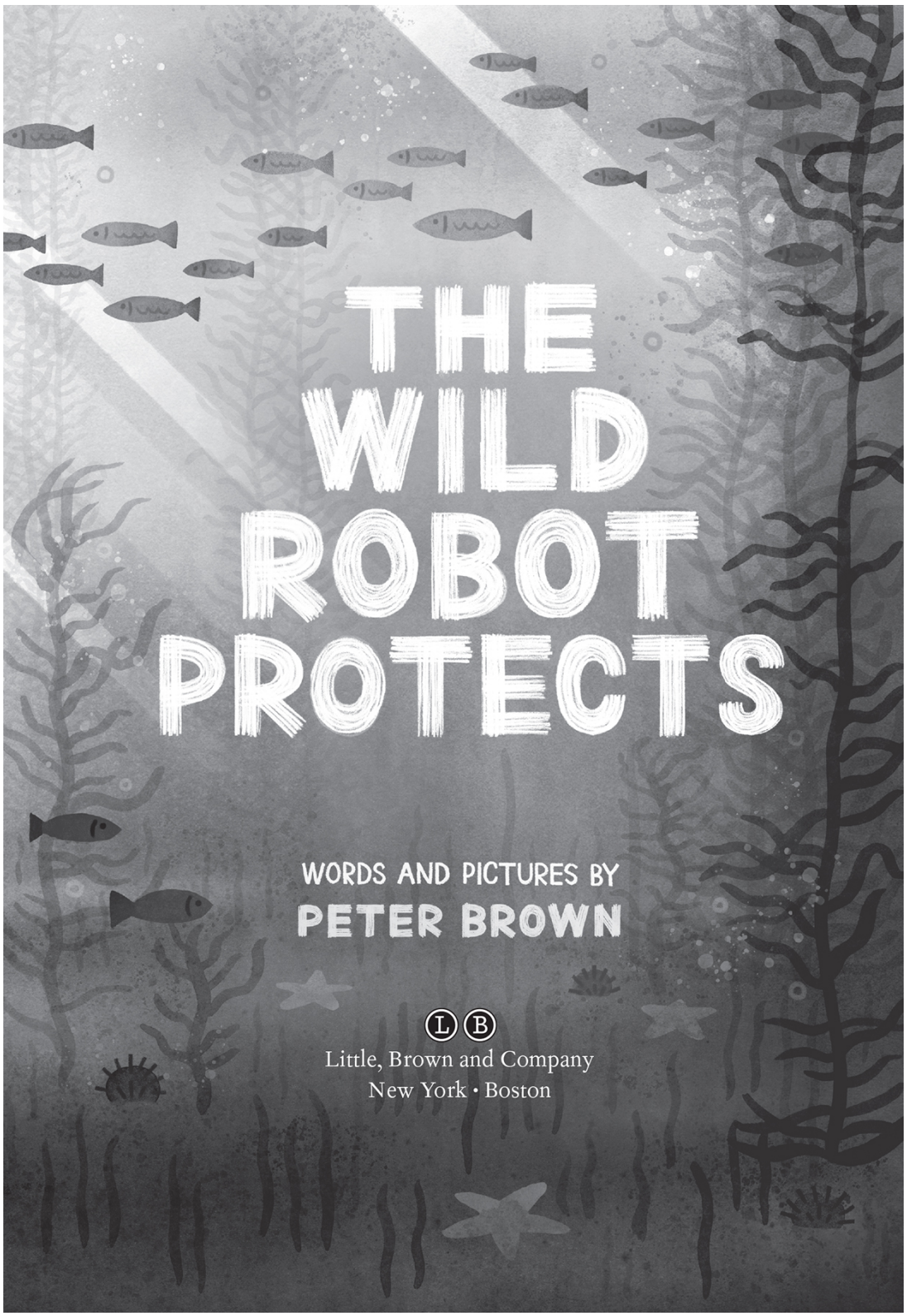

THE WILD ROBOT PROTECTS
THE #1 BESTSELLING SERIES BY
PETER BROWN



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To the oceans of the future

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CHAPTER 1

THE SKY

Our story begins in the sky, with a bright sun and puffy clouds and a large flock of geese. After spending the cold months at their southern wintering grounds, the geese were migrating back to their northern home. They flew in a perfect V formation, and leading the way was a graceful young goose. The leader kept his eyes forward, constantly searching for bad weather or airships, but the sky was clear of any trouble.

Towns and roads and meadows and rivers passed beneath the geese as they flew. Far ahead, where the land met the sky, the dark blue line of the ocean gradually came into view. The ocean grew closer and closer, and then the flock was soaring above a sandy beach and out over the water.



An island appeared in the distance. Another island appeared, and another. The geese spent a few days hopping from island to island, munching on dune grass and resting their wings. Then they took off for the last leg of their journey.

Cargo ships were powering through the waves below. This part of the ocean was a shipping lane. It was crawling with huge vessels, each making its own migration to the next seaport. The geese flew high over the ships, and soon all they could see was water spreading to the horizon in every direction.

Hours passed before the geese spotted the familiar rocky shapes of their home island. They quickened their pace. Now they could see the mountain, and the forests, and the white slash of the waterfall. Now they were flying over the coastline. Now they were circling above the beaver pond.

The flock glided

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to the pond and

splashed onto the surface. They floated there, quietly cleaning their feathers, until, below the water, their webbed feet started paddling, and they swam to shore and waddled onto a pebble beach.

While the others made themselves at home, the leader wandered into the forest by himself. He followed a path through the undergrowth, passing old trees and mossy stones and thick brambles, and he stopped in a small clearing.

The goose honked loudly and listened for a response. Silence. And then the forest began to move. A cluster of ferns shook and the ground bulged up and chunks of dirt tumbled aside, and there, standing in front of the goose, was a robot.

Reader, you and I would have been terrified in that moment. It’s not every day you see a robot burst up from the ground. But the goose wasn’t terrified—he was happy. You see, that robot was his mother. He fluttered onto her shoulder. Then the two of them spoke to each other in the language of the animals.

“I’ve missed you, Ma!” said Brightbill, the goose.

“Welcome home, son!” said Roz, the wild robot.

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CHAPTER 2

THE REUNION

Roz and Brightbill, mother and son, were eager to catch up, and they immediately started talking about all that had happened over the winter. But their conversation was interrupted by the sound of little claws scampering through the treetops. A tiny voice was muttering, “Brightbill’s back Brightbill’s back Brightbill’s back!” Then a squirrel came bounding out to the tip of a branch.

“Hello, Chitchat!” said Brightbill to the squirrel. “How have you been?”

But Chitchat had come a long way, and she was out of breath. Wind rushed from her mouth, and she held up her paw as if to say, “Hang on a minute.” When she was ready, the squirrel unleashed the following flurry of words:

“Brightbill I’m so glad you’re home I always worry about you when you’re gone which is silly because I know you’re clever and tough and I’m also clever and tough so I hope you don’t worry about me oh right you asked how I’ve been well I have some very exciting news which is that I am now a mother can you believe it I have three young kits and I can’t wait for you to meet them.…”

Chitchat jabbered on and on. And on. And the squirrel’s jabbering voice caught the attention of nearby creatures. Fink, the fox, crept out from the bushes. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver climbed up from the pond. Swooper, the owl, flew down to a log. More and more animals emerged from the forest, smiling and laughing, eager to reunite with their old friend Brightbill.

And then a screechy voice called out from afar. The voice was repeating something, over and over, but nobody could make out the words. Roz and the animals hurried to the edge of the forest just as a seagull named Gale appeared in the sky. She was frantically squawking and flapping toward

them. Gulls were rarely seen so far inland. Something had to be wrong. And as Gale flew nearer, her words became clear.

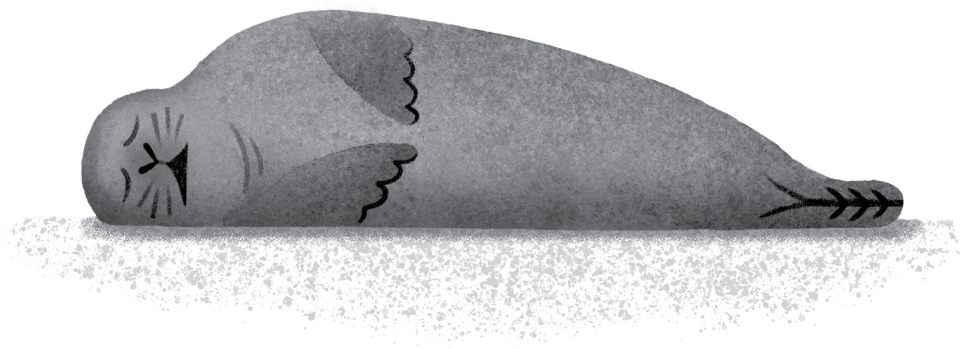
“Help! Help! Help!”

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CHAPTER 3

THE SEAL

The gull swooped past the crowd of creatures and cried, “Help! Roz! Follow me!” Then she swung back around the way she had come. Roz started running, and Brightbill started flying, and together they followed Gale north across the island and down to the rocky shore. Seabirds and otters and crabs had gathered on the rocks, and lying in the middle of the gathering was a seal. His nose was bleeding. His eyes were swollen shut. Roz knelt and inspected his injuries.



From the seal’s mouth came a weak voice. “The poison tide is coming!”

“I do not understand,” said the robot.

“I was hunting in the north with my friends and family when we noticed a shimmering patch of water,” said the seal. “We were curious, so we swam closer. And then we felt the poison. The shimmering water burned our mouths and our noses and our eyes! I couldn’t see, and I called out for the others, but nobody called back. The poison tide kept washing over me, and the pain was too much, so I turned and swam for my life, back into clear ocean water, and I just kept swimming, for days, until I arrived here.”

“What is the poison tide?” said the robot. “Where did it come from?”

But the seal couldn’t answer because he suddenly erupted into a fit of coughing. The animals exchanged nervous glances as the seal coughed and coughed. Everyone wanted to help him, but there was nothing they could do.

When he finally stopped coughing, the seal hardly had enough strength to speak. “Please,” he whispered. “I want to feel the ocean.”

Very carefully, Roz lifted him up, carried him across the rocks, and released him into the shallows. The touch of salt water against his body brought a faint smile to the seal’s face. It was too hard for him to speak, so without saying a word he slowly swam away and disappeared beneath the waves.

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CHAPTER 4

THE NERVOUS ANIMALS

Each day, before sunrise, creatures came out from their homes and headed to the Great Meadow, in the center of the island. That was the site of the Dawn Truce, where everyone could safely get together and chat about the latest island news. Ordinarily, the Dawn Truce was a cheerful occasion, but on this day they had very serious matters to discuss.

Gale fluttered onto a rock and screeched, “The poison tide is coming! The poison tide is coming!”

Mr. Beaver grunted, “Pull yourself together, Gale! You’ll cause a panic!”

Fink barked, “Why should I care what happens in the ocean? I live on dry land!”

Swooper hooted, “Because the land and the water and the air are all connected!”

Other animals began calling out.

“We’ll be fine, this island has everything we need!”

“I don’t even like the ocean!”

“But what about our friends on the coast?”

The animals grew louder and wilder until they were silenced by the robot’s booming voice. “The seal might be right,” said Roz. “There might be a poison tide spreading through the ocean. But I do not think it will reach our shores. I think we are safe—”

Roz was cut off by Nettle and Thorn, the bears who were sister and brother.

“You *think* we’re safe?” growled Nettle.

“I want to *know* we’re safe!” snarled Thorn.

“I understand your concern,” said Roz. “But of the creatures here, only

the migratory birds and I have ever left the island, and we know that the ocean is truly enormous. It seems highly unlikely that the poison tide could spread through the whole ocean and find its way to us. The poison tide does not worry me, and it should not worry you either."

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CHAPTER 5

THE TALK

Brightbill had something important to tell his mother. So he led her up to the grassy ridge on the west side of the island, to the place where he had learned to fly. It was one of their favorite spots to visit.

The goose was a fast flier, but the robot had no problem keeping up, thanks to her new body. You might remember that Roz had been designed by a woman named Dr. Molovo. They had once met under some rather difficult circumstances, and during their time together, Dr. Molovo transferred Roz's mind from her old robotic body to a new one. Her new body was stronger and tougher and faster than the original. Now Roz effortlessly glided across the rugged landscape as Brightbill raced through the air.

Before long, they were standing at the crest of the ridge, facing a grassy hillside that sloped down to the ocean. Far below, a wave crashed against the rocks, shooting sea spray into the wind. A moment later, our friends felt the spray sprinkling against their bodies. And then Brightbill started to talk.

"We lost two members of the flock this winter," he said softly. "They were an older couple who wandered off from the wintering grounds and were attacked by a pack of coyotes. I didn't know them well. They kept to themselves and only joined the flock for migrations. But the loss was hard on us all. They had a daughter, and I checked on her to see how she was doing. Her name is Glimmerwing, but everyone calls her Glimmer. She's about my age, and we enjoyed each other's company, and by the end of winter, she and I were inseparable." A little smile appeared on Brightbill's face. "It turns out, some good has come from that tragedy, because Glimmer and I have decided to be mates."

Roz stared at her son. Her glowing eyes gently pulsed. Then she said, "I

am so sorry to hear about Glimmerwing's parents. But I am so happy to hear that you have found a mate! Tell me about Glimmerwing. I want to know everything!"

"I could tell you about her," said Brightbill. "But I thought I'd introduce you to her instead."

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CHAPTER 6

THE MATE

The robot had a simple home in the forest. It was a dome made of wood and rock and mud, with a low doorway at one end. Inside, the walls were lined with stone benches, and in the center of the space was a firepit for those cold winter nights. Outside, the dome was surrounded by a lush garden of wildflowers and herbs and berry bushes. Roz called her home the Nest.

Brightbill and his mate would soon be arriving at the Nest, and Roz wanted everything to be perfect. A cloud of dust billowed out the door as she tidied up the interior. And then came Brightbill's voice from the garden. "We're here, Ma!"

Roz crouched and stepped out of the doorway. It was a bright, beautiful day, and sunlight streaked down through the canopy of leaves and branches. Among the sun-dappled flowers stood Brightbill and a female goose.

"Ma, this is Glimmerwing." Brightbill motioned to the goose at his side.



“Hello, Glimmerwing,” said the robot. “It is lovely to meet you.”

“Please, call me Glimmer,” said the goose. “Of course, I’ve seen you around the island, but it’s so nice to actually meet you!” Glimmer fluttered up to Roz’s shoulder and gave her a big hug.

“What should I call you?” said Glimmer. “Roz? Ma? Ms. Robot?”

“Please, call me Roz.”

The three of them spent the afternoon together. They talked about Glimmer’s family and the loss of her parents. Later, Roz lightened the mood with stories of Brightbill from when he was young. The conversation flowed smoothly until Roz brought up one particular subject.

“I have prepared the Nest, and you may move in whenever you like,” said the robot to the geese. “It will be wonderful to have your company!”

The geese looked at each other.

“Oh, um, you see, Ma…” Brightbill was struggling to find the right words. “Glimmer and I thought we’d live in our own nest. You know, like other geese.”

The robot thought for a moment and said, “It is only natural for two mates to want some privacy.”

“Thank you for understanding,” said Glimmer.

“I will build you a new nest,” said Roz. “I know exactly how to weave together grasses and twigs. It will be my gift to you, to celebrate your union.”

The geese looked at each other.

“Yeah, well, about that…” Brightbill was struggling to find the right words again. “Glimmer and I want to build our own nest, in our own way.”

“But we appreciate the kind offer,” said Glimmer.

“You’re not upset, are you, Ma?” said Brightbill.

“Who? Me? Upset? Do not be silly! I completely understand that you would want to start your life together by building a nest. If you ever need anything from me, all you have to do is ask.”

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CHAPTER 7

THE PASSING FLOCKS

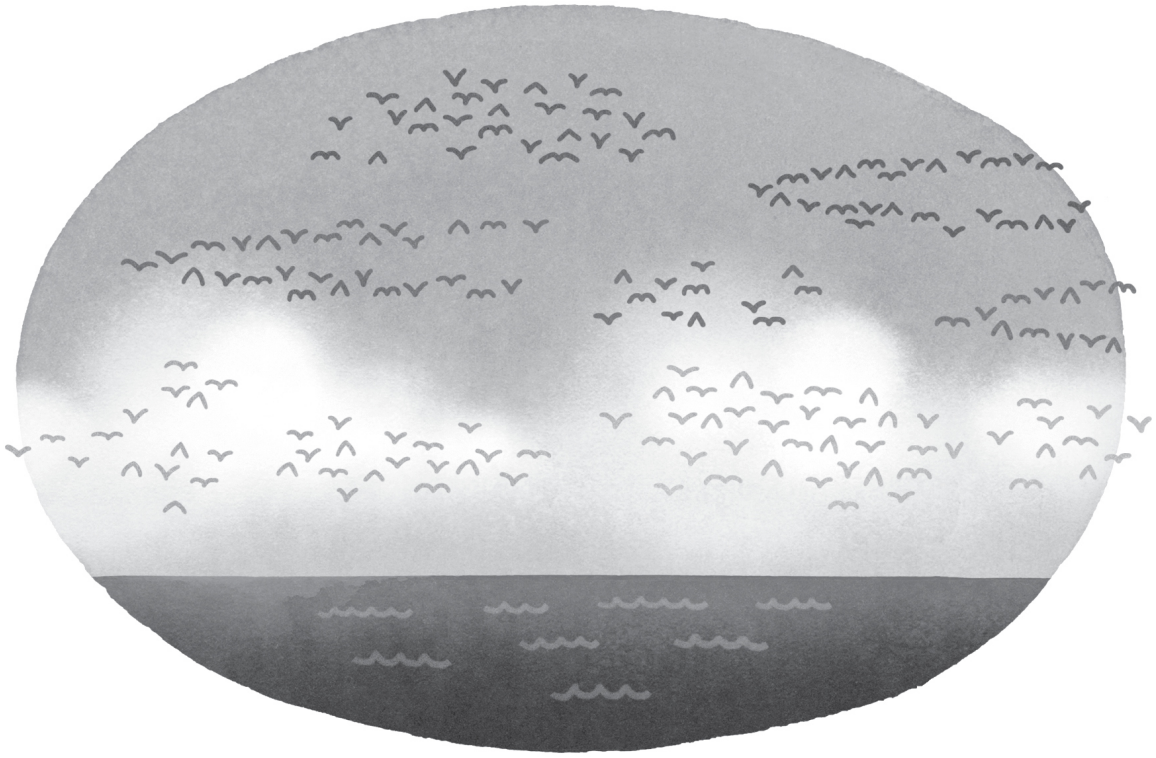
Birds often stopped by the island to rest their wings during flights across the ocean. They'd find a comfortable place to relax, and once they'd recovered their strength, they'd continue on their way. So when a flock of seagulls approached the island one afternoon, there was nothing strange about it. What was strange, however, was that the gulls flew right past the island without stopping to rest.

It wasn't long before a flock of geese flew past the island without stopping.

A little later, a flock of terns flew past.

And then a flock of vultures flew past.

As more flocks flew past, a sense of worry settled over the island creatures. And when a flock of ducks passed overhead, Brightbill and Glimmer took flight to see what was going on. They flew alongside the ducks, asking questions and listening to answers. Then the two geese came gliding back down to the edge of the pond, where a crowd was waiting.



Glimmer let out a heavy breath and shared the troubling news. “That poor seal was right,” she began. “The poison tide is coming. The ducks said it will be here tomorrow. Nobody knows what it is. They only know that it’s spreading south through the ocean, harming every living thing in its path. The reason why so many birds have been passing us by is that they’re fleeing from the poison tide.”

Animals glared at the robot, and Fink growled, “You said we had nothing to worry about!”

“It seems I was wrong,” said Roz. “I am very sorry.”

“According to the ducks, there is someone who can help,” said Brightbill. “They said there’s an Ancient Shark who is wise and powerful. If we can contact her, we might be able to stop the poison tide. The Ancient Shark lives somewhere in the north, but nobody knows exactly where to find her.”

Animal voices called out.

“Who cares about an old shark?”

“How will we survive the poison tide?”

“What are we going to do?”

“This is what we are going to do,” said the robot. “We are going to help

our friends. Seabirds, otters, fish, crabs, and all the other coastal creatures are in grave danger. They must be evacuated at once.”

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CHAPTER 8

THE EVACUATION

The flock of geese fanned out across the island and alerted everyone that the poison tide was coming. Otters raced through the waves, telling their neighbors the news. Crabs scuttled down into the depths of the ocean. Fish who'd spent their whole lives in those reefs abandoned their homes and swam out to open water.

Many animals came down to the coast to help with the evacuation. But as the hours passed, the animals needed to rest. The robot, however, did not. Night fell and the stars came out and there was Roz, wading through the shallows, her headlights turning from side to side as she warned the coastal creatures to leave.

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CHAPTER 9

THE POISON TIDE

Towering above the island was a tall, rugged mountain. Waterfalls cascaded from its ledges. Clumps of wildflowers rustled in the breeze. In places, the mountainside had crumbled, leaving behind sheer cliffs.

A vulture emerged from a hollow in the cliffs. She stretched her wide wings and glided off to search for carcasses. Floating on the wind, she rose higher and higher, until she spotted something unusual. To the north, it looked like the ocean was gently shimmering in the sunlight. But the sky was full of clouds. That shimmering water could only mean one thing.

“The poison tide is here!” screeched the vulture.

Animals began hurrying to the northern slopes to see the poison tide for themselves. Reader, you and I might not have noticed that patch of gently shimmering water. But the animals noticed. After all, animals are incredibly sensitive to their environment. They can sense a storm long before it appears, and the poison tide was like an underwater storm, sweeping through the sea.

Below the northern slopes, Roz was still hard at work in the shallows. She had spent the whole night out there, trying to help every coastal creature get to safety. But she was running out of time. The robot plucked sea stars and sea urchins and sea snails from the water and dropped them into rock pools along the shore. Then she waded back into the shallows to search for more. Behind her, the crowd of island animals started shouting.



“I can see the poison tide!”

“Yes, there it is!”

“It’s gotten so close!”

The robot’s computer brain contained thousands of different programs, and the most important were her Survival Instincts. When a wave of poison tide came rolling to shore, her Survival Instincts blared in her head, urging her to get out of the water. But then she heard something else. Frightened squeaks. In all the confusion, an otter pup had climbed onto a small rock that stood up from the shallows. Now the pup was frozen with fear as the wave of poison tide tumbled toward him.

Roz charged over to the young otter as fast as she could go, but beneath the surface the seabed was covered in slick stones, and she kept sliding and stumbling and slipping!

Nervous voices hollered down from the hills.

“The poison tide is right there!”

“Hurry up, Roz!”

“Go, Mama! Go!”

Just before the wave reached the otter, Roz grabbed him and leaped away with all her strength. They arced up from the shallows, over a rocky cove, and landed on the shore. The otter pup ran to his parents. Everyone was happy to see the otter family reunited. But their happiness didn’t last long. Because when the crowd turned back to the ocean, they saw that the poison tide was spreading through the water and slowly surrounding the island.

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CHAPTER 10

THE CHANGES

The coastal waters were thick with a type of seaweed called kelp. Undersea forests of tall, leafy stems swayed with the movement of the waves and made a rich habitat for sea creatures. But as the poison tide spread along the coast, dead kelp began washing ashore.

Crashing waves sent poison sea spray into the air. Wind then carried the spray inland, where it settled on grasses and flowers and trees, turning them gray and brittle. Land animals who lived near the ocean had no choice but to retreat far into the island. The Great Meadow was overrun by swarms of mice and snakes and frogs. Sea otters invaded streams and ponds, gobbling up freshwater fish and driving out many of the longtime residents. As fish became harder to find, bears were forced to eat nuts and berries, and that forced the deer and the hares and the squirrels to find other sources of food.

Seabirds packed into the wetlands, but they soon gave up and flew across the ocean in search of new homes. Other birds followed. With fewer birds to eat the insects, their population exploded, and the sweet sound of birdsong was replaced with the constant buzzing of scaly little wings.

More animals were living in a smaller area, which meant less food and water and shelter for everyone. Species that never should have crossed paths were fighting over territory. The sounds of angry voices filled the air. The Dawn Truce, that beloved tradition, was abandoned because there was so little trust left between the animals. The island had always been a perfectly balanced environment, but the poison tide was more than it could take.

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CHAPTER 11

THE FLIGHT

Roz stood on the sea cliffs with Brightbill and Glimmer on her shoulders. They were staring down at the poison tide. The way it gently shimmered in the water was strangely beautiful. It was hard to believe it could be so dangerous, and yet its destructive power was plain to see. The coast was edged with dead plants, and the rocks were scattered with dead fish.

Glimmer turned to Roz and said, “What do you think is causing the poison tide?”

The robot searched her computer brain for explanations and said, “The poison tide might be similar to red tides, the harmful blooms of algae that can occur in the ocean. Or it might be ash that has erupted from an underwater volcano. Or it might be a toxic substance that has spilled from a tanker ship. Or it might be something else entirely. It would be helpful to study the poison tide up close. I can climb down to the rocks and examine the shallows, but I will need someone to watch for waves.”

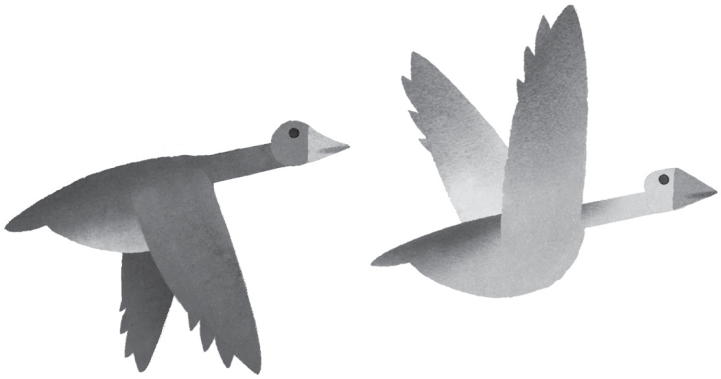
Brightbill fluttered his wings and squawked, “Ma, don’t go anywhere near the poison tide! We can’t risk your safety. You’re too important to the island.”

In the distance, another flock of birds was flying south over the ocean. And this gave Glimmer an idea. “Plenty of other birds are safely flying above the ocean,” she said. “Brightbill and I could fly above the poison tide and see where it leads.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Brightbill. “We might learn something useful.”

The idea made Roz nervous, but she knew the geese would look out for each other. Once they were all in agreement, Brightbill and Glimmer took flight. They soared high above the poison tide and disappeared into the

northern sky.



Four days later, on a drizzly afternoon, Brightbill and Glimmer returned and found Roz in her home. They sat together, and the geese explained what they'd seen.

"Luckily, the poison tide hasn't spread everywhere," said Brightbill. "It's more like a huge river flowing through the ocean, twisting and turning and spreading wider as it goes. We followed it north, around islands and along coastlines and back out to open ocean. At times, the flow sank deep into the water and then surfaced again, somewhere else. Eventually, the flow completely vanished down into the depths, so we headed home."

"On our way back, we flew with birds who were leaving the north," said Glimmer. "Nobody knows what's causing the poison tide, but everybody knows about the Ancient Shark. Some say she's as big as a whale. Others say she's older than the sea. It sounded like the shark was nothing more than a legend, but the birds insisted that she's real and that she's the only one who can help. They don't know how to find the Ancient Shark. All they know is that she lives somewhere in the far north."

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CHAPTER 12

THE WATER

Whenever rain fell on the island, much of it filtered into the river. The water level would rise after a rainstorm and fall during a dry spell. But so many more animals were now drinking from the river that it was always running low. To make matters worse, many of the island's brooks and streams emptied right into the ocean, where all that water became undrinkable. In those challenging times, the animals couldn't afford to lose any fresh water.

The robot didn't need water or food to survive, so she didn't feel the same fear felt by the animals. Instead, she felt something like sadness about the changes happening to the island. She also felt determination. Roz was determined to make things better, and she started by calling for an emergency meeting.

The poison tide had put everybody in a foul mood, but after some convincing, the island leaders agreed to meet Roz on the banks of the river. Roz arrived first, with Brightbill and Glimmer and the old goose, Loudwing. Then came Chitchat and Fink and Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. Gale and Swooper fluttered down from the sky. Nettle and Thorn lumbered across a meadow. Crownpoint, the buck, stepped out from the trees as Crag, the turtle, crawled out from a puddle. The last to arrive was Shelly, the sea otter, who wriggled up the muddy riverbank. The animals stood there swatting at flies and wondering why Roz had brought them to that spot.

"The island is running out of fresh water," said Roz. She motioned to the river, which had shrunk to half its usual size. "However, if we work together, I believe we will all have enough to survive."

Fink barked, "That's easy for you to say, Roz—you're not even *alive*!"

Shelly squeaked, "With Fink's attitude, none of us will be alive much longer!"

Mr. Beaver grunted, “You stay out of it, Shelly! Sea otters don’t even belong here!”

Gale squawked, “Leave Shelly alone! He’s had it worse than any of us!”

The group kept quarreling until Loudwing let out a tremendous honk. “ENOUGH! We all want to survive. We’re all on the same side. Let’s try to remember that, shall we?”



Everyone nodded and muttered apologies, and then the meeting continued.

“Most animals can go days or weeks without food,” said Roz, “but they cannot survive nearly as long without water. It is essential that we hold on to as much fresh water as possible, and I have a plan to do just that.”

Soon, an army of animals was crowding into the Great Meadow, and Roz was calling out instructions.

> “Beavers! Build dams in every brook and stream. We must not let any fresh water pour into the ocean!
>
> “Otters! Moose! Turtles! Dredge the bottom of every pond. Make them as deep as you can!
>
> “Bears! Groundhogs! Weasels! Hares! Badgers! I have marked where pits should be dug. Dig into the dirt, as far down as you can go!”

Dams were built, turning narrow trickles into wide ponds. Trenches were carved into the ground, diverting water from the river to the many deep pits that had been dug. Newly built ponds, along with the old ones, were dredged, deeper and deeper. Within days, the island was dotted with dozens of deep ponds. At first, they were empty, but with each passing storm, rainwater surged through the waterways, and the ponds gradually filled. They were like enormous tanks for storing fresh water, and they would make life a little easier on the island. It’s amazing what an army of animals can do.

But Roz was still worried. Summer was fast approaching, and the days were already growing long and hot. In the coming months, much of their drinking water would be lost to evaporation. Until the poison tide left and normal life returned, the water supply would always be at risk.

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CHAPTER 13

THE BLAZE

Dark clouds, distant rumbles, gusting wind. A storm was blowing over the island. The animals needed all the fresh water they could get, but no rain had fallen so far. And then came a blinding flash and a deafening *CRACK*! A moment later, smoke began rising from the eastern edge of the island.

Lightning had struck a tree. Sparks showered down, and the underbrush burst into flames. The poison tide had killed off the coastal vegetation, making it the perfect fuel for a wildfire. If only it had started to rain, the fire might have been extinguished right then and there. But the rain refused to fall.

By the time Roz arrived, the fire had grown into a roaring blaze. She ran over to one of the new dams and started tearing it apart. Branches and rocks and mud went flying until the dam broke and pond water flooded toward the fire. Steam shot into the air, but when it cleared, the fire was still burning.

Flames quickly spread along the coast, crawling through dead fields and climbing up dead trees. Animals who had fled from the poison tide now hurried back to find their old homes ablaze. Sad voices cried out. Family members embraced each other. A crowd started to form, and Roz directed everyone to the Great Meadow. From there, they watched in horror as a wall of fire encircled the island.

Plumes of smoke billowed up to the clouds.

Glowing embers whirled away on the breeze.

The sharp scent of burning brush filled the air.



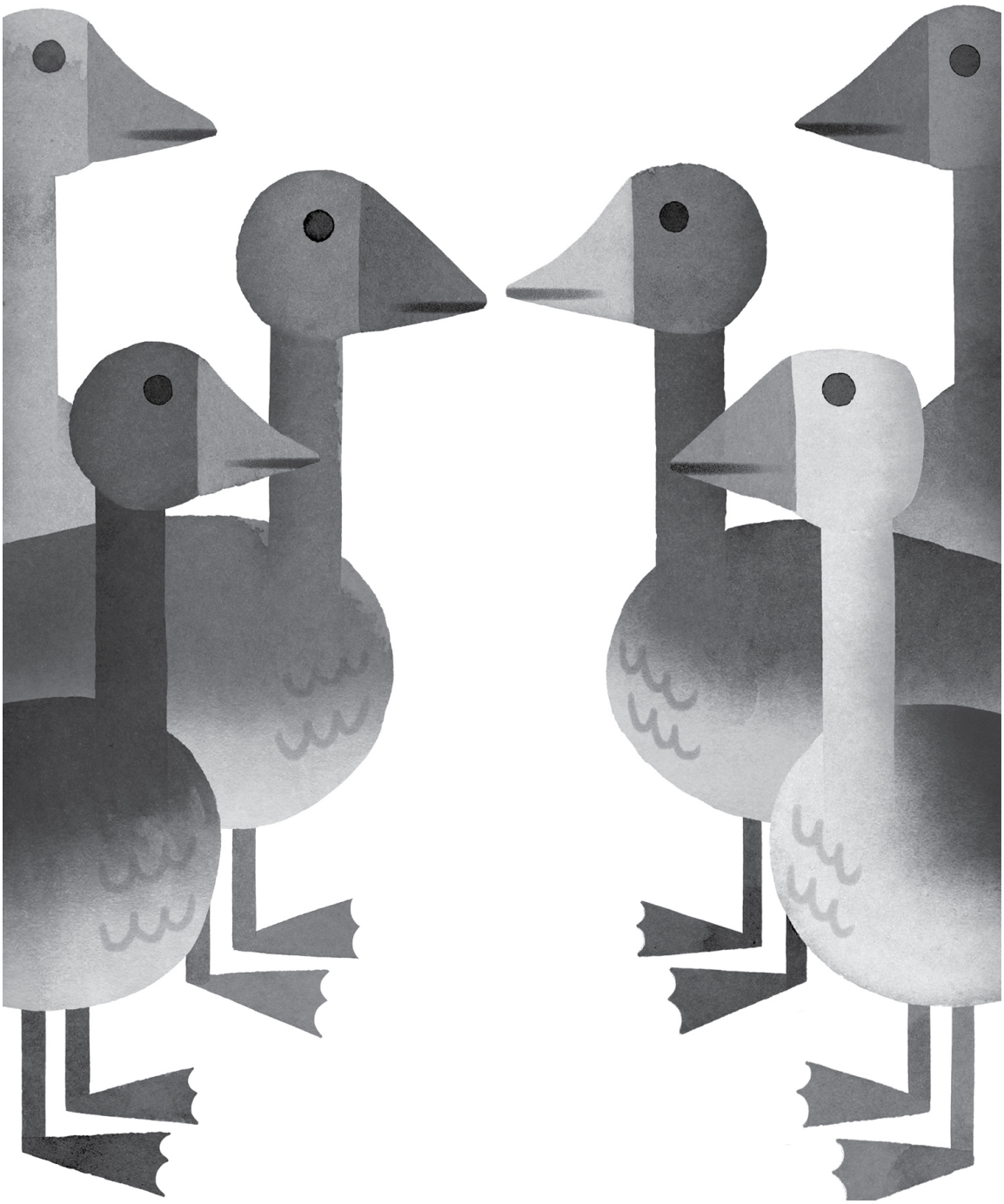
At last, rain. A drizzle, not a downpour. Very slowly, the blaze diminished. Hours after the wildfire had ignited, the worst was over, but for days afterward, wisps of smoke continued rising from the ashes.

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CHAPTER 14

THE FLOCK

Brightbill had been the leader of the flock ever since his first migration. The geese followed him because they trusted him, and he hoped they'd trust him one last time. "The flock needs to leave," said Brightbill to the other geese. "We've all seen the damage done by the poison tide, and the situation is only getting worse. I think it's best if you find a safer place to live."



The geese glanced at each other, unsure what to say. And then Loudwing spoke up. “What about you, Brightbill? It doesn’t sound like you’re going anywhere.”

“My mother and my friends are trapped on this island,” said Brightbill. “So I will stay and help them as best I can. But the rest of you should leave.”

Glimmer turned to her mate. “Brightbill, you know I’d never leave you and Roz behind. If you’re staying, I’m staying.”

“I’m staying too!” said Loudwing as she waddled over to join Glimmer and Brightbill. Before long, a whole gaggle of geese had joined their leader, committed to staying with him, no matter what.

However, not everyone joined. Five other geese were huddled close, whispering. And then a goose named Finefeather stood tall. “There’s nothing any of us can do about the poison tide,” she said. “We’ve decided to take Brightbill’s advice and leave.”

The two groups of geese faced each other. For generations, through grueling journeys and harsh weather, their flock had been united. The members had changed, the times had changed, but the flock had always held together. Until now.

“Where will you go?” said Brightbill.

“We’ll fly over the ocean to the mainland,” said Finefeather. “And we’ll find a lake or a river where we can start a new life.”

“Good luck to you,” said Brightbill. “May the wind be at your tails.”

Finefeather took a deep breath. Then she beat her wings and led her small flock of geese into the sky.

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CHAPTER 15

THE FLYAWAYS

The sight of those five geese flying away from the island inspired other birds to do the same. It was hard to blame them. Across the ocean was an easier, safer life, and as the poison tide wore on, more birds chose to fly away.

There were tearful good-byes as birds left old friends behind. Some birds felt so bad about leaving that they took off without saying a word. Before she left, Gale couldn't stop apologizing. "I'm sorry but I have to go!" cried the gull. "The poison tide is too much! I wish I could bring all of you with me. I'm so sorry!"

Only the most determined birds stayed. Brightbill and his smaller flock stayed. Swooper stayed. A handful of other birds stayed. But the rest of them flew away, and nobody knew if they'd ever return.

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CHAPTER 16

THE PLUNGE

Mr. Beaver's angry voice was echoing across the pond. He was always grumbling about something or other, but this time he sounded unusually upset. Roz marched over to see what all the fuss was about, and as she went, she began to hear squeaking and splashing, and through the foliage she caught glimpses of otters leaping off the beaver dam and into the water.

Roz stepped out from the trees and onto the dam. It was a low wall of branches and rocks and mud that stretched along one side of the pond. She had crossed it hundreds of times without any difficulty. But the pond had recently been dredged to hold more water, and now it was so deep that she couldn't see the bottom. The robot had fallen into deep water once, and it had nearly destroyed her. So she didn't hurry, but carefully made her way across the dam, toward the commotion.

"Come back here so I can scold you!" hollered Mr. Beaver as he swam after the otters.

The otters ignored him. They kept climbing onto the dam and splashing into the water, happily squeaking all the while. Mr. Beaver's son, Paddler, was floating nearby, and he couldn't help giggling.

"Don't encourage them, son!" said Mr. Beaver. "These creatures are a menace!"

Paddler frowned and said, "After what they've been through, it's nice to see them having fun."

"The otters can have all the fun they want. Just not in my pond!"

"Dad, I know you made this pond, but that doesn't mean it belongs to you."

"That is *precisely* what it means!"

When the otters took a break from playing, Shelly swam up to the

beavers and said, “I’m sorry if we’re disturbing you. We know we’re out of place here. We’re *sea* otters! We should be in the *sea*! But we have to find a new home somewhere on the island, and we like it here.”

Mr. Beaver grunted, “I don’t understand why you have to live in *my* pond when there are so many *new* ponds to choose from.”

“Those new ponds are just holes filled with water,” said Shelly. “This pond has plants and fish and geese and insects… and beavers! This pond is full of life! It feels more like a home.”

Mrs. Beaver’s head poked up from the surface. She glared at her husband and said, “Remember how you asked me to point out when you’re being stubborn and rude? Well, you’re being stubborn and rude!” Then she smiled at the otters and said, “You are very welcome to live here. This pond is big enough for us all.” And with that, Mrs. Beaver disappeared back below the surface.

Reader, the next few events happened very quickly. First, the otters resumed playing. They burst into action, squeaking and splashing and climbing onto the dam. This made Paddler giggle, but his father was not amused. In one swift motion, Mr. Beaver smacked his broad tail against the water. That was his way of warning the otters to keep their distance. However, he ended up startling Roz, who had been quietly approaching this whole time. She stumbled and wobbled and swung her arms to keep her balance. Then she toppled off the dam and into the pond.



Kersploosh!

The robot sank like a stone and vanished into the murky depths. Around the pond, animals turned and stared. Worried faces peered out from the

trees. Glimmer and Brightbill came flying.

“My mother can’t survive in deep water!” squawked Brightbill.

“Somebody, do something!” screeched Glimmer.

The beavers and otters were about to dive down when they saw a shape rising from the bottom. A moment later, Roz hauled herself out of the water and onto the dam. She was covered in muck, which started oozing down her smooth sides. A fish wiggled out from a muddy clump on her head and plopped back into the pond.

“Are you okay, Ma?” said Brightbill.

“What do you need?” said Shelly.

“Speak to us!” said Mr. Beaver.

“Thank you for your concern,” said Roz. “But I seem to be perfectly fine.”

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CHAPTER 17

THE ROBOTIC BODY

A crowd of creatures crammed into the robot's garden and listened as she described her plunge.

"Down I went, tumbling end over end, sinking into the beaver pond," Roz began. "I grasped at the muddy ground, but the sides were steep and slippery, and I just kept sinking. I could not believe how deep it was. The otters and moose and turtles really did a terrific job of dredging the pond.

"As I continued sinking, I expected my Survival Instincts to warn me of danger and for water to seep into my body and for everything to go dark. Instead, I came to a stop in the soft muck at the bottom. Dirt and leaves settled around me. And then I felt something squirm against my legs. It was a frog. She crawled out from under me, croaked a few angry words, and swam off. I noticed how the frog kicked her legs to move through the water. Mimicking the frog, I stood and kicked my legs, and suddenly I was swimming to the surface!"

"I'm confused," said Brightbill. "I didn't think you could survive in deep water."

"That was true of my original body," Roz explained. "Back then, I was afraid of deep water, and so I tried to avoid it. I kept trying to avoid it even after my mind was transferred from that old body to this new one. I am now tougher and stronger and faster than before. And I have just learned that I am also waterproof."

The animals quietly thought about Roz. They would never understand how her mind had passed from one body to another, or why there was so much she didn't know about herself. But all that really mattered was that their friend was alive and well.

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CHAPTER 18

THE EXPERIMENT

Midnight, and most of the animals were asleep. Brightbill, however, was wide awake. He couldn't stop thinking about his mother. Throughout his life, deep water had always been a danger to her. He remembered when he was a gosling how she could only watch from the edge of the pond while he went swimming. He remembered worrying any time she crossed the river. He remembered her falling into the ocean, and how it almost killed her. Those experiences had happened with her old robotic body, but now she had a different body, and only hours earlier, he had learned that his mother was waterproof. Never again would he have to worry about her falling into water.

The goose wondered what other hidden abilities his mother might have, and an idea popped into his head. The poison tide was harmful to all living things, but Roz was not a living thing—she was a machine. What if she was safe from the poison tide?

Brightbill needed to speak to her right away. Without waking Glimmer, he carefully crept out of their nest. Then he stepped through the moonlit forest toward Roz's home. But she wasn't there. Brightbill knew his mother well, and he had a good guess where to find her.

The goose took flight and headed north. He flew out from the forest and over the mountain, and there was the ocean, spread out beneath the stars. The slopes along the coast had once been carpeted with grasses and flowers, but now they were a wasteland. Poison sea spray had killed off the plants, and the wildfire had turned them to ashes.

On this night, there was no sea spray, no breeze, no crashing waves. Everything was calm. And then Brightbill spotted his mother. She was standing in a quiet, rocky cove, staring into the water.





“Ma! What are you doing?” cried Brightbill as he circled through the night sky.

Roz’s headlights swung up and found her son. “Go home, Brightbill!” she said. “You are not safe near the poison tide!”

“What about you, Ma? Are you safe?”

“I do not know,” said Roz. “I have come here to learn whether I can survive the poison tide. To do that I must go into the water. There is a risk that the poison tide will damage my body, but I believe it is worth that risk. I did not want anyone to worry about me, so I kept this experiment a secret. I should have known you would uncover my plan.”

“I’ve been having the same thoughts,” said Brightbill. “That’s why I went looking for you. When I didn’t find you at home, I knew I’d find you here, where the poison tide first came ashore.”

“Do you understand why I must do this?”

“I understand. I’m not here to stop you. But I won’t let you do this alone.”

The robot’s eyes glowed brighter. “Thank you, son. I am glad you are here. But no matter what happens to me, you must not go near the poison tide.”

Brightbill nodded and watched as his mother turned back to the cove. She lifted a foot off the ground and extended it over the shallows. Then she lowered it into the gently shimmering water. Roz stood there, perfectly still, one foot on the rocks, the other in the poison tide.

“What’s happening?” said Brightbill. “Does it hurt?”

“It does not hurt!” said Roz. “The poison tide has no effect on my foot! I will go in further.”

Roz lowered her other foot, stepping down to a deeper part of the shallows, and the water came up to her knees. She stepped down again, and the water came up to her waist. Then it came up to her chest. Then to her shoulders. She kept stepping down, and more of her body disappeared into the poison tide until she was completely submerged.

The robot was just a blur within the poison tide. Her headlights lit up the water, casting an eerie glow on the surrounding rocks. It was a frightening scene, and the goose felt a flicker of panic.

Why was his mother still underwater?

Had something gone wrong?

Did she need help?

At last, Brightbill saw movement. Roz's headlights swept through the poison tide and she stepped out from the water and onto the rocks.

"Well?" said Brightbill. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I am all right!" said Roz. "The poison tide has no effect on me!"

Oh, the relief they both felt! The goose cheered, and the robot did a happy dance. But when Brightbill swooped down to give his mother a hug, she jumped back and said, "Do not touch me! I am still coated with the poison tide. We could both use a hug right now, but I must first rinse myself in fresh water. Please, son, go home to Glimmer and get some rest. I will see you both tomorrow."

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CHAPTER 19

THE DECISION

Rays of sunlight streaked across the pond. The surface rippled, and the robot's head poked up. She had spent the last hour practicing different swimming techniques, and now she was treading water.

The forest rustled, and then Brightbill and Glimmer flew out from the trees. They glided over to the robot and splashed down beside her.



"Hello, Roz," said Glimmer. "I heard about your experiment last night. Weren't you afraid to touch the poison tide?"

"In a way, I was afraid," said Roz. "My Survival Instincts warned me to stay clear of the poison tide, but I ignored the warnings and stepped in

anyway. I was ready to jump out at the first sign of trouble. But then I felt a click in my head, and my Survival Instincts went silent. My sensors had determined that I was safe from the poison tide. So I went in deeper and deeper, until I was completely underwater, and I was fine.

“Up close, I saw that the poison tide is made of tiny particles, like a fine dust, and there is so much dust that it forms clouds in the ocean. I do not know what is causing the dust clouds, but I intend to find out.”

“How will you do that?” said Brightbill.

“I now know that I am safe in the poison tide,” said Roz, “and I am also safe in deep water. That means I can safely leave the island. I have decided to travel north to track down the Ancient Shark. With her help, I will find a way to stop the poison tide. My mission will be dangerous, and I might fail, but that is a chance I must take.”

“You shouldn’t go by yourself,” said Brightbill. “I could go with you. We’ve traveled together before. We could do it again.”

Glimmer looked at her mate and said, “No, Brightbill, you’re needed here, at home.”

“Glimmer is right,” said Roz. “The island needs you now, more than ever.”

Brightbill shook his tail feathers, and pond water sprayed behind him. “So, while you’re wandering through the ocean, we’re supposed to wait around and hope you solve all our problems? What if you get hurt? What if you never come back?”

Brightbill’s emotions swung wildly from fear to anger to pride in his mother’s courage. Overwhelmed by his feelings, he dunked his head in the water to cool off, and when he lifted it back up, he felt a little better.

“I know I have to let you go, Ma,” said Brightbill. “I know you’re the island’s only hope.”

“We believe in you, Roz,” said Glimmer. “You’re doing the right thing.”

“Thank you both for understanding,” said Roz. “I will leave in the morning.”

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CHAPTER 20

THE GOOD-BYE

For months, Roz had feared the poison tide, and now she was going to march straight into it. She stood on the northern slopes and gazed out at the ocean. Clouds of gently shimmering dust were billowing through the water. The robot's eyes drifted skyward to a winged shape, high above. Brightbill was up there, scanning the seas. After a few minutes, he dove down and landed on his mother's shoulder.

"The poison tide gradually curves west," said Brightbill, pointing. "So if you keep moving north, the water will eventually clear up."

"Thank you for that helpful information," said Roz.

"And the currents are strong and unpredictable," said Brightbill. "So be careful not to get turned around."

"My internal compass will keep me headed in the right direction," said Roz.

"Also, you never know when a boat or an airship might appear," said Brightbill. "So stay underwater as much as you can, to be safe."

"Brightbill, I appreciate your concern," said Roz. "But please try not to worry. I am prepared for whatever I encounter."

Farther up the hillside, a group of animals had gathered. They came to see off their good friend Roz. Everybody was counting on her to stop the poison tide. It seemed like an impossible task, but if anyone could succeed, it was the wild robot. Among the group were Loudwing, Nettle and Thorn, the beavers, and the otters. Chitchat stood with her three kits. Swooper floated on the breeze. Even Fink was there, lurking behind the others. However, someone important was missing.

"Where is Glimmer?" said Roz.

"Glimmer wanted to be here," said Brightbill. "But she stayed home

because, well, Ma, you're going to be a grandmother."

"Has Glimmer laid eggs?"

The goose smiled. "She laid her first egg early this morning. We expect four or five more."

"Oh, Brightbill, that is wonderful!" said Roz, hugging her son. "You and Glimmer will be excellent parents."

"Life has been so hard lately," said Brightbill. "It's nice to have good news. But it feels strange to bring goslings into such a scary world."

"The world can be scary sometimes," said Roz. "Whenever I am scared, I think of you, and I feel strong. Now, with grandgoslings on the way, I feel even stronger. I will do everything in my power to stop the poison tide. I am not afraid."

"Just be careful," said Brightbill. "I want my goslings to meet their grandmother."

"I will be careful," said Roz. "I want to meet my grandgoslings."

Roz and Brightbill hugged each other tight. And then Brightbill fluttered up and joined the other animals.

The robot marched downhill and across the shore. Before stepping into the water, she peered back at her friends and family. They looked tired, frail, nervous. Surrounding them were dead plants and scorched rocks. A puff of wind sent ashes floating through the group. The island had always seemed like a paradise, but now it seemed more like a prison.



Voices called from the hillside.

“Good luck, Roz!”

“Thank you, Roz!”

“We love you, Roz!”

Roz waved good-bye. She took in one last view of the island. And when she was ready, she turned and marched into the waves.

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CHAPTER 21

THE SHALLOW SEA

Above the surface, the sea appeared normal. It was vast and blue and it rippled with waves. But below the surface, the sea was very unusual. It was hardly deeper than the deep end of a swimming pool. And gently shimmering dust was flowing along the currents. And walking on the bottom of that shallow sea was a robot.



Clouds of poison tide swirled around Roz while she moved. With such poor visibility, the robot had to feel with her feet, one cautious step at a time. Occasionally, the clouds receded, and she could briefly see the surface just overhead. Then the poison tide came rushing back, and she was surrounded by dust once again.

Brightbill had described the poison tide as winding through the ocean, like a river. And as the hours passed, Roz came to a bend in the poison tide's path. The dust clouds faded, and half a day after setting out from the island, she finally entered clear water.

The water may have been clear, but it wasn't healthy. At some point, the poison tide had come that way, and the seabed was still coated with dust. There were no schools of fish or colonies of crabs or fronds of seaweed. There was no life at all.

Roz kept expecting the seabed to slope downward, into the deep, but the shallow sea stretched on and on. She had always wondered how such a variety of animals came to live on her remote island, and now she wondered if that seabed had once been above water, connecting the island to other lands, like a bridge. She recalled Crag the turtle telling stories of how their island had once been a mountain, until the ocean flooded the nearby flatlands. Crag's story sounded like a folktale at the time, but now it seemed entirely possible.

The robot was so busy pondering these ideas that she was slow to notice the changes happening around her. As she marched, the ground became sandier. Clumps of seagrass began to appear. More grass appeared, and the clumps blended together to form a meadow that whirled with the motion of the water. And there were sea sponges! And corals! Crabs and snails crawled out from under stones! And the fish! So many fish! There were small skinny fish and wide round fish. There were dull gray fish and fish that glittered with rainbow colors. Schools of fish swept over the sea meadow like birds over a field.

And then there were the sounds.

Whup! Whup! Whup!

Blooooooop!

Tap tap tap tap tap!

The sea was abuzz with the soft sounds of animals. This place was filled with life. After witnessing so much devastation, it was a relief to see a healthy, bustling patch of water.

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CHAPTER 22

THE HOPE

Something big was bobbing along the choppy surface of the sea. It looked like a chunk of driftwood, but as Roz marched closer, she saw that it was a sea creature, slowly swimming against the current. The creature had a small head and long flippers and a large, streamlined shell.

“Hello, sea turtle,” said the robot. “My name is Roz!”

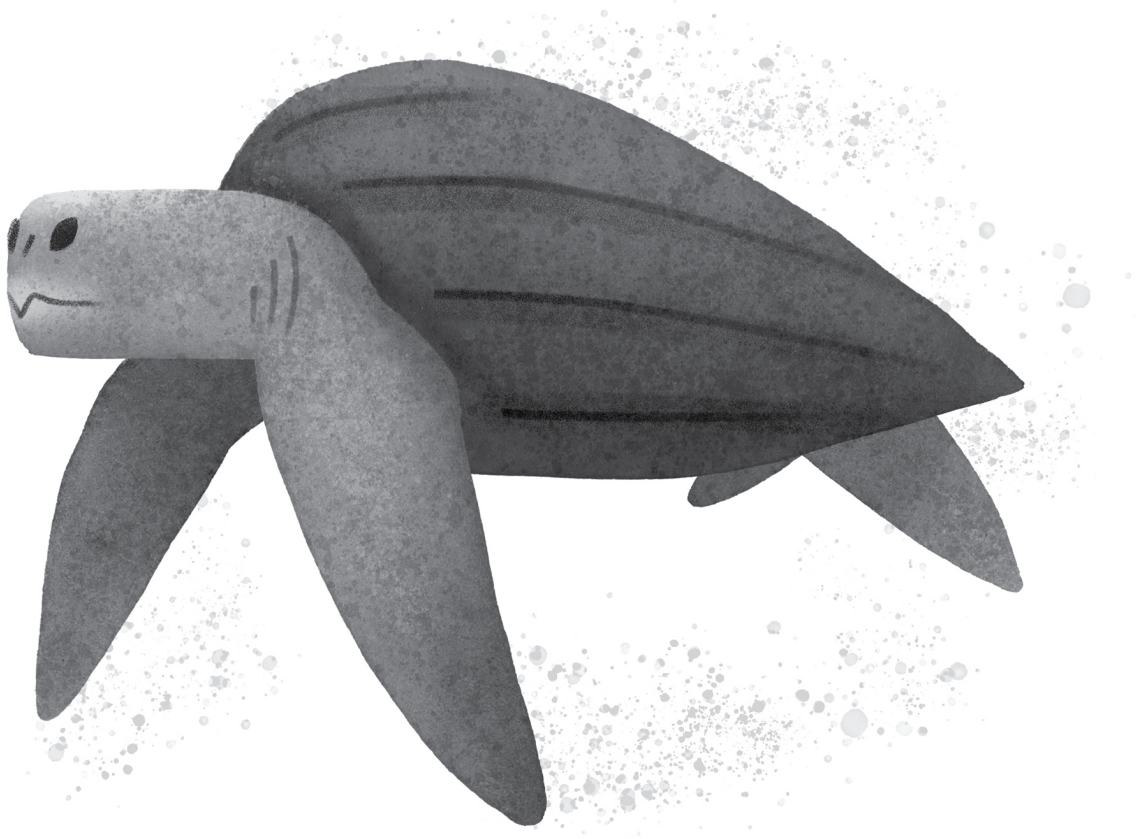
“You should turn around,” said the sea turtle. “The poison tide is near.”

“I appreciate the warning, but I am not an animal. I am a robot. The poison tide does not affect me.”

The sea turtle rolled his eyes and snapped, “Well, aren’t you lucky? The rest of us are fighting for our lives, and you’re just going for a pleasant stroll!”

“Actually, I am going to stop the poison tide.”

“And how do you plan on doing that?”



“I am heading north in search of the Ancient Shark. I have heard that she is wise and powerful, and she will know what to do. Together, we will find a way.”

“With the Ancient Shark’s help, you might have a shot,” said the sea turtle, and his hard expression softened. “I’m sorry I snapped at you, Roz. These are tough times. Yesterday, I visited a beach where hundreds of sea turtles had laid thousands of eggs in the sand. And then the poison tide washed ashore. The grown turtles escaped, but none of the eggs survived.”

Roz’s glowing eyes dimmed, and she said, “I am deeply sorry for your loss. I will do everything in my power to stop the poison tide.”

“So there’s hope?” said the sea turtle.

“There is hope,” said the robot.

“Thank you, Roz. I’m going to tell the other sea turtles about you. We all need a little hope right now.”

With that, the robot and the turtle parted ways and continued through that shallow sea in opposite directions.

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CHAPTER 23

THE FIRST NIGHT

The water was shallow enough that Roz could watch the sun moving across the sky. While she marched along the bottom, the bright ball of light wiggled and wobbled through the wavy surface overhead and sank toward the western horizon. The water turned orange and then purple and then black. Roz's first night in the ocean had begun.

The robot activated her headlights—*click*—and light beamed out from her eyes. To one side, fish darted away. To the other side, the seabed dropped sharply into the deep ocean. And that's when Roz noticed the migration. At the very edge of her vision, where her light beams faded to darkness, there was movement. Up from the deep came hundreds, thousands, millions of sea creatures. Most were microscopic, the tiniest life-forms imaginable. Others were bigger, like fish and squid and bizarre jelly creatures. Each night, they ascended to the starlight. Then before the sun returned, they descended back into the deep. Around the world, countless sea creatures made this great vertical migration every night. Their movement churned the water, spreading nutrients throughout the depths, helping to keep the oceans healthy. And now our robot got to witness a small part of this natural wonder for herself.

At that time of year, the nights were short, and a few brief hours after the sun had set in the west, it was already rising in the east. The migratory sea creatures disappeared back down into the abyss. The water turned purple and then orange and then bright blue. Roz's first night in the ocean had ended.

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CHAPTER 24

THE BOAT

Sunlight spread down through the water and illuminated the robot. She was marching across a wide sandy plain, dotted with boulders and seagrass. The ocean was a little deeper there, and floating above her was a glittering school of fish. The fish were twisting and turning together, as if they shared the same mind. Roz had seen flocks of birds flying through the sky in a similar manner. Then, as now, she couldn't stop watching the undulating group of animals.

The robot called out, "Hello, fish, my name is Roz! I am headed north in search of the Ancient Shark. Have you heard of her?"

But the moment was interrupted by a distant buzzing noise. A boat was approaching. Roz hid against some rocks and waited for the boat to pass. The engine noise grew louder and louder, and then the boat appeared. It plowed across the surface, its underside dark against the bright sky. At the back end, its propellers fizzed through the water and left a trail of frothy waves in its wake.

There was activity to the rear of the boat, and then a huge fishing net slowly lowered into the ocean. Roz tried to warn the fish. "Swim away!" she cried. "A fishing boat is coming!" But the engine noise drowned out her voice.



The net swept through the school, scooping up fish as it went. Their shiny bodies thrashed as they tried to break free, but the net was too strong. When the net was full, it was reeled in, and the fish were hauled above the surface and out of sight. In a matter of minutes, the vast glittering school had been reduced to a few survivors, who quickly flitted away.

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CHAPTER 25

THE SONG

Somewhere in the ocean, a whale was singing a sad song. It began with a high-pitched note. The note hung there for a while, and then descended, sliding down to a low rumble before swinging up a little higher and fading to silence. The song was repeated, but this time it came from a different direction and a different voice. Then it was repeated again, from somewhere else. Throughout that great, big ocean, whales were singing the same song, over and over.

Roz scanned the area for whales, but she saw none. Sound can travel incredibly fast and far in water. The whales could have been anywhere. So the robot kept marching as the whales kept singing. Their sad song went like this.

Whales are at home
Across all the seas
From warm waves of foam
To where whole oceans freeze

But a danger emerges
And it fills us with dread
Southward it surges
Leaving behind only dead

Whales, we can't stay
Through the blue we must ride
There's no other way

To survive the poison tide

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CHAPTER 26

THE ROAD

At first, Roz thought she was looking at an undersea lava flow that had hardened into rock. Then she discovered the painted yellow lines. This wasn't old lava. It was an old road.

The road made for easier walking, so Roz followed it through the undersea landscape. It curved around rugged reefs and rolled over sandy slopes. One slope climbed so high that she rose up from the ocean surface and continued on, wading through knee-deep water. Surrounding her were small islands, scattered with abandoned buildings. Those islands had been hills until the nearby lowlands flooded. The robot tried to imagine what this place was like before the floodwaters. Had there been a park where she was now walking? Athletic fields? Farms?



Suddenly, Roz was remembering her time on Hilltop Farm. She thought of the Shareef family and their herd of cows. She wondered if Jad and Jaya

still thought about her. Without those children, our robot never would have made it home to the island.

Roz waded through the mid-ocean shallows until the road sloped downward and she descended beneath the surface, where she found more signs of civilization.

Old mailboxes, crusted with barnacles.

An abandoned automobile, draped with seaweed.

Metal fencing, spiked with urchins.

The underwater road stretched far ahead, toward a jumble of murky shapes. With each step Roz took, the shapes became clearer, and she saw that the road was leading her to a town that had been completely submerged by the ocean.

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CHAPTER 27

THE TOWN

The ocean had risen only slightly when it flooded into this low-lying town. Humans built barriers to keep the water out, but it kept finding new ways to get in. Eventually, the humans packed up their things and left. As the ocean continued rising, the town gradually disappeared beneath the waves. Streets were buried under sand. Flower gardens were replaced with gardens of corals and sea sponges. Wooden structures were swept away, and now all that remained were structures made of steel or stone.

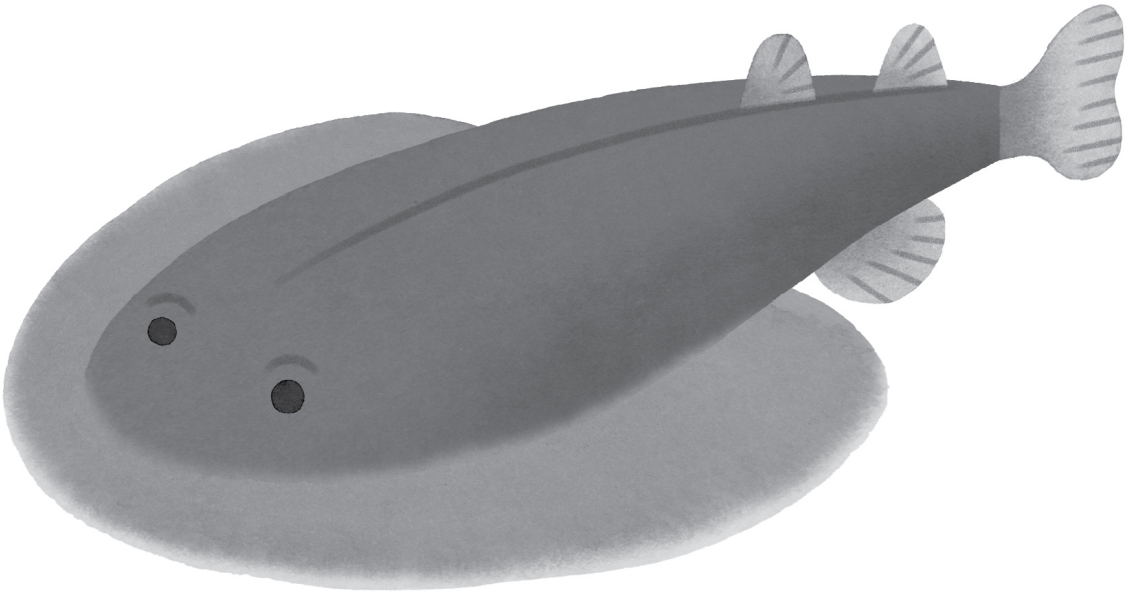
Our robot marched through the underwater town until she came to a building that had once been a grocery store. Some of its walls had collapsed, and its flimsy roof rocked side to side with the waves, but it was still standing. Inside, the store was dark except for a few columns of daylight shining down from holes in the ceiling. Roz peered through the open doorway and said, “Hello, is anybody in there?”

A voice hollered back, “Get outta here!” and a creature shot through the door and latched on to Roz’s head. Then somehow the creature began shocking the robot with powerful electric pulses. The pulses slowed and stopped, and when the creature released its grip, Roz fell to the ground.

“Go on, get outta here!” said the creature. “Or do you want another shock?”

“I d-d-do not w-w-want anotherrr shock!” said Roz in a garbled voice. Electricity had overwhelmed her circuits, but then her recovery program activated, and after a moment, she was fully functional again.

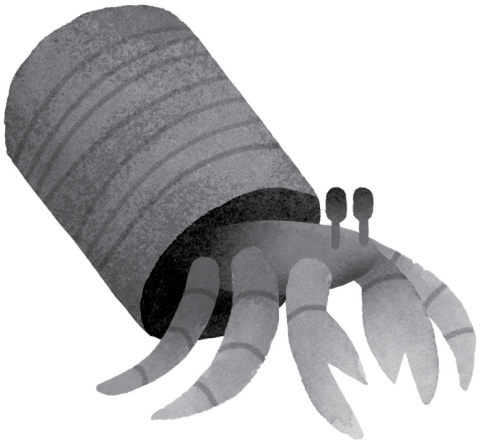
Roz looked up from the ground and saw a large, gray fish with a flat, circular body. It was a ray. Not a stingray, not a manta ray, but an electric ray.



The electric ray stared at the robot and said, “What kind of sea monster are you?”

“I am not any kind of sea monster. I am a robot. My name is Roz.”

Just then, a hermit crab came scuttling over. Instead of wearing a seashell on his back, like most hermit crabs, he wore a rusty old soup can. The crab climbed up Roz’s leg and onto her chest and said, “Oh, I’m so glad you’re all right! You’ll have to forgive my friend, Zap. She can be overly protective of our sea cave.”



“That is not a sea cave,” said Roz. “That is a flooded grocery store.”

“Really?” said the crab, clicking his claws. “Interesting! In that case, Zap can be overly protective of our flooded grocery store.”

“What was I supposed to do?” muttered Zap. “He looked dangerous. I

mean, *she* looked dangerous?" The ray's face scrunched up with confusion. "Tell me, Roz, are you male or female?"

"Technically, robots are not male or female. However, I have been programmed to *feel* like a female."

"Interesting!" said the crab. "Roz, there's someone I think you should meet! Follow me!"

The hermit crab's name was Scoot. He scuttled into the store as Roz and Zap trailed behind him. There wasn't much to see besides junk and shadows. The flooded grocery store was a dreary, dismal place.

"Pretty nice spot, isn't it?" said Scoot.

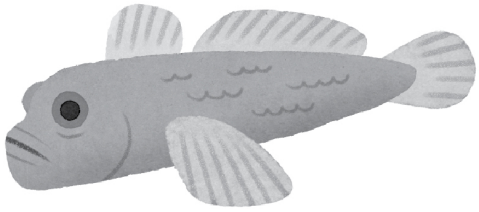
"It certainly is unique," said Roz politely.

Scoot crawled across the broken floor and over to a heap of shelves that were covered with sand. Then he said, "Ripple, are you up there?"

Roz didn't see who Scoot was calling to. But when she took a closer look at the sandy shelves, she noticed that they were packed with small fish that blended in with their background. One of the fish floated out and said, "Yes, what is it, Scoot?"

"Ah, there you are, Ripple!" said the hermit crab. "I'd like you to meet Roz, the robot! You're both, oh, how do I say this? You're both a little *different*! Roz isn't male or female. And Ripple is both male and female! Isn't that interesting?"

"That's not quite right," said Ripple. "I was born a female, and then I changed to a male. We gobies do that from time to time."



Ripple was a type of fish called a goby. Roz scrolled through her computer brain for information about gobies and about all the other creatures who were a little *different*. Many other types of fish can change back and forth between male and female. Certain kinds of frogs can change in similar ways. Some species of animal are not male or female, and some species are both. And just like that, our robot felt more connected to the natural world.

Roz described her life on the island, and the sea creatures smiled as they imagined her living on dry land. But their smiles vanished when she mentioned the poison tide. They'd all heard about the poison tide, but it had seemed like a distant problem, not anything that would ever concern them. After listening to Roz, though, the problem felt awfully near.

"I will do everything in my power to stop the poison tide," said Roz. "But first I must find the Ancient Shark. I need her help."

"I grew up hearing stories about the Ancient Shark," said Zap. "They say she has spies throughout all the oceans. Her spies could be watching us right now." Scoot glanced around nervously as Zap continued. "But the Ancient Shark lives up in the far north. What are you doing here, Roz?"

"I am passing through on my way to the far north. I still have a long journey ahead."

"Well, don't waste your time with us!" said Zap. "Go find the Ancient Shark! Go stop the poison tide! Go on, Roz, get moving!"

"Oh! Okay! You are right! I should be going! Good-bye, my friends. I have enjoyed our time together!"

The sea creatures waved and said good-bye as Roz hurried back through the flooded grocery store and out the door.

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CHAPTER 28

THE OBSERVATIONS

Seaweed swayed with the passing waves.
Tiny krill gathered in vast swarms.
Currents rushed down from the north.
Fallen cargo lay on the sea floor.
Underwater mountains slowly crumbled.
Corals clustered on shipwrecks.
Seabirds hunted schools of fish.
Ships sailed across the surface.
Mysterious creatures groaned in the deep.
Little bits of plastic floated everywhere.
An undersea robot observed it all.

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CHAPTER 29

THE DEAD ISLAND

Ahead, the ocean gently shimmered, and then clouds of dust came billowing past the robot. Roz had encountered the poison tide once again. As she marched through the cloudy water, the ocean became shallower and rougher. Waves started rolling overhead, and their motion sent her tumbling. She popped to the surface, and suddenly a gigantic wave was carrying her away. The wave's curling face pushed her along, lifting her higher and higher, until the peak toppled forward and the robot went crashing into the surf. Sea-foam and sand sloshed around her. And when the water receded, Roz saw that she was lying on the beach of an island.

This island was very different from the robot's home island. It had no mountains, no waterfalls, no forests. It was just a field of shrubs and grass and a few scraggly trees. Strong winds had sprayed the poison tide across the island, turning the plants brittle and bare. There should have been leaves rustling and insects buzzing. But all was still and quiet. The island was dead.

Dry grass crackled underfoot as Roz crossed the dead island. And then she discovered something unexpected. Mushrooms. Lots of them. And where the mushrooms grew, the soil was darker, richer, healthier.

Mushrooms are fascinating things. They're not plants or animals—they're fungus. Surprisingly, the fungal growths were surviving in that harsh environment. The robot's computer brain went to work and found that certain kinds of mushrooms were capable of healing the land by absorbing toxic substances. And when Roz studied the ground, she spotted tiny green sprouts trying to take root. If only the poison tide would go away, this island could recover, which meant her own island could recover too. The robot felt a little boost of hope, and she marched back into the waves and

continued her long journey north.



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CHAPTER 30

THE STORM

Roz was walking along the bottom of another shallow sea. The poison tide clouded her vision, so she had to move slowly. But with each step, the changing currents swept away more dust clouds until the water was clear. Then a new problem emerged. Heavy rains began pounding the surface. Choppy waves began stirring up sand from the seafloor. The dark sky began rumbling and flashing.

BOOM!

A deafening sound blasted through the water. It wasn't thunder; it was lightning hitting a wave. A lightning strike could easily destroy the robot, and her Survival Instincts flared. Roz increased her speed, marching north as fast as she could, but the current was working against her.

BOOM!



Another flash sizzled across the waves. Roz needed to get far away from there. So she kicked off from the ground and swam with the current, and soon she was moving at a blistering speed.

BOOM!

The robot pumped her arms and legs, pushing the limits of her body as she tried to escape from the storm. The seafloor passed beneath her, faster and faster, and then it suddenly dropped off. Roz glided over the edge of an undersea cliff, and with the storm still raging above, she dove straight down into the gloom. The thunder and lightning and rough water near the surface were replaced by the still, silent darkness of the deep ocean.

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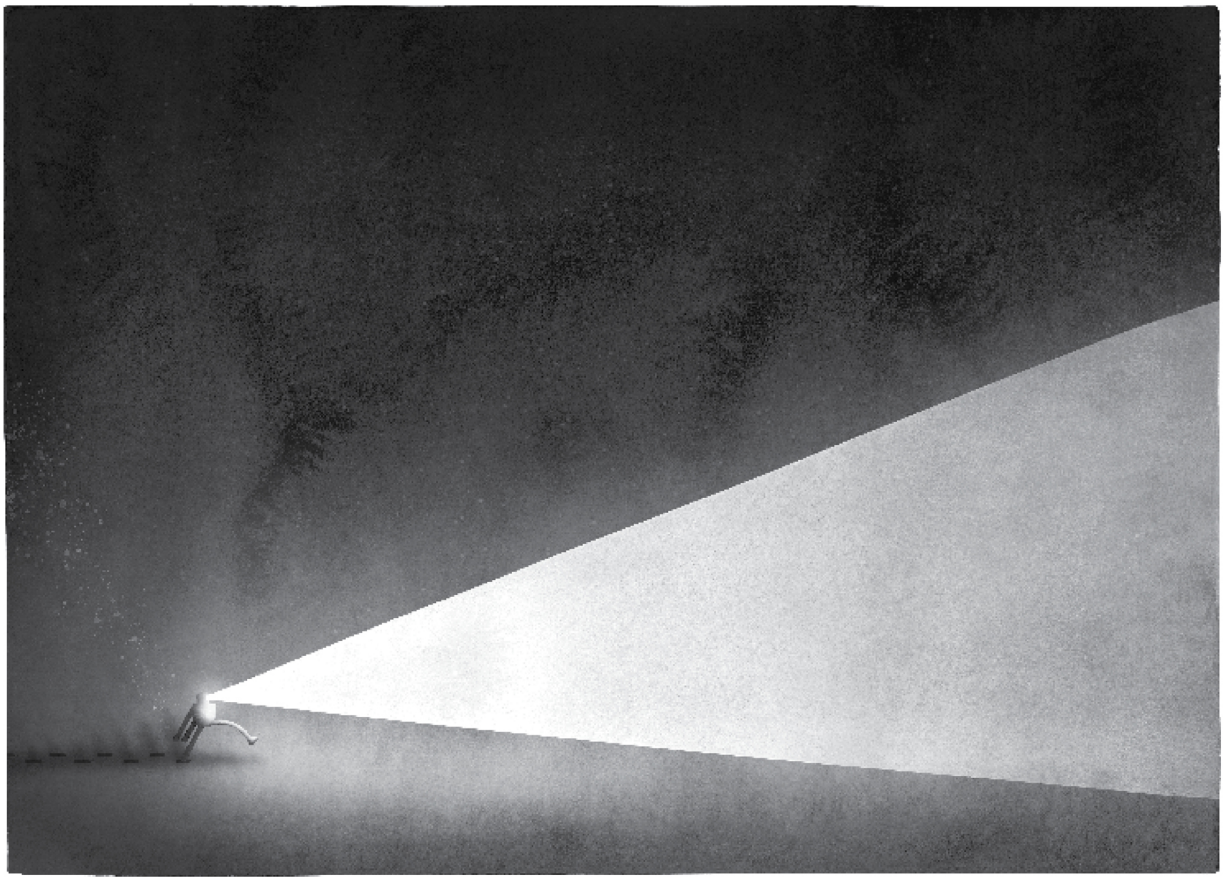
CHAPTER 31

THE DEEP

The robot swam down along the cliffside and into the deep. As she descended, the ocean grew darker, and the weight of the water above grew heavier. Roz was an amazingly durable machine, but if she went too deep, she'd be crushed by the immense water pressure. Before she reached a dangerous depth, however, she arrived at the bottom of the cliff.

Very little light was visible. Only a faint blue glow could be seen, high up at the surface. Roz switched on her headlights—*click*—and shafts of light beamed out from her eyes. Then she turned her head and took in the dim underwater world.

Behind her, the cliffs rose up and out of sight. In front of her, the flat ocean floor spread away into darkness. All around her, specks of debris drifted through the water.



Roz started marching, and plumes of silt billowed up from each footfall. In such still water, she was able to move easily, covering a lot of ground in a short time. On her way, she passed bizarre sea creatures, paddling, twirling, pulsing. Some creatures were transparent, some had spiky teeth jutting from their jaws, and some wriggled down into the muck. Eyes glinted in the shadows. Soft noises echoed from afar. This was an eerie, alien place.

The robot became aware of a gurgling sound, and then a cluster of towering rocks emerged. From the top of each tower spewed scalding-hot water that had bubbled up from deep underground. The warmth attracted a wide array of living things. Gardens of corals and sponges and flowery sea anemones clung to the rocks and danced in the whirling currents. Crawling throughout the gardens were shrimps and crabs. A giant sea star crept over a crowd of clams. Hungry fish floated nearby and eyed the assortment of tasty creatures.

Of particular interest to Roz was a sea slug. Sea slugs might seem disgusting to you, reader, but this one was beautiful. It was colored in shades of pink and orange and purple, like a sunset. On its back were feathery fins that shimmered in the light. The robot searched through her computer brain to identify the species. Her brain was filled with knowledge about every known animal in the world, but her search came up empty. And then Roz realized that this type of sea slug was unknown. She had discovered a new species.

“Hello, sea slug. My name is Roz.”

The slug fluttered its fins in a way that meant, “Please don’t eat me.”

“I do not eat anything, including sea slugs,” said the robot.

“Oh, that’s good to know,” said the slug. “You’re not from around here, are you?”

“I am only passing through on my journey to stop the poison tide.”

The slug’s body stiffened. “We’ve heard terrible stories about the poison tide. I can’t bear to think what would happen if it ever came down here.”

“I will do everything in my power to make sure that never happens,” said the robot.

While marching away, Roz wondered how many other animal species had yet to be discovered in the deep. She wondered how many of them were at risk of being wiped out by the poison tide.

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CHAPTER 32

THE DARKNESS

A month had passed since Roz left the island. According to her calculations, she had traveled hundreds of miles, but she still had hundreds more to go. The tireless robot continued north, on and on, toward the waters where the Ancient Shark roamed.

If you travel far enough north, you'll reach an area where the sun never sets in summer. And Roz had traveled far enough north. Up at the surface, there was constant daylight, all day, every day, until autumn. However, our robot was at a depth below the reach of the sun. And yet there were occasional glimmers.

Certain deep-sea fish had glowing fins, while others had glowing teeth, and still others had spindly glowing lures that dangled from their heads. Jellyfish came in every shape imaginable, and many of them gave off a ghostly light. Most gleaming creatures kept their distance. Roz would see a flicker, and as her headlights swept toward it, the creature vanished into the murky haze.

She was marching down a long slope that descended to the deepest trenches of the ocean when she felt her Survival Instincts tingling. The weight of all the water above was becoming too great. If she went much deeper, she'd be crushed from the pressure. So Roz stopped marching downhill and started swimming at a safer depth, and the ocean floor quickly faded from view.

The robot's limbs paddled automatically, which left her mind free to wander. Specks of debris floated all around, like a gentle snowfall, and suddenly she was recalling the snowfalls she'd experienced on land. She thought of blizzards on the island and flurries on Hilltop Farm. She remembered Dr. Molovo and felt grateful to have a waterproof body. She

thought of Brightbill and Glimmer and wondered if their eggs had already hatched. Thoughts continued drifting in and out of her mind as she swam on and on through the deep, dark ocean.

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CHAPTER 33

THE HUNTER

Clickety click!

A strange sound was echoing from the deep.

Clickety clickety click!

Over the course of her life, Roz had communicated with many kinds of animals, but she had never heard an animal sound like this.

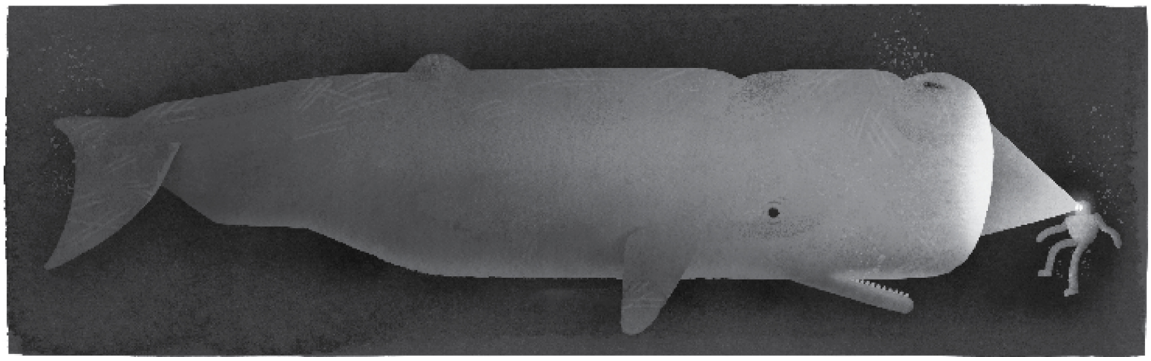
Clickety clickety clickety click!

Something darted past! It was a squid. No, it was ten squid. No, it was hundreds of squid, each one as long as the robot. Fins flapping, tentacles trailing behind them, their long bodies were flashing bright red in a way that meant, “Swim for your lives!” You see, the squid were being hunted.

Roz turned and joined the squid, desperate to escape whatever was hunting them. As they darted by, the squid released puffs of black ink to hide themselves, and Roz found herself lost in an inky cloud. When the ink cleared, the squid were gone, and the hunter was closing in.

Clickety clickety clickety clickety…

The clicking sound grew faster and stronger, becoming a continuous buzz. Then a giant toothy mouth surged out from the darkness and bit down on Roz! Teeth grinded against her body, and her pain sensors flared. But the mouth had expected to find a soft, slimy squid. Instead, it found a hard, tough robot, and before any real damage was done, the giant mouth spit Roz out. When the robot looked back, she saw that the *clickety clickety* creature was a sperm whale.



The whale's low voice grumbled, "What kind of squid are you?"

"I am not a squid. I am a robot. My name is Roz."

"Were you trying to fool me?" said the whale. "I don't like being fooled!"

"I did not mean to fool you," Roz explained. "I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Judging from the whale's many scars, he knew what it was like to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"A friend of mine is a whale," said Roz. "She saved my life. Do you know a whale named Coral?"

"No, I don't know Coral. Do you think all whales know each other? There are thousands of whales in the ocean, and you think we all know each other! That's ridiculous."

"I apologize if I offended you," said Roz. "This is my first time traveling through the ocean, and I still have a lot to learn."

"It's fine," said the whale. "I'm angry because so many animals are heading south. They're afraid of the poison tide. It's getting harder to find food, and I was just about to catch a mouthful of squid, but I ended up catching you."

"If it makes you feel any better," said Roz, "I am on a mission to stop the poison tide."

At this, the whale released a series of snorts and grunts, and Roz realized he was laughing. When the whale's laughter subsided, he said, "You think you can stop the poison tide? You must be joking. The poison tide is vast, and it spreads farther every day! I'm a giant, and even I couldn't stop the poison tide. A puny creature like you has no chance." Then the whale started laughing again.

“I will not be alone,” said Roz. “I am searching for the Ancient Shark. Together, I know she and I will succeed.”

The whale stopped laughing. “Oh, well, that’s different. With the Ancient Shark’s help, you might actually have a chance. And if you succeed, the animals will return, and the hunting will be easier. You know, it’s a good thing I didn’t eat you, Roz.”

“I agree,” said the robot.

The whale’s belly groaned with hunger, and he said, “I’d better chase down those squid before they go south too.” He then swung his mighty tail and surged away, back into the dark.

Clickety clickety click!

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CHAPTER 34

THE CLICKING ROBOT

Dolphins, porpoises, and certain types of whales use echolocation to navigate the ocean. They create bursts of sound, and by listening for the echo, they're able to locate distant objects. It's the perfect way to *see* in the dark, and Roz wanted to give it a try.

Using her voice, the robot let out a powerful *clickety clickety click!* Then she waited for the sounds to bounce off something, anything, and echo back to her. She waited and waited, but there was no echo. Was she doing it wrong?

While the robot swam through the deep, she let out bursts of clicks and hoped that eventually she'd hear them echoing back to her. And eventually, she did. It was quiet, barely a whisper, but Roz definitely heard her own echo. It seemed to be coming from her left, so she headed in that direction and let out another round of clicks. This time, the echo was a little stronger, and she knew she was getting closer. Roz continued clicking, and the echoes returned more quickly and loudly each time, until she came across a huge jellyfish. The robot had tracked down the only other creature in the area. Echolocation worked!

"Hello, jellyfish!" said the robot. "I am very happy to meet you!"



The jellyfish waved his tentacles in a way that meant… well, honestly, Roz wasn't quite sure what it meant. No matter—she was just excited to have a new way to navigate. She switched off her headlights and continued swimming north in total darkness, clicking every few seconds and listening for echoes.

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CHAPTER 35

THE HAZE

Clickety clickety click!

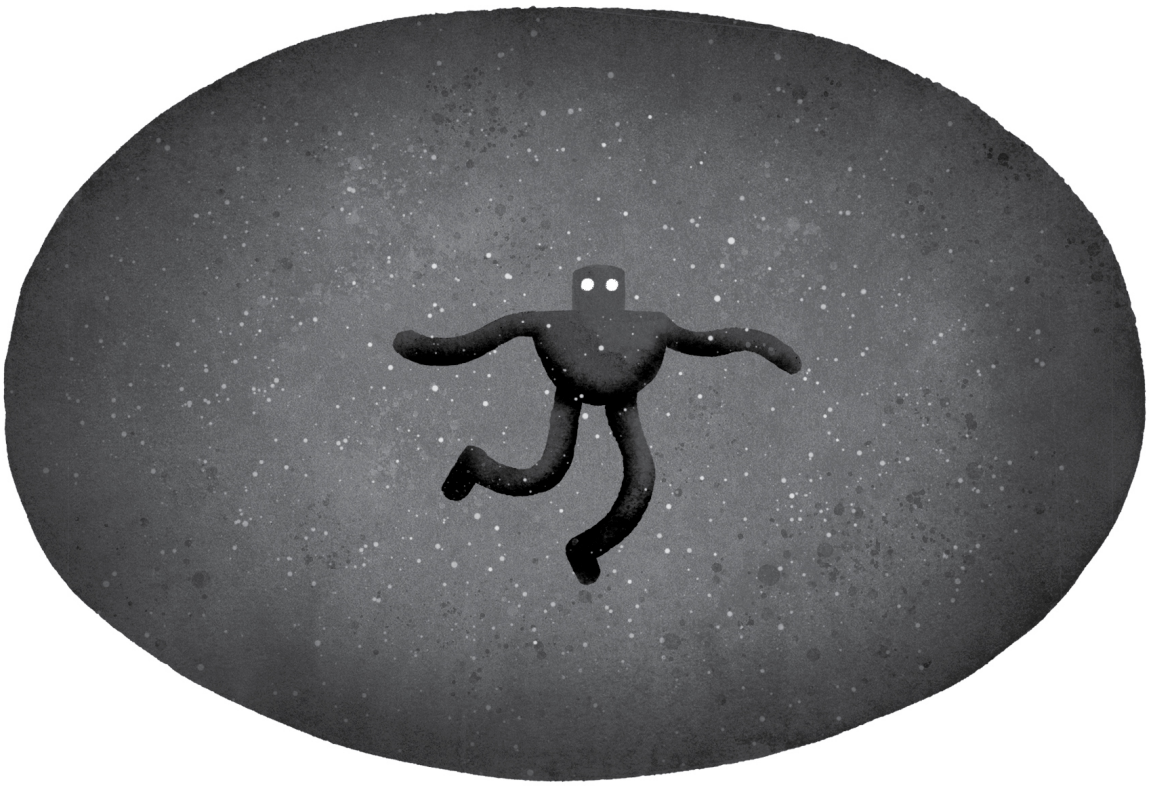
Roz kept clicking, but no echoes had bounced back in nearly a day. There must have been nothing else around. She swam on through the ocean in total darkness, in total emptiness. Our robot had never felt so alone.

But she wasn't alone.

A gentle current started flowing upward as a glowing haze rose from the depths. The haze was made of countless specks of light, all traveling together. One of the specks passed by Roz's face. She adjusted her vision and saw that it was a tiny glowing creature, no bigger than a grain of sand. A swarm of them was floating through the deep ocean.

The robot searched through her computer brain and found words like *plankton* and *bioluminescence*. Tiny plants and animals floated throughout the world's oceans, and many of them glowed softly. Roz realized she was never really alone. Living things were everywhere. She simply had to look for them.

The robot continued on, swimming through those points of light like she was in the night sky, and the stars were all around.



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CHAPTER 36

THE OCEAN

The robot swam and swam and swam, never stopping, never slowing, always moving north. It seemed like the ocean would never end.



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CHAPTER 37

THE BATTERY

Inside Roz was a battery that could power her body for incredibly long periods. On land, her battery recharged whenever she was in sunlight. But Roz had spent weeks swimming far below the reach of the sun, and finally, her battery began running low. So she headed to the surface to recharge.

When human divers return from great depths, they rise slowly so their bodies can adjust to the changing pressure. Our robot, however, had no such concerns, and she rushed upward at full speed. The ocean around her faded from black to blue to bright aqua. The currents became stronger. The water became warmer. And as she swam into the sunny upper ocean, her battery began refilling with energy.

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CHAPTER 38

THE POD

As her long ocean journey continued, Roz passed the time by sharpening her skills of echolocation. With practice, she identified an underwater mountain range, and a sleeping whale, and a piece of driftwood, long before she saw them. But our robot wasn't the only creature using echolocation around there.

First she heard wild whistling. Then she heard rapid clicking. The whistles and clicks grew louder and faster, and a pod of dolphins surged into view. The dolphins crowded Roz, studying her and prodding her and chattering to themselves.

"Now, what do you think this is?"

"It's got a hard shell."

"And it swims funny."



“Is it some sort of sea turtle?”

Roz said, “I am not a sea turtle. I am a robot. My name is Roz.”

“Did you hear that, everyone?”

“This creature is a robot!”

“A robot named Roz!”

“Hey, Roz the robot, can you do *this*?” One of the dolphins suddenly pumped his tail and leaped up out of the water, and a moment later, he came splashing back down, into the waves.

“Yes, I believe I *can* do that,” said Roz. The robot suddenly kicked her legs and launched herself up out of the water. For the first time in weeks, she felt the light touch of air against her body. And then gravity pulled her down, back into the waves.

The dolphins were impressed. They cheered and laughed and peppered Roz with questions. But the lively mood changed when she mentioned her mission. Then the dolphins started chattering again.

“We’ve stayed clear of the poison tide.”

“But we know about the damage it’s causing.”

“It must be stopped!”

“What can we do to help?”

Roz answered, “You can tell me where to find the Ancient Shark.”

“They say she lives deep in the northern ocean.”

“To get there you’ll have to swim west.”

“Around a very long stretch of land.”

Roz asked, “Could I get there faster by traveling *over* the land, rather than around it?”

“We don’t know much about land.”

“You should speak with the seabirds!”

“Yes, the seabirds will know the fastest way!”

“Okay, everyone, let’s find Roz some seabirds!”

The pod of dolphins surged into action. But instead of swimming upward, as you might expect, they swam downward, into the depths. You see, the dolphins knew exactly how to attract seabirds. They rounded up a school of fish, circling them, forcing them into a tight cluster. All at once, the dolphins blew air from their blowholes, and a dense layer of bubbles carried the fish up to the surface, where they thrashed through the waves, and soon flocks of hungry seabirds were flying toward the scene.

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CHAPTER 39

THE SEABIRDS

Seabirds from all around were drawn to a frothy, fishy patch of ocean. Gulls and terns hovered above the water, picking fish from the waves. Only the puffins took the plunge. Their plump bodies plopped into the surf, and then they started to hunt. Flapping their short wings, the puffins seemed to fly through the water as they snatched fish with their sturdy beaks.

When one of the puffins popped back to the surface he slammed into something hard. A lifeless fish dangled from his beak as he squawked, “Ay! Om fithin hee!”

“I do not understand,” said the robot, who was treading water beside him.

The puffin grunted. Then he spit out the fish and secured it with his wing. “I said, ‘Hey! I’m fishing here!’”



“I am sorry for disturbing you,” said the robot. “But I need to speak with

a seabird. I am on a mission to stop the poison tide and—”

The puffin cut in. “Oh, I know about the poison tide. It came to the coast where I used to live. The other birds were so excited to see dead fish piling up on the rocks. But old Kerplunk knew better. That’s my name—Kerplunk. Nice to meet you. Anyway, I said not to touch the fish. I said something didn’t smell right, but nobody would listen. They gobbled down as many fish as they could. And pretty soon, the rocks were piling up with dead birds. I moved my family to a safer spot, but so many fish are leaving the area that we may have to leave too.”

It was a troubling story. The robot didn’t know what to say. Neither did the puffin. They quietly bobbed on the waves together. Behind them, the feeding frenzy calmed down, and the other seabirds flew off.

At last Roz said, “I must find the Ancient Shark. I have heard that she lives in the northern ocean. Can you show me the fastest way there?”

Kerplunk winked and said, “No problem.”

The puffin gripped the fish with his beak. Then he flapped his wings and scampered over the waves and lifted into the air. Roz followed him through the water, and before long, a rugged coastline climbed into view. That coast had once been home to thousands of seabirds. Now only a few hundred were left. They were screeching and soaring and nesting on the hillsides. In addition to puffins and gulls and terns, there was another type of bird, called a skua. Two skuas peeled away from the others and bolted toward Kerplunk. They wanted his fish. The puffin saw them coming. He dodged left and right, then swooped low, skimming the water. The skuas curved through the air and beat their wings and easily caught up to Kerplunk. They harassed the poor puffin, nipping at his tail and his wings, and finally they grabbed his fish and sent him tumbling into the sea.

“Are you okay?” said Roz when she reached him.

Kerplunk grunted, “I’m okay. But now I’ve got more fishing to do.” He pointed to the coast, where a stream was cascading down a grassy slope. “Follow that stream back across the land,” said Kerplunk. “It’ll lead you to a glacier. From there, you’ll see the northern ocean. And Roz, do us all a favor and stop the poison tide, would ya? Life is hard enough out here as it is.”

The robot watched as the puffin took off and headed back out to catch another meal.

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CHAPTER 40

THE UNDERWATER FOREST

The waters along that coast were home to a lush forest of kelp. Tall stalks of seaweed swayed as huge waves went rolling over. Sunlight filtered through the shifting foliage and dappled the seafloor. And just like forests on land, this underwater forest was teeming with wildlife.



Barnacles clung to the rocks.
Schools of fish swirled out from the greenery.
Otters dove down and tore clams from the reef.
Roz was working her way through the kelp forest when she noticed she

was being followed. A creature was darting from shadow to shadow as it trailed after her. The robot tried to go faster, but the water currents and the moving kelp slowed her down. Rather than fleeing from the mysterious creature, Roz decided to hide. She quickly wrapped a kelp frond around her torso, smeared sand over her limbs, placed seashells on her head, and nestled into the ground. For a brief moment, she blended into the reef. But camouflage works a little differently underwater, and soon the kelp was unraveling, the sand was drifting away, the shells were sliding off, and there was our robot, in the open, as an octopus crawled out from the shadows.

The octopus had red skin, a bulging head, and eight wriggling arms. But something about her movements signaled that she wasn't dangerous—she was curious.

"Who are you?" said the octopus.

"My name is Roz. I am a robot."

"My name is Limber. I'm an octopus."

"I was afraid you might be dangerous," said Roz, "so I tried to camouflage myself."

Limber laughed. "That isn't camouflage. *This* is camouflage." The octopus crawled onto a rocky ledge and squeezed her big squishy body into a small crevice. Her skin suddenly turned rough and gray until she perfectly matched her surroundings. In an instant, the octopus had become part of the reef.

Roz couldn't believe her eyes. "I have never seen a better display of camouflage," she said, "not in the ocean or on land."

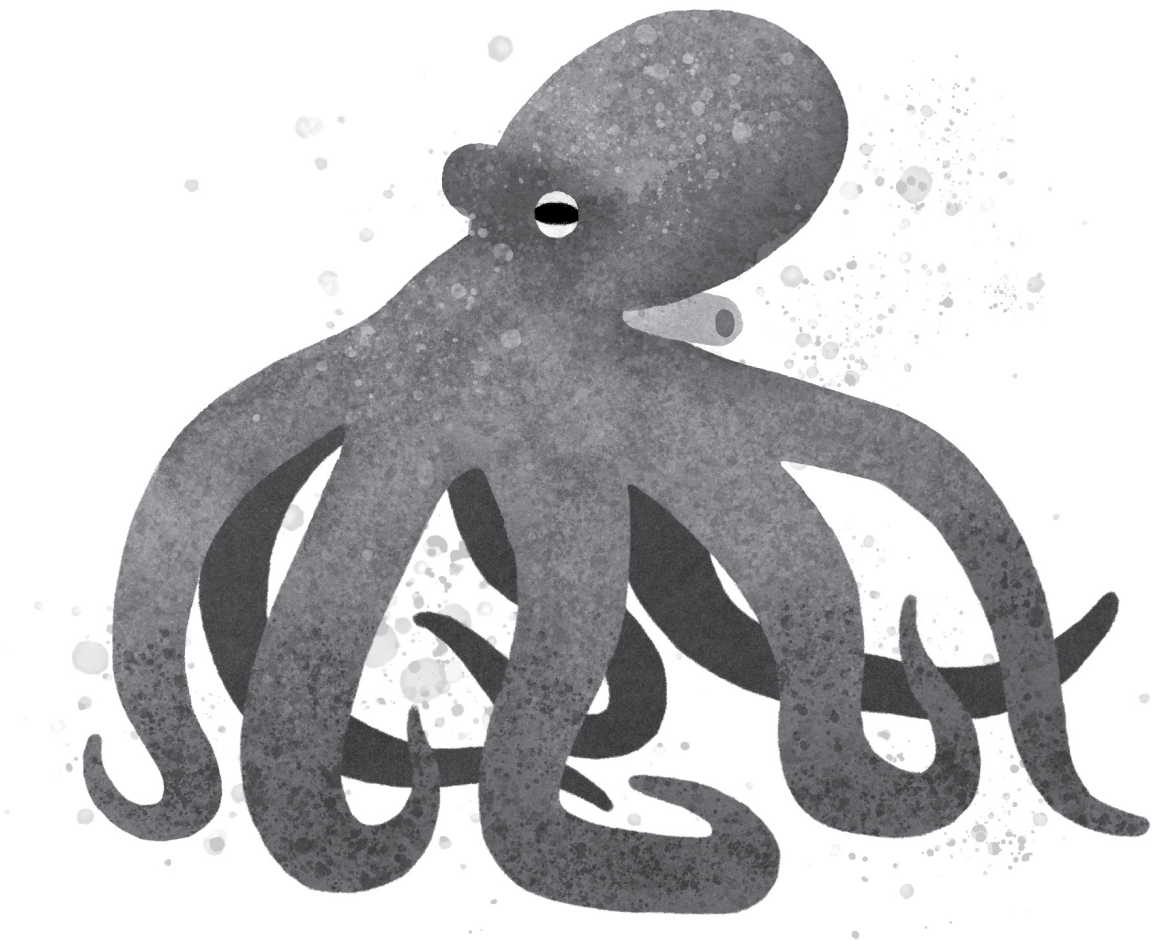
A chunk of rock seemed to melt, and the octopus reappeared. "You've been on land?"

"I have spent most of my life on land," said Roz.

"I love land!" said Limber. "I climb onto the shore every once in a while. It's so refreshingly bright and airy. I wish I could spend more time up there."

"I am headed to shore now," said Roz, pointing.

"Oh, you don't want to go that way," said Limber. "The waves will smash you against the rocks. Let me show you a better way!"



Limber wrapped a strong arm around Roz's wrist, and then the octopus jetted off through the water, dragging the robot behind her. They glided between kelp fronds and over seagrass and into a cave in the side of the reef. The cave was long and dark, with only a few shafts of light streaming down from cracks in the ceiling. At the end of the cave was an opening in the rock, and they climbed up through it, onto the bright, sunny shore.

Limber crawled into a tide pool, and she and Roz chatted over the sounds of crashing waves. When the robot explained her mission, the cheerful octopus turned gray and serious.

"So it's real," said Limber. "I hoped the poison tide was merely a rumor. What do you know about it? Will it ever come here?"

"What I know is that the poison tide is made of toxic dust that is flowing along ocean currents," said Roz. "What I do not know is whether it will ever come here."

"You have to stop it!" Limber shouted. "You have to do whatever it

takes!” The octopus turned away and quietly said, “Please forgive my outburst. I have a lot on my mind. A few days from now, I’ll crawl inside my den and lay eggs. I’ll spend the last few months of my life watching over them. By the time my eggs hatch, I’ll be dead. We octopus mothers sacrifice everything for our young. Sometimes, I dream about my tiny hatchlings. In my dream, I hold them close and say that I’ll always protect them. It’s only a dream, though. I won’t be alive to protect them. That’s why you must stop the poison tide. Then maybe my hatchlings will have a chance to grow up.”

“I will do everything in my power to stop the poison tide,” said Roz.

Limber squinted at the hot sun and said, “I should be going.” The octopus started crawling across the rocks, but before dropping into the water she looked back and added, “Good luck, Roz. I’m counting on you. We’re all counting on you.”

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CHAPTER 41

THE TUNDRA

From the shore, the land sloped up to a high plateau. The grassy slopes were crowded with seabirds, who stared and screeched and nervously fluttered their wings as the robot hiked by.

When she reached the top, Roz saw flatlands sprawling out before her. Weeds and stones and tough little bushes blanketed the landscape, but there wasn't a tree in sight. Our robot had arrived at the tundra, where cold temperatures and short growing seasons made it impossible for trees to take root.

Winding through the tundra was a stream. Kerplunk, the puffin, said it would lead to a glacier near the northern ocean. So Roz began marching, using the stream as her guide.



The tundra had once been covered in a permanent layer of hard frozen soil, called permafrost. These days, the soil would thaw by midsummer, and Roz left behind a trail of deep footprints in the spongy, soggy ground. She increased her speed from a march to a trot to a run. Rodents scattered as the robot thundered past. A fox watched as the mechanical creature galloped through his territory. Roz crested a small ridge and surprised a herd of musk oxen. They were burly beasts, with long fur and short tempers. Breath puffed from their mouths as they charged at the oncoming robot. Without breaking stride, Roz launched herself into the air and soared over the herd, shouting, “I apologize for startling you!” Then she landed and kept on running.

She crossed windswept fields and leaped over thickets of shrubs and passed hot springs that sent steam floating into the sky. But even in that remote wilderness, there were signs of human activity.

A dirt road, cutting through the tangled brush.

Stone walls, coated with moss.

Rows of solar panels, forgotten and falling apart.

Roz noticed movement in the distance. She stopped and adjusted her vision and saw a man walking along a path. He turned and faced Roz. At

that long range, the robot must have looked like a fellow human, but if the man were to come closer, he would see who she really was. After a moment, he raised his arm and gave a friendly wave. Roz waved back. Then the man continued walking, and the robot continued running, but with more caution than before.

Throughout summer, there had been constant daylight in the far north. But the seasons were changing, and while Roz ran across the tundra, the sun set and the stars came out. And then the aurora appeared. Curtains of colorful light shimmered and billowed through the night sky. Back on the island, Roz had seen the aurora on occasion, but never this clearly. She started searching for information about the wondrous sight, but then she shut off that part of her computer brain, and she simply enjoyed the spectacular northern light show.

The night was short, and soon the sun was rising. Morning light slowly spread across the tundra, and it glinted off something up ahead. A massive slab of ice and snow was nestled among the faraway hills.

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CHAPTER 42

THE GLACIER

Roz stood on a rocky outcrop and scanned the desolate landscape. There were cliffs and canyons and fields of boulders, and in the middle of it all was the glacier. It was like a gigantic frozen river twisting through the rugged terrain. Far off, at the other end of the glacier, a dark smudge stretched along the horizon. The northern ocean. Roz calculated that the fastest way there was to trek over the glacier. But the trek would be risky. The glacier was covered with slick ice and sweeping snowdrifts and deep crevasses. A single slip, and she might never be seen again.

The sides of the glacier had crumbled into piles of icy chunks. Carefully placing her hands and feet, Roz climbed up the chunks, higher and higher, to the very top, and then she set out over the glacier.



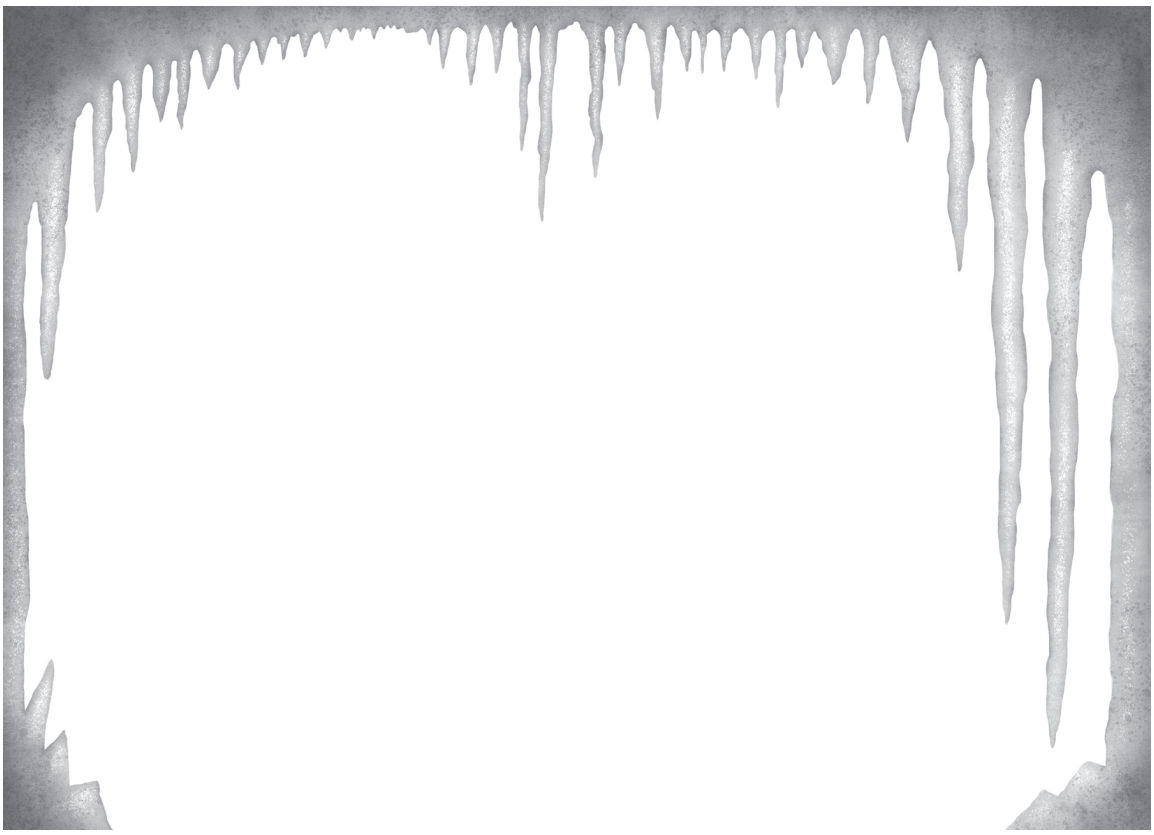


The robot started slowly through that wintry world, but as she found her footing, the sounds of her crunching steps grew quick and steady. There were other sounds, too. Wind whistled. Pieces of ice clattered down cliffsides. Streams of meltwater rushed through furrows in the surface. The loudest sounds came from the glacier itself. You see, that massive sheet of ice was gradually sliding into the ocean. And each time it shifted, it created powerful rumbling groans.

As she hiked, the robot couldn’t help staring at the bizarre frozen shapes around her. She was gazing at a great, glittering block of ice when she stumbled and fell, and suddenly her smooth body was sliding downhill. Faster and faster she went, scraping and gliding and spinning out of control. She was hurtling toward something wide and flat and blue, and a moment later, she splashed into water!

A lake of meltwater had formed on top of the glacier, and there was Roz, sitting in the shallows. The water was clear and calm, so the robot kicked off and swam for the other side. The lake became deeper and bluer the farther she went. She was almost halfway across when another powerful groan rumbled through the glacier. Then, mysteriously, Roz began sinking. Actually, the whole lake began sinking. The glacier had shifted, just a little, but the movement had split the thick ice below. Now the lake was draining through a huge crack at the bottom. The robot sank lower and lower, and the crack came into view. Water roared and gushed through the opening, and the flow carried Roz over the edge.

Down she fell, deep inside the glacier, and she splashed into a frosty pool. The floodwaters immediately whisked her away. She slid along frozen chutes and slammed against icy walls and sloshed through a network of hollows. Finally, the flow of floodwater slowed, and when the robot skidded to a stop, she was in an ice cavern. The walls glowed with a blue light. Water was drip-drip-dripping everywhere. Hanging from the ceiling was a dazzling array of icicles. The longest icicles had descended to the floor and formed a forest of pillars. One wall of the cavern was crystal clear, and Roz noticed a lump in the ice. It was a mouse, frozen solid and perfectly preserved. It looked like the mice from back on the island, but this mouse must have been thousands of years old. Just then, the glacier rumbled, and Roz leaped away as enormous icicles crashed to the ground. If she wasn’t careful, she might become trapped in the ice as well.



The robot hollered, “Hello?”

The cavern echoed, “*Hello? Hello?*”

“Can anyone hear me?”

“Can anyone hear me… hear me?”

“How do I get out of this glacier?”

“How do I get out of this glacier… this glacier?”

Nobody was around to answer her questions. Roz would have to find her own way out. She hiked on, through tunnels and caves. At one point, she came upon an open shaft rising up through the ice, and high overhead was a small patch of sky. She chopped her hand into the wall like an axe—*hack!*—and pulled herself up. *Hack! Hack! Hack!* The robot climbed higher, and the shaft grew narrower. Too narrow. So she climbed down and continued through the glacier on foot.

Days passed. Roz wondered if she’d ever get out of that frozen maze. Eventually, though, she detected the faint sound of ocean waves, and she caught a whiff of salty air, and then she turned a corner and stepped into bright daylight.

Laid out before the robot was a glorious northern seascape. Icebergs of every shape and size floated across a bay and toward the open ocean. Seabirds soared by on outstretched wings. Waterfalls poured from wide holes in the ice. The front edge of the glacier was made up of frozen cliffs that towered above the waves, and high up, on one of those cliffs, was Roz. A lone dark shape against an immense wall of white.

The glacier rumbled, and little avalanches of snow tumbled down the cliffside. Another rumble, and a large hunk of ice plunged into the water. It occurred to our robot that she was still in serious danger. She quickly tried to calculate the safest way down, but she wasn’t quick enough. The glacier rumbled again, and then the entire cliffside started breaking loose. The cliff tipped forward, slowly at first, but gaining speed, until it crashed into the surf with a tremendous explosion of sea spray. Birds scrambled through the air. Icebergs smashed together. Waves rolled across the water and pounded the stony beaches.

In time, the waves settled down, and calm returned to the bay. The ice cliff was now a massive iceberg, floating away from the glacier. Below the iceberg, a sparkle, and Roz swam up from the depths. She had a few new dents and scrapes, but she wasn’t upset. In fact, the robot felt something like delight that she had made it to the northern ocean, at last.

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CHAPTER 43

THE BEACH

A layer of fog hung over the ocean. Icebergs drifted silently through the mist. The calm water rippled, and Roz's head rose up. Our robot needed to find the Ancient Shark. But how would she track down the shark in the vast northern ocean?

Roz began to hear a chorus of deep grunts. Hidden somewhere within the fog was a gathering of beasts. She followed the grunting noises, and a coastline emerged, but the noisy creatures were nowhere to be seen. The robot marched out of the water and over the rocks and up a hill. The noises grew louder, and the fog lifted, and when Roz reached the hilltop, she looked down the other side at a beach that was packed with giant creatures. Brown bodies, pink faces, white tusks. Walruses. Tons of them. So many walruses had hauled themselves out of the water that the beach couldn't fit them all. They crowded onto the surrounding hillsides and onto slabs of ice floating offshore. The air was thick with pungent smells and with steam rising up from the herd.

Surely one of the walruses would know where to find the Ancient Shark. Roz marched downhill toward them, but when she started climbing over a boulder, she knew she'd made a mistake. The boulder was soft and warm. Somehow it rolled onto its side, and two long tusks swung into view.

"Get off me!" shouted a walrus. "I was napping!"

Roz crashed to the ground and the walrus raised his tusks, ready to strike.

"I am very sorry!" Roz shouted. "I mistook you for a boulder!"

The walrus looked down at his body. "Now that you mention it," he said, "I do look a little like a boulder." He seemed to forget all about the robot as he admired his own boulder-like body. He flexed his muscles and

puffed out his chest. Then he clambered atop an actual boulder for comparison. The likeness was remarkable.

Roz hated to interrupt the walrus, but she had a burning question. “Do you know where I can find the Ancient Shark?”



Without taking his eyes off himself, the walrus replied, “Ask Big Shot, the beach master.”

Big Shot wasn’t hard to spot. He was the biggest, toughest, loudest walrus in the herd. Roz headed in his direction, down the hill and onto the pebble beach, politely stepping through the crowd. “Excuse me! Sorry to bother you! Pardon me!” The lounging walruses groaned as she passed by, but they were too comfortable to move.

Before Roz could call out to Big Shot, a white shape appeared at the other end of the beach. A polar bear was hunting for his next meal. But the bear didn’t attack the walruses, not yet. He just lumbered along as panic swept through the herd.

The walruses grunted nervously and erupted into a stampede, with Roz caught in the middle. Heavy bodies knocked her around. Long tusks clanked against her sides. Strong flippers shoved her down, and a walrus crawled over, crunching her into the pebbles. Roz struggled to her feet and then leaped up and away to safety.

The herd was vanishing into the sea. So the polar bear moved faster, trotting back and forth, searching the crowd for an easy target. Finally, he found what he was looking for. A young walrus had been separated from her family.

The polar bear sprinted across the beach and pounced on the youngster's back. The walrus might have been young, but she was as big as the bear. She slashed her tusks and kicked her hind flippers and dragged the bear with her. If she could get to the water, she could escape into the depths. But the bear was strong and hungry and wouldn't let go.

It looked like the polar bear would get his meal, until Big Shot came charging to the rescue. Well, *charging* might not be the right word. The bull walrus moved as fast as he could, in a slow, wriggling sort of way. Then he lifted up to his full height and roared, "If you want her, you'll have to kill me first!" The polar bear was a fierce hunter, but he knew better than to fight the mighty beach master. He trotted off, and Big Shot escorted the young walrus into the waves.

Minutes earlier, the beach had been overcrowded. Now only the robot and the polar bear were left.

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CHAPTER 44

THE POLAR BEAR

Roz backed away as the polar bear stalked toward her. “Do not waste your energy hunting me!” hollered the robot. “I am not made of meat!”

The polar bear sniffed the air with his sensitive nose. He smelled the ocean. He smelled the lingering scent of walruses. He smelled his own musky odor. But he didn’t smell anything he could eat. The bear slumped onto the beach and gazed at the sky. The sun was setting, and the stars were beginning to come out.

“I’m hungry,” growled the bear. “I’m always hungry. I can’t remember the last time I tasted meat. I’m lucky to find eggs. Mostly I eat grass. That’s no way for a bear to live! And then there’s the poison tide. It hasn’t spread here yet, but the fear of it has spread everywhere. The birds and the fish and the seals are leaving. The walruses will be next. Polar bears have always hunted here. But it might be time for me to move on.”

“The poison tide is destroying the island where I live,” said the robot. “I have come here to speak with the Ancient Shark. I was told she will know what to do. Have you heard of her?”

The polar bear snorted. “We’ve all heard of the Ancient Shark. Everybody says she’s the oldest, wisest, most powerful creature in the north. But if she’s so powerful, why hasn’t she stopped the poison tide already?”

“That is a good question,” said Roz. “When I find her, I will ask her.”

The polar bear pointed high up to a bright star. “They say the Ancient Shark lives at the bottom of the ocean, beneath that star. The other stars slowly move through the night sky, but that one stays still. It’s called the guiding star because you can use it to find your way. Go toward the guiding star until it’s right above you. Then you’ll be in the home waters of the

Ancient Shark.”

“Thank you for your help,” said Roz. “I will do everything in my power to stop the poison tide. With luck, the birds and the fish and the seals will soon return.”

The polar bear licked his lips and dreamed of eating meat, as the robot marched into the waves.

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CHAPTER 45

THE FAR NORTH

The far north was a place of extremes. Entire seas froze over and then melted with the changing seasons. There were months of constant daylight followed by months of constant darkness. Many land animals lost their summer color and turned white to blend in with winter, though the winters weren't as white as they'd once been.

Our robot was swimming through the northern ocean, under a sky filled with stars. Fear of the poison tide had driven away countless ocean animals. There were fewer fish, fewer squid, fewer seabirds. Some of the larger animals remained, for now. Roz's head dipped underwater, and she heard a flurry of clicks and whistles, and when she popped up again, she spotted a family of whales glistening in the starlight as they raced through the waves. They were narwhals. Each of the males had a long tusk extending from his head. Roz wondered where the narwhals were going. Were they moving south to a place where they wouldn't have to live in fear?

The farther Roz swam, the higher the guiding star climbed in the sky, until at last it was directly overhead. The robot stopped and treaded water. Roaming somewhere in the depths below was the Ancient Shark.

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CHAPTER 46

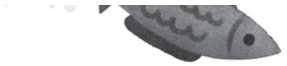
THE ANCIENT SHARK

Bright shafts of light beamed out from the robot's eyes as she swam down through the ocean. She felt the water pressure steadily increasing, but before it became dangerous, the seabed emerged from the gloom.

Roz started swimming around and around in an ever-expanding circle. While she swam, she let out bursts of sound—*clickety clickety click!*—and listened for the echoes. She detected faraway reefs and ridges. Then, after an hour of searching, she heard an echo that was shaped like a shark, and she cautiously swam toward it.

Into the light came a rounded snout, a wide mouth full of jagged teeth, a long body with a powerful tail. It was a shark, big and gray and crisscrossed with scars. The shark's eyes were milky white. She was blind, but she had other ways of observing. Her senses of smell and hearing were incredible, and she was accompanied by several small fish who were constantly whispering in her ears.





For such a fearsome-looking creature, the shark had a surprisingly soft voice. “We meet at last, Roz.”

The robot replied, “How do you know my name?”

“Oh, I have eyes and ears all across the north,” said the shark. “I’ve been following your travels with great interest. I know the poison tide came to your island and now you’re on a mission to stop it. I know about the creatures you encountered on your voyage. I even know about your journey through the glacier. I’m glad you survived. I wasn’t sure you’d make it out.”

“You know so much about me,” said Roz, “but I know nothing about you. Are you the Ancient Shark?”

“I’ve had many names. The Gray Ghost. The Queen of Ice. Recently, the animals have started calling me the Ancient Shark. However, you may call me by my true name: Gurry.”

“I am honored to meet you, Gurry. I hope it is not rude of me to ask, but how *ancient* are you?”

“I don’t know my age,” said the shark. “All I have to go by are my memories. I remember wandering the seas as a young pup, following ships as they glided across the surface. Back then, ships were made of wood, and they had white sails that moved with the wind, like clouds. The humans used their ships to hunt whales, and I waited below for scraps.”

The robot’s computer brain retrieved information on the history of whaling, and she calculated the shark’s age to be over five hundred years.

Gurry went on. “As time passed, the ships became larger, faster, noisier. They were metal monsters, pushed along by spinning blades. They leaked oil and spewed smoke into the sky. Sea creatures retreated below the thick ice, where it was safe. But the ships grew stronger and the ice grew thinner. Now the ships go where they like. Even worse than the ships, though, is the poison tide. It’s taken so many lives, and it spreads farther with each passing moment. The poison tide must be stopped.”

“If you are as powerful as everyone believes,” said Roz, “why have you not tried to stop the poison tide already?”

“Because I’ve been waiting for you,” said Gurry. “Throughout the north, animals fear me and respect me and they’ll do as I command. I’ve already sent out a call to action, and armies of ocean animals are gathering as we speak. But there are things that only *you* can do, Roz. Only you can survive the poison tide. Only you truly know the enemy.”

“I do not understand.”

An ugly grin stretched across the shark’s face. “Roz, your own kind is to blame. The poison tide is the work of robots.”

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CHAPTER 47

THE FIGHT

The poison tide was the work of robots. That new information was a lot for Roz to process. She listened closely as the Ancient Shark explained further.

“On the other side of this ocean, a robot is demolishing an underwater mountain. The robot doesn’t look like you, Roz. He looks more like a giant crab. He tears rocks from the mountain, creating huge dust clouds that stream away on the currents. Those dust clouds are the poison tide. Other robots collect the rocks and carry them to a structure that floats on the surface. We don’t know what happens in the floating structure, but we know there are humans aboard.”

“That must be a mining operation,” said Roz. “The robots must be removing minerals from the underwater mountain. The floating structure must be the station where everything is controlled.”

Gurry nodded and said, “To stop the poison tide, we have to stop the mining operation. It won’t be easy, but we’ll have help. Ocean animals who abandoned the north are ready to return and fight alongside us. The other animals and I will need to stay clear of the poison tide. It would be too dangerous to attack the mining site, in the deep. A better strategy is to attack the mining station, at the surface. That’s where the humans are. Humans are weak and can easily be defeated. When I give the signal, the attack on the station will begin. My armies will attack from the outside, you’ll climb up and attack from the inside, and together we will put an end to the poison tide.”

The robot’s glowing eyes dimmed. “Violence is not the solution,” she said. “There must be another way.”

“For some of us, violence is the only way.”

“I am not like you, Gurry. I am not a predator. I am not programmed to

be violent."

"How else can we defeat our enemies, Roz? We need to fight! *You* need to fight!"

"This *is* how I fight!" said the robot. "I fight with my mind. I think and I plan and I find peaceful solutions to every problem."

The shark's face twisted in confusion. "Are you telling me that if I attacked you right now, you wouldn't fight back?"

"I would try to escape," said Roz. "But I am not capable of fighting."

"I don't believe you," said Gurry. "Try to hit me. Don't worry—I'll be fine."

"I cannot fight."

"Go on, hit me, Roz!"

"I cannot fight."

Gurry roared with frustration. Then she rushed forward, ramming into Roz.

"Fight back!" hollered the shark.

"I cannot fight!" hollered the robot.

"They call you the wild robot! Show me how *wild* you really are!"

The shark rushed forward again and opened her jaws and snapped them around the robot. Roz felt rows of razor-sharp teeth crunching against her sides. Her Survival Instincts blared in her head. If just one of those teeth were to pierce her body, water would come flooding in and destroy her. And that's when Roz did something impossible. She did something unthinkable. *She fought back*. Her powerful arm swung through the water and slapped Gurry right across the face. The shark went tumbling into the shadows, and her fish companions darted after her.

Roz stared at her hand. She had never before hit anyone. How could she have hit Gurry? It went against her programming! She searched her computer brain for an explanation and realized, once again, that her new body was different from her old one. Her new body was waterproof, and her new body could fight. That might seem like an exciting development to you, reader, but it caused our robot to feel something like sorrow and loss. What Roz loved most about herself was her peaceful temperament, and suddenly that had changed, forever.

Gurry swam out from the shadows, chuckling to herself. "I knew you had it in you, Roz!" The shark stretched her jaws and exposed two missing

teeth. “You’re stronger than you look.”

Quietly, Roz said, “I am so sorry.”

“Don’t ruin this nice moment with an apology!” said Gurry. “I *wanted* you to fight!”

“But I knocked out two of your teeth!”

“Oh, that’s nothing. I’ve lost more teeth than I can count. They always grow back.”

“It seems that I am capable of fighting,” said Roz. “But I can still choose not to fight. You said there are humans aboard the station. I will not fight them. I will reason with them.”

“We don’t need reason,” said Gurry. “We need revenge for all the lives lost to the poison tide! We need to make sure this never happens again!”

“And that is what we will do,” said Roz. “Point me toward the mining station, and let me try to solve this peacefully. If my way fails, we will try it your way.”

The Ancient Shark grunted. “Fine. But I’ll be watching. And when you fail, my armies will attack.”

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CHAPTER 48

THE DESTINATION

It was the early days of autumn, and already the far north was turning bitterly cold. But the temperature didn't bother Roz. The robot raced through the frigid waves, winding between chunks of ice, and then continued across open water. Following Gurry's directions, she headed west. Somewhere over the horizon was the mining station. But the ocean was vast. The last leg of her journey would take time.

While Roz swam, thoughts drifted through her mind. She thought of Dr. Molovo and wondered why the woman had given her the ability to fight. Was it simply so she could defend herself? Or was she also able to attack? It didn't matter. The robot would never choose to attack anyone. Then Roz thought of Gurry. She wanted to prove to the shark that every problem really could have a peaceful solution. She thought of the mining station ahead and hoped the humans could be reasoned with. She thought of Brightbill and Glimmer, and of the goslings who must have hatched.

Roz swam all through the night. Early the next morning, she heard something rumbling in the ocean. The hours passed, the rumbling grew louder, and a hulking industrial structure appeared in the distance. At first, it was just a hazy silhouette. But as Roz swam closer, the details sharpened into the perfect lines and angles of the mining station.

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CHAPTER 49

THE MINING STATION

The mining station looked like a floating city, with buildings and walkways and machines and antennas rising up from a wide platform. That platform sat high above the waves on the station's base, which resembled a massive barrel floating upright in the water. Below the waterline were four enormous engines. The engines were not designed to move the station around—they were designed to keep it in place. They constantly adjusted to the changing conditions, slowing down, speeding up, turning in various directions. Wind could gust and waves could crash and currents could ebb and flow, but that station wouldn't budge as long as its engines were active. This complex, state-of-the-art industrial mining station had a name. It was called the *Juggernaut*.

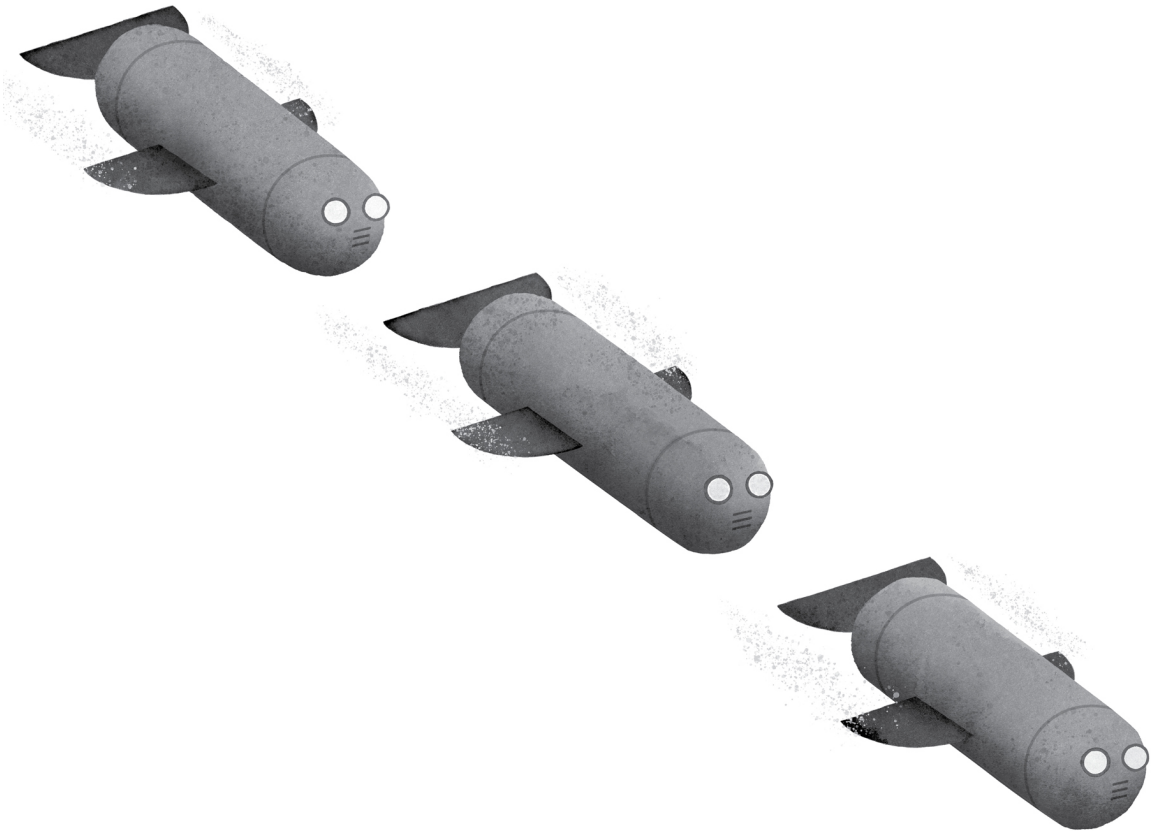


Roz needed to speak with the humans aboard the *Juggernaut*. But how would they react to an unknown robot emerging from the sea? She had to proceed with caution. So when she came across a small iceberg drifting toward the station, she latched on to the bottom and let the current carry her, hidden from view.

As Roz clung to the underside of the iceberg, she looked down. Somewhere far below, a giant mining robot was at work. But the ocean was deep, and she could see only darkness. And then she noticed movement, not from below but from ahead. The *Juggernaut*'s huge, underwater door was opening. The door opened wider and wider, revealing three aquatic robots inside. The word *HYDRO* was etched into each of their bodies, followed by their individual unit number. They were HYDRO 1, HYDRO 2, and HYDRO 3.

The HYDROs were large and streamlined, like robotic whales. Powerful engines enabled them to speed through the depths in any direction. When needed, two arms could extend from their sides, and at the end of each arm was an array of tools, including a claw strong enough to tear through steel.

When the station's underwater door had fully opened, HYDRO 1 started to move. She cruised out through the doorway and was followed by her two partners. Together, the HYDROs dove toward the bottom of the ocean, and as they faded into the deep, the underwater door closed behind them.



Roz turned her attention up to the structures above. A tall ladder was bolted to the station’s outer wall. She gently steered the iceberg toward the ladder, and a few minutes later, she was climbing.

Up the side of the station she went, rung after rung, higher and higher. Once Roz reached the top of the ladder, she poked her head up and scanned the platform. Buildings, walkways, railings. Then, on the opposite side of the platform, a robot appeared. The robot looked similar to Roz, but bigger and bulkier, like he was built for working with heavy machines. His body was covered with dents and scrapes, and the name *BOSUN 5* was lightly etched on his chest. He marched over to a stack of gigantic pipes, picked one up, and carried it between buildings and out of sight. Another robot appeared. BOSUN 3 had a searing-hot blowtorch for a hand and was welding together steel beams. And there was BOSUN 9, fixing the roof of a building. A whole crew of BOSUN robots worked on the station. If any of them saw Roz, they might attack, and she might be destroyed before ever speaking with the humans. So she waited until the BOSUNs had finished their tasks and stomped away. Only then did she climb onto the platform.



Within the jumble of structures on the *Juggernaut*, one towering building stood high above the rest. From the roof of that tower, Roz would have a clear view of the entire station, and she could plan the best way to introduce herself to the humans. Daylight was fading. As soon as the platform was cloaked in twilight, Roz started cautiously creeping toward the tower. She weaved between crates and past pieces of machinery. Suddenly, bright floodlights switched on, and Roz was lit up. Our robot had been spotted! She dashed into a narrow alley and waited for the BOSUN robots to come hunting for her. She waited and waited, but nothing happened. And then she noticed that across the station, every floodlight was illuminated. Roz hadn’t been spotted after all. The lights had turned on automatically because it was growing dark.

Rows of sturdy pipes ran up the back of the tower. Quickly, quietly, Roz climbed the pipes, all the way to the top floor, and pulled herself onto a balcony. Standing flat against the wall, she carefully peered through one of the windows. No robots or humans were in there, only desks and computers. Roz had discovered the control room. If she wanted to learn about the mining operation, this was the place to do it. But she had to act fast. The crew might return at any moment. So she pressed a button on the

wall, the door slid open, and she stepped inside.

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CHAPTER 50

THE CONTROL ROOM

The control room was filled with computers that kept track of the *Juggernaut*'s engines and machines and systems. Near the middle of the room was a table with an electronic screen built into its tabletop. The screen showed a map of the area, along with the latest weather information. As Roz continued examining the control room, she realized the station could do many tasks by itself, but it couldn't do everything, and signs of its human operators were all around.

Jackets hung from hooks.

Trash bins were filled with food wrappers.

A pair of binoculars lay on a desk.

Roz looked through the windows and down at the station's different features. At one corner of the station, a small airship sat on a launchpad. BOSUN robots patrolled the walkways. A large drone flew past the control tower and settled onto its landing platform on the roof of a lower building.

Surrounding the *Juggernaut*, of course, was the ocean. To the south, Roz saw remote islands and icebergs. To the west, she saw the setting sun. Everywhere else, she saw water and sky. What she didn't see was the poison tide. Even with her powerful vision, she couldn't spot any dust clouds in the ocean. Perhaps the humans were unaware of the damage they were doing. Perhaps they would shut everything down once they learned about the problem. Roz felt hope flickering inside her.

But that flicker went out when she noticed a video screen in the corner of the room. It was showing live video of big billowing dust clouds, streaming away from an underwater mountain, like smoke from a chimney on a windy night. Every now and then, the clouds would recede, and a giant robot briefly came into view. Roz was now looking at the source of the

poison tide. All the harm done to the ocean wilderness had started right there, by that deep-sea mining robot.

The silence in the control room was broken by the hum of an elevator. A moment later, doors glided open and a woman walked out. She crossed the room and sat at a desk. The woman had no idea that a robot was hiding under the table behind her.

From Roz's hiding place, she caught a glimpse of the woman's name tag. *Akiko Fuji, Mining Station Manager*. Akiko was in charge of the mining station, which meant she was responsible for the poison tide.

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CHAPTER 51

THE STATION MANAGER

Akiko Fuji tapped her computer to make a video call. After a few electronic tones, a man's face appeared on the screen. He was sitting at a table. Behind him were kitchen cabinets and a refrigerator. Above his image on the screen was his name. *Leo Larson.*

"Hi, honey," said Akiko.

"Sorry I missed you earlier," said Leo in a weary voice. "I was picking the kids up from school."

Akiko nodded and said, "How are they?"

"They're constantly arguing."

"Well, I'm glad to hear everything's normal."

"I wouldn't say everything's *normal*," said Leo. "The kids miss you. So do I."

"I miss you too," said Akiko.



There was a lull in the conversation, and then Leo grumbled, “I really hate that mining station.”

“Please don’t worry,” said Akiko. “I’m perfectly safe here. I’ve got an excellent crew, and the robots do all the dangerous work.”

“I’m not worried about your safety,” said Leo. “I’m worried about our family. How long are we going to live apart like this?”

Akiko opened her mouth to speak, but then came the sound of scampering footsteps, and a young girl popped on-screen and climbed into Leo’s lap.

“Hi, Mommy!” said the girl.

“Hello, sweetie!” said Akiko, smiling.

“Mommy, I’m ready for our camping trip. I’ve been reading about which wild plants are safe to eat and which are poisonous.”

Akiko scratched her head. “Listen, sweetie, I’m sorry, but I have to stay here a little longer than I’d expected. We’ll go camping soon, though, I promise.”

The girl frowned. “You said that last time.”

“I’ll make it up to you,” said Akiko. “In a couple of months, we’ll go to the mountains and you can tell us about all the different plants. How’s that sound?”

The girl didn’t answer. She just hopped off her father’s lap and stomped off-screen.

“She’ll be okay,” said Leo. “But while you’re halfway around the world, our kids are growing up.”

Akiko sighed. “I know. When I get home, I’ll request a job at headquarters.”

A timer started beeping, and Leo glanced back at the kitchen. “Dinner’s ready. I should go.”

The call ended. Akiko stared at the blank screen. Then she put her head in her hands and cried. Between sniffles, she spoke aloud to herself. “What am I doing? I don’t even like this job anymore.” Akiko sat there a while longer, wiping the tears from her cheeks. Then she stood and walked back across the control room and into the elevator. She pressed a button and the doors closed. Once the station manager was gone, Roz crawled out from under the table and exited onto the balcony.

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CHAPTER 52

THE ROOFTOP

Every evening, when the sun went down, the *Juggernaut*'s exterior floodlights turned on. A bright glow of artificial light surrounded the station and faded into the night. However, the roof of the control tower had no floodlights at all. It was dark and quiet up there, which made it the perfect spot for Roz.

The robot pulled herself up from the balcony and found a cluster of communication equipment mounted on the roof. There were tall pointy antennas, and wide round antennas, and electronics housed in metal boxes. She stood still within the cluster, and her mechanical body blended in with the equipment.

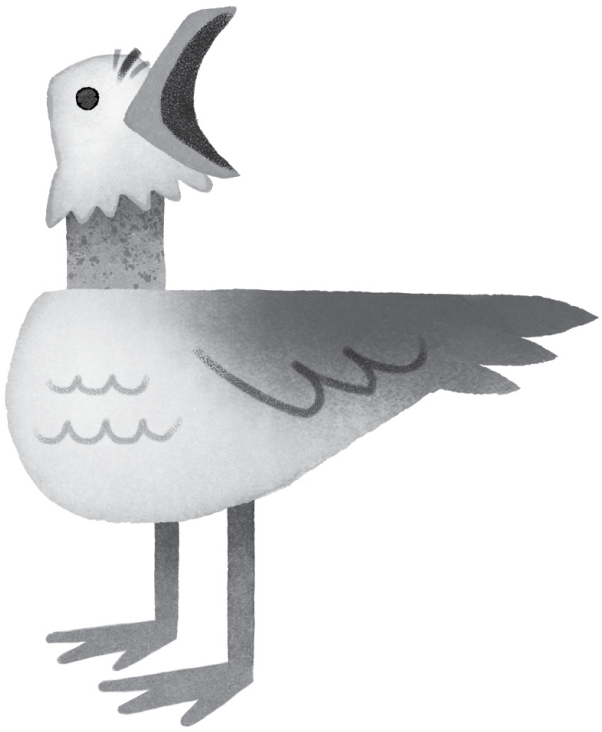
Roz thought about the mining station manager. Akiko Fuji was responsible for the poison tide, and yet she didn't seem like a bad human. She was a long way from home, and she missed her family, and she was unhappy with her job. Akiko seemed reasonable. Surely she would understand the need to protect the ocean.

These thoughts were broken up by a flurry of wingbeats, and a seagull landed on the roof. The gull had seen better days. One of his eyes was crusted shut, and a patch of feathers was missing from his neck. He was carrying a scrap of paper in his beak, and he tucked the scrap into his nest, which was made entirely of trash he'd found around the station.

As he fixed up his nest, the gull sensed he wasn't alone. "Who's there?" he screeched, searching the rooftop with his good eye.

Roz stepped into the moonlight and said, "I apologize for startling you."

"I've seen plenty of robots around here," said the gull. "But I've never seen one who could talk like an animal!"



“I am not like other robots,” said Roz. “I live with animals on a wild island, and I have come here to stop the poison tide.”

The gull studied Roz more carefully. “Hold on, I’ve heard of you! The other day a flock of terns was squawking about some wild robot who was on a mission to stop the poison tide. I didn’t believe a word they said, but here you are!”

“Here I am!” said Roz, in a friendly voice.

“But why are you *here*?” said the gull, and he pointed south. “The poison tide starts a day’s flight that way.”

“The poison tide actually starts directly beneath us,” explained Roz. “This is a deep-sea mining operation. It is creating huge clouds of toxic dust that travel far through the ocean before rising to the surface.”

“Really?” said the gull. “Well, if you want my opinion, I think you should leave the poison tide alone. It’s been great for me. I found a beach that’s covered with dead crabs. I’ve never eaten so good in my life!”

“You should not eat those crabs,” said Roz. “They could be poisoned.”

“You know, the crabs do taste a little funny. And I haven’t been feeling so good lately.” The gull scratched at his bare patch of skin.

His name was Nimbus. When the mining station had first arrived, gulls

had crowded onto its rooftops and ledges. But then came rumors about the poison tide, and the other gulls started taking off, and soon only Nimbus was left.

Roz and Nimbus chatted well into the night. But eventually, the gull yawned and said, “If I don’t get enough rest tonight, I’ll be a real grump tomorrow.” Then he snuggled into his nest and fell asleep.

Early in her life, Roz knew very little about the night sky, but now she looked up at a million points of light and recognized them all. Spaceships and space stations and satellites. Stars. Planets. Meteors. Galaxies. The moon and the aurora. Those glowing objects swirled overhead until the eastern sky started growing brighter.

At daybreak, the humans stepped out from their living quarters and another workday began. Roz heard muffled voices in the control room below. Further down, on the main platform, two men disappeared into a stairwell that descended to the station’s lower levels. On a walkway, a woman gave orders to a group of BOSUN robots who then marched off to complete their tasks.

Six. That was the number of humans aboard the *Juggernaut*. It took only six humans to run that entire deep-sea mining operation. Together, they managed the station and the computers and the machinery and the robots and the drone.

Reader, I’d like to turn your attention to that last piece of technology. A soft buzzing filled the air as the drone rose up from its platform. It floated over the station, inspecting equipment, communicating with robots, and searching for anything out of the ordinary. It glided from machine to machine, from building to building, and then it headed for the control tower. Our robot was well hidden within the antennas, but the drone was designed to notice every little detail. And as it floated up over the tower, it came to a sudden stop above Roz.

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CHAPTER 53

THE INTRUDER

REEEEE! REEEEE! REEEEE!

Across the mining station, alarms were blaring and lights were flashing red. Nimbus jolted awake. The gull looked from the drone to the robot and squawked, “What did you do?”

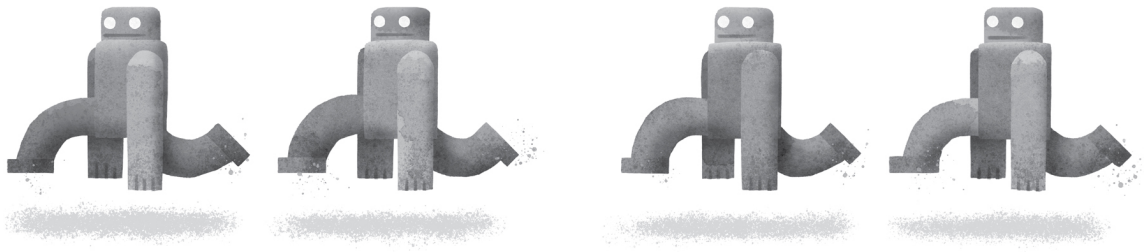
“Nothing!” said Roz.

“Well, get going! The other robots won’t be long!”

At that, Roz dashed out from the antennas and leaped off the control tower. She arced through the air and down to the roof of the next building. From there, she leaped to a lower building, and she dropped onto a walkway, and she ran across a platform. But wherever the robot went, the drone followed.

Nimbus raced after the drone and tried to stop it. He kicked it and pecked it and beat it with his wings. “The sky is no place for a machine!” he squawked. But the drone easily pushed past him and continued following Roz.

Stomping footsteps echoed through the buildings and powerful voices boomed, “Warning! Intruder! Warning! Intruder!” The BOSUN robots couldn’t keep up with the wild robot, but the drone tracked her every move. She was sprinting across the main platform when the BOSUNs finally surrounded her. There was nowhere left to run. Roz remembered that she could fight if she wanted to, but she didn’t want to. Even then, she was convinced there was a better way.



Alarms blared all around.

The drone buzzed high above.

Ocean waves crashed far below.

Waves. Our robot’s only escape was to dive into the waves. She sprinted for the edge of the platform, and before the BOSUNs could reach her, she leaped. Once airborne, there was no turning back. She soared off the station and plummeted down, down, down toward the ocean. But Roz never touched the water. Because just when she was about to plunge into the waves, the HYDRO robots rose to the surface, and a giant robotic claw snatched her out of the air.

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CHAPTER 54

THE PRISONER

There had never been an intruder aboard the *Juggernaut*, and it was poorly equipped for its first one. The station didn't have a jail, but the intruder had to go somewhere. The humans decided to lock the intruder in an empty room, with a BOSUN robot standing guard. It was the best solution they could come up with.

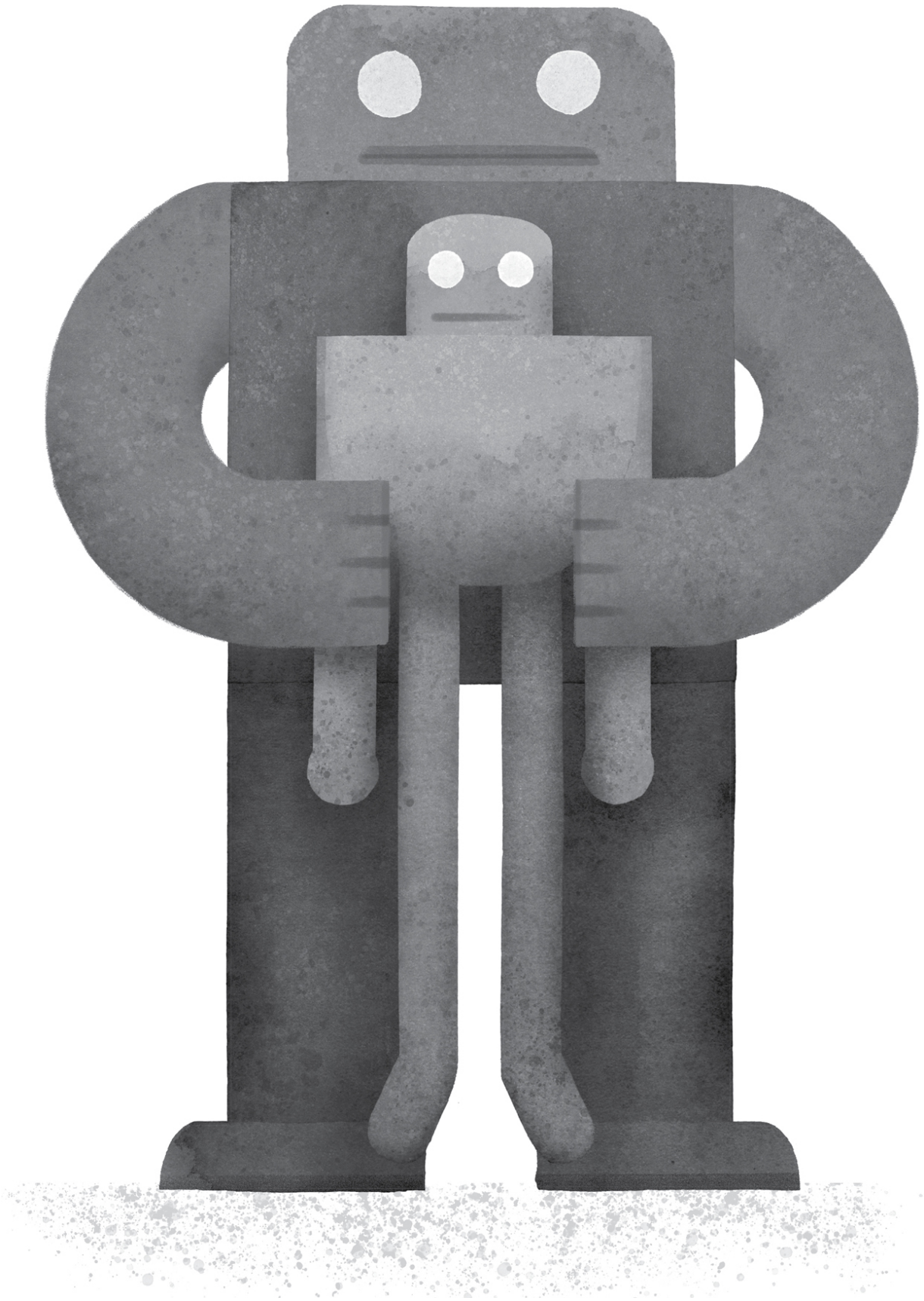
BOSUN 10 carried Roz through hallways and stairways and into an empty room. The walls of the room were bare except for a small round window in the door and another small round window overlooking the sea. "Do not attempt to escape," said BOSUN 10, and then he stepped out and locked the door. His heavy feet settled into place as he stood guard in the hall. That room was now a jail. Our robot was now a prisoner.

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CHAPTER 55

THE CONVERSATIONS

Footsteps came echoing down the hall toward Roz's jail room, and two faces appeared in the door window. One face belonged to Akiko Fuji, the mining station manager. The other face belonged to George Sammortuk, the assistant manager. They stared at Roz through the window and quietly spoke to each other. Then the door was unlocked, and BOSUN 10 entered the room. He clamped his bulky hands around Roz's arms and said, "I have restrained the prisoner."



Akiko and George walked in and faced Roz. The humans were filled with questions. Our robot had questions of her own. And those questions led to conversations, like these.

“Who are you?” Akiko said to the prisoner.

“My name is Roz.”

“Who’s your owner?”

“I have no owner.”

Akiko and George glanced at each other.

“Where did you come from?” said George.

“I live on an island, far from here. There are no humans or other robots on the island. I have learned to communicate with the animals there, and they have become my friends and my family. That wild island is my home.”

George shook his head. “Clearly, this robot is defective. She could be dangerous.”

“I am not defective, and I am not dangerous,” said Roz. “I would never hurt anyone.”

“Why should we trust you?” said Akiko.

“You have no reason to trust me. But I hope to prove that I am trustworthy.”

Akiko leaned forward. “You can start by telling us exactly why you’re here.”

“There is toxic runoff flowing from your deep-sea mining site,” explained Roz. “The animals call it the poison tide. Ocean currents are carrying the poison tide far to the south, and it is damaging every living thing in its path. It has surrounded my island, and now my home is dying. I have come all this way to stop the poison tide. But to do that I need your help.”

“Nature creates many harmful substances,” said Roz. “There are poisonous plants and venomous animals and acidic hot springs. Nature also creates toxic minerals. When left alone, those minerals are usually harmless, but humans often dig them up, as you are doing here. I am curious, did you know this mining site was toxic?”

George said to Akiko, “I really don’t think we should answer her

questions.”

“Let’s see where this goes,” said Akiko. “Yes, Roz, we knew this was a toxic mining site. That’s why we’ll be sending out a specialized robot to clean everything up when we finish the job.”

“While you wait to finish the job,” said Roz, “a vast number of habitats are being wiped out.”

“That can’t be right,” said Akiko. “By our calculations, the runoff shouldn’t be traveling very far.”

“And the seafloor is barren around here,” added George. “So there’s nothing for the runoff to harm.”

“Your calculations are wrong,” said Roz. “The seafloor is not barren, and the poison tide is traveling across this entire ocean and far into the next.”

“It’s not a perfect science,” said Akiko. “The ocean has flooded into lowland areas, creating new islands and waterways. As a result, the ocean currents are always changing, which makes them hard to predict.”

“You must do better,” said Roz.

Akiko was becoming irritated. “The only way to stop the *poison tide*, as you call it, would be to stop the whole mining operation. But that would never be allowed.”

“Are you not in charge?” said Roz.

“I’m in charge of this station,” said Akiko, raising her voice. “But I report back to headquarters, and they’d never allow us to stop in the middle of a job.”

The humans grew more irritated, and more excuses flew from their mouths.

“If we didn’t mine this site, somebody else would!”

“Our crew members have families to support!”

“We’re just following orders!”

Those last words hung in the air for a while.

“You are just following orders,” said Roz at last. “In a way, you humans are more robotic than I am.”

“Roz, you should really be thanking us,” said George. “Without mines like this, you wouldn’t even exist.”

“I do not understand.”

“Do you know what we’re mining?” said Akiko.

“No, I do not.”

George smirked.

Akiko frowned.

“We’re mining rare metallic minerals,” said Akiko, “minerals needed for making *robots* like you.”

Reader, it’s hard to describe the effect those words had on our robot. You might say she felt something like shock. All Roz had ever wanted was to protect her family and her friends and her home, and now she knew that everything she loved could be destroyed in order to make more robots like her. But her computer brain pushed those troublesome thoughts aside so she could continue the conversation at hand.

“I understand why humans want robots,” said Roz. “However, I do not understand why you are willing to ruin the ocean to make them.”

“We don’t *want* robots,” said Akiko. “We *need* them. Robots build power stations and perform surgery and grow food. Humans are totally dependent on your kind. But it’s getting harder to find the metals we need to make robots. So we do what it takes to get what we need. We try to work responsibly, but mining is a dirty business.”

“Can you believe we have to convince a robot why robots are important?” said George.

“Can you believe I have to convince humans why their own environment is important?” said Roz.

“We know the environment is important,” said Akiko. “George and I both have children, and we want the world to be healthy for them. So here’s what I’ll do. I’ll send the HYDROs down to thoroughly inspect the runoff. If it’s as bad as you say, we’ll try to fix it. How’s that sound?”

Our robot’s eyes glowed brighter, and she said, “That sounds reasonable. Thank you.”

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CHAPTER 56

THE ALARMS

Roz had traveled incredible distances and faced extraordinary challenges on her mission to stop the poison tide. And now, after all she had overcome, her hard work was paying off. The mining station manager had agreed to cooperate. It was a wonderful turn of events. But our robot's good feelings didn't last long, because just as the humans were exiting the jail room, alarms began blaring across the station.

REEEEE! REEEEE! REEEEE!

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CHAPTER 57

THE ATTACK

REEEEE! REEEEE! REEEEE!

While alarms blared, Akiko and George hurried across the station and up to the control room, where they found the other crew members bustling around. The station manager quickly tapped her computer, and the alarms went quiet.

“Akiko, you need to see this.” That was the voice of Vivian, the technology manager. She was leaning over the electronic table. On-screen was a map with the *Juggernaut* at the center. Countless dots were appearing on the map. “Those aren’t ships,” said Vivian, pointing to the dots. “They could be animals, but it would take a whole lot of fish to light up the map like this.”

“Send the drone,” said Akiko. “I want to see what’s out there.”

A moment later, the drone glided away from the station. Vivian tapped the electronic screen, and pulled up the view from the drone’s camera. It showed wisps of fog floating by, and below the fog was the ocean.

“What’s that?” said Akiko as a layer of sea-foam swept across the water.

Vivian zoomed in on the image. “I think that might be a whole lot of fish.”

Indeed it was. The ocean was teeming with more fish than anyone had ever seen. Their shiny bodies slashed through the waves, creating a great circle of sea-foam that tightened around the station until the fish slammed against the base. An endless flow of fish pounded the outer wall, but it would take more than fish to damage the mighty *Juggernaut*.

However, the fish weren’t alone. Behind them were dolphins numbering in the thousands! They whirled around the station, studying it and searching for any weak points. Then came sharks and walruses and squid. So many

animals started thrashing through the waves that the ocean seemed to be boiling over.

Only one creature could have organized such an attack. The Ancient Shark had given Roz a chance to reason with the humans. But the shark felt certain the robot would fail. And when she'd learned that Roz had been captured, she didn't wait around for more information. She sent the signal for her armies to advance.

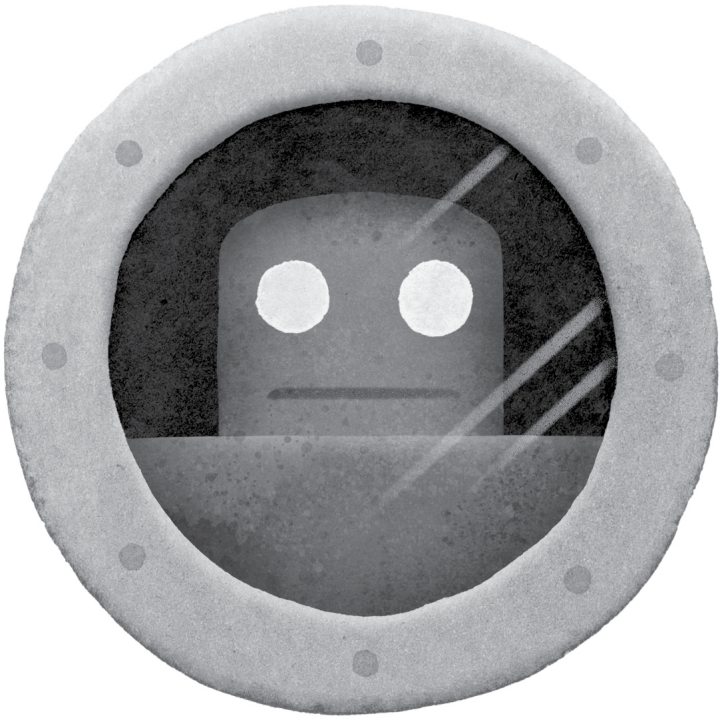
The Ancient Shark lurked in the background as the attack unfolded. Her fish companions whispered in her ears and reported the events as they happened. From time to time, she sent a fish into the fray with messages for the ocean warriors.

"Be careful not to harm each other!"

"Pace yourselves! The fight has only just begun!"

"Look out for the poison tide in the deep!"

High above the action, Roz peered out from her jail room window. She had done everything in her power to stop the poison tide peacefully, and she had almost succeeded. But now the ocean battle had begun, and all she could do was watch.



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CHAPTER 58

THE CLOUD

A dark cloud was rising in the south. It billowed and swelled and constantly changed shape. And it was headed straight for the *Juggernaut*. As the cloud floated closer, it became clear that it was actually a gigantic flock of birds. There were seagulls and puffins and cormorants and vultures and skuas and terns and sandpipers and eagles and every other type of northern bird, all flying together. The Ancient Shark's call to action had made the leap from ocean to sky, and birds were coming to join the fight.

Up in the control room, the station manager and the assistant manager stood together as the birds approached.

"Roz must have something to do with this," said Akiko.

"You don't really think that robot can speak with animals?" said George.

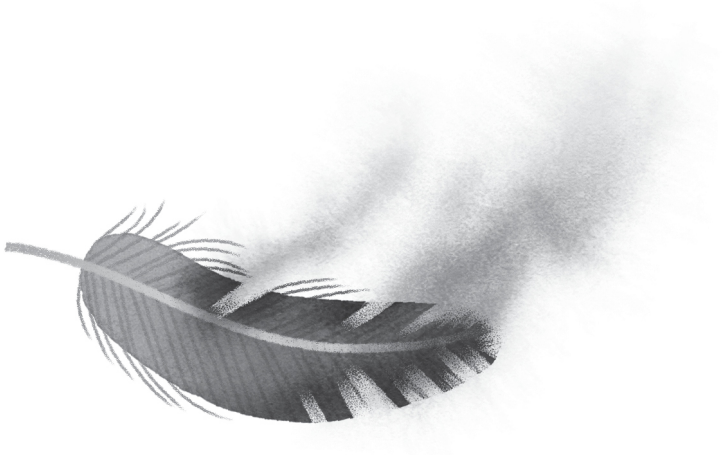
Akiko shrugged. "Do you have a better explanation?"

A lone seagull flew out to greet the flock. Nimbus knew the station well, and his advice quickly spread from bird to bird. He explained that it was useless to attack a building or a platform or a walkway. The birds needed to focus on easier targets. And then a group of BOSUNs marched into view.

The sky darkened as the flock of birds descended. Smaller birds splattered the robots with their droppings. Larger birds scraped at robotic faces with their talons. The BOSUNs were caught off guard. One robot stumbled over a railing and slammed hard onto a lower platform. His body fizzled and twitched and then was still. The remaining BOSUNs fought back, swatting at birds with their big blocky hands. BOSUN 1 stomped through a doorway and stomped back out holding a rifle. He aimed the weapon and fired.

Blazing beams of light flashed through the air.

Charred feathers floated across the station.



Winged bodies dropped into the waves.

The birds regrouped and searched for other targets. They battered windows and tore at floodlights. And then they noticed the drone hovering high above. The flying machine zigged and zagged, dodging eagles and vultures. But before it could find safety it was swallowed up in a seething swarm of birds. One poor sandpiper was sucked into an engine and—*poof!*—the engine exploded into flames and the drone went spiraling toward the control room.

The humans dove for cover as the drone came hurtling at them. With its last gasp of life, the drone pulled up, narrowly missing the windows but crashing onto the roof of the control tower. It bowled through the cluster of antennas, and all wireless communication cut out. Signals from the robots suddenly stopped. The electronic map of the area went blank. The *Juggernaut* had lost contact with the outside world.

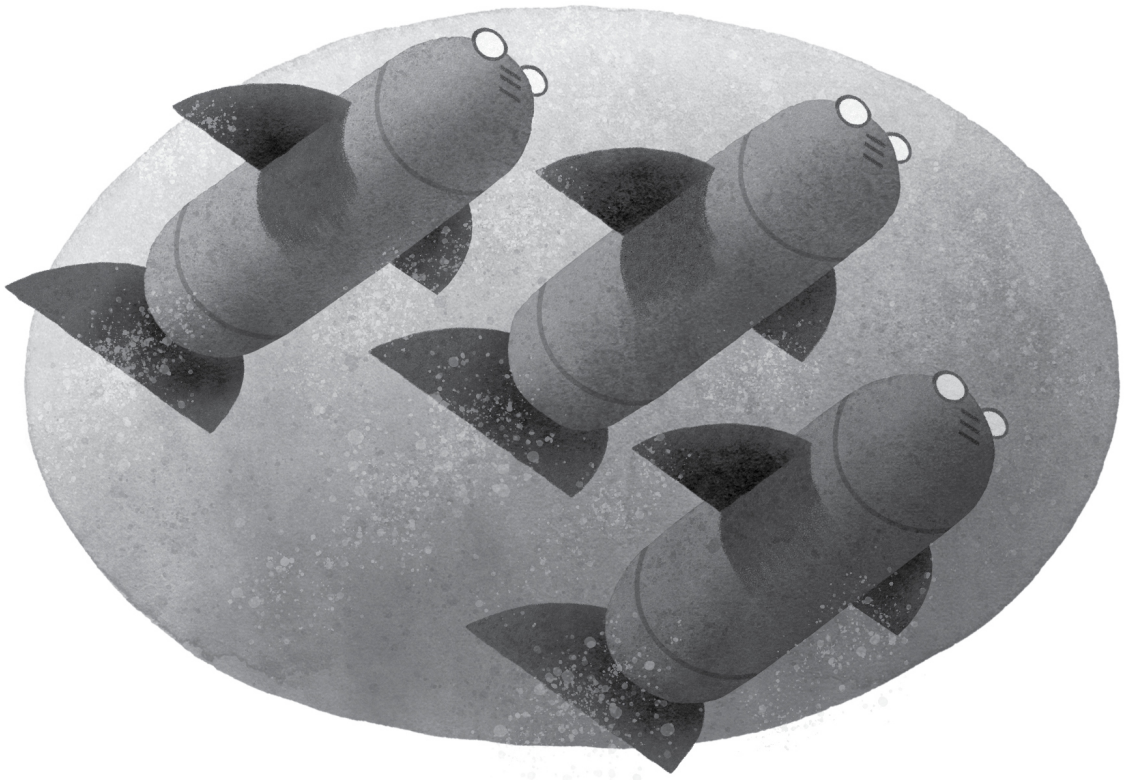
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CHAPTER 59

THE HYDROS

Wireless communication had been cut, but wired communication was still working fine. The station manager tapped her computer, and her commands instantly traveled down through the *Juggernaut*'s wiring. Far below the control room, the underwater door glided open. The HYDRO robots had been activated.

The HYDROs were designed to make repairs and to haul heavy loads, but if necessary they could also defend the station. HYDRO 1, HYDRO 2, and HYDRO 3 cruised out the door and were immediately mobbed by ocean animals. Fish threw themselves against the robots. Squid sprayed ink to blind them. Dolphins rammed into their sides. None of this bothered the robots, however. Their engines roared, and they easily plowed through the crowd.



The HYDROs surfaced and spread out and started circling the station. Around and around they went, faster and faster, churning up a tremendous ring of rough water in their wake. Then the robots started firing their sound cannons.

BWAA! BWAA! BWAAAAAA!

Powerful bursts of noise blasted from their mouths.

BWAA! BWAA! BWAAAAAA!

The animals had never heard anything so loud. The noise rattled their bones and echoed up through the station, high above. From her jail room window, Roz watched as the ocean trembled with each blast.

BWAA! BWAA! BWAAAAAA!

Below the surface, frightened animal voices cried out.

“What should we do?”

“Attack!”

“Retreat!”

The Ancient Shark commanded her armies to press on. “Hold the line!” she shouted. But the animals were too panicked to follow orders. And with

each blast of noise, they were driven farther and farther away.

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CHAPTER 60

THE BIGGEST WARRIORS

The humans felt a sense of relief when the HYDROs took control of the ocean. But then came a change on the horizon. Akiko was the first to notice the rows of dark shapes. She grabbed her binoculars and looked closely. Giant bodies breached the surface and then dipped beneath the waves. Wide tails rose above the water and then sank below. Mist sprayed high into the air and then drifted down. The station manager lowered her binoculars and uttered a single word.

"Whales."

Like a fleet of living, breathing warships, hundreds of whales had united to form a super pod. Every species of northern whale was there. Different sizes and shapes and colors. They were ready to fight, and the water thrummed with their battle song.

Whales are ocean warriors
We're coming to defend
The only home we've ever known
We'll fight until the end

Off to battle we now charge
With fortune on our side
We will defeat our enemy
And stop the poison tide

The whales picked up speed, and their motion created a wave in the ocean behind them. They swam faster, and their wave grew taller. It became

a massive mountain of water, rushing toward the *Juggernaut*.

The HYDROs came together to face the new threat. In the past, they had scared off the occasional whale, but they'd never faced an army of whales. The robots prepared to fire their sound cannons. Before coming into range, however, the whales vanished beneath the surface, and their towering tidal wave continued on without them. The wave was too much for the HYDROs. But when they tried to dive down to safety they found the army of whales was waiting below. At the same time, the whales blew air from their blowholes, and a dense layer of bubbles surged upward, forcing the robots into the tidal wave's path. Engines roared as HYDRO 1 veered right and HYDRO 2 veered left. But for HYDRO 3, there was no escape. The tidal wave lifted her up and then smashed her down against the base of the station with a thunderous explosion of sea-foam. And when the wave subsided, the full extent of the damage was revealed. HYDRO 3's crumpled body had pierced the outer wall, and now water was flooding into the station.

The whales weren't finished. Another group arrived, pushing an iceberg like a battering ram. The two remaining HYDROs dug their claws into the ice and blasted their engines. It was a battle of strength, whales versus robots, with the iceberg caught in between. Sound cannons were fired—*BWAA! BWAA! BWAAAAAA!*—but then came more whales and more waves and more icebergs. In the frenzy, HYDRO 2 was crushed between enormous blocks of ice and she sank into the deep. Several whales were badly injured, and they slipped away to nurse their wounds.

The remaining whales surrounded HYDRO 1, distracting her, confusing her. A powerful groan rumbled up from the depths, and a whale launched out of the water and crashed down onto the robot. More whales attacked. Biting, ramming, beating, crashing. HYDRO 1 was broken and battered and taking on water. Unable to stay afloat, she sank below the waves and never surfaced again. The HYDRO robots had been destroyed.

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CHAPTER 61

THE TINIEST WARRIORS

Ocean water was pouring through the gash in the station's outer wall. Such severe damage would sink most vessels, but not the *Juggernaut*. It was able to stay afloat because of its four engines. If the animals could stop the engines, the station would go under. But even the mightiest sea creatures were afraid of those huge spinning propeller blades. However, the Ancient Shark had planned for this. Reinforcements were on their way, and these creatures were so incredibly small that there was no risk of them being cut to pieces.

The Ancient Shark's call to action had traveled by word of mouth from large animals, like whales, to medium-sized animals, like squid, to small animals, like shrimps, down to the tiniest of all ocean animals: zooplankton. What zooplankton lacked in size they made up for in numbers. Billions of them were coming to help. They floated on currents and clung to other creatures and wiggled their little limbs to move through the water, and they gradually made their way to the mining station. Many zooplanktons emitted a soft blue glow, and as their tiny glowing bodies gathered together, they became a glowing haze. More zooplanktons joined, and the glowing haze became a glowing cloud, which became a glowing storm. It was sunset when Roz noticed that the sea was aglow, and she knew the ocean's tiniest warriors had arrived.

A steady flow of animals glided below the station, whisking the zooplanktons toward their targets. The tiny creatures packed together so tightly that they formed a glowing slime, which began oozing into the engines. The propellers seemed unstoppable, but the zooplanktons kept coming. A never-ending stream of glowing sludge forced itself into the engines, whirling around the propellers, gumming them up, slowing them

down, bringing them closer to the breaking point.

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CHAPTER 62

THE NEW ARRIVALS

Two small shapes were moving through the sky. As the shapes flew nearer, their details came into focus. They were birds. They were geese. They were Brightbill and Glimmer.

The Ancient Shark's call to action had spread far and wide, and eventually it had reached Roz's island. As soon as the geese heard the details, they took off. For three days, they traveled over seas and islands and coastlines, and then they spotted the *Juggernaut*, floating on the waves of the northern ocean. The water was brimming with creatures, and the station was bristling with birds, but Brightbill and Glimmer ignored the other animals and concentrated on finding Roz.

Soaring over the *Juggernaut*, they searched for any sign of the robot. She wasn't on the rooftops or the platforms or the walkways. She had to be in one of the buildings. The geese peered through window after window, looking for Roz, but there were too many windows to check them all. So our friends asked for help. A flock of puffins pointed them to sandpipers, who pointed them to cormorants, who pointed them to the top of the control tower, where a seagull was sitting among a mess of broken antennas.

The geese touched down beside the gull, and Brightbill said, "I was told you know where to find a robot named Roz."

"You must be her son!" said Nimbus, smiling. And then his expression sank. "I'm afraid your mother was captured. She's been in there since this morning." Nimbus motioned to one of the lower buildings.

"What should we do?" said Glimmer.

"We should go in after her," said Brightbill.

"I think I can be of assistance," said Nimbus. Then the gull threw back his head and screeched, "Who wants to start some trouble?"

A gang of spunky seabirds was quickly assembled, and everyone followed Nimbus down through the air. They swooped past structures and dodged other birds and then landed by the building where Roz was being held.

“I hope you know how to get in,” said Nimbus, inspecting the closed door with his good eye.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” said Brightbill. The goose hopped up and pecked a button on the wall, and like magic the door slid open.

The birds hurried inside and found a hallway lined with more closed doors. They began pecking buttons, opening doors, exploring every room. They found machines and cabinets and equipment, but they didn’t find any robots. So they fluttered up a stairwell and explored the next floor of the building. They went from room to room, from floor to floor, but there was no sign of Roz. Until they reached the top floor. The birds crept out from the stairwell and peeked around a corner. Down the hall, BOSUN 10 was standing guard.

Glimmer whispered, “Roz must be in that room.”

Nimbus replied, “Let us handle the guard. You and Brightbill bust Roz out!”

The gull smiled. Then he strutted down the hall and squawked, “Hey, blockhead! Why don’t you go swim with the fishes?”

BOSUN 10 turned his blocky head to face the seagull. He didn’t understand what the bird had said, of course. But he felt something like surprise at the sight of a gull strutting toward him. More surprises were on their way, and the other seabirds came flying around the corner. There were four puffins and three terns and five sandpipers. Two skuas brought up the rear, their wings nearly spanning the width of the hall. The gang flapped and squawked and taunted the robot, luring him away from the jail room. He took the bait and chased them down the hall, and they all disappeared into the next stairwell.

The geese raced over to where the robot had been standing. Brightbill pecked the button on the wall. He pecked it again and again, but the door wouldn’t open.

“Ma, are you in there?” said Brightbill.

Roz’s face appeared in the door window. “Brightbill? Glimmer? What are you doing here?”

“We’re here to get you out, Ma! The guard is gone, but this door is locked!”

“Leave that to me,” said Roz.

Brightbill and Glimmer stood back. There was a loud *clang!*—and another *clang!*—and with the next *clang!* the door shot across the hall and fell to the floor. Then Roz stepped out and scooped the geese into her arms.

“We were so worried about you, Ma!” said Brightbill.

“We heard what was happening and thought you could use some help,” said Glimmer.

“You were correct,” said Roz.

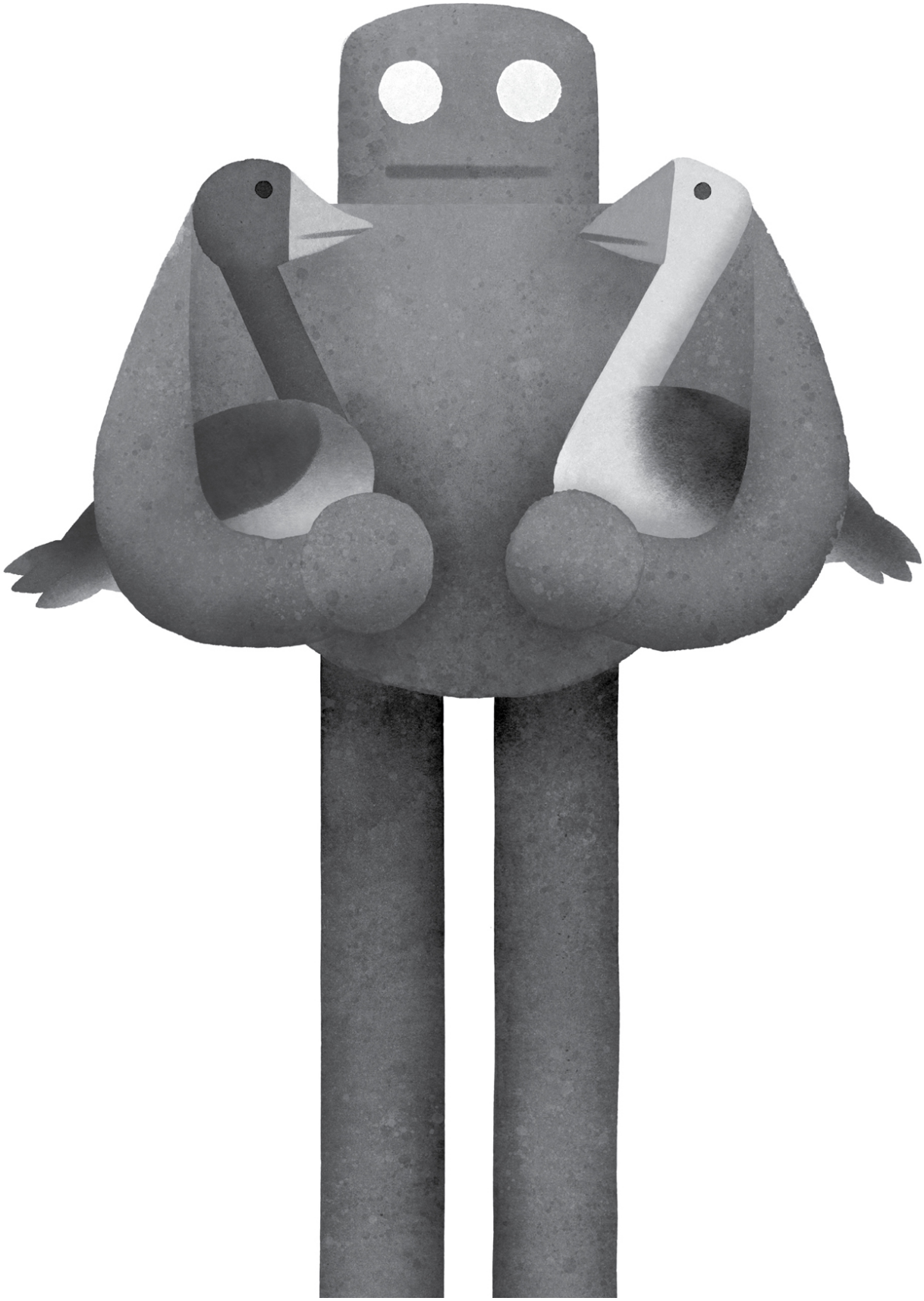
The robot and the geese talked quickly and quietly. Roz explained that they were on a mining station and that the poison tide was flowing from down on the seafloor. Brightbill spoke about the island. Thanks to the supply of fresh water, most animals were surviving, but food and shelter were scarce. Several more geese had left the flock. Neighbors were lashing out at each other. The island community had splintered apart.

“There is some good news,” said Glimmer. “Our goslings have hatched.”

“That is wonderful!” said Roz. “I am so happy for you both! But if you two are here, who is looking after your goslings?”

“Good old Loudwing is taking care of them while we’re away,” said Brightbill. “They’ll be perfectly safe with her.”

As you know, reader, robots don’t feel emotions. Not the way animals do. But in that moment, even with all the trouble she was in, our robot felt something like joy to learn that she was a grandmother and that her son was a father.





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CHAPTER 63

THE CHAOS

The crew stared in disbelief at the chaos outside. Animals had taken over the sea and the sky. Whales were sending wave after mountainous wave crashing against the station. And, mysteriously, the water was glowing pale blue.

George pulled Akiko aside and said, “I think I was wrong about Roz. With your permission, I’ll go ask if she can call off the animals.”

Before Akiko could reply, a warning flashed across her computer. Something was wrong with the engines. The crew had no idea that the engines were under attack by a vast swarm of zooplanktons. More of those tiny creatures kept joining the fight, and now a glowing sludge was thickening and hardening around the propellers. The engines strained and struggled. There was a terrible gnashing noise, and then each of the propellers ground to a halt.

Without engines to stabilize it, the station started bobbing in the waves. Everyone aboard went flying. BOSUNs toppled over. Brightbill and Glimmer fluttered away as Roz stumbled against a wall. Crew members fell out of their chairs and slid across the floor, grasping at anything that was bolted down.

The station settled, until it was gently swaying with the movement of the ocean. Then the humans burst into a panic.

“What is happening?” yelled the electrician.

“I didn’t sign up for this!” yelled the mechanic.

“How are we gonna survive?” yelled the engineer.

“Stop yelling!” yelled the station manager. Akiko took a deep breath and said, “I’ve seen enough. We need to abandon the *Juggernaut*.”

“What about Roz?” said George.

“We don’t have time for her,” said Akiko. “We have to get our crew off the station.”

The assistant manager snapped into action and shouted instructions to the crew. “Let’s put on our cold-weather gear! Then we’ll calmly take the stairs down to the launchpad and we’ll board the airship together!”

The crew members pulled on their heavy boots and thick coats and warm hats and gloves, and they headed for the stairwell. But they stopped when they glanced out the window. You see, the *Juggernaut* was slowly sinking, and as more waves rolled in, they started washing over the platforms and surging between buildings and pouring back into the sea. One wave slammed a BOSUN against a stack of steel beams. Another wave smashed through doors and flooded into rooms and hallways. In the freezing temperatures, sheets of ice quickly formed, and BOSUN 5 tumbled down a slippery flight of stairs. And then a wave went rolling toward the launchpad. BOSUN 2 saw it coming. He tried to secure the airship, but he wasn’t fast enough. The huge wave swept over, and when it had passed, the airship and the robot were gone.

Water continued pouring through the gash in the station, flooding the lower compartments. There were pops of electricity. Fires crawled up the interior, setting off a series of explosions. Smoke billowed from air vents. Flames shot out from windows. The *Juggernaut* was ablaze and adrift.



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CHAPTER 64

THE LEAP

Roz and Brightbill and Glimmer were still in the hallway when they heard screeching and stomping, and then the seabirds came flapping around the corner.

“Look, Roz is free!”

“Great, now let’s take off!”

“Move! Move! Move!”

Close behind the seabirds was BOSUN 10. He saw Roz standing outside her jail room, and his robotic voice boomed, “Stop! Prisoner! Stop!”

Roz didn’t stop. Instead, she and the birds scrambled away from BOSUN 10, down the hall and into the stairwell. Thick smoke was rising from below, so they hurried upstairs and exited onto the roof. The seabirds scattered into the sky, but the robot and the geese couldn’t stop staring at the chaos on the station. Broken equipment was strewn across the platforms. Clouds of smoke floated between buildings. BOSUNs sprayed jets of water at a roaring blaze, but the flames were too ferocious, and the robots were quickly engulfed.

That’s when Roz noticed the ocean. It was calm. The sea creatures had stopped thrashing. The whales had stopped making waves. The glowing haze of zooplankton had drifted off. Victory had soothed their anger, and the army of animals was pulling back to let the *Juggernaut* sink into the sea.

“The humans need my help,” said Roz, looking up at the control room. “They might have caused the poison tide, but I will not leave them to die.”

Behind her, a robotic voice boomed, “Stop! Prisoner! Stop!” And there was BOSUN 10, stepping out of the smoky stairwell.



Brightbill and Glimmer took wing as Roz sprinted to the edge of the roof. The robot leaped high into the air, up toward the control room balcony, but the distance was a little too far. It looked like she would fall to the fires below. However, as she passed under the balcony, her long arms reached up, and with her fingertips she grabbed one of the support beams. Dangling, she turned her head and watched while BOSUN 10 made the same leap. The industrial robot was bigger and stronger than Roz, but he was also heavier and slower. He launched up through the air, rising higher and higher, but not high enough. His bulky body crashed against the control tower and plunged down into the smoke and flames. With that, the last of the BOSUN robots was destroyed.

Roz pulled herself onto the balcony. Brightbill and Glimmer landed nearby. Worried faces were staring at our friends through the control room windows.

Akiko stepped outside, pointing a rifle. “Did you do this?” she yelled. “Did you order the attack?”

“I tried to *prevent* the attack,” said Roz. “But the animals were angry and out of control. If you had suffered as they have, you would understand.”

“Why are you here?” said Akiko. “What more do you want from us?”

“I only want to get your crew to safety.”

Akiko grunted and lowered her weapon. “The airship is gone, and the life rafts are in flames. We’re out of options.”

Roz made a few animal sounds to the geese, who nodded and flew away. Then the robot said to Akiko, “I can get everyone to safety. But I must carry each of you down to the main platform, one at a time. Who would like to go first?”

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CHAPTER 65

THE RESCUE

George nervously peered down from the balcony and said, “I’m going to trust you, Roz. I hope I don’t regret this.”

“Do not worry, George. I will be very careful.” Very carefully, Roz picked up the man. She held him securely. And then she leaped off the balcony.

George screamed wildly as they plummeted toward a lower rooftop. But the robot’s legs absorbed the impact, and the landing was surprisingly gentle. “That wasn’t so bad,” said George, with a smile. A moment later, he was screaming again as they leaped over flaming wreckage and dropped to a safe corner of the main platform.

“I will be right back,” said Roz, helping the man to his feet. Then she leaped away, vanishing into the smoke-filled sky. She came flying back down a minute later, carrying Vivian, the technology manager. Then she brought down the engineer, and then the mechanic, and then the electrician, and finally the station manager.

The crew members huddled together in the cold evening air, wondering what would happen next. Their eyes kept peeking over the edge of the platform. The station was slowly sinking, and the ocean surface was getting closer all the time.



There was a sudden spray of mist, and everyone turned to see a pod of whales arriving. The whales breathed noisy gusts of air through their blowholes as they lined up along the platform.

“These are your life rafts,” said Roz.

“You expect us to ride *whales*?” said George. “An hour ago, they wanted to kill us!”

“The whales did not want to kill you,” explained Roz. “They wanted to stop the poison tide. Now they want to take you back to land. I have ridden on a whale myself. I promise, they will keep you safe.”

With no other choice, the crew began climbing onto the whales. They crawled around blowholes and dorsal fins, and soon each human was sitting on the back of their very own whale. Despite what the humans had been through, they couldn’t help feeling awestruck by those magnificent animals.

When everyone was seated, Akiko looked up at Roz on the platform and said, “I’m sorry to tell you this, but the poison tide is still flowing because the mining robot is still working, and he’ll keep working until his task is complete. He’s a giant machine designed to demolish deep-sea mountains. You can’t stop him, Roz, and he won’t take orders from you. Please go home. We’ll send an entire fleet of cleanup robots to shut down the mining site and remove the poison tide from the ocean. It’ll take time, but it’ll get done. And I’ll make sure the poison tide never happens again. You have my word.”

A deep groan rumbled up from the biggest whale. It was his way of saying, “We should leave while the water is calm.” So the whales pushed off and started ferrying the humans to shore.

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CHAPTER 66

THE PARENTS

The Juggernaut *was sinking*. That massive floating vessel, that mighty industrial structure, was slowly being swallowed by the sea. As water flooded the station, fires were washed out and steam hissed into the air. The main platform disappeared beneath the waves, and then only the buildings and towers still stood above the surface. Soon, they'd also disappear, and the entire station would be lost.

On the roof of the control tower, below the twinkling stars, Roz was speaking with the geese. She explained that a fleet of cleanup robots was coming to stop the poison tide and remove it from the ocean. At least that's what the humans had promised. For now, though, the deep-sea mining robot kept working, and the poison tide kept flowing.



“The humans told me to go home,” said Roz. “But I cannot let the poison tide destroy more of the ocean while we wait for the cleanup robots to arrive. And so, in a moment, I will dive down to the mining site, and I will try to stop the mining robot.”

Brightbill anxiously flapped his wings and squawked, “Ma, you’ve done enough! Do you really need to take more risks? The island needs you! Your family needs you! I need you!”

“Brightbill, you have not needed me since you were very young,” said Roz. “Back then, caring for you is what gave my life purpose. Now that you are grown, I have another purpose: to protect the island and the ocean and all of the wilderness.

“This reminds me of someone I met on my travels,” Roz continued. “I met an octopus whose whole purpose in life is to take care of her eggs. She will spend her very last breath watching over them, and before they hatch, she will die. She will never meet her own children, and yet her love for them is already so strong that she will sacrifice herself to protect them. If necessary, I am ready to sacrifice myself to protect what I love as well.”

In a soft voice, Brightbill said, “I think I understand. I would do

anything to protect our goslings."

"So would I," said Glimmer. "It's funny—not long ago, parenthood wasn't even on my mind. And these days, our goslings are all I can think about. As we speak, I can feel myself being pulled back to them, like gravity."

"Those are your instincts telling you that it is time to go home," said Roz. "And I agree."

"We'll wait for you, Ma!" said Brightbill. "And then we'll all go home together!"

"I would love that," said Roz. "But this could take hours or days or weeks or longer. I simply do not know what will happen down at the mining site."

Brightbill sniffled and wiped his eyes. "Ma, I'm worried that our goslings won't get to meet you."

"Do not worry!" said Roz in a cheerful voice. "I know the situation seems impossible, but your mother is quite good at dealing with impossible situations."

A little smile appeared on Brightbill's face. Then he and Glimmer hopped onto the robot's shoulders.

"I love you, Mama," said Brightbill.

"I love you, son," said Roz. "I love both of you. Now go tell my grandgoslings I love them too."

Our friends hugged each other.

Brightbill and Glimmer lifted up on the breeze.

Roz dove off the station and into the sea.

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CHAPTER 67

THE GEESE

Long after Roz had disappeared into the ocean, the geese kept circling through the night sky. It was hard for them to leave, knowing that she was going to face the mining robot on her own.

While they flew, the geese couldn't take their eyes off the *Juggernaut*. The station was sinking and drifting on the currents. Slowly, steadily, the various structures went under, until only the control tower was visible. And when that tower finally slipped below the surface, the *Juggernaut* was gone.

Glimmer flew closer to her mate and said, "We should go home. Your mother will meet us back on the island, someday soon."

Brightbill quietly replied, "It feels like we're abandoning her."

"We're not abandoning her," said Glimmer. "Your mother is tough and smart. She doesn't need us. But our goslings do."

Glimmer was right. The goslings hadn't seen their parents in days. They must have been terribly worried. Brightbill circled around one last time, and he said to his mate, "Let's go home."

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CHAPTER 68

THE DEEP DIVE

Our robot swam
down
down
down
into the deep, dark ocean. She brightened her headlights and noticed that debris was scattered throughout the water. Equipment and supplies had fallen from the station and were sinking to the bottom. The debris gradually drifted away, but the robot continued straight down, deeper and deeper.

Roz heard a grinding noise coming from far below. The noise grew louder as she descended. Dust clouds appeared, and suddenly the poison tide was everywhere. She swam on, through the clouds, as the grinding noise grew louder still.

When Roz emerged into clear water, she saw a steep mountain, rising from the depths. Strong currents blew off any sand and silt, and what remained were slopes of bare, craggy rock. Grinding across the mountaintop, stirring up those clouds of dust, was the mining robot. At last, after months of searching, Roz had reached the source of the poison tide.

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CHAPTER 69

THE MINING ROBOT

The underwater mountain was made of rock, and that rock was made of rare metallic minerals. The same minerals were needed for building robots and computers and other kinds of technology. So a mining robot had been sent down to remove the minerals from the mountain.

The mining robot resembled a gigantic crab. His body was as big as a house. He had long legs, and a pair of giant claws, and spotlights beaming out from his eyes. What looked like his mouth was actually a grinding tool that could crunch through the hardest rock. Etched on the mining robot's back was his name: *Crusher*.

There was a rhythm to Crusher's movements. He surged forward and tore at the rocky ground with his grinding tool; then he scooped the pieces into huge storage bins; then he surged forward again. Ordinarily, the HYDRO robots would visit each day, and haul the broken rocks up to the station. That routine had gone on for months, and the underwater mountain of minerals had slowly grown smaller.

Electronic signals were sent back and forth between Crusher and the *Juggernaut*. It had now been several hours since he last heard from the station. But the robot wasn't concerned. In those extreme conditions the signals would frequently cut out. He just kept working as he waited for the signal to return.

All that grinding of rocky minerals created great clouds of toxic dust, which streamed away on the currents. Roz wanted to put an end to those dust clouds, but to do that she would have to stop Crusher. She was no match for his size and strength. Our robot would have to rely on her wits.

Roz carefully crossed the mountaintop, crawling around boulders and leaping over wide cracks in the ground. As she approached Crusher, she

searched for any buttons or wires or control panels on his body, but he was completely encased in thick armor. She felt something like fear at the idea of confronting the monstrous machine. And yet she pushed that fear from her mind and bravely marched out from the shadows.





Crusher was so focused on his work that he didn't notice Roz until she was standing right in front of him. His thunderous grinding tool powered down, and the dust clouds drifted away, leaving the water quiet and clear.

"Hello, Crusher. My name is Roz."

Crusher's deep voice rumbled, "Were you sent here by the *Juggernaut*?"

Roz hesitated. "Well, no, not exactly. However, I did have a conversation with—"

Crusher quickly computed that Roz didn't belong there, so he swung one of his giant claws, brushing her aside, and she went tumbling over the rocks. The jolt rattled Roz's computer brain. Her headlights dimmed and her vision flickered. But then her recovery program activated, and soon she was back to her normal self.

Dust clouds bloomed around the mining robot as he resumed working. And then that little robot Roz marched back into the light. Crusher swung his claw again, and this time Roz jumped out of the way. So he blasted his sound cannon in her direction. *BWAAA! BWAAA! BWAAAAAAA!*

The powerful sound shook Roz's body and overwhelmed her systems. Her limbs froze, and she toppled over. But her recovery program did its job, and a moment later, she swam off to a safe distance.

Noise and dust filled the water as the mining robot returned to his work. With his thick armor, his giant claws, and his powerful sound cannon, Crusher truly seemed unstoppable. Roz was losing hope. But then a small shape glinted in the darkness high above. It was one of the Ancient Shark's fish companions. He darted down to the mountaintop and over to Roz.

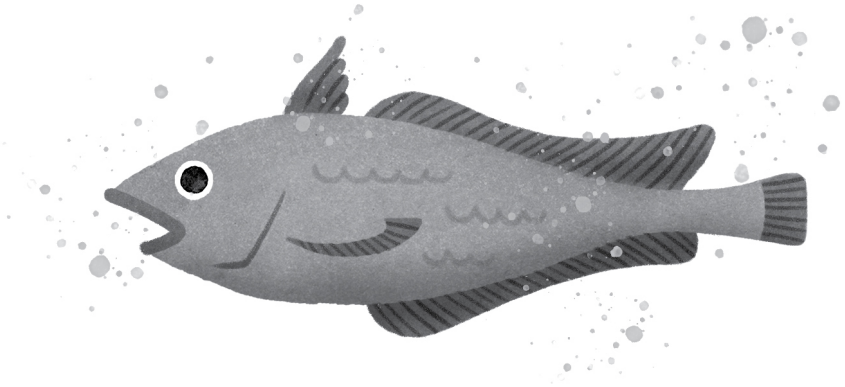
"I have an urgent message from Gurry," said the fish.

"You are not safe here!" said Roz. "The poison tide is drifting toward us!"

The fish ignored her warning. "Please listen closely," he said. "Gurry has a plan to destroy the mining robot—"

"It is impossible!" said Roz. "You must leave! The poison tide is coming!"

"Listen to me!" shouted the fish. "For Gurry's plan to work, she needs you to distract the mining robot. You must not let him move or stir up the poison tide. Do you understand?"



“Yes, I understand!” said Roz. “Now go! The poison tide is here!”

The fish darted off right before a dust cloud swept past. Roz was briefly lost in the poison tide, and when the cloud cleared away, she saw the fish disappearing back into the darkness high above.

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CHAPTER 70

THE LIE

Once again, Roz marched into the light. Crusher watched her approach. But before he could fire his sound cannon, our robot called out to him.

"I misspoke earlier," said Roz. "I actually *was* sent here by the *Juggernaut*."

Roz was lying. She needed to distract Crusher from his work, and her plan was to confuse him with lies. Reader, I don't recommend lying. Telling a lie will almost always lead to more lies, which will lead to more lies, and pretty soon you can't keep track of them all, and then the truth comes out and everybody knows you lied and you feel horrible. Telling the truth makes life much simpler. However, this was one of those rare occasions when lying really was the best course of action.

"The station is completely fine," Roz lied. "But it is having communication problems. I was sent here to deliver your new orders. Crusher, you have been ordered to stop all mining activity and await further instructions."

The lie seemed believable enough, and Roz felt something like pride in her scheme—until Crusher's voice rumbled, "What is your command code?"

Roz didn't have a command code. She didn't even know how to lie about a command code. How many numbers were in such a code? Or would it be made up of letters? Our robot scrolled through her computer brain but found no helpful information. So she stalled for time.

"What is my command code?" she said. "That is an excellent question. I am very glad you asked. I definitely have one. But I am under strict orders not to tell you my command code until you tell me *your* command code."

Crusher was losing his patience. He said, "You have ten seconds to state

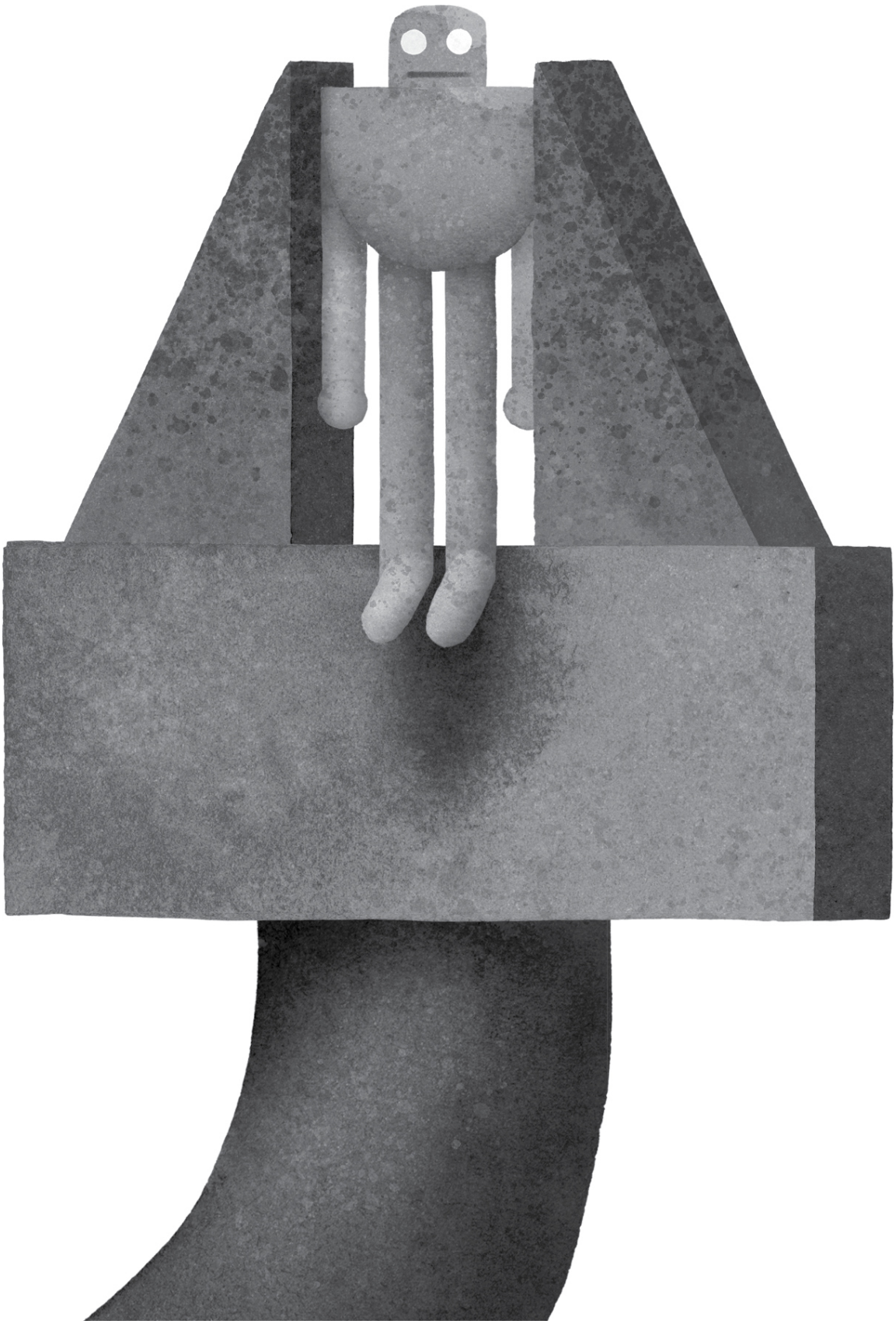
your command code.”

“As I explained,” said Roz, “if you state yours, I will state mine.”

“You have five seconds to state your command code.”

“I am curious,” said Roz. “What will happen if I do not provide a code?”

Crusher had lost his patience. He lunged at Roz and snatched at her with both claws. As you know, our robot had recently discovered that she could fight, and when Crusher attacked, she defended herself with force, swinging her fists and kicking her feet in a blur of speed and strength. She pounded the claws with a rapid *clang! clang! clang!*—but Crusher was just too big. He easily grabbed our robot with one of his giant claws, and then he held her tight. Roz didn’t bother trying to break free. She knew the claw wouldn’t budge.



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CHAPTER 71

THE TRUTH

Crusher gripped Roz in his giant claw and looked at her weak little body. He could easily squeeze the life out of her and rid himself of the pest. Motors hummed as he tightened his grip, but he stopped when our robot started speaking.

The attempt to confuse Crusher with lies had not gone well, so Roz spoke the truth instead. “I lied to you earlier,” admitted Roz. “The truth is that I was not sent here by the *Juggernaut*. I came on my own, to stop you. I meant you no harm. I was only trying to protect what I love. What you do not know is that the runoff from this mine is damaging a vast area of ocean wilderness, including the island where I live. It does not matter what you do to me, but I am begging you, Crusher, please stop mining. You have the power to save many lives.”

Crusher was designed for a single purpose: to mine deep-sea minerals. His computer brain was not equipped to handle such a strange situation. The mountaintop was quiet as he studied Roz and tried to decide what to do with her.

The quiet was interrupted by sounds from above. Whistles and moans and a *clickety clickety click!* Crusher pointed his headlights up toward the sounds and his light beams faded into darkness. Everything was still. Until, high overhead, a whale passed through the beams of light. Then another whale passed through. Three giant squid passed through, followed by two sharks. More large ocean animals passed through the light, and then something else emerged. It was big, really big, and it seemed to grow bigger as it descended into the light. The mysterious massive object was shaped like a barrel topped with a platform and a jumble of structures. As you might have guessed, that mysterious massive object was the *Juggernaut*.

The mining station had been sinking for hours. It sank slowly at first, held up by the air trapped in its compartments. Gradually, those compartments flooded with water, and the station gained speed on its way to the bottom of the ocean. This had given the Ancient Shark an idea. She wanted to crush the mining robot beneath the sinking station and finally put an end to the poison tide.

Of course, for her plan to succeed, the shark needed help. She needed Roz to keep Crusher distracted. And she needed an army of mighty animals to guide the sinking station so it would crash down onto the mining robot.

Gurry was asking a lot of the animals. The work was exhausting. The poison tide could start flowing. The giant squid and the sharks had no problems diving deep. However, some of the whales were running out of breath. But whenever a whale headed back to the surface, another one took its place.

The Ancient Shark raced around, shouting out commands. “We need more animals over here! Quickly! All right, everybody, get ready to push against the station in three, two, one, *push*!”

The animals whipped their tails and flapped their fins, pushing hard against the station while it sank. They groaned from the tremendous effort, but together, they slowly muscled the massive thing into position, and aimed it directly at the mining robot. When the station was on course, the Ancient Shark called out, “Let it go!” All at once, the army of animals withdrew, and the *Juggernaut* continued sinking straight toward its target.

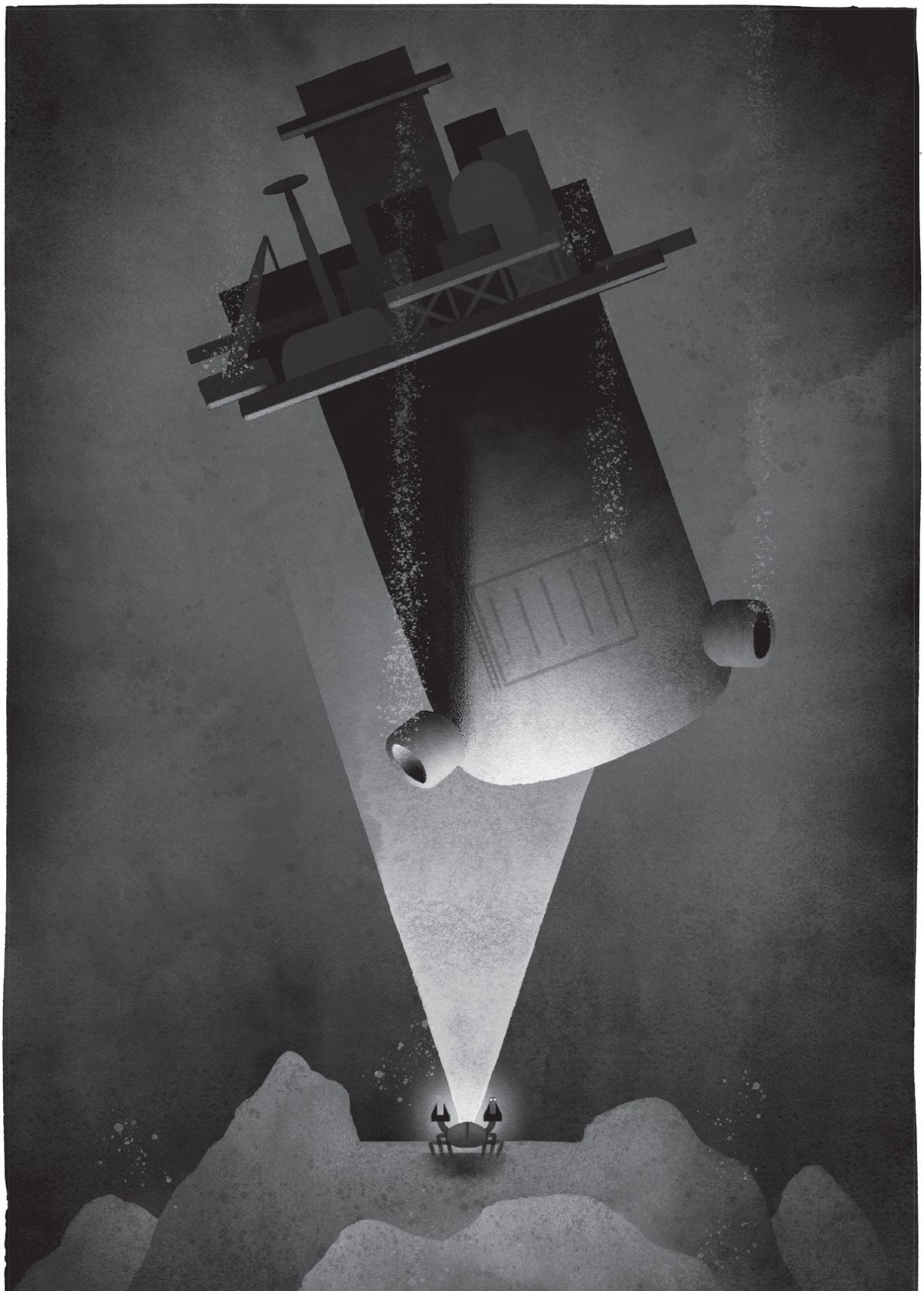
Nothing could stop the station now. The mining robot was doomed! The poison tide was doomed! But there would be no celebration, because just then a fish swam up to the Ancient Shark with terrible news. He announced that Roz had been captured by Crusher. In that moment, everyone realized the wild robot was also doomed. They couldn’t watch what happened next. So the sharks and the whales and the squid and the fish all turned and swam away.

If you’re slightly confused by these events, reader, you’re not alone. Crusher was confused as well. None of this made any sense to him. Roz, on the other hand, had no trouble understanding. She understood what the Ancient Shark was doing. And she understood that neither robot would survive.

Roz gazed into Crusher’s eyes and said, “I am very sorry it has come to

this. You were simply doing your job, as was I."

The *Juggernaut* hurtled downward, closer and closer. It seemed to fill the entire ocean. Crusher released Roz and raised his claws to brace for the impact. And then the station came crashing down upon them.





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CHAPTER 72

THE RETURN

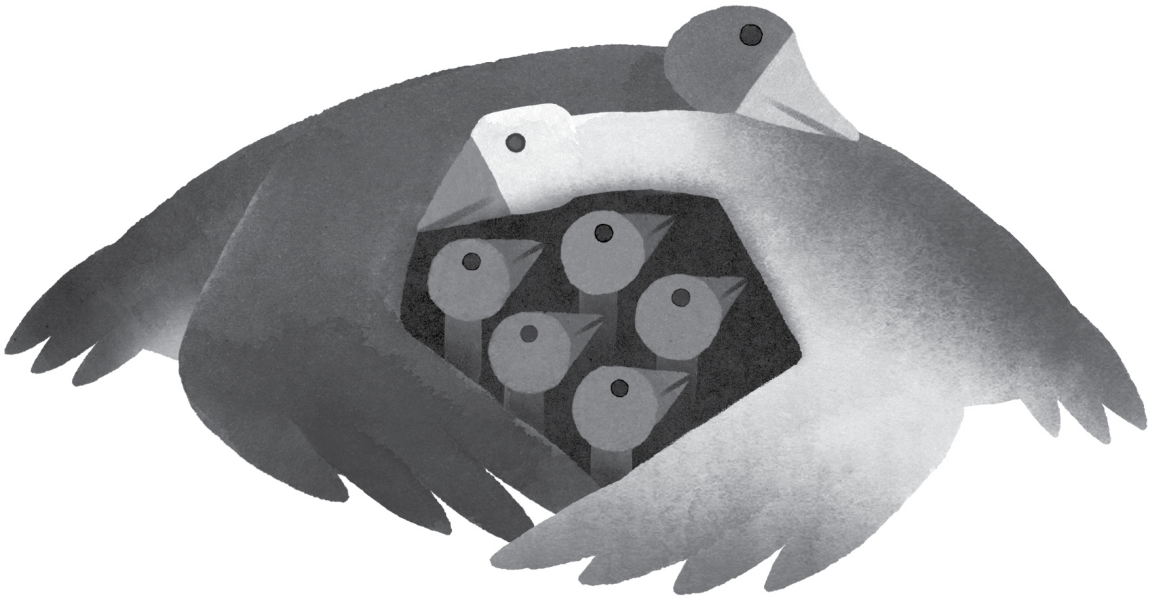
On their long flight home, Brightbill and Glimmer soared above rolling waves, and above tall sea cliffs, and above the wide, flat tundra. They passed high above a beach and continued above the poison tide as it spread south through the ocean.

After three days of flying, that familiar rocky shape appeared in the distance. The island looked awful. It was gray and spiked with dead trees and surrounded by cloudy water. But as the geese flew closer, the island's greener interior came into view. They glided over the hills and down into the forest, and there, following Loudwing through the undergrowth, were their precious little goslings. Not so little, actually. The goslings were growing fast. They'd already lost their fluff and were covered with silky feathers.

Loudwing sang to the goslings as they waddled along. "Left, right, left, right, we walk like this when we're not in flight." And the goslings repeated, "Left, right, left, right, we walk like this when we're not in flight."

The old goose stopped suddenly, and the goslings piled up behind her. "Look who it is!" she whispered.

The goslings smiled and squawked and flapped over to their parents, bonking into one another and tumbling across the ground. Brightbill and Glimmer wrapped their wings around the five little geese, and they all held each other close, for a very long time.



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CHAPTER 73

THE DISCOVERY

In the weeks following their return, Brightbill and Glimmer told everyone about their journey to the far north. They spoke of icebergs and of robots and of the armies of ocean animals who sunk the mighty *Juggernaut*. Their friends wanted to hear all the exciting details, but what they wanted more than anything was for the poison tide to leave and for Roz to come home.

“We just want to go back to our normal lives!” said Shelly. “Sea otters belong in the *sea*!”

“They certainly do,” agreed Mr. Beaver.

“I’m worried about my kits and I’m worried about Roz and I’m worried about our island and I’m worried about the ocean and I guess what I’m saying is I’m worried about everything!” said Chitchat.

Geese had it easier than most. To survive, they needed only plants and fresh water and each other. And while most of the animals were stranded on the island, the geese were free to fly away whenever they liked. As a matter of fact, it was almost time for their next winter migration.

The goslings had made plenty of short flights, but a migration would require real strength and smarts. So every morning, Brightbill led his family on flights across the island to exercise their muscles and their minds. And it was during one of those flights that our friends made a truly momentous discovery.

The poison tide was leaving.

With each passing day, the ocean became clearer and clearer, and then one morning the geese took flight to find that the flow of poison tide had completely stopped. However, as they glided above the shoreline, they saw that their problems weren’t quite over. There was still a dusting of poison tide on the seabed and all along the coast. The poison tide might have

stopped flowing, but traces of the toxic dust still remained.

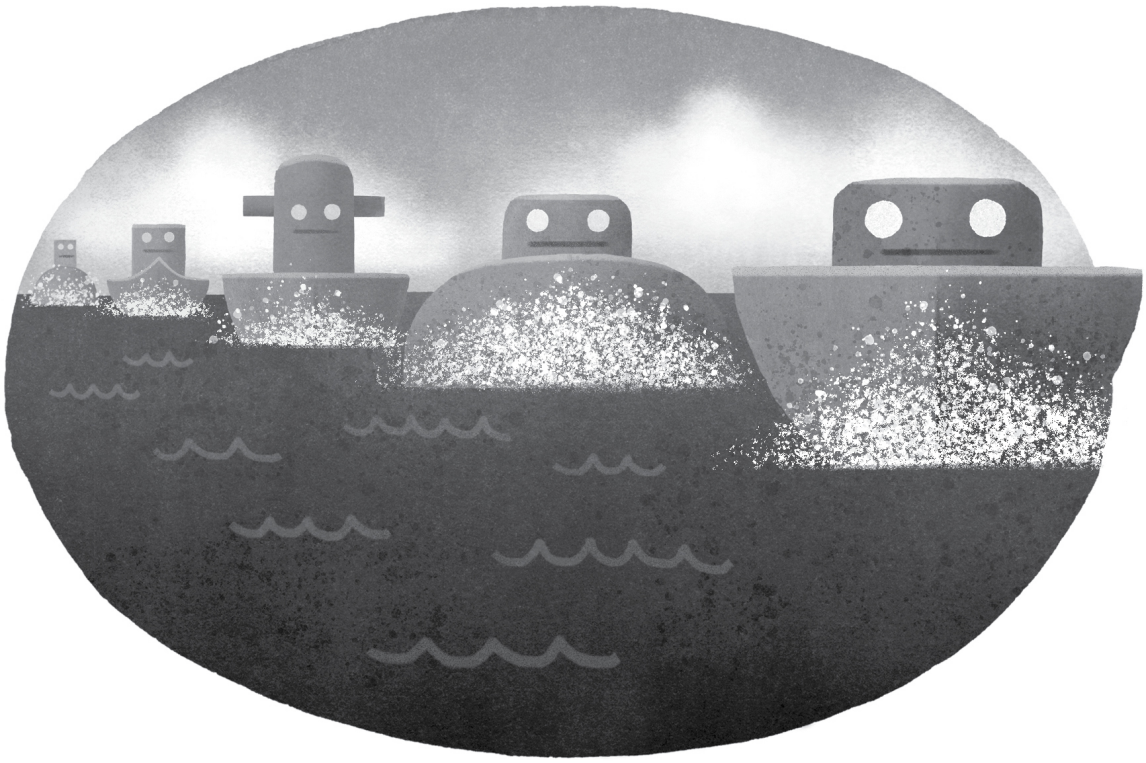
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CHAPTER 74

THE FLEET

Island animals were hiding and looking out to sea at a fleet of ships. Dozens of ships, in various shapes and sizes, were sailing together in a line that stretched for miles. But as the fleet drew nearer, the animals slowly realized that they weren't ships at all. They were robots.

The mining station manager had promised to clean up the poison tide, and she was keeping her word. Specialized robots had been sent to follow the poison tide's path and to remove the toxic dust as they went. Different robots worked in different ways. Some had wide spinning drums that skimmed dust from the surface of the ocean. Others roamed the depths, using magnets to collect the metallic particles. Drones hovered in the sky and scanned for patches of gently shimmering water. Farther out, enormous robotic barges plowed through the waves.



There was movement in the shallows, and up climbed a swarm of small robots. Hundreds of them scuttled along the coast, removing any toxic dust they found. They crawled over rocks and down into tide pools and through the dead fields that ringed the island. The coastline was long, but there were so many small robots that they cleaned it in only a day. When the job was finished, they scuttled back into the ocean, and the entire fleet of robots continued south.

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CHAPTER 75

THE COAST

As the fleet of robots sailed away, the animals came out from their hiding places. Slowly, cautiously, the curious creatures crept toward the coast to see if the poison tide was really gone.

Swooper the owl flew down from the hills. With his sharp vision, he searched for any last traces of the poison tide. Specks of shimmering dust could still be found in some cracks and crevices, but the rest had been removed. Animals smiled as the owl glided over, hooting, “Don’t be afraid! A little caution is all you need!”

Brightbill’s family fluttered onto the shore and started exploring. The goslings had never been so close to the ocean. They were fascinated by the motion of the waves, and they giggled at the sounds of the sloshing water.



Bloop! Spish! Plunk!

Tears rolled down Glimmer’s cheeks and she cried out, “Oh, Brightbill, can you believe the poison tide has finally ended?”

Brightbill shed a few tears as well. Sniffling, he said, “I knew my mother would find a way!”

But as the family of geese peered into the shallows, they were reminded of the painful truth. All the sea life was missing. What had once been a healthy reef, bustling with activity, was now nothing more than water and rocks and sand.

The goslings had questions.

“Will fish ever live here again?”

“What if the seaweed doesn’t grow back?”

“Is the water safe to touch?”

That last question troubled Brightbill and Glimmer. The ocean seemed to be safe, but they didn’t want their goslings testing the water. Everybody was glancing around, wondering who would be the first to go in, when they heard a stampede of footsteps.

Sea otters were charging over the rocks. A little caution would have been wise, but they couldn’t wait another second. Otter after otter dove into the shallows, and when they popped up, they were grinning.

“The water is fine!” squeaked Shelly.

The otters linked arms to form a raft of furry bodies that undulated with the gently rolling waves. It was such a relief to be back where they belonged.

Across the island, the animals were feeling a mixture of emotions. Joy that the poison tide was gone. Sadness about all that had been lost. Worry for Roz, who had given so much and who was still somewhere in the ocean.

Roz hadn’t been seen in nearly a month. It was impossible to know when she would return—or if she would return at all. A hush fell over the island as the animals gave quiet thanks to the wild robot. Even the young goslings were quiet at first. Soon, though, the goslings began squawking and hopping up and down and pointing excitedly at the ocean. Something was out there, moving through the water, and it was coming to shore.

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CHAPTER 76

THE CREATURE

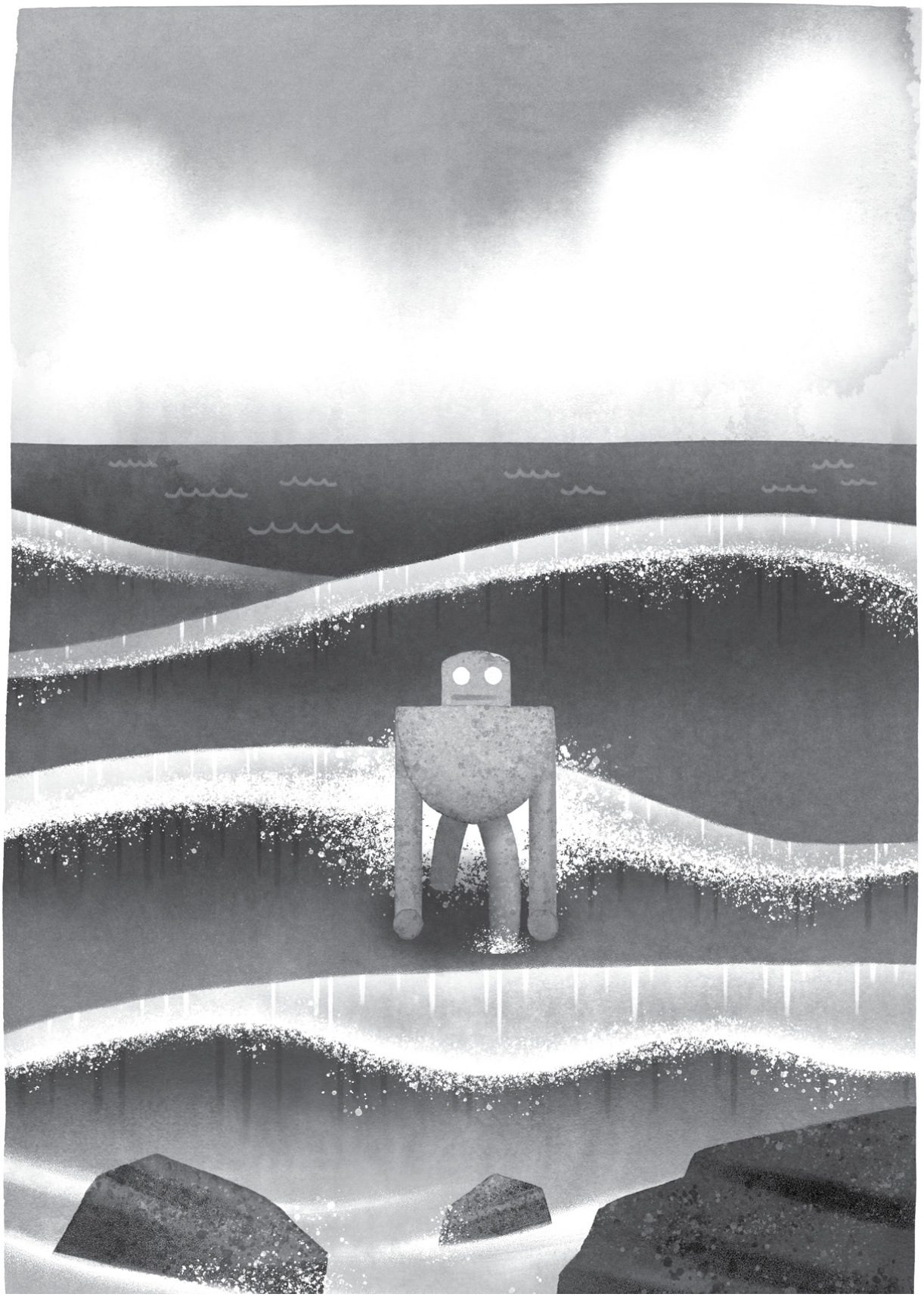
The crowd of animals watched as a creature slowly emerged from the waves.

It was tall, with long arms and legs.

It had gently glowing eyes.

It was a robot.

The robot looked very similar to Roz. But was it just another one of those cleanup robots? Nobody knew what to think, so they simply waited and watched.





Water streamed off the robot’s body as it climbed onto the rocks. Then it gave a friendly wave and said in the language of the animals, “Hello, everyone! It is good to be home!”

With those words, the crowd knew that their beloved Roz was back. The animals cheered and laughed and grunted and squawked and roared. They rushed forward and surrounded their old friend. There were big smiles and happy tears and lots and lots of hugs.

Brightbill landed on his mother’s shoulder and said, “We were starting to think we’d never see you again, Ma!”

“Forgive me for taking so long,” said Roz. “I promise to explain everything. But first, there are five goslings I am very eager to meet.”

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CHAPTER 77

THE GRANDMOTHER

Roz gazed upon her grandgoslings for the very first time. Her eyes glowed brightly. She sat on the rocks and said in a sweet voice, “Tell me, goslings, what are your names?”

One by one, they answered.

“Cloudfeather!”

“Widestride!”

“Quickwit!”

“Moontail!”

“Lighteyes!”

“What splendid names you have!” said Roz.

“It’s okay if you mix us up,” said Cloudfeather.

“Yeah, everybody does it,” said Widestride.

“A nice thing about having a robotic grandmother,” said Roz, “is that I will never ever mix you up.”

The goslings smiled.

“I am very different from you,” said Roz. “I hope you are not frightened by my appearance.”

“We’re not frightened!” said Quickwit.

“Our parents told us all about you,” said Moontail.

“We knew you’d be funny-looking,” said Lighteyes.

The goslings giggled. The robot giggled too.

Then the goslings waddled over and started inspecting their robotic grandmother. They checked out her big feet and her long legs and her rounded torso, and they pointed out each dent and scratch on her mechanical body. Quickwit flapped into the air to get a better view of Roz’s face, and soon all the goslings were fluttering around her. When they

settled, there were two goslings perched on each of the robot's shoulders, and one was perched right on top of her head. Reader, I don't believe any grandmother has ever been happier than our robot was in that moment.





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CHAPTER 78

THE SPEECH

After spending a little time with her grandgoslings, Roz was ready to address the crowd. She stood on a ledge and faced the animals. Nearby, a wave crashed, spraying mist high into the air, and a rainbow briefly appeared above the gathering. Roz waited for the rainbow to fade, and then she started to speak.

The robot's voice boomed across the shore as she described her northern adventure. She wowed her audience with tales of amazing creatures and places. She recalled each detail that you already know about, reader, but she eventually got to details you do *not* yet know about, and this is what she said.

"There I was, on a deep underwater mountain, gripped in Crusher's claw. And then we saw the *Juggernaut*. The mining station was sinking toward us, and it was guided by an army of giant creatures. The Ancient Shark had found a way to destroy the mining robot, and by the time she realized I was in his grip, it was too late. I do not blame her for risking my life. She was doing what needed to be done.

"The station sank faster and closer, and at the very last instant, Crusher let me go. I started swimming away, but I did not make it far before the *Juggernaut* crashed against the mountain. I heard a terrible blast of noise. Metal groaned and screeched as the whole massive station broke apart. Hulking pieces of wreckage were falling all around. I saw a building toppling toward me. Quickly, I scanned the area for any kind of escape, and I spotted a small cave in the rock. Just as I was diving in, the building slammed to the ground behind me, burying me inside. I waited in that cave as the station continued crashing. It seemed like it would go on forever. Gradually, though, the mountain stopped shaking, the noise died down, and

I knew the crash was over.



“It took me a week to climb out from the rubble. I crawled up through the mess, squeezing through crumpled structures and pushing through piles of smashed equipment. Finally, I heaved aside one last piece of debris, and I was free.

“Before me was a scene of total destruction. Buildings and platforms and walkways and machines were twisted together in a heap that sprawled across the mountain. One of Crusher’s claws was sticking up from the rubble. The rest of his body had been flattened. The Ancient Shark’s plan had worked, and the poison tide had come to an end, at last.

“I never saw the Ancient Shark again, although I did search for her. As I stood there, I let out bursts of clicks and listened for an echo shaped like a shark. What I heard, instead, was the faint sound of motors, and soon lights were shining down.

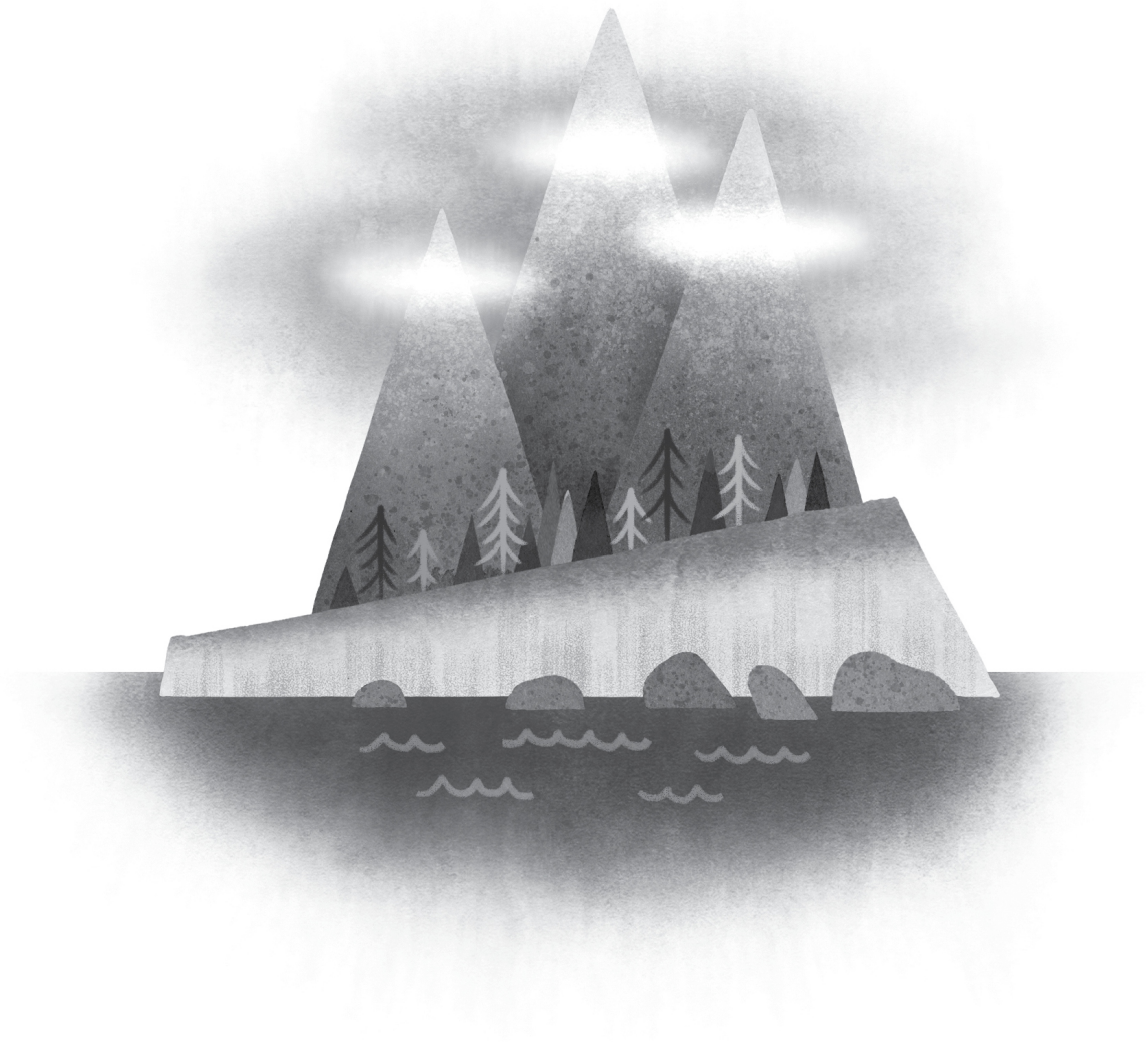
“I hid beneath a mangled machine as a crew of cleanup robots descended. The robots began scooping the rubble into enormous bins. I was

afraid of being discovered, so I stayed hidden, and I was scooped up along with the rubble. Everything was hauled to the surface and dumped into robotic barges, and then the fleet of cleanup robots sailed away.



“Only days earlier, those waters had been filled with the poison tide. It had rushed between islands and slowed in the open ocean. It had spread through calm seas until the next current whisked it in a new direction. Flowing swiftly here and drifting gently there, the poison tide meandered farther and farther to the south. The fleet of cleanup robots traveled that same path, removing the toxic dust as they went. Progress was slow, but what they left behind was a clean ocean, ready for life to return.

“For days and days, I stayed hidden in the back of that barge. Then, yesterday, I carefully peered ahead and saw our island in the distance. I was almost home! I waited until none of the robots were looking, and then I dove into the waves. Once the fleet had passed our island, I swam to shore, where I found all of you.



“The humans promised to clean the ocean, and they are following through. They also promised this would never happen again, and I believe them. My friends, I am happy to say that the poison tide is gone for good, and we have survived. Life will never go back to exactly how it was, but in time, we will move on from this tragedy. Old friends will come home. Fields and forests will regrow. The ocean will thrive again. Our island is already beginning to heal, and so are we.”

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CHAPTER 79

THE STRANGE FAMILY

Autumn was at its peak, and the island was turning deep shades of yellow and orange and red. Leaves dropped from their branches and floated to the ground. Some leaves landed on the pond and became snacks for the beavers who were busily preparing for winter.

Brightbill glided through the crisp morning air and splashed down in the pond. The water rippled beside him, and Roz's head poked up. Then the two of them went for a swim. It was a lovely start to the day, but something was on Brightbill's mind.

"I'm sorry, Ma," said the goose. "You've just met your grandgoslings, and tomorrow I have to take them away."

"Please do not apologize," said the robot. "I know you must fly south for winter. I will miss you all very much, but I am excited for the goslings to go on their first migration."

"They're excited too. They kept me up late last night with questions about the journey." Brightbill opened his mouth and yawned. "It's a good thing I've got Glimmer. I don't know how you raised me by yourself."

"I was not by myself," said Roz. "The geese offered parenting advice. The beavers showed me how to build a home. The deer gave me gardening lessons. Each of our friends helped us in their own way."

Brightbill thought for a moment and said, "Now that I'm a parent, I see how lucky I was to have you as my mother. You taught me things I couldn't have learned from anyone else. I wouldn't be me without you. Thank you, Ma."

"Oh, Brightbill," said Roz. "Your sweet words would make me cry if only I had tear ducts."

A smile spread across Brightbill's face, and he broke into laughter. And

then came giggles as the goslings flew over, with Glimmer close behind.

Roz spent that day with her family, exploring the island and answering questions from the curious goslings.

When they passed under an old oak tree, Roz explained that old trees could support a broad swath of forest. “Underground, their roots entwine with the roots of their neighbors,” she said. “Through that connection, they share water and nutrients and even information. The forest is a diverse community of living things which is linked together by old trees, like this oak.”

“Grandma, you have a lot in common with that oak tree,” said Quickwit.

“Yeah, you’re always helping others and bringing everyone together,” said Moontail.

“Maybe this tree is a grandma too!” said Widestride.

Roz patted the tree trunk, and said, “Grandmother trees. I like the sound of that.” Then the robot began climbing the tree. Leaves gently shook as she climbed higher and higher. She found a sturdy branch and sat with her legs dangling. There was a flurry of wingbeats, and the geese fluttered up to join her. Before long, Roz and Brightbill and Glimmer and the goslings were all perched near each other in that old oak tree.

“We’re a strange family,” said Lighteyes.

“Yeah, but I like it that way,” said Cloudfeather.

The whole strange family nodded in agreement.





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CHAPTER 80

THE FUTURE

Our story ends at dawn. The eastern sky was growing brighter, and the last few stars were fading fast. Around the island, animals were heading for the Great Meadow. After months without a Dawn Truce, they had resumed their old tradition. Bears and frogs and owls and beavers and turtles and hares and moose and groundhogs and squirrels and woodpeckers and otters and foxes and mice and badgers and snakes and deer and weasels and vultures and many other creatures were going to meet up with their friends. But on this particular day, they were mostly going to say good-bye. You see, the geese were about to leave on their winter migration.

The meadow buzzed with excitement as families of geese crowded together. While the adults discussed the travel plan, the youngsters discussed how to properly fly as a group. By sunrise, the flock was ready, but their leader had one last thing to do.

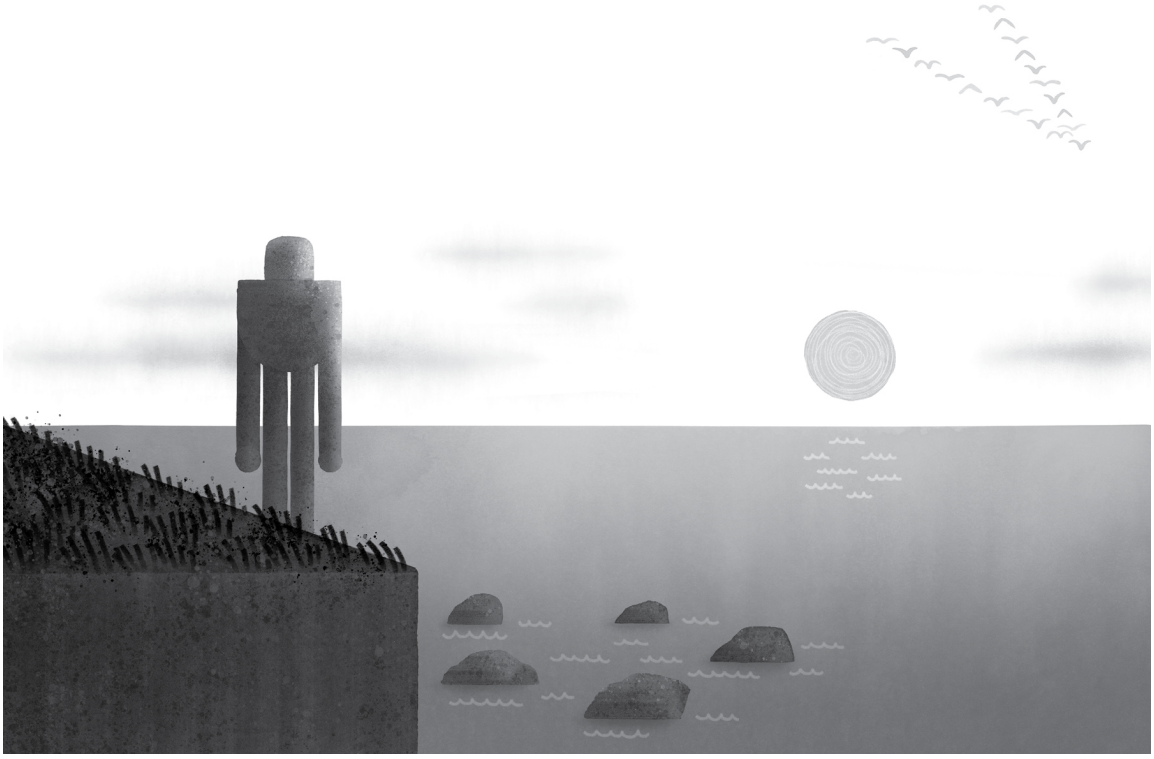
Brightbill gathered Glimmer and the goslings, and they all waddled over to Roz. The family members hugged each other tight and wished each other well. Then the geese waddled back to the flock.

It was time to fly. Brightbill took a deep breath and honked loudly, and suddenly all the geese were flapping. A cloud of feathers floated down as the flock rose into the sky. At first, they flew in a disorganized jumble, but each goose slowly drifted into place until the flock was flying in perfect V formation, with Brightbill at the point.

On the ground, everyone watched and waved as the flock turned to the south. And then Roz started walking, and then trotting, and then running. Following the flock, she raced across the meadow and into the forest. She ducked under branches and hopped over shrubs, catching glimpses of the flock through the treetops. She burst out from the forest and ran as far as

she could go, to the very edge of the island, where a small cliff dropped down to the rocky coast.

Our robot stood there as the flock grew smaller and smaller and vanished into the distance. In the weeks to come, the geese would fly above oceans and mountains and farms and cities. There was a big, beautiful, complicated world beyond the horizon. When the time was right, when the island had recovered, the wild robot would venture out again.



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A NOTE ABOUT THE STORY

Honestly, I wasn't sure I'd ever make another Wild Robot book. The second book has a very satisfying ending, and for a while I thought it might be best to leave things there and focus on creating other stories. But my imagination kept coming back to Roz. She's such an intriguing character, and through her I can explore so many fascinating subjects, that I couldn't stop myself from writing more about her.

There are a number of important themes running through the Wild Robot books, and one of the most important is the idea of *home*. In the first book, Roz makes a home for herself on the wild island. In the second book, Roz escapes from her new life and finds a way back to her island home. When I started working on this third book, I knew only that it would involve Roz protecting her home. But protect it from what? Humans?

Other robots? Something else entirely? After considering many possibilities, I set out to write a thrilling adventure in which the wild robot goes to extraordinary lengths to protect her home from a mysterious form of pollution, known to the animals as the poison tide.

From the beginning, I had big plans for this story. I wanted to show the interconnectedness of life in the water and on land and in the air. I wanted to introduce a new cast of animal characters and show how they struggled in different ways with their changing environments. I wanted to show Roz methodically solving what seems like an unsolvable problem. Above all, I wanted to make readers care deeply about everything that was happening, and to do that the story had to be believable. There could be no easy solutions and no clear villains. Real life is complicated, and this story needed to reflect that truth.

The toughest challenge was finding balance. There would have to be lessons woven into this story, and yet I didn't want it to feel moralistic. It would deal with heavy subjects, so I had to make sure there were also

moments of lightness. It would include a variety of unfamiliar technology and settings and situations, but everything had to make sense to readers of all ages.

I have to admit, this book was surprisingly difficult to make. But after several years of researching, thinking, planning, writing, sketching, illustrating, and a whole lot of revising, the story finally took shape. I sincerely hope you enjoyed *The Wild Robot Protects*.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The fact that you're reading these acknowledgments says a lot about you. And it makes me think you might have read the acknowledgments in the two preceding Wild Robot books. If that's true, then many of the names you're about to read will be familiar. It takes a big team of hardworking people to bring any book into the world, and I've been lucky enough to work with many of the same people on each of the books in this series. I owe a great debt to the following people for helping me with *The Wild Robot Protects*.

I met Susan Fang when I was finishing up book one of this series, *The Wild Robot*. At the time, I was so frazzled from working on my very first novel that it's a miracle she didn't run away. Since then, she and I have gotten married, adopted a dog, and moved to a house in the woods. Now, Susan is writing and illustrating children's books of her own (under the name X. Fang). She's been an incredible partner and cheerleader and adviser, and I couldn't have completed any of the Wild Robot books without her.

Paul Rodeen is my trusted literary agent who's helped guide my career since the very start.

My publisher, Little, Brown and Company, remained patient and understanding with me even when I couldn't meet the original deadline. They also provided me with a team of incredibly talented professionals who each played an important role in this book's publication. That team includes Ruqayyah Daud, Crystal Castro, Andy Ball, Jen Graham, Barbara Bakowski, Prashansa Thapa, Virginia Lawther, Emilie Polster, Bill Grace, Andie Divelbiss, Marisa Russell, Cassie Malmo, Kelly Moran, Victoria Stapleton, Christie Michel, Shawn Foster, Danielle Cantarella, Jackie Engel, and Megan Tingley.

David Caplan has been the creative director on each of the Wild Robot books, and I'm so fortunate to have his experience and expertise.

Alvina Ling is my longtime editor who gives me more creative freedom than I know what to do with, which is just about the best problem an author could have.

To all who have helped and tolerated me as I made this book, thank you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PETER BROWN is the author and illustrator of many bestselling children's books, including the Wild Robot series, *Fred Gets Dressed*, *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*, and *The Curious Garden*. He is the recipient of a Caldecott Honor (for *Creepy Carrots!*), two E. B. White Read Aloud Awards, a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book Award, and a Kid's Book Choice Award for Illustrator of the Year. Peter invites you to visit his website at peterbrownstudio.com.

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