

Sea Star

by Buffy Silverman
art by Diane Blasius

Sea Star grips the rocky ocean bottom near shore. Waves crash over her, but she holds on tight. Tiny suckers underneath her five arms keep her in place. The suckers are on the tips of hundreds of little tubes that Sea Star uses as feet to crawl along the ocean floor.

The ocean waves carry the smell of clams to her. Sea Star is always ready for a meal. Her muscles pull water inside her body. Her tube feet fill like little balloons, and their suckers grab onto the sea floor. Then Sea Star squeezes the water out of

some of her tube feet to pull herself forward. By pumping water in and out, Sea Star creeps closer and closer to the smell of clams.

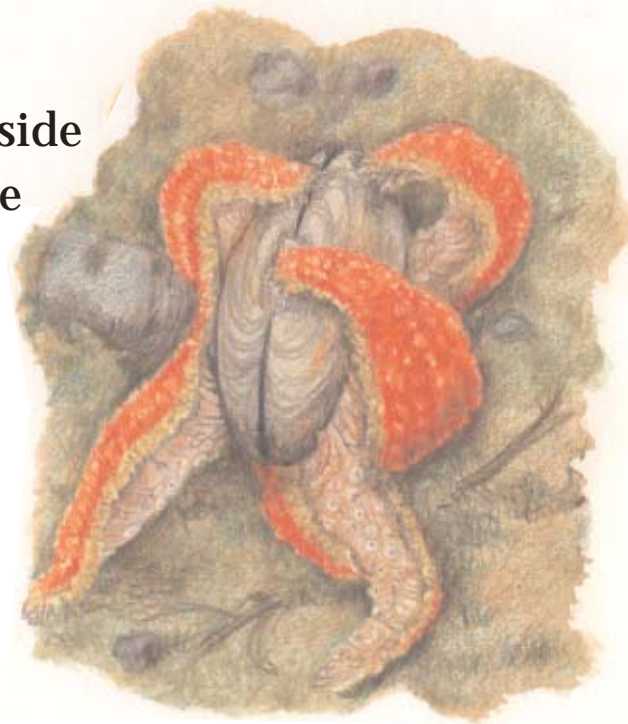
When Sea Star reaches her goal, she climbs on top of a clam. The clam snaps its two shells closed, hiding its soft body. Clamping on with her tube feet, Sea Star tries to pry the shells open. She pulls and pulls, but the clam's strong muscles hold tight. Finally, Sea Star budes the shells apart.

*A closeup look
at tube feet.*

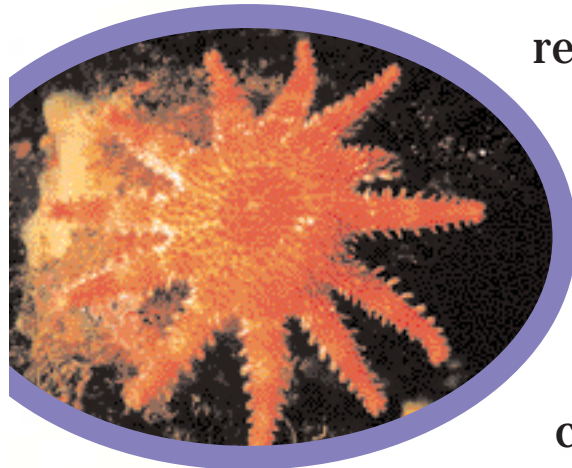


Sea Star flips her stomach out through the mouth on her underside and into the tiny gap between the shells. She squirts chemicals that soften the clam's body. When the clam turns soupy, she swallows her meal. All that remains are two empty shells.

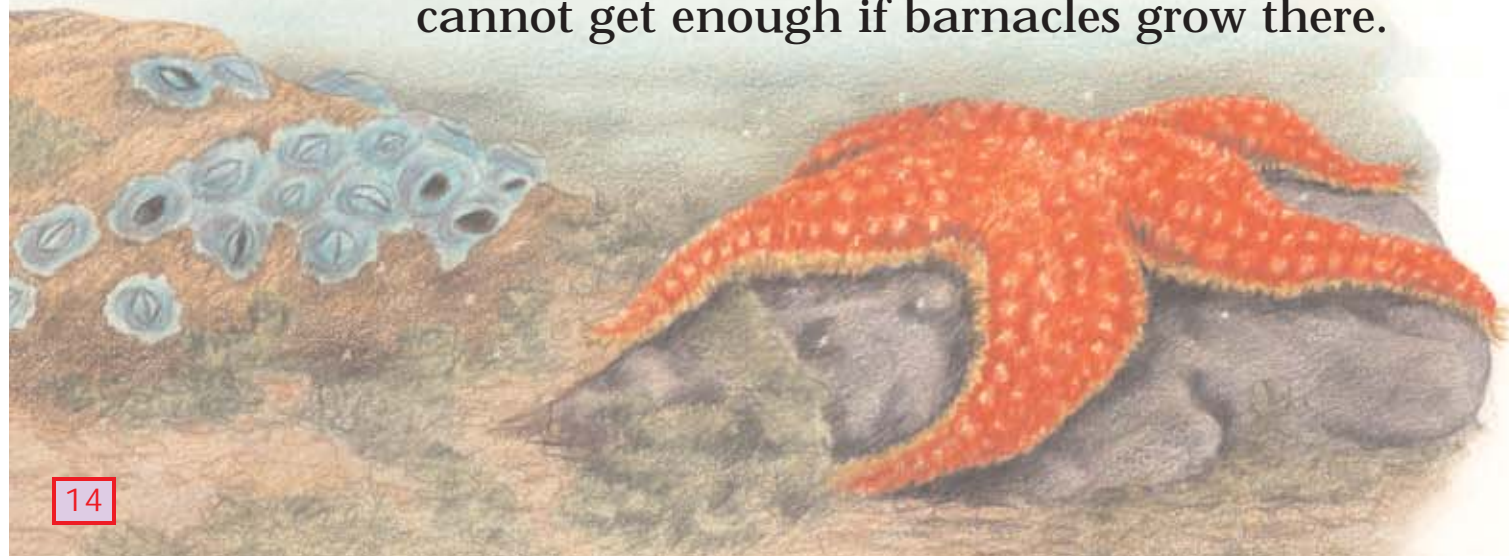
After finishing her meal, Sea Star clings to a rock in the shallow water and



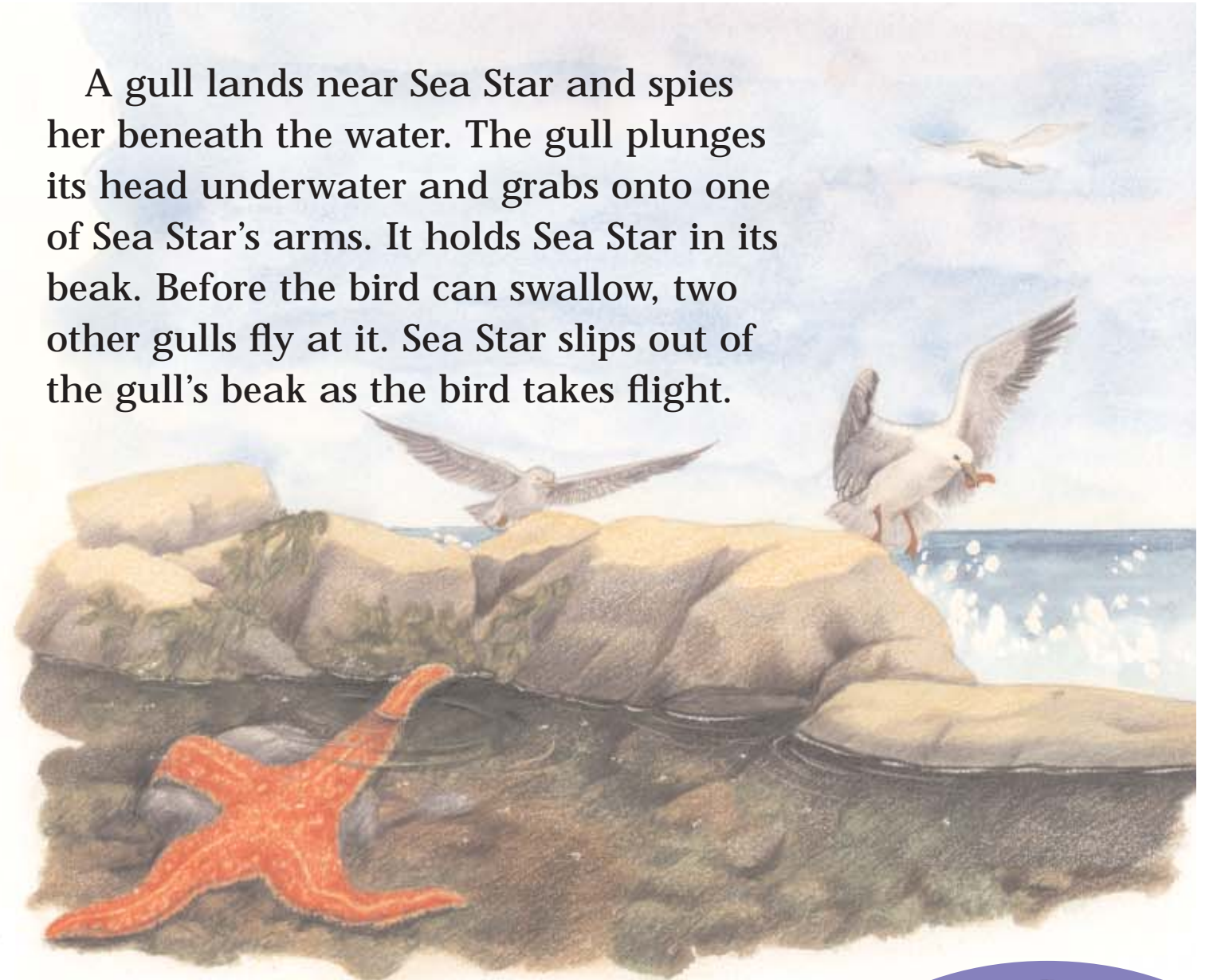
rests. Tiny baby animals called barnacles drift in the water that flows over her. Some try to attach onto Sea Star's back. But Sea Star has little pinchers on her spiny skin. The pinchers snap at the barnacles, chasing them away. It is important for Sea Star to keep her skin clean. She takes in oxygen through her bumpy skin and cannot get enough if barnacles grow there.



Some sea stars have more than five arms. This sun star has twelve!



A gull lands near Sea Star and spies her beneath the water. The gull plunges its head underwater and grabs onto one of Sea Star's arms. It holds Sea Star in its beak. Before the bird can swallow, two other gulls fly at it. Sea Star slips out of the gull's beak as the bird takes flight.

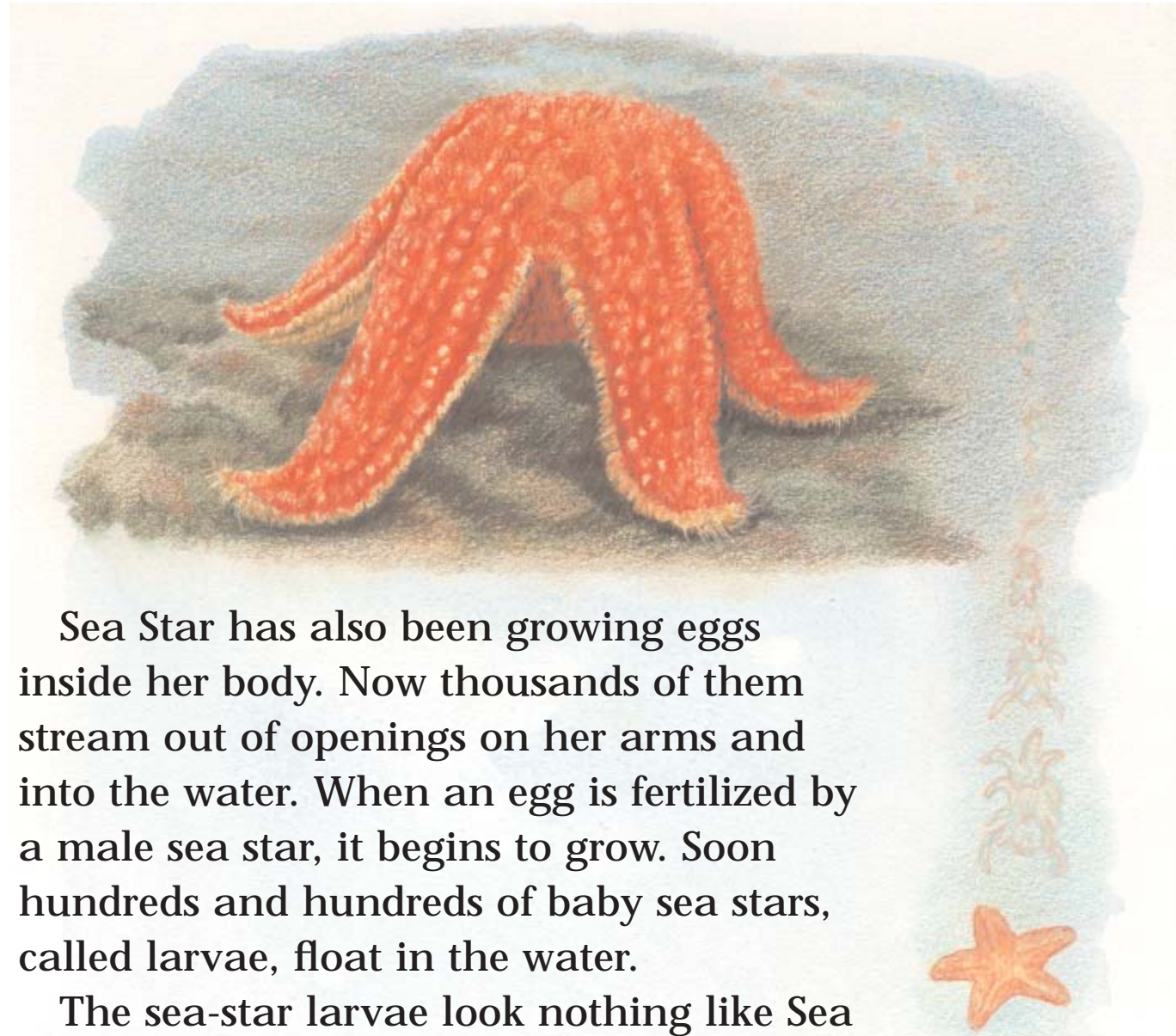


The gull broke off one of Sea Star's arms. But Sea Star is not bothered. She creeps into a crack between two rocks on her remaining four arms.

That spring Sea Star's missing arm grows back. At first it is tiny. Slowly it grows larger and larger. After several months, Sea Star's new arm is as long as the others.



This sea star lost two of its arms. Now both arms are starting to grow back.



Sea Star has also been growing eggs inside her body. Now thousands of them stream out of openings on her arms and into the water. When an egg is fertilized by a male sea star, it begins to grow. Soon hundreds and hundreds of baby sea stars, called larvae, float in the water.

The sea-star larvae look nothing like Sea Star. Fish and other sea animals will eat most of them. Others will be washed ashore by the ocean waves. Only a few will survive and grow to look like Sea Star. Someday those sea stars will crawl along the rocky bottom near the shore on their tube feet, hunting for a seafood meal.

There are many different kinds of sea stars. These are bat stars.

