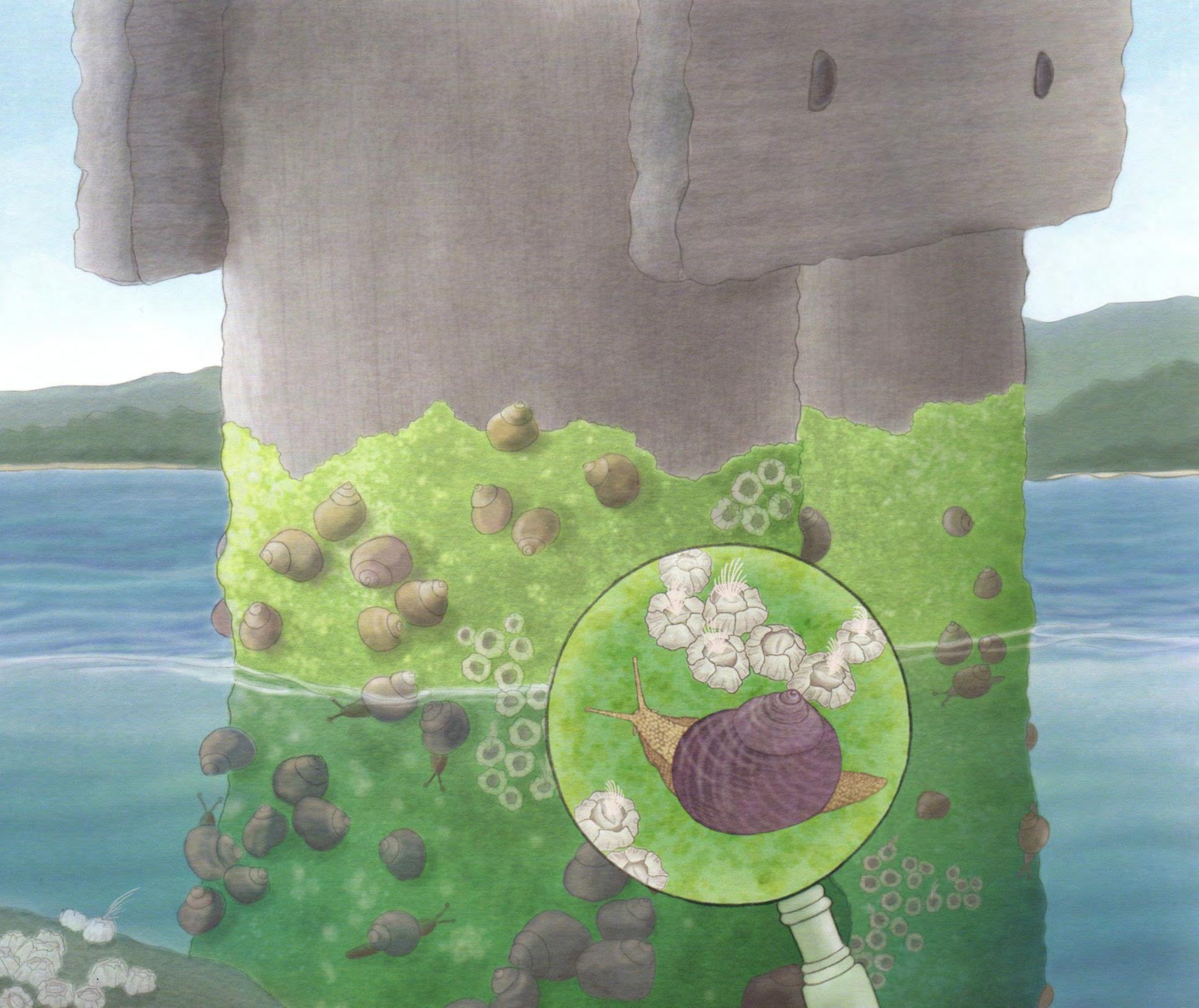
Perhaps you'd prefer to surf waves in a bay,
over soft, swirling sand on a hot summer day.





Would you hide in your shell that you glued to a rock,
or slide with your shell through the sludge on a dock?





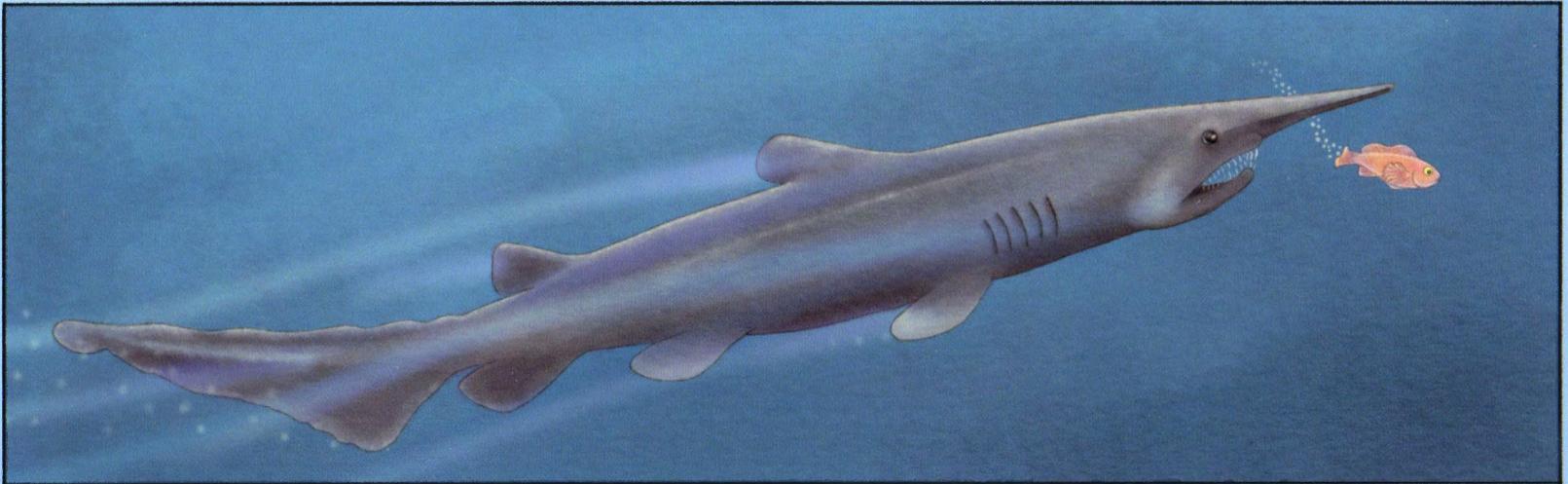
You could soar with your pod while you cruised across Earth,



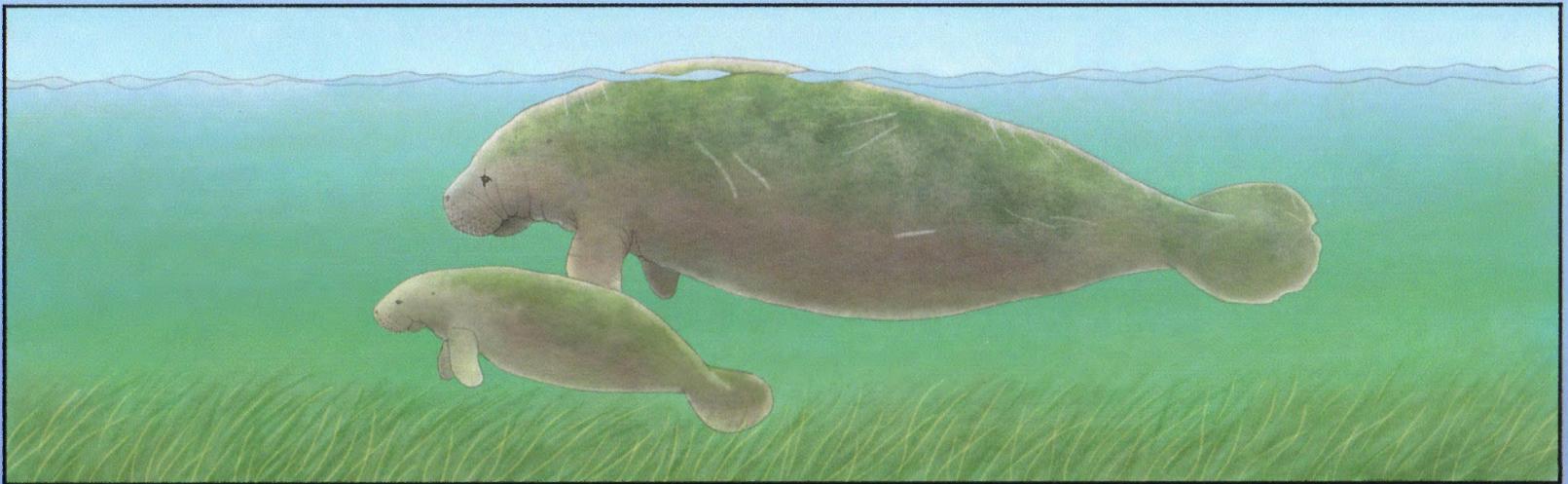


or journey alone from the day of your birth.

There's so much you could be, if you lived in the sea!



Goblin shark?



Manatee?

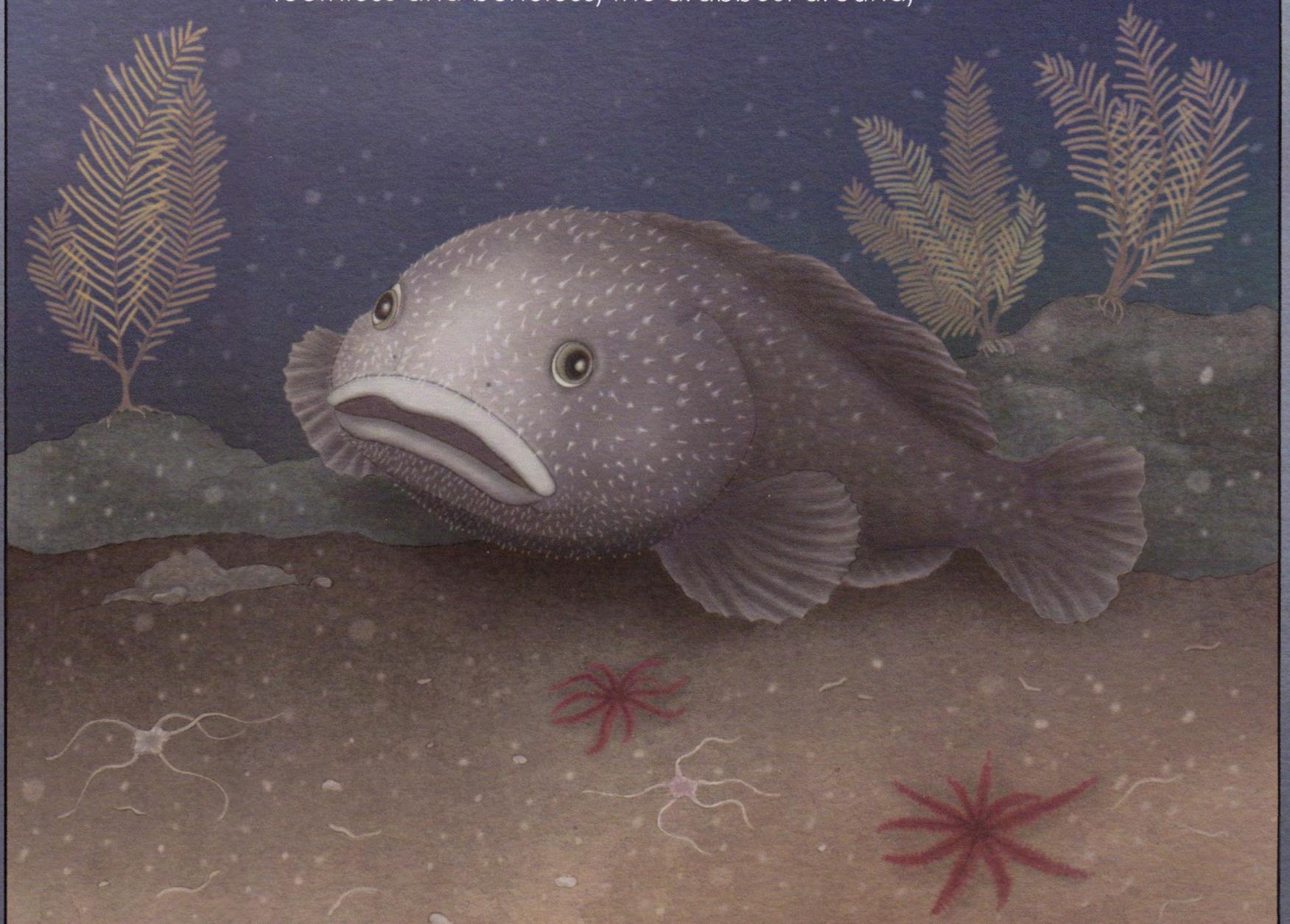


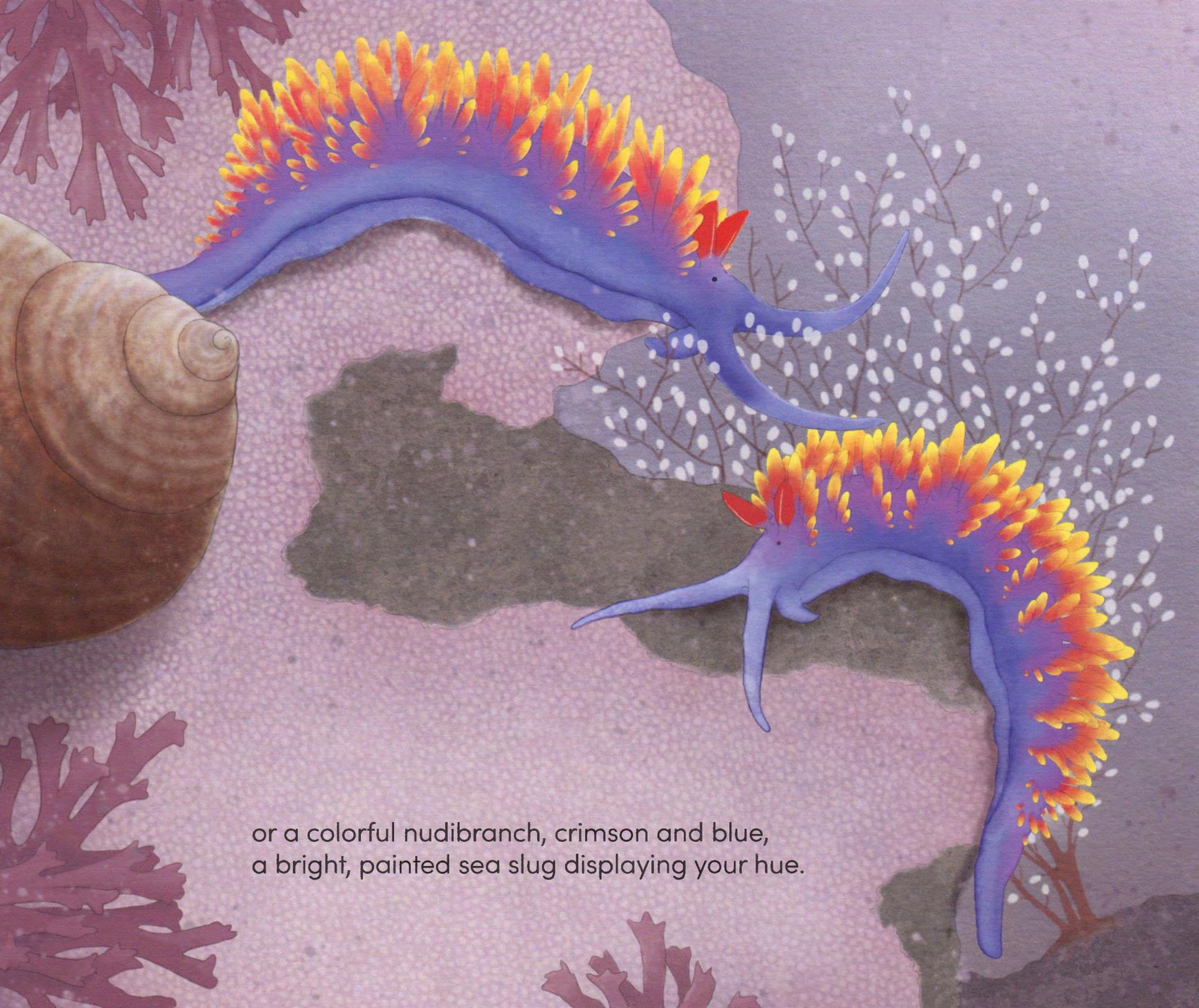
Cuttlefish?



Anchovy?

You might be a blobfish and loom near the ground,
toothless and boneless, the drabest around,





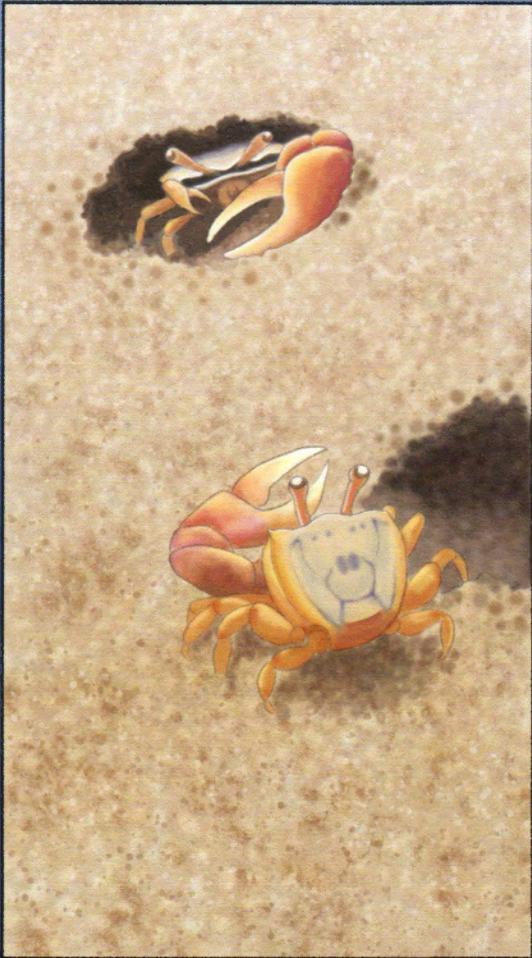
or a colorful nudibranch, crimson and blue,
a bright, painted sea slug displaying your hue.

If you were a dugong, you'd root with your snout,
chewing on seagrass while grazing about.



As an elephant seal, your snout would inflate
while you bellowed and barked in search of a mate.



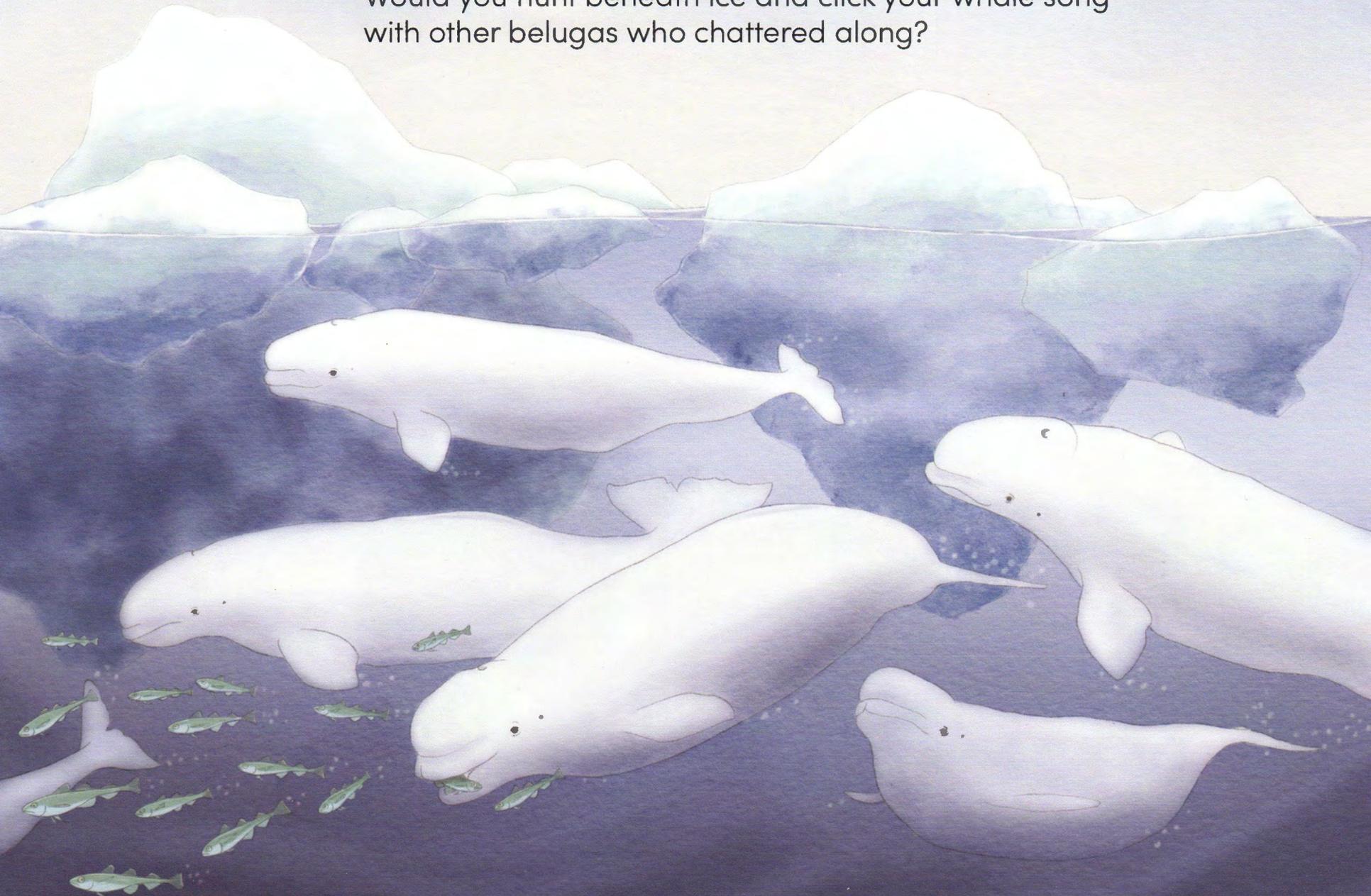


You might be a digger, a diver, or slimer,



a squirter, a herder, or maybe a climber.

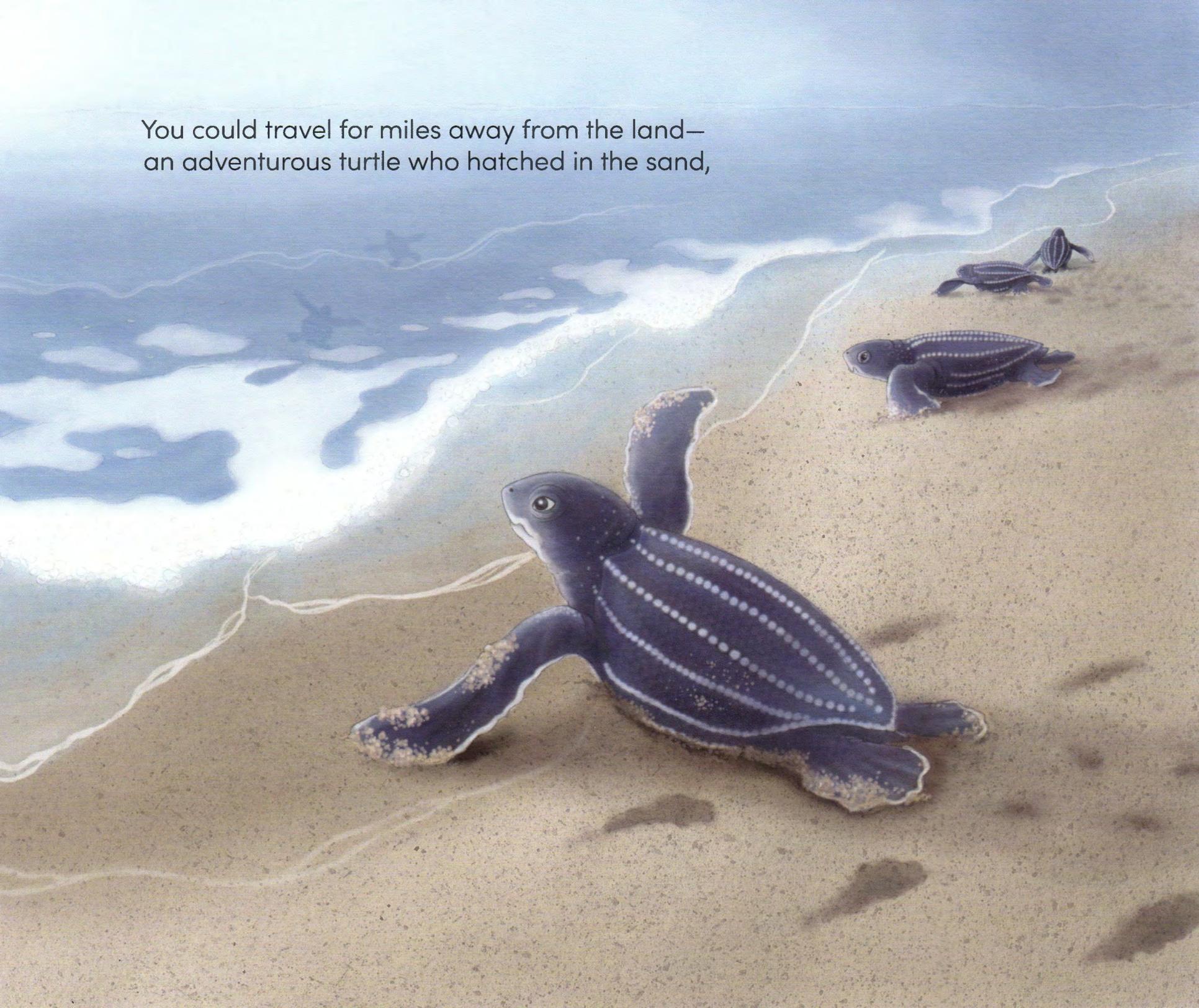
Would you hunt beneath ice and click your whale song
with other belugas who chattered along?



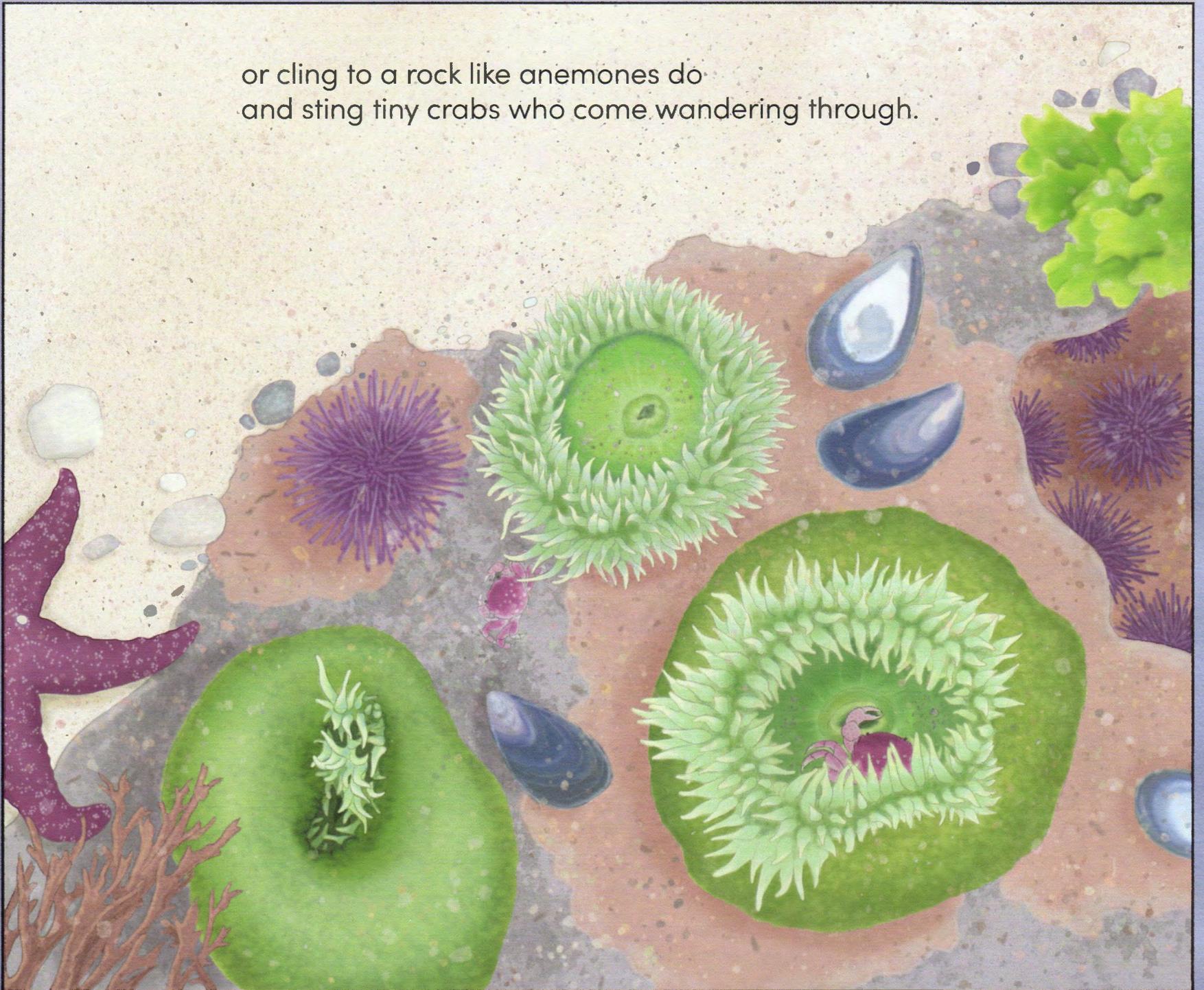


Or whip through warm water,
then up through the air—
a flying torpedo with shimmering flair?

You could travel for miles away from the land—
an adventurous turtle who hatched in the sand,



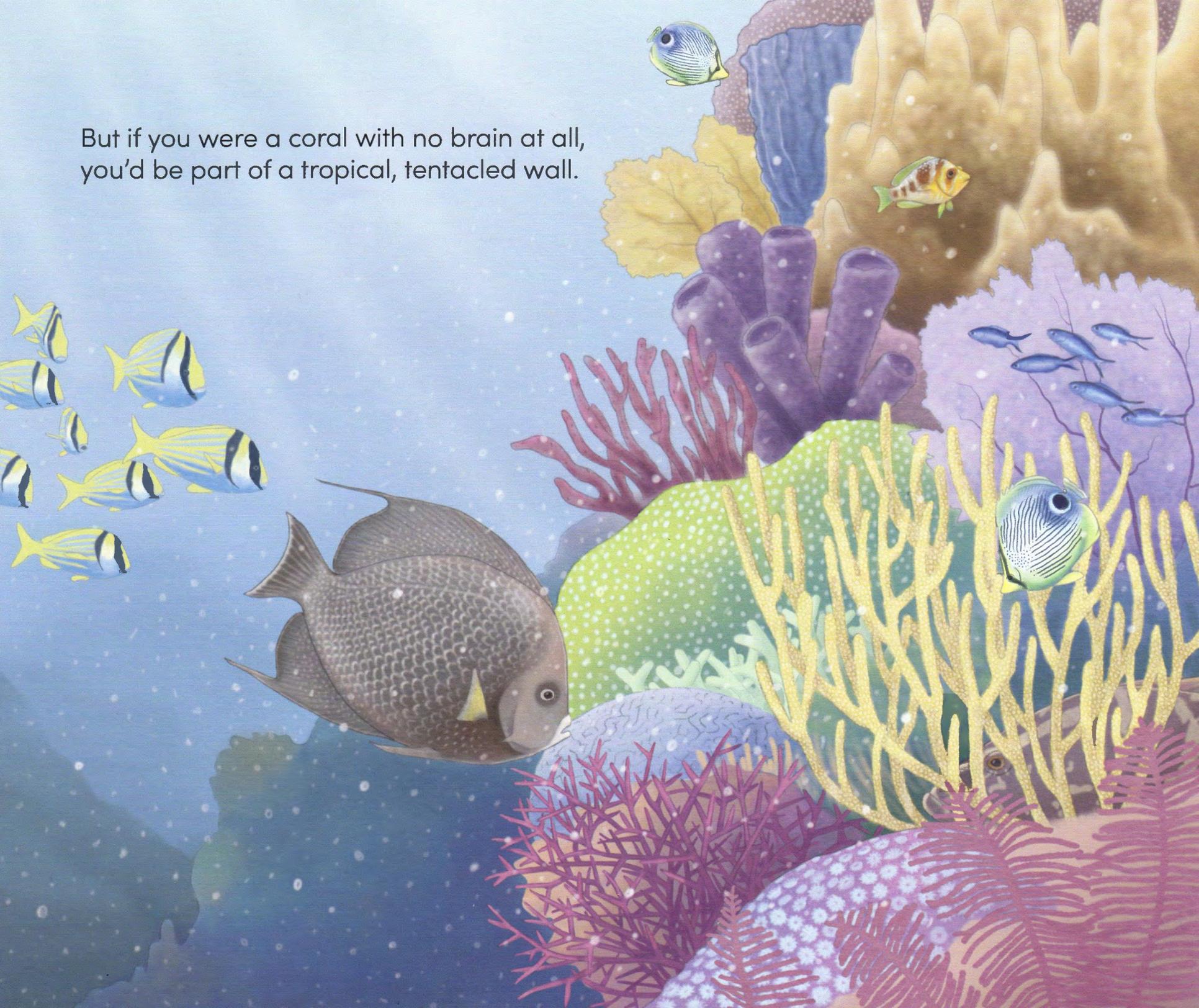
or cling to a rock like anemones do
and sting tiny crabs who come wandering through.

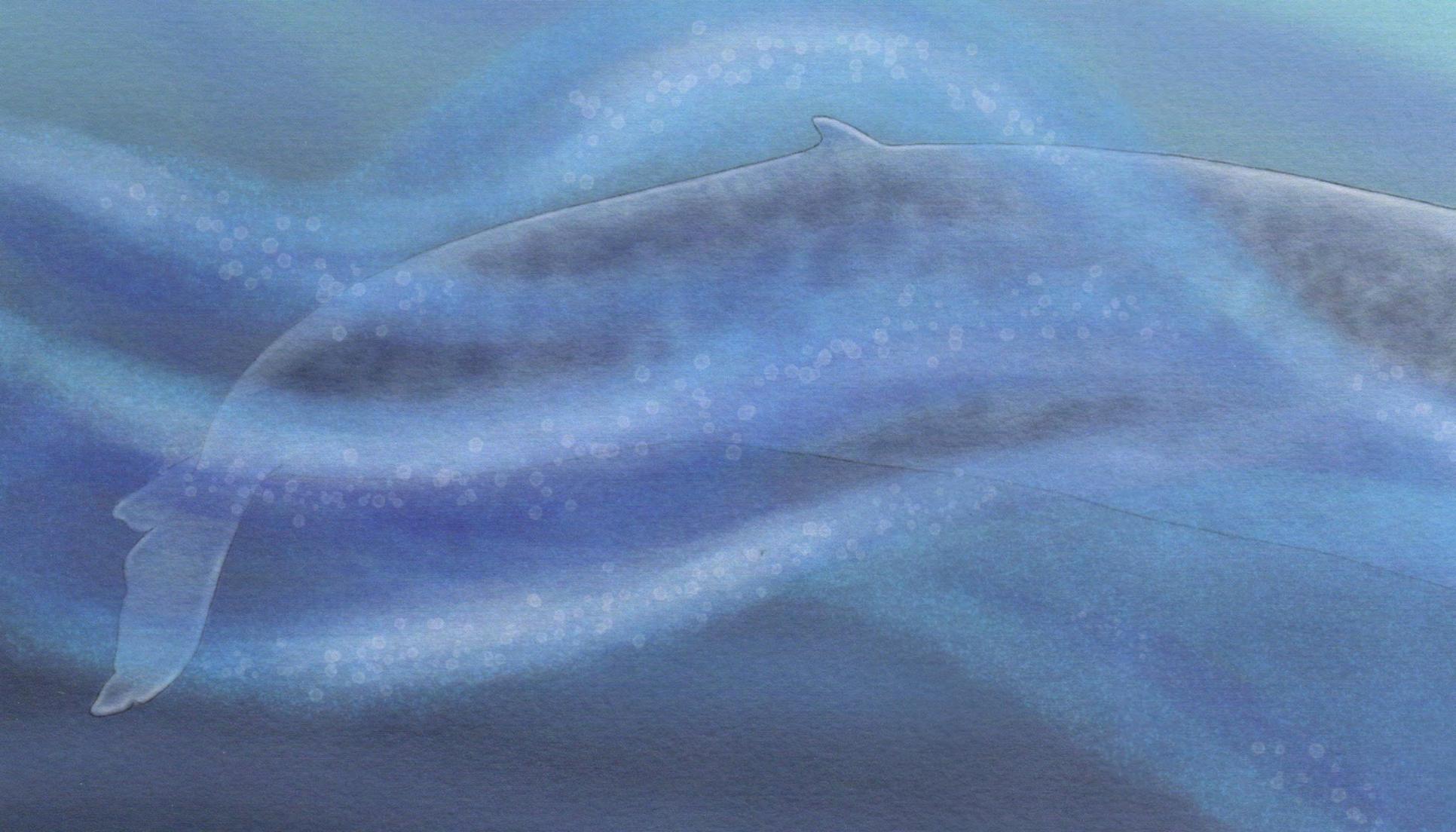




As a barreleye fish in your deep and dark home,
your brain could be seen through a clear liquid dome.

But if you were a coral with no brain at all,
you'd be part of a tropical, tentacled wall.





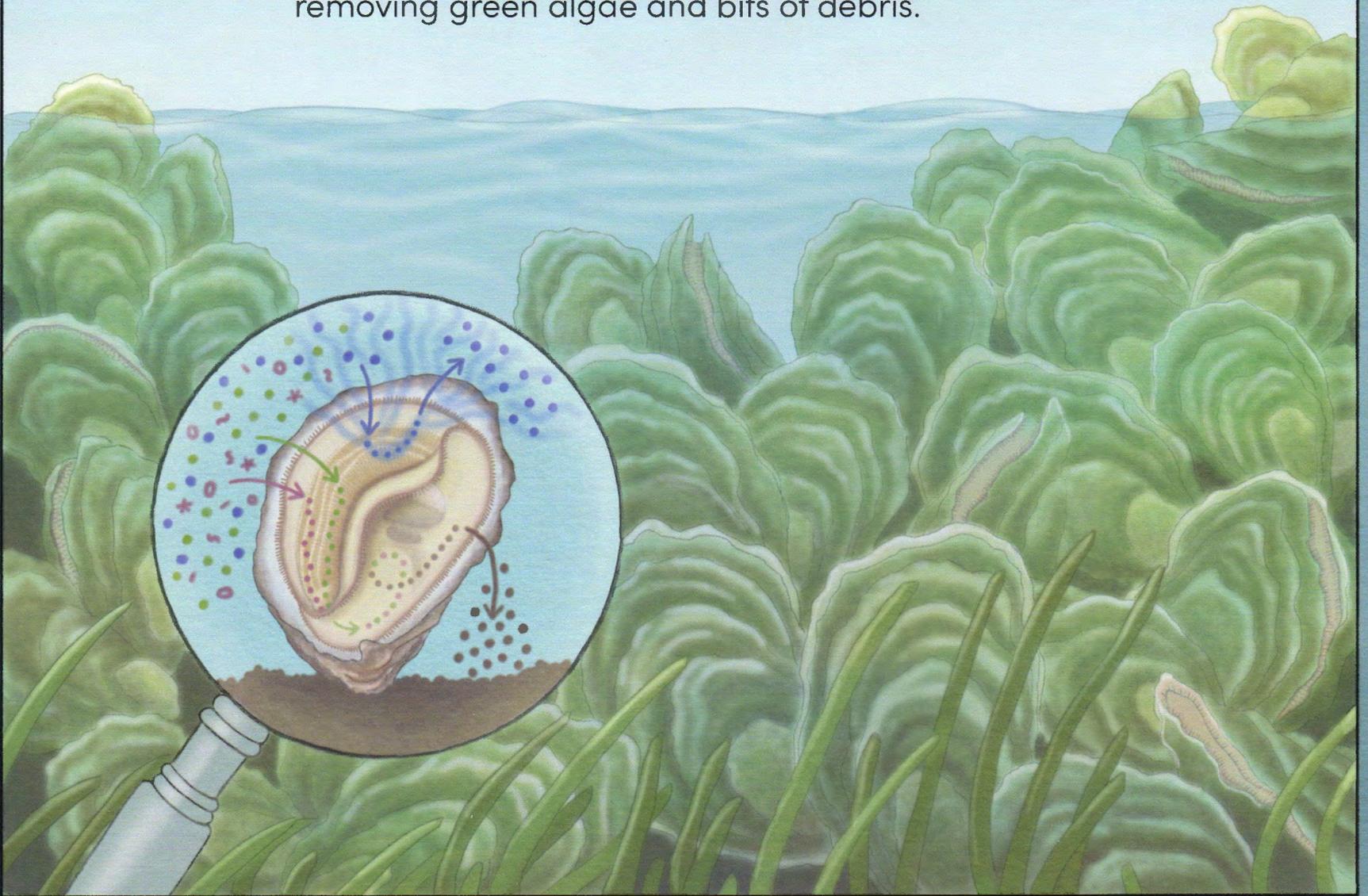
You might be a giant, a blue baleen whale,
with filters for teeth and two flukes for a tail,

or a teeny, wee plankton displaying your presence
by lighting the sea with your bright phosphorescence.

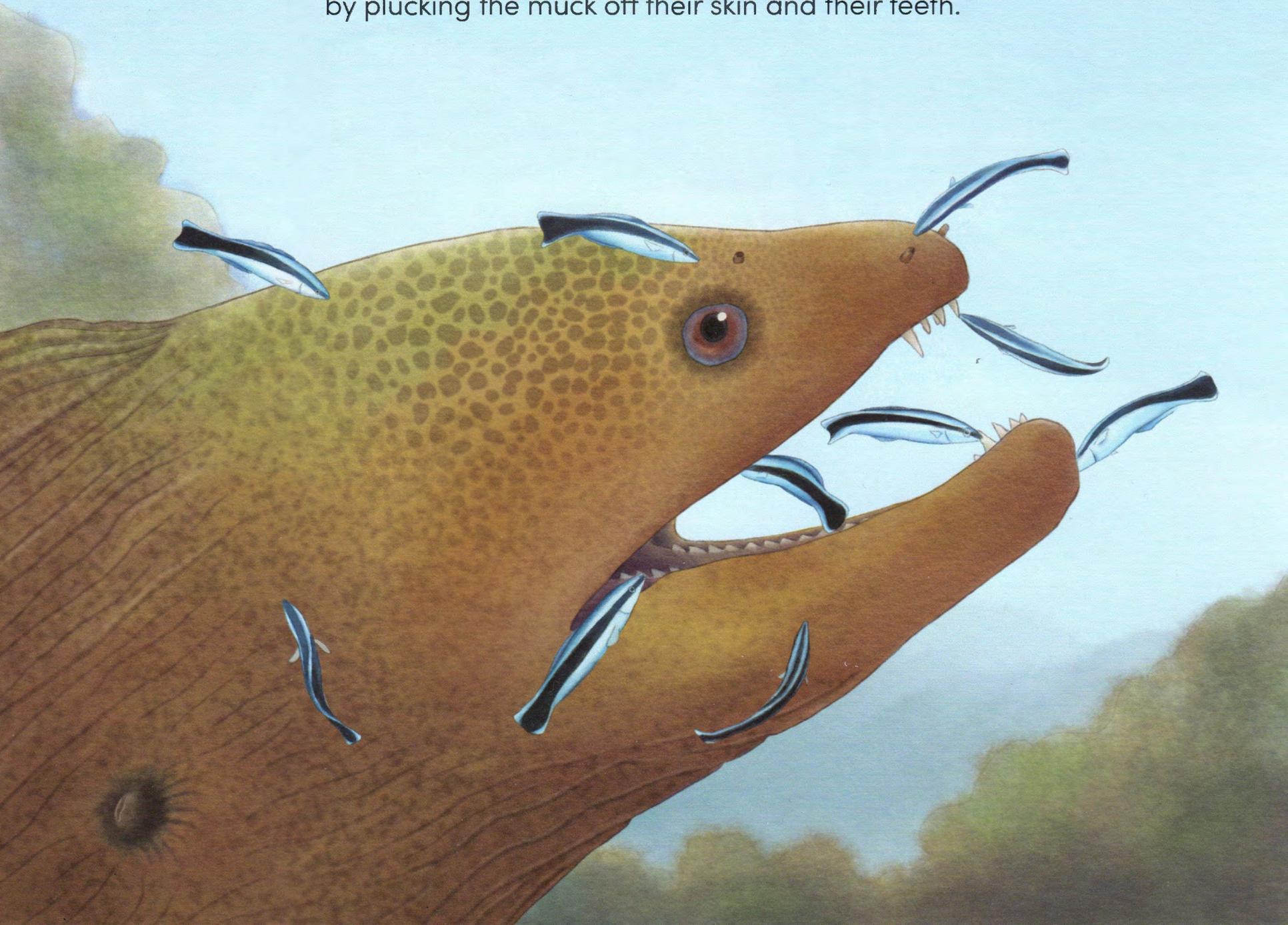


As a creature who dwells in the tides and the swell,
you'd have a big job that you'd surely do well.

You might be an oyster who filters the sea,
removing green algae and bits of debris.



Or perhaps you would clean fellow fish in the reef
by plucking the muck off their skin and their teeth.



But you'd play a big role and be part of a chain,
as important to Earth as the sun and the rain.

Whoever you'd be, there's one thing you can bet—
if you lived in the sea, you would surely get wet!



About the Animals

Still having trouble deciding who you'd be? It's not easy! There are millions of creatures who live in the sea. Here are some fun facts about the creatures in this book to help get you started.



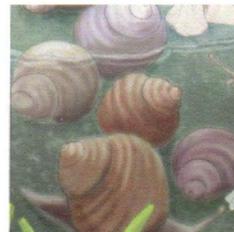
Anglerfish: Female anglerfish are famous for their glowing (scientific term, bioluminescent) "fishing pole," which acts as a lure to attract prey. It hangs just above and in front of their fang-filled face.



Dolphin: Among the dozens of species of dolphins, most love to surf. Scientists have a few theories about why they ride the waves. It could help them catch food or remove parasites from their skin. Another theory? Dolphins surf for fun, just like us!



Barnacle: Barnacles are crustaceans with outer shells and soft inner bodies. They make one of the world's strongest natural glues, which they use to stick themselves headfirst to hard surfaces, where they spend most of their lives.



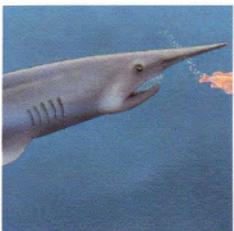
Sea Snail: Sea snails are slow-moving mollusks whose soft bodies are protected by a shell, and they come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. They move using a single muscular "foot," leaving behind a trail of mucus as they slide.



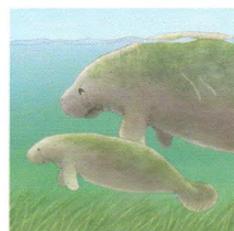
Orca: Orcas belong to the dolphin family, despite their nickname "killer whales." Orcas live in pods, social groups of up to 40 family members. They use echolocation (reflected sound waves) to hunt and communicate, and each pod has its own distinctive sounds.



Octopus: Octopuses are solitary creatures that can use camouflage, squirt clouds of ink, and squeeze into tiny nooks to defend themselves. They can even regrow an arm if they lose it in a fight.



Goblin Shark: Goblin sharks have long narrow snouts and fang-like teeth connected to jaws that they can push out of their mouths to catch prey. They are rarely seen, so scientists are still trying to learn more about this mysterious fish.



Manatee: Manatees are large "sea cows" that graze on seagrass and algae. They generally swim alone or in pairs, but occasionally, they meet in bigger groups to mate or share an area with a large supply of food.



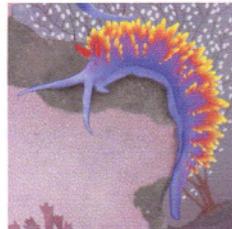
Cuttlefish: Cuttlefish can squirt ink and change texture and colors to mimic their surroundings. They have the unique ability to make mesmerizing rapid patterns that look like ripples of color flowing over their bodies.



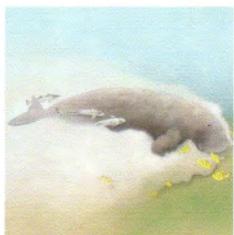
Anchovy: Anchovies are small, silvery fish that live in dense schools of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of individuals. They are an important food source for predators like salmon, halibut, and sharks, as well as mammals and seabirds.



Blobfish: Blobfish have virtually no bone or muscle, so when blobfish are removed from the deep sea and taken to the surface, their gelatinous bodies turn into blobs. In their home at depths of between 2,000 and 3,900 feet (600 to 1200 meters), they appear more fish-like.



Nudibranch: These shell-less mollusks include some of the fanciest slugs on the planet. Nudibranchs get their coloring from things they eat, like algae, sponges, corals, and anemones. They keep predators away with toxic secretions and stinging cells.



Dugong: Dugongs are vegetarians that use sensitive bristles on their snouts to find and graze on seagrass. As mammals that breathe oxygen, dugongs must come to the surface for air.



Elephant Seal: Some elephant seals can grow up to 20 feet (6 meters) long and weigh 8,800 pounds (360 kilograms). A male elephant seal inflates his large snout to intimidate other males and defend his territory. Their unusual “barks” can be heard from far away.



Sand Crab: Most types of sand crabs live in the “swash” zone (the area where waves wash up on the shore) and can only move backwards. Skillful diggers, they spend their days burrowing into the sand and extending their featherlike antennae to catch plankton.



King Penguin: These large birds are incredible divers, eating up to 2,000 fish per day. They use their flippers to dive to depths of up to 1,000 feet (300 meters) and have excellent vision to navigate deep waters.



Jellyfish: With no brains, heart, or blood, these creatures aren’t actually fish at all. They’re invertebrates with a slimy, jelly-like body that is made up of 95% water! Most jellyfish have tentacles and the ability to shoot out venom.



Squid: Like octopuses and cuttlefish, squids are cephalopods and use camouflage and squirt ink. Their ink produces a dark cloud, which is meant to confuse and distract predators, but it isn’t poisonous.



Walrus: These large animals live in herds near the Arctic Circle. Walruses have lots of blubber, which keeps them warm in the frigid Arctic climate. Both males and females have tusks that they use to pull themselves onto ice and to defend themselves.



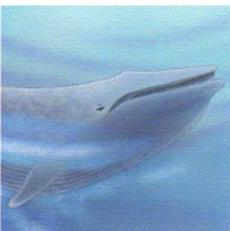
Beluga: Belugas are one of the smallest species of whale, known by their white color and “melon” foreheads. Living in pods in the Arctic Ocean, they use a distinct language made up of clicks, whistles, clangs, and chattering to communicate.



Sea Turtle: Sea turtles migrate incredibly long distances—up to 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometers) a year. They mate at sea, then females return to the beach where they were born to lay their eggs in the sand.



Barreleye Fish: This deepwater fish has a transparent dome-shaped head filled with clear liquid. Located in upward facing orbs in barrel-like tubes that can rotate forward, their eyes absorb the tiniest bits of light to help them find prey like the bioluminescent jellyfish.



Blue Whale: Blue whales can grow up to 100 feet long (30 meters) and weigh up to 200 tons (180,000 kilograms). In one day, a blue whale eats more than the weight of an African elephant in shrimplike crustaceans called krill.



Marine Iguana: Marine iguanas have strong legs and sharp claws to help them hold onto the sea bottom and climb onto rocks. They feed on underwater algae and use special glands to help sneeze out the excess salt. They are only found in the Galapagos Islands.



Flying Fish: Flying fish are tropical and temperate marine species that soar out of the water using winglike pectoral fins. They are attracted to light and can propel themselves up to 35 miles (56 kilometers) per hour.



Sea Anemone: Sea anemones are made up of a round disc with a mouth and stinging prey-catching tentacles. Sea anemones attach themselves to stationary objects and inject toxins into small crustaceans, fish, shrimp, and other prey that swims by.



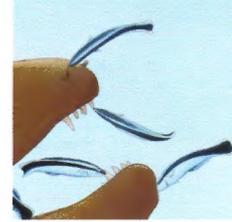
Coral: Coral is made up of individual brainless animals called polyps that divide into thousands of clones, connecting together to create a colony. Colonies join with other colonies to become reefs. Coral reefs provide shelter to animals and protect coastlines.



Plankton: Phytoplankton are microscopic algae (plant-like organisms) that drift, while zooplankton are microscopic animals. Many types of plankton produce flashes of light through a process called bioluminescence, making them appear phosphorescent—or glowing.



Oyster: Oysters live in clusters on hard surfaces, where they form reefs that become habitats for other species. Oysters are extremely valuable to ecosystems because they filter the water with their gills and remove pollutants from the sea.



Cleaner Wrasse: In tropical reefs, groups of cleaner wrasses set up cleaning “stations” where they eat parasites and dead skin off other reef fish. This provides protection and food to the wrasses, while other fish get to be cleaned in return.

End Note and Resources

Humans could not survive without healthy oceans. They affect all living creatures, whether we live in a seaside village or on a remote mountaintop. Not only do our oceans power Earth’s water and climate cycles, but they also contain plant and animal life that we depend upon to breathe, eat, work, and more. Although pollution, overfishing, climate change, and loss of habitat are putting ecosystems at risk, there are many people and organizations working hard to improve the health of our seas.

For more information, check out:

The Ocean Cleanup (theoceancleanup.com)

Oceana (oceana.org)

Sea Trees (seatrees.org)

Ocean Futures Society (oceanfutures.org)



*For Taffy and Dicky Bob, with eternal love and gratitude. ~ J.H.J.
For my dear friend, Penny, whose heart is as big as the sea. ~ M.S.*

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Illustrations © 2025 by Meg Sodano

For ages 4–8

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If you lived in the sea, would you dive to the depths of cold, murky water or fly high above warm coastal waves? With animals grouped according to opposite traits and shared characteristics, this rhyming adventure inspires readers to imagine what it would be like to live in the sea. From a grazing dugong rooting about to an elephant seal with an inflatable snout, readers will learn about a wide variety of beloved and obscure sea creatures and the lives they live beneath the spray. Curious minds can delve deeper into the extensive backmatter.

JULIE HONAN JOHNSTON grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, almost a thousand miles from the nearest ocean. When she and her four siblings took their first plunge in the stormy Pacific, the intrigue was instant. She went on to discover many more oceans and lands and has shared her passion for these places as an educator and writer. Though she doesn't currently live in the sea, she and her family live delightfully close to the Pacific Ocean in Berkeley, California. *If You Lived in the Sea, Who Would You Be?* is her first book for children. To find out more about Julie, visit juliehonanjohnston.com.

MEG SODANO is fascinated by changes in the natural world—life cycles, migrations, seasons, tides, weather—and with interactions among species and their environments. She uses her first-hand experiences, knowledge of biology, and training in science illustration to make picture books about ecology and conservation. Her illustrations appear in *Beaver and Otter Get Along...Sort Of* by Sneed B. Collard III, *Salamander Sky* by Katy Farber, and *Lila's Harbor* by C.J. Talbert. To find out more about Meg, visit msodanoillustration.com.


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