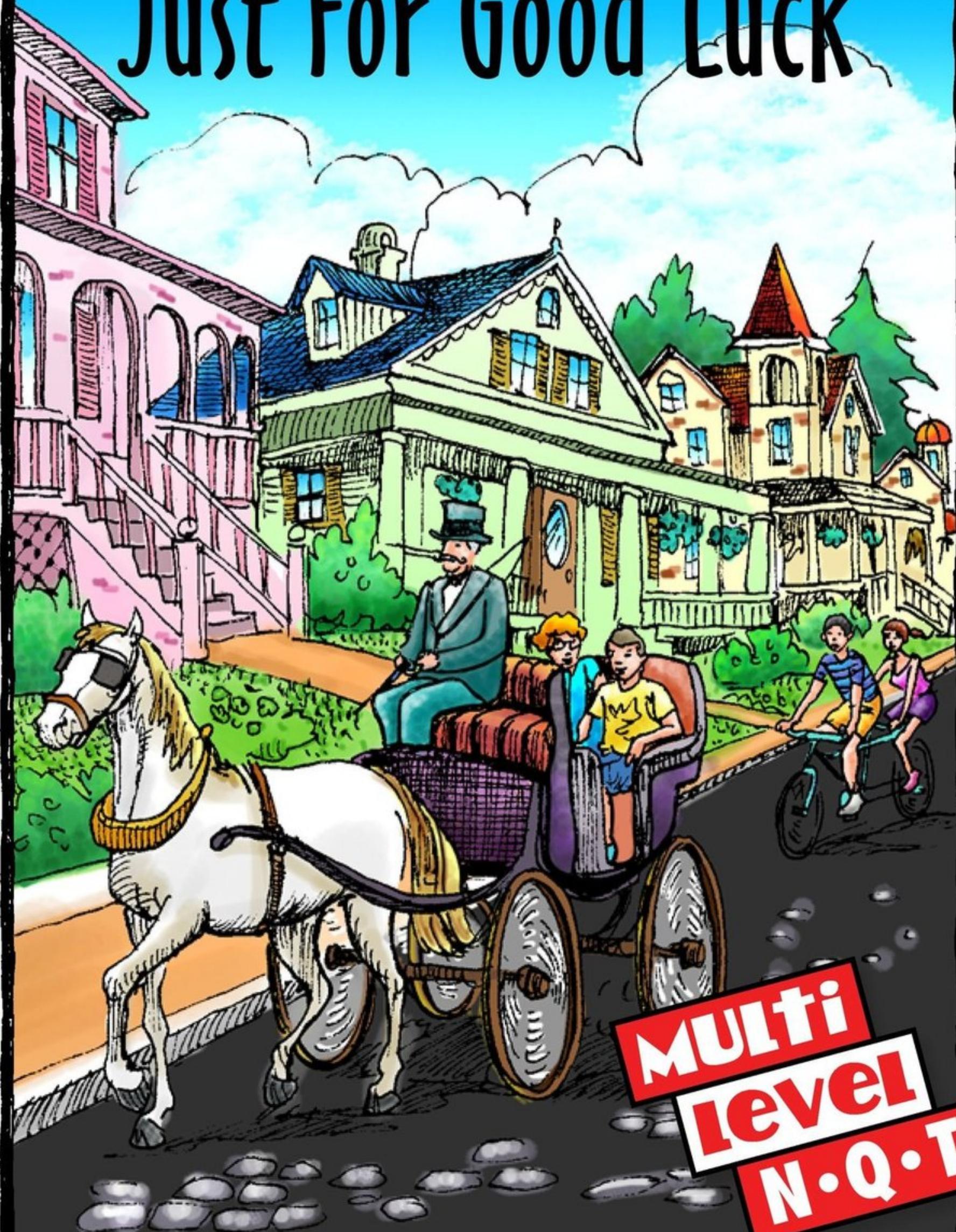


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Horseshoes Aren't Just For Good Luck



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Written by Deborah Ambroza
Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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Introduction

Everyone has a special summer they treasure as the best summer of all. Mine came when I was nine years old, and it started after my first train ride alone. That short ride out of the city began my summer-long exploration of new surroundings. Even now, the pattern of smells, sounds, and textures seems so immediate that I can imagine myself back there. When my father first suggested that I visit Gram, his grandmother, at her big beach house, I had no way of anticipating the outcome. I had never seen an ocean or a beach. Dad said he had loved spending long, lazy summers there, and his enthusiasm colored every story he told.

Leaving Home

I kept asking my dad, “But what is it like there?” and he said, “The entire environment of a beach town is different from the city. People have chosen to enjoy a different way of living. You’ll see.” Raised with the routines of life in the city, I wasn’t sure what he meant by ‘a different way of living.’ In the taxi we took to the train station, Dad kept assuring me that I would love discovering it all for myself.



I rode alone on the train, watching the passing view change from my familiar city skyline to small towns, then to no towns at all. I wondered what it would be like where I was going. I didn’t feel very reassured.

Life by the Sea

My questions vanished when I saw Gram waiting for me at the train station, laughing and waving her straw hat. Her friend Jim loaded my bags into his car and chose a route through Gram's little beach town so I could see what it was like.

The first thing I noticed was that most of the people we passed were walking or riding bicycles. There was also a beautiful horse ambling slowly down the shady street, drawing a carriage. No one was in a hurry at all. I could already see that a summer here was going to be unusual.



We stopped in front of a tall gray house that had a rambling garden with flowers of all kinds. Jim carried my bags as we climbed up the many steps to the broad front porch.

Gram started to prepare dinner for all of us. Whatever she was making had a sharp, spicy aroma. "While I'm doing this, go upstairs and pick any bedroom you like," she suggested. Creaking wooden stairs led up to a hallway with three bedrooms and a bath with large bay windows. Each room I examined had billowing lace curtains, was painted a different color, and was personalized with its own pattern of wallpaper. Choosing a bedroom was easy. Once I leaned my elbows on the windowsill of the sunny yellow room and breathed in the salt-tinged breeze from the ocean, I decided it had to be my room.



My Summer Home

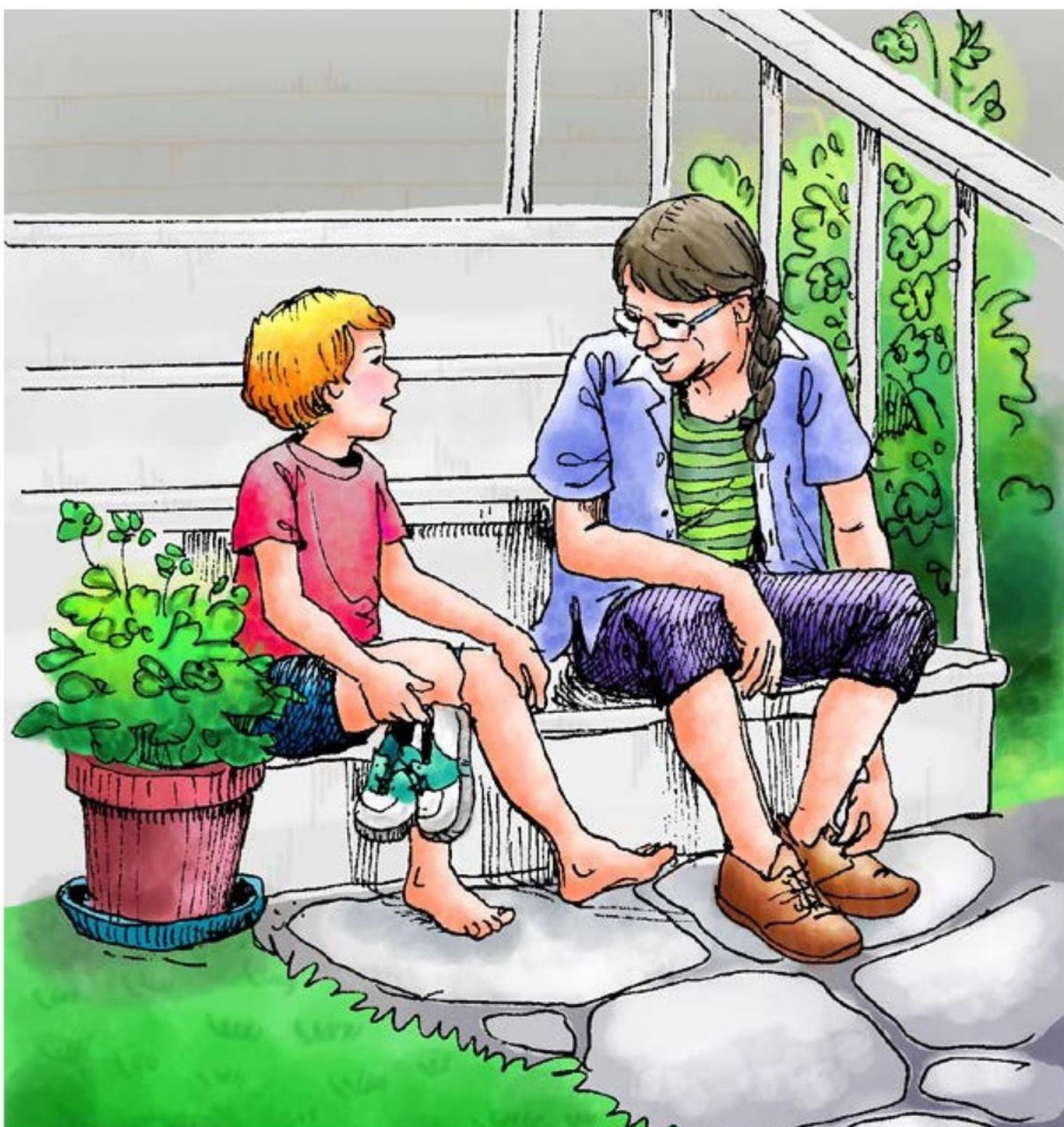
The high, old-fashioned bed was inviting, so I plopped onto its plump comforter, stretched in satisfaction, and listened. It was very quiet, except for the background sound of the waves rolling onto the beach, over and over, wave after wave. The ocean was just outside the door.



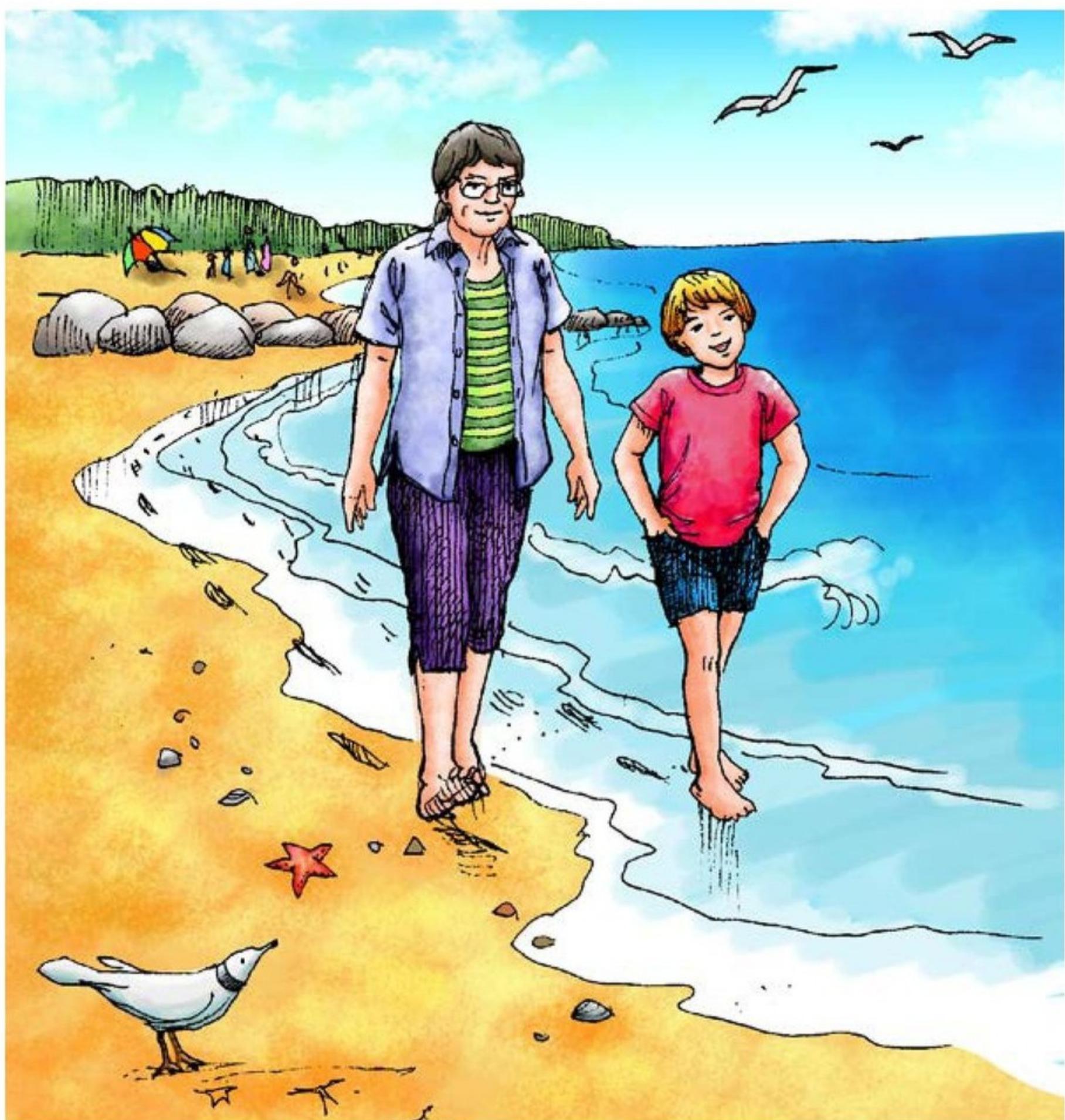
I ran down the creaky stairs and announced, “I’m going down to the beach!” But Gram stopped me.

She said, “It’s very important to learn the rules of the sea before you go to the ocean unattended. Come with me.”

We took off our shoes on the porch and walked down to the beach together.



As we scrunched our toes in the damp sand, Gram explained the purpose of the two long, rock wall **jetties** that dominated the beach. “Years ago, our shoreline was much broader. Over time, **erosion** (ih-RO-zhun) and the tides pulled much of the sand away,” she said. “So the town decided to position these heavy rocks in two long rows to help protect the beautiful beach from eroding further.”





Gram cautioned me, “Only walk along the shoreline between the jetties. Always pay attention to the waves.”

She described *currents* as strong flows of ocean water that could drag a swimmer far out to sea. And she said an *undertow* could pull a person under the surface and trap them there. I agreed not to go into the water unless she or Jim were with me.

My spicy welcoming dinner included little **crab cakes**, and there were flowers from her garden on the table. Jim told lots of stories about things he had found on the beach. After clearing the dishes, I was suddenly ready for bed. In my new pajamas, I burrowed deeply into my cool pillows and watched shadows from the lace curtains dance across the wall. Very soon, I was dreaming contentedly of running along a sandy beach.

Limulus

The screech of seagulls awoke me early the next morning. Pulling on shorts and a T-shirt, I ran downstairs as Gram called out, "Remember the rules!"

I nodded yes as I dashed out into my new world. The early sunlight was almost rosy, and dozens of seagulls were gliding in wide figure-eights above my head.



While watching the seagulls circle, I almost stepped on a turtle. No, a dozen turtles! The sand was covered with odd-looking creatures that had hard, brownish-gray shells and pointed tails. But when I looked closer, I realized they weren't turtles at all. Some of these strange creatures were lying upside down on their shells, rocking and wiggling. I crouched down to watch them wiggle until I heard Gram call me for breakfast.

As I tried to describe the creatures I'd seen, Gram laughed and said they were horseshoe crabs. "It's a type of **arthropod** (AR-throw-pod) that scientists call limuli (LIM-yoo-lie). But people just call them horseshoe crabs because of the U-shaped design in their shells. The waves float them onto the shore, and sometimes they land upside down on their shells."

She said that the upside-down crabs I had almost stepped on were trying to use their pointed tails to turn themselves upright. She said if they didn't turn over quickly enough, their undersides would become too hot from the sun and they would die.



She said the crabs floated in and out on the waves. If crabs became stranded on the beach after the tide receded, they tried to stay cool by **burrowing** into the wet sand. The female crabs came onto the beach to lay their green, jellylike eggs a few inches under the sand. One female horseshoe crab might lay as many as eighty thousand eggs in one season! Within two weeks, those eggs would develop into tiny **larvae** (LAR-vee), and the larvae would be washed out into the ocean. These young larvae were tailless but, toward the end of summer, they would **molt** and then develop tails.



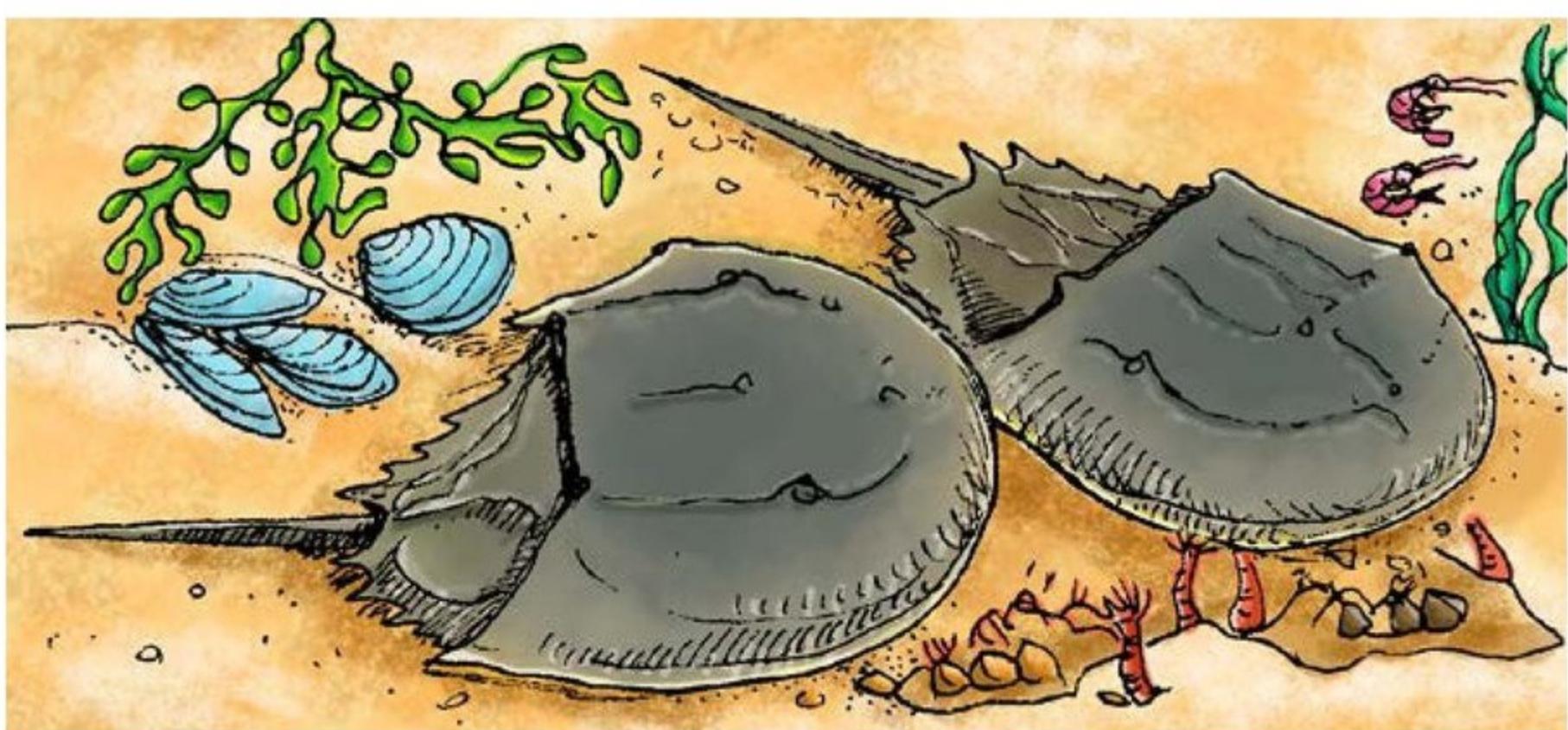
Gram explained, “*Molting* is when an animal sheds its skin, fur, or feathers and then grows back new ones. Animals often molt because they are growing larger.”

We returned to the beach that afternoon for a walk, and I watched her technique as Gram kept stopping to turn over any upside-down crabs. She turned them gently, in one motion. She also put several of the stranded crabs back into the ocean, to swim away. I was certain I saw her give a little pat to one or two of them.



Gram described the horseshoe crabs as long-distance swimmers but added that when they get tired, they just turn over and float on their shells as if they were little boats. When they are hungry, they stop swimming and gradually sink to the bottom of the ocean, where the water is saltier, and they find abundant sources of food.

Horseshoe crabs are considered very valuable creatures. Scientists study them to learn more about their nine eyes and nervous systems. Their blood is used to test for some human diseases and also to test new drugs. Horseshoe crabs may look odd, but they have adapted to their changing environment and survived for 350 million years—since dinosaurs roamed the Earth.



Rescuing

I immediately assigned myself the role of Chief Rescuer of Valuable Arthropods. Every morning became a rescue mission. I turned over stranded crabs or tossed them back into the waves, if seagulls hadn't reached them first to eat their tender parts. Sometimes I tossed them from the end of the rock jetty, waved, and wished them "good luck" as they swam away. Many times they'd float back in and become stuck on the shore again, but I soon learned when the waves would take them farther out into the water.

I also tried to chase birds away when I saw them eating the eggs. But Gram told me I should leave the birds alone because for many years this had been their way of getting the food they needed on their flight back north.



Early one morning, I walked out to discover everything had changed again. There was not a single horseshoe crab in sight! I ran back to the house to ask what had happened to them. “It’s all right,” Gram said. “The crabs are done laying their eggs. They’ll be back next year.” I was disappointed, but I hoped that I could come back to Gram’s big ocean house again next summer.

I walked back to the beach and plopped down onto the warm sand, watching the seagulls circling overhead. My crab rescue campaign had been an exciting new adventure. And, thanks to Gram, I had learned about the ocean environment, helped nature a little, and had seen a whole different way of living. Now I was ready for whatever my next summer adventure might be.

Read the follow-up stories
Ants in My Bed and
Bats in the Attic at Level T.



Glossary

arthropod (<i>n.</i>)	an animal that has jointed legs, a body with two or more parts, and a skeleton on the outside of its body; arthropods include insects, crustaceans (such as crabs), and spiders (p. 13)
burrowing (<i>v.</i>)	digging into something, such as sand, and burying or partially burying one's body (p. 14)
crab cakes (<i>n.</i>)	a mixture of crabmeat, egg, spices, and breadcrumbs formed into patties and fried (p. 11)
erosion (<i>n.</i>)	wearing away caused by wind, water, or ice (p. 10)
jetties (<i>n.</i>)	walls built into the ocean to keep the beach from eroding (p. 10)

larvae (*n.*) the newly hatched forms of certain animals that look very different from their parents and that change greatly in appearance as they become adults (p. 14)

molt (*v.*) to shed skin, fur, feathers, or a shell before they are replaced with new growth (p. 14)



Note about the series: Horseshoes Aren't Just for Good Luck is the first book in a three-part series written by Deborah Ambroza. The books that follow are: Ants in My Bed and Bats in the Attic.

Horseshoes Aren't Just For Good Luck

Level T Leveled Book

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Written by Deborah Ambroza

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