

OCEAN COMMOTION: SEA TURTLES

Under the warm, silvery sand on a moonlit beach in Florida, a tiny turtle hatched from her soft white egg. All around her the jumble of other turtles shuffled and shifted. *Ouch!* Someone's flipper poked her in the eye. She felt the urge to crawl upward out of the crowded dark, but first she had to digest the last of her yolk.



Two more nights she lingered and when the sand near the surface was cool and damp against her beak, *wiggle, waggle, jiggle, squirm!* She set off a chain reaction. All the **hatchlings** began to fidget at once, and as the sand caved in around them, it created a turtle elevator they rode to the surface.

She was the first to **emerge**. The sand crust covering her eyes fell away when she blinked. She looked one way, then the other, and in that instant the dark shape of the shoreline was forever fixed in her memory. A hundred other turtles popped out all around her.

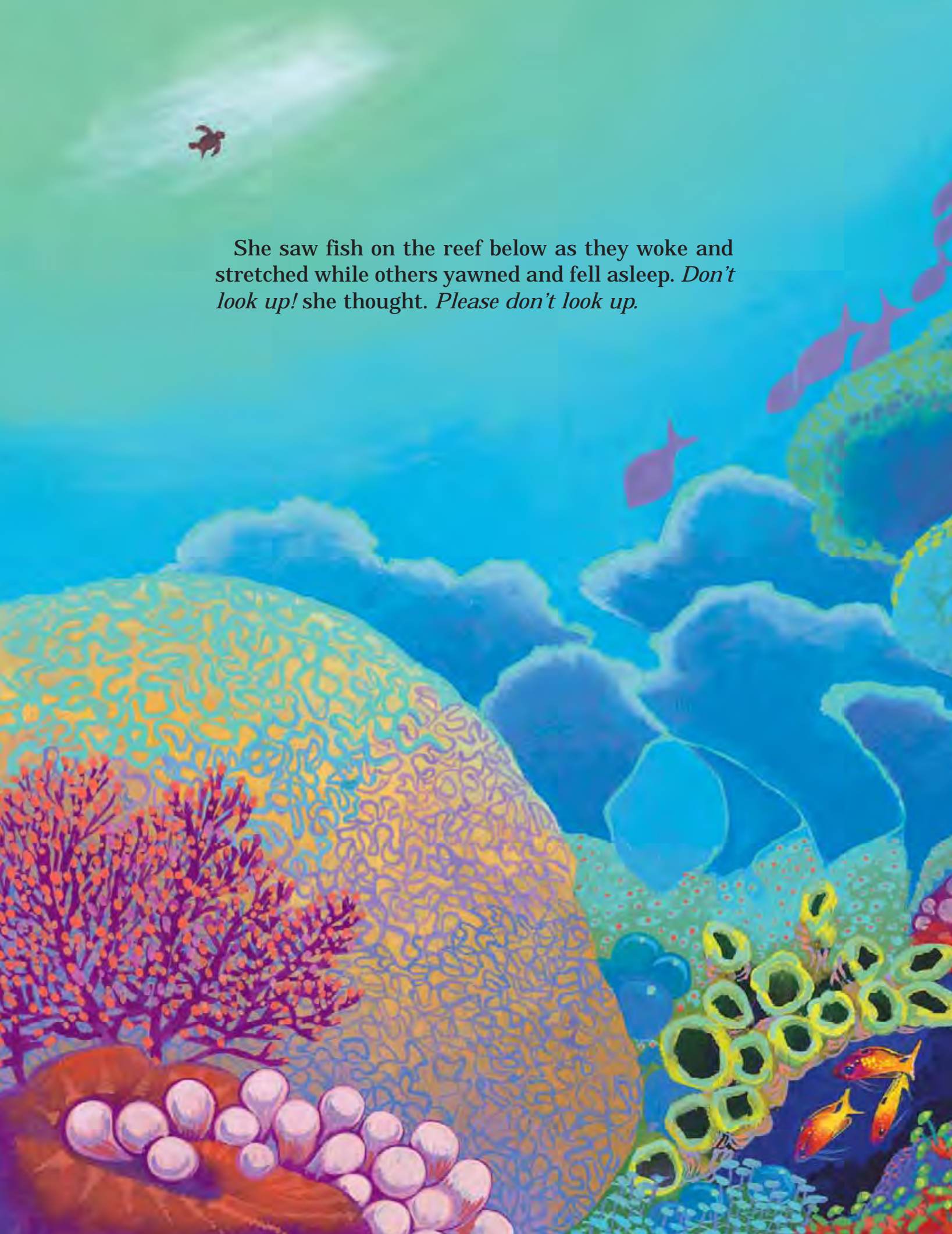


It was a **frenzy!** She dashed down the beach, away from the dunes and the trees. She toppled past a raccoon, skittered around a crab, and tumbled into the ocean. *I did it!* she thought.



In the confusion of the noise and bubbles of the waves, she bobbed for a second, but when a big fish splashed out of the water, her flippers spun like a wind-up toy and she shot out of the shallows.





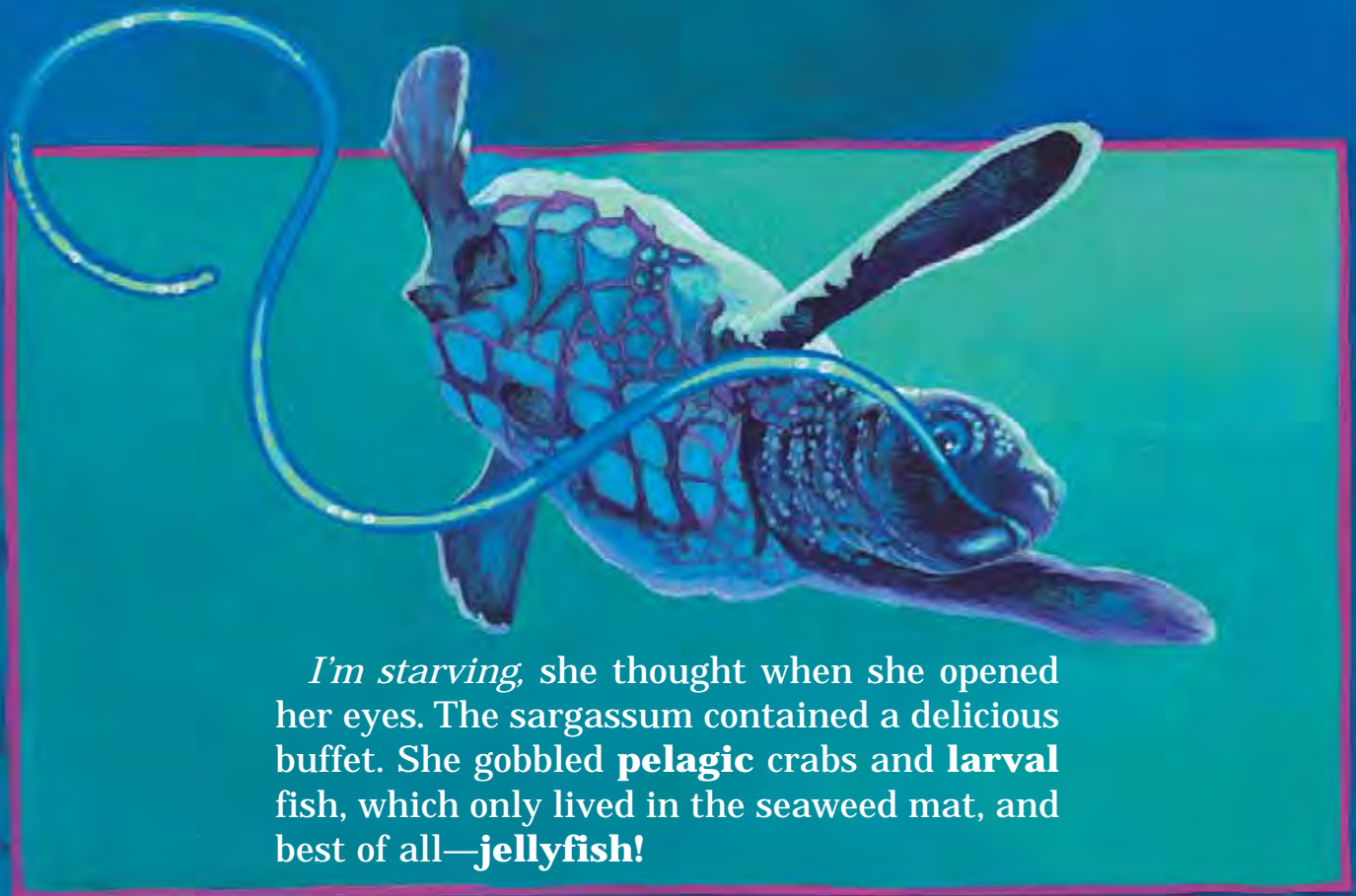
She saw fish on the reef below as they woke and stretched while others yawned and fell asleep. *Don't look up!* she thought. *Please don't look up.*





For three whole days, the tiny turtle swam. Every time she looked back, there were fewer hatchlings following her. On the third night, when she couldn't lift a flipper one more time, the **Gulf Stream** caught her in its **current**.

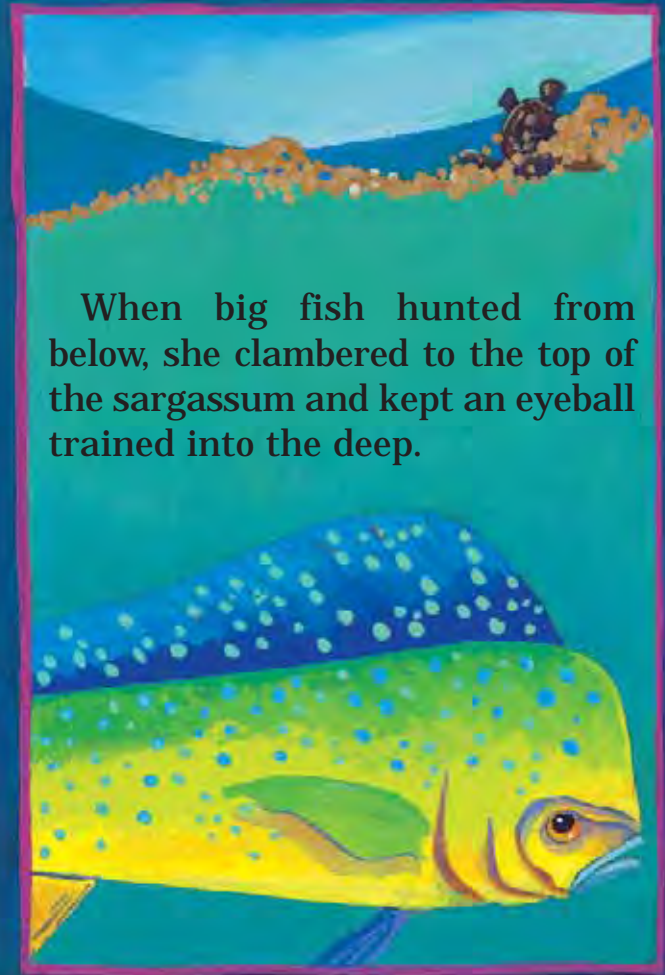
She rocked with the strong northward flow. A passing raft of **sargassum** tangled in her flippers. She wound its air sacs around her $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch shell, fell sound asleep, and drifted through her exhausted dreams.



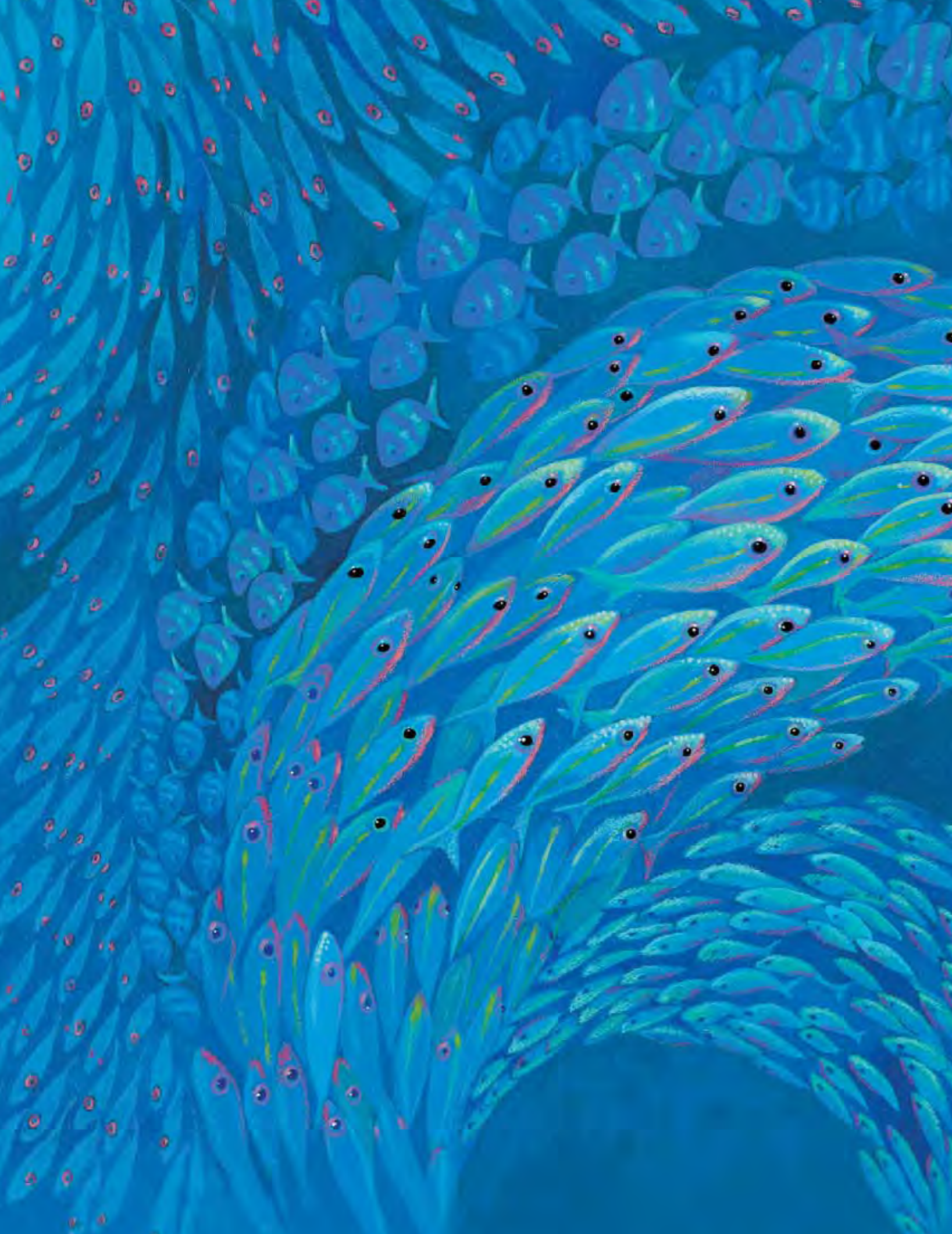
I'm starving, she thought when she opened her eyes. The sargassum contained a delicious buffet. She gobbled **pelagic** crabs and **larval** fish, which only lived in the seaweed mat, and best of all—**jellyfish!**

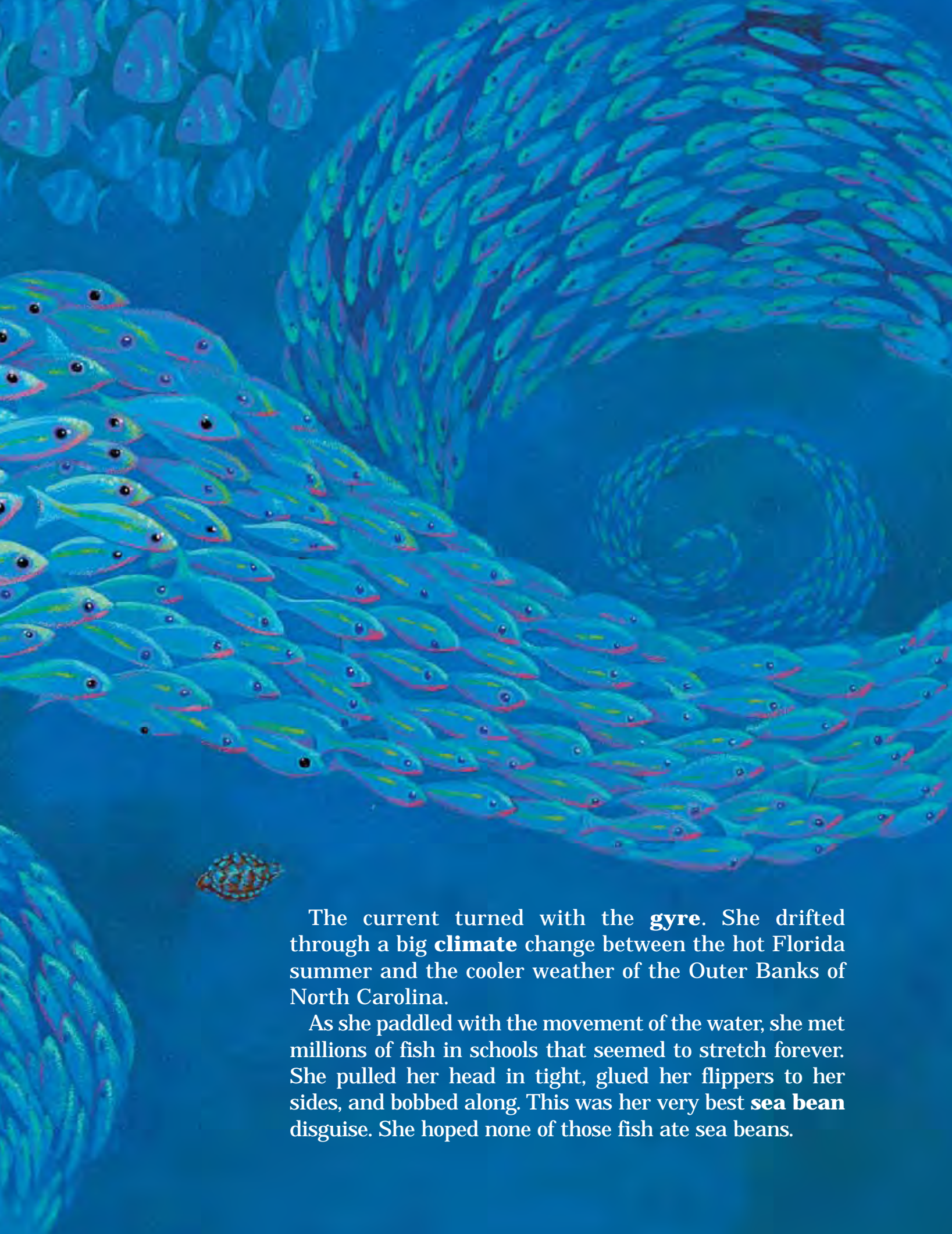


When sea birds circled above, she held her breath and wiggled deep into her floating home to hide.



When big fish hunted from below, she clambered to the top of the sargassum and kept an eyeball trained into the deep.





The current turned with the **gyre**. She drifted through a big **climate** change between the hot Florida summer and the cooler weather of the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

As she paddled with the movement of the water, she met millions of fish in schools that seemed to stretch forever. She pulled her head in tight, glued her flippers to her sides, and bobbed along. This was her very best **sea bean** disguise. She hoped none of those fish ate sea beans.