

The Secret Life of Sand



A children's story about
a grain who helps
hold the coast together

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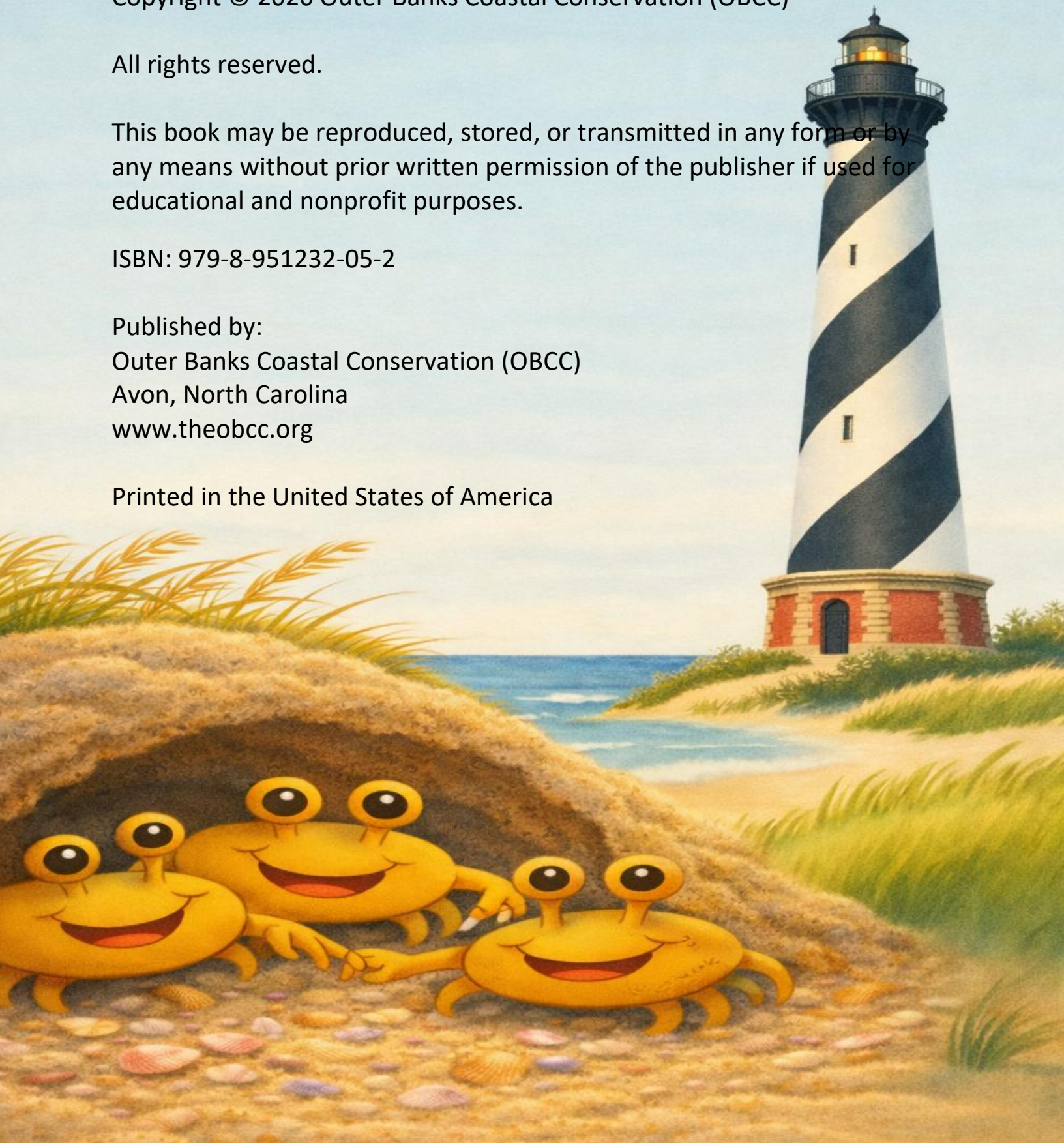
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About This Book

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.

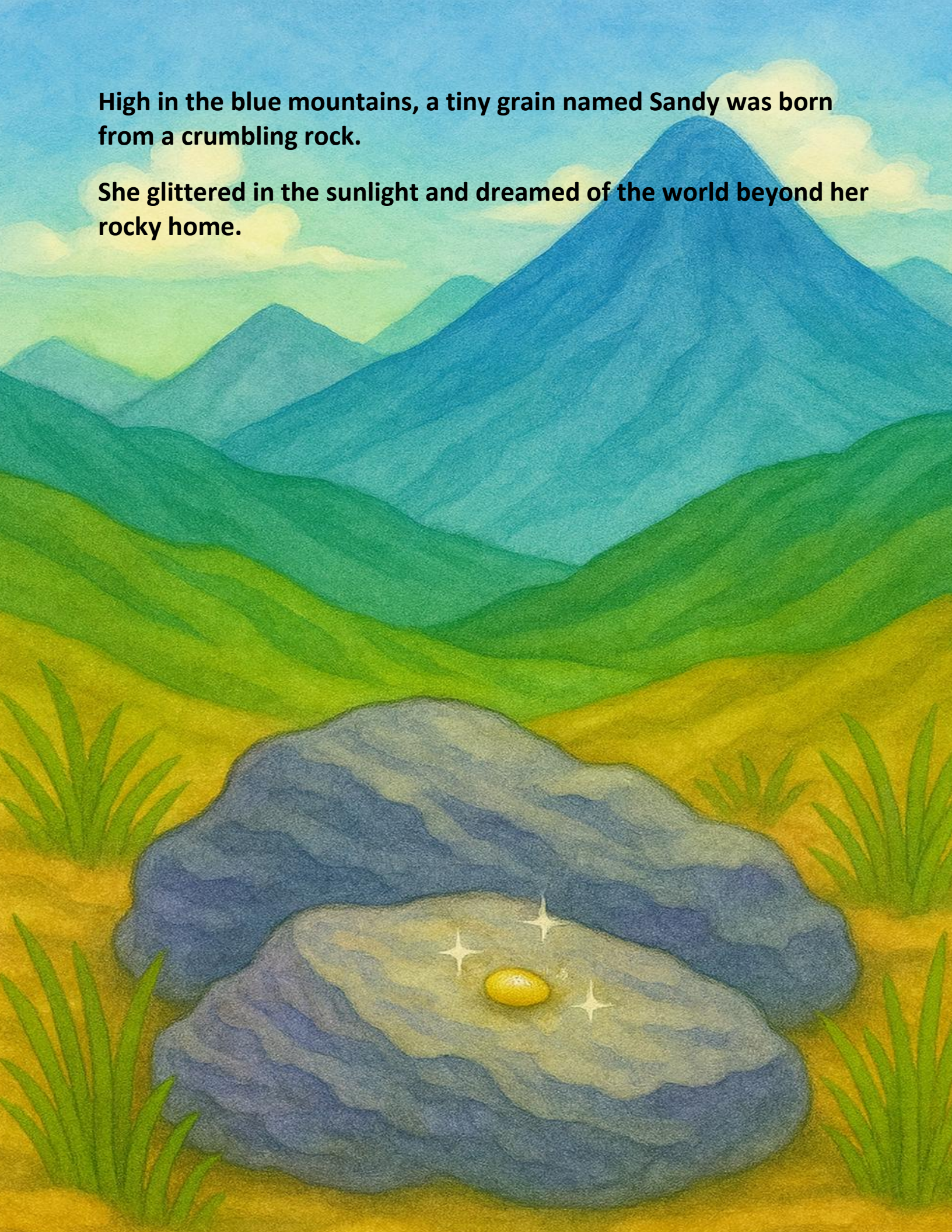
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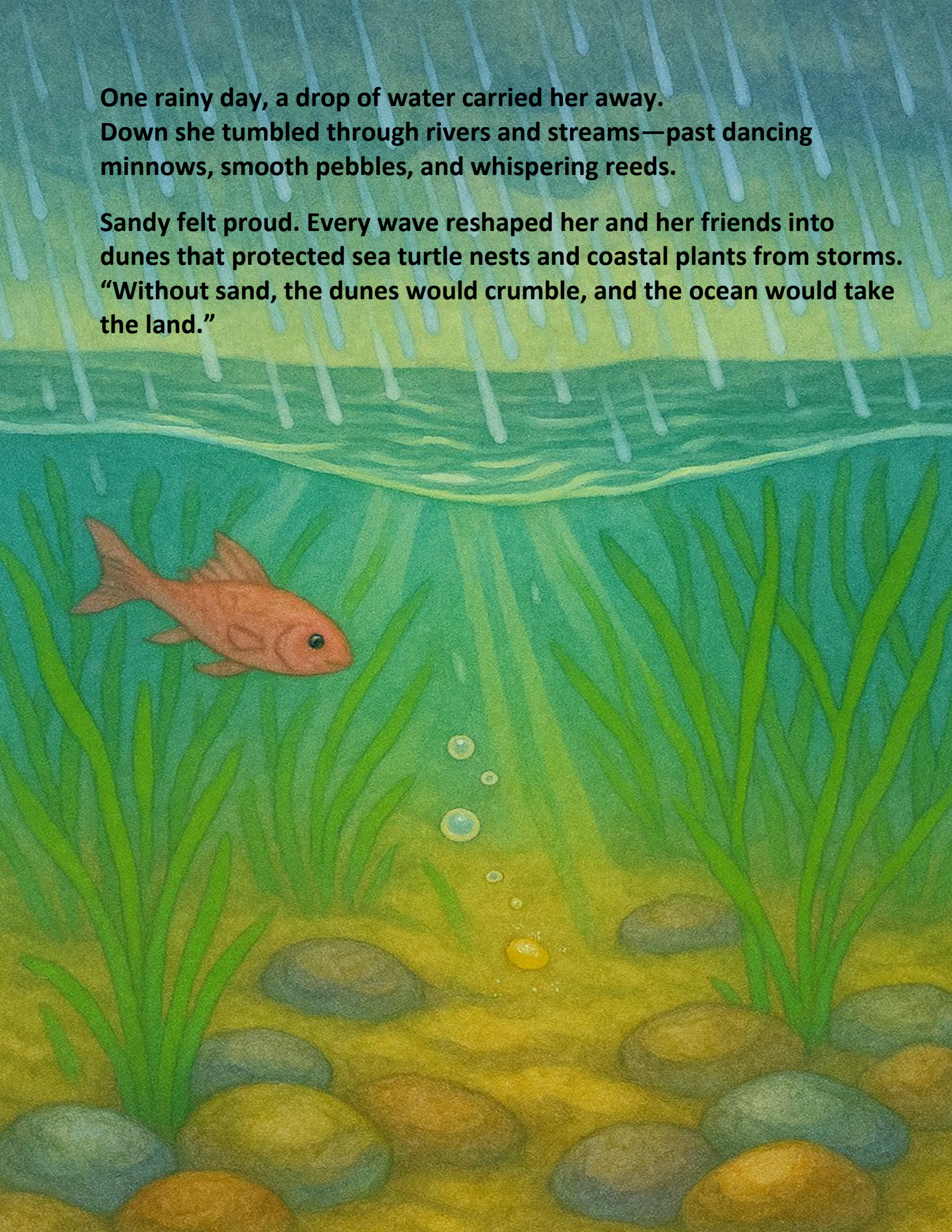
High in the blue mountains, a tiny grain named Sandy was born from a crumbling rock.

She glittered in the sunlight and dreamed of the world beyond her rocky home.



One rainy day, a drop of water carried her away.
Down she tumbled through rivers and streams—past dancing minnows, smooth pebbles, and whispering reeds.

Sandy felt proud. Every wave reshaped her and her friends into dunes that protected sea turtle nests and coastal plants from storms. “Without sand, the dunes would crumble, and the ocean would take the land.”



At last, she reached the great sea.
The waves lifted her gently, swirling her until she landed on a
wide sandy beach.
“This is it!” she cheered. “My new home!”



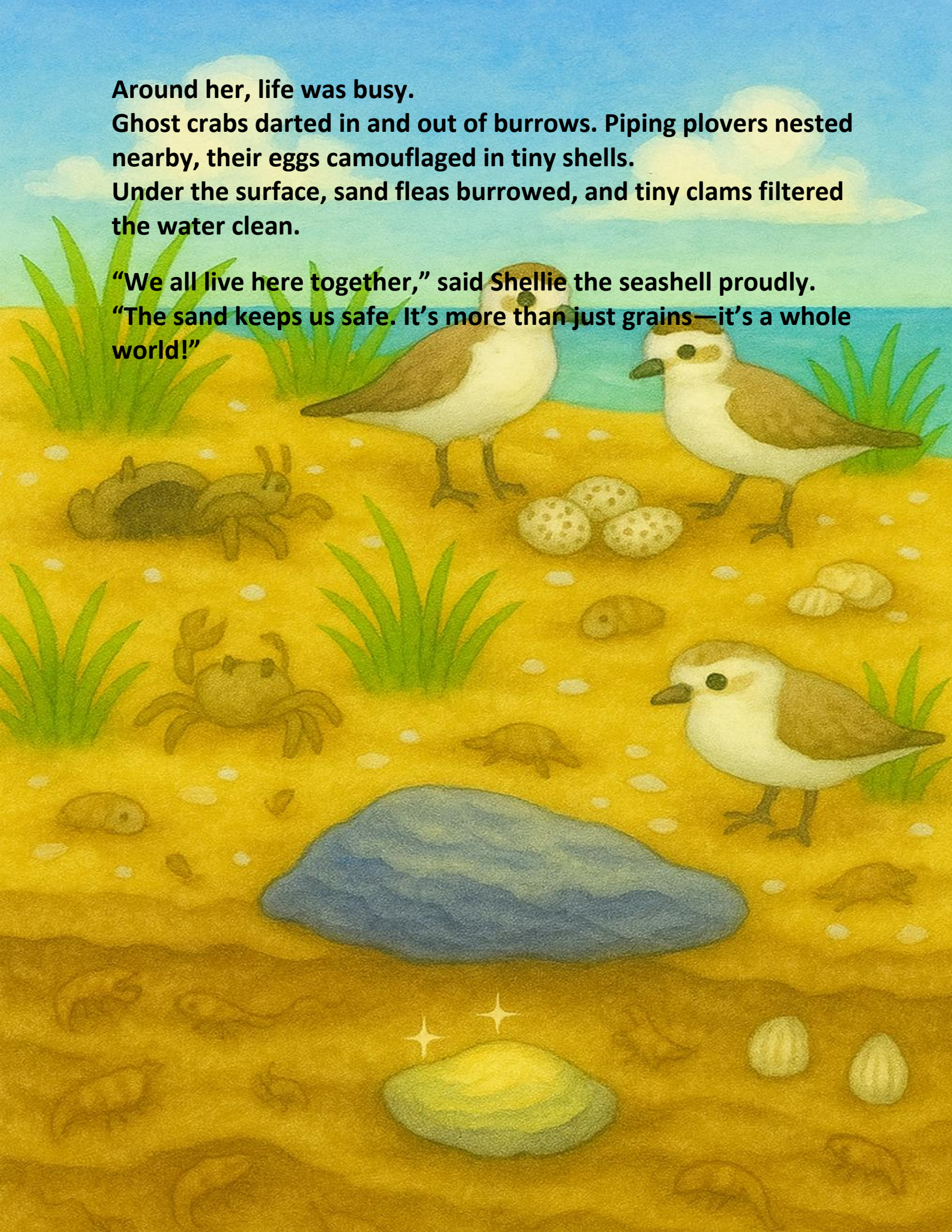
Around her, life was busy.

Ghost crabs darted in and out of burrows. Piping plovers nested nearby, their eggs camouflaged in tiny shells.

Under the surface, sand fleas burrowed, and tiny clams filtered the water clean.

“We all live here together,” said Shellie the seashell proudly.

“The sand keeps us safe. It’s more than just grains—it’s a whole world!”

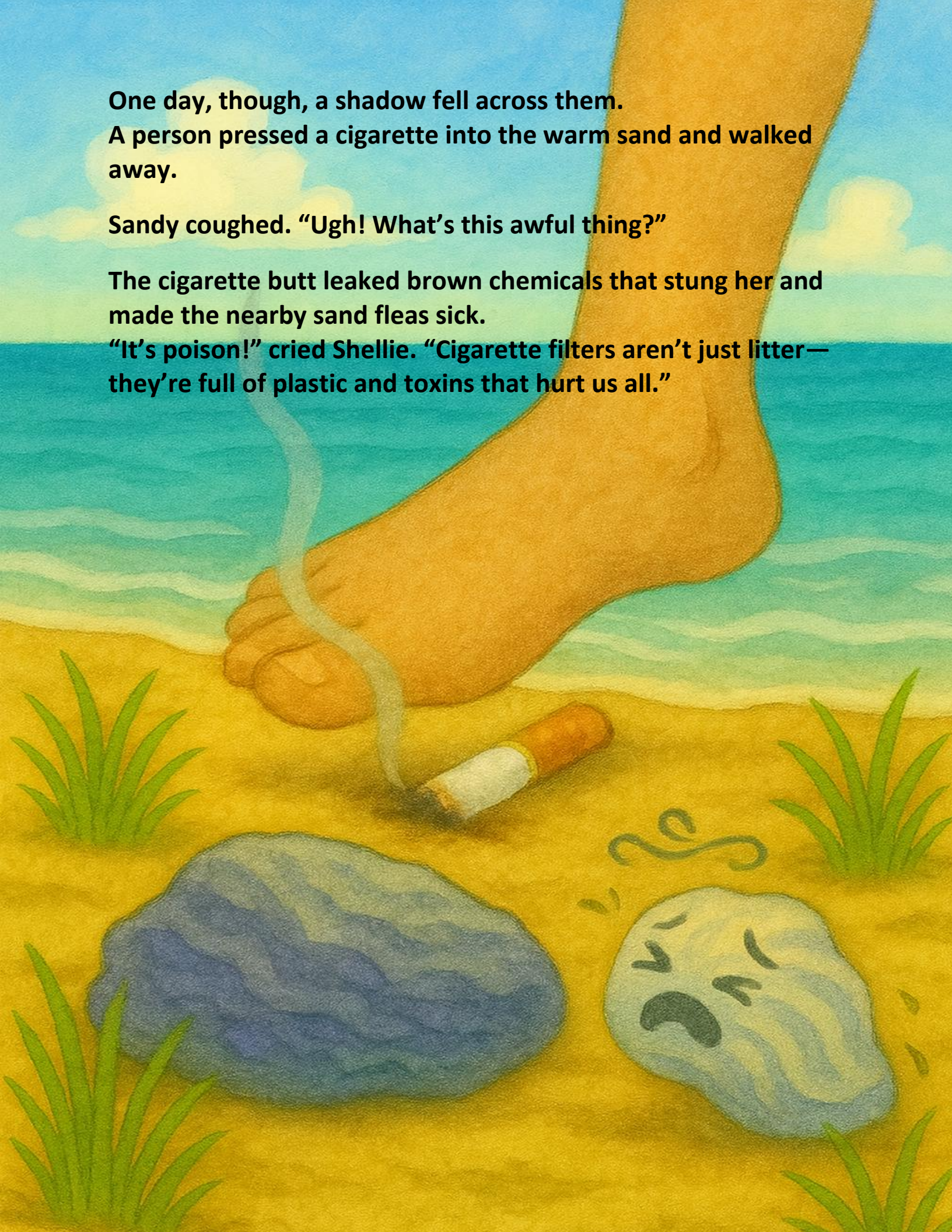


One day, though, a shadow fell across them.
A person pressed a cigarette into the warm sand and walked away.

Sandy coughed. “Ugh! What’s this awful thing?”

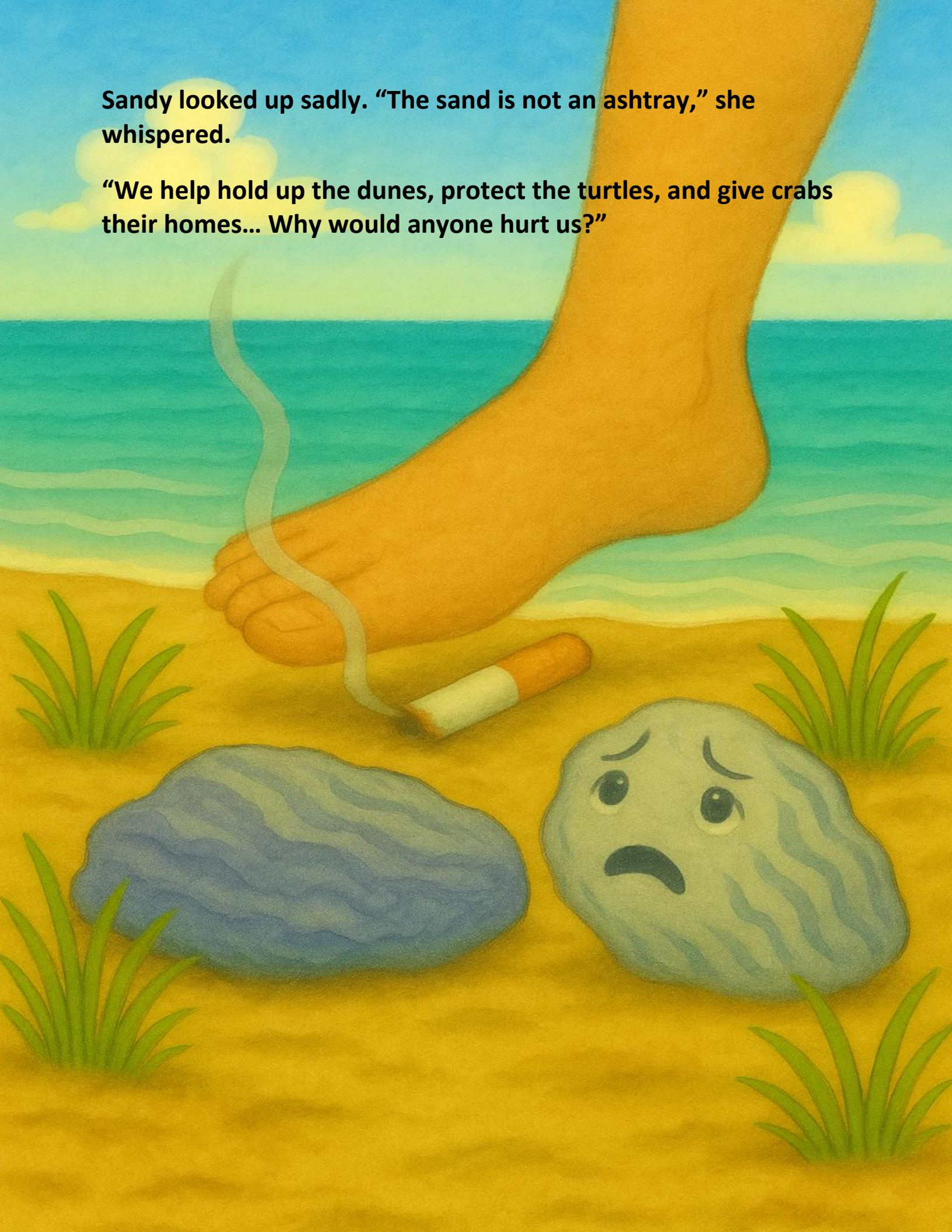
The cigarette butt leaked brown chemicals that stung her and made the nearby sand fleas sick.

“It’s poison!” cried Shellie. “Cigarette filters aren’t just litter—they’re full of plastic and toxins that hurt us all.”



Sandy looked up sadly. "The sand is not an ashtray," she whispered.

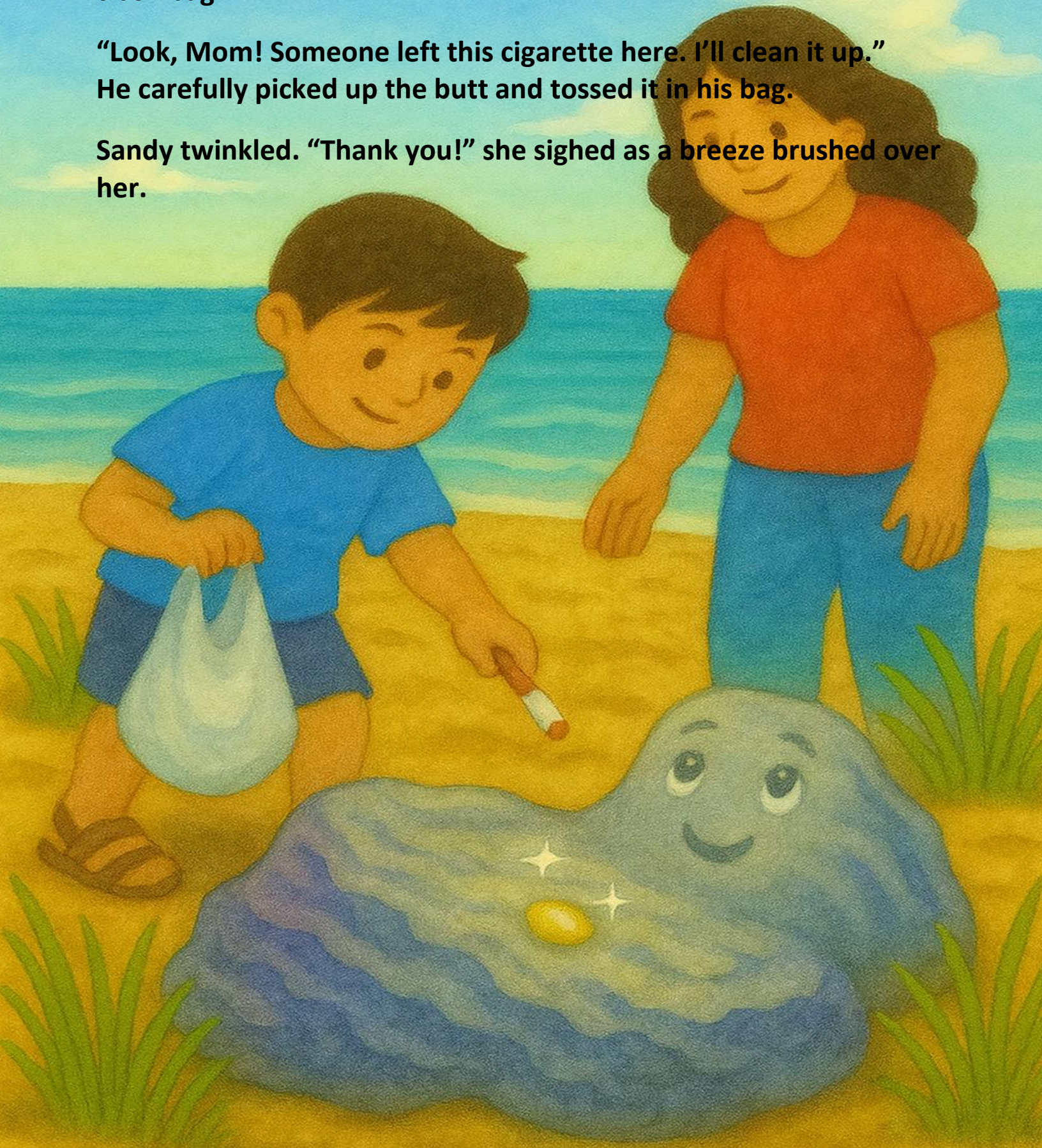
"We help hold up the dunes, protect the turtles, and give crabs their homes... Why would anyone hurt us?"



Just then, a boy named Juan ran over with his mom, holding a trash bag.

“Look, Mom! Someone left this cigarette here. I’ll clean it up.” He carefully picked up the butt and tossed it in his bag.

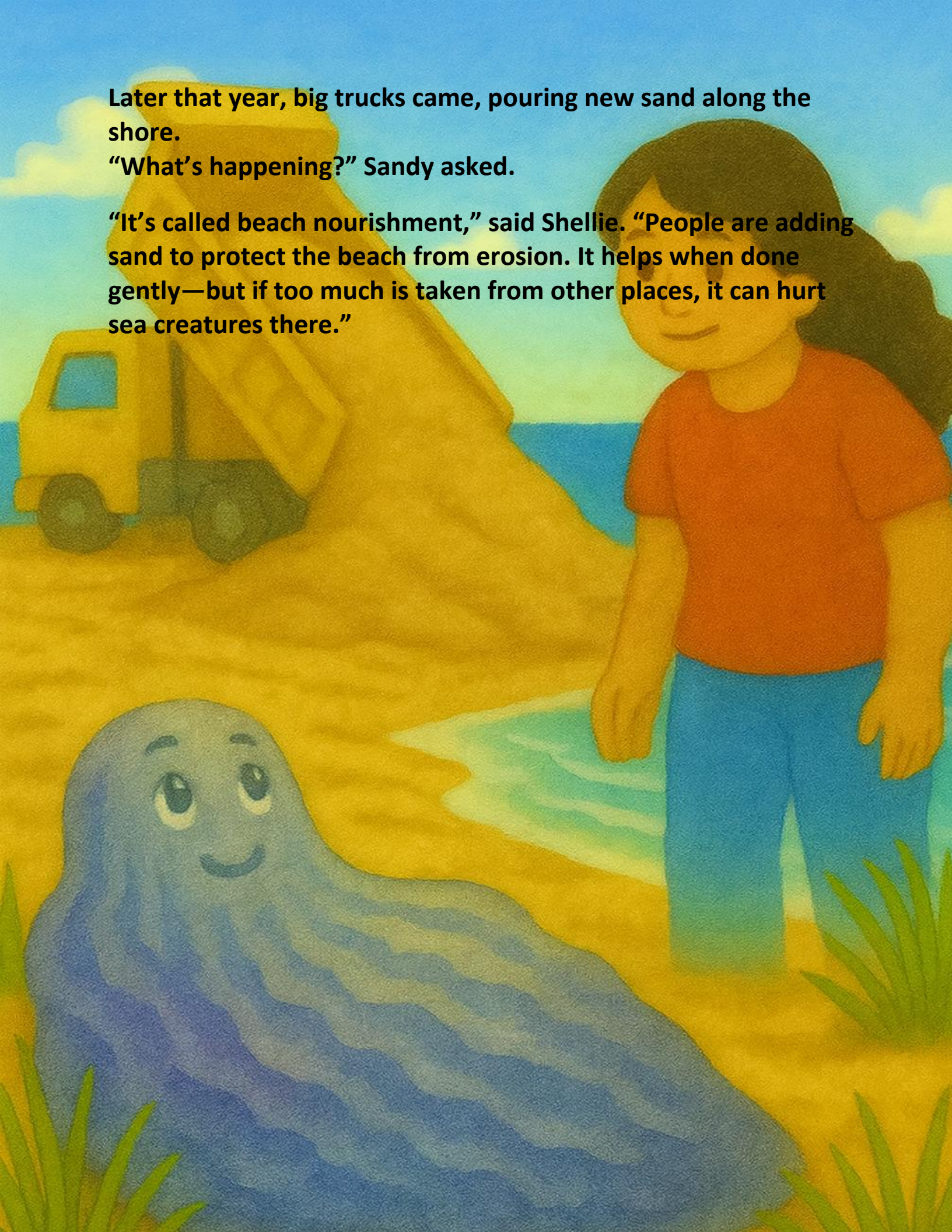
Sandy twinkled. “Thank you!” she sighed as a breeze brushed over her.



Later that year, big trucks came, pouring new sand along the shore.

“What’s happening?” Sandy asked.

“It’s called beach nourishment,” said Shellie. “People are adding sand to protect the beach from erosion. It helps when done gently—but if too much is taken from other places, it can hurt sea creatures there.”



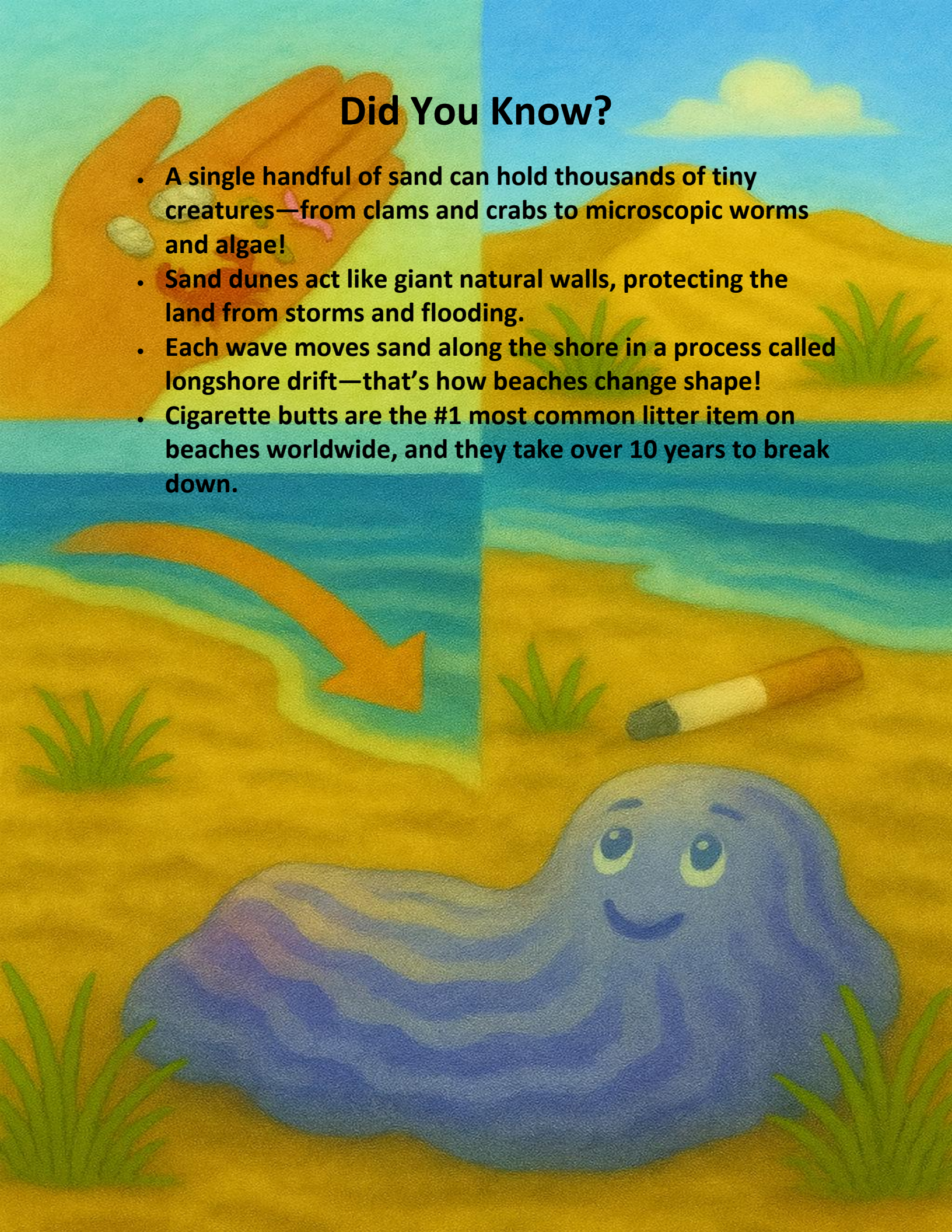
Sandy nodded. She had learned so much since her journey began—from mountain streams to the ocean's edge. Now she knew that sand wasn't just dust beneath people's feet—it was the heartbeat of the beach.

When the moon rose and the waves sang softly, Sandy whispered to her friends: "We are homebuilders, nest-keepers, and protectors of the shore. And when people take care of us, we can keep the coast alive—grain by grain."



Did You Know?

- A single handful of sand can hold thousands of tiny creatures—from clams and crabs to microscopic worms and algae!
- Sand dunes act like giant natural walls, protecting the land from storms and flooding.
- Each wave moves sand along the shore in a process called longshore drift—that's how beaches change shape!
- Cigarette butts are the #1 most common litter item on beaches worldwide, and they take over 10 years to break down.



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The Secret Life of Sand: A children's story about a grain who helps hold the coast together

A tiny grain of sand named Sandy is born in the mountains and journeys through rivers to the sea, where she becomes part of a beach on the Outer Banks. Along the way, she learns how sand protects sea turtle nests, supports dunes, and provides homes for crabs, clams, and countless tiny creatures.

When someone extinguishes a cigarette in the sand, Sandy becomes sick, learning that cigarette filters contain plastic and toxins harmful to wildlife. Thankfully, a young boy named Juan and his mother clean it up, showing how small actions can make a difference. Later, Sandy witnesses beach nourishment—the process of adding sand to eroding beaches—and learns it can help if done responsibly but harm other ecosystems if overdone.

In the end, Sandy reflects on her journey and declares that sand is more than dust—it's the heartbeat of the beach, vital to the health of the coast and its creatures.

About the Publisher

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Learn more and download free educational resources at:
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