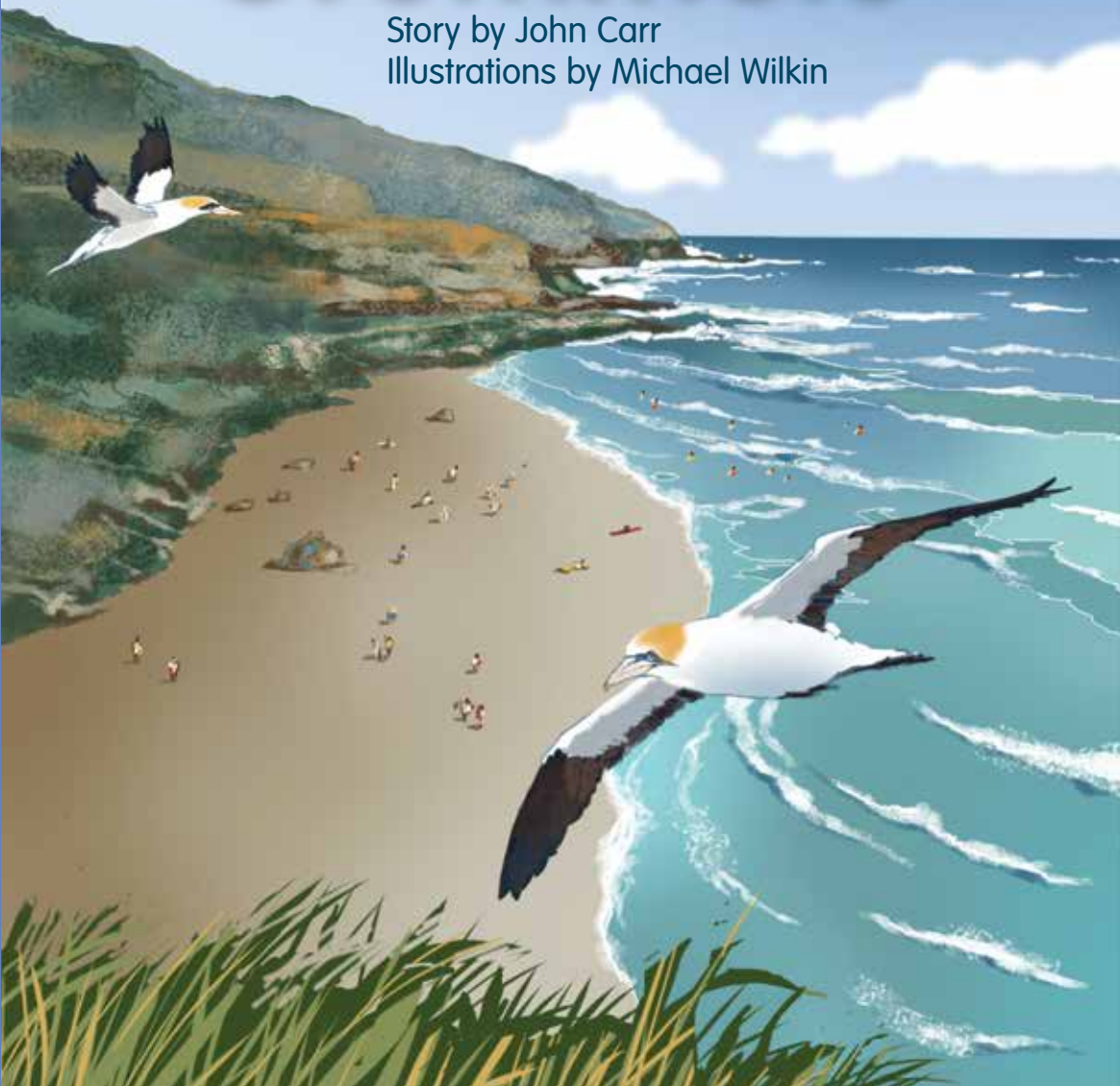


Gannets and Grommets

Story by John Carr

Illustrations by Michael Wilkin



Gannets and Grommets

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Gannets and Grommets



Chapter 1

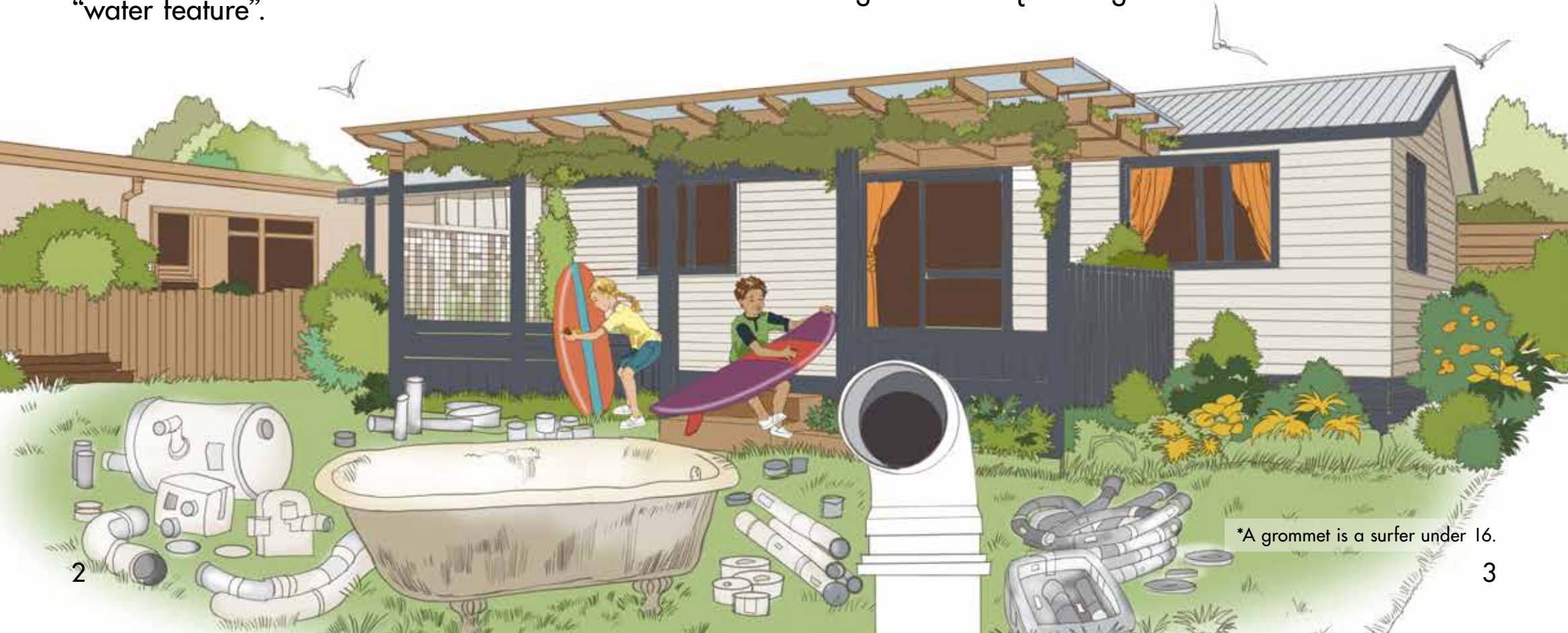
Josh was on his third week without wifi or tomato sauce, but he didn't mind. He loved staying with Pop during the summer holidays. He enjoyed the bush and the surf beach and, most of the time, he enjoyed Pop's company.

Pop was a plumber. Bits of pipe and hot-water cylinders were piled on the front lawn. In the middle, there was an old bath that Pop called his "water feature".

The other feature was a letterbox. Pop had made it out of bits of plastic downpipe. It looked more like a submarine periscope than a letterbox, but Pop was proud of it.

Josh and his surfing buddy Sandy were waxing their boards and talking about waves when Pop came onto the deck.

"Gannets and grommets!" he groaned. "It's either young gannets squawking for food or it's young grommets* squawking about waves."



*A grommet is a surfer under 16.

“Well, Pop,” Josh said, “you live near a surf beach with a gannet colony. What do you expect?”

“I expect to be able to get some sleep once in a while,” said Pop.

“You’re supposed to be looking after me for three weeks. Remember!” Josh laughed.

Pop looked at his watch.

“Mmm, just three days and six hours to go,” he said. “Then you grommets head back to school. Those gannet chicks will have enough feathers to head back to Australia. I’ll be heading back to bed.”

“Don’t worry Pop. Today the waves are OK for our grommet group,” said Josh. “The surf lifesavers will be keeping an eye on us. We need to catch some waves.”

“Here’s a wave you can have without getting wet,” laughed Pop, and he raised his arm.

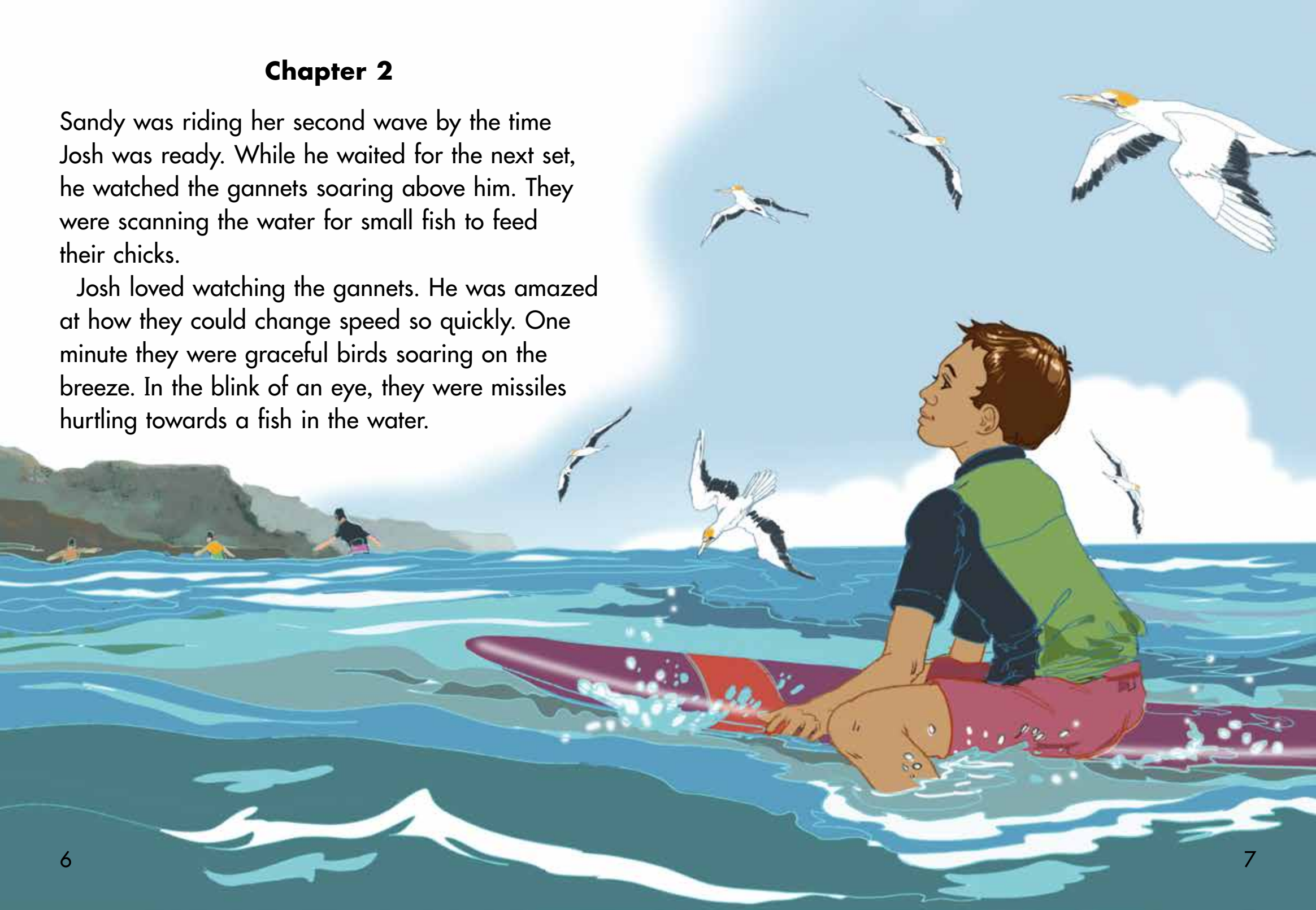
“Goodbye!”



Chapter 2

Sandy was riding her second wave by the time Josh was ready. While he waited for the next set, he watched the gannets soaring above him. They were scanning the water for small fish to feed their chicks.

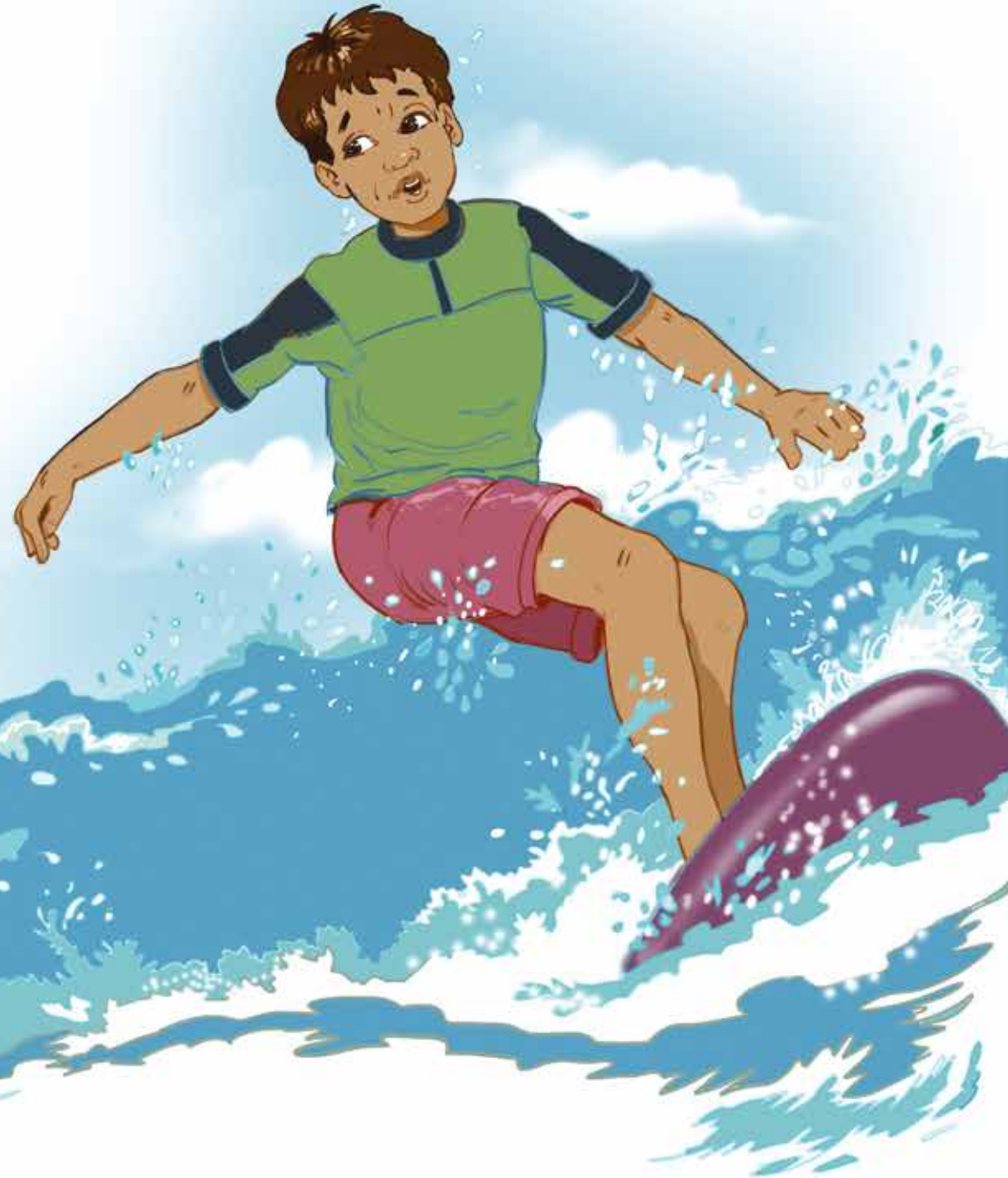
Josh loved watching the gannets. He was amazed at how they could change speed so quickly. One minute they were graceful birds soaring on the breeze. In the blink of an eye, they were missiles hurtling towards a fish in the water.



As Josh watched one of the gannets diving into the water, he felt a swell beneath him. The next one felt bigger. He quickly turned his board and paddled as fast as he could. This was a good wave. If he didn't catch it, Sandy would tease him.

As the board sped up, Josh scrambled to his feet. To his right, he noticed something white splashing about in the water. It was a gannet. She had surfaced from her dive but was unable to fly.

Josh knew that Sandy would tease him if he bailed. That didn't matter. The gannet was in trouble. He had to do something.

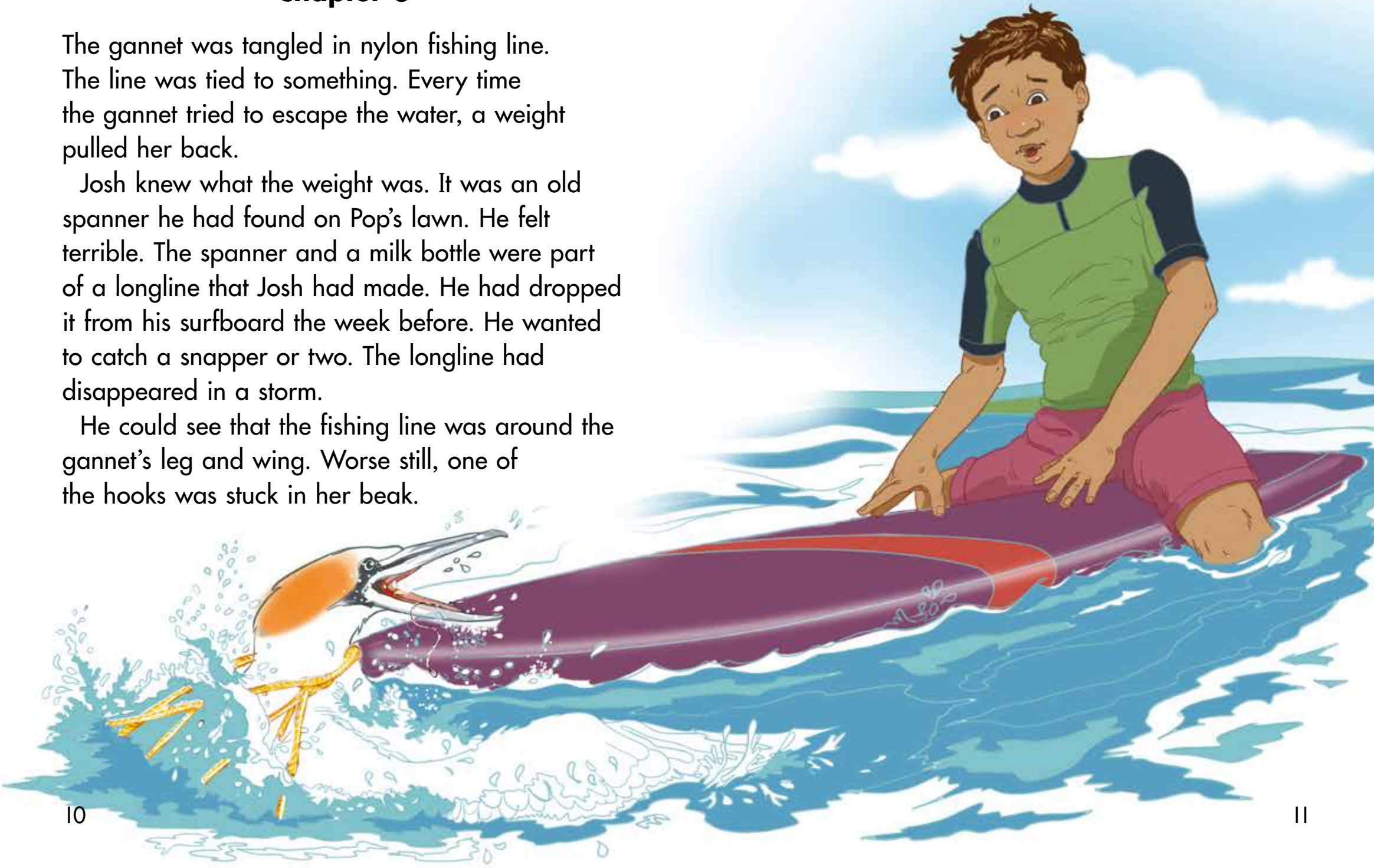


Chapter 3

The gannet was tangled in nylon fishing line. The line was tied to something. Every time the gannet tried to escape the water, a weight pulled her back.

Josh knew what the weight was. It was an old spanner he had found on Pop's lawn. He felt terrible. The spanner and a milk bottle were part of a longline that Josh had made. He had dropped it from his surfboard the week before. He wanted to catch a snapper or two. The longline had disappeared in a storm.

He could see that the fishing line was around the gannet's leg and wing. Worse still, one of the hooks was stuck in her beak.



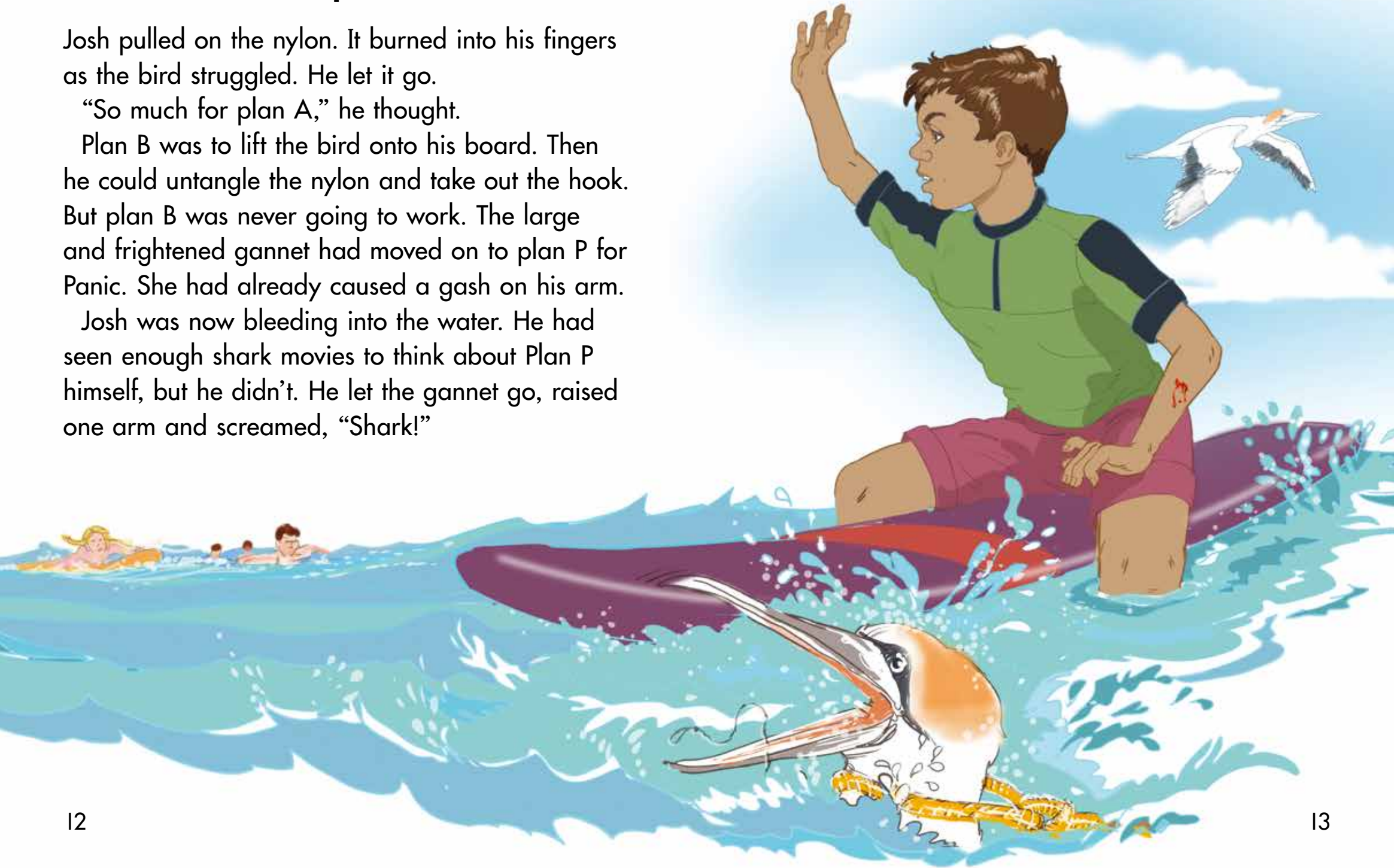
Chapter 4

Josh pulled on the nylon. It burned into his fingers as the bird struggled. He let it go.

“So much for plan A,” he thought.

Plan B was to lift the bird onto his board. Then he could untangle the nylon and take out the hook. But plan B was never going to work. The large and frightened gannet had moved on to plan P for Panic. She had already caused a gash on his arm.

Josh was now bleeding into the water. He had seen enough shark movies to think about Plan P himself, but he didn't. He let the gannet go, raised one arm and screamed, “Shark!”



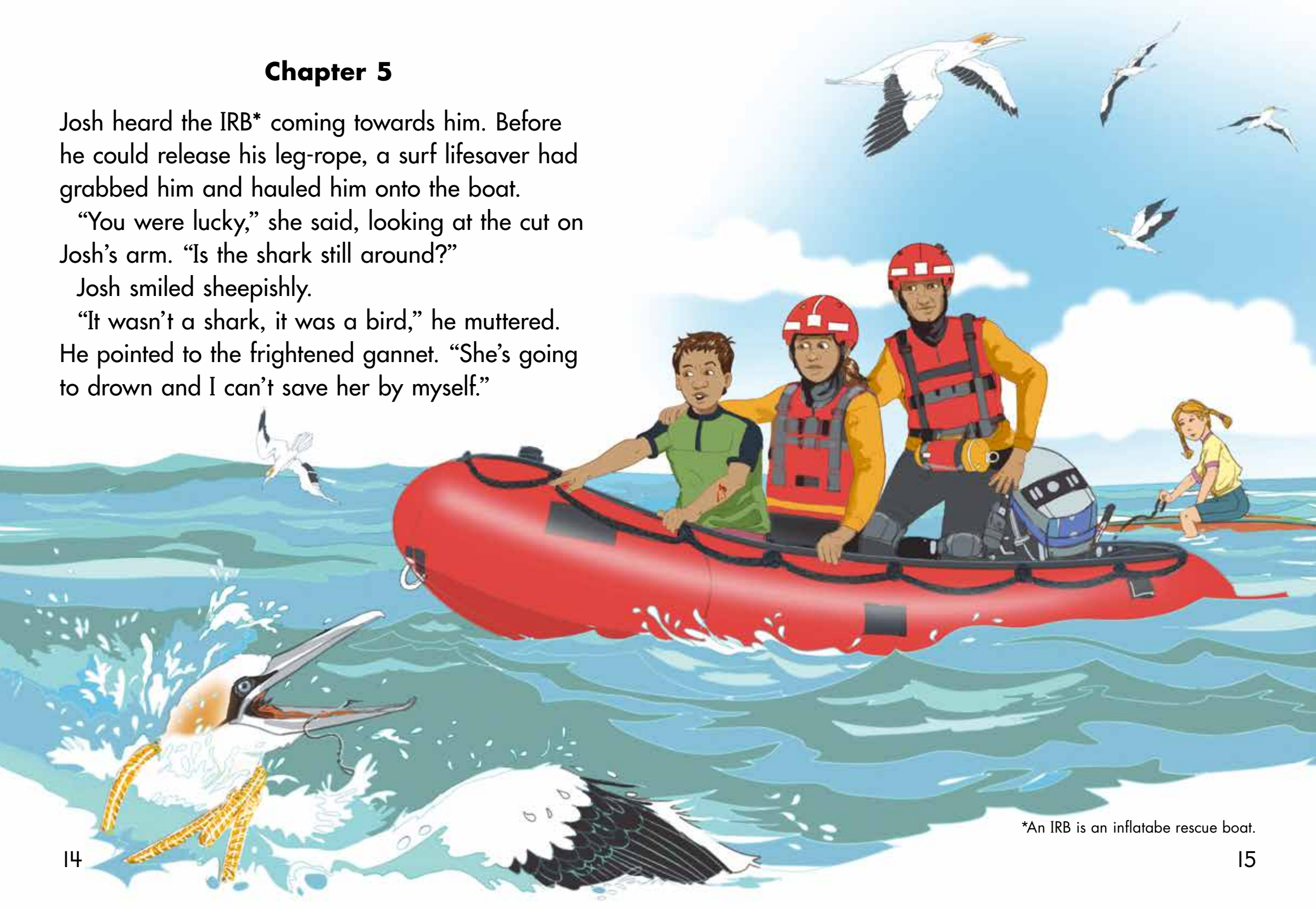
Chapter 5

Josh heard the IRB* coming towards him. Before he could release his leg-rope, a surf lifesaver had grabbed him and hauled him onto the boat.

“You were lucky,” she said, looking at the cut on Josh’s arm. “Is the shark still around?”

Josh smiled sheepishly.

“It wasn’t a shark, it was a bird,” he muttered. He pointed to the frightened gannet. “She’s going to drown and I can’t save her by myself.”



Chapter 6

Josh and Sandy sat in Mrs McGinty's back yard. Mrs McGinty was the bird lady. She was a wildlife rehabber who rescued and treated wildlife.

Mrs McGinty was taking the fish hook out of the gannet's beak while Pop held the gannet firmly.

"Gannets and grommets, Mrs McGinty," he sighed. "Gannets and grommets!"

Sandy smiled at Josh. She wanted to make a joke about her surfing buddy. "Rescued by surf lifesavers when he couldn't tell the difference between a great white shark and a gannet! Better not!" she thought.



Mrs McGinty used pliers to cut off the barbed end of the hook. She pulled the hook out from the gannet's beak.

"There you go my beauty," she said, and placed the gannet in a cage. "After some food and a rest, you'll be back with the family in no time."



Mrs McGinty turned to the children.

"This one was lucky. Some swallow the hook and die of infection or starvation. Often the tangled ones drown and get washed up on the beach."

As if Josh wasn't feeling bad enough, Mrs McGinty showed them photos of birds and animals injured by fishing lines or hooks. There were photos of gannets, gulls, shags, terns, blue penguins and a fur seal pup.

"Fishing lines, sinkers and hooks are a real problem," said Mrs McGinty.

On the way back to Pop's house, Josh and Sandy decided to do something about it.



Chapter 7

The next day, Josh and Sandy were amazed at how much fishing line they found on the beach. They found lots among the seaweed, driftwood and mangrove seeds at the high tide mark.

“Maybe we could put a couple of hook-and-nylon bins on the beach,” said Josh, “then people can dump their tangled nylon and hooks safely.”

“But the bins need to be designed so that seabirds and kids can’t get into them,” Sandy said. “They need to be easy to empty for recycling. That will probably be expensive.”



The children were thoughtful as they walked along the road.

“Wait!” said Josh. “I have a brilliant idea.”

“What is it?” she asked.

Josh couldn’t contain his excitement.

“Pop’s periscope!” he said.



Chapter 8

Pop's periscope letterbox was the perfect design for a hook-and-nylon bin. There was enough old piping lying around Pop's place to make two.

The children had a bag of cement donated by Mrs McGinty, sign writing donated by Sandy's brother, labour donated by Pop and some wooden fence posts donated by the last flood. It wasn't long before the beach had two new hook-and-nylon bins.

A few days later, Pop checked his letterbox. As well as some tangled nylon that someone had put in there by mistake, he found an envelope addressed to "Gannets and Grommets Ltd".



"It's from the council," said Pop. "They probably want us to take the bins down. We didn't ask their permission."

The look on his face changed to delight as he read the letter.

"They think the bins are a great idea and they want to pay us to build some more for all the fishing spots in the district!"

"Fantastic," said Josh. "That will give you something to do in the winter when you don't have me to look after."

Pop laughed. "What am I going to buy with your share of the money?"

Josh winked at Sandy. "How about wif and tomato sauce?"



Seabird Facts and Tips

Help protect precious seabirds by sharing these seabird facts and tips with your friends, family, classmates and teachers.

- A seabird is any species of bird that spends most of their life at sea. New Zealand is a special place for seabirds. Nearly one-quarter of the world's seabird species breed in New Zealand – more than anywhere else in the world!
- All seabirds come to land to breed and raise their chicks. Seabirds, like gannets, often nest in large groups called colonies and many return to the same colony every year.
- Seabirds love eating fish and often hang out around fishing boats and fishing nets looking for an easy meal. This puts them at risk of becoming tangled in fishing line, swallowing hooks, or swimming into nets.
- Some fishing boats fly brightly coloured flapping materials to safely keep birds away from their fishing hooks, lines or nets.
- Heavy weights built into fishing lines makes them sink more quickly so they will be out of sight from seabirds.
- Seabirds can smell fish from far away, so avoid attracting seabirds to your fishing spot by keeping your boat clean and hiding bait and scraps in a bucket with a lid.
- Always dispose of used fishing line, hooks and netting responsibly and well out of reach from birds and other animals.

Visit kids.spcaeducation.org.nz to learn more about caring for wildlife.