

Tessa and the Fishy Mystery



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"Tunza" means "to treat with care or affection" in Kiswahili. UNEP hopes to inspire caring for the Earth through creative literature that sparks the interest and awareness of children, their parents and teachers.

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Tessa loved living near the seashore. Each day after school she'd run down to the sparkling white beach, eager to play with her sea friends.

Dolphin let her ride his smooth back. They splashed and plunged, exploring castles of coral while visiting Parrotfish, Clownfish, Seahorse and Skate.

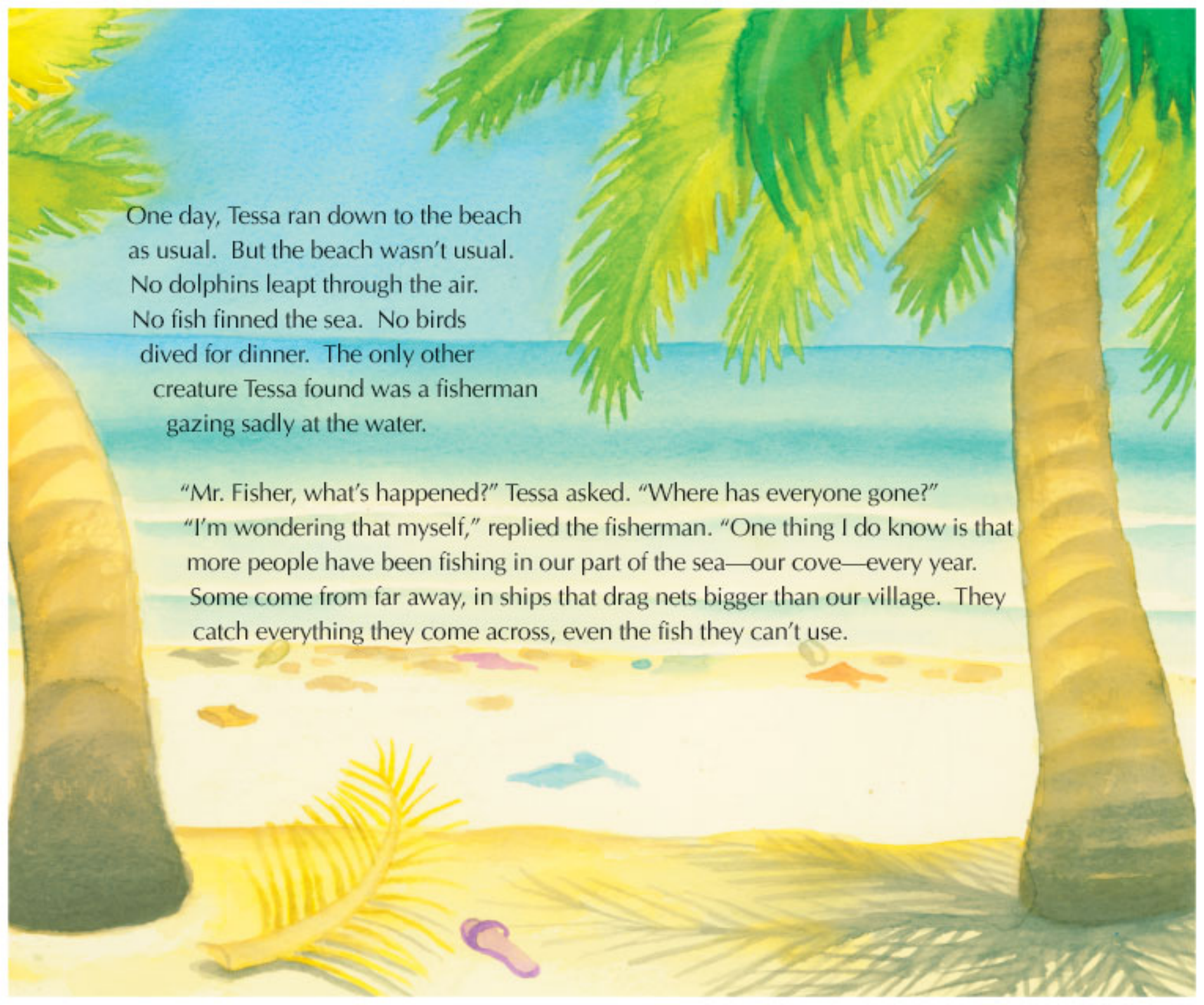


Parrotfish begged Tessa to play hide and seek.
Parrotfish sure could hide!
He'd squeeze through a crack in the coral—
and change color to blend right in.



Sandpiper would race with Tessa on the beach,
winging over the sand and landing again.





One day, Tessa ran down to the beach as usual. But the beach wasn't usual. No dolphins leapt through the air. No fish finned the sea. No birds dived for dinner. The only other creature Tessa found was a fisherman gazing sadly at the water.

"Mr. Fisher, what's happened?" Tessa asked. "Where has everyone gone?"
"I'm wondering that myself," replied the fisherman. "One thing I do know is that more people have been fishing in our part of the sea—our cove—every year. Some come from far away, in ships that drag nets bigger than our village. They catch everything they come across, even the fish they can't use."

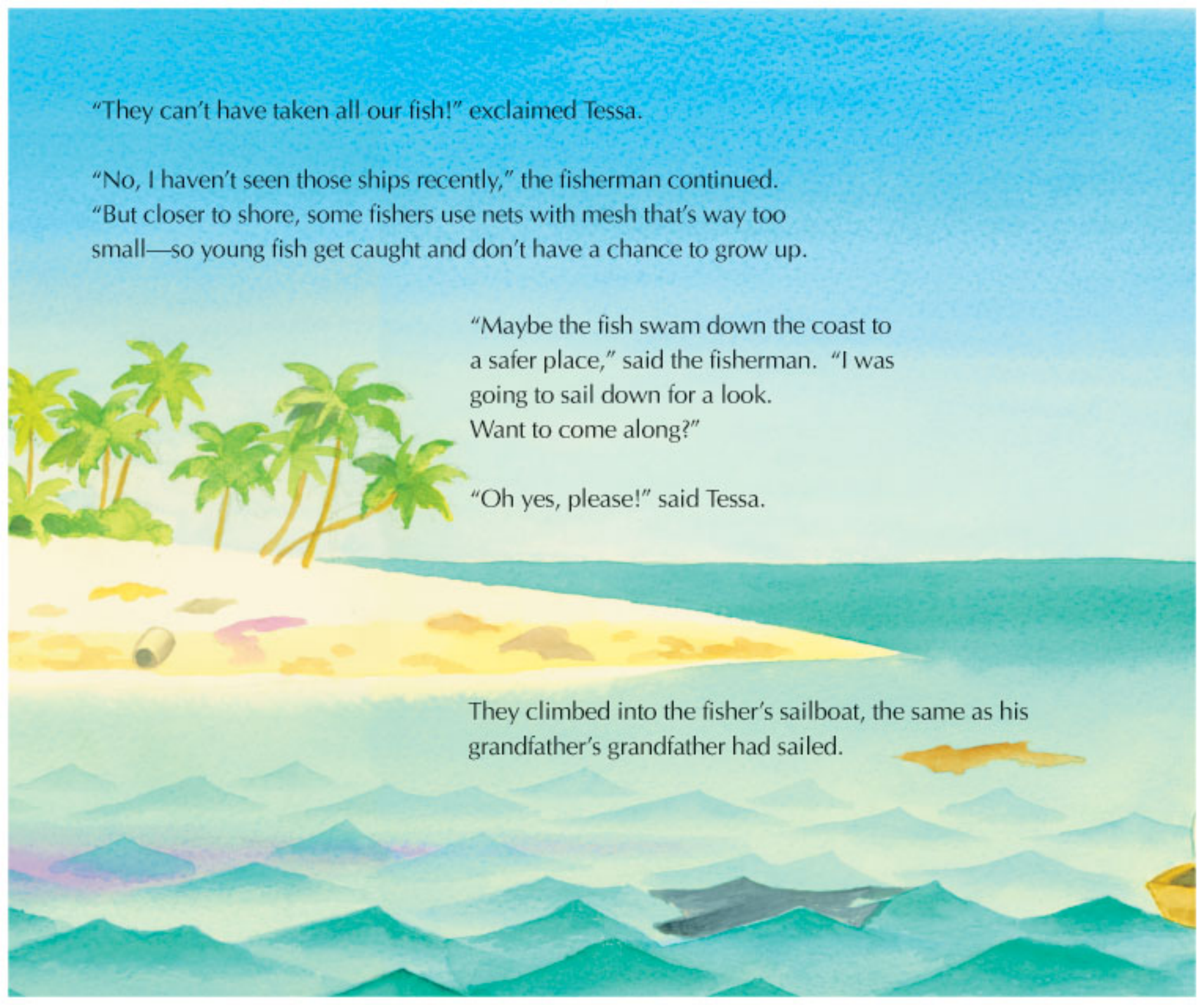
“They can’t have taken all our fish!” exclaimed Tessa.

“No, I haven’t seen those ships recently,” the fisherman continued.
“But closer to shore, some fishers use nets with mesh that’s way too small—so young fish get caught and don’t have a chance to grow up.

“Maybe the fish swam down the coast to a safer place,” said the fisherman. “I was going to sail down for a look. Want to come along?”

“Oh yes, please!” said Tessa.

They climbed into the fisher’s sailboat, the same as his grandfather’s grandfather had sailed.







Soon, a sea turtle came gliding by. As wide as the boat, she looked 100 years old, wrinkled and wise.

"Hello, Sea Turtle," called Tessa. "Have you seen the other water creatures?"

"Can barely see anything around here with all this garbage," replied Sea Turtle. "Seems every day there's more—soda cans, old shoes, plastic milk cartons.... Just yesterday I ate a plastic bag by mistake and made myself sick. Thought it was a jellyfish."

"Maybe the fish got fed up and swam down the coast to clearer water. Think I'll try that too," she concluded and drifted out of sight.

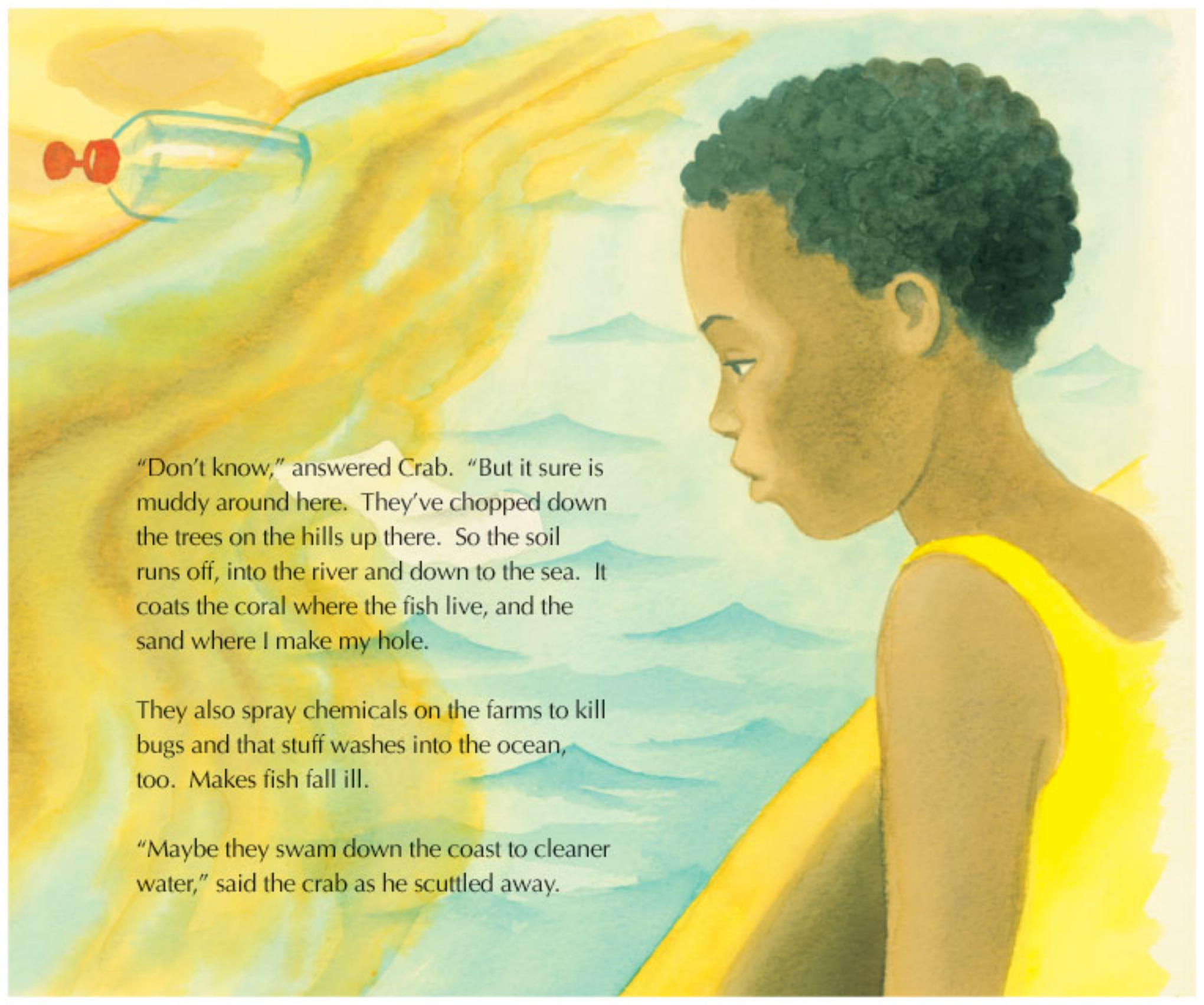


Next, Tessa and the fisher came across a little crab.

"Hello, Crab," called Tessa.

"Where have all the sea creatures gone?"





"Don't know," answered Crab. "But it sure is muddy around here. They've chopped down the trees on the hills up there. So the soil runs off, into the river and down to the sea. It coats the coral where the fish live, and the sand where I make my hole.

They also spray chemicals on the farms to kill bugs and that stuff washes into the ocean, too. Makes fish fall ill.

"Maybe they swam down the coast to cleaner water," said the crab as he scuttled away.

Next, they found a black and white seagull floating in the air. “Hey Seagull,” yelled Tessa. “Do you know where all the fish have gone?”

“Nope” said the bird. “But I saw folks come and tear out the mangrove trees where the baby fish used to hide. Maybe they swam down the coast to a nice, cool mangrove forest.”

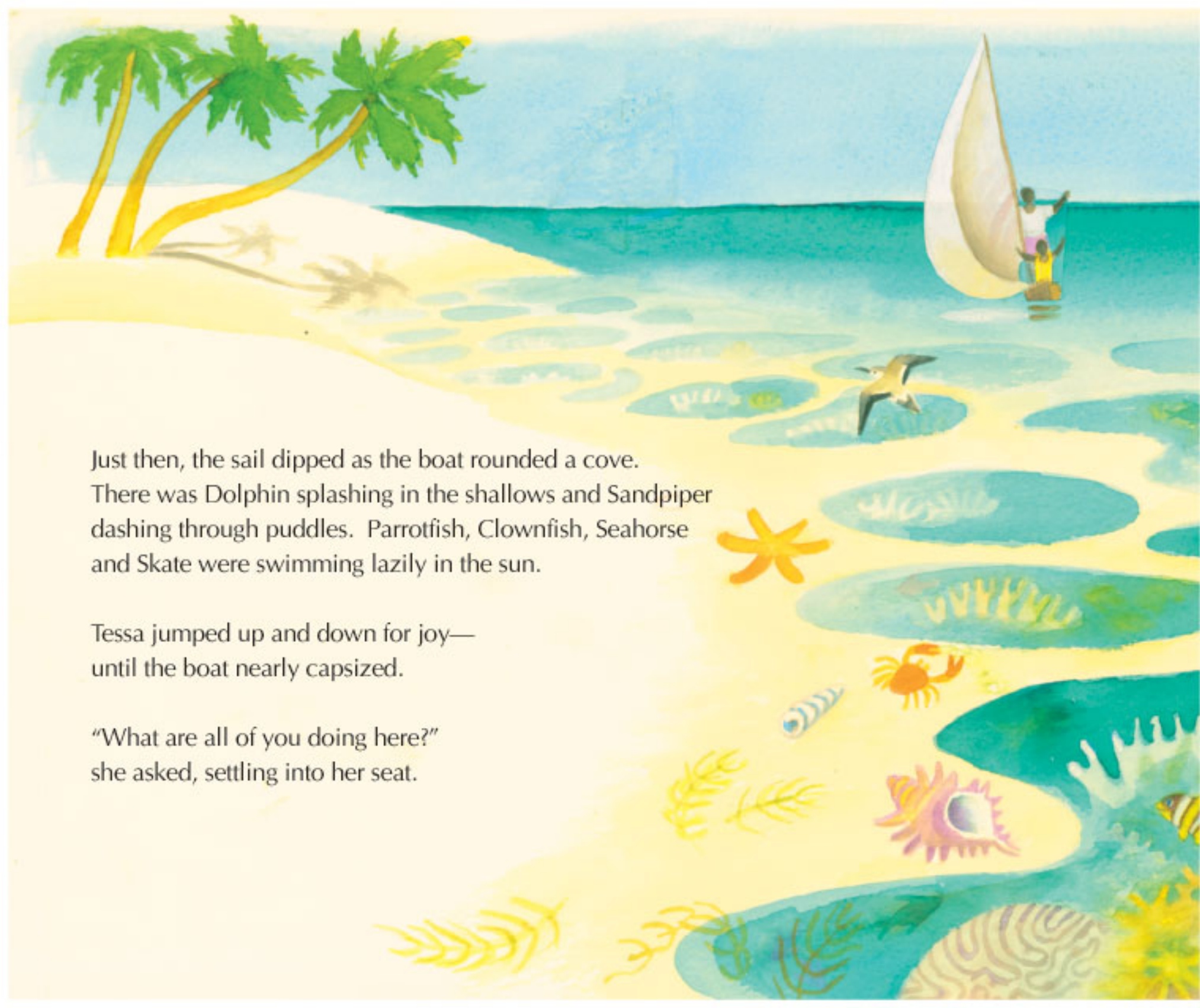
Tessa turned to the fisherman: “I had no idea that we shouldn’t throw garbage in the water—that’s what everybody does at home. And surely, all the farmers need to kill bugs, right? The hilltop forests and those mangroves—don’t we need them for wood?”

“It sounds hopeless,” she sighed.

“I’m afraid we’ll never see our fish again.”







Just then, the sail dipped as the boat rounded a cove. There was Dolphin splashing in the shallows and Sandpiper dashing through puddles. Parrotfish, Clownfish, Seahorse and Skate were swimming lazily in the sun.

Tessa jumped up and down for joy—until the boat nearly capsized.

“What are all of you doing here?” she asked, settling into her seat.

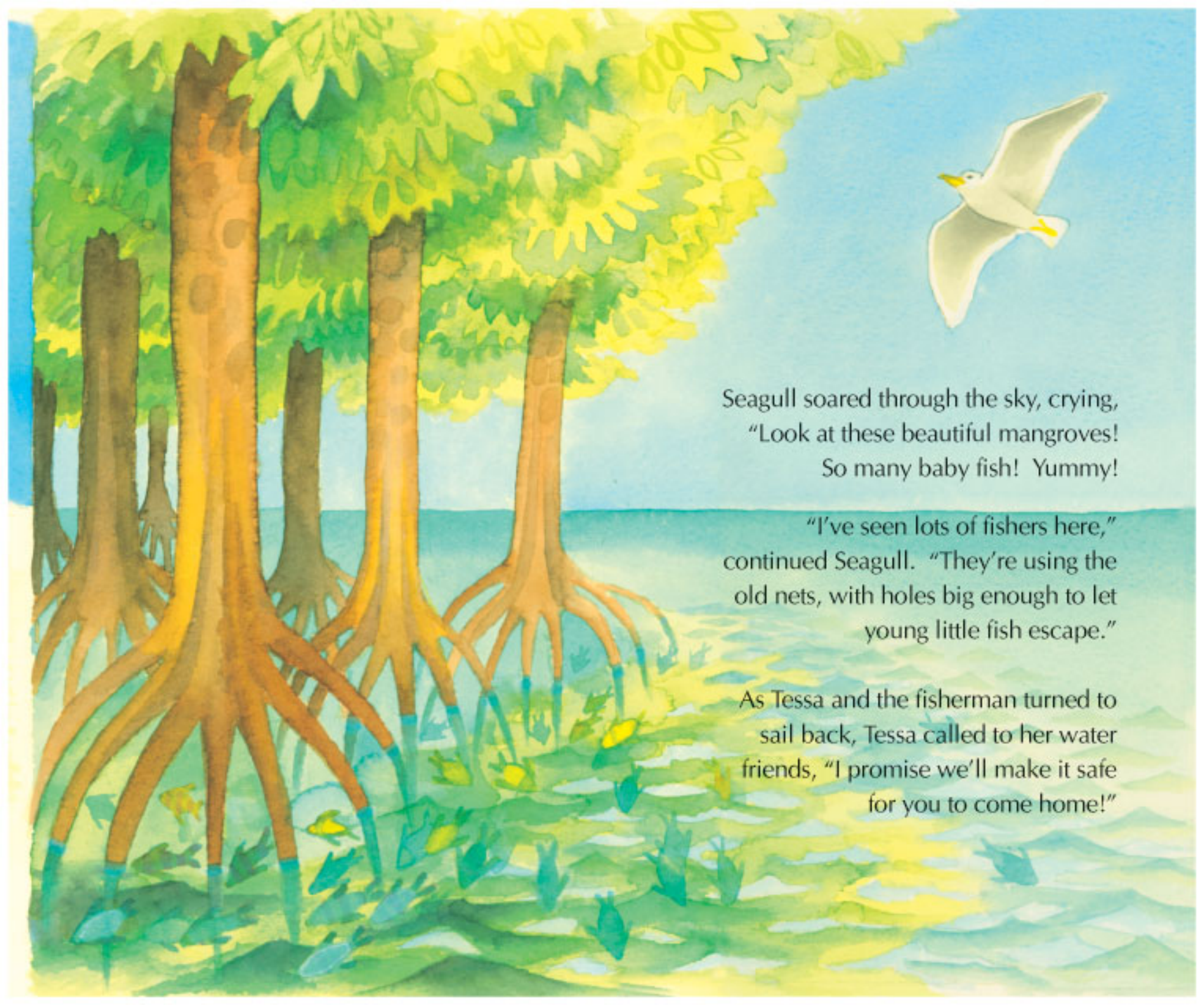




Sea Turtle shouted, "They've cleaned up this whole place! I can swim anywhere without bumping into garbage!"

Crab called, "Look, no mud! I can find my hole and the coral's healthy. They must have planted lots of trees up in the hills. The water even tastes clean—no chemicals!"





Seagull soared through the sky, crying,
“Look at these beautiful mangroves!
So many baby fish! Yummy!”

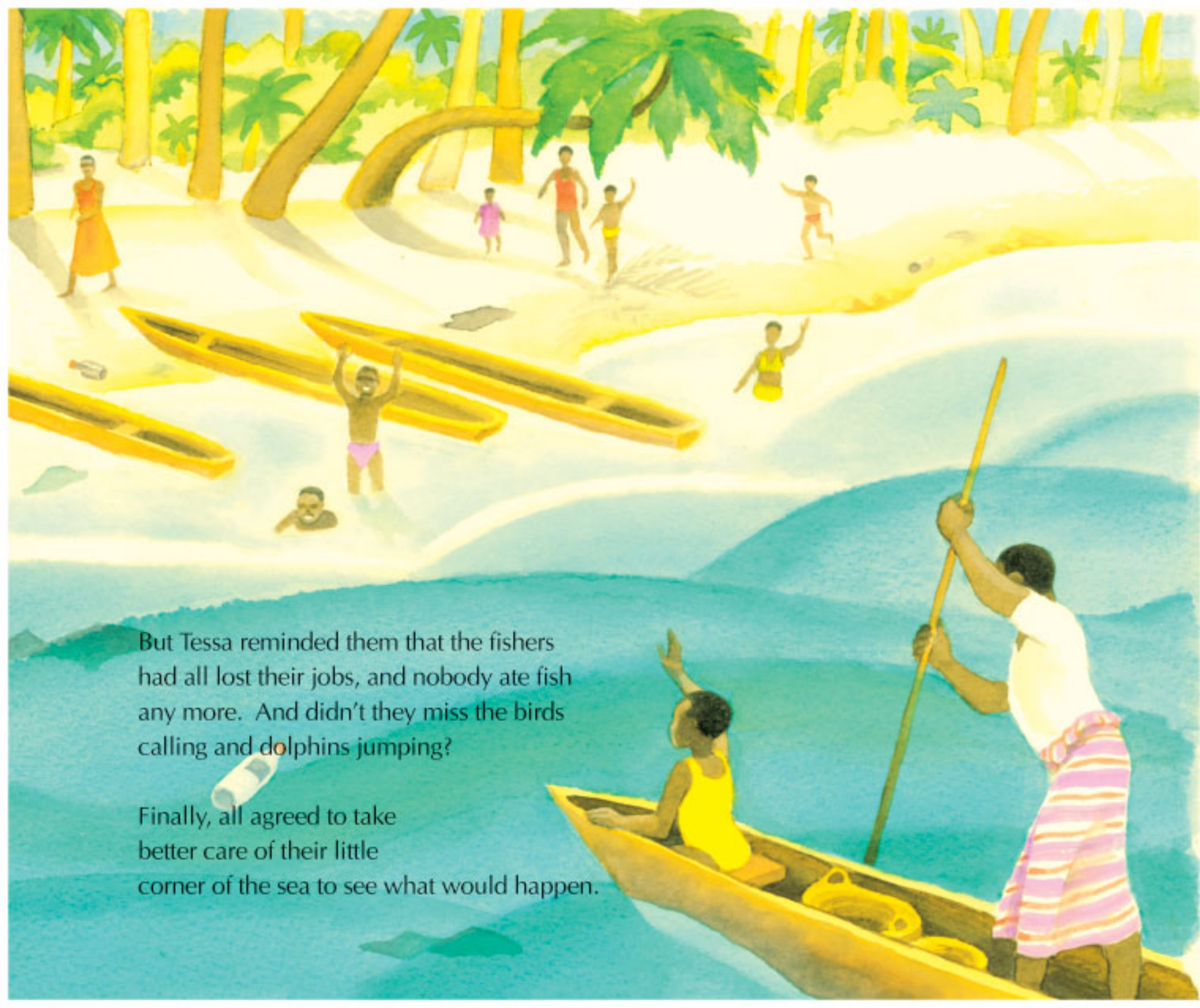
“I’ve seen lots of fishers here,”
continued Seagull. “They’re using the
old nets, with holes big enough to let
young little fish escape.”

As Tessa and the fisherman turned to
sail back, Tessa called to her water
friends, “I promise we’ll make it safe
for you to come home!”



Everyone in Tessa's village came out to welcome her. They were worried since she'd been gone so long. Tessa was nervous but knew how important it was to share what she'd learned. Standing tall, she told everyone how to make their cove a good home for the fish again.

At first, people argued: "The ocean's so big—what difference can we possibly make?" Others asked, "Why should we change what we've always done?"



But Tessa reminded them that the fishers had all lost their jobs, and nobody ate fish any more. And didn't they miss the birds calling and dolphins jumping?

Finally, all agreed to take better care of their little corner of the sea to see what would happen.

The next week, the town held a tree-planting festival.
They planted thousands of seedlings on hillsides and along the shore.

After that, they brought in farmers to teach people how to grow food
without using lots of chemicals.



The fishers changed nets, so they'd only catch bigger, older fish.





Meanwhile, every afternoon Tessa ran down to the beach to search for her water friends. And every afternoon she was disappointed.

Finally one day, she caught sight of Dolphin.
"Come swim with me!" he called.



Overjoyed, Tessa climbed on Dolphin's back. As they cruised along, Tessa saw all her old friends—Parrotfish, Clownfish, Seahorse and Skate. Sandpiper skimmed along the beach.

"We promise we'll never leave again, as long as you keep our beautiful water clean" they sang out together.





Some facts and figures on seas and oceans

1. Oceans cover 70 per cent of our planet. All the oceans are connected as well. "If you stick your finger into the sea, you're connected with the whole world," goes an old saying from Croatia.
2. Seas and oceans are home to an amazing array of creatures. Tens of thousands of species of fish, turtles, birds and other creatures live in and around the ocean. In fact, scientists believe that the sea is where all life began, billions of years ago.
3. Chances are you live or people you know live near the shore: more than 40 percent of all the people in the world live within 60 kilometers of the sea, and this number is growing.
4. Coral reefs are a bit like walls under the water, but they are alive. Large groups, or colonies, of tiny animals called coral polyps build the reefs. Each polyp secretes chemicals to build a little shelter for itself, but millions and millions of polyps end up building an enormous structure: coral reefs can be over 1,000 miles long! Australia's Great Barrier Reef can be seen from space! Coral reefs are home to an enormous variety of sea life. About 4,000 species of fish depend on them for food or protection. Coral reefs line the shores of 109 countries. In 93 of these countries, though, coral reefs are being harmed by pollution, building along the coast, harmful fishing practices, the rising temperature of the sea, and even tourism.
6. Mangrove forests, where tree roots grow right into the water, and seagrass beds, where plants grow on the seabottom, are also vital habitats for fish and other creatures. Protecting coral reefs, mangrove forests, and seagrass beds can greatly increase both the number of fish and their size. This in turn helps fishermen and the communities that depend on fishing.
7. Most of the garbage and chemical pollution in the sea starts on land. For instance, plastic waste is a big problem. Up to a million sea birds, and 100,000 sea mammals such as dolphins and whales, die each year because they eat plastic or get tangled in it. So do many sea turtles and countless fish.

What can you do?

- 1) Join a youth group, such as a Wildlife Club or Girl or Boy Scouts. Youth groups can sponsor trips to see the shore, help you learn about our precious environment, and sponsor clean-ups—even events to help save sea turtle babies. If you live on the shore, try to find an environmental group and volunteer.
- 2) Remember that everything you dump—from a plastic bag to oil from a vehicle—ends up washing into the ocean sooner or later. So when you go shopping, carry a basket or cloth bag for your purchases instead of getting a plastic bag. Encourage your family and friends to do this too.
- 3) If your town has a recycling programme, make sure you recycle your waste—plastic, glass, newspapers. If not, encourage your family to dispose of waste properly—burying any plastic deeply if you don't have garbage collection services. Burning plastic creates toxic fumes.
- 5) If you have a garden, try to grow your vegetables and flowers without chemicals, or use as little as you can. That's healthier for you and your family as well as the sea creatures. Environmental groups can advise you on how to control insects without lots of chemicals.
- 4) When you visit the coast, be gentle. If there's a coral reef there, don't walk on it or break pieces off. Living coral can be easily killed.
- 5) Plant trees, especially kinds that grow naturally in your area. As well as providing shade and habitat for all sorts of creatures—and possibly fruit or nuts for you—trees hold the soil in place, so it doesn't erode and wash into the sea.

