

Ann Guillidae

A European eel story

Eva Lucía Bayarri y Susana Vilanova



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A watercolor illustration featuring a large, glowing yellow sun or moon in the center. The sun is surrounded by soft, ethereal light and is framed by green foliage and leaves. Small white sparkles or stars are scattered throughout the scene, particularly around the sun and the leaves. The overall style is soft and artistic, with a focus on natural elements and light.

To Pepa

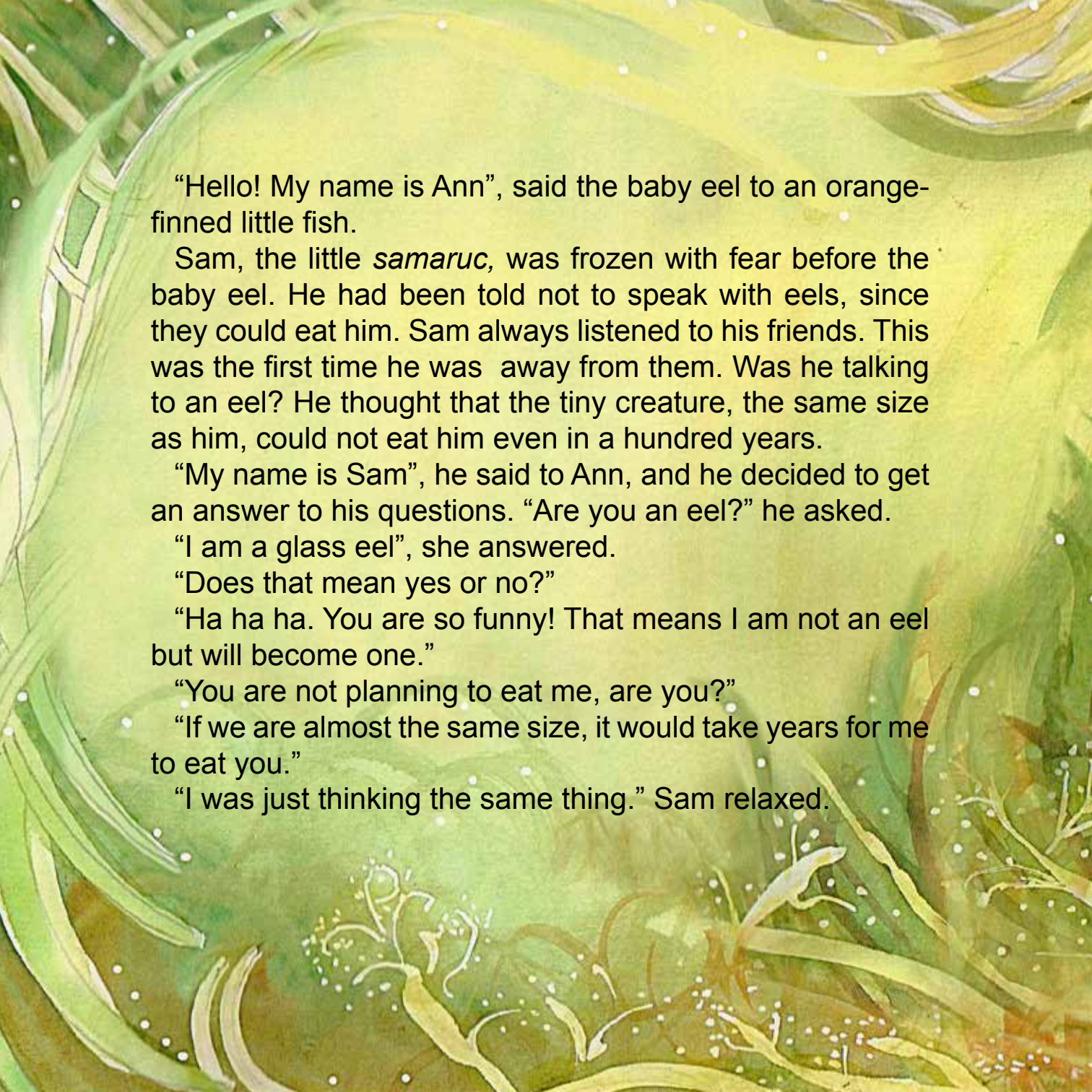


One cold night a little baby eel arrived in Albufera Park, near Valencia. Some years ago, not as many as you might think, there used to be hundreds of them arriving there.



Ann Guillidae had travelled thousands of miles from the North Atlantic to the Gulf of Valencia. She was feeling so successful she wanted to share it with someone.





“Hello! My name is Ann”, said the baby eel to an orange-finned little fish.

Sam, the little *samaruc*, was frozen with fear before the baby eel. He had been told not to speak with eels, since they could eat him. Sam always listened to his friends. This was the first time he was away from them. Was he talking to an eel? He thought that the tiny creature, the same size as him, could not eat him even in a hundred years.

“My name is Sam”, he said to Ann, and he decided to get an answer to his questions. “Are you an eel?” he asked.

“I am a glass eel”, she answered.

“Does that mean yes or no?”

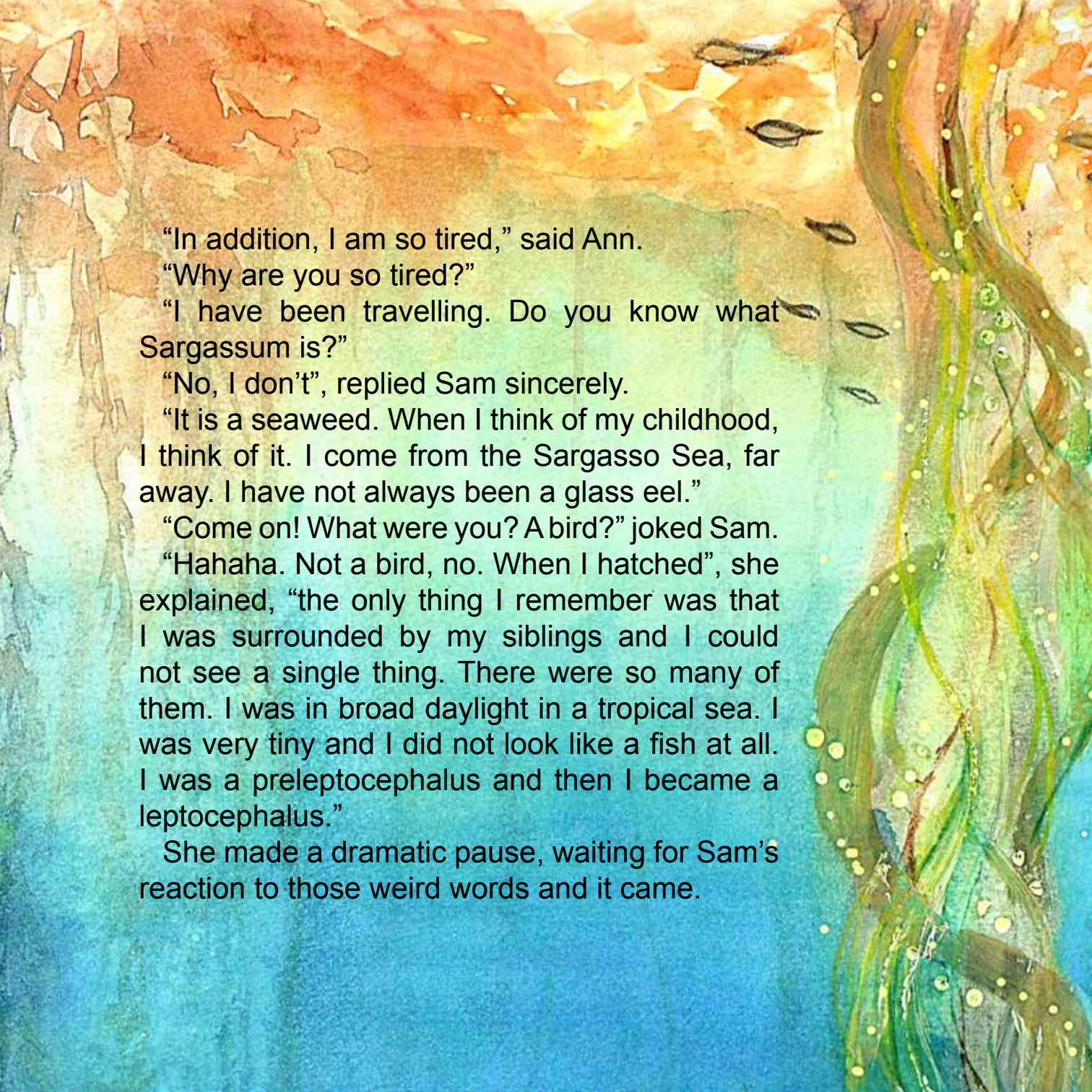
“Ha ha ha. You are so funny! That means I am not an eel but will become one.”

“You are not planning to eat me, are you?”

“If we are almost the same size, it would take years for me to eat you.”

“I was just thinking the same thing.” Sam relaxed.





“In addition, I am so tired,” said Ann.

“Why are you so tired?”

“I have been travelling. Do you know what Sargassum is?”

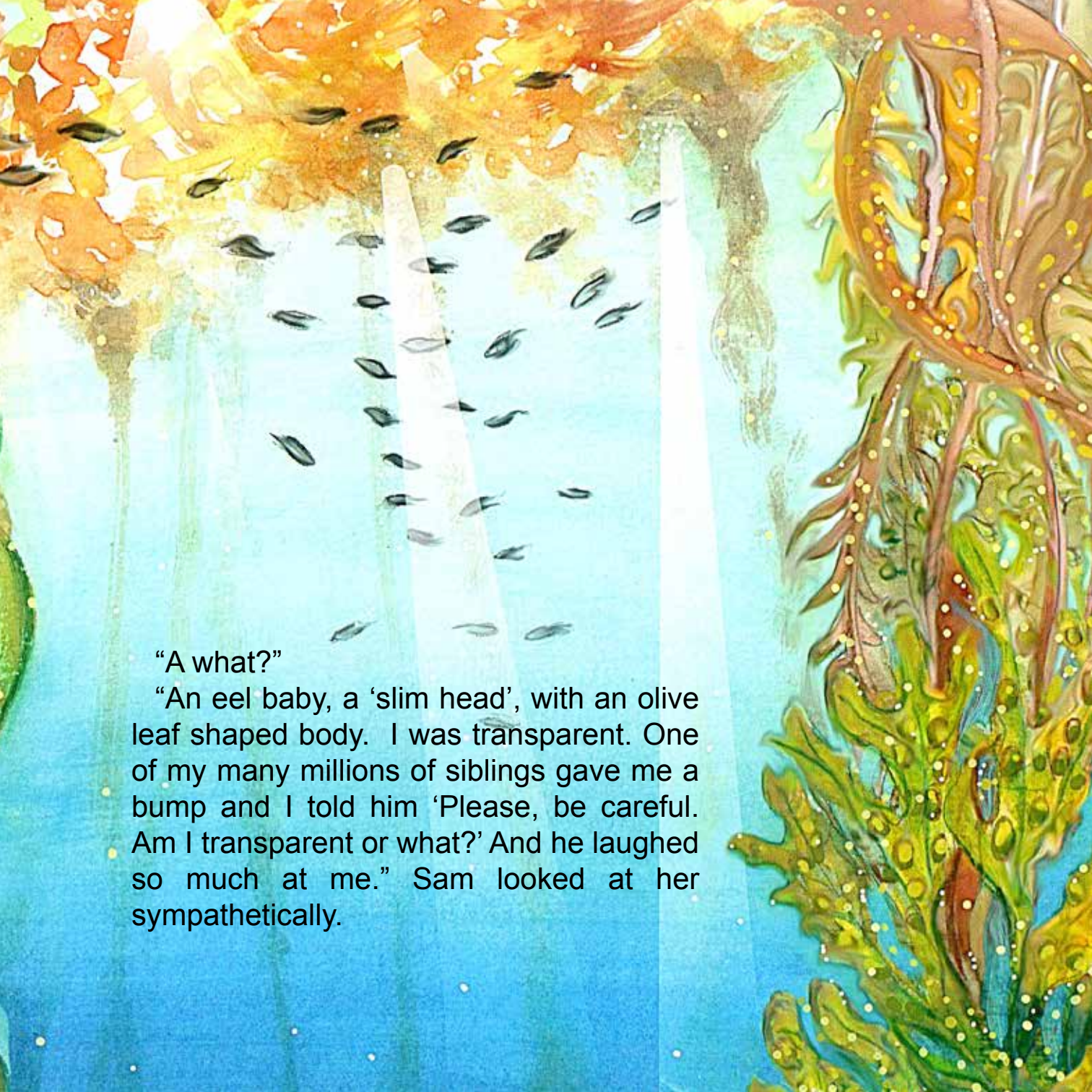
“No, I don’t”, replied Sam sincerely.

“It is a seaweed. When I think of my childhood, I think of it. I come from the Sargasso Sea, far away. I have not always been a glass eel.”

“Come on! What were you? A bird?” joked Sam.

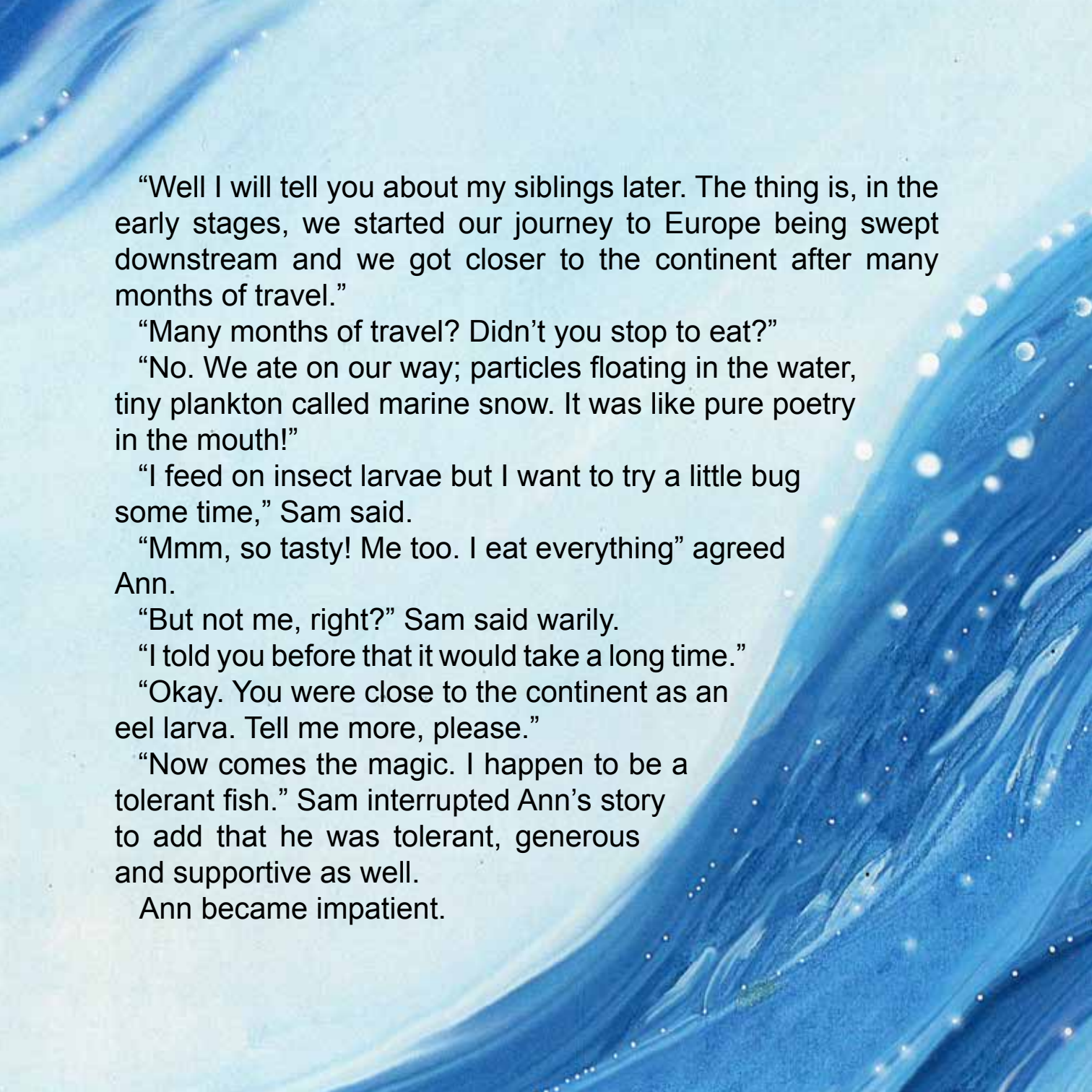
“Hahaha. Not a bird, no. When I hatched”, she explained, “the only thing I remember was that I was surrounded by my siblings and I could not see a single thing. There were so many of them. I was in broad daylight in a tropical sea. I was very tiny and I did not look like a fish at all. I was a preleptocephalus and then I became a leptocephalus.”

She made a dramatic pause, waiting for Sam’s reaction to those weird words and it came.



“A what?”

“An eel baby, a ‘slim head’, with an olive leaf shaped body. I was transparent. One of my many millions of siblings gave me a bump and I told him ‘Please, be careful. Am I transparent or what?’ And he laughed so much at me.” Sam looked at her sympathetically.



“Well I will tell you about my siblings later. The thing is, in the early stages, we started our journey to Europe being swept downstream and we got closer to the continent after many months of travel.”

“Many months of travel? Didn’t you stop to eat?”

“No. We ate on our way; particles floating in the water, tiny plankton called marine snow. It was like pure poetry in the mouth!”

“I feed on insect larvae but I want to try a little bug some time,” Sam said.

“Mmm, so tasty! Me too. I eat everything” agreed Ann.

“But not me, right?” Sam said warily.

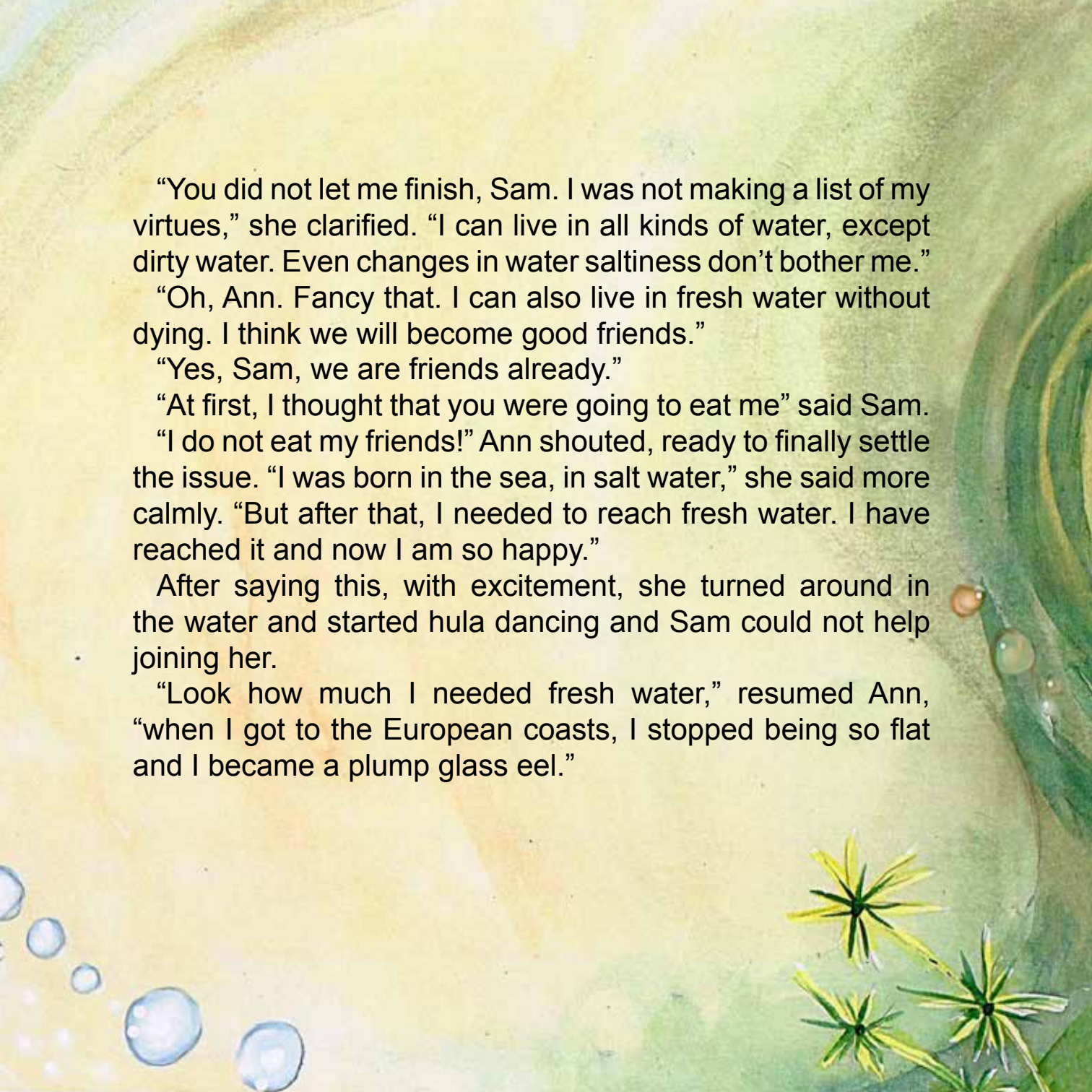
“I told you before that it would take a long time.”

“Okay. You were close to the continent as an eel larva. Tell me more, please.”

“Now comes the magic. I happen to be a tolerant fish.” Sam interrupted Ann’s story to add that he was tolerant, generous and supportive as well.

Ann became impatient.





“You did not let me finish, Sam. I was not making a list of my virtues,” she clarified. “I can live in all kinds of water, except dirty water. Even changes in water saltiness don’t bother me.”

“Oh, Ann. Fancy that. I can also live in fresh water without dying. I think we will become good friends.”

“Yes, Sam, we are friends already.”

“At first, I thought that you were going to eat me” said Sam.

“I do not eat my friends!” Ann shouted, ready to finally settle the issue. “I was born in the sea, in salt water,” she said more calmly. “But after that, I needed to reach fresh water. I have reached it and now I am so happy.”

After saying this, with excitement, she turned around in the water and started hula dancing and Sam could not help joining her.

“Look how much I needed fresh water,” resumed Ann, “when I got to the European coasts, I stopped being so flat and I became a plump glass eel.”



“You really make me laugh. What will you be tomorrow?”

“Hahaha. I laugh so much with you. What a question! I will be a yellow eel, but not tomorrow. I will change little by little. First, I was a flat larva, then I got round and now, little by little, I will get my colors. Eventually, I will stop being transparent which is such a pain.”

“Why do you say that being transparent is a pain? To me, it seems so cool.”



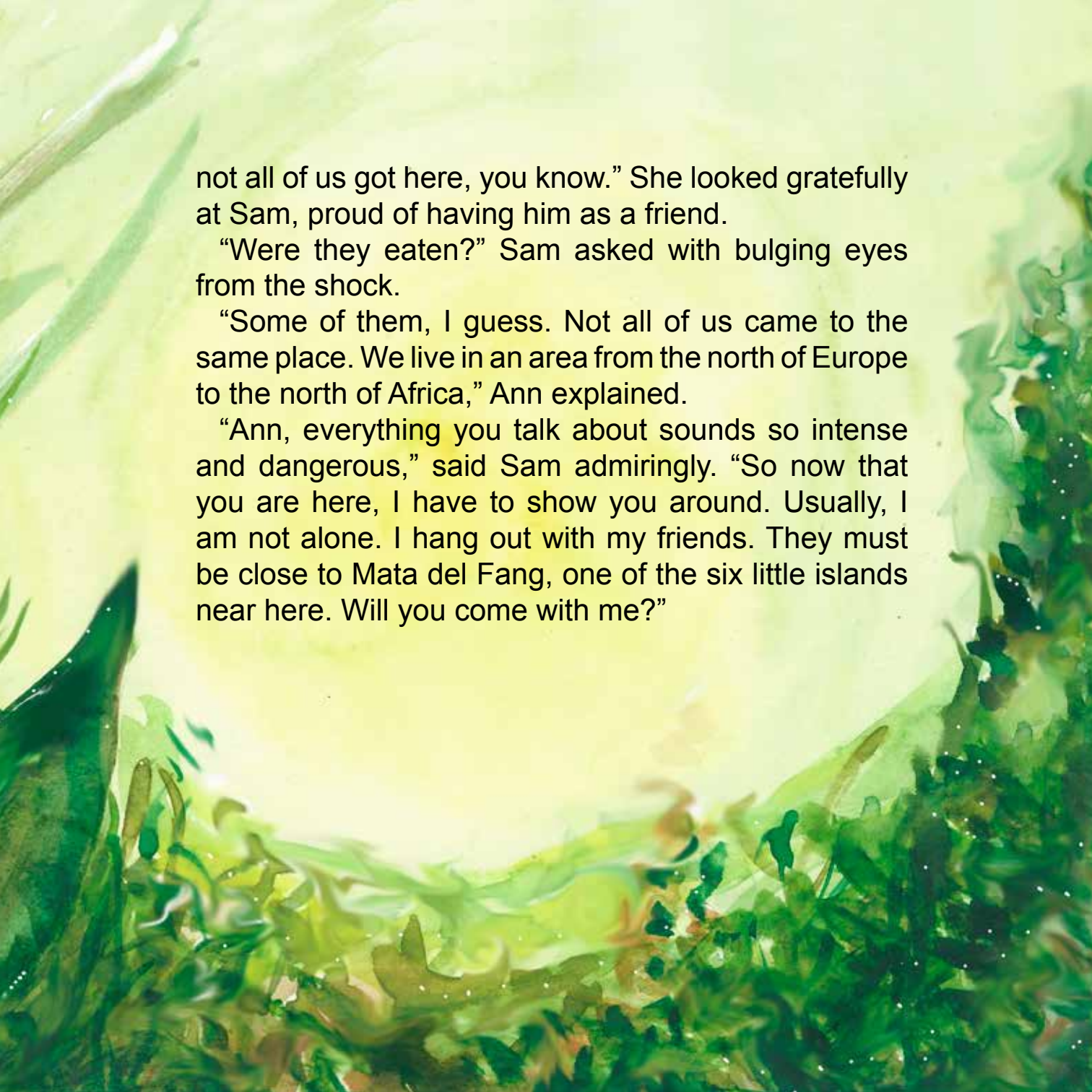
“Well, because of my siblings. They made fun of me when I asked ‘Am I transparent?’ for many years. They used to bump into me and said ‘Oh, sorry. I did not see you’. They laughed out loud.”

“I think that, since you were transparent, the ones who wanted to eat you could not see you.”

“Sam, you are obsessed with the food chain. Nevertheless, you are right. It can be a good thing not to be seen... In fact,





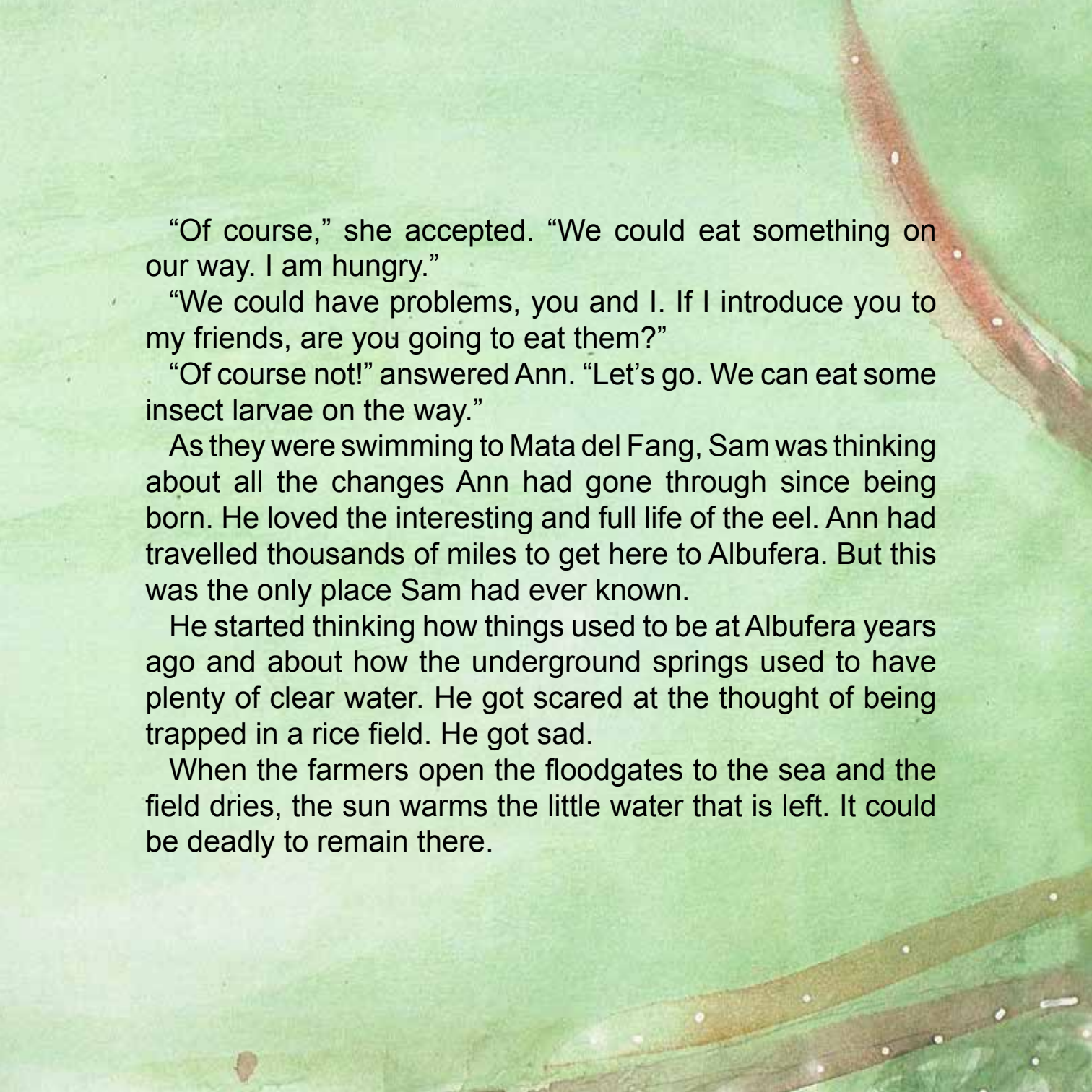


not all of us got here, you know.” She looked gratefully at Sam, proud of having him as a friend.

“Were they eaten?” Sam asked with bulging eyes from the shock.

“Some of them, I guess. Not all of us came to the same place. We live in an area from the north of Europe to the north of Africa,” Ann explained.

“Ann, everything you talk about sounds so intense and dangerous,” said Sam admiringly. “So now that you are here, I have to show you around. Usually, I am not alone. I hang out with my friends. They must be close to Mata del Fang, one of the six little islands near here. Will you come with me?”



“Of course,” she accepted. “We could eat something on our way. I am hungry.”

“We could have problems, you and I. If I introduce you to my friends, are you going to eat them?”

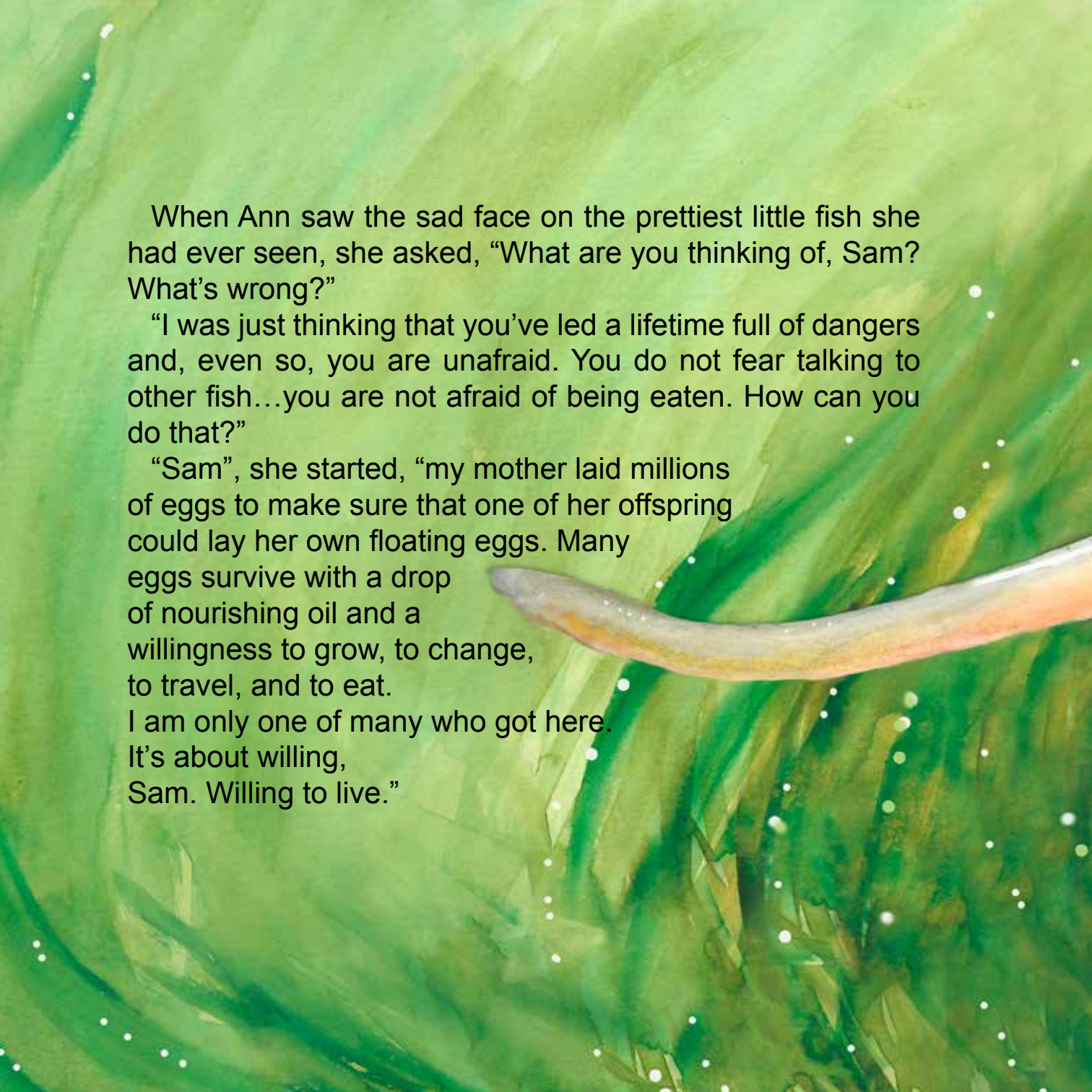
“Of course not!” answered Ann. “Let’s go. We can eat some insect larvae on the way.”

As they were swimming to Mata del Fang, Sam was thinking about all the changes Ann had gone through since being born. He loved the interesting and full life of the eel. Ann had travelled thousands of miles to get here to Albufera. But this was the only place Sam had ever known.

He started thinking how things used to be at Albufera years ago and about how the underground springs used to have plenty of clear water. He got scared at the thought of being trapped in a rice field. He got sad.

When the farmers open the floodgates to the sea and the field dries, the sun warms the little water that is left. It could be deadly to remain there.



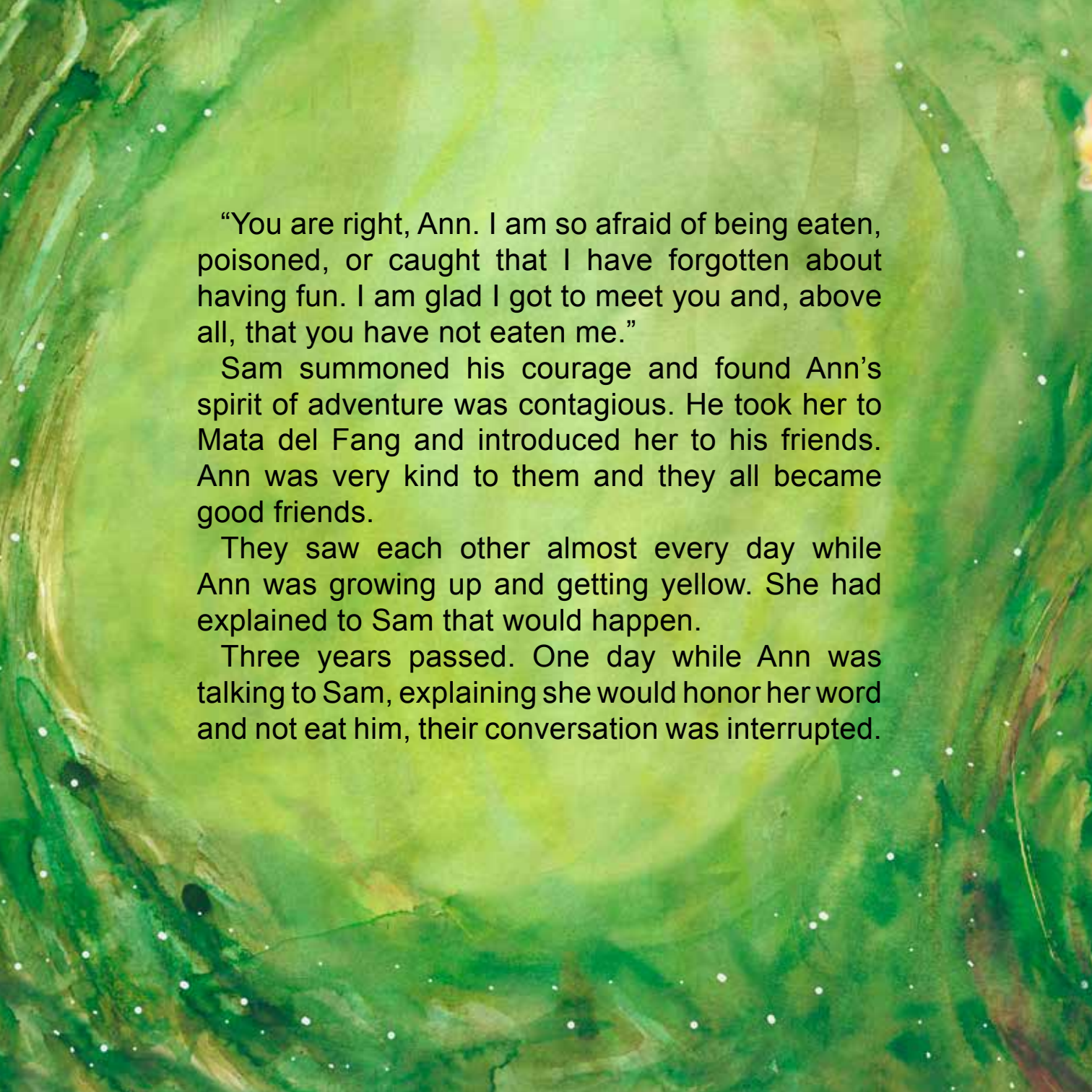
The background is a vibrant, painterly illustration of an underwater scene. The water is depicted in various shades of green, from light lime to deep forest green, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of movement. Small white specks, possibly bubbles or light reflections, are scattered throughout. A single, slender, pinkish-orange fish is swimming from the right side towards the center, its body curved slightly. The overall mood is serene and naturalistic.

When Ann saw the sad face on the prettiest little fish she had ever seen, she asked, “What are you thinking of, Sam? What’s wrong?”

“I was just thinking that you’ve led a lifetime full of dangers and, even so, you are unafraid. You do not fear talking to other fish...you are not afraid of being eaten. How can you do that?”

“Sam”, she started, “my mother laid millions of eggs to make sure that one of her offspring could lay her own floating eggs. Many eggs survive with a drop of nourishing oil and a willingness to grow, to change, to travel, and to eat. I am only one of many who got here. It’s about willing, Sam. Willing to live.”





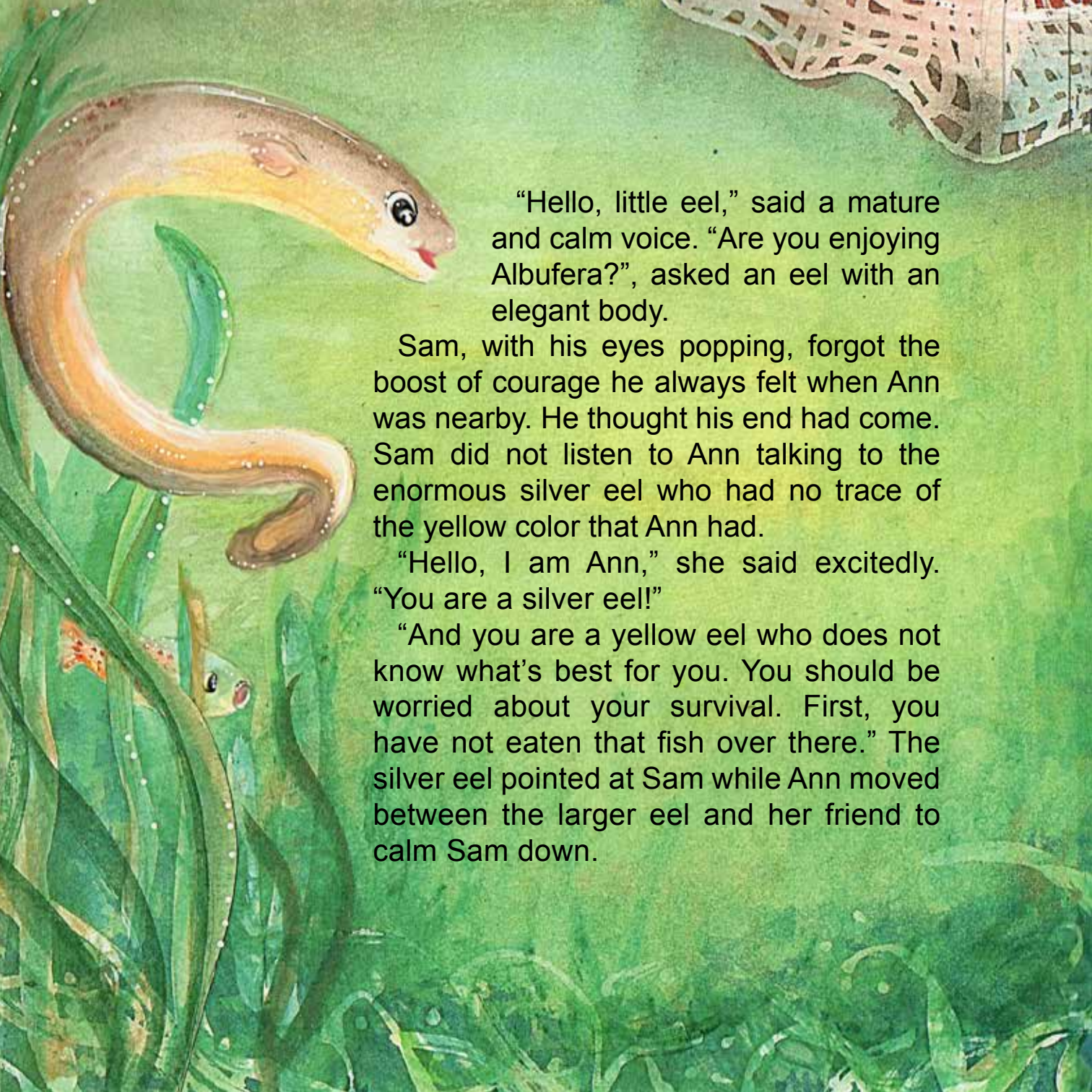
“You are right, Ann. I am so afraid of being eaten, poisoned, or caught that I have forgotten about having fun. I am glad I got to meet you and, above all, that you have not eaten me.”

Sam summoned his courage and found Ann’s spirit of adventure was contagious. He took her to Mata del Fang and introduced her to his friends. Ann was very kind to them and they all became good friends.

They saw each other almost every day while Ann was growing up and getting yellow. She had explained to Sam that would happen.

Three years passed. One day while Ann was talking to Sam, explaining she would honor her word and not eat him, their conversation was interrupted.





“Hello, little eel,” said a mature and calm voice. “Are you enjoying Albufera?”, asked an eel with an elegant body.

Sam, with his eyes popping, forgot the boost of courage he always felt when Ann was nearby. He thought his end had come. Sam did not listen to Ann talking to the enormous silver eel who had no trace of the yellow color that Ann had.

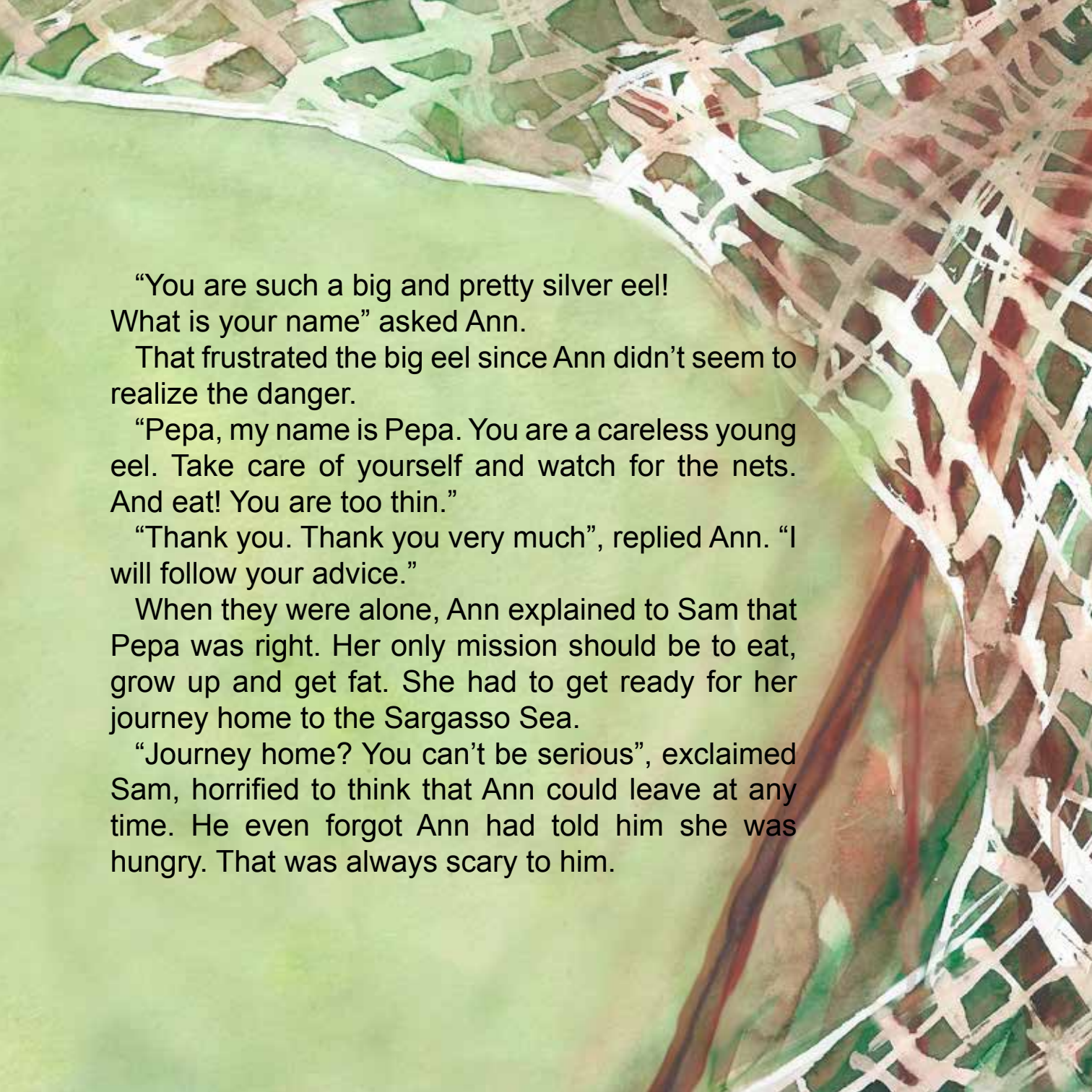
“Hello, I am Ann,” she said excitedly. “You are a silver eel!”

“And you are a yellow eel who does not know what’s best for you. You should be worried about your survival. First, you have not eaten that fish over there.” The silver eel pointed at Sam while Ann moved between the larger eel and her friend to calm Sam down.



“Second, you are about to get trapped in the net attached to sticks. Do you not see it?” said the silver eel. “Oh, now you see it. The gill net is designed to stop you and lead you to the fish traps. If you want to lay your own eggs, keep away from the nets.”



A watercolor illustration of a fishing net, likely made of white or light-colored twine, draped over a green surface. The net is filled with various shades of green and brown, suggesting it contains fish or other marine life. The background is a solid, light green color. The net is positioned on the right side of the page, with its mesh extending towards the left.

“You are such a big and pretty silver eel!
What is your name” asked Ann.

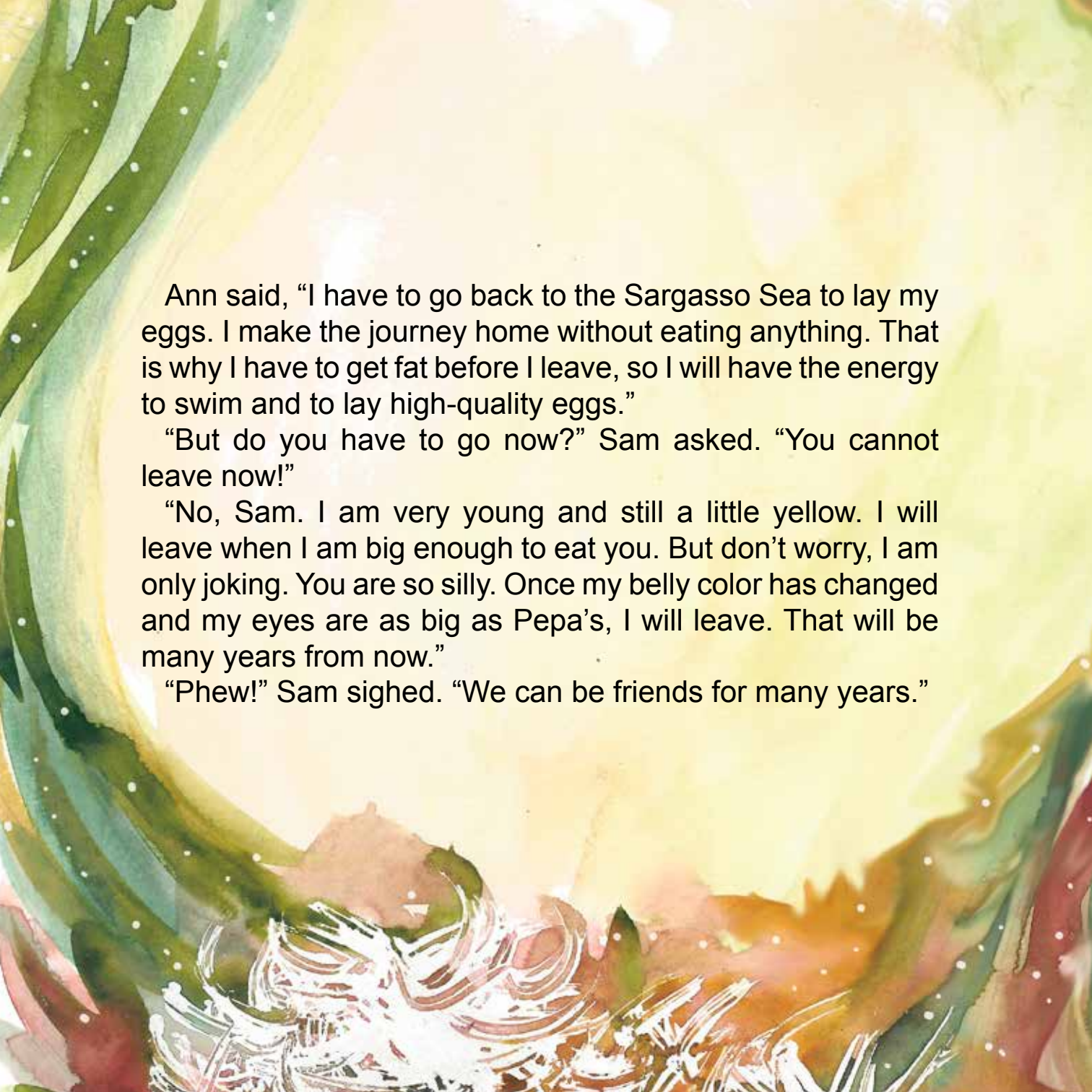
That frustrated the big eel since Ann didn’t seem to realize the danger.

“Pepa, my name is Pepa. You are a careless young eel. Take care of yourself and watch for the nets. And eat! You are too thin.”

“Thank you. Thank you very much”, replied Ann. “I will follow your advice.”

When they were alone, Ann explained to Sam that Pepa was right. Her only mission should be to eat, grow up and get fat. She had to get ready for her journey home to the Sargasso Sea.

“Journey home? You can’t be serious”, exclaimed Sam, horrified to think that Ann could leave at any time. He even forgot Ann had told him she was hungry. That was always scary to him.



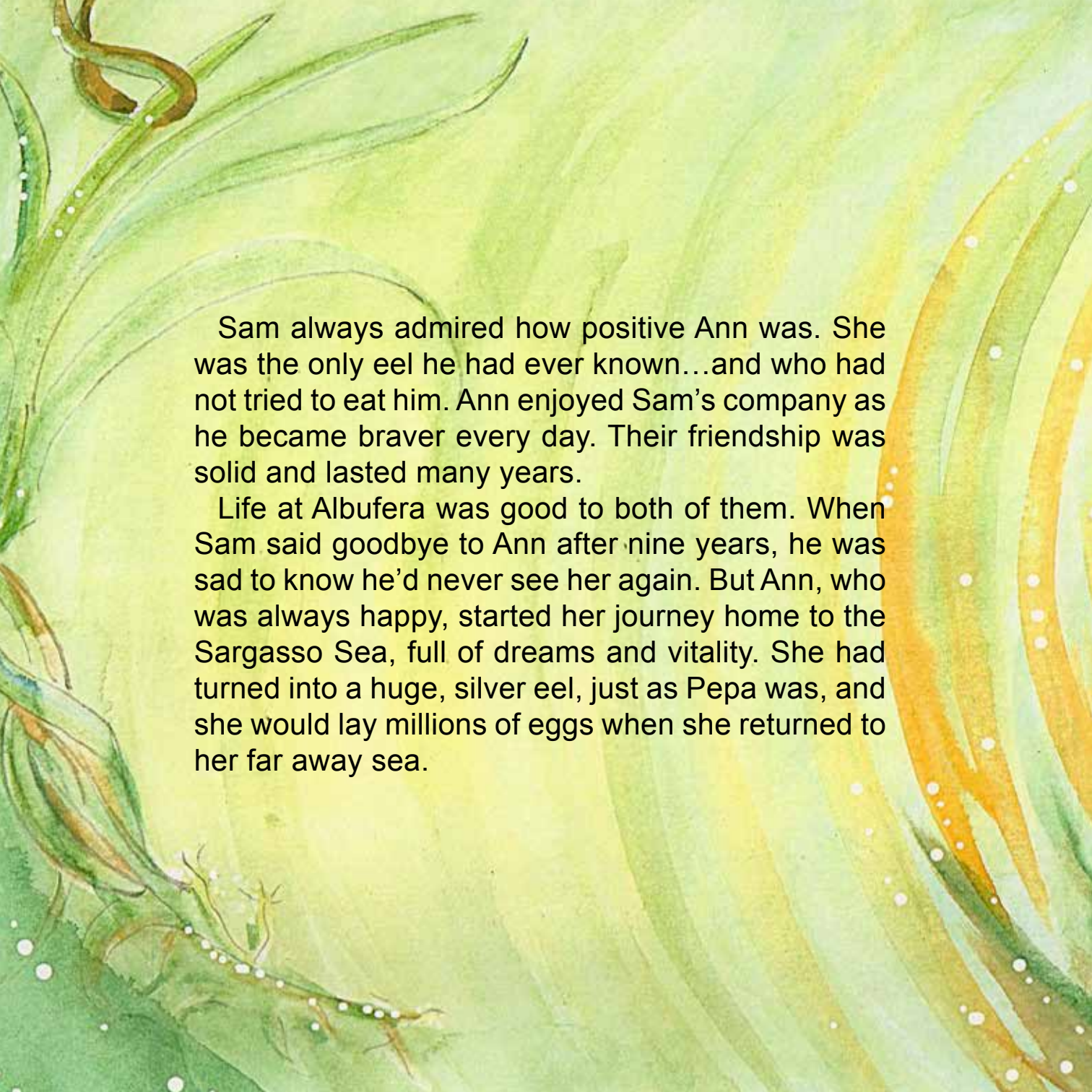
Ann said, “I have to go back to the Sargasso Sea to lay my eggs. I make the journey home without eating anything. That is why I have to get fat before I leave, so I will have the energy to swim and to lay high-quality eggs.”

“But do you have to go now?” Sam asked. “You cannot leave now!”

“No, Sam. I am very young and still a little yellow. I will leave when I am big enough to eat you. But don’t worry, I am only joking. You are so silly. Once my belly color has changed and my eyes are as big as Pepa’s, I will leave. That will be many years from now.”

“Phew!” Sam sighed. “We can be friends for many years.”



The background is a watercolor illustration of an underwater scene. It features various shades of green and yellow-green, suggesting sunlight filtering through water. There are several long, thin, curved shapes that look like seaweed or eels, some with small white dots along their length. The overall style is soft and painterly.

Sam always admired how positive Ann was. She was the only eel he had ever known...and who had not tried to eat him. Ann enjoyed Sam's company as he became braver every day. Their friendship was solid and lasted many years.

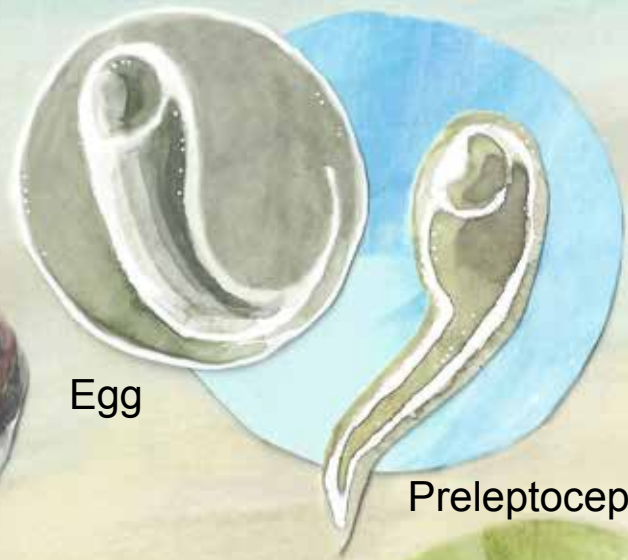
Life at Albufera was good to both of them. When Sam said goodbye to Ann after nine years, he was sad to know he'd never see her again. But Ann, who was always happy, started her journey home to the Sargasso Sea, full of dreams and vitality. She had turned into a huge, silver eel, just as Pepa was, and she would lay millions of eggs when she returned to her far away sea.



Life Cycle



Silver eel



Egg

Preleptocephalus



Yellow eel



Leptocephalus



Glass eel

European eel: *Anguilla anguilla* is a bony, snake-like fish (serpentiform teleost) with a curious lifecycle. It lives along all Europe and North Africa, even though it spawns in Atlantic Ocean.

Egg: In this drawing, you can see a fertilized egg. It is an embryo of 0.039 inches (1mm) in diameter.

Preleptocephalus: Eel larva in its first state after hatching.

Leptocephalus: Larva in its next state. In this stage, they make the longest part of their journey to Europe and Africa.

Glass eel: Elver eel. In this stage, they arrive at European and African coasts.

Yellow eel: Adult form of the eel, before puberty.

Silver eel: Last metamorphic state of the eel, which shows up when eels are ready to start their migration to the sea when they reach puberty.

Did you know...

Eels are migratory fish. Just like salmon and sturgeons.

Eels are catadromous: they are born in the ocean, live in fresh water and they spawn in the ocean.

Eels are euryhaline, just as salmon: they tolerate changes in water saltiness.

Eels and salmon are endangered species.

Glossary

Metamorphic state: Growth's phases of some animals that imply a change in their shape.

Albufera: Lake in Valencia, Spain, nourished by Turia and Júcar rivers. It separated from the sea by the formation of a coast sand barrier in the Roman era, which blocked the river mouths.

Golas: Natural channels. Three channels allow access between Albufera of Valencia and the Mediterranean Sea.

Sargasso Sea: Northeast region of the Atlantic defined by the oceanic flows surrounding it. It is a sea of superficial, warm waters that slowly rotate clockwise, covered by big extensions of Sargassum seaweed.

Sargassum: Planktonic macroalgae that float thanks to gas vesicles.

Mata del Fang: Small peninsula in the Albufera that enters from the Northeast.

Plankton: Microscopic organisms that float in the ocean.

Samaruc: *Valencia hispanica*. Little fish endemic to quiet waters and streams at Spanish East Coast.



Ann is a brave eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) who reaches the Albufera lagoon in Valencia, Spain, after a long journey from the Sargasso Sea. There, she meets Sam, a fearful local fish (*Valencia hispanica*) who soon becomes her best friend.

Know about the particular life cycle of these endangered species and about this special friendship.

Find this book's original song at our YOUTUBE channel: Caja de Cuentos Ediciones.

