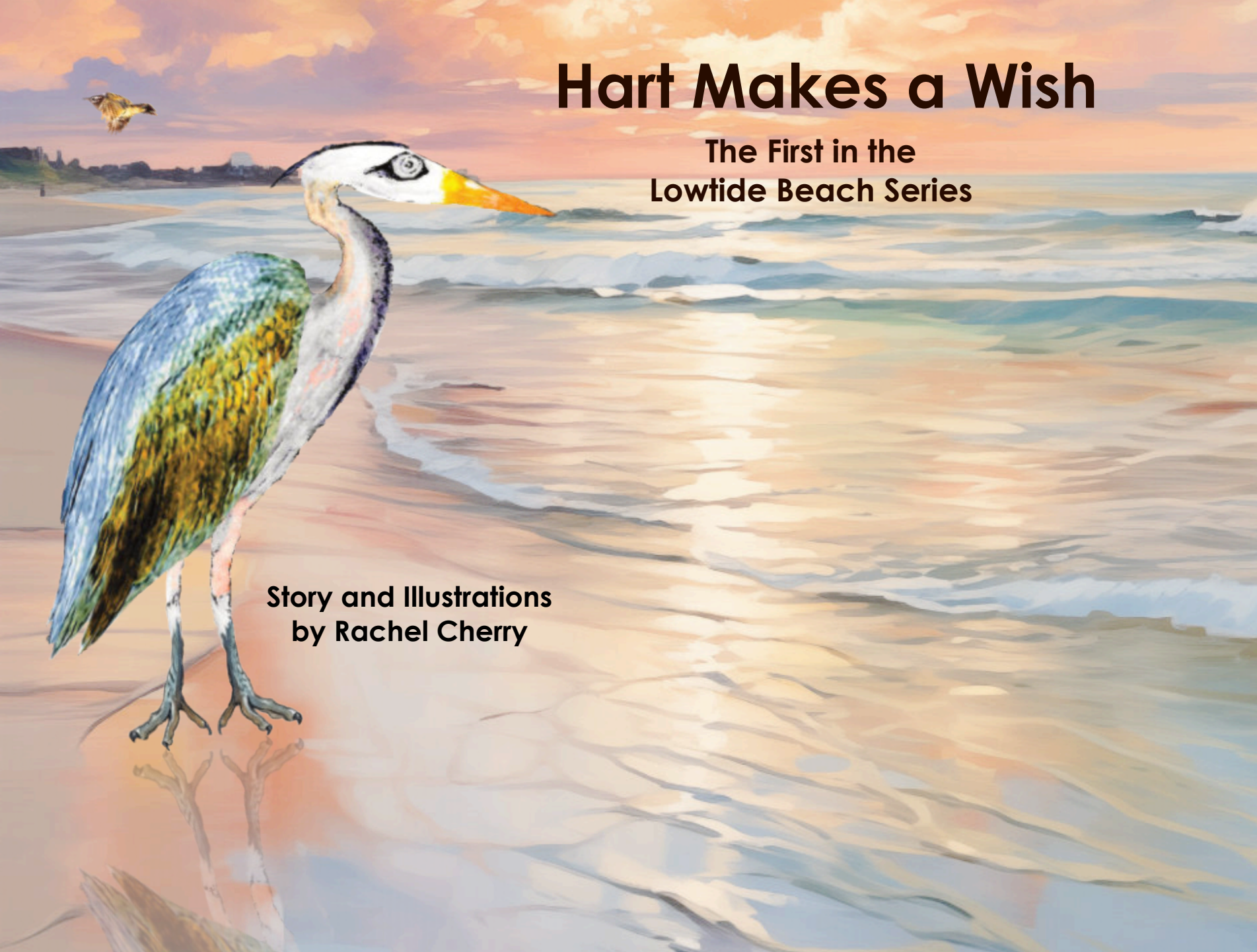
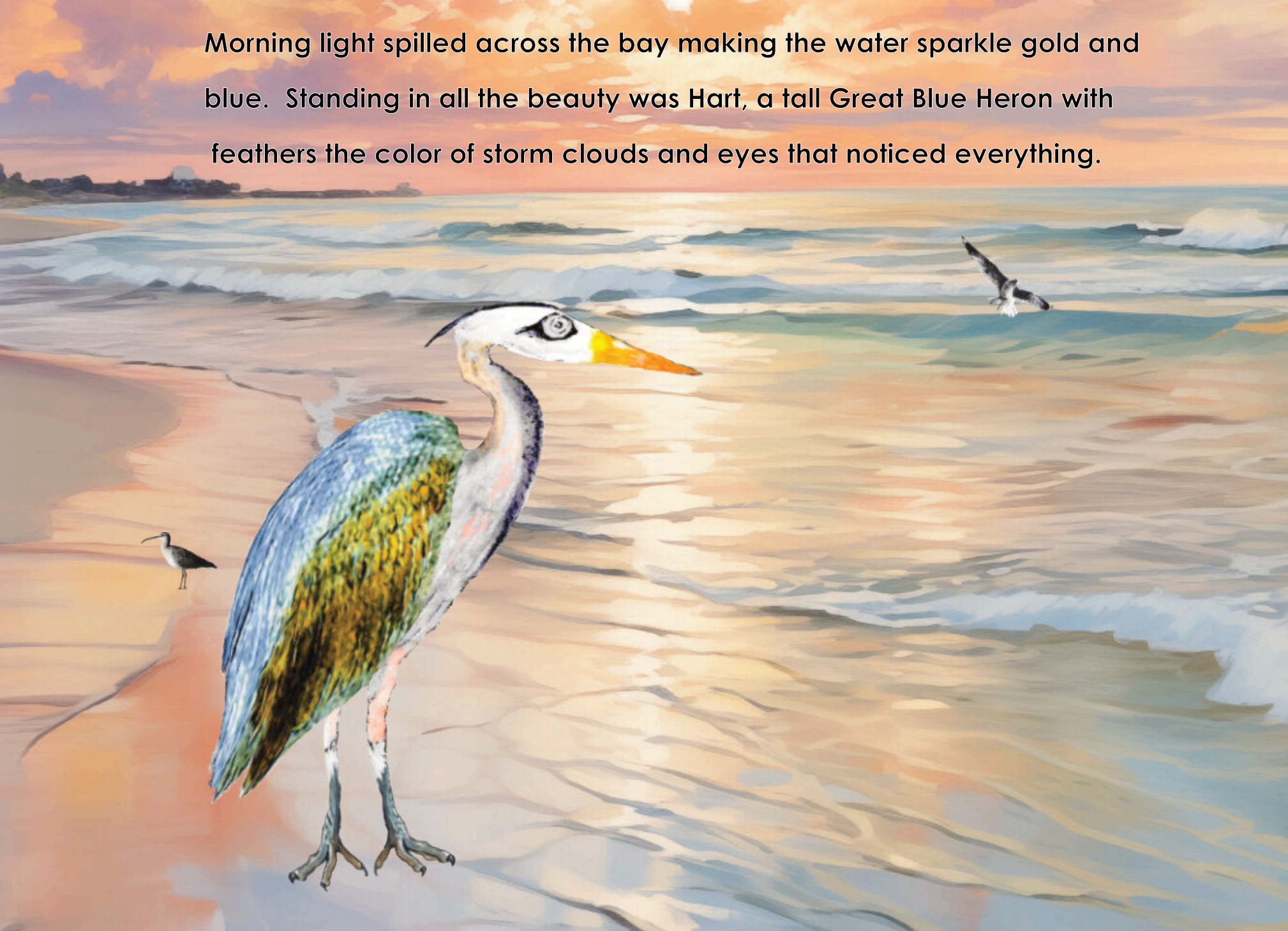


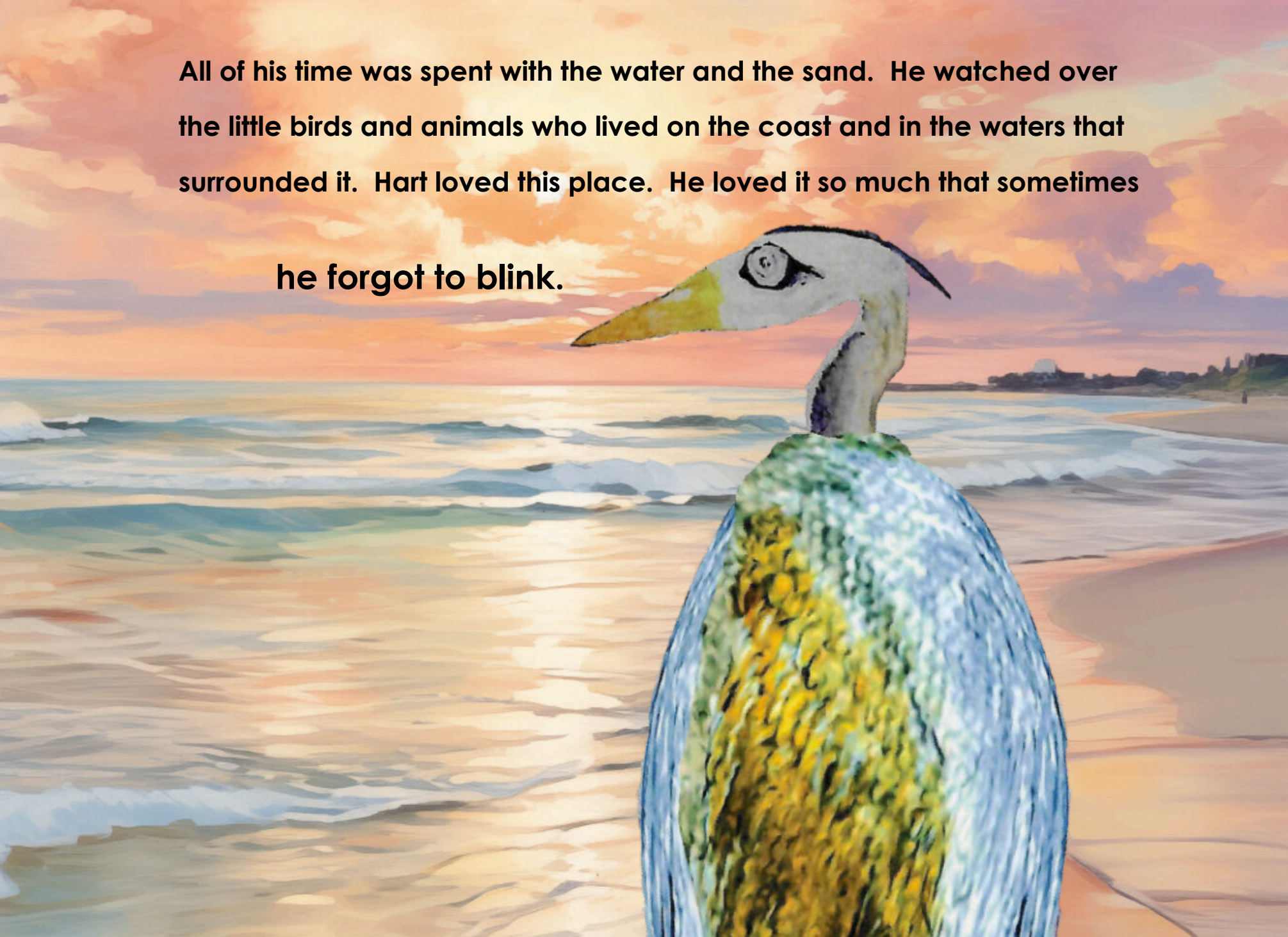
Hart Makes a Wish

The First in the
Lowtide Beach Series

Story and Illustrations
by Rachel Cherry



Morning light spilled across the bay making the water sparkle gold and blue. Standing in all the beauty was Hart, a tall Great Blue Heron with feathers the color of storm clouds and eyes that noticed everything.



All of his time was spent with the water and the sand. He watched over the little birds and animals who lived on the coast and in the waters that surrounded it. Hart loved this place. He loved it so much that sometimes

he forgot to blink.



Hart was not loud. Hart was not flashy. He did not flap around or squawk or make a fuss. He simply watched.

He watched the tides. He watched the wind. He followed the tiny footprints left by sandpipers racing to breakfast and when someone needed something, Hart was always the first to step in and help, such as being a shelter from a storm as it arrived on the shore.

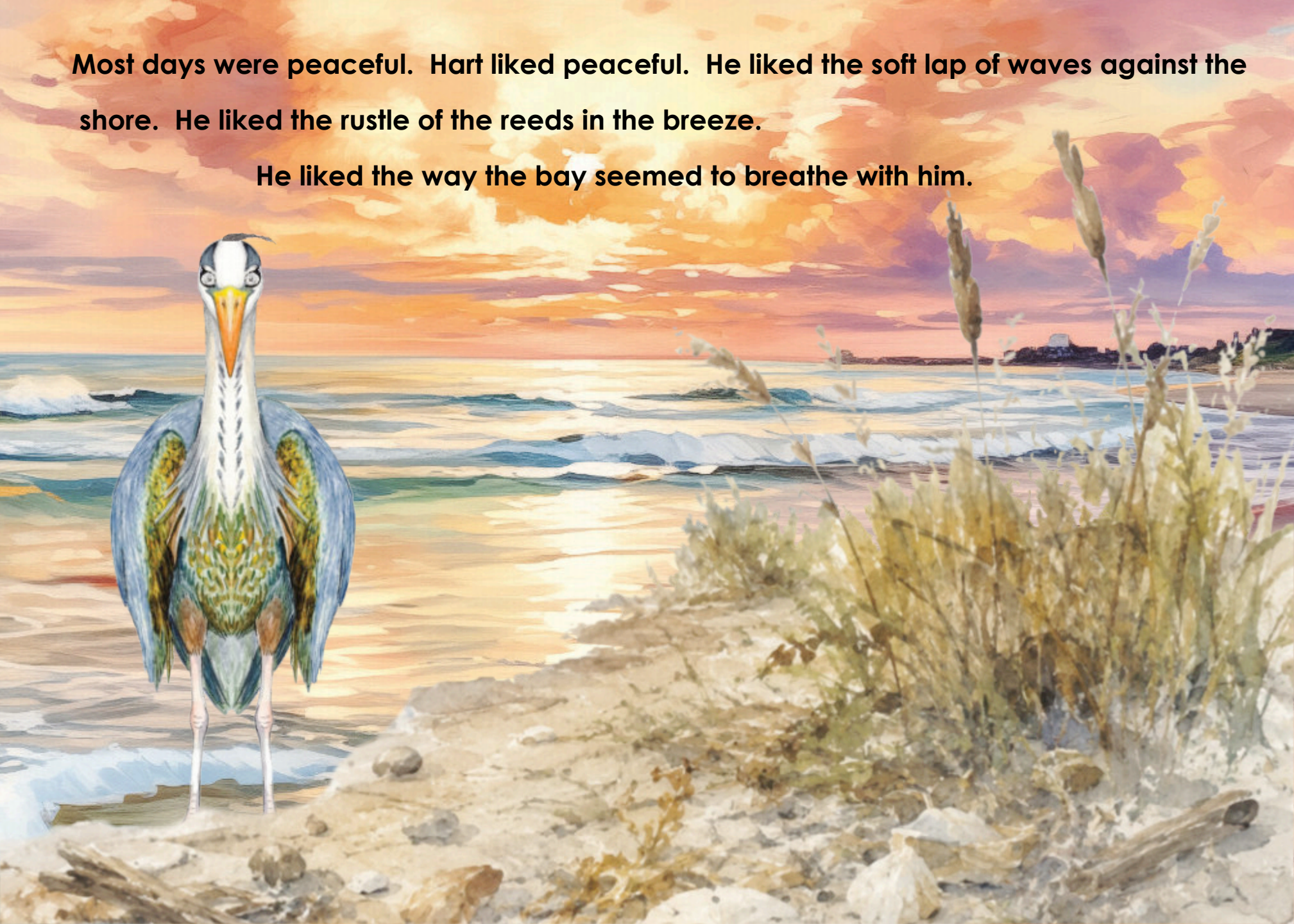




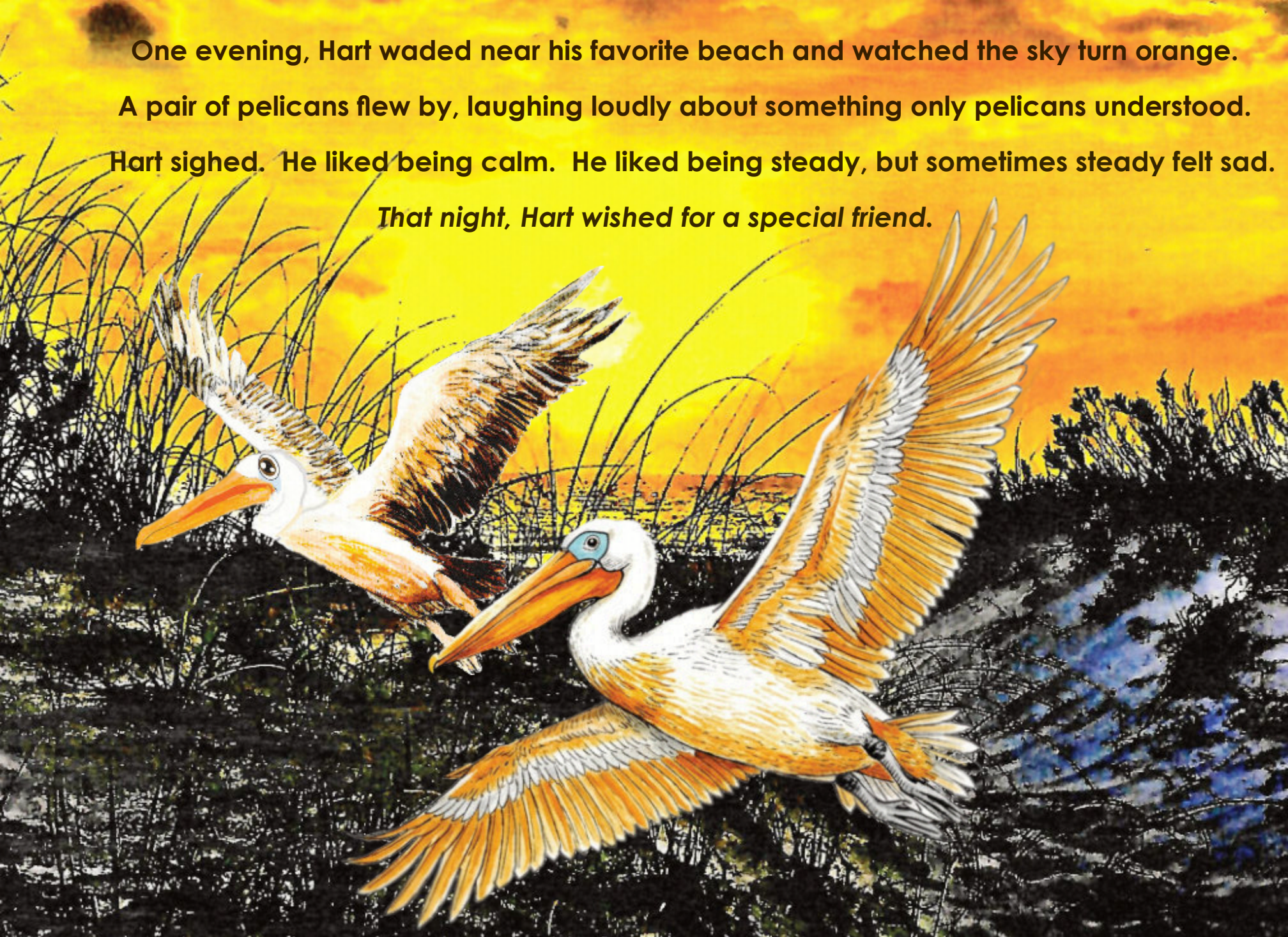
One morning, he guided a lost baby turtle back to the water. Another day, he gently untangled a crab who had her seaweed wig caught in a fishing line. (The crab insisted she did not need help. The crab was wrong).

Hart even helped the gulls sometimes, though they usually pretended they had already planned to do the right thing.




Most days were peaceful. Hart liked peaceful. He liked the soft lap of waves against the shore. He liked the rustle of the reeds in the breeze.
He liked the way the bay seemed to breathe with him.


Sometimes when the sun dipped low and the waters turned quiet . . .
Hart felt something else, too. He felt a small, gentle ache.
It was a feeling that maybe, just maybe something was missing.

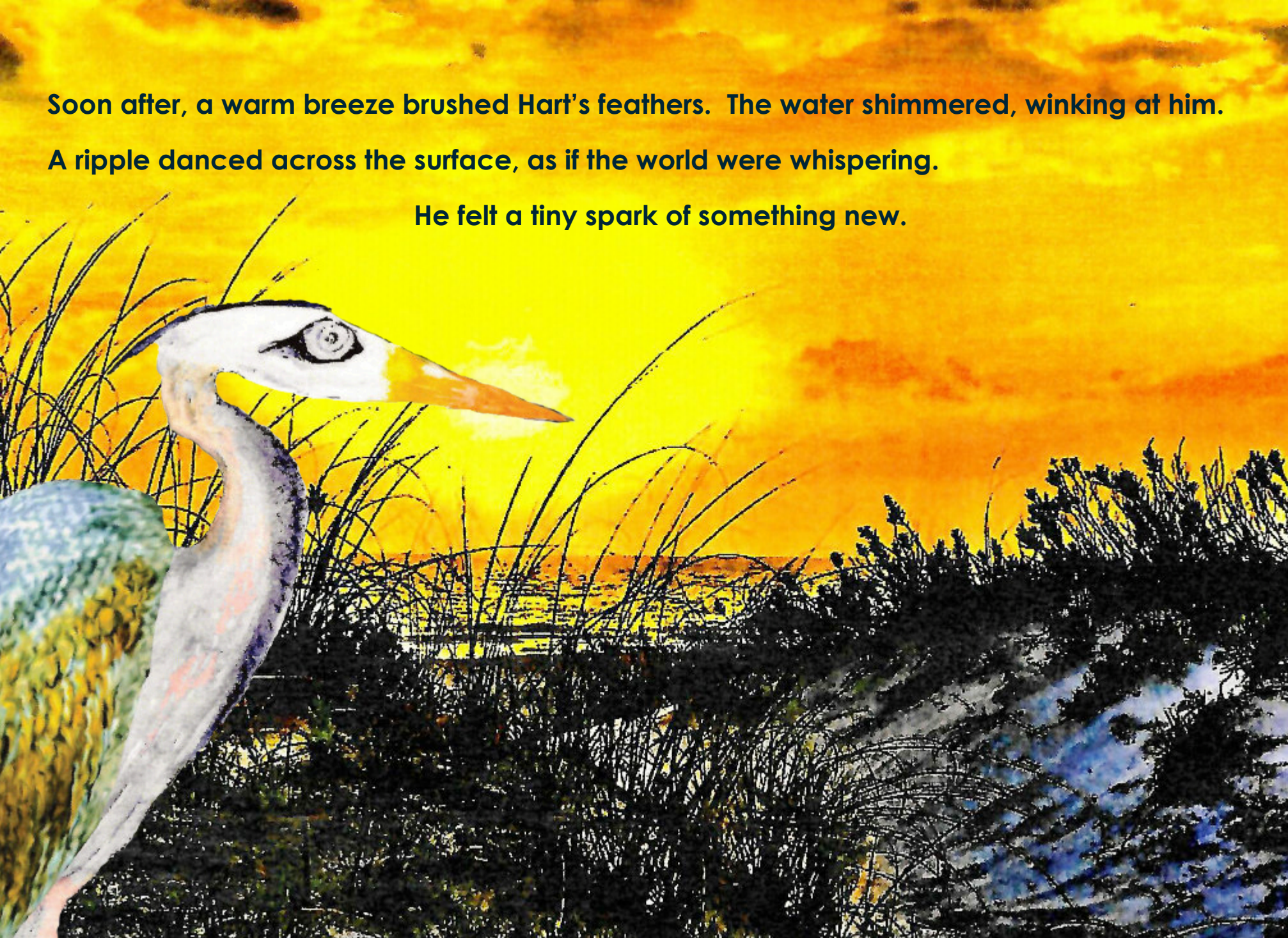


One evening, Hart waded near his favorite beach and watched the sky turn orange.

A pair of pelicans flew by, laughing loudly about something only pelicans understood.

Hart sighed. He liked being calm. He liked being steady, but sometimes steady felt sad.

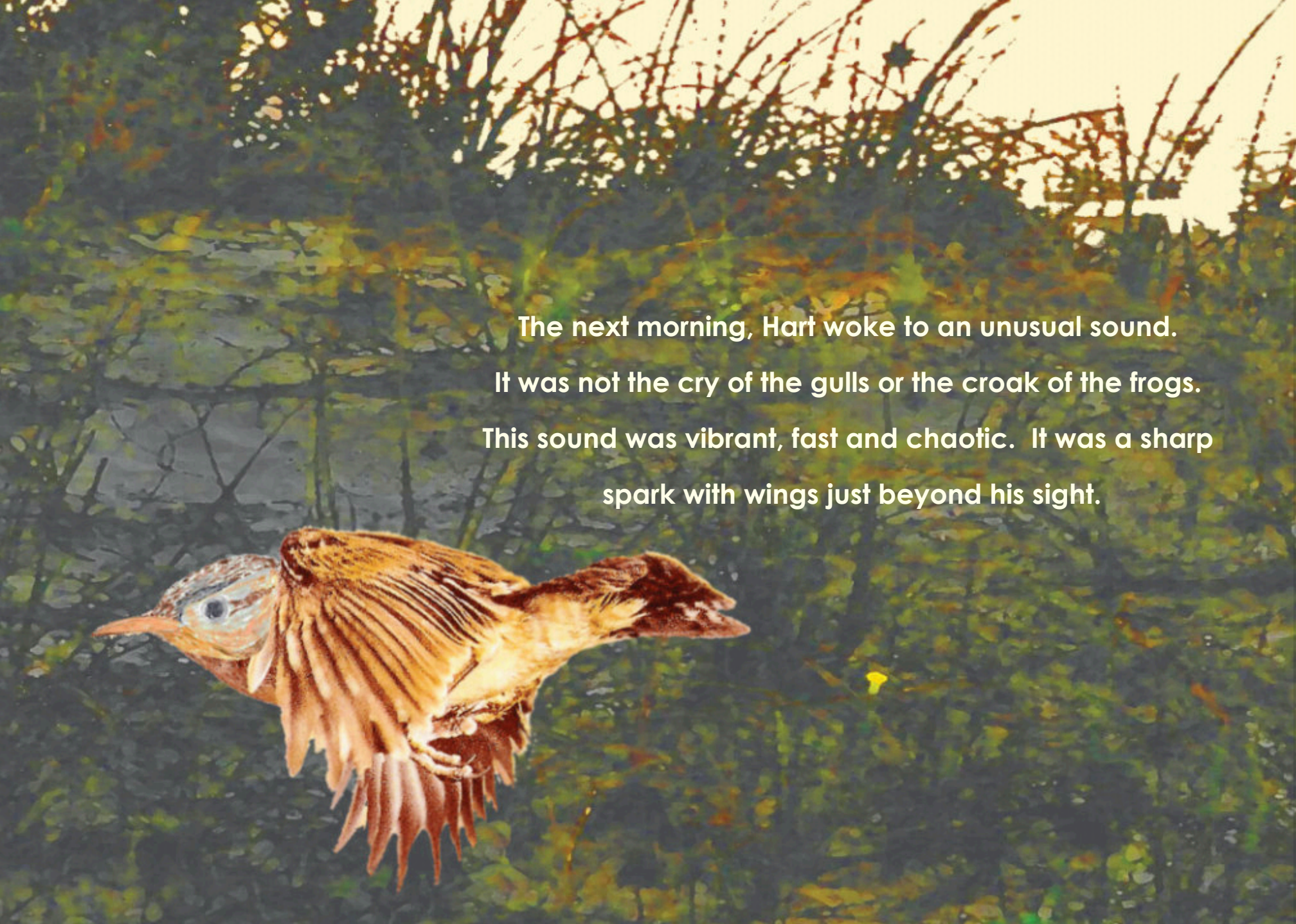
That night, Hart wished for a special friend.



Soon after, a warm breeze brushed Hart's feathers. The water shimmered, winking at him.

A ripple danced across the surface, as if the world were whispering.

He felt a tiny spark of something new.



The next morning, Hart woke to an unusual sound.

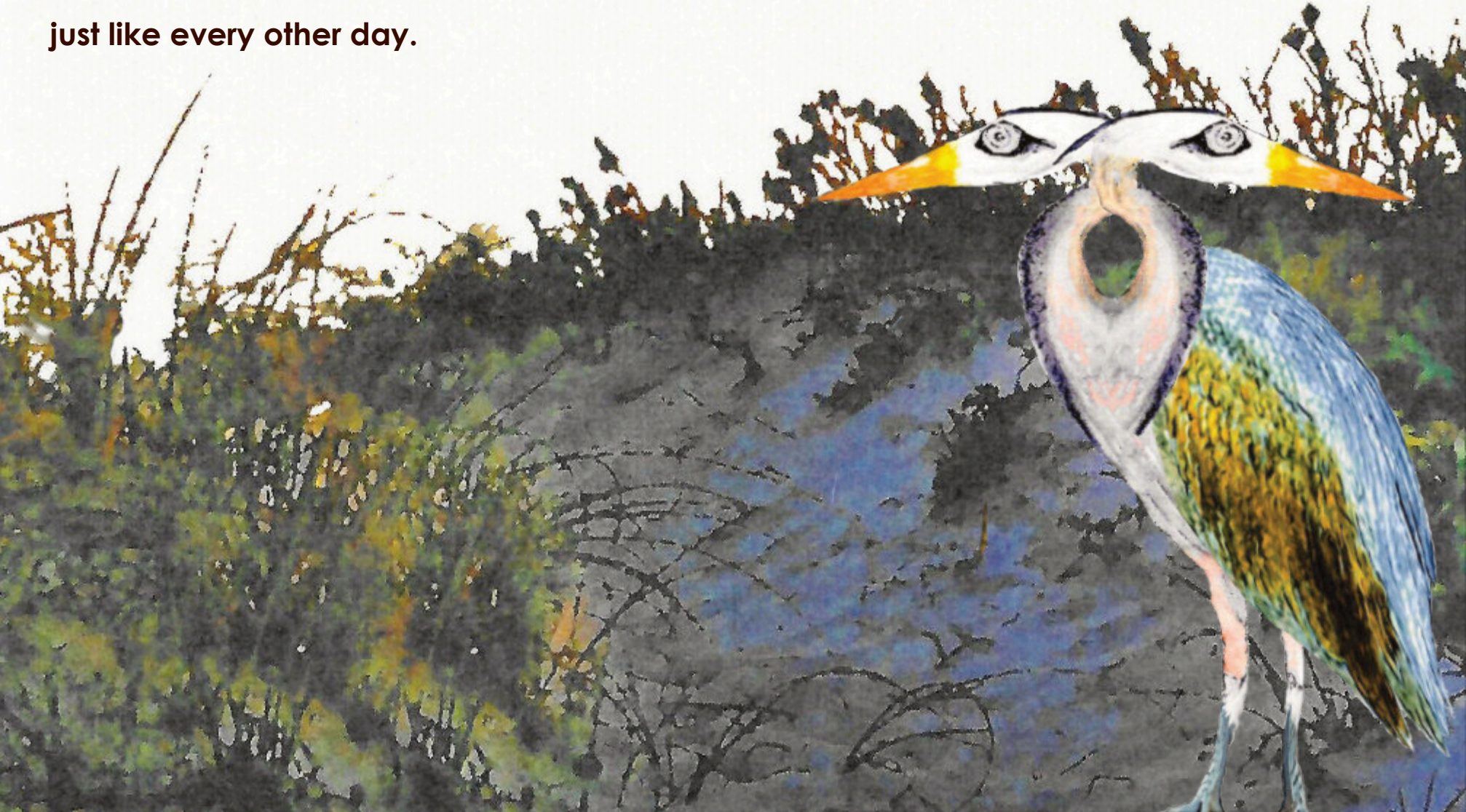
It was not the cry of the gulls or the croak of the frogs.

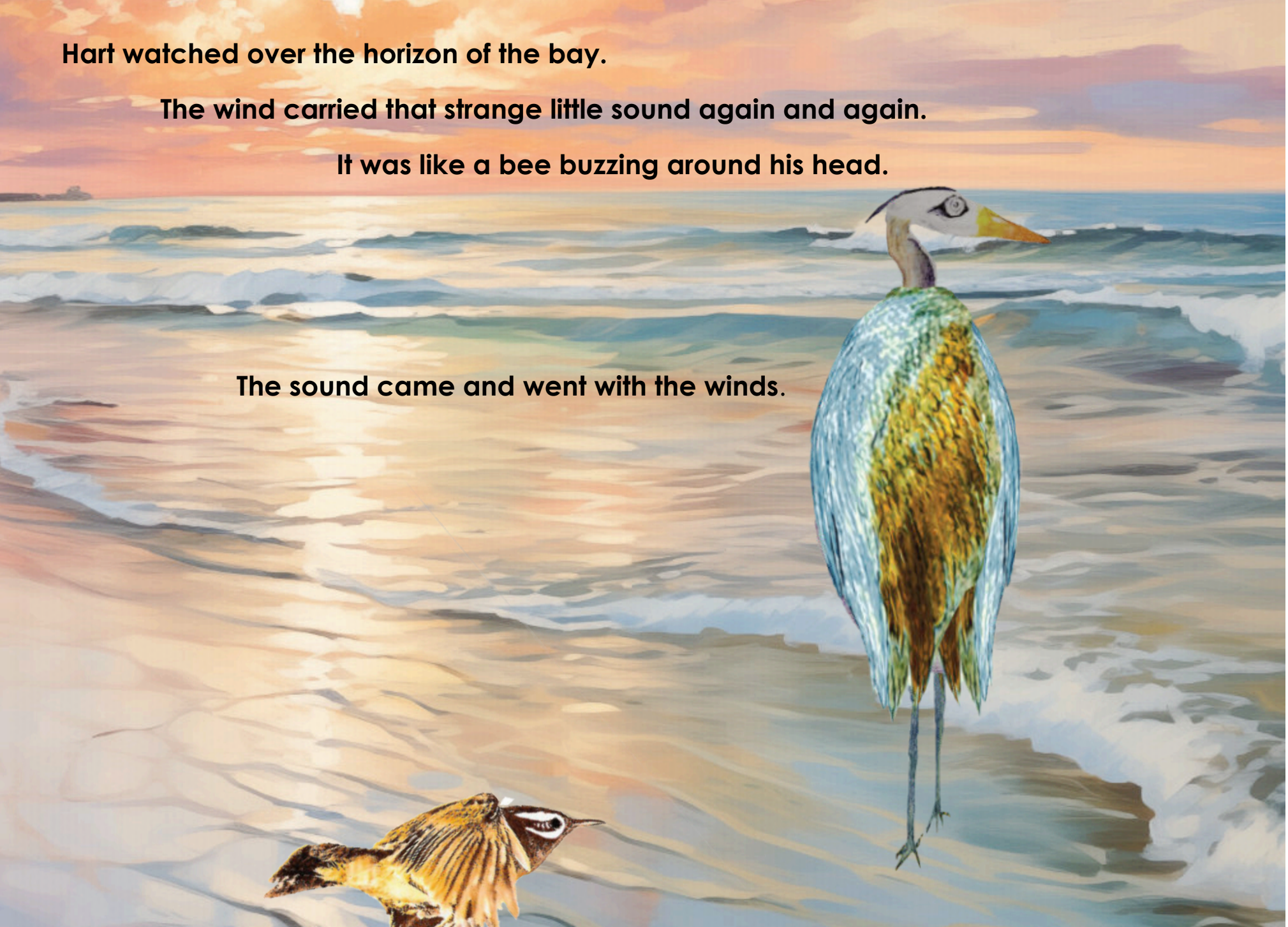
This sound was vibrant, fast and chaotic. It was a sharp

spark with wings just beyond his sight.

Hart tilted his head. “What was that?” he asked himself aloud. As he looked to the left, then he looked to the right. The sound whizzed past him on the right and disappeared.

For now, he would wait to see what the new day would bring. The waves broke on the shore just like every other day.





Hart watched over the horizon of the bay.

The wind carried that strange little sound again and again.

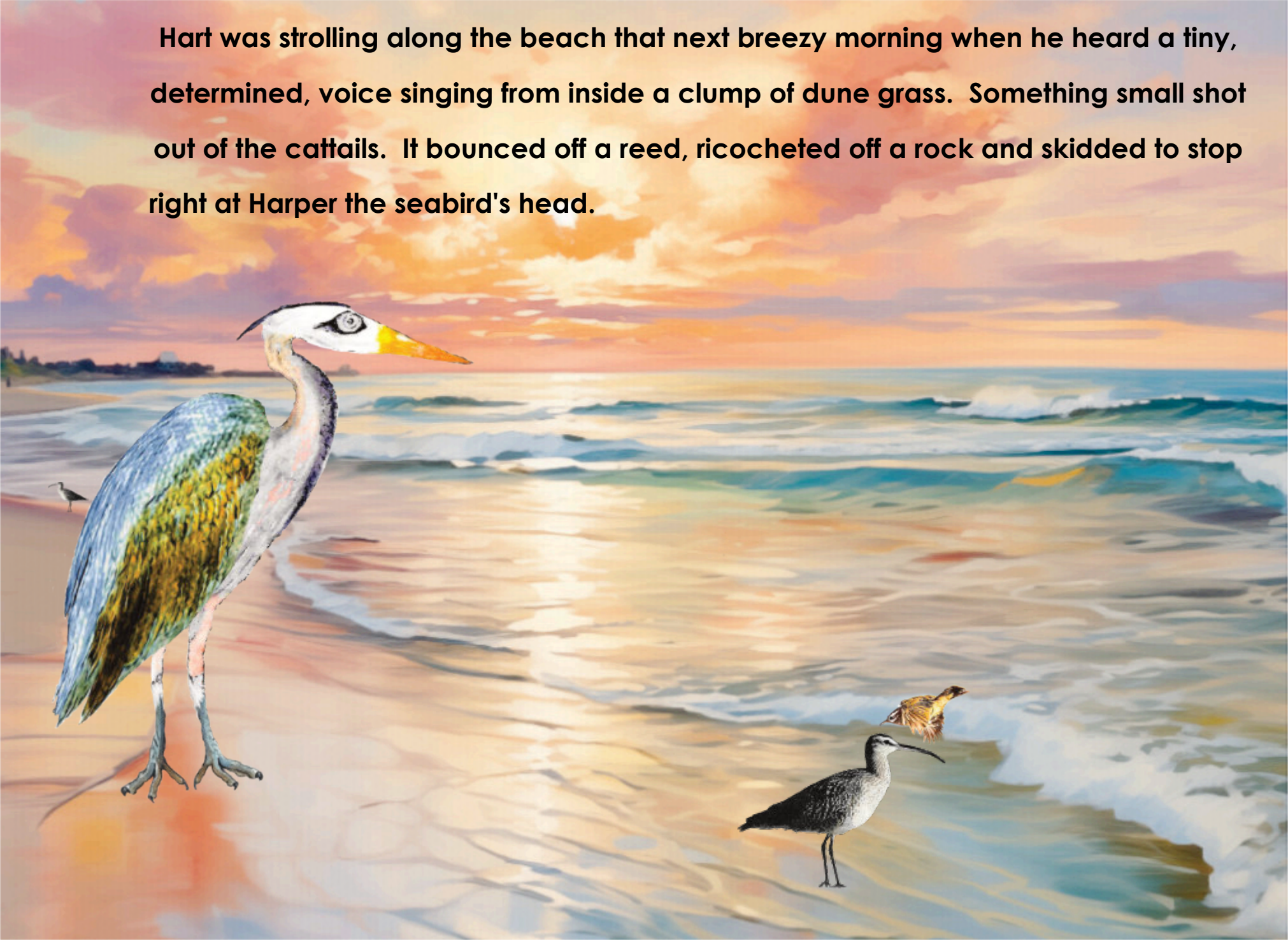
It was like a bee buzzing around his head.

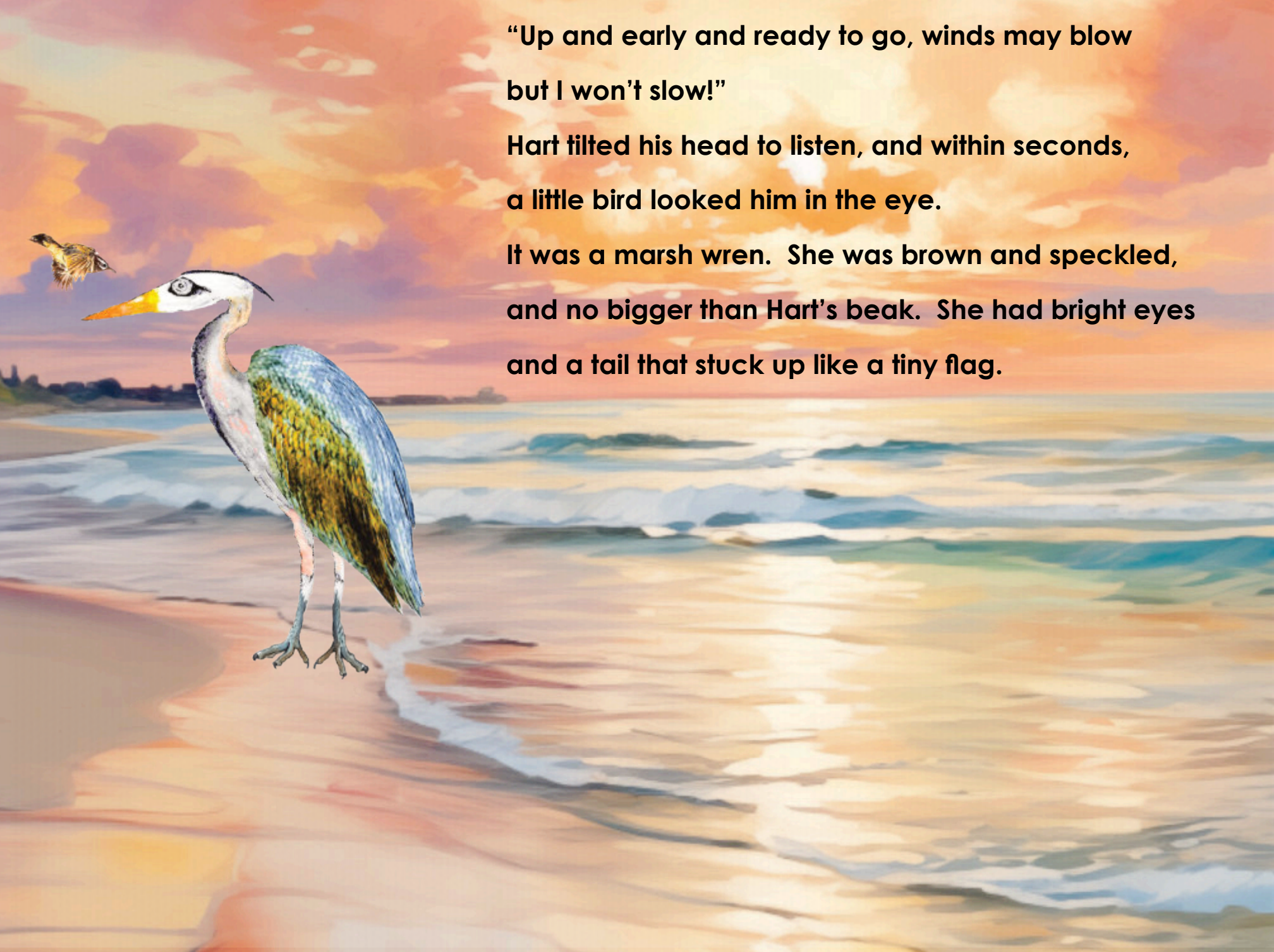
The sound came and went with the winds.

In the evening, Hart flew over the water. He wondered what would happen tomorrow and the next day and the next day.



Hart was strolling along the beach that next breezy morning when he heard a tiny, determined, voice singing from inside a clump of dune grass. Something small shot out of the cattails. It bounced off a reed, ricocheted off a rock and skidded to stop right at Harper the seabird's head.





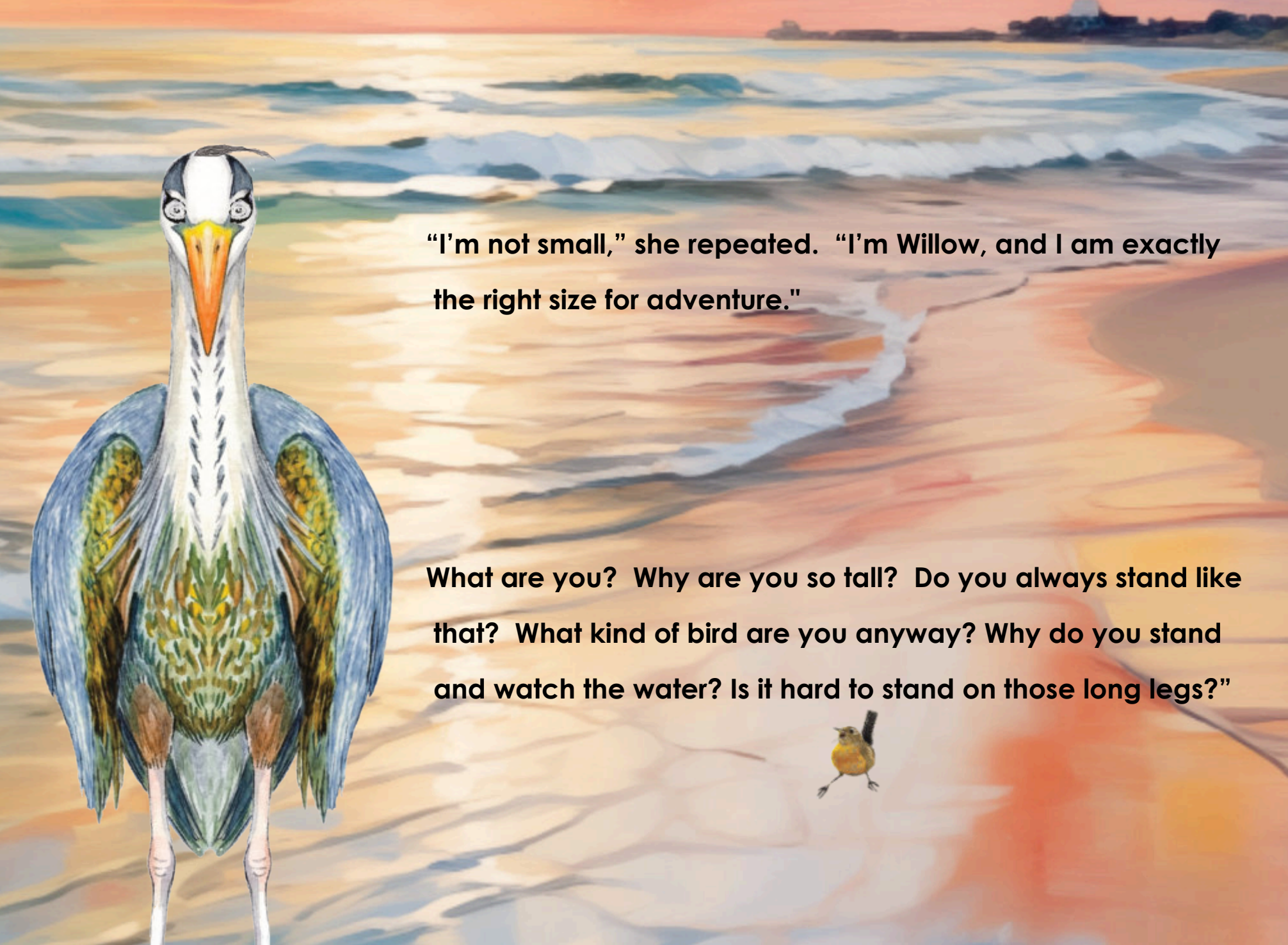
“Up and early and ready to go, winds may blow but I won’t slow!”

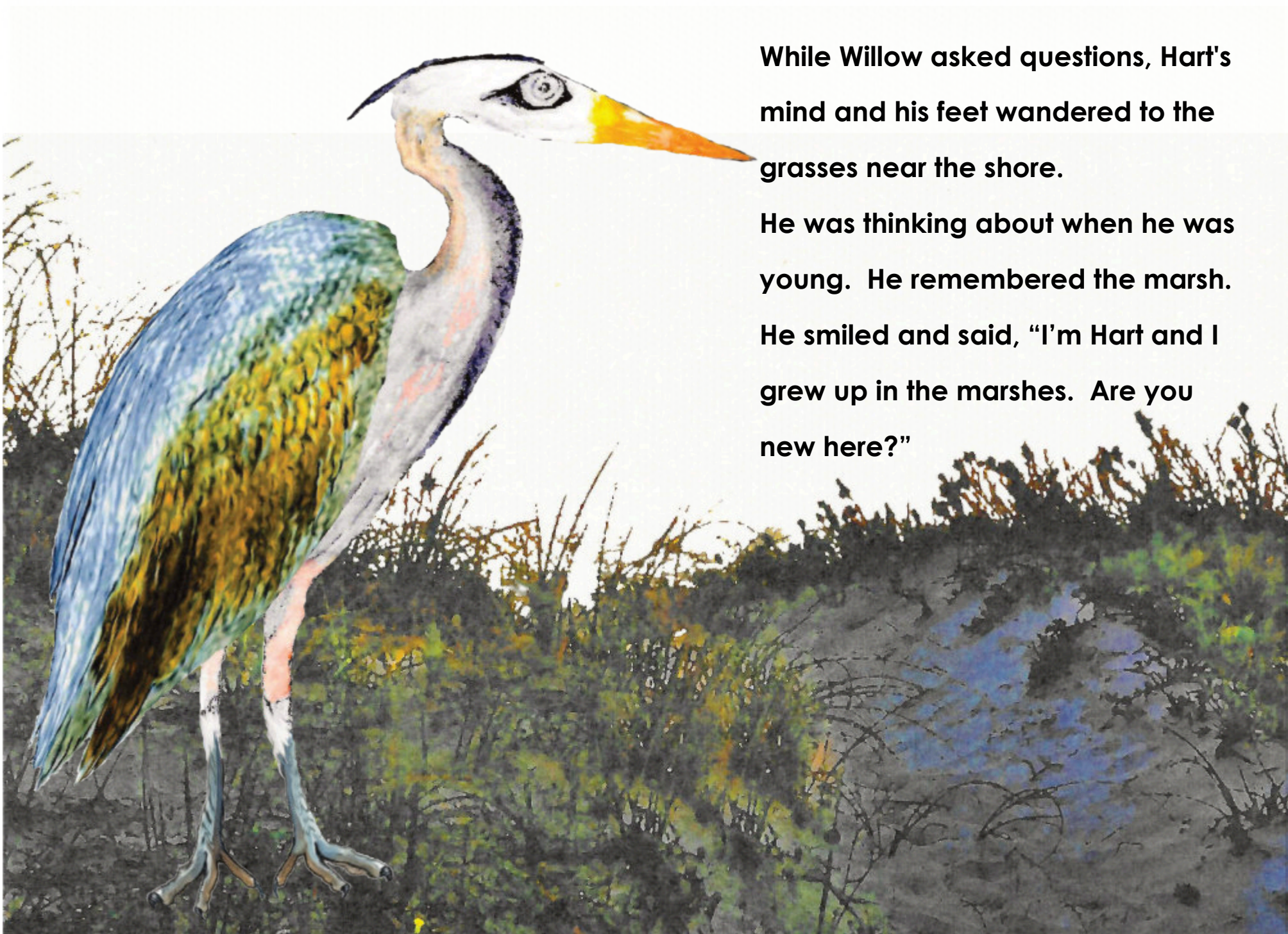
Hart tilted his head to listen, and within seconds, a little bird looked him in the eye.

It was a marsh wren. She was brown and speckled, and no bigger than Hart’s beak. She had bright eyes and a tail that stuck up like a tiny flag.



That's quite a song for someone so small," Hart said. "I'm not small," she stated proudly as she flew in circles around Hart's head.


“I’m not small,” she repeated. “I’m Willow, and I am exactly the right size for adventure."
What are you? Why are you so tall? Do you always stand like that? What kind of bird are you anyway? Why do you stand and watch the water? Is it hard to stand on those long legs?”



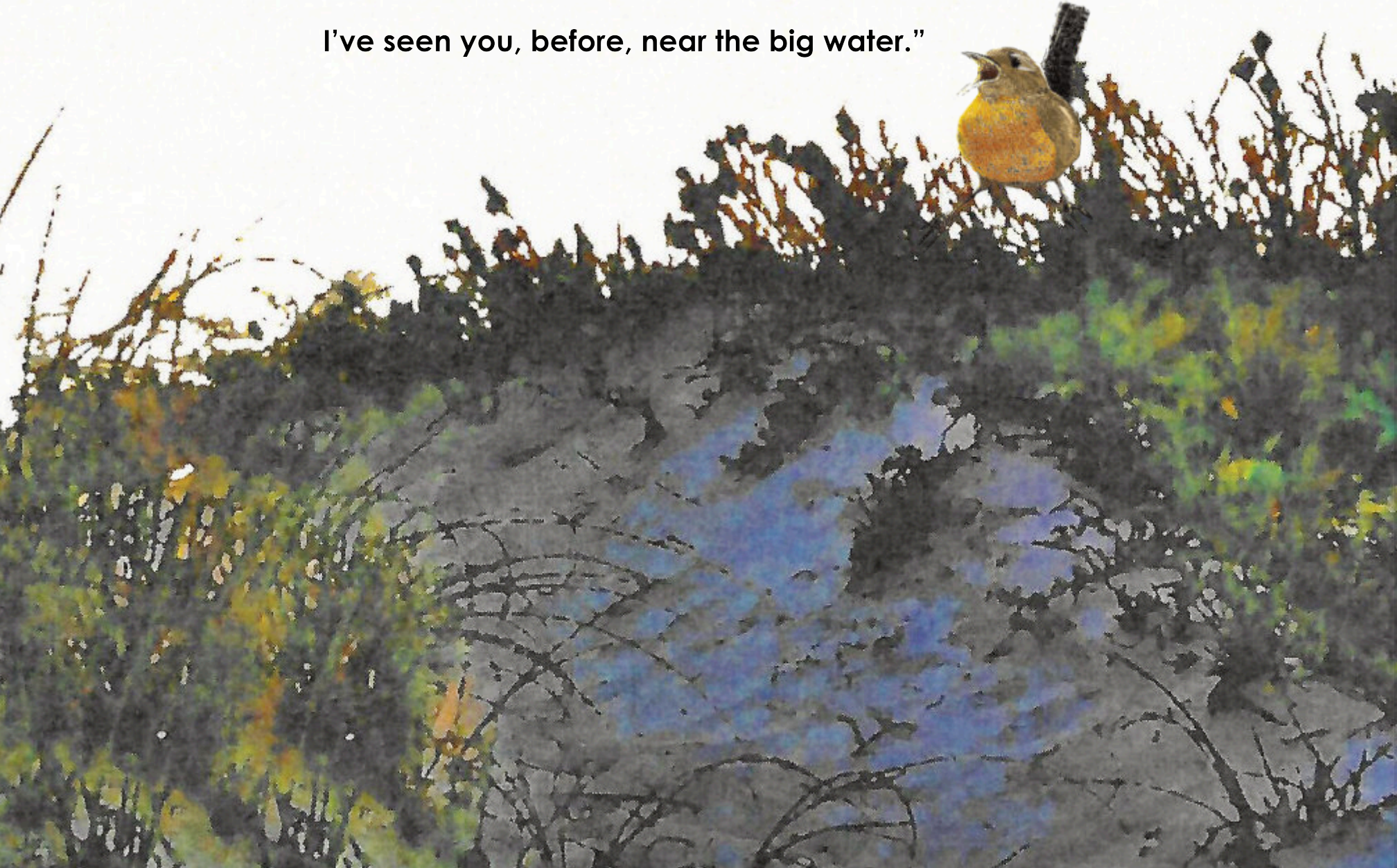
While Willow asked questions, Hart's mind and his feet wandered to the grasses near the shore.

He was thinking about when he was young. He remembered the marsh.

He smiled and said, “I’m Hart and I grew up in the marshes. Are you new here?”

Willow followed Hart into the brush. Then she puffed her feathers and answered, "I followed the waterways south and ended up here. I've been exploring ever since.

I've seen you, before, near the big water."

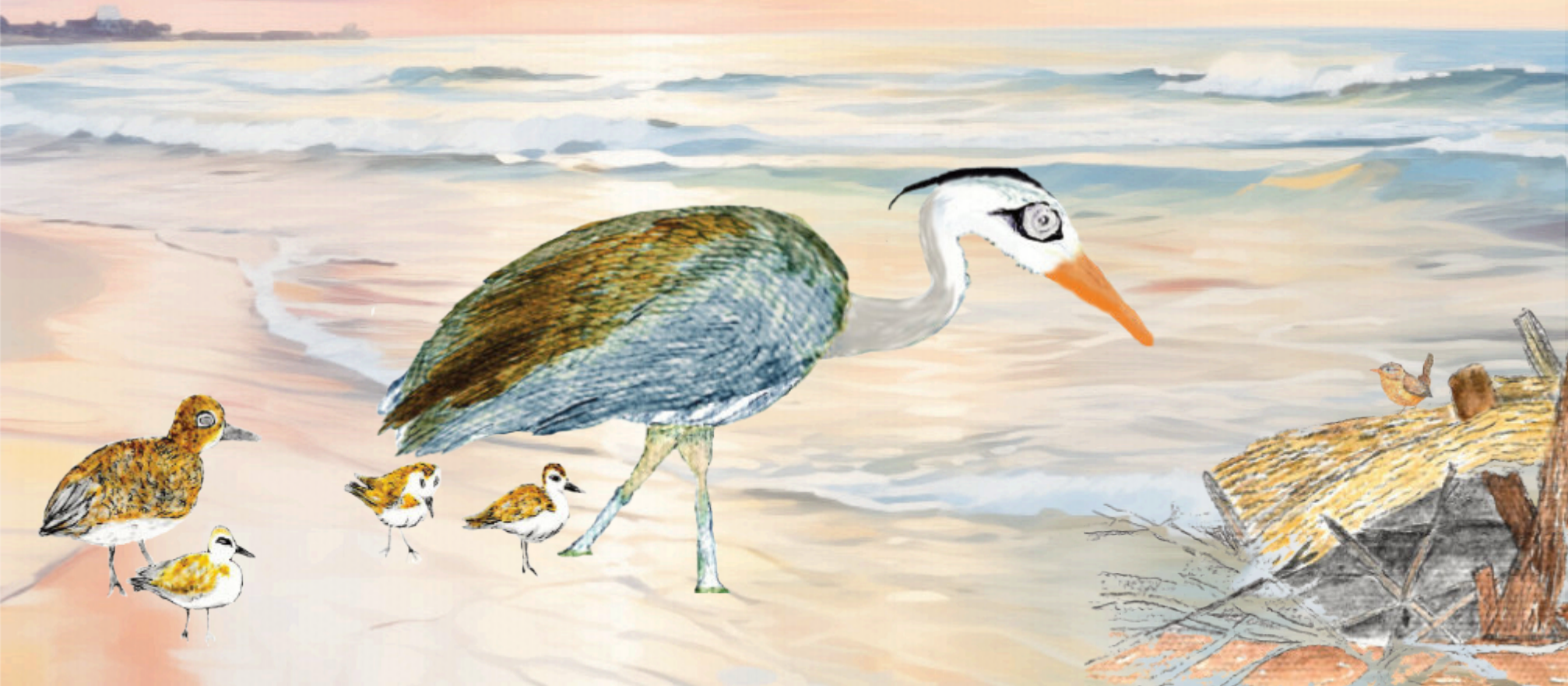


Hart remembered the whizzing by and sounds of who he now knew was Willow while he watched the evening tides. He didn't know much about wishes, but it seemed to him that an answer to one just flew into his life.

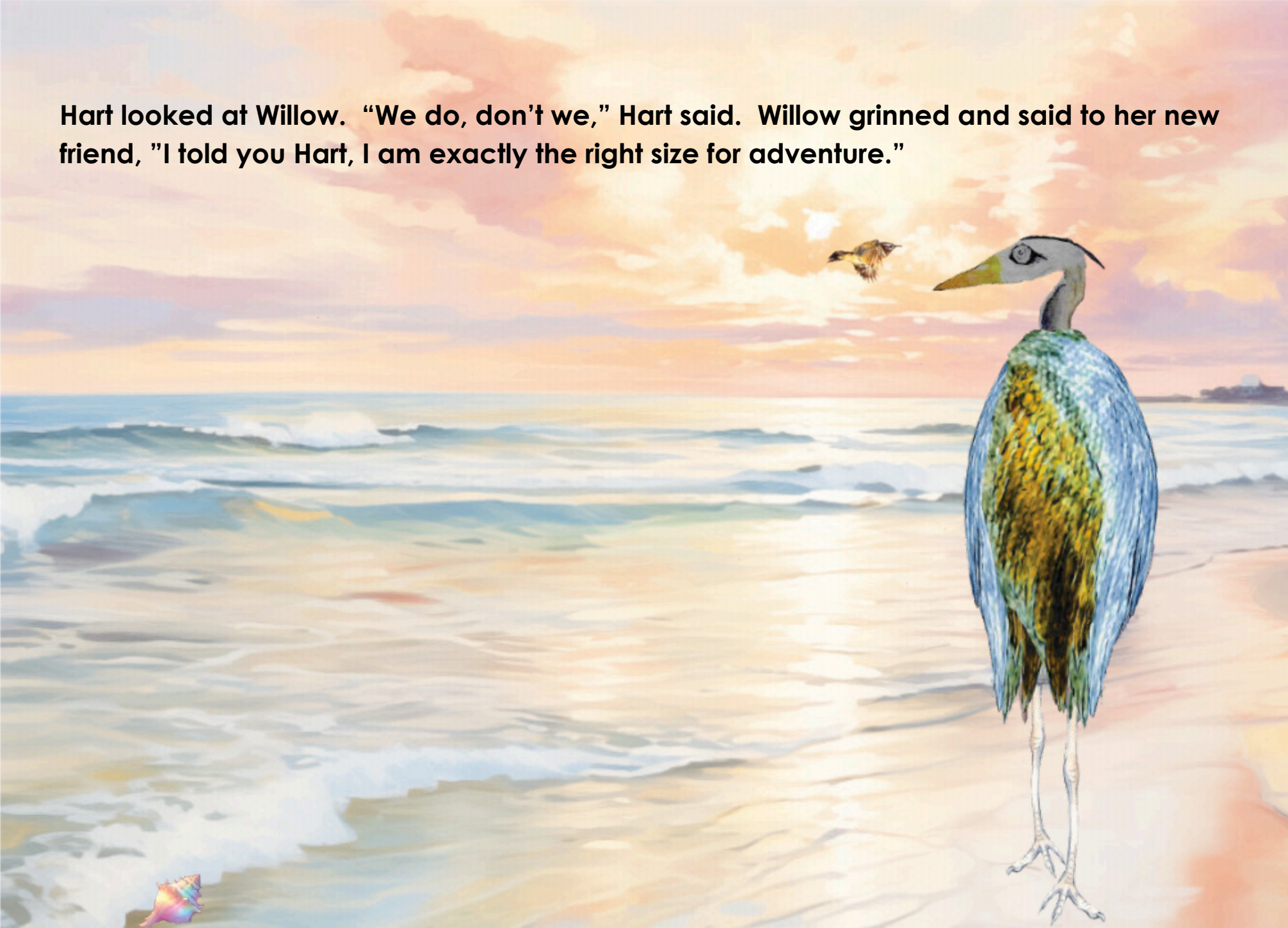
As they started toward the beach, a gust of wind blew a plovers' nest sideways. The little birds panicked. "My eggs!" the mama plover cried.



Willow zipped forward and took command. “Hart, lift the driftwood! I will weave the grasses tighter! Hurry! Hart used his long beak to hold the nest while Willow darted around, stitching the grasses together with incredible speed. Within moments, the nest was secure again. “You two make a great team,” the sandpiper said gratefully.



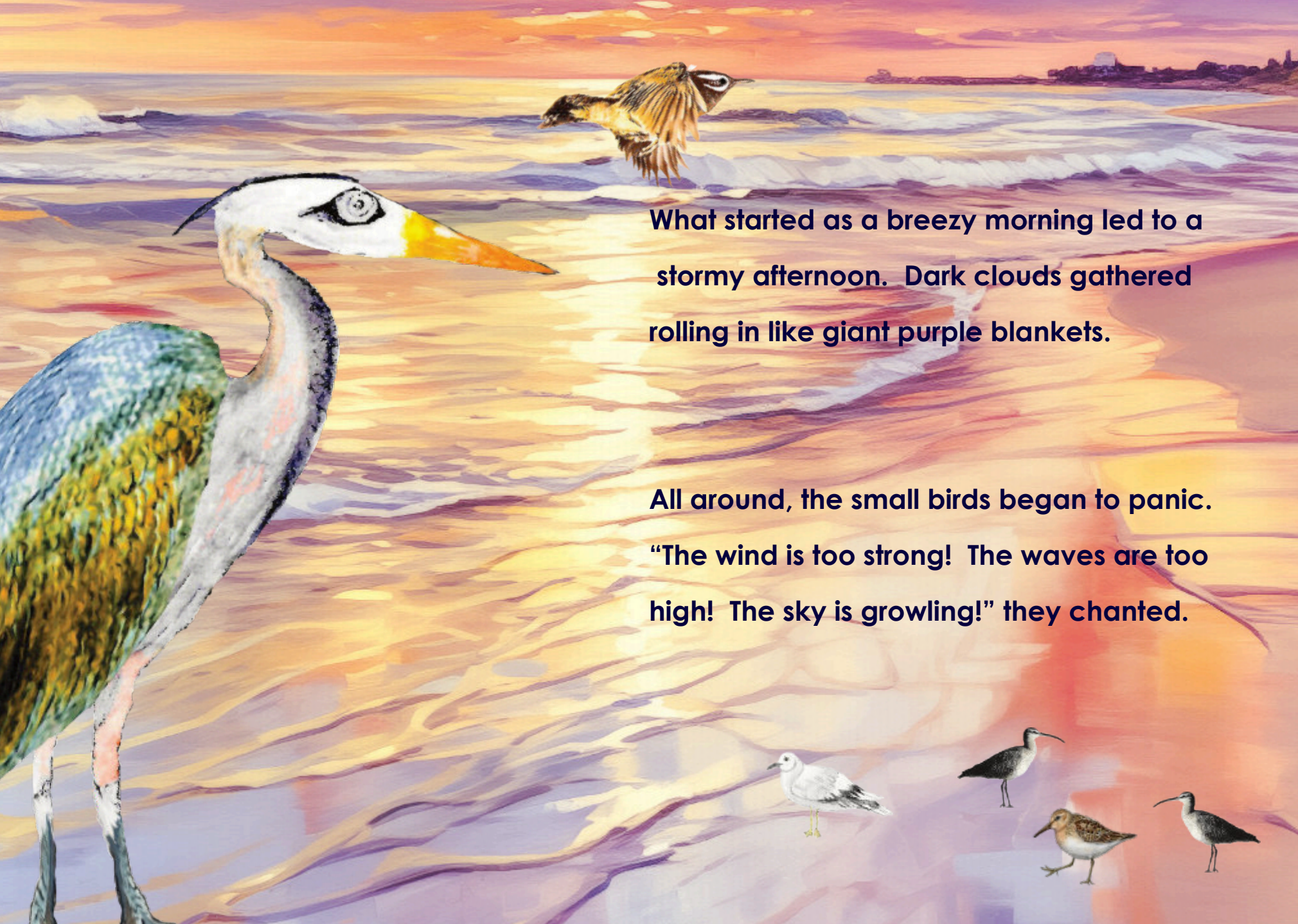
Hart looked at Willow. "We do, don't we," Hart said. Willow grinned and said to her new friend, "I told you Hart, I am exactly the right size for adventure."



From that day on, Willow perched on Hart's shoulder or zipped ahead to scout the path. Hart's calm strength and Willow's quick wit made them an unbeatable pair. Together, the marshes and beaches felt a little more like home for each of them.



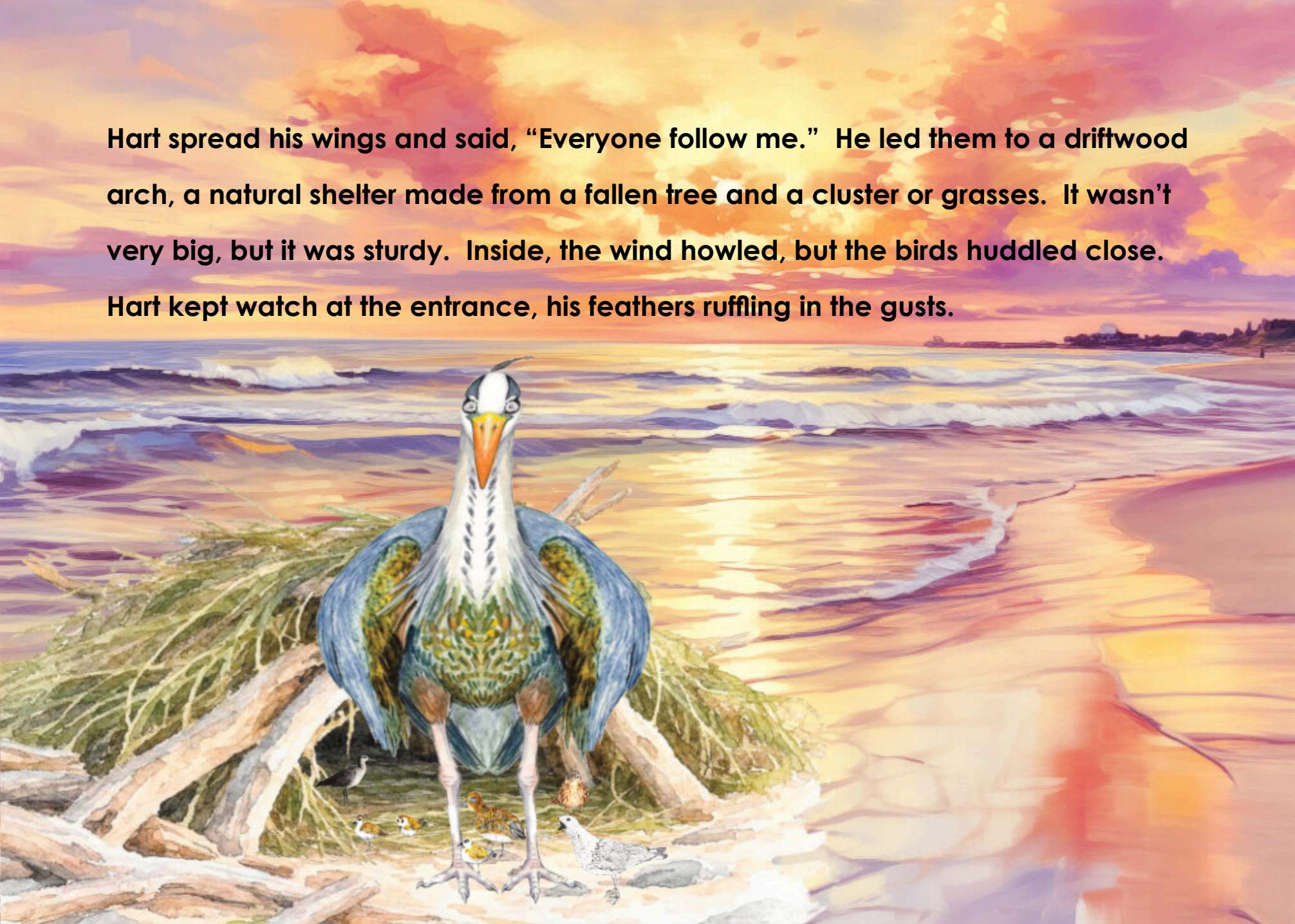




What started as a breezy morning led to a stormy afternoon. Dark clouds gathered rolling in like giant purple blankets.

All around, the small birds began to panic. "The wind is too strong! The waves are too high! The sky is growling!" they chanted.

Hart spread his wings and said, “Everyone follow me.” He led them to a driftwood arch, a natural shelter made from a fallen tree and a cluster or grasses. It wasn’t very big, but it was sturdy. Inside, the wind howled, but the birds huddled close. Hart kept watch at the entrance, his feathers ruffling in the gusts.



To distract themselves, the plovers invented a tapping game. Willow told silly stories about clouds shaped like dragonflies and they sang happy songs.





A gull walked up to Hart and said, "I don't like storms." Hart nodded and said, "I know you don't, but storms always pass and we are safe together." The rain drummed on the driftwood roof and the thunder grumbled.

Slowly, the sky began to brighten. A sliver of sunlight peeked through and then another. When the storm finally drifted away, the beach sparkled. Raindrops clung to the sand like tiny jewels. The little birds cheered and ran out to play in the fresh, cool air.



To Hart, the day had excitement, joy, danger, peace and happiness. He knew that Willow was just the thing he needed to make his world brighter, quite possibly more fun and certainly a lot more chaotic!





COMING SOON



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