

Shellby

and the

Smiling Produce

Outer Banks, North Carolina

Forward

This storybook was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

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Summer vacation had finally arrived in the dunes, and Sandy, Scoot, and Shellby Dunehopper were thrilled. They loved Sea Oats School—but summer meant sunshine, seaside breezes, and new adventures.

Sandy planned to scoop smiles at the Ice Cream Shack. Scoot would be popping popcorn at his stand near the pier—and giving surfing lessons to anyone brave enough to ride the waves sideways, just like a ghost crab.

Shellby, however, had a different idea.

“I think I want a job,” she announced one morning.

Her friend Georgina the grasshopper perked up. “The Dunes Market is hiring in the produce department!”

That was all Shellby needed to hear.



A Big Opportunity

The very next day, Shellby scurried down the sandy path to the Dunes Market and filled out a job application. Before she could even tuck her pencil away, the store manager—Mr. Grocer—smiled kindly.

“You’re hired!” he said.

Shellby’s eyes grew wide.

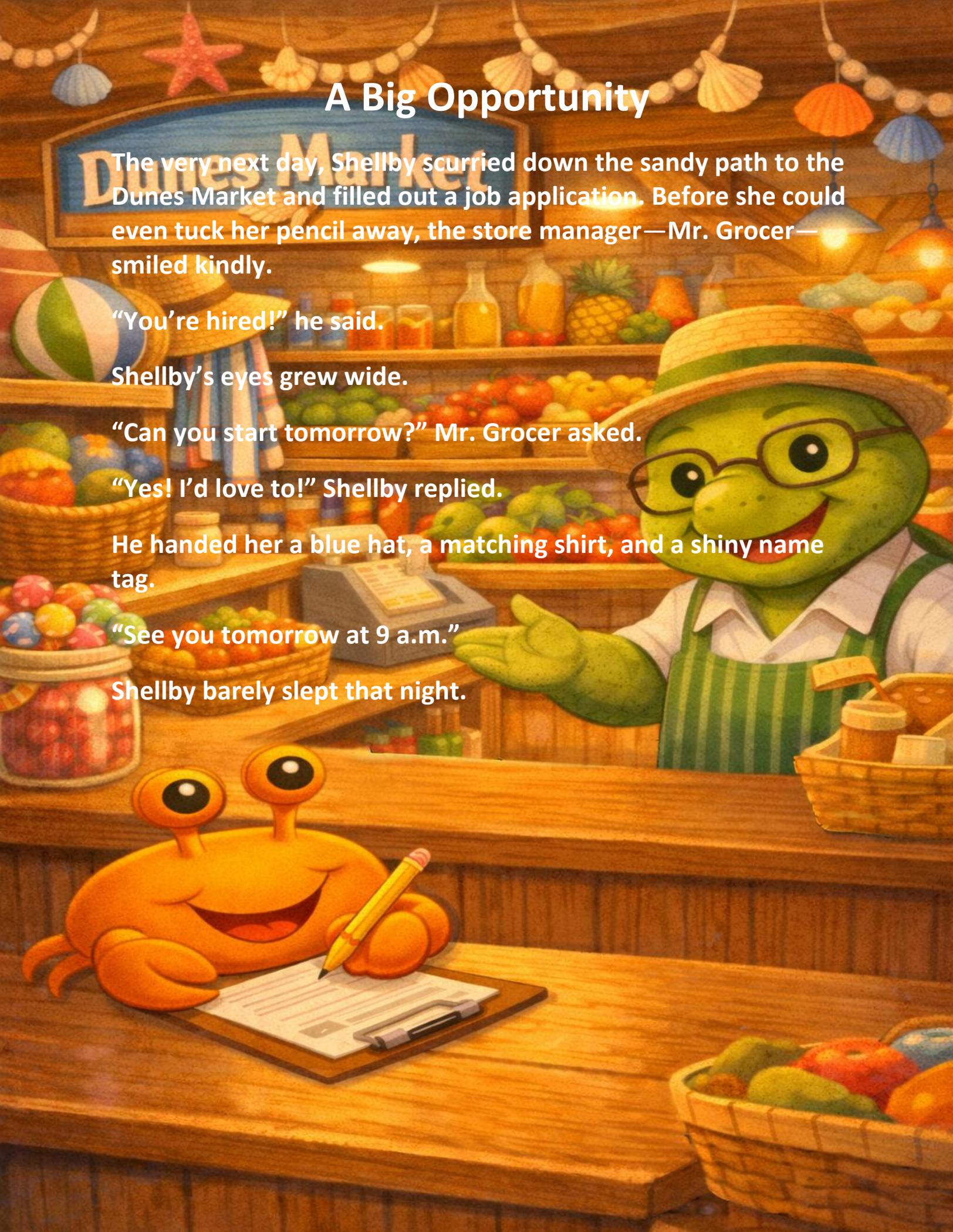
“Can you start tomorrow?” Mr. Grocer asked.

“Yes! I’d love to!” Shellby replied.

He handed her a blue hat, a matching shirt, and a shiny name tag.

“See you tomorrow at 9 a.m.”

Shellby barely slept that night.



Training Day

The next morning was a perfect June day on the Outer Banks. Papa and Mama walked Shellby to the door.

“Do your best,” Papa said.

“Be kind, be careful, and work hard,” Mama added.

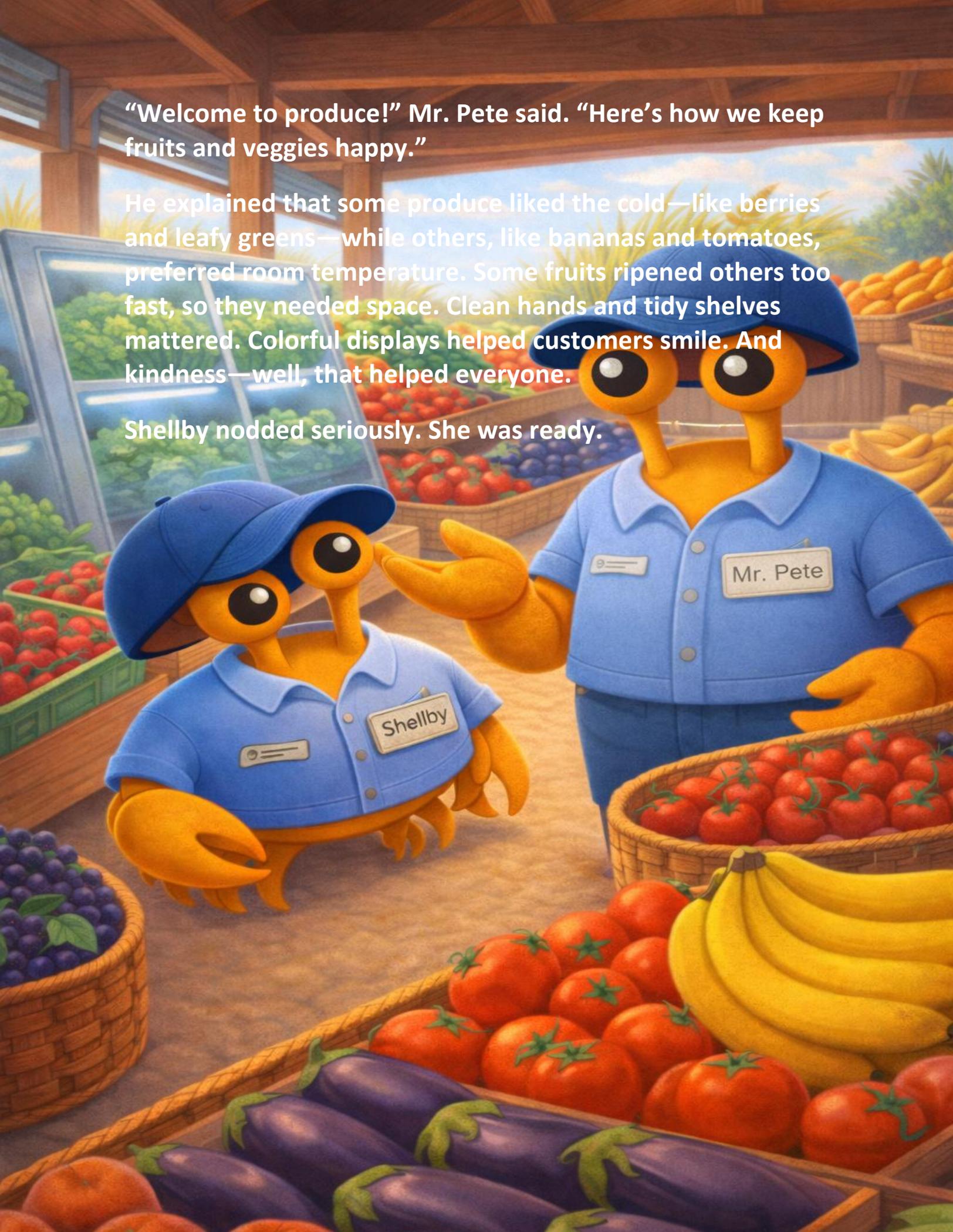
Shellby slipped on her uniform and hurried to the market, where she met Mr. Pete, the produce manager.



“Welcome to produce!” Mr. Pete said. “Here’s how we keep fruits and veggies happy.”

He explained that some produce liked the cold—like berries and leafy greens—while others, like bananas and tomatoes, preferred room temperature. Some fruits ripened others too fast, so they needed space. Clean hands and tidy shelves mattered. Colorful displays helped customers smile. And kindness—well, that helped everyone.

Shellby nodded seriously. She was ready.



Uh-Oh... Produce Problems

Shellby's first task was stocking bananas. She went into the cold storage room and shivered.

"Brrr! It's freezing in here!"

She reached into the banana box when—

POP!

Out jumped a black widow spider!

"YIKES!" Shellby leapt so high she nearly hit the ceiling.



Next, she tried stocking oranges.

“Put me down!” one orange grumbled. “I want to go back to the orchard!”

“Oh—sorry, Mr. Orange,” Shellby said nervously, placing him back in the box.



Then came tomatoes.

Squish.

Red splattered everywhere.

“I’ll be gentler next time,” Shellby sighed.



Later, while rotating apples, one apple stuck out her tongue.
“I don’t belong here,” said Ms. Apple. “I want sunshine!”

Shellby felt torn. “I really need to do my job...”

To make matters worse, customers complained about moldy lettuce.

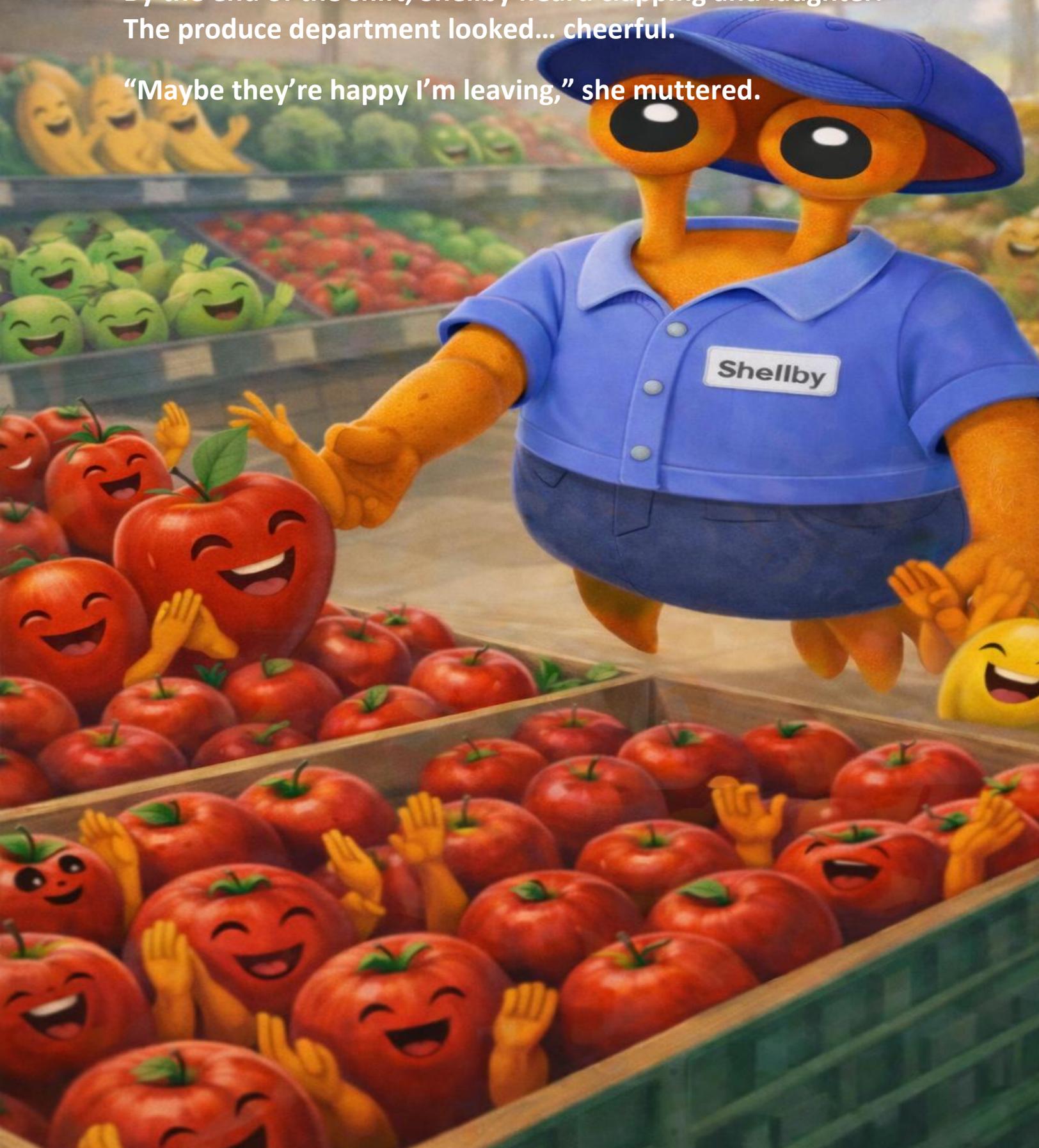
“But lettuce is green,” Shellby whispered to herself, confused.



The Mystery Revealed

By the end of the shift, Shellby heard clapping and laughter. The produce department looked... cheerful.

“Maybe they’re happy I’m leaving,” she muttered.



Mr. Pete approached her. “Why weren’t the apples and oranges stocked?”

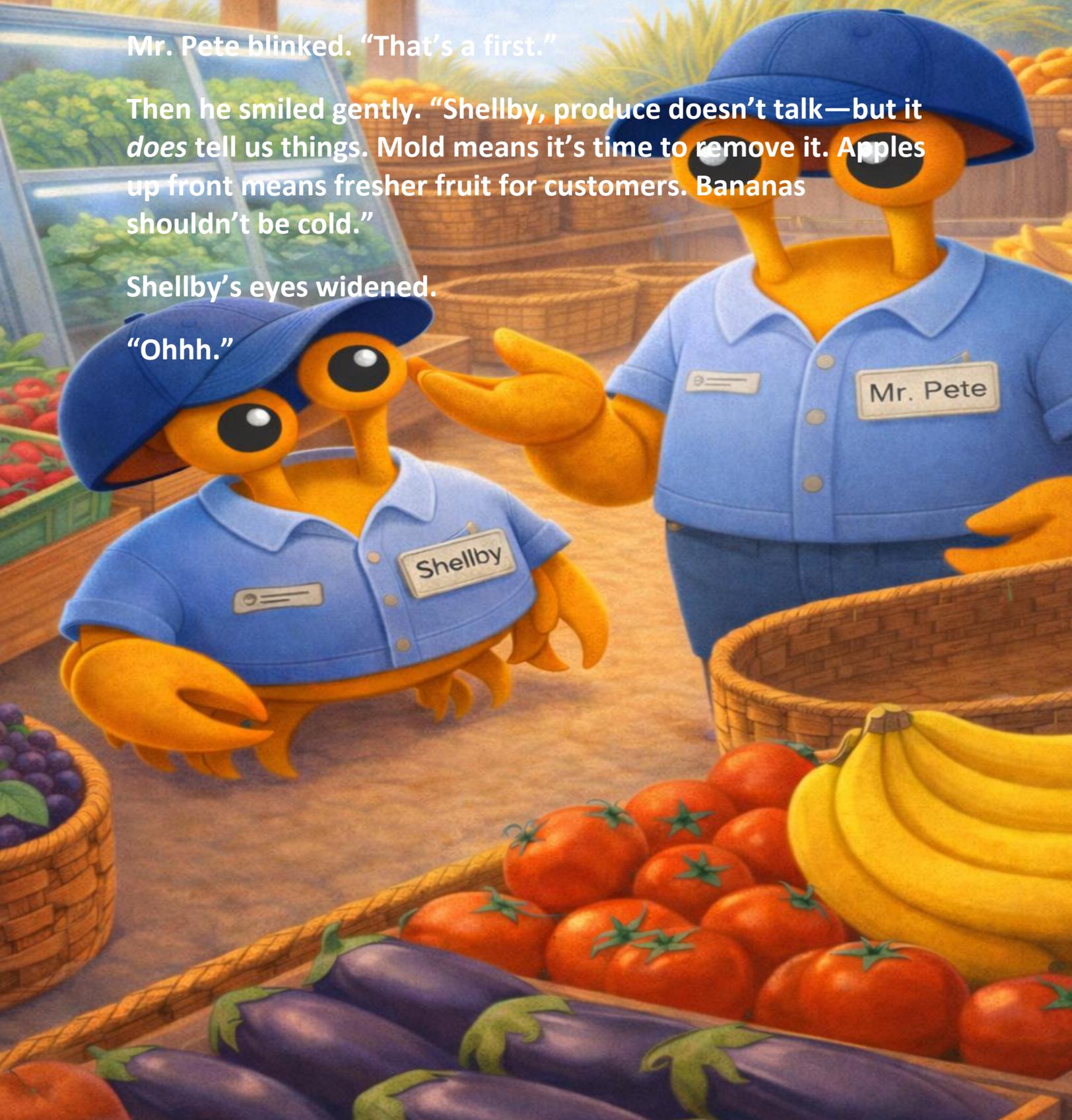
Shellby hesitated. “They... talked to me. They wanted to go home.”

Mr. Pete blinked. “That’s a first.”

Then he smiled gently. “Shellby, produce doesn’t talk—but it *does* tell us things. Mold means it’s time to remove it. Apples up front means fresher fruit for customers. Bananas shouldn’t be cold.”

Shellby’s eyes widened.

“Ohhh.”



A Better Tomorrow

That night at dinner, Shellby shared everything.

“It was rough,” she admitted. “I tried, but I didn’t understand.”

Papa nodded. “Every first day is hard.”

Mama smiled. “Tomorrow, you’ll do better.”

Shellby went to bed feeling hopeful.

She was learning.

And tomorrow, she’d make the produce—and the customers—very happy.



Did You Know?

Fruits and vegetables don't talk—but they do give us clues!

- Bananas don't like the cold. If they get too chilly, their peels turn brown faster.
- Apples give off a natural gas that can make other fruits ripen more quickly—so they sometimes need their own space.
- Moldy lettuce isn't safe to eat, even if it's still green. Mold means it's time to say goodbye.
- Some produce loves the cold, like berries and leafy greens, because it helps them stay fresh longer.
- Clean hands and tidy shelves help keep fruits and veggies healthy—and customers happy!

Just like Shellby learned, taking care of produce means paying attention, being gentle, and learning as you go.

