



# Once Upon Our Planet

By Vitta Murrow

## Once Upon a Reef



Thousands of years ago, along a great peninsula that stretched from the mainland into a warm ocean, lived two brothers. They weren't a typical family; one was a seagull and the other a whale, but they were family to each other, nonetheless, linked by a chance meeting far out in the ocean





Whale, a young calf, had travelled a great distance, practicing their natural navigation skills. High above, Gull, too, had travelled far, using the colourful water below to track their path.



“Aero, Azure, Sea Foam, Pale Blue, Aqua, Turquoise,  
Teal,” Gull recited.



On that particular day, lava vents near the water had suddenly become instantly clouded, and they could no longer see the colourful waters to chart their way.

Flummoxed, Gull flew in circles. Fear quickly descended upon the lost bird.





Below, deep in the water, away from the  
smoke and bluster, swam young Whale.



When they surfaced for a breath, Whale heard a kerfuffle above them – a flurry of flaps and a terrible squawk. It was, of course, Gull. Whale puffed a spray of water and called out to a confused seabird.





“You, up there! Are you lost?”

“Terribly!” replied the panicked Gull.

“Not to worry!” Whale said confidently. “I am a keen navigator. I will show you the way.”





“But how? I cannot see!” Gull replied, worried.

“Listen! You will hear my breaths,” Whale reassured the stranger in the sky. Sure enough, attentive Gull was calmed by the rhythm of Whale’s breathing. “Follow my lead,” Whale called up.



Gull followed the breath in and out. The rhythm became a guiding signal from the sea. Gull followed Whale all the way to clear skies – and to safety.

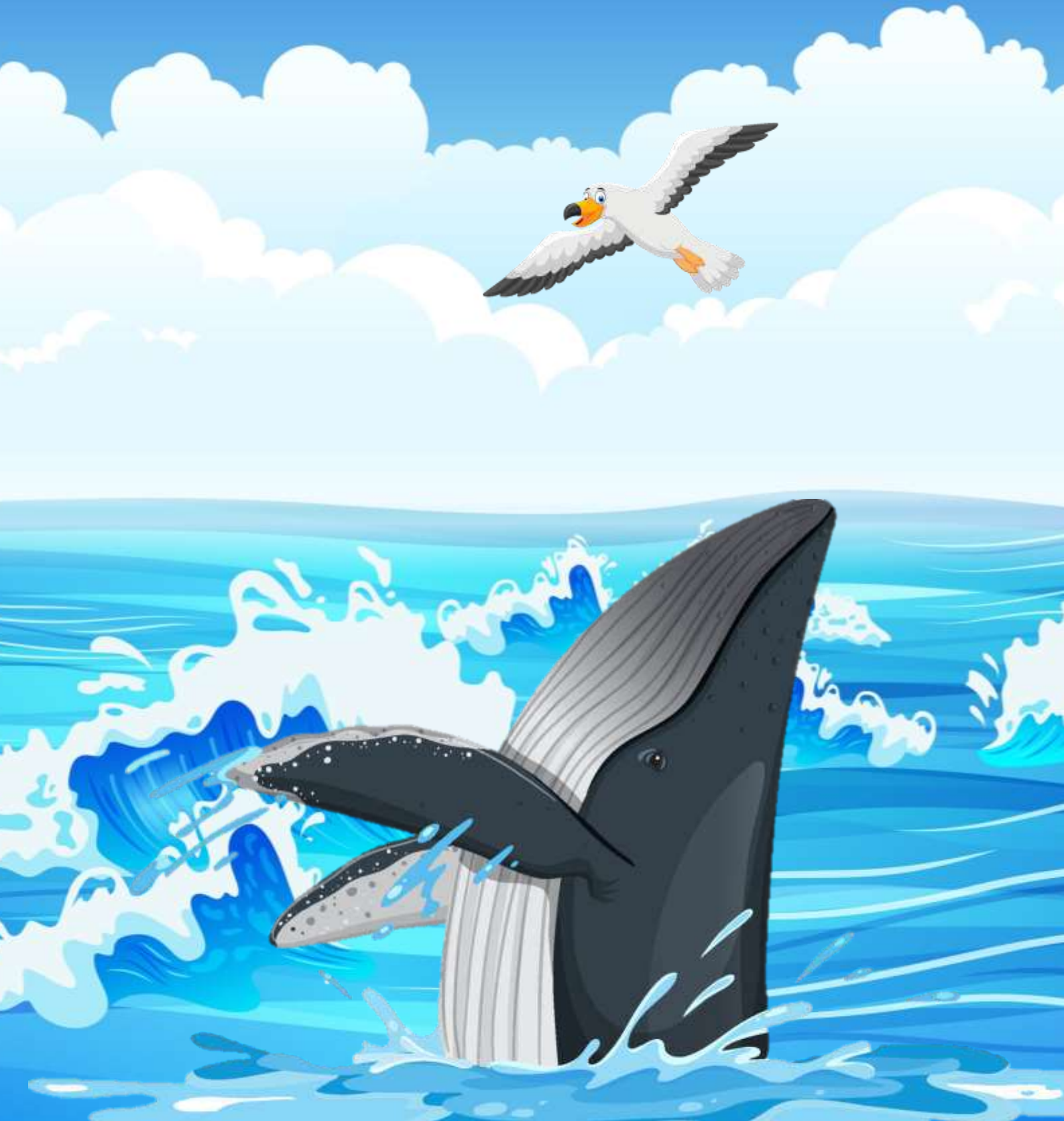




Gull was overcome with joy and gratitude and vowed to return the favour someday.

“No need,” Whale responded.

“Well, you’ll always have my friendship then,” Gull offered.



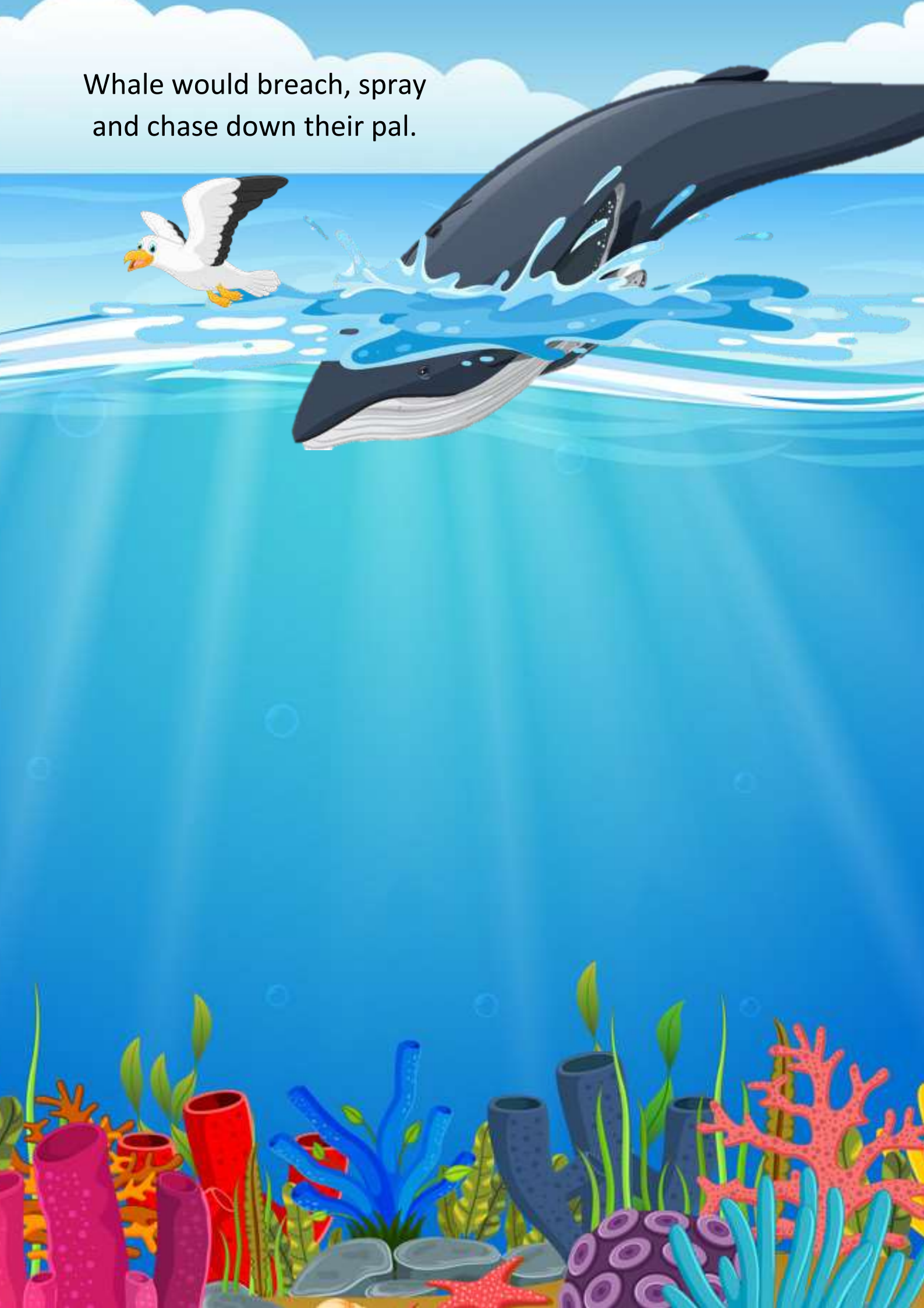
From that day forwards, Whale and Gull had an instant and lasting bond.

They spent days devising parallel fun. Gull swooped and skimmed the water near Whale.





Whale would breach, spray  
and chase down their pal.



While Whale left for colder waters every year, they returned to the same spot where they had first met Gull. Over time, the two came to call one another 'brother'. The peninsula and the surrounding waters were their shared haven.





The brothers travelled among and above the water's wonderful coral and white wildlife; fish, rays, sea stars and crustaceans in all colours and shapes. There was plenty for the pals to explore.



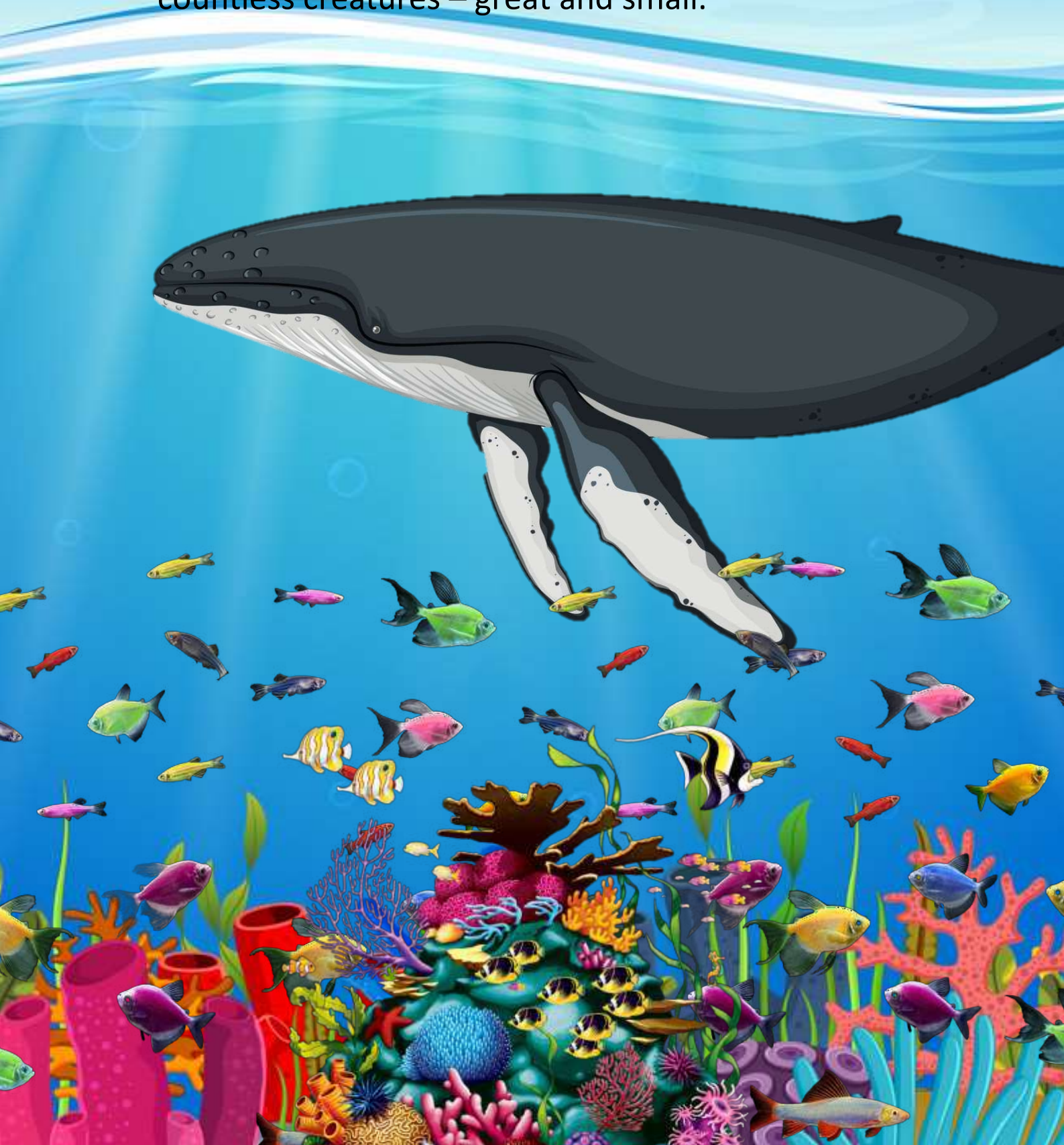


As the two grew older, so did the coral community. It mated to enclose the peninsula like a halo.



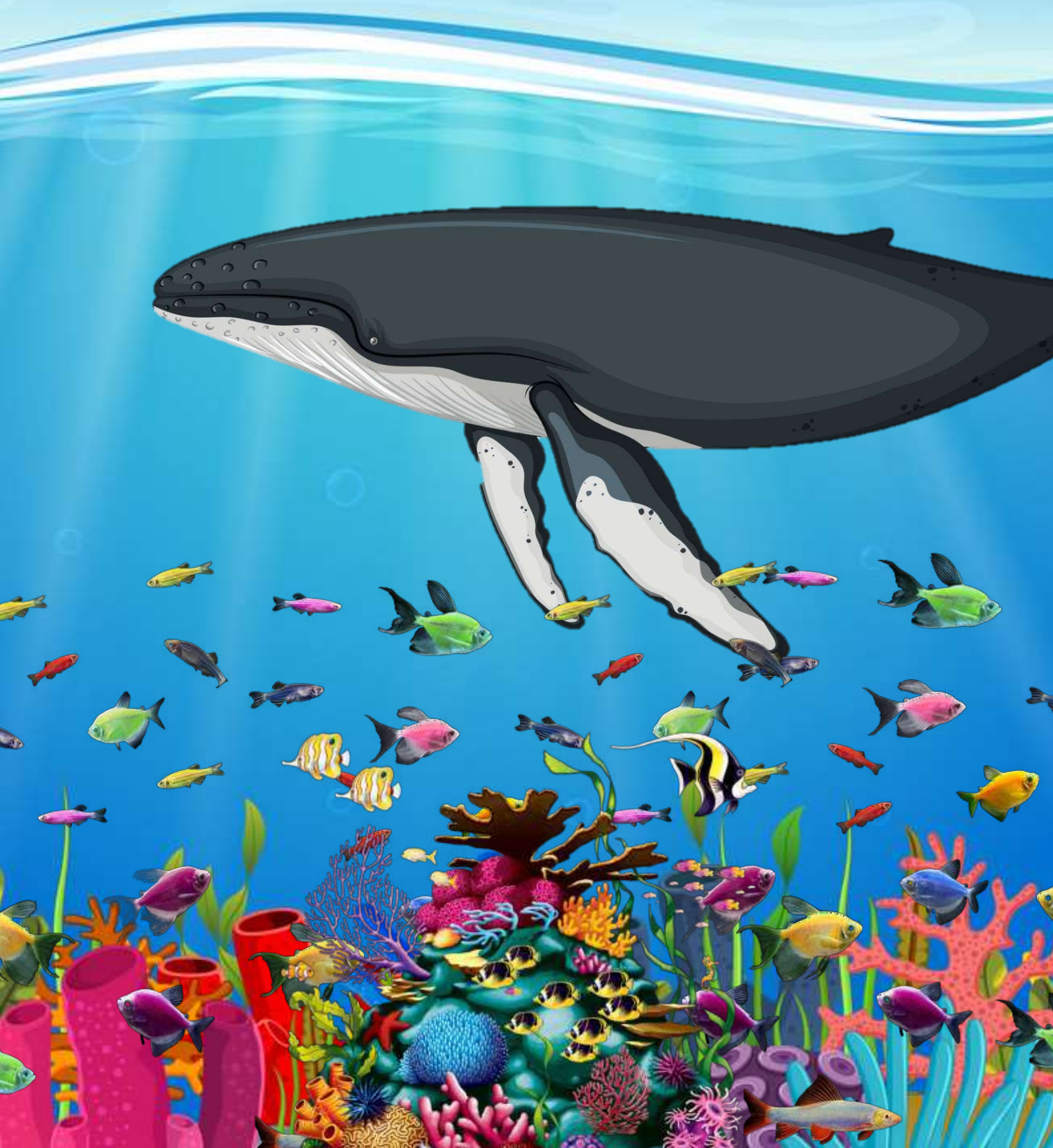


Whale and Gull loved this coral halo and spent much of their time there. their friendship inspired other plants and animals to call the coral their home and in time, the halo became a packed reef. A reliable home to generations of countless creatures – great and small.



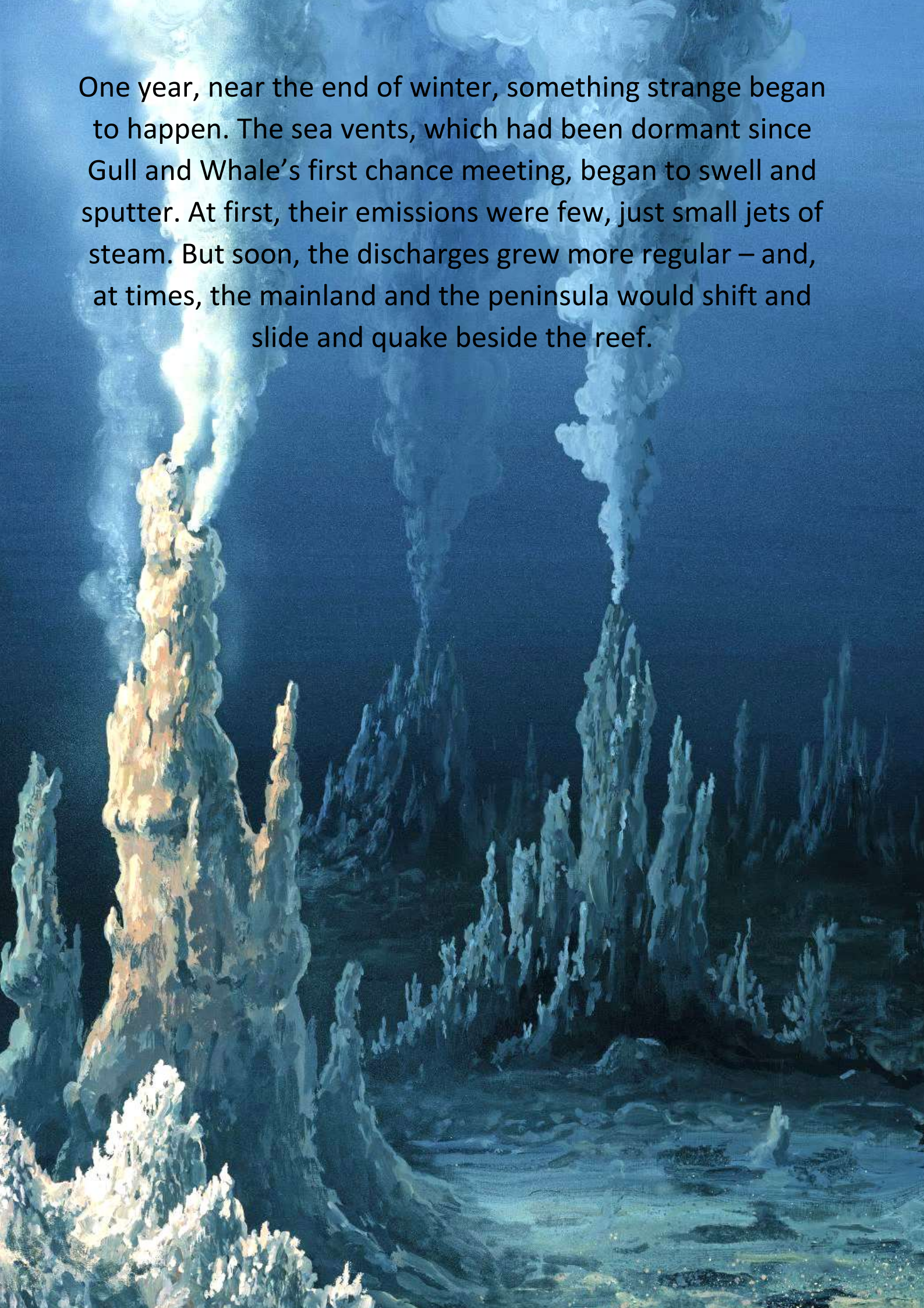


Whale and Gull were the reef's mascots,  
unofficial captains of the  
neighbourhood. They were a constant  
presence above and beneath and helped  
any animals they met to find their way.





One year, near the end of winter, something strange began to happen. The sea vents, which had been dormant since Gull and Whale's first chance meeting, began to swell and sputter. At first, their emissions were few, just small jets of steam. But soon, the discharges grew more regular – and, at times, the mainland and the peninsula would shift and slide and quake beside the reef.





Whale nestled in growing waves and the warmth that jetted below. They tried to comfort and reassure the nervous residents of the reef.





Gull, meanwhile, spent time overhead collecting information to share with Whale below.

From above, Gull could see the other changes were taking place too. The warmer waters had caused the reef to act in mysterious ways. Gull saw that some of the wildlife ebbed away and the coral had taken on new and ghostly hues.



“The water has changed!” remarked Whale as the brothers journeyed alongside the peninsula. Gull atop Whale’s back.

“Yes,” agreed Gull. “From the sky, all the colours are different.”





“Have you noticed the animals are moving away?”  
asked Whale.

“Oh, I’ll be back, don’t worry,” Whale replied. But both  
brothers sensed uncertainty.



As the weeks wore on, winter drew to a close, and soon it was time for Whale to depart. By then, the reef had grown even more irregular. Whale was reluctant to leave.

“What if I stayed? Whale suggested. “Perhaps I could convince other animals and algae to return, to bring the colour back to the reef?”

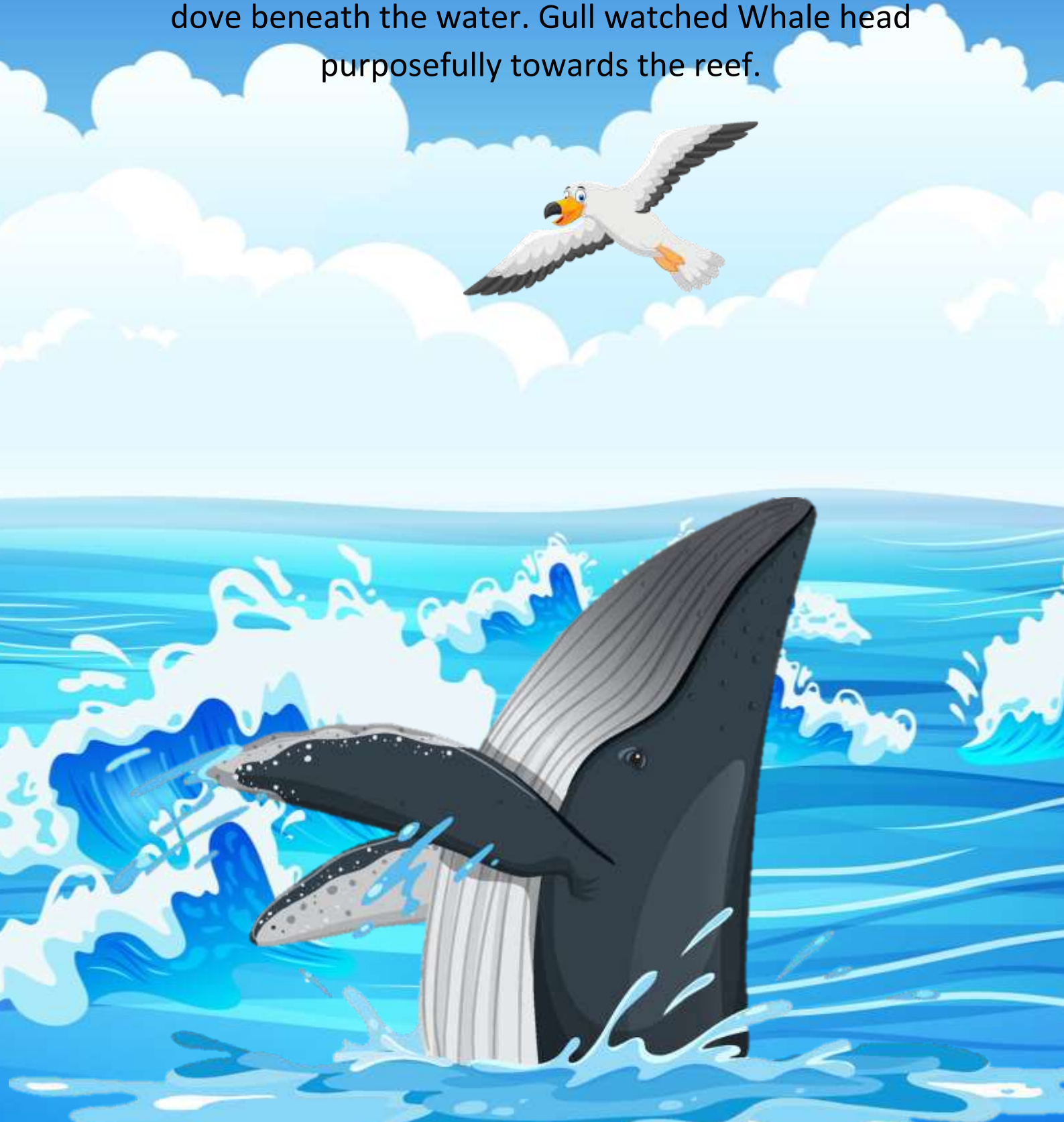




Gull saw from their vantage point that the reef was nearly white, and that little movement could be found in among the coral.

“I don’t know ... It could be too late,” Gull agonized.

‘It’s worth trying!’ Whale said defiantly, and quickly dove beneath the water. Gull watched Whale head purposefully towards the reef.



Suddenly, a resounding BOOM! Was heard, and at the spot where the peninsula attached to the mainland, a great fissure opened in the earth.

Fiery rocks shot forth from the opening. Ribbons of black smoke bloomed behind the projectiles.





Gull knew the air would be thick with smoke before long and they sped past the edge of the peninsula to the far reaches of the bereft reef.

Gull swooped and searched the water for Whale. Behind them, the land exploded and roared.



Enflamed lava spilled from higher ground and ran to the water's edge. Gull feared for Whale. As the hot lava runoff hit the saltwater, it fizzed and steamed and formed bulbous rocks. It looked like a burned border between land and sea.





Gull took to a safe height and looked down. In a dark pathway between the peninsula and the reef, Gull spotted the peninsula and the reef, Gull spotted Whale trapped among the new black rocks which had formed a wall.



Whale was coming up for frequent breaths but had little room to manoeuvre. Gull remembered the day they had met – when Whale was calm and reassuring and had shepherded Gull to safety.





Gull plummeted towards the water, calling to Whale. “I’ve got you, brother!”

Gul scarcely knew what to do, until they spotted trees that had been upended by the trembling land.



They flew to them and grabbed some branches in their bill. With all their might, Gull dragged and pulled the trees one by one to where the peninsula met the mainland.

Moving each tree scored and cut the earth beneath. And scored and cut Gull's mouth. But Gull dragged and pulled the trees until the land between was etched and soft.

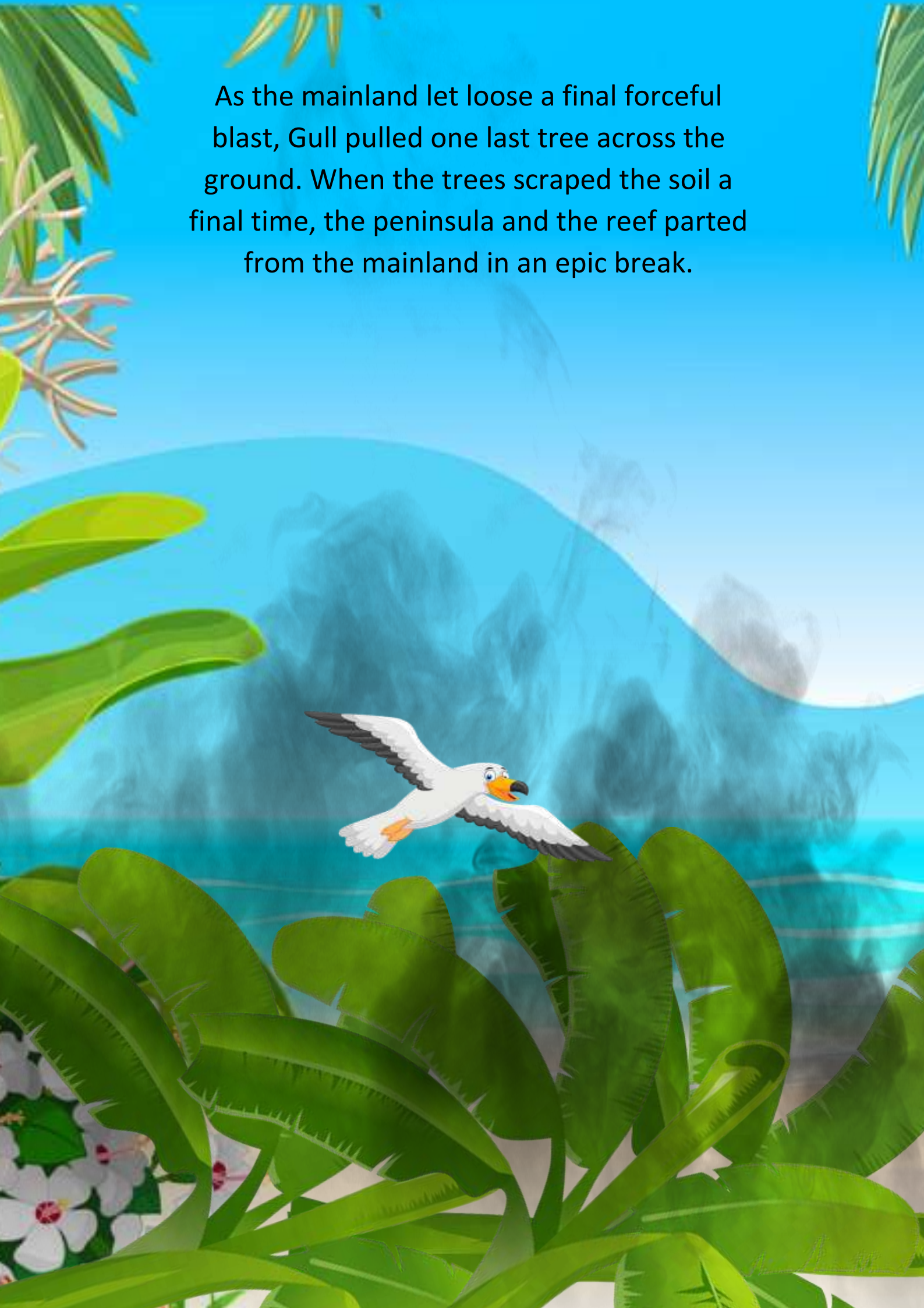




Whale was coming up more frequently for air; Gull monitored their sea spray anxiously.



As the mainland let loose a final forceful blast, Gull pulled one last tree across the ground. When the trees scraped the soil a final time, the peninsula and the reef parted from the mainland in an epic break.





At the place where Whale had been stuck, a gateway opened. Whale breached high in the air, over the black rocks, and landed heavily in the water before heading out into the ocean. Gull flew above Whale. Behind them, their home, their haven, was blanketed in smoke and ash.



The brothers looked back  
at their former home from  
a safe distance.

“Will the reef recover?”  
Whale mourned. “Will it  
ever be a home again?”

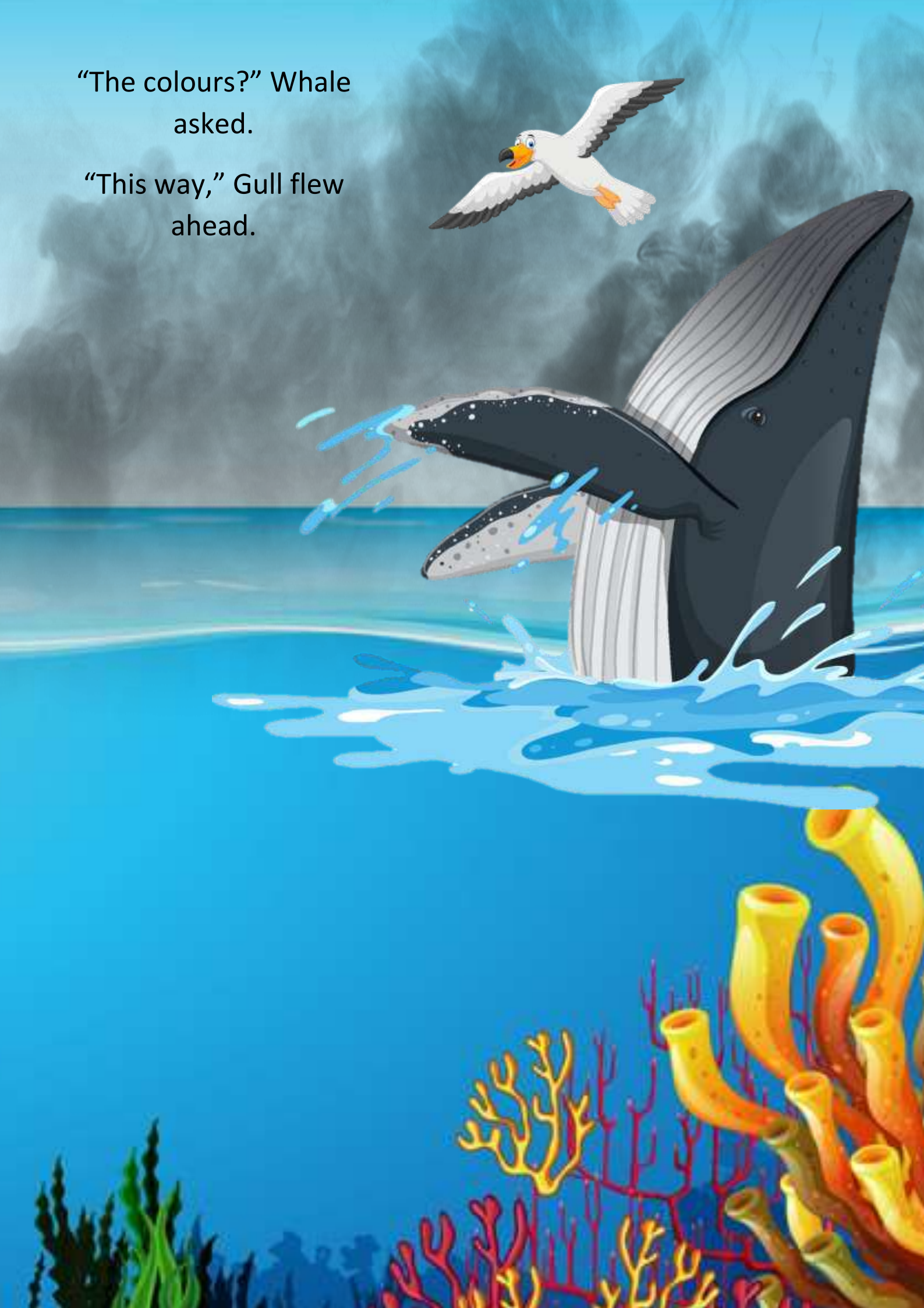
From deep within, Gull  
found optimism and  
reserve. “We’ll follow the  
colours,” he said. “They  
will take us to a vibrant  
new home.”





“The colours?” Whale  
asked.

“This way,” Gull flew  
ahead.



“Aero, Azure, Sea Foam, Pale Blue, Aqua, Turquoise, Teal,” Gull recited. “When the reef has recovered, we will follow the colours home.”





Together they travelled onward, brothers bonded by the sea. Together they held fast to the promise of a day when the reef would one again be a place of splendour, majesty and colour: a place they could call home.





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