

Instinct: Erica Griffiths

What was this thick, gooey stuff all over me? I tried to wipe it away but couldn't move my arms or legs. Was this place safe? Should I stay? I briefly entertained the idea, but the voice in my head shouted at me to get out of there. I feebly pushed on the whiteness in front of me, but my hands were awkward, big, oversized mittens, no claws, nothing helpful.

What was happening to me? Was I lost or had I been abandoned, left to die trapped below the ground? I pushed my tiny head against the wall, an exit seemed impossible. But my internal coach was persuasive, pushing me to pound harder. A faint sound, something breaking, the world appearing lighter through the crack. I clumsily forced myself forward, tearing a larger opening. My deformed hands were useless in helping me climb, but I pushed out of the white and into the abrasive sand, the sticky fluid attracting grains, transforming me into a crumbed fillet.

I sensed movement around me, below me, above me, with the sand finally falling away to reveal an immense sky. I was momentarily blinded by the hot high sun, my internal voice urging me forward. Was it my mother calling? Would someone be coming to help? The heat of this wasteland was intense. It would suck the water from my body if I stayed, I needed to move, but how? My tiny legs, impractical arms and cumbersome body made me feel inadequate. But someone or something was forcing my unwieldy body onwards, but whereto? Then I saw it, a thin azure strip, gleaming on the horizon.

Perhaps I can just waddle slowly, straight towards the blue. But squawking demon shadows quickly filled the sky, swooping low, carrying off my brothers and sisters and forcing me to run. I'm flapping and floundering with these pathetic limbs, but the water is closer now and soon the froth touches me.

I know now that it was the saltwater calling me, the wave foam camouflaging my little body from the birds, its next breaker lifting and carrying me off the shore. My hopeless legs and arms come alive as paddles for swimming and suddenly I understand. I scull smoothly towards the deep, knowing that a formidable force of nature has been at work. I've arrived in the ocean alive and free, striving to be one of the fortunate hatchlings that returns here in fifteen years, to crawl up this beach as a mature turtle, to lay my eggs deep in the sand and begin the cycle again.