

A Promise to Each Other~ ~ and to the Beach,



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



It was a beautiful, sunny Saturday in June on the Outer Banks, and excitement buzzed through the dunes. Today was a very special day— Mama Dunhopper's Cousin Charlie was getting married to his fiancé, Clara, at the lovely Dune Chapel.



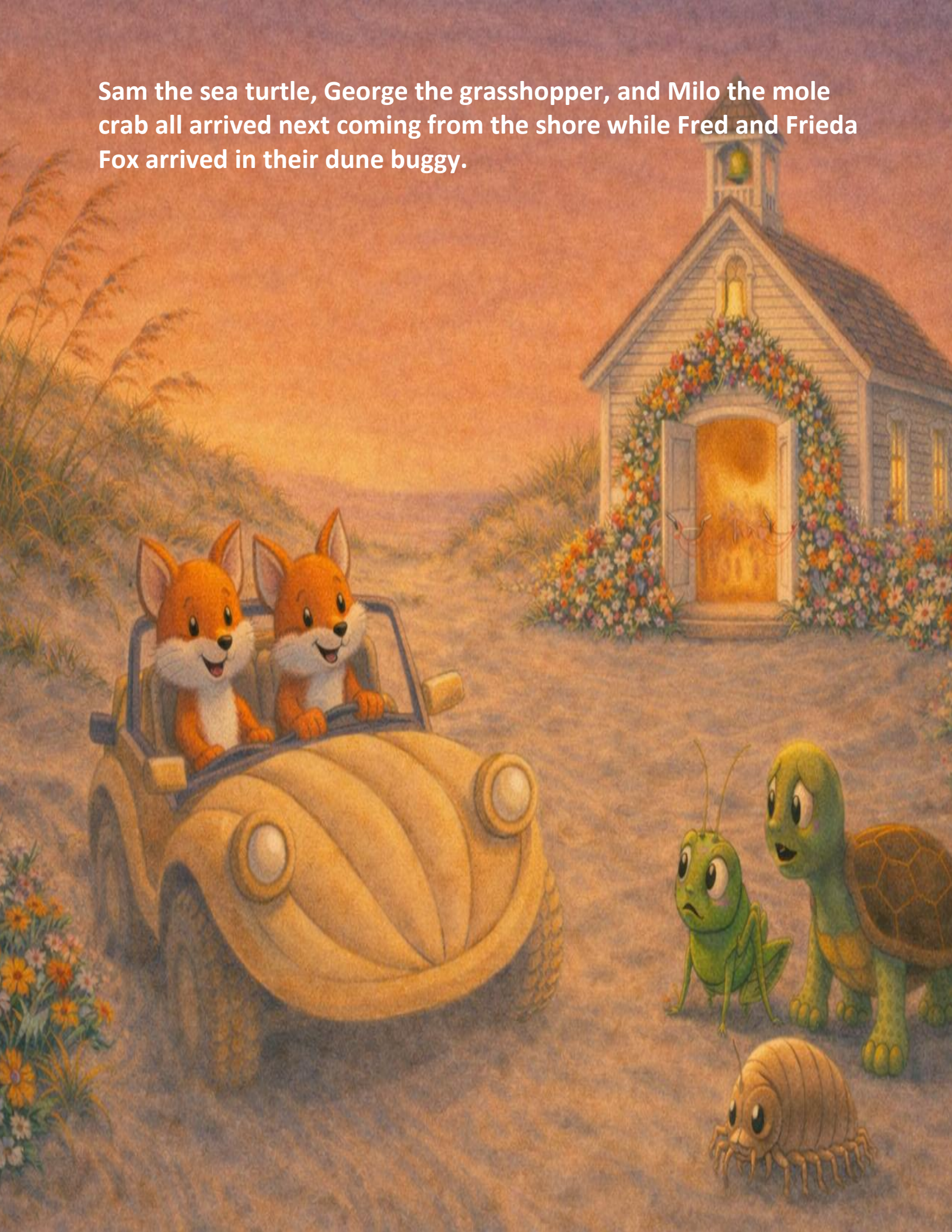
Mama, Papa, Sandy, Scoot, and Shellby all climbed into the family dune buggy, its tires humming softly over the sand as they set off for the celebration. Everyone wore their finest shells and biggest smiles.



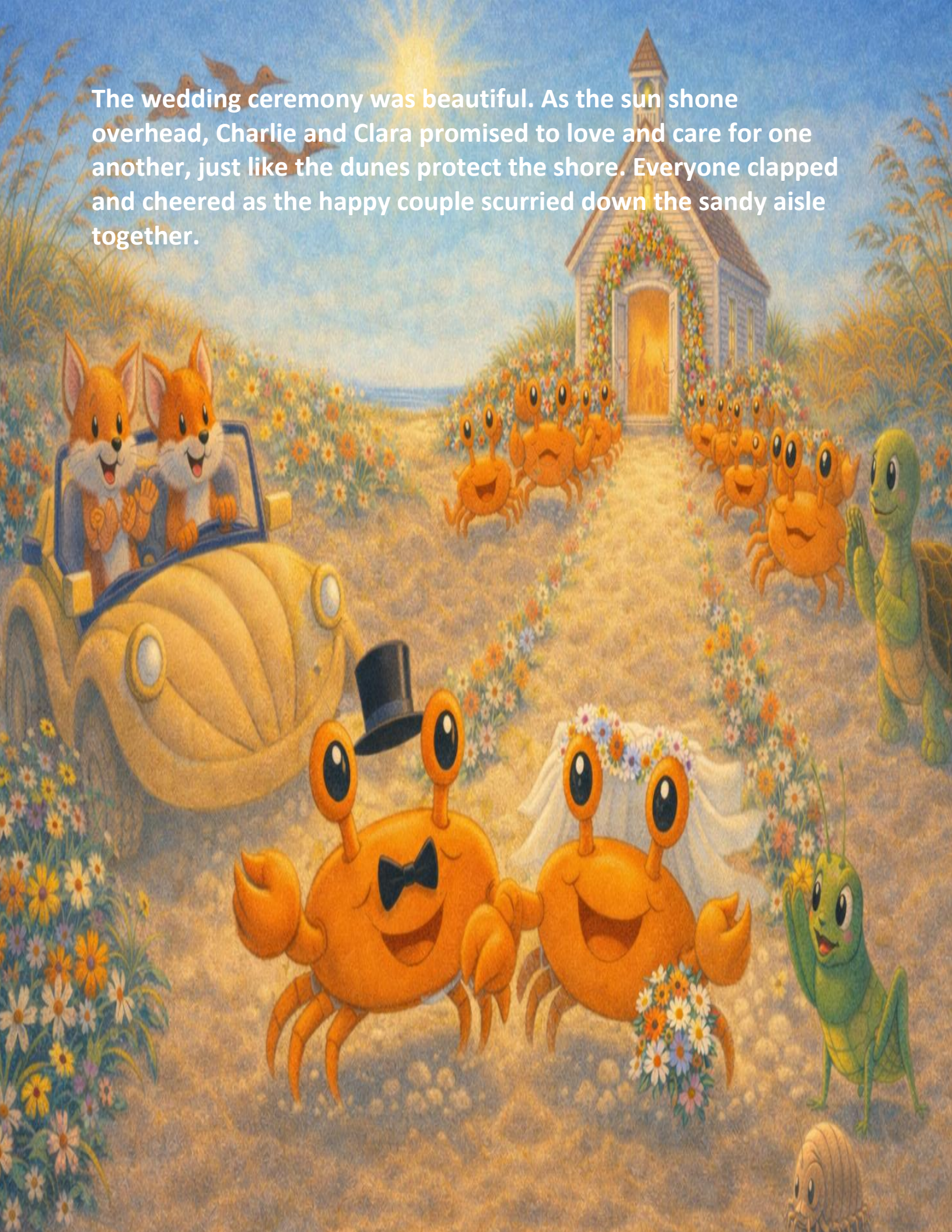
Soon, the Dunehoppers arrived at the Dune Chapel. Nestled between tall, whispering sea oats and silky sand dunes, the chapel was the coziest little wedding spot in all the Outer Banks. Sea breezes carried the scent of salt and flowers, and friends from across the dunes had already gathered.



Sam the sea turtle, George the grasshopper, and Milo the mole crab all arrived next coming from the shore while Fred and Frieda Fox arrived in their dune buggy.



The wedding ceremony was beautiful. As the sun shone overhead, Charlie and Clara promised to love and care for one another, just like the dunes protect the shore. Everyone clapped and cheered as the happy couple scurried down the sandy aisle together.





After the ceremony, Fred and Frieda Fox proudly pulled out a bundle of colorful balloons, each tied with a long string.

“We’re going to release these to celebrate!” Frieda said joyfully.

Sandy gently stepped forward. “Fred and Frieda,” she said kindly, “did you know that balloon releases are illegal in many Outer Banks towns and throughout Dare County?”

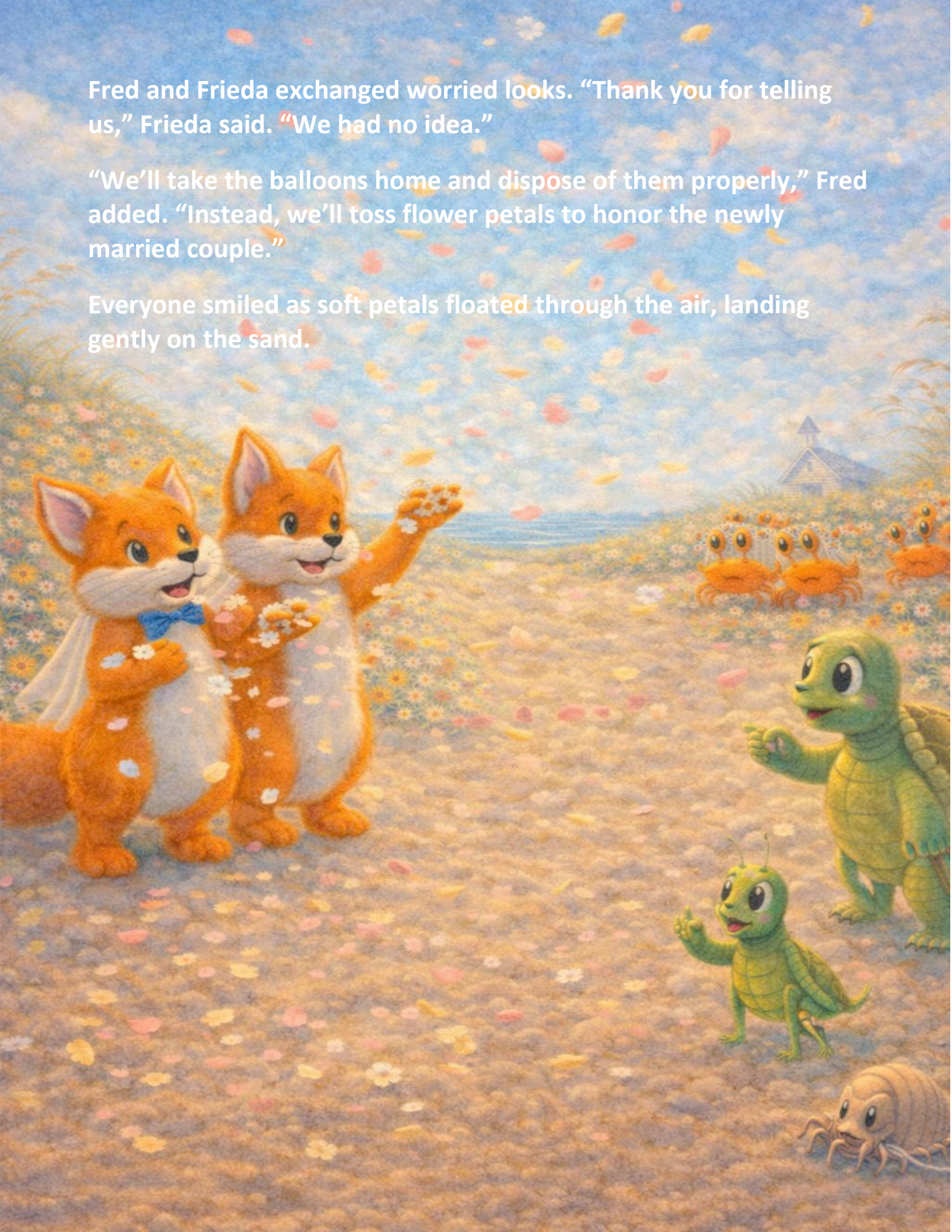
The foxes looked surprised. “No, we didn’t know that,” Fred replied.

Sandy nodded. “Balloons don’t just disappear. They fall into the ocean or onto the beach, where animals can mistake them for food or get tangled in the strings. My friend Sam became very sick once after swallowing part of a balloon because it looked like a jellyfish. And Luna the ghost crab got her leg tangled in balloon string and couldn’t move.”

Fred and Frieda exchanged worried looks. "Thank you for telling us," Frieda said. "We had no idea."

"We'll take the balloons home and dispose of them properly," Fred added. "Instead, we'll toss flower petals to honor the newly married couple."

Everyone smiled as soft petals floated through the air, landing gently on the sand.



Later, as the sun dipped low and painted the sky with shades of orange and pink, Charlie and Clara headed down to the beach to take sunset photos. The wedding guests followed, laughing and chatting as they walked along the shoreline.

But soon, their smiles faded.

Scattered along the sand were bits of trash—wrappers, bottle caps, and especially plastic straws. Dozens of them poked out of the sand or floated near the water's edge.

Scoot frowned. "Why are there so many straws on the beach?"

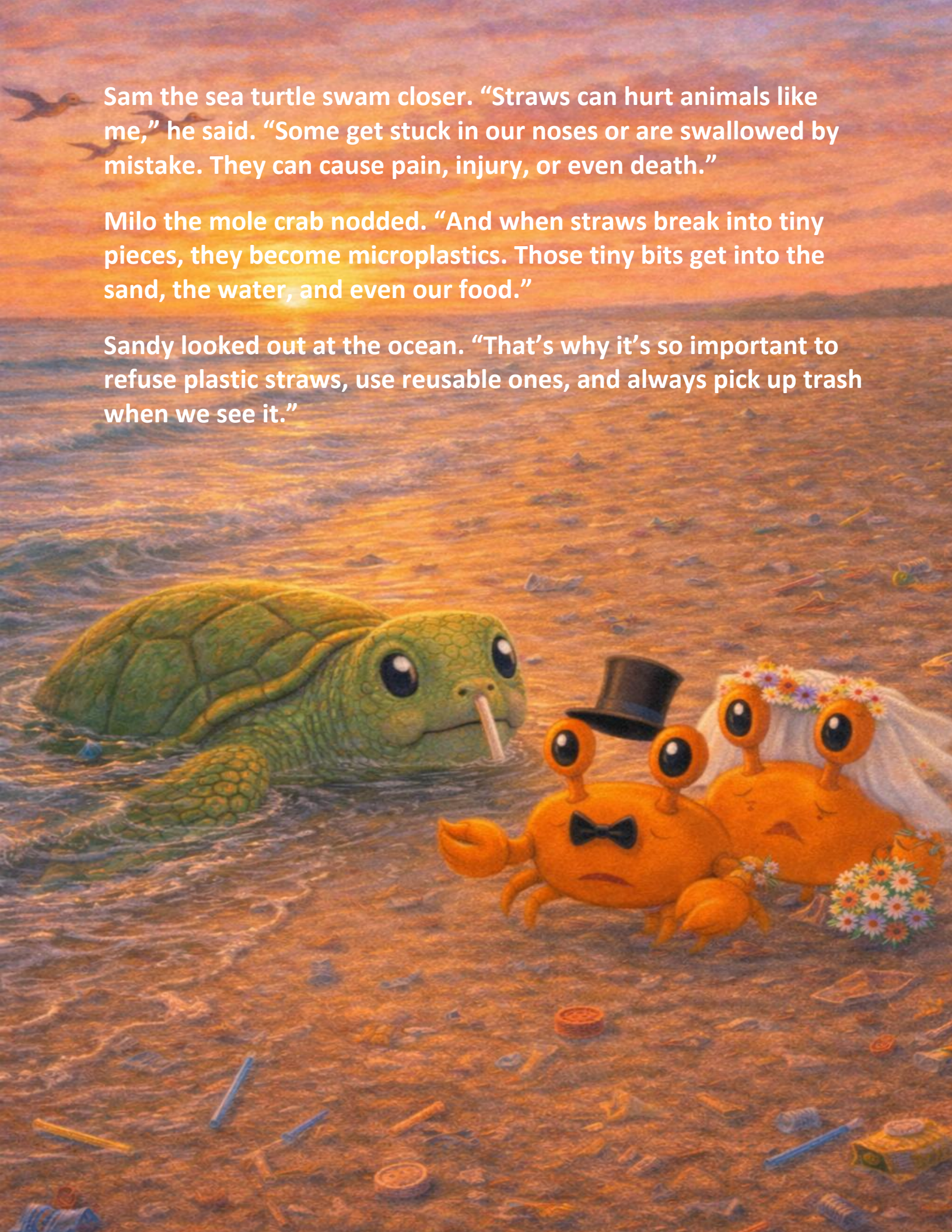
Mama sighed softly. "Plastic straws are very dangerous to wildlife," she explained. "They don't break down like shells or seaweed. Instead, they last for many years."



Sam the sea turtle swam closer. "Straws can hurt animals like me," he said. "Some get stuck in our noses or are swallowed by mistake. They can cause pain, injury, or even death."

Milo the mole crab nodded. "And when straws break into tiny pieces, they become microplastics. Those tiny bits get into the sand, the water, and even our food."

Sandy looked out at the ocean. "That's why it's so important to refuse plastic straws, use reusable ones, and always pick up trash when we see it."



Inspired, the wedding guests began collecting the litter together. Scoot and Shellby raced to fill a bag with straws, while George used a leaf to scoop up tiny pieces. Soon, the beach looked clean again, just in time for Charlie and Clara's photos.

As the sun set behind the dunes, the newly married couple smiled, knowing their special day had helped protect the place they loved.



And the Dunehoppers knew that even small actions—like saying no to plastic straws and balloons —could make a big difference for the beach and all the creatures who call it home.



Did You Know?

Plastic straws and balloons might seem small, but they can cause big problems for beach animals.

Sea turtles, crabs, birds, and fish can mistake straws for food or get hurt by them.

Over time, plastic straws and balloons break into teeny-tiny pieces called *microplastics* that stay in the sand and ocean for many, many years.

The good news?

When you say *no* to plastic straws, use reusable ones, or help pick up litter, you're protecting the beach—just like the Dunehoppers!

Small choices can make a big difference for our ocean friends.

