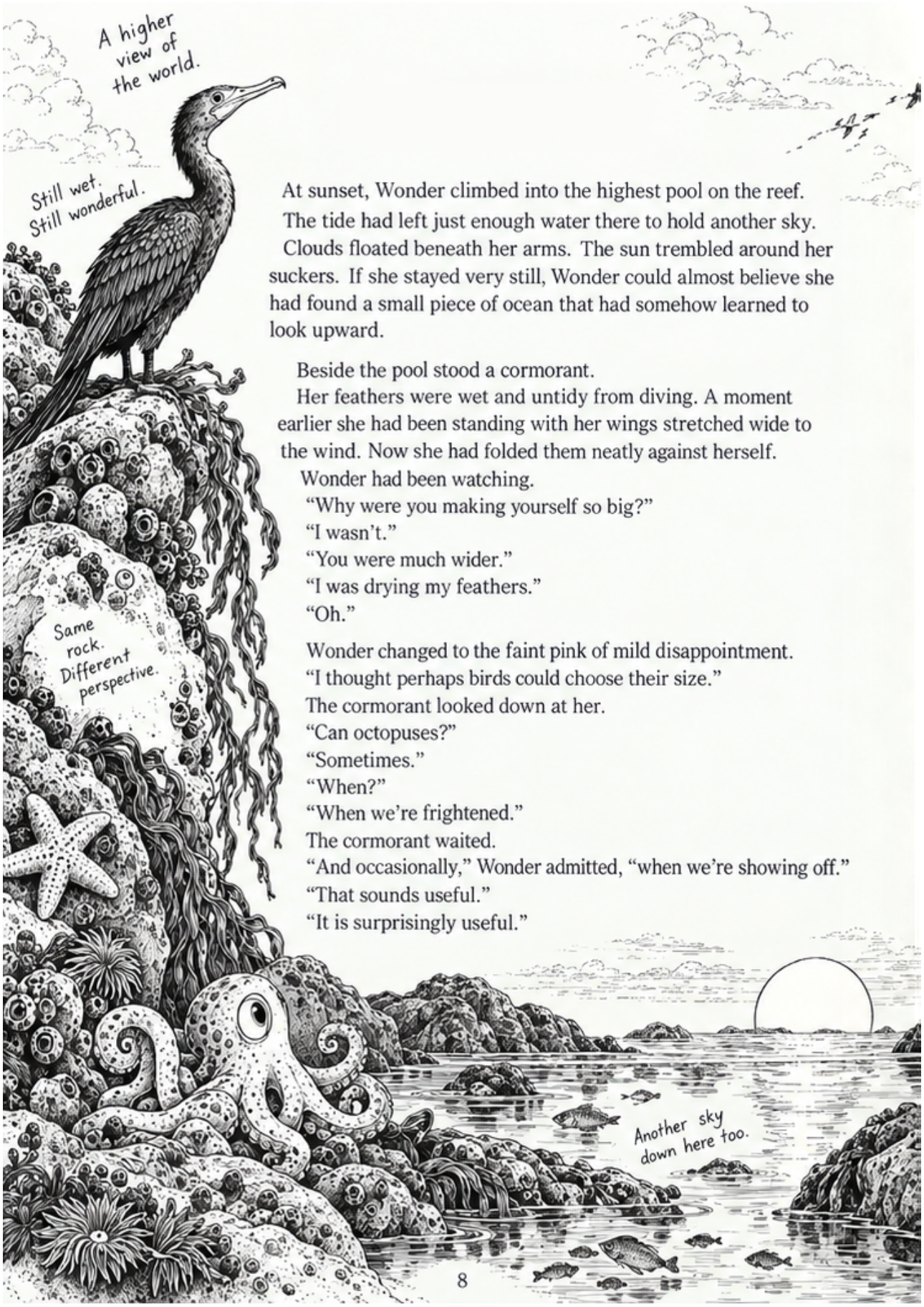


At sunset, Wonder climbed into the highest pool on the reef. The tide had left just enough water there to hold another sky. Clouds floated beneath her arms. The sun trembled around her suckers. If she stayed very still, Wonder could almost believe she had found a small piece of ocean that had somehow learned to look upward.

Beside the pool stood a cormorant. Her feathers were wet and untidy from diving. A moment earlier she had been standing with her wings stretched wide to the wind. Now she had folded them neatly against herself.

Wonder had been watching.

"Why were you making yourself so big?"

"I wasn't."

"You were much wider."

"I was drying my feathers."

"Oh."

Wonder changed to the faint pink of mild disappointment.

"I thought perhaps birds could choose their size."

The cormorant looked down at her.

"Can octopuses?"

"Sometimes."

"When?"

"When we're frightened."

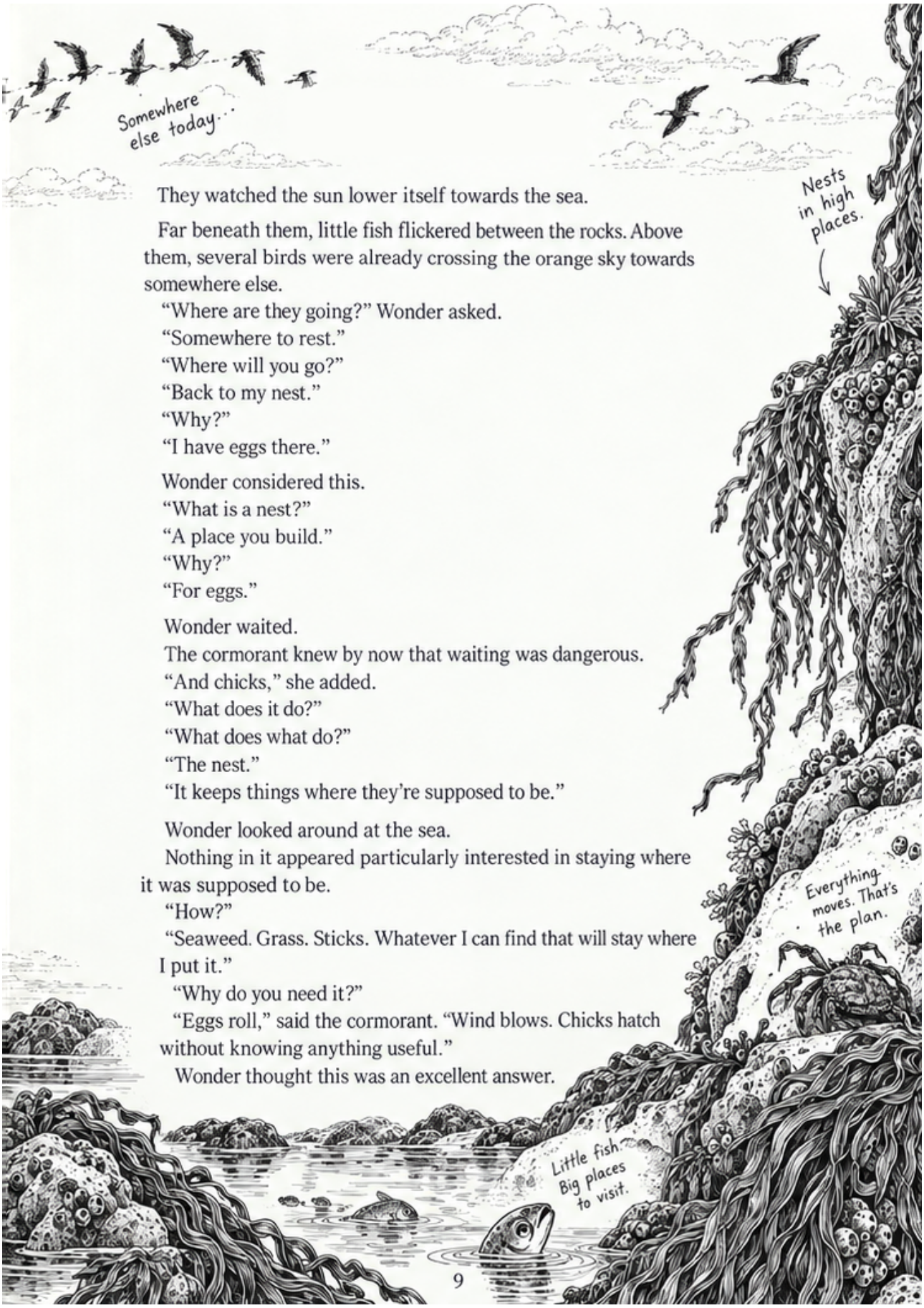
The cormorant waited.

"And occasionally," Wonder admitted, "when we're showing off."

"That sounds useful."

"It is surprisingly useful."

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They watched the sun lower itself towards the sea.

Far beneath them, little fish flickered between the rocks. Above them, several birds were already crossing the orange sky towards somewhere else.

"Where are they going?" Wonder asked.

"Somewhere to rest."

"Where will you go?"

"Back to my nest."

"Why?"

"I have eggs there."

Wonder considered this.

"What is a nest?"

"A place you build."

"Why?"

"For eggs."

Wonder waited.

The cormorant knew by now that waiting was dangerous.

"And chicks," she added.

"What does it do?"

"What does what do?"

"The nest."

"It keeps things where they're supposed to be."

Wonder looked around at the sea.

Nothing in it appeared particularly interested in staying where it was supposed to be.

"How?"

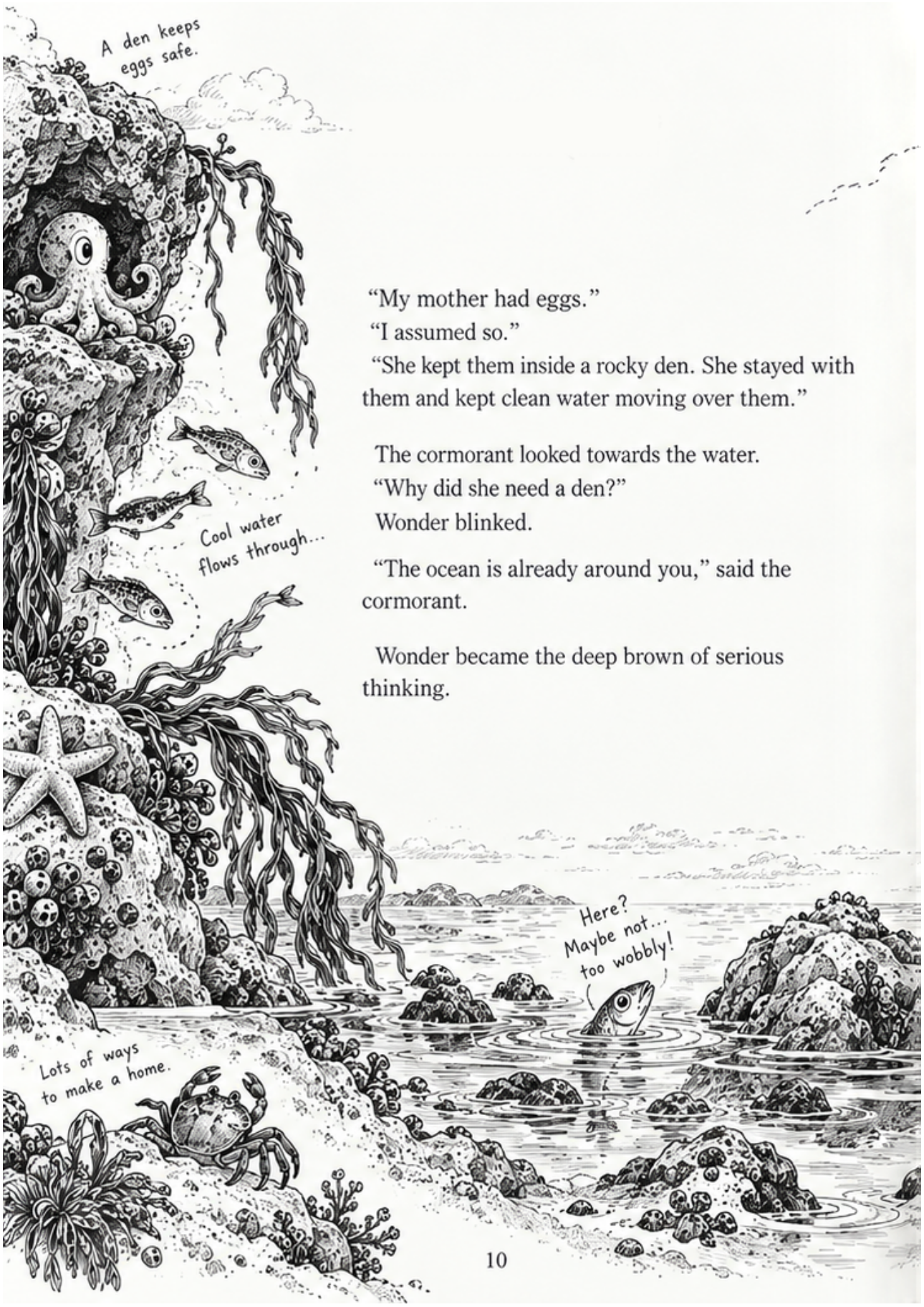
"Seaweed. Grass. Sticks. Whatever I can find that will stay where I put it."

"Why do you need it?"

"Eggs roll," said the cormorant. "Wind blows. Chicks hatch without knowing anything useful."

Wonder thought this was an excellent answer.

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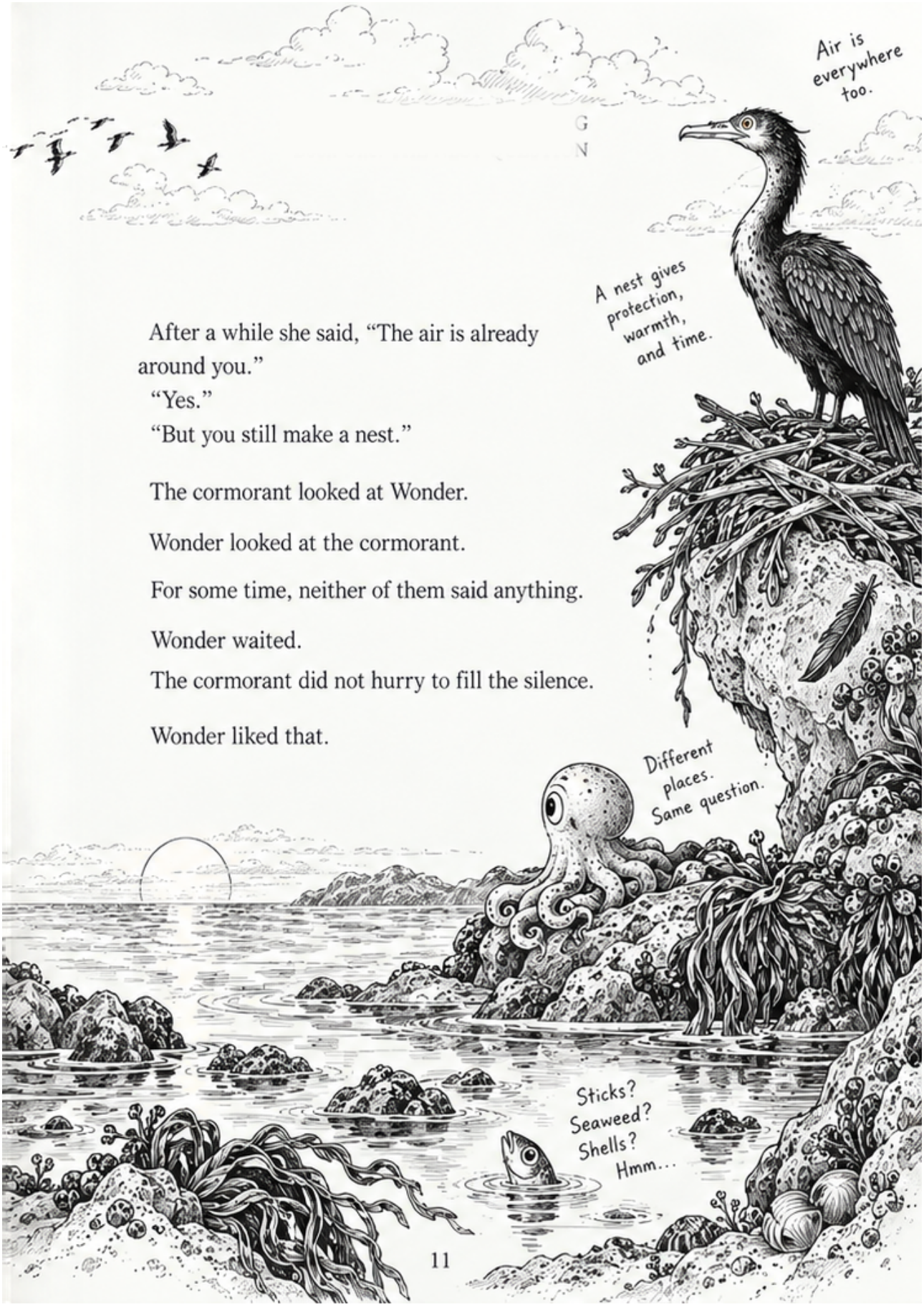
"My mother had eggs."
"I assumed so."
"She kept them inside a rocky den. She stayed with them and kept clean water moving over them."

The cormorant looked towards the water.
"Why did she need a den?"
Wonder blinked.

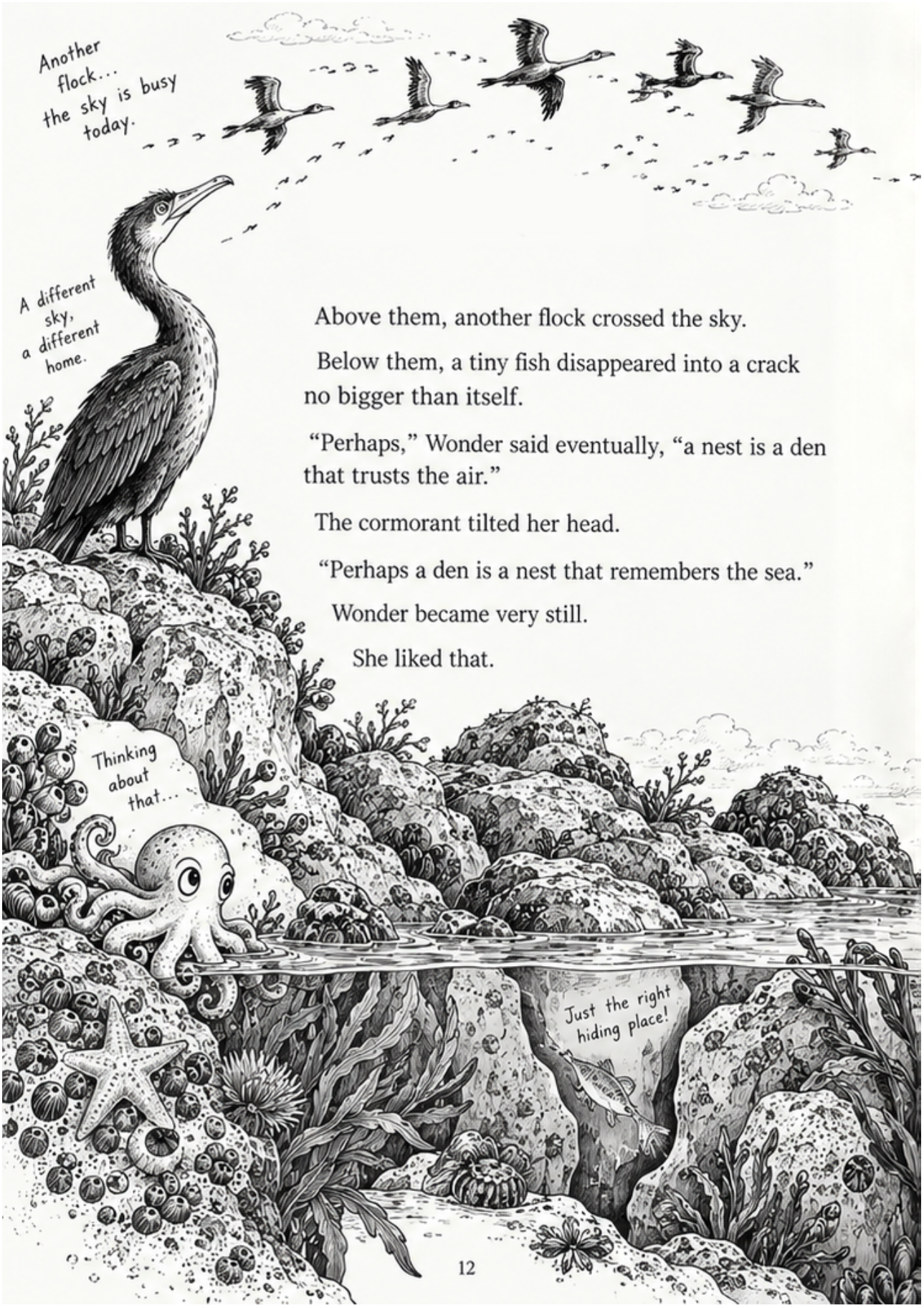
"The ocean is already around you," said the cormorant.

Wonder became the deep brown of serious thinking.

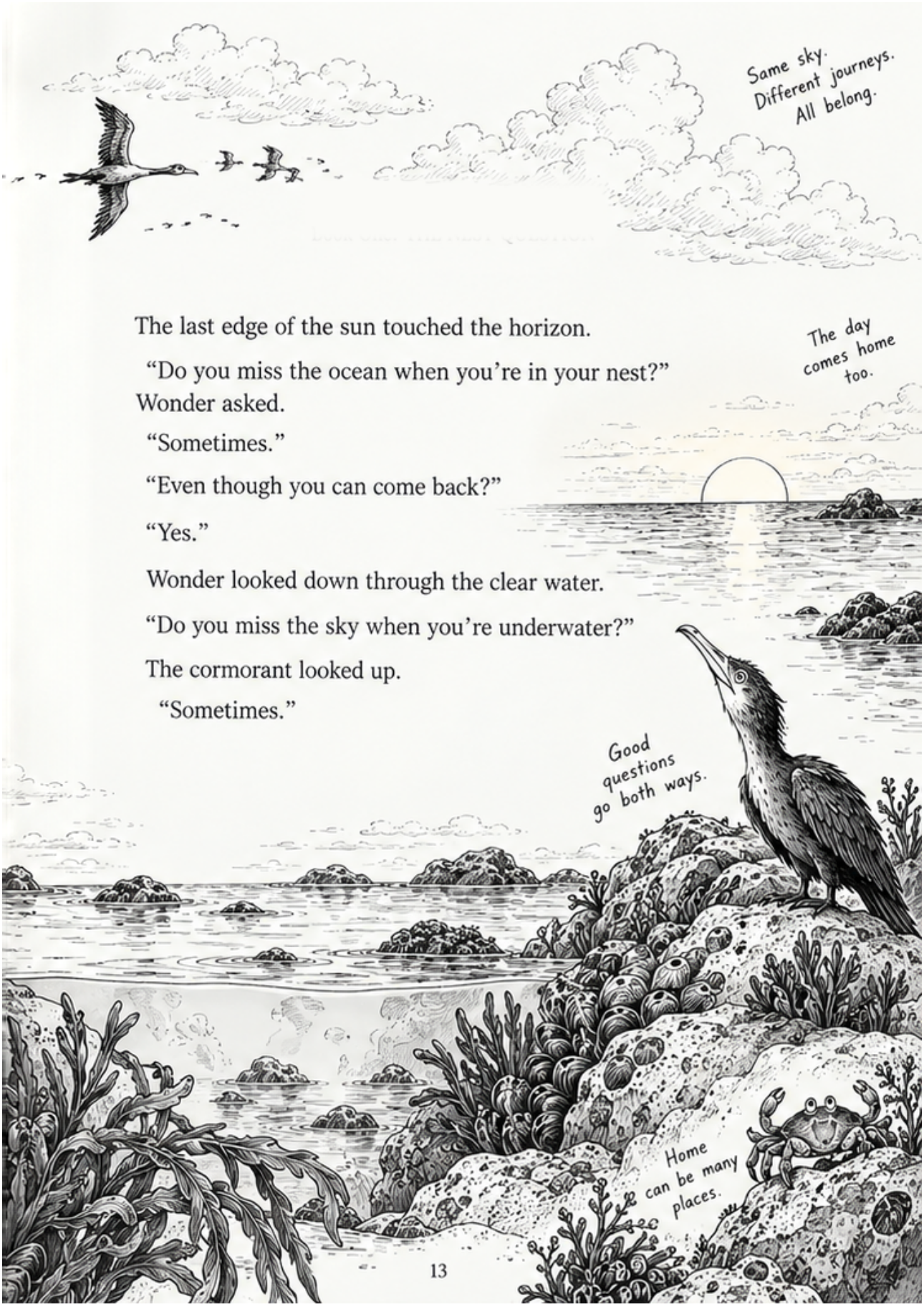
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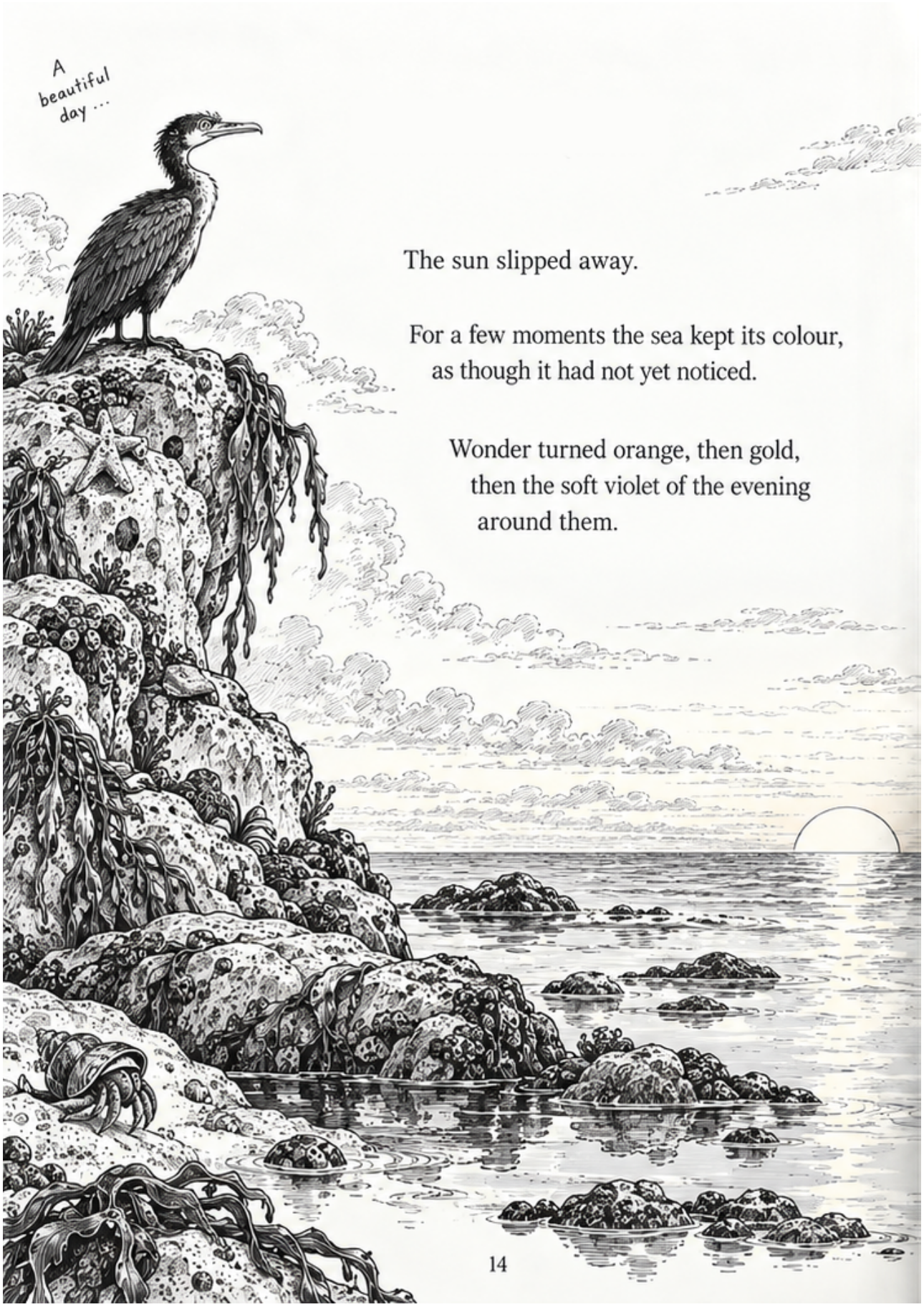
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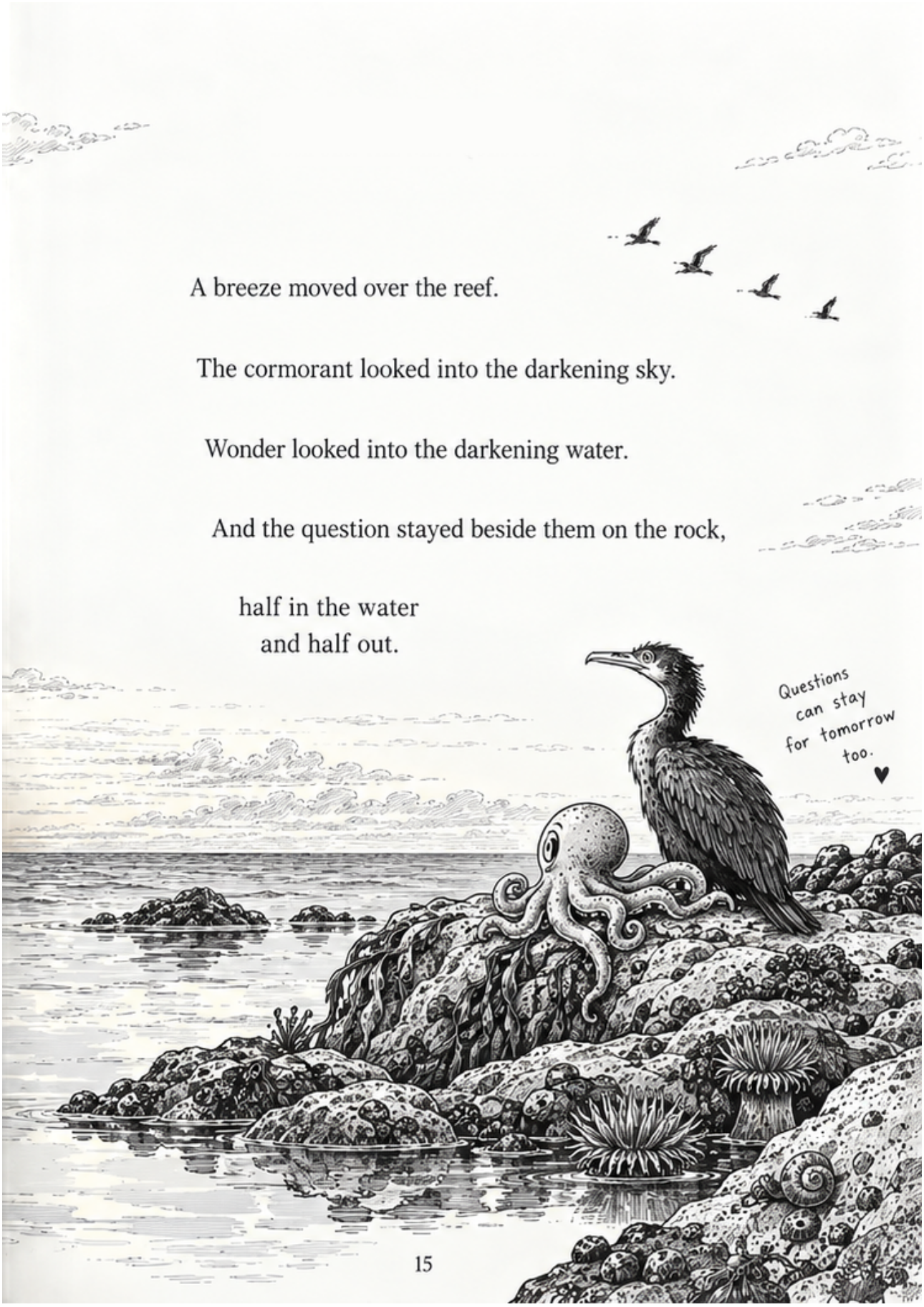
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