

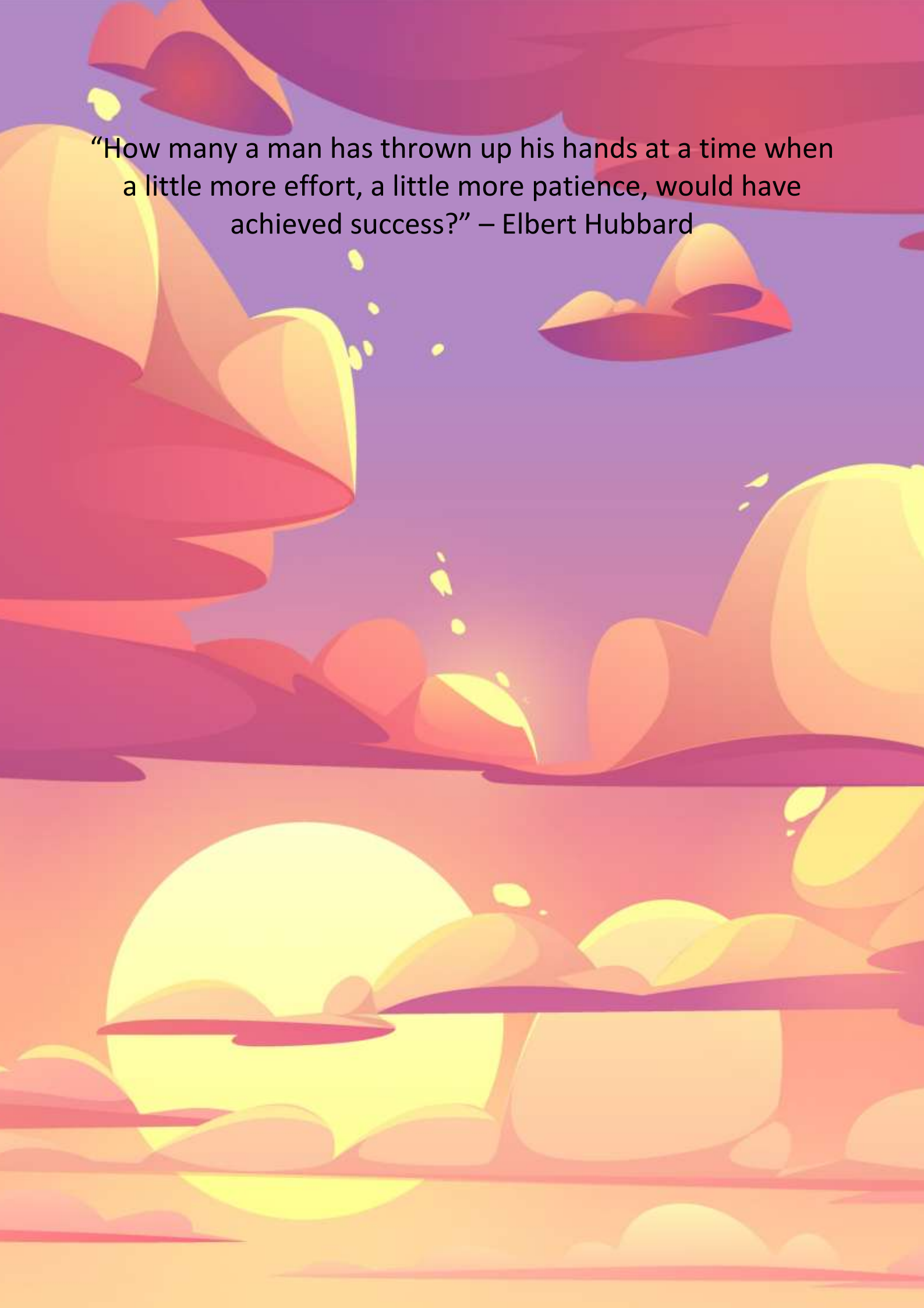
Stories of Courage, Laughter & Hope



Baby's Ears



“How many a man has thrown up his hands at a time when a little more effort, a little more patience, would have achieved success?” – Elbert Hubbard



Mom poured herself a glass of orange juice.

“I’m worried about Grandma,” she said.

I was pouring syrup on my French toast, hot and sweet, just the way I liked it.

“Why?” I asked as I licked a drop of syrup from my fork.



“Well, remember before she moved to Florida, how early Grandma would get up?”

“Before the sun,” I said, “to make pancakes and bacon.”

My mom nodded. “But now Grandma sleeps most of the day or watches television. I can’t get her out of the house, and she won’t try to make friends.” Mom frowned and lowered her voice. “Grandma’s even talking about going back to New York.”



“Back to New York? But you said that she couldn’t live alone anymore. That’s why she came to live here.”

I liked Florida. Of course, I had a lot of girlfriends to play with in my sixth-grade class.



“If Grandma went back to New York, she would have to live in a nursing home,” my mother told me. “That’s a place where old people live and nurses take care of them.”



“It sounds like a hospital to me,” I said.
I thought for a minute. “I’ll find a way to make Grandma like Florida.”

Mom smiled and said, “I wish you could.”

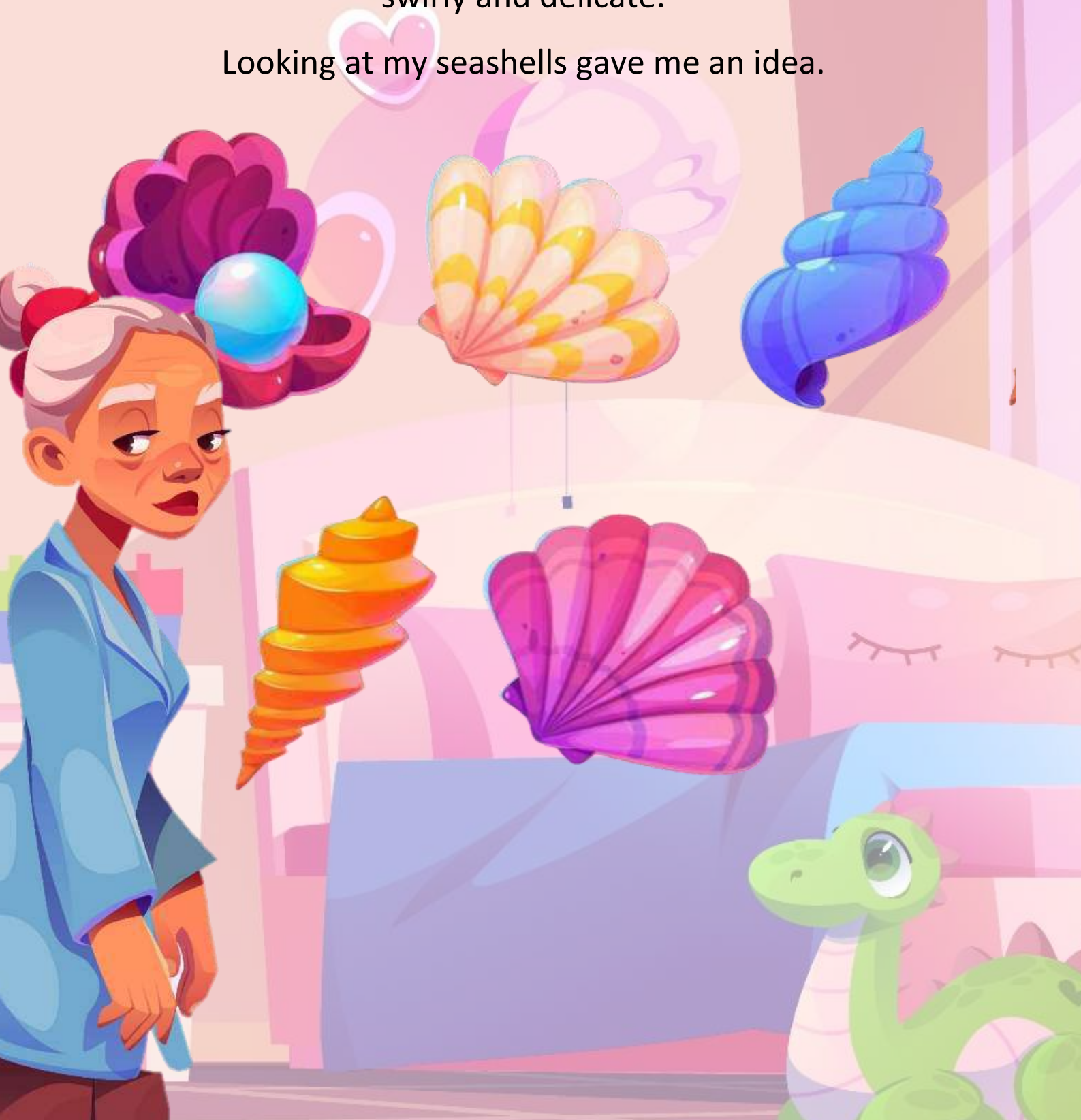
After school, I saw Grandma watching television and figured she hadn’t moved all day.



In my room, I sat on my bed and took out my seashell collection. I had found striped whelks, purple sea snails, and even a queen conch shell. You can hold a conch shell up to your ear and actually hear the ocean waves.

My very favourite shell was called a Baby's Ear. It's a beautiful white shell shaped just like the ear of a baby—all swirly and delicate.

Looking at my seashells gave me an idea.



I went into the living room and sat on the couch.

“Did you ever go to the beach when you were little, Grandma?” I asked.

“Once my mother took me, but I didn’t enjoy it at all,” she said, frowning.



“Really?” I took an oatmeal cookie from the plate on the coffee table. “Why not?”

“I’m afraid of the water, and I can’t swim.”

Grandma pursed her lips as though she’d tasted a lemon. I wished Grandma could feel the way I did about the beach. I loved seeing pelicans flying over the water, and once I even saw a huge green iguana.



“Well, I was wondering if you could take me to the beach, Grandma. I need some new shells for my collection.”

Grandma didn't even look up from the TV.

“I'm watching my show, Val. Can't you go by yourself?”

“No. I'm not allowed to go to the beach by myself. Please!”
I begged, imagining Grandma in a nursing home.



“Oh, all right,” Grandma sighed.

She took my hand as we left the house, and we walked to the beach. The sun felt hot enough to melt metal. I handed Grandma a plastic bag.

“Here. This is for the seashells you find.”



“Oh, I’ll leave that to you,” she said. A soft ocean breeze
blew her grey curls across her eyes.

I shook my head. “No, Grandma. I need all the help I can
get.”

“Oh, all right,” she said.



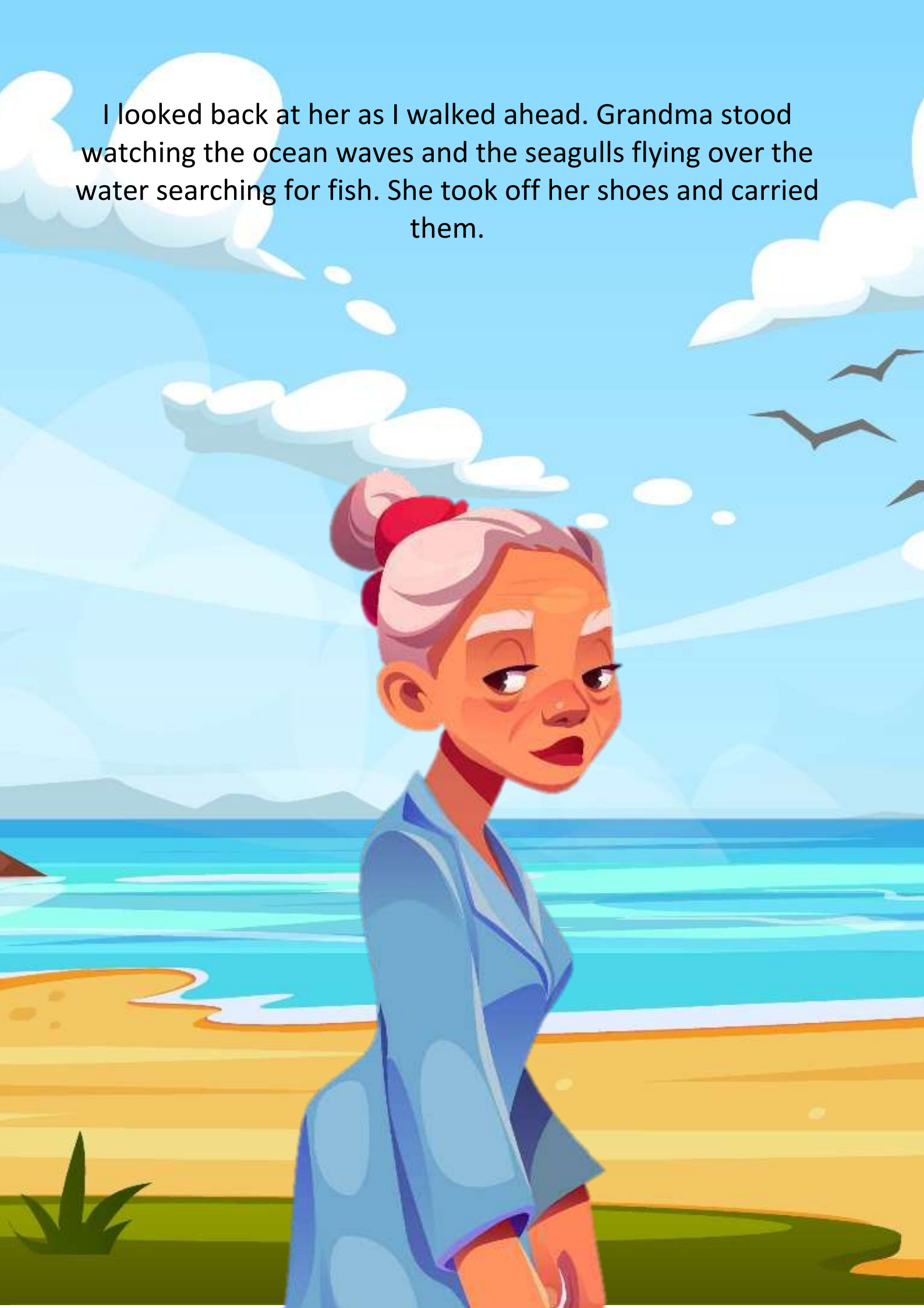
“We walked side by side up the beach, our heads down, looking for only the most beautiful shells.

“Doesn’t look like there’s much to choose from,” Grandma said, shading her eyes with her hand. “Maybe we should go home.”

“Not yet, Grandma! I’ll go ahead like a scout and see if I find anything good.”



I looked back at her as I walked ahead. Grandma stood watching the ocean waves and the seagulls flying over the water searching for fish. She took off her shoes and carried them.



I ran on ahead and slipped a pink triton shell from my pocket, dropping it in the sand. Farther up the beach, I did the same with my blue starfish and my green serpent star.

Finally, I dropped my favourite shell—the Baby’s Ear.

Just then, I heard Grandma shout, “Val! Look what I found!”

Grandma stood in the sand, holding up the pink triton.



“That’s beautiful, Grandma!” I cried. “It will look great in my collection.”

Grandma nodded and smiled. “Let’s keep looking!” she said, suddenly excited.

I pretended to pass right by the blue starfish, but Grandma bent down slowly and picked it up.

“Val! Look at this starfish. It’s blue!”



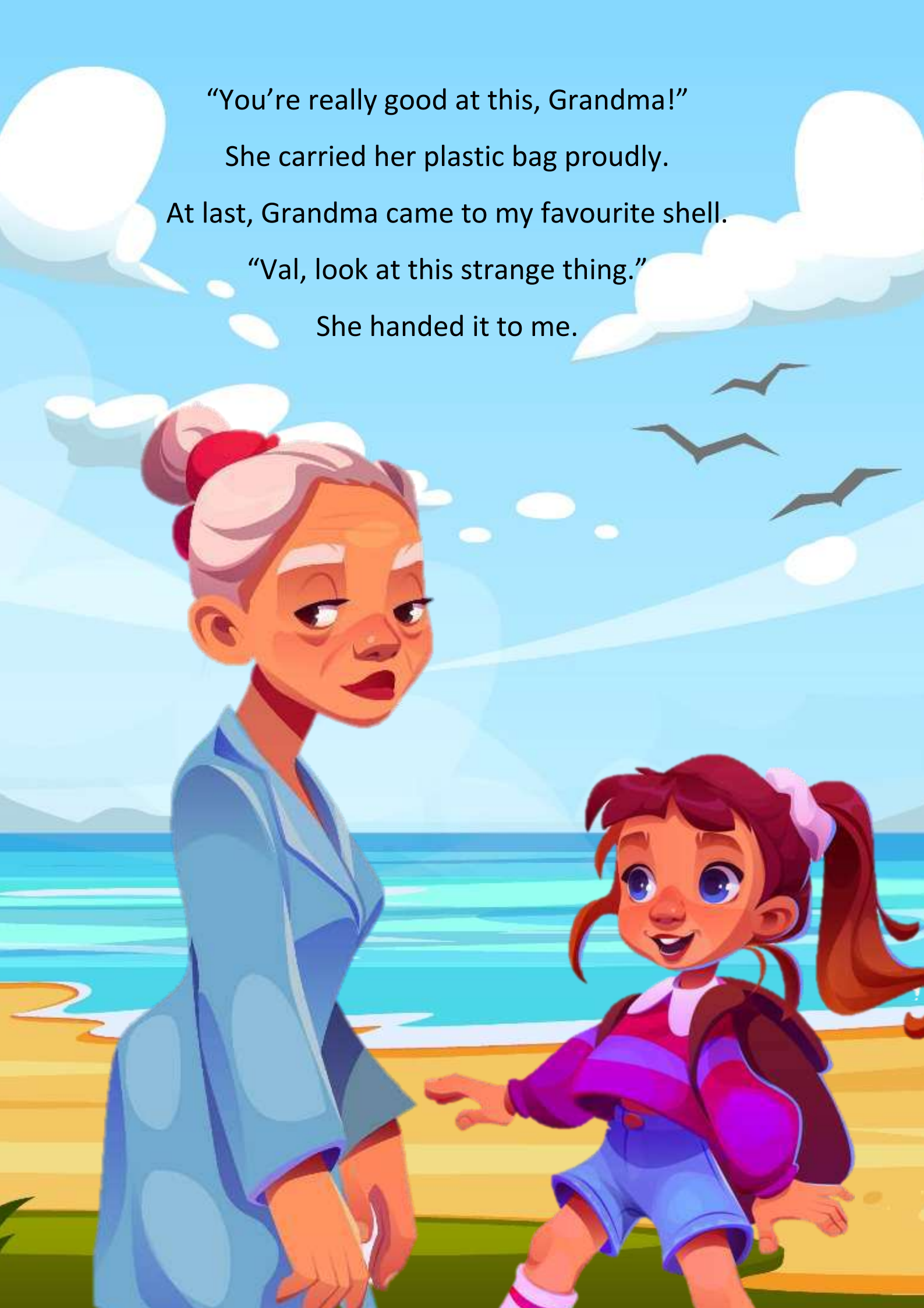
“You’re really good at this, Grandma!”

She carried her plastic bag proudly.

At last, Grandma came to my favourite shell.

“Val, look at this strange thing.”

She handed it to me.



I cradled the shell in my hand. "It's called a Baby's Ear because that's what it looks like."

"You're pretty good at this yourself, Val," Grandma said, giving me a hug.

On the way home, we waded in the ocean. Grandma seemed to have forgotten her fear of water.

We met my mom on the front porch.



“We’ve been to the beach,” Grandma told her. “And you know, I think I’ll start a shell collection of my own. You can help me, Val.”

“Okay, Grandma,” I said.

My mom and I shared a secret smile.

Valerie Allen





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