

THE DAY the DUNES DISAPPEARED

A Dunehopper Family Story
About Protecting Sand Dunes



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.

All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.

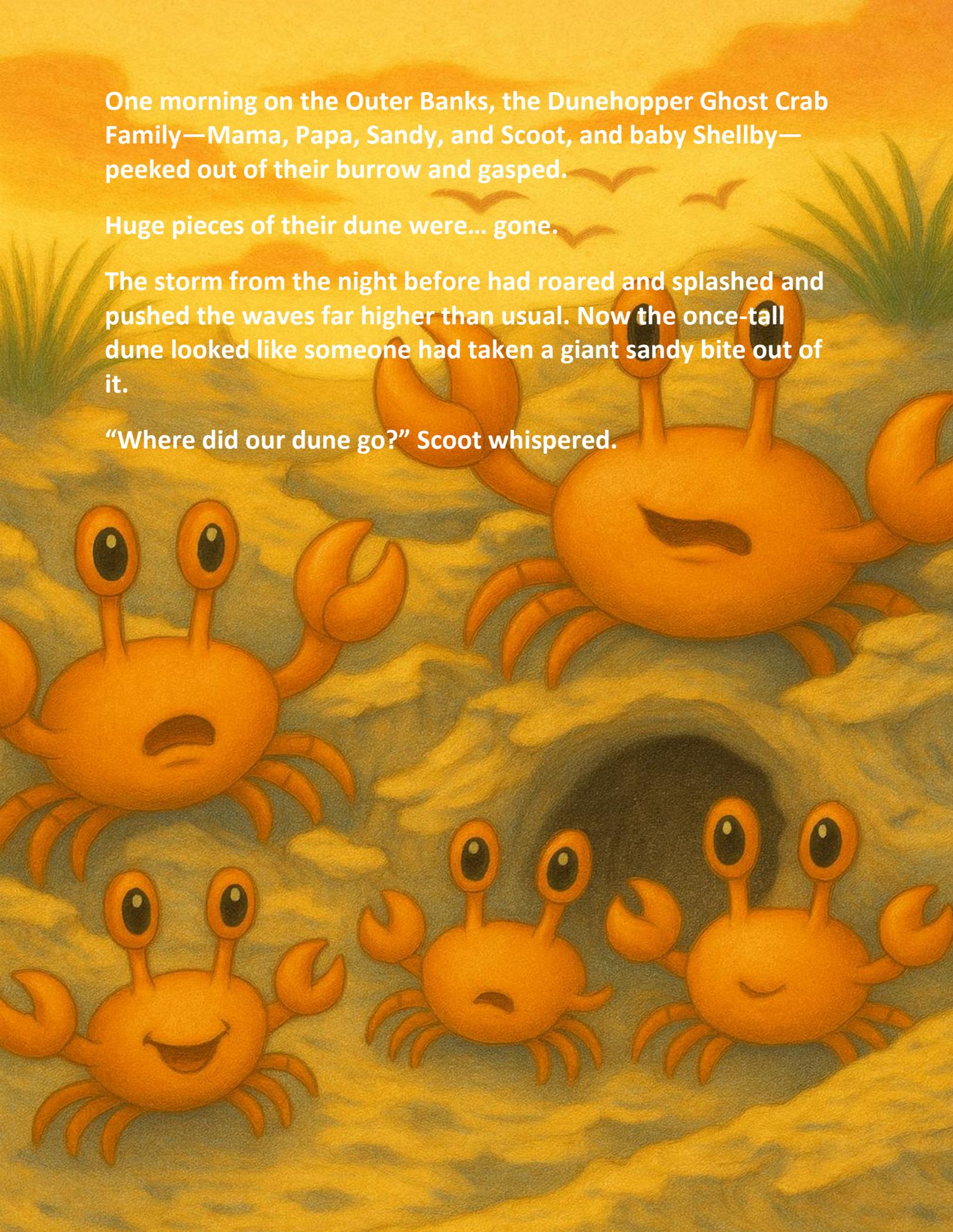


One morning on the Outer Banks, the Dunehopper Ghost Crab Family—Mama, Papa, Sandy, and Scoot, and baby Shellby—peeked out of their burrow and gasped.

Huge pieces of their dune were... gone.

The storm from the night before had roared and splashed and pushed the waves far higher than usual. Now the once-tall dune looked like someone had taken a giant sandy bite out of it.

“Where did our dune go?” Scoot whispered.



Mama brushed sand from her shell. “The storm washed parts of it away. This is called erosion.”

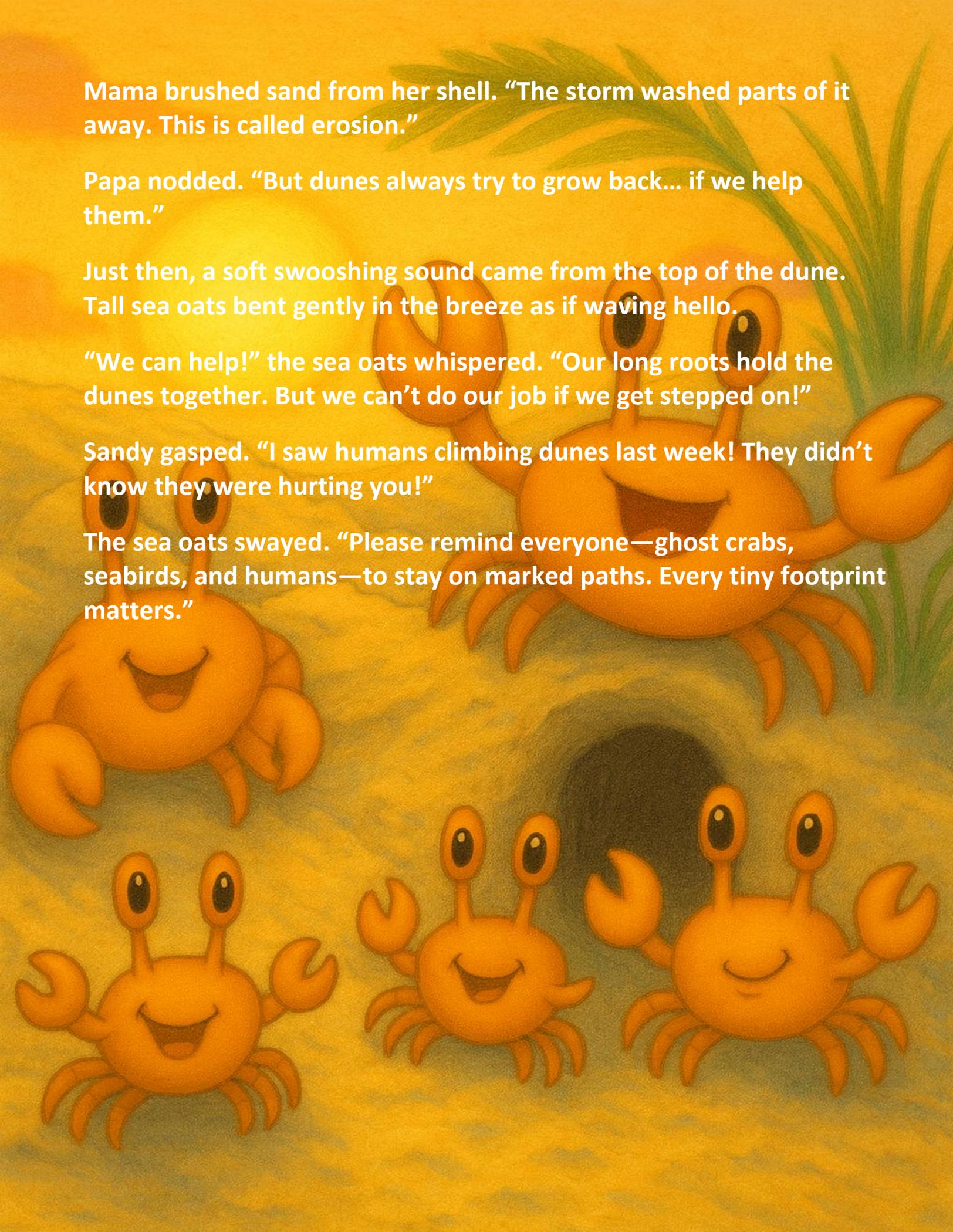
Papa nodded. “But dunes always try to grow back... if we help them.”

Just then, a soft swooshing sound came from the top of the dune. Tall sea oats bent gently in the breeze as if waving hello.

“We can help!” the sea oats whispered. “Our long roots hold the dunes together. But we can’t do our job if we get stepped on!”

Sandy gasped. “I saw humans climbing dunes last week! They didn’t know they were hurting you!”

The sea oats swayed. “Please remind everyone—ghost crabs, seabirds, and humans—to stay on marked paths. Every tiny footprint matters.”



Suddenly, other ghost crabs popped out of nearby burrows, their eyes wide.

“Our home vanished too!”

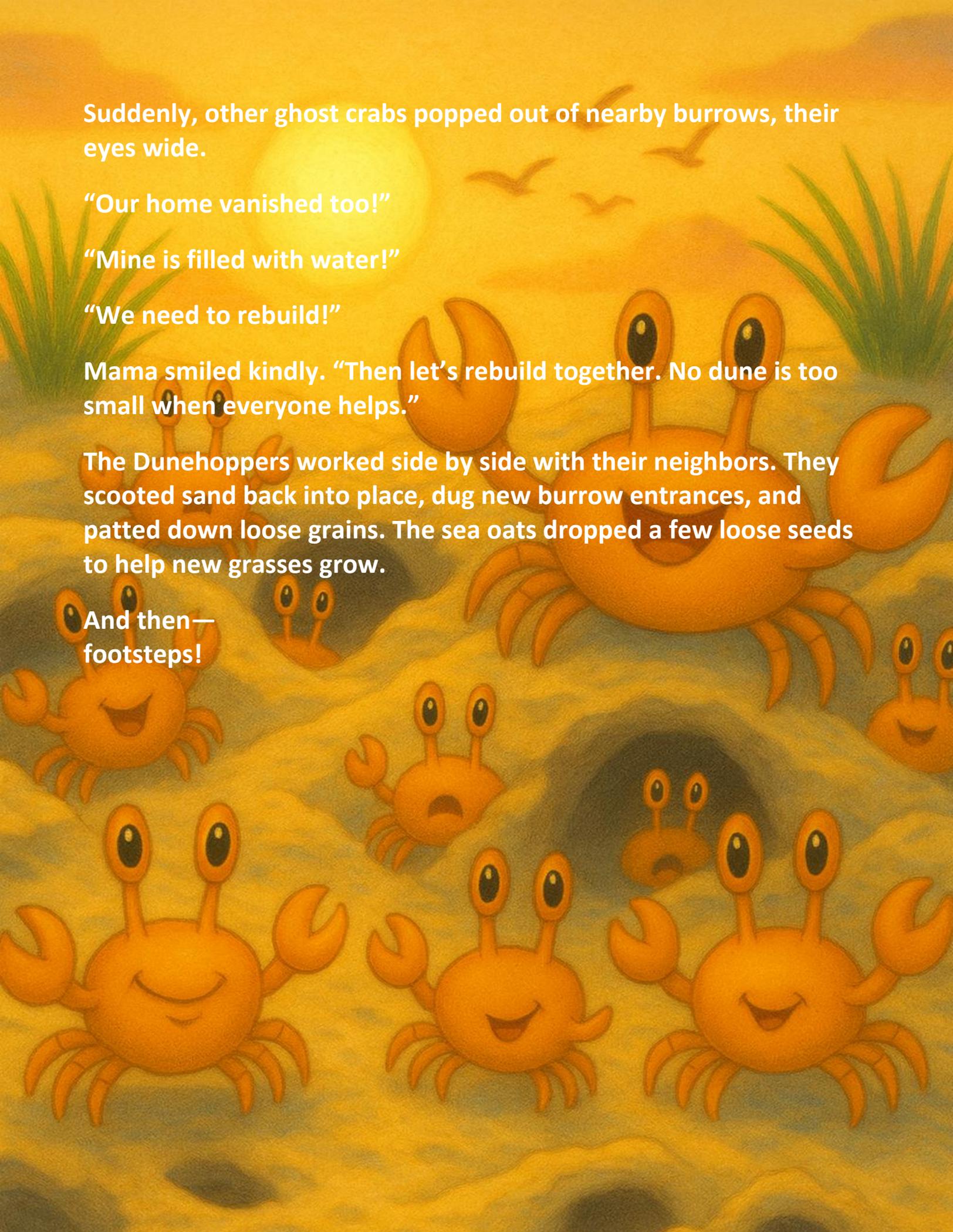
“Mine is filled with water!”

“We need to rebuild!”

Mama smiled kindly. “Then let’s rebuild together. No dune is too small when everyone helps.”

The Dunehoppers worked side by side with their neighbors. They scooted sand back into place, dug new burrow entrances, and patted down loose grains. The sea oats dropped a few loose seeds to help new grasses grow.

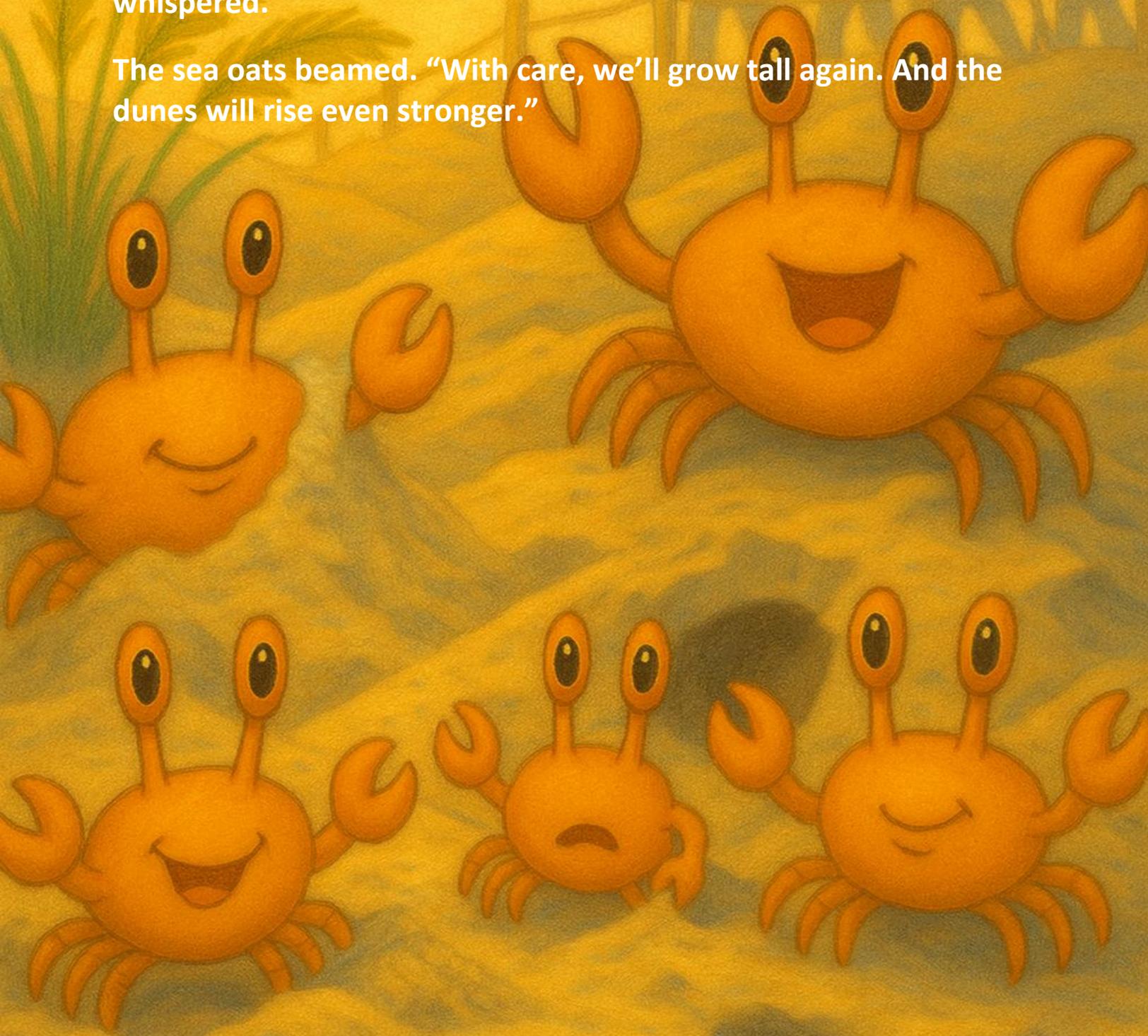
And then—
footsteps!



Mama nodded proudly. “These humans are building a living shoreline—planting grasses, placing shells and natural materials, and shaping the dune to protect the land behind it.”

Baby Shellby gave an excited squeak. A child placed a small bundle of dune grass carefully in the sand nearby. “Grow strong,” the child whispered.

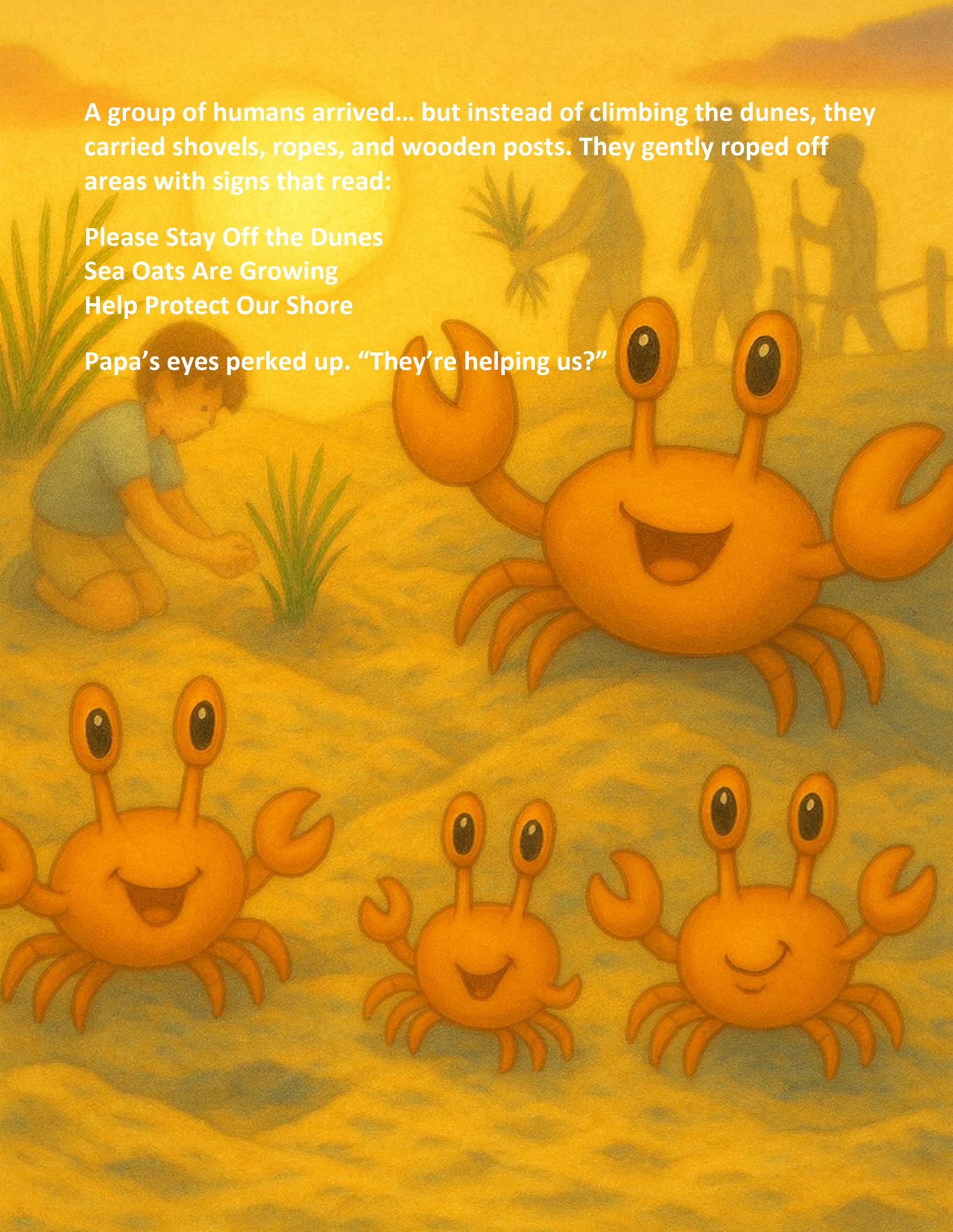
The sea oats beamed. “With care, we’ll grow tall again. And the dunes will rise even stronger.”



A group of humans arrived... but instead of climbing the dunes, they carried shovels, ropes, and wooden posts. They gently roped off areas with signs that read:

Please Stay Off the Dunes
Sea Oats Are Growing
Help Protect Our Shore

Papa's eyes perked up. "They're helping us?"

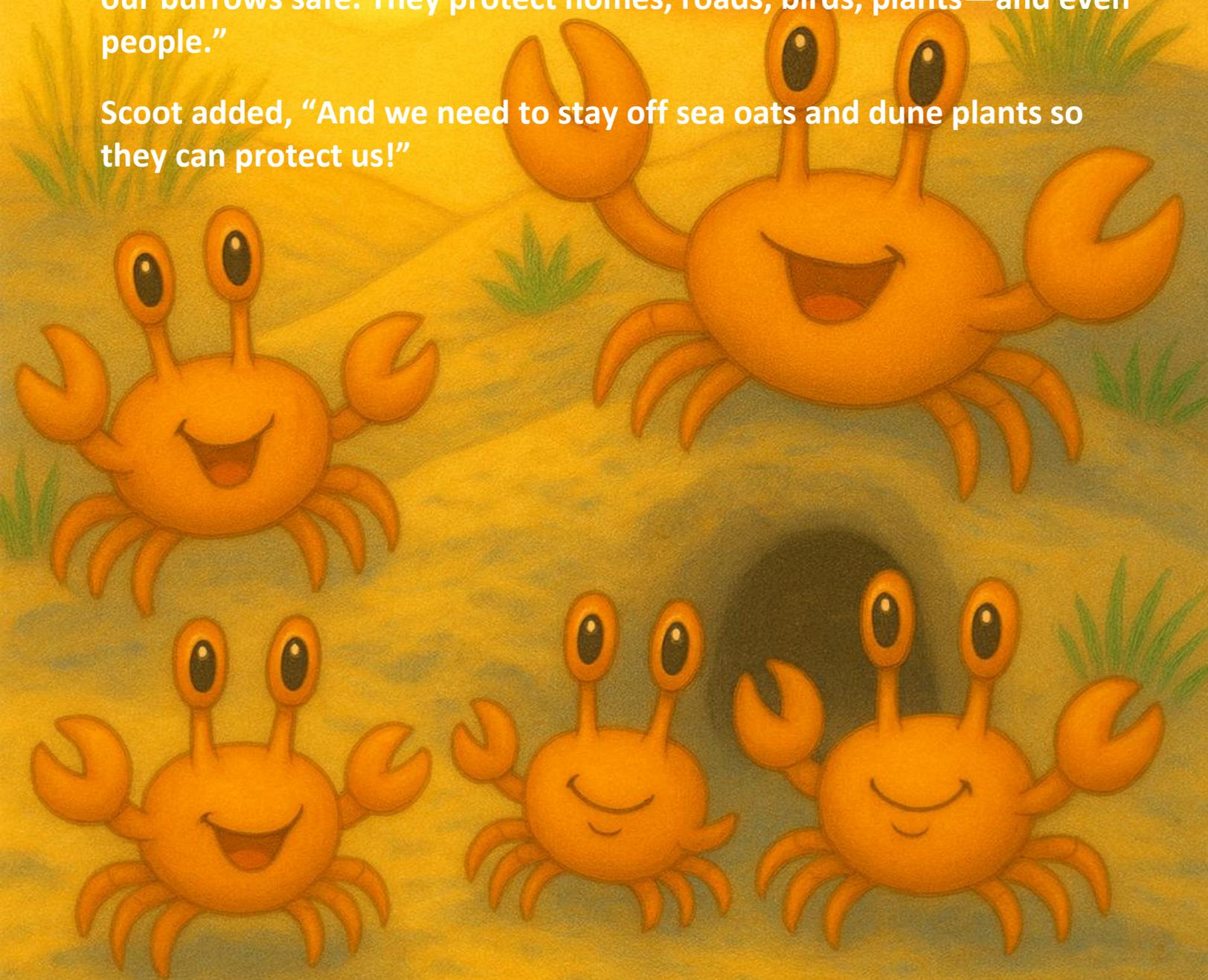


By sunset, the beach was glowing gold. The rebuilt dune was still smaller than before, but it stood proudly—patched together by paws, claws, roots, and human hands.

Sandy said, “I didn’t know dunes protected so much.”

Mama smiled. “Dunes keep storms from flooding the land. They keep our burrows safe. They protect homes, roads, birds, plants—and even people.”

Scout added, “And we need to stay off sea oats and dune plants so they can protect us!”

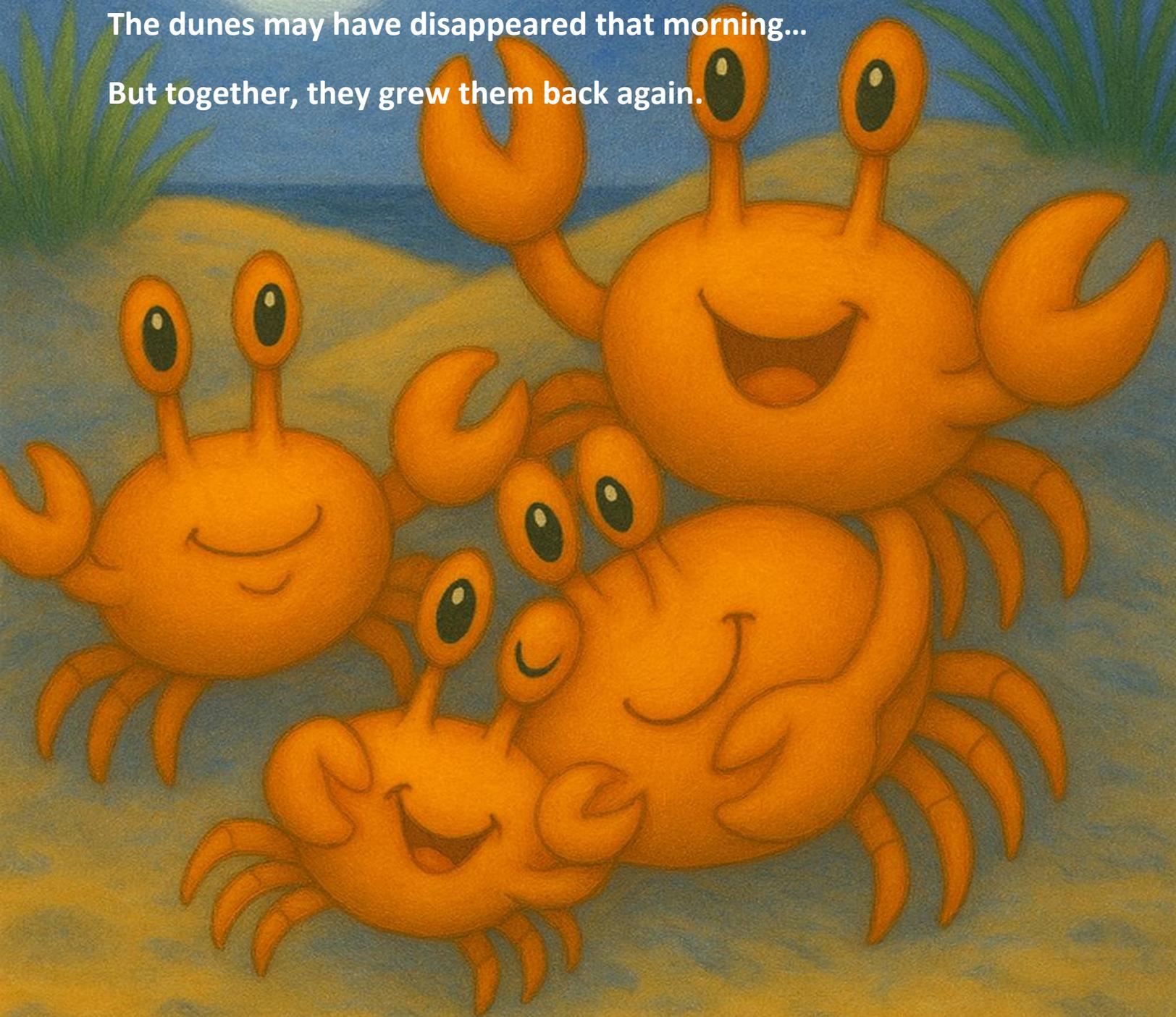


Papa wrapped his claws around his family. "Today we learned something important: Everyone—big or small—can help care for the dunes."

As the moon rose over the ocean, the Dunehoppers snuggled close, feeling safe once more.

The dunes may have disappeared that morning...

But together, they grew them back again.



Did You Know?

Sea oats are dune helpers!

Their roots act like *nature's glue*, holding the sand together so dunes don't wash away during storms.

When people climb on the dunes, the sea oats get squished and can't do their job.

But when we stay on the paths, the sea oats stay strong—and that helps ghost crabs, birds, plants, AND people stay safe!

