



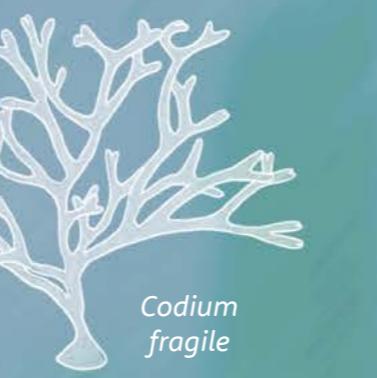
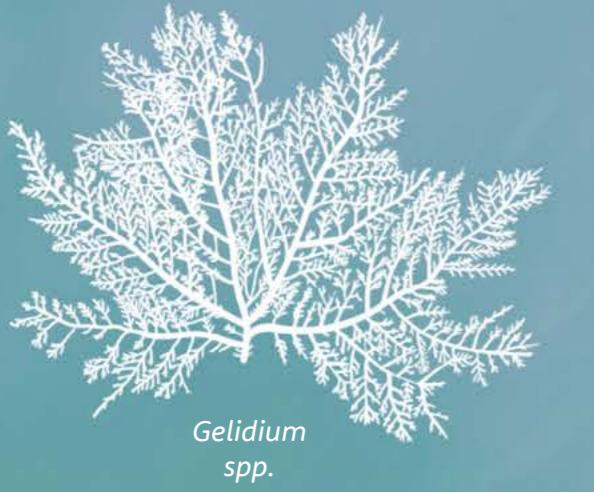
Goby and the enchanted lagoon



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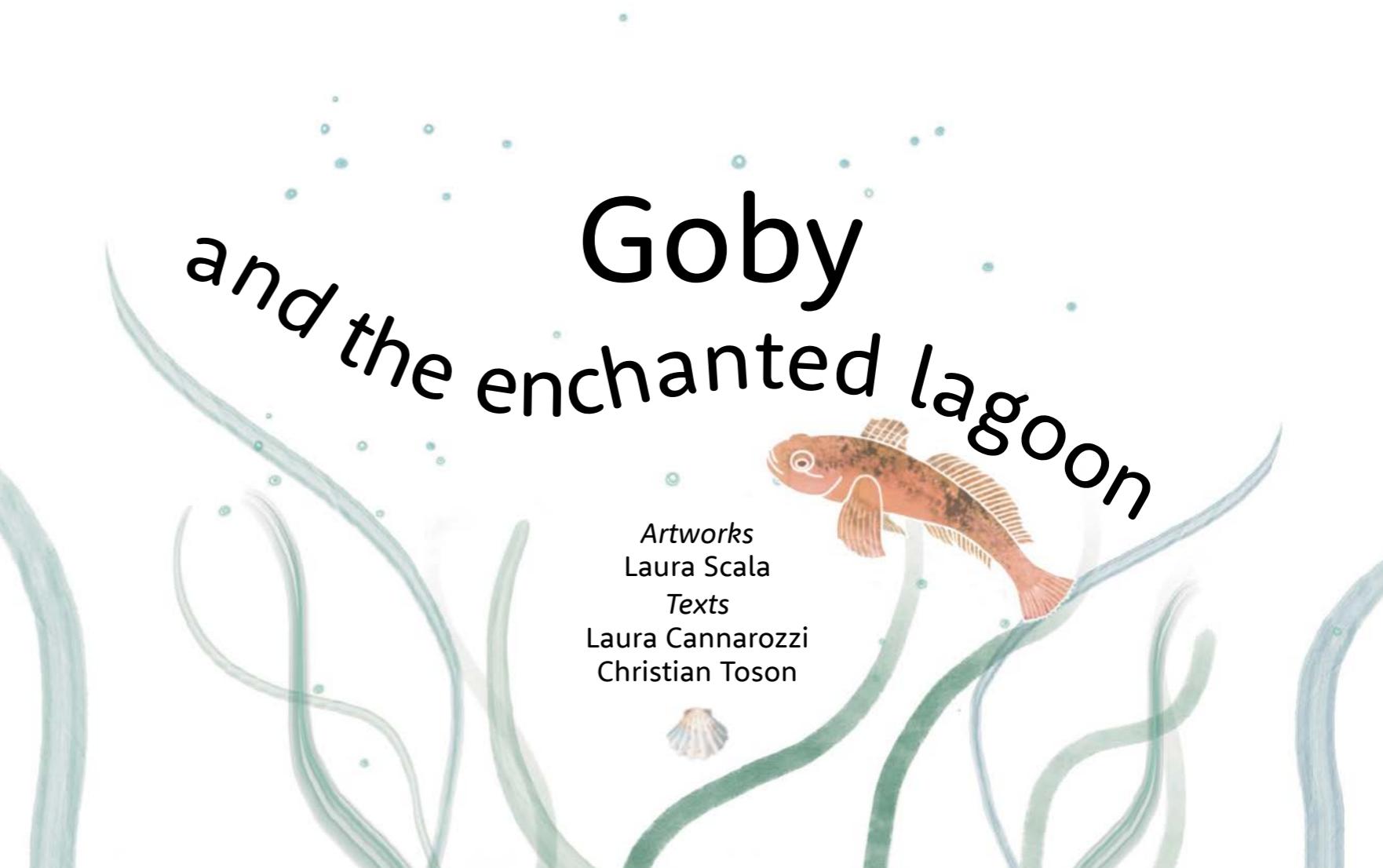
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Goby and the enchanted lagoon

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One sunny afternoon, in the calm waters
of a bright blue lagoon, a little fish named Goby,
cheerful and curious,
was getting ready to leave his snug little home.

Goby lived among soft green *Zostera*,
its long leaves swaying gently with the water.



Many tiny sea creatures lived there too.
One of them was Mario the hermit crab, Goby's best friend.
He lived in a bright and colourful shell. When it started to feel
too tight, he would change it for a bigger one.

Not far away lived Stella,
a gentle sea star with soft, flowing arms.

"Hello Mario! Hello Stella!" called Goby, full of joy.
Just like every morning, they were ready for a day
filled with play and adventure.



"You're finally here," said Stella with a smile.

"Now the only one missing is Johnny."

"Typical Johnny," thought Goby, grinning at the thought
of his always-late friend.

"Why don't we head to his place instead of waiting here?"

"Alright," said Mario.

"But could we have a little snack on the way?
I'm as hungry as a shark," he added, tapping his tummy
with his claws as it gave a loud rumble.

Stella and Goby looked at each other and laughed.

Even though he was small, Mario always had a big appetite.



They decided to stop at their favourite feeding spot.

It was the dock near the current.

Thanks to the moving water, there was always fresh seaweed
and lots of other tasty things that Goby and his friends couldn't resist.

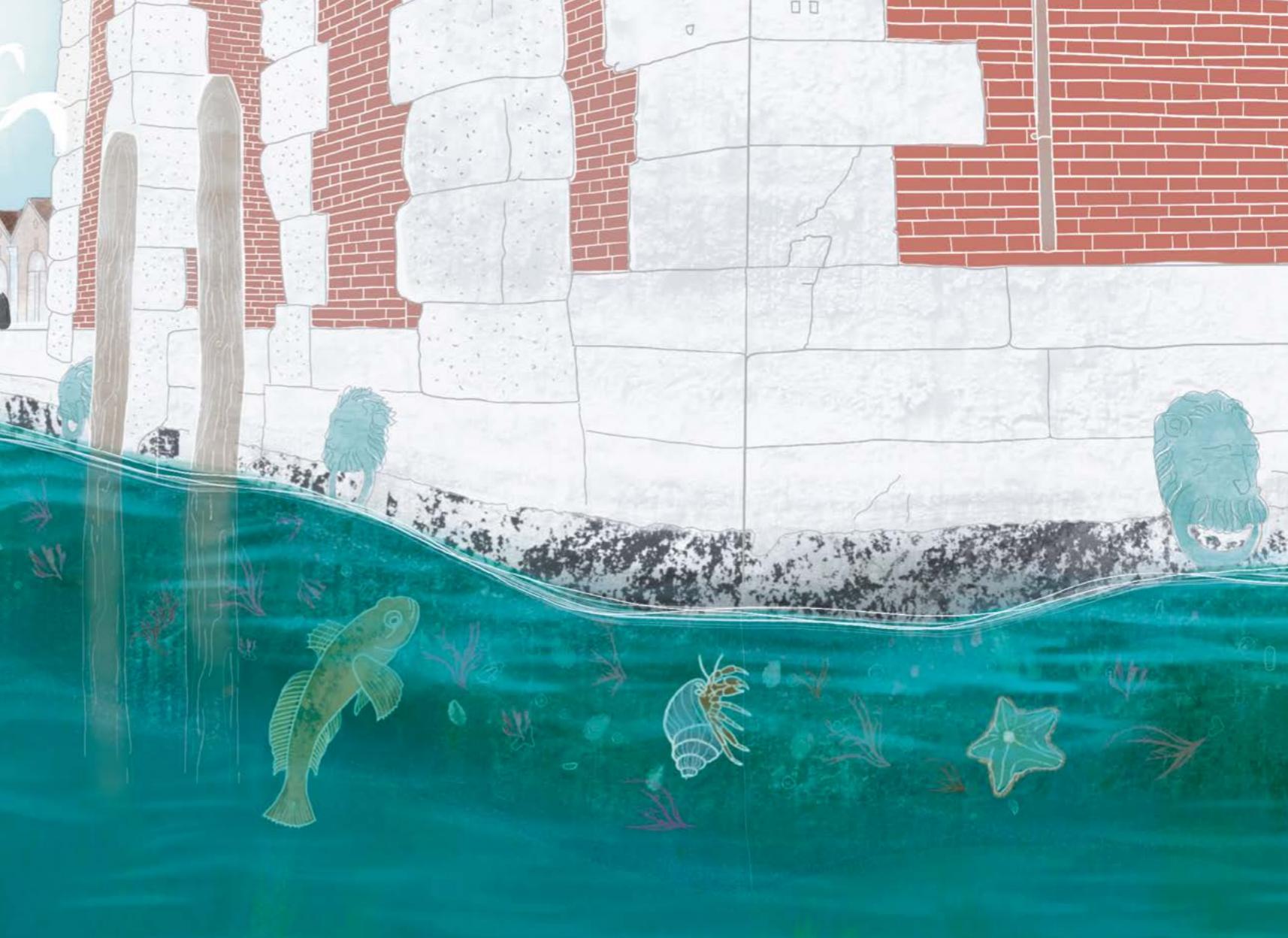
When they arrived, they got straight to it.

Each one had their own way of feeding.

Goby searched among the plants and pebbles for crunchy crustaceans.

Mario carefully collected strips of seaweed.

Stella sifted through the detritus on the seabed,
looking for the tiny invertebrates she loved to eat.



All of a sudden, Goby saw something drifting in the distance.
A cloud of plastic was floating towards them.

It wasn't unusual. Bottles, tangled fishing nets, bags
and other rubbish often ended up polluting the water and the sea floor.
"Oh no, look over there!" he said with concern.
"Let's hope it doesn't get too close."

Luckily, the current changed and pulled the big cloud away.

"Hurray!" the friends cheered.
Goby stayed quiet for a moment. He wished someone would clean up
all that plastic, and that people would stop throwing it into the sea.



Just then, another friend appeared, drifting gently with the current.
It was Gina the jellyfish.

"Hello, everyone!" called Gina. "I was looking for you.
I can't find Johnny anywhere. He's gone!"
"Gone?" said Stella. "What do you mean?"
"Are you sure?" asked Mario.
Gina gave a small nod. She looked worried.

"Then we need to find him!" said Goby.
The friends didn't waste a moment. Off they went,
and that's how their adventure began.



Swimming through the waves, the little crew reached a seaweed garden,
where long fronds moved gently with the current.

Goby swam over to Oakleaf, a friendly seaweed who loved to chat.

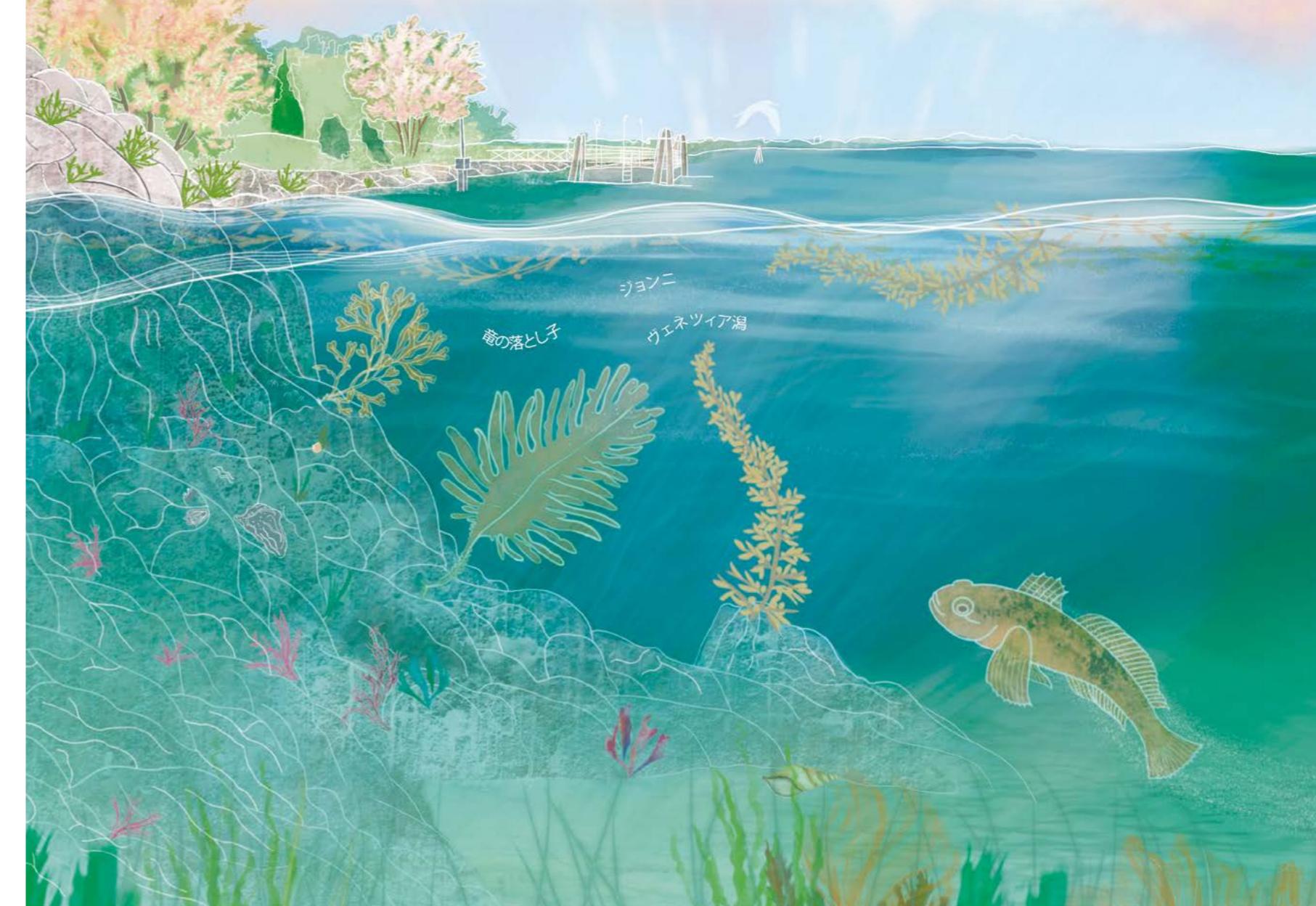
“She’ll be able to help us find Johnny,” he thought.

But Oakleaf was busy talking to two seaweeds who only spoke Japanese.

Their names were Waka, an Undaria, and Muti, a *Sargassum*.

People called them “alien” species, because they came from far away,
drifted into the lagoon by chance, and decided to stay.

“No sign of him, my friends. Let’s move on,” said Goby with a sigh.



Goby spotted a group of oysters attached to the wooden posts.
"Let's ask them. Maybe they've seen Johnny."

But the oysters were far too busy filtering the water
and growing their shells. Many tiny sea creatures had made
their homes inside. They hadn't seen a thing.

Close by, hidden among the waving fronds,
Goby and his friends saw Nobi. She was an old shell,
large and graceful, and she loved to tell stories.



"Hello Nobi! By any cha—" Goby didn't have time to finish his sentence when Nobi interrupted him.

"You know," she said, "a long time ago, people used my byssus threads to make an extremely fine fabric, sea silk, which fishermen used to weave precious cloth that shimmered like gold."

Stella's eyes widened.

"Wow, sea silk! You really are special, Nobi!
But today we came to ask if you've seen Johnny, our friend...
we can't find him anywhere!"

"Your friend?" she replied, taking a deep breath.
"I haven't seen him. I'm sorry."



As they were about to say goodbye to Nobi,
Goby spotted a creature he had never seen before.
It had enormous claws and a deep blue colour, just like the ocean.
“Who’s that?” he whispered with curiosity.

“That’s a blue crab,” said Mario the hermit crab.
“He comes from America and has just moved here.
Greeny, my friend the green crab, says he can be a bit bossy
because he eats everything he finds and leaves nothing for anyone else.
But he’s strong and brave too.
I even heard he once cut through the fishermen’s nets
to help his fish friends escape.”



Goby thought about how much the lagoon was changing.
There was plastic floating in the water, new creatures arriving,
and boats passing by all the time.
It was nothing like it used to be when he was just a tiny fish.

“Let’s go,” said Goby. “We can’t give up now!”
The friends set off again, heading for the sea.

A right turn, then left, forward through the sandbanks and the mudflats,
close to the harbour mouth, across the wide sandy shallows,
the friends came to a beautiful green meadow under the water. It was full of life.
Little fish were playing with shiny bubbles of oxygen.
But still, there was no sign of Johnny.



Night was almost here,
and the friends, feeling disheartened, were getting ready to go home.

But suddenly, they saw a movement in the leaves further away...
A little pointed nose! Out from the fronds popped Johnny the seahorse!
At last!

“Johnny! We’ve been looking for you everywhere!”
cried Goby as he swam over and hugged his friend.

“Sorry, everyone,” said Johnny with his dreamy gaze.
“I was hiding from a big sea bass and completely lost track of time.
But come with me, there’s something I want to show you.”



Johnny had a passion for the invisible world. Yes, really invisible.
A world made up of organisms so tiny you can't see them with the naked eye,
but full of secrets waiting to be discovered.

Today, Johnny had found something extraordinary.
Just as the last light of evening touched the water, it suddenly began to glow.
Countless microalgae lit up all at once,
shimmering and swaying with the motion of the waves.

So the friends stayed there, watching that magical display,
happy to be together again.



“And you know what, little ones...
Yes, I’m talking to you, children!” said Goby.

“This magical lagoon isn’t only our home.
It’s yours as well.
So when are you coming to explore it with us?”



The Biodiversity Gateway of the National Biodiversity Future Center

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The *Biodiversity Gateway* is the first access point in Italy, both physical and digital, entirely dedicated to biodiversity. Its territorial network and digital portal aim to foster effective synergies among the scientific community, economic players and society as a whole, offering a concrete opportunity to explore, protect and enhance the rich biodiversity heritage of Italy and the Mediterranean region.

The *National Biodiversity Future Center* brings together more than 2,000 researchers and 48 partner institutions, including universities, research organisations, foundations and companies. It serves as a strategic and operational reference point for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

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