

A Day at Liberty Bay

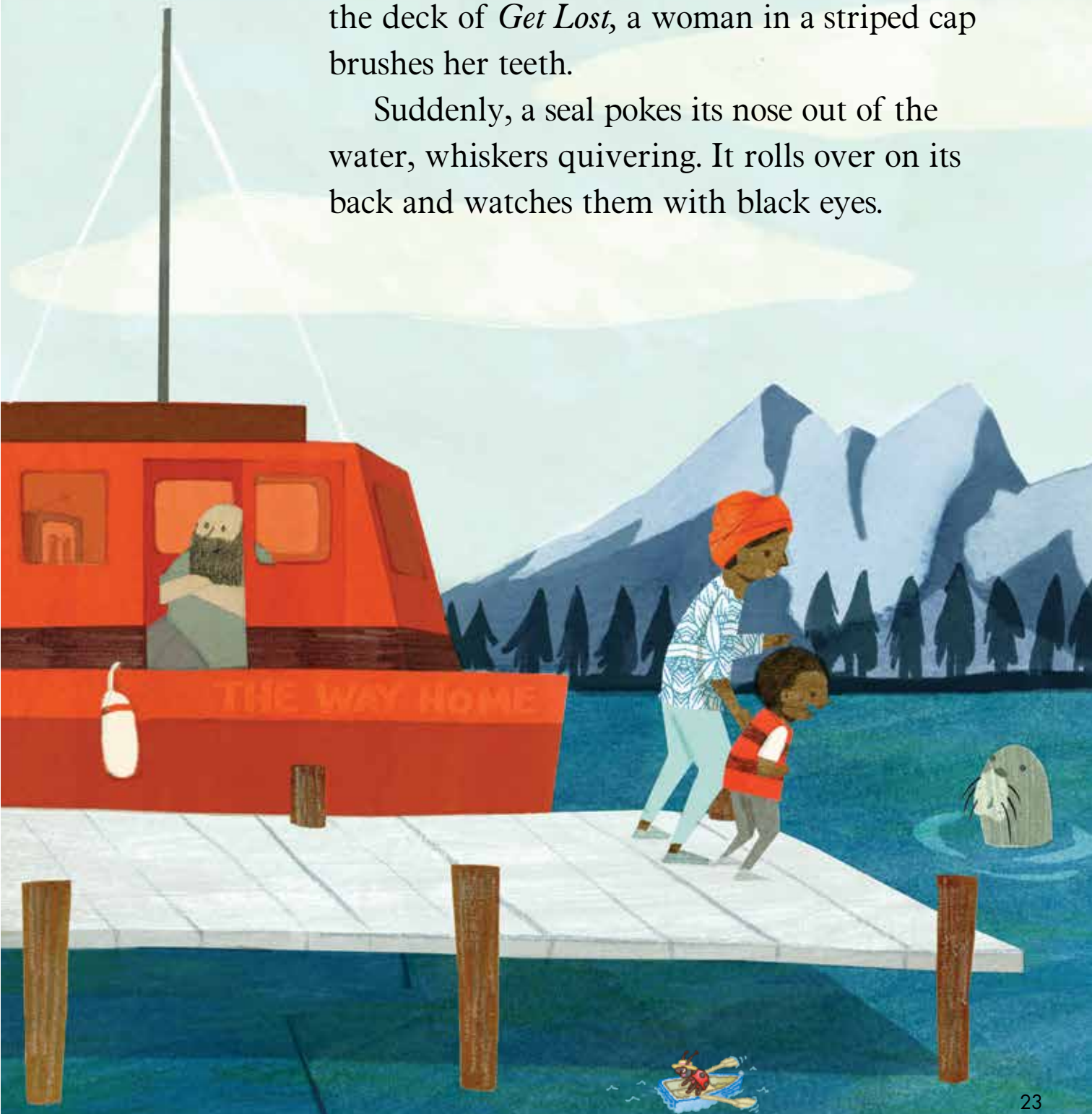
by Kimberly Long Cockroft ✨ Art by Isabel Roxas

“**W**hat else do you want to write?” Mom asks. Ben sighs, kicking the last of the unpacked boxes. He thinks of Leo far away, back in the town where he used to live.

“Let’s go for a walk,” says Mom. They step out into the misty morning and walk past a row of houses, through the park, down to the pier at Liberty Bay.

Mom helps Ben into a red life jacket. They read the names of boats as they walk past. Inside *The Way Home*, a bearded man watches TV. On the deck of *Get Lost*, a woman in a striped cap brushes her teeth.

Suddenly, a seal pokes its nose out of the water, whiskers quivering. It rolls over on its back and watches them with black eyes.





Ben peeks over the edge of the pier, looking for the seal. But it is gone. Tiny sea jellies float in the clear water like ghosts. Ben wishes he could touch a red sea star clinging to a rock. Would it be rough or soft? He dips his fingers into the icy cold water and shivers.

A little dog tied outside *Lazy Day* whines. He wags his tail, wanting Ben to pet him.

A girl with freckles on her nose pops out of the boat and waves a bright yellow bucket. “He likes to be scratched behind the ears. I’m Samantha.” The dog licks Ben’s face, and Samantha laughs. “His name is Charley. He’s five. How old are you?”

Ben wipes dog slobber off his face. “I’m six.”

“Me, too! Do you want to go down to the beach?”

Ben nods, but inside he misses Leo more than ever. His mom, chatting with Samantha’s mom, waves. “Go explore! Have fun!”

Samantha, Ben, and Charley climb down the steps to the rocky beach. Shallow pools glint in the sunshine.

“Ugh, it smells like rotten fish!” Ben groans, holding his nose.

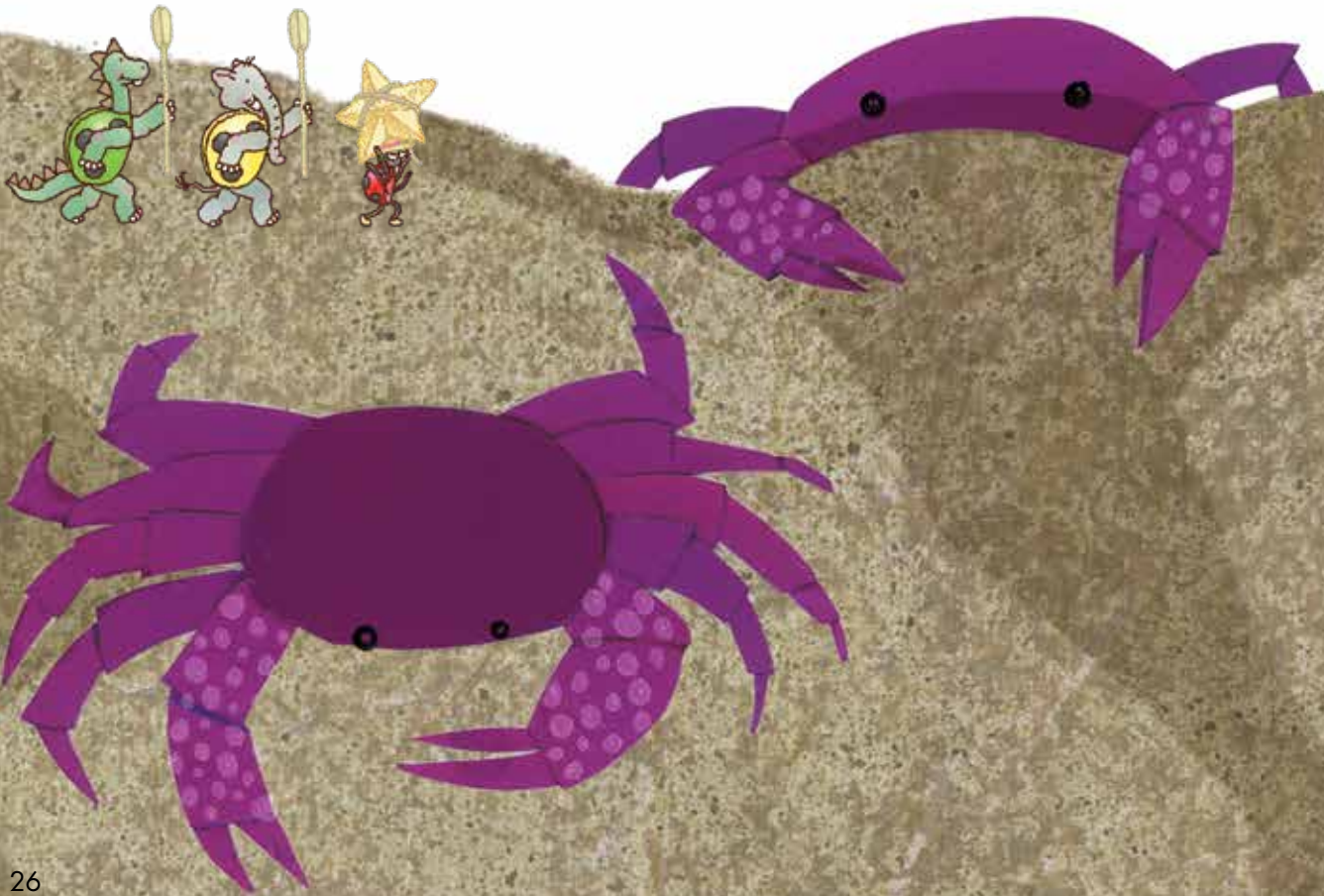


“It smells like the beach.” Samantha laughs. She flips over a gray rock and a clutch of crabs scatter. But she does not scream. Instead, she carefully scoops them into her hand. “They’re called purple shore crabs,” she says. “Come and look.” Charley sniffs curiously. Then he runs back up the sand and rolls around on his back.

“Crabs make Charley crazy,” Samantha says.

Ben steps closer to peer at the crabs in Samantha’s hand, waving their tiny pincers in the air. “Won’t they pinch you?”

“These little guys?” Samantha shrugs. “Not if you’re fast.” She gently drops one into the yellow bucket.



Samantha and Ben make a sand house for the crabs, with a big swimming pool and a shell slide. They make a seaweed necklace for Charley, but Charley tries to eat it.



Then they find a piece of driftwood. Ben makes a sail with a stick and a big leaf.

“Let’s send a crab on a journey,” he says.

Samantha giggles. “This crab looks brave. Maybe she has an aunt in Japan, and she wants to visit her for supper. Let’s call her Captain Sammy—”

“—the Fearless Crabby!” Ben laughs.

They put Captain Sammy the Fearless Crabby on the driftwood boat. Ben wades into the water and gives the boat a little push out onto Liberty Bay.

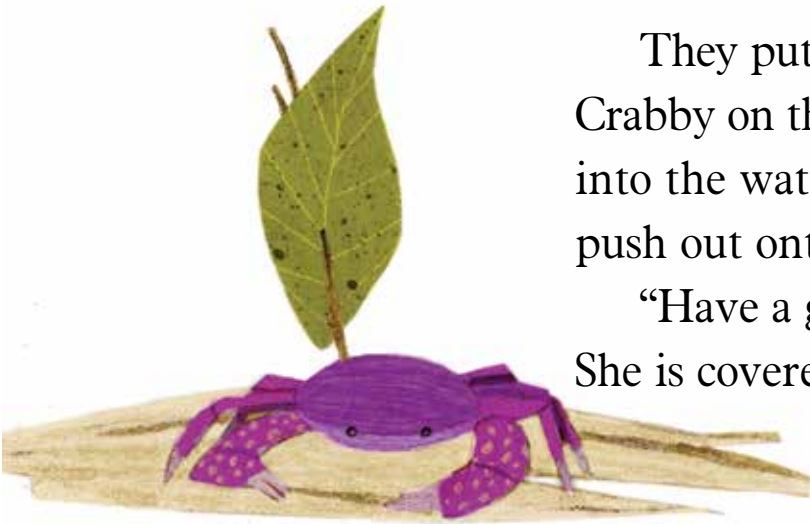
“Have a good trip!” Samantha shouts. She is covered in mud. Ben is covered in mud. Charley is covered in mud, too.

Samantha roars. “I’m a Mud Monster!”

Ben roars back. “I’m muddier!” But Charley is the muddiest monster of all. He barks and wags his tail. They do a wild Mud Monster dance on the sand.

Barnacles blink and seagulls laugh, *haaaa! Haaaa!*

From the steps, Ben’s mom waves. “Time to go!”



“See you soon, Ben,” Samantha says.


“Just one more thing,” Ben says. “Have you ever touched a sea star?”

Samantha smiles. “Sure. I’ve touched tons. You will, too, because you live here now.”

Dear Leo,

I had a good day. This girl named Samantha caught crabs, but they didn’t pinch her. Her dog, Charley, likes to eat seaweed. Yuck! We sent a crab on a boat to Japan. Soon I will find a sea star to touch. When I do, I will tell you all about it.

Love,

Ben 



It is very important to be gentle with all animals that live in the sea or in tidal pools, and to ask a grownup before touching them. Ben and Samantha were careful not to step on any animals. After they enjoyed looking at them, they always put the animals back where they found them—except Captain Sammy the Fearless Crabby, who probably scuttled off the boat and back under a rock as fast as she could!