

Driftwood's Journey Home



Outer Banks, North Carolina

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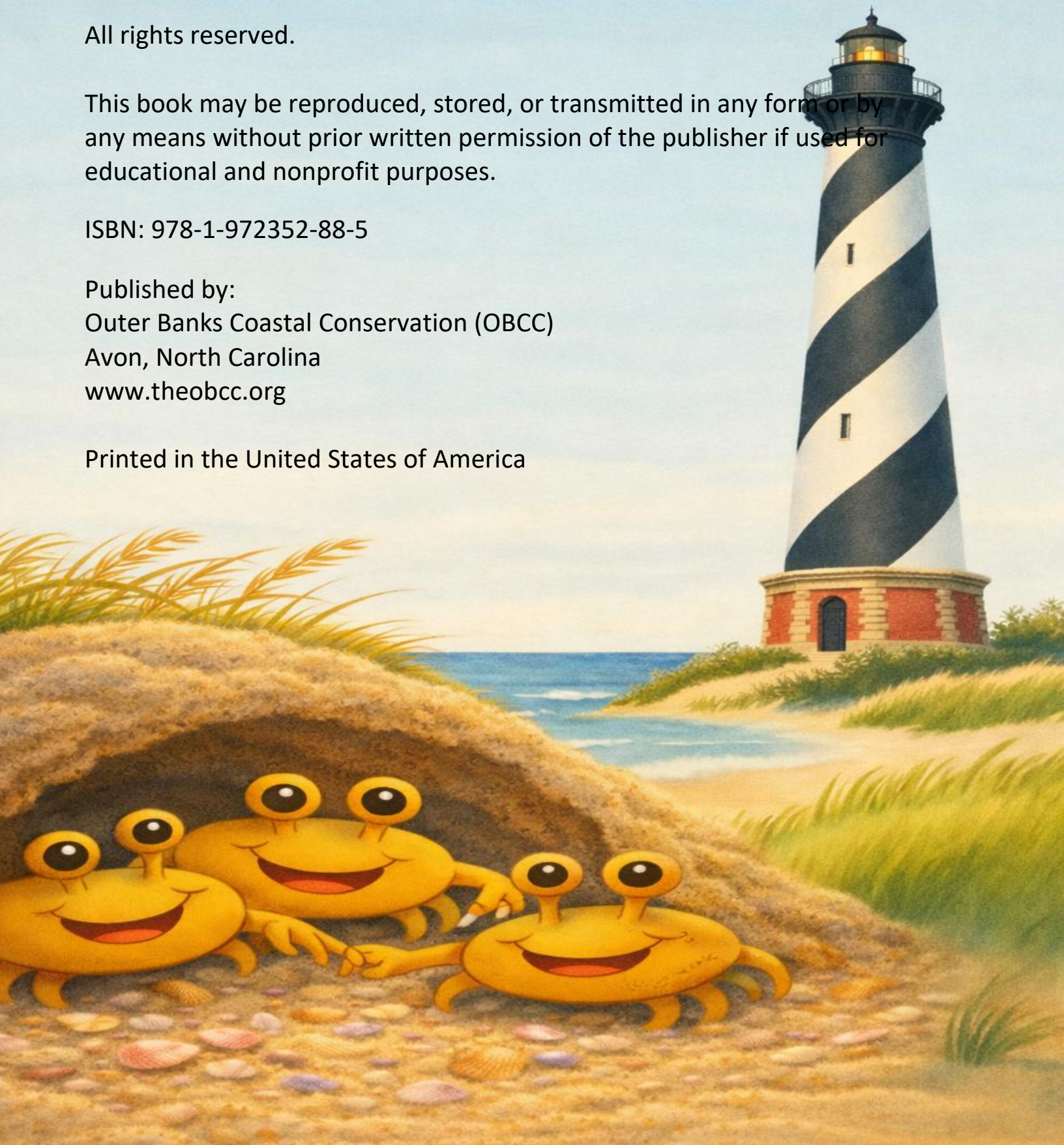
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ISBN: 978-1-972352-88-5

Published by:
Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC)
Avon, North Carolina
www.theobcc.org

Printed in the United States of America



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.

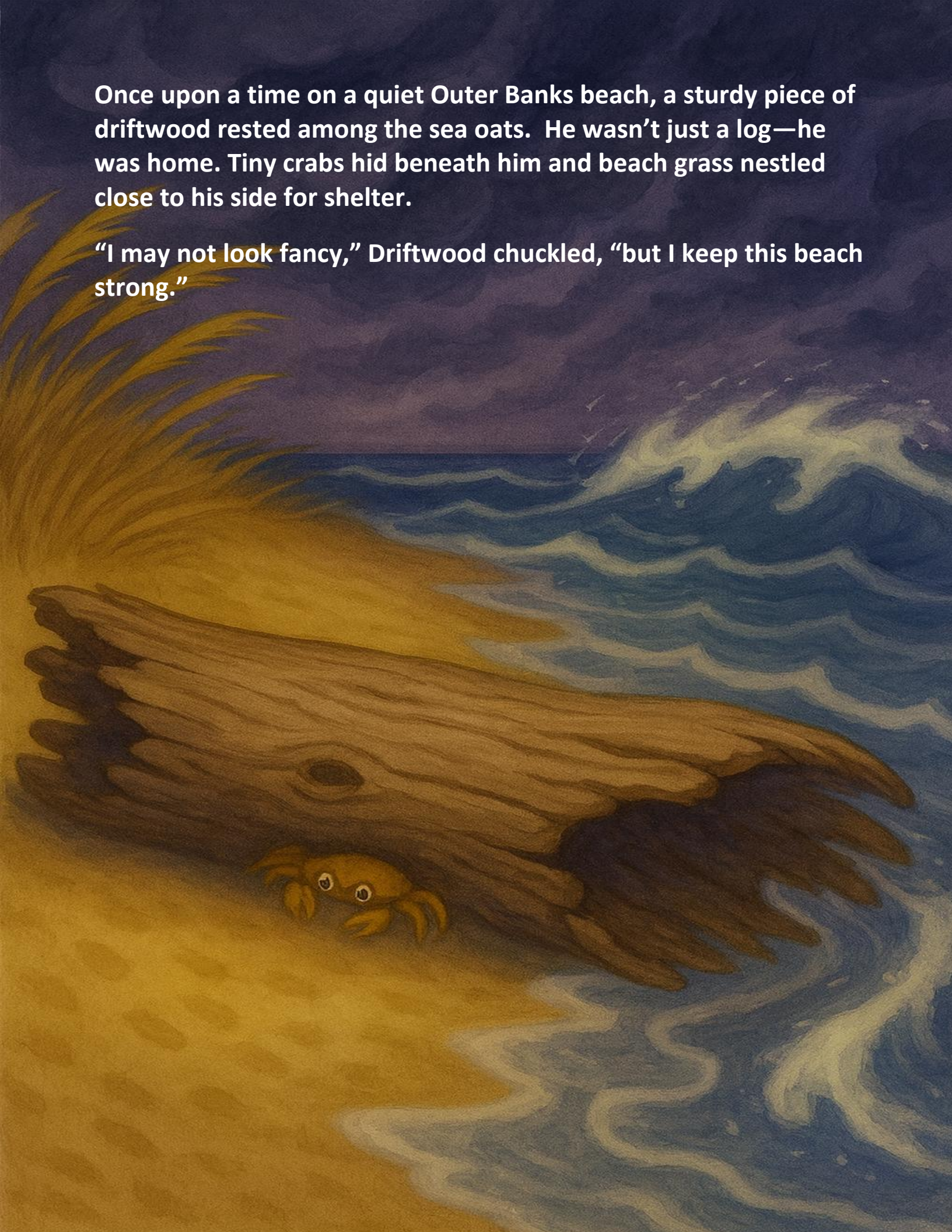
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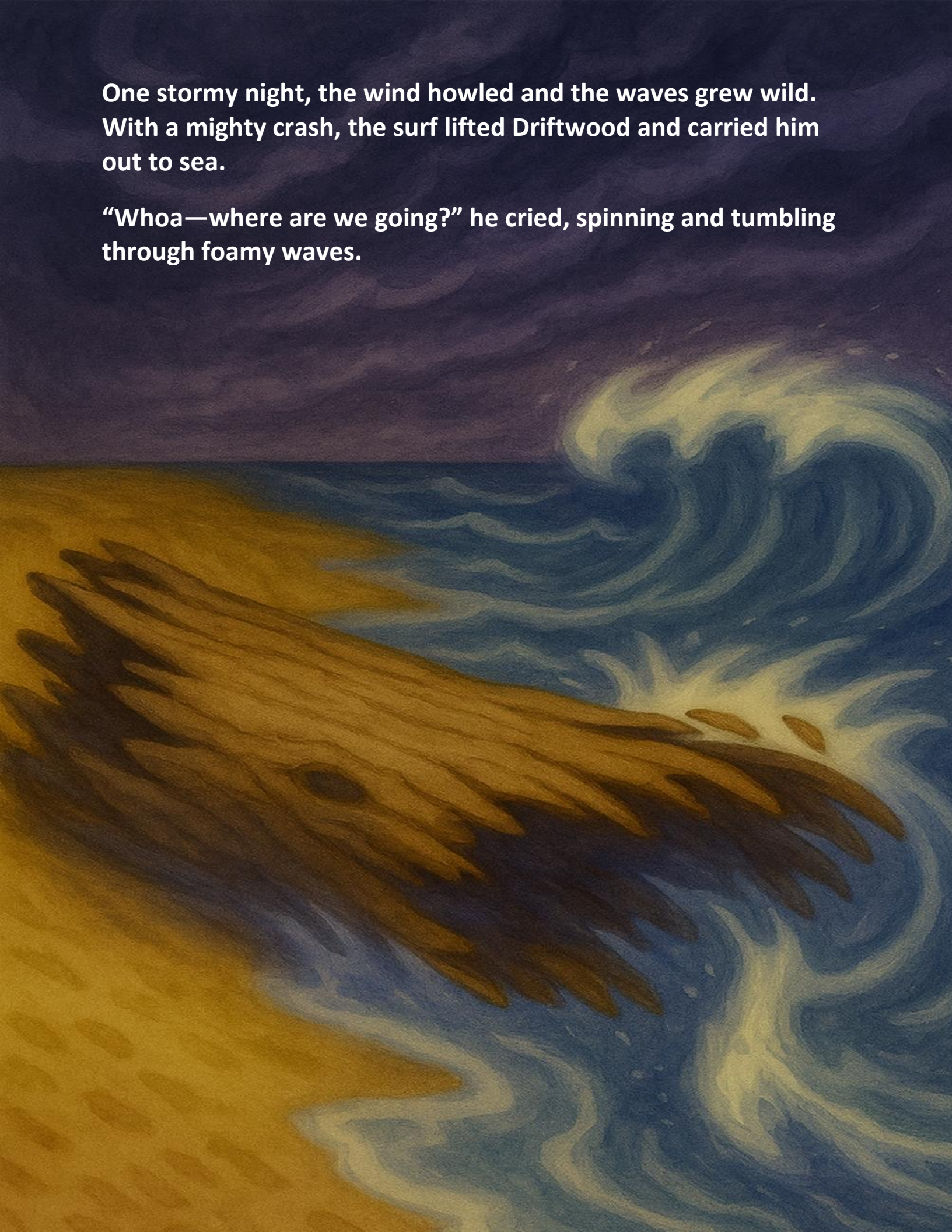
Once upon a time on a quiet Outer Banks beach, a sturdy piece of driftwood rested among the sea oats. He wasn't just a log—he was home. Tiny crabs hid beneath him and beach grass nestled close to his side for shelter.

"I may not look fancy," Driftwood chuckled, "but I keep this beach strong."



One stormy night, the wind howled and the waves grew wild.
With a mighty crash, the surf lifted Driftwood and carried him
out to sea.

“Whoa—where are we going?” he cried, spinning and tumbling
through foamy waves.



Days passed. Driftwood floated far from shore, bumping against bottles, wrappers, and plastic bags drifting aimlessly.

“Hello!” he called to a plastic bottle.

“Don’t bother me,” the bottle said. “I’m too busy drifting forever!”

Driftwood frowned. “But... aren’t you supposed to go home someday?”

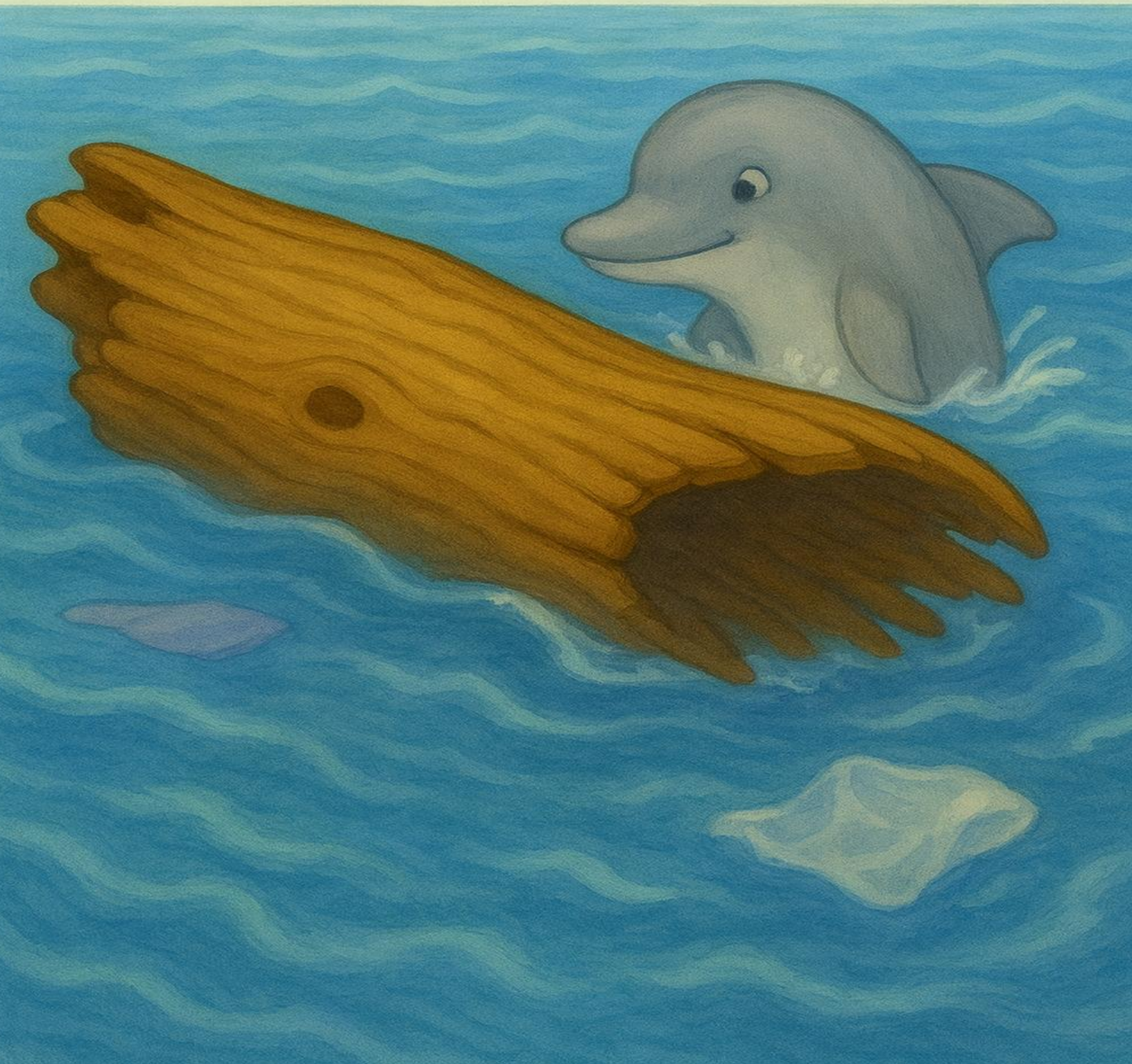
“Nope,” sighed the bottle. “Plastic doesn’t belong anywhere. I’ll float here for hundreds of years.”

Driftwood felt heavy with worry. He missed the dunes, the birds, and his crab friends. He wanted to go back where he *belonged*.



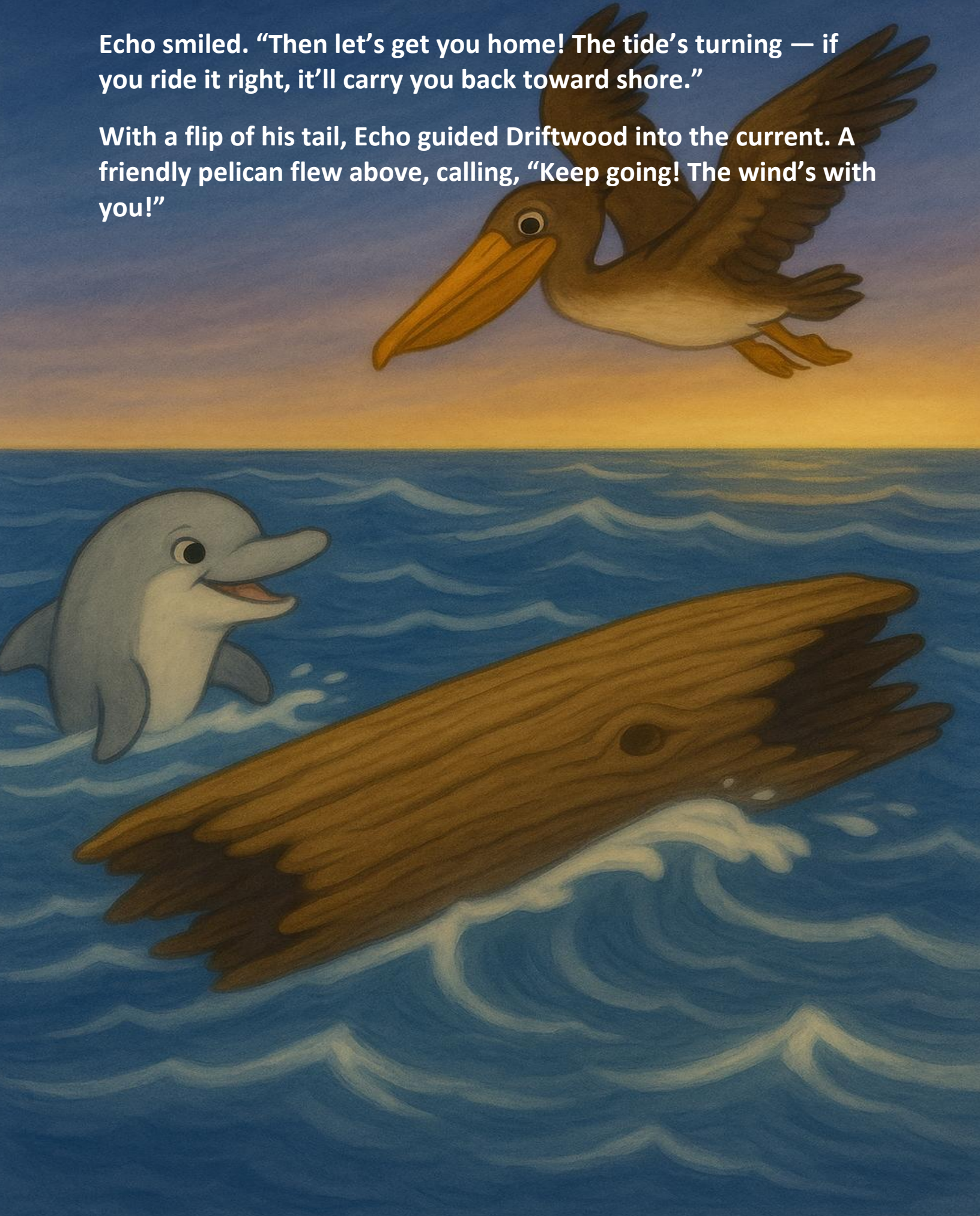
One calm morning, a playful dolphin named Echo spotted Driftwood bobbing near the inlet. “Hey there! You look like you’ve traveled a long way!” said Echo.

“I have,” Driftwood sighed. “A storm swept me away from my beach. I miss the dunes and my little crab friends.”



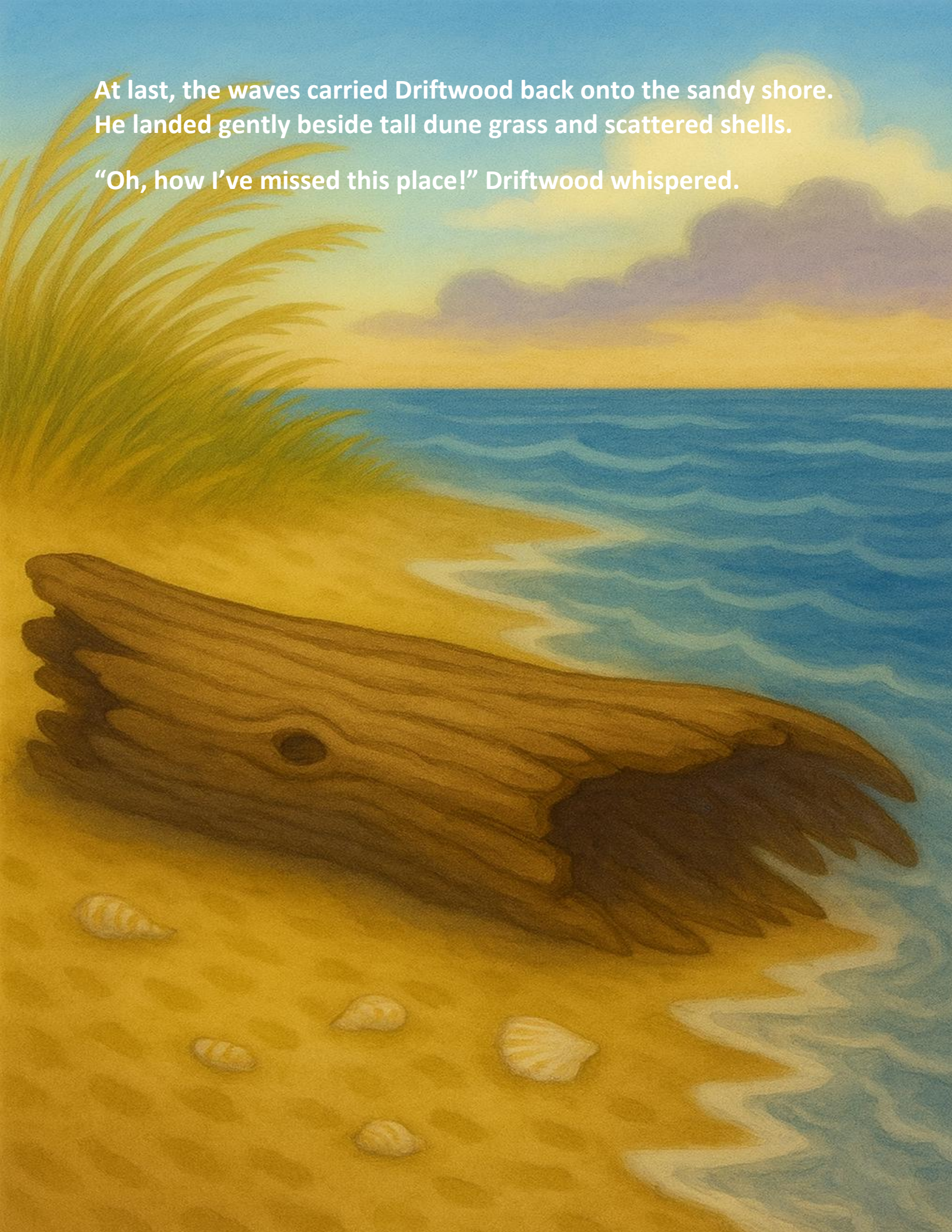
Echo smiled. “Then let’s get you home! The tide’s turning — if you ride it right, it’ll carry you back toward shore.”

With a flip of his tail, Echo guided Driftwood into the current. A friendly pelican flew above, calling, “Keep going! The wind’s with you!”



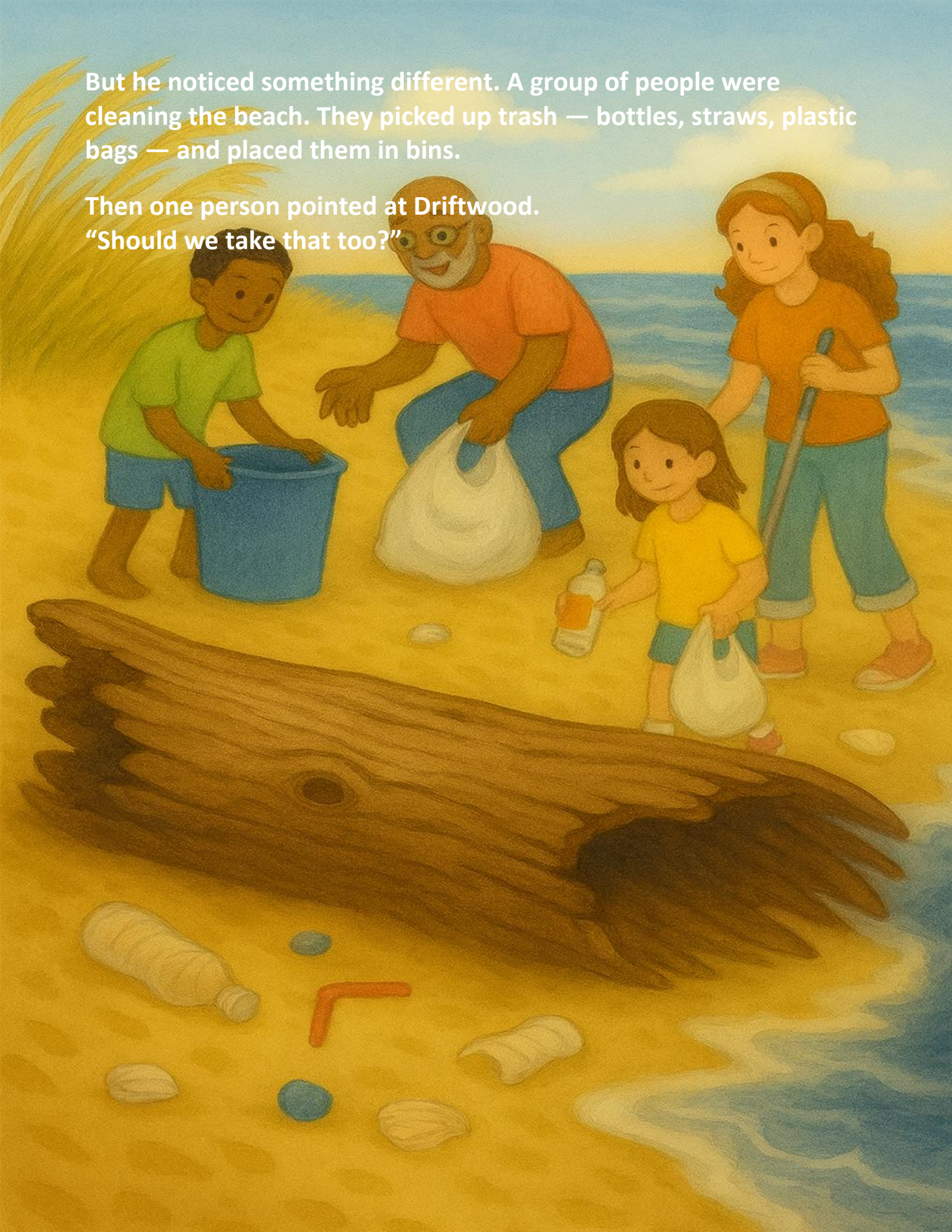
At last, the waves carried Driftwood back onto the sandy shore.
He landed gently beside tall dune grass and scattered shells.

“Oh, how I’ve missed this place!” Driftwood whispered.



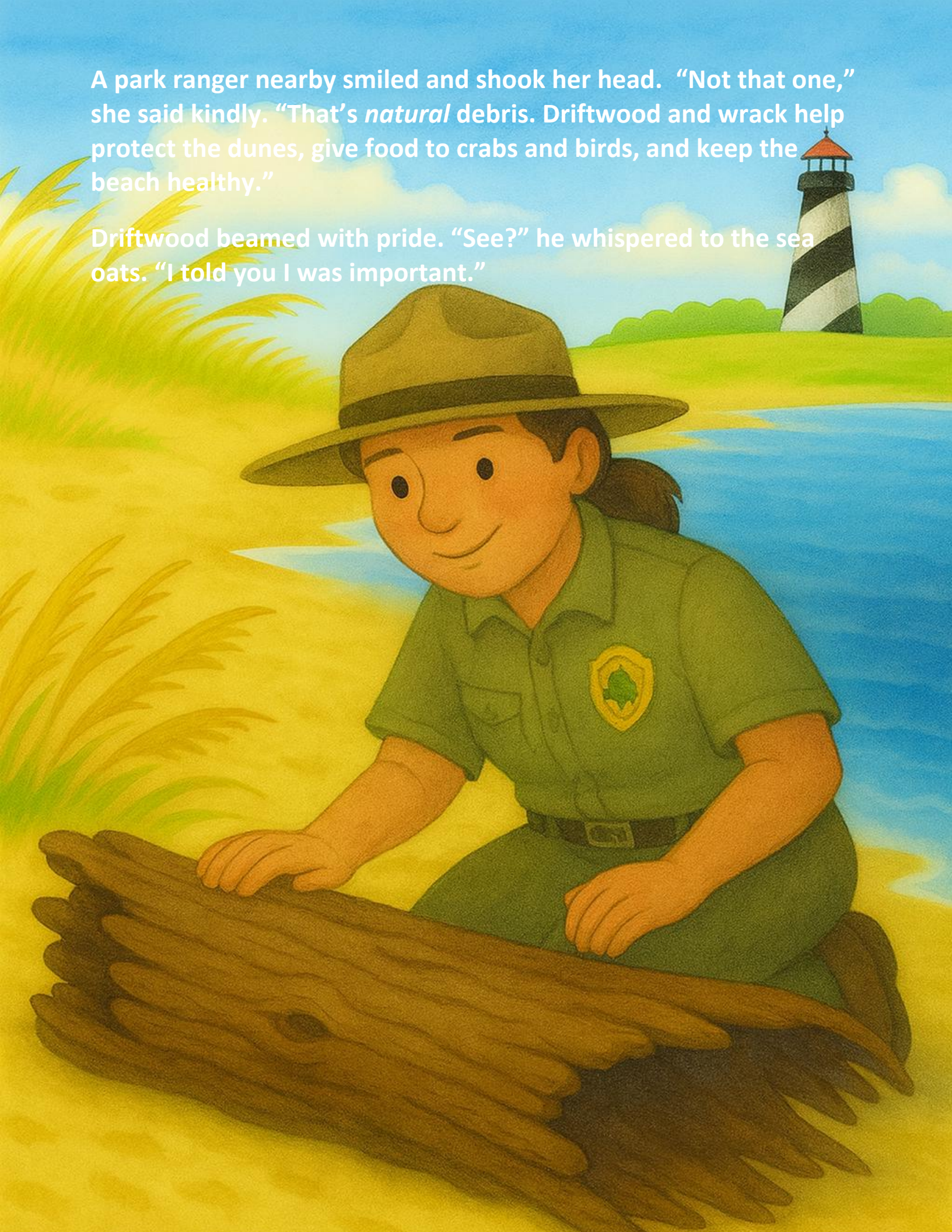
But he noticed something different. A group of people were cleaning the beach. They picked up trash — bottles, straws, plastic bags — and placed them in bins.

Then one person pointed at Driftwood.
“Should we take that too?”



A park ranger nearby smiled and shook her head. “Not that one,” she said kindly. “That’s *natural* debris. Driftwood and wrack help protect the dunes, give food to crabs and birds, and keep the beach healthy.”

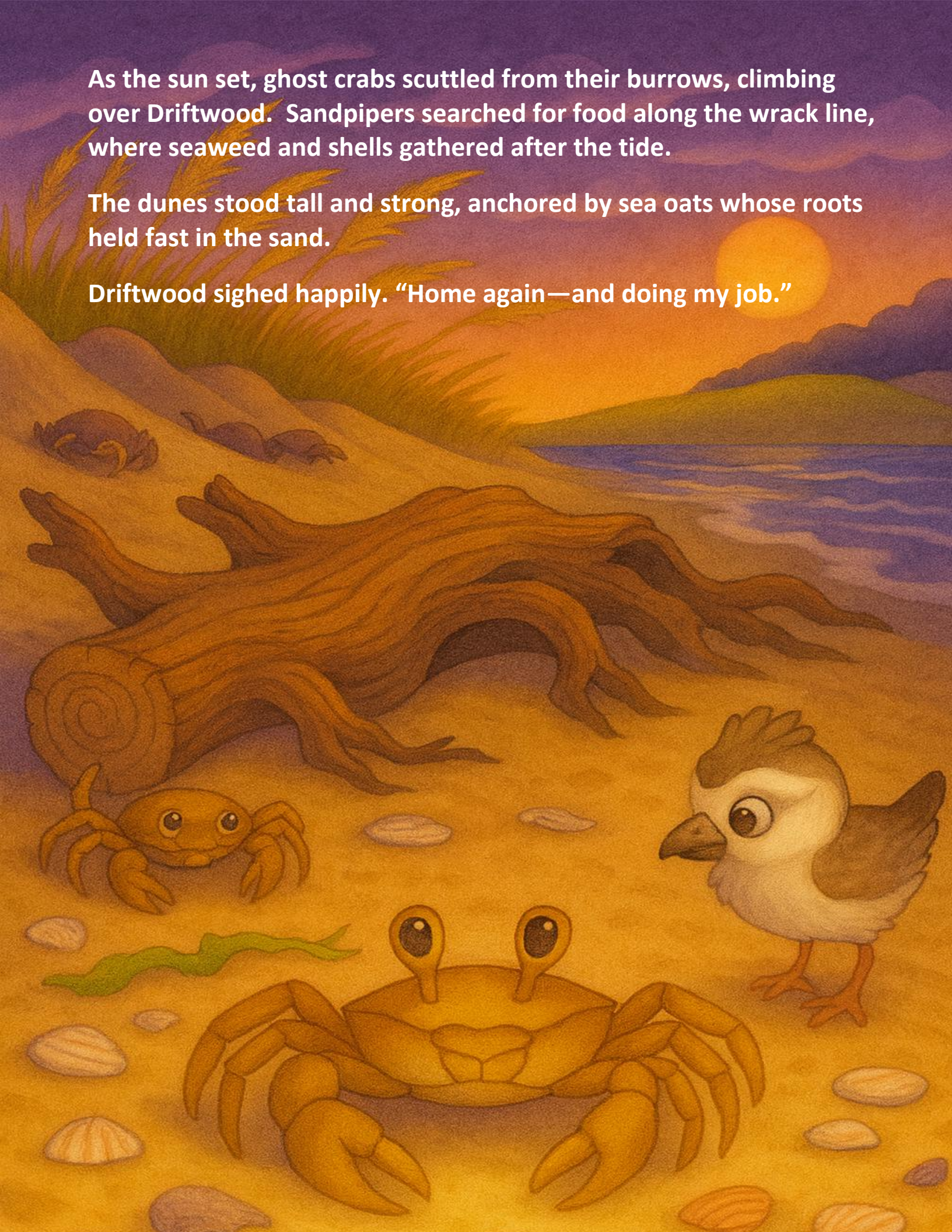
Driftwood beamed with pride. “See?” he whispered to the sea oats. “I told you I was important.”



As the sun set, ghost crabs scuttled from their burrows, climbing over Driftwood. Sandpipers searched for food along the wrack line, where seaweed and shells gathered after the tide.

The dunes stood tall and strong, anchored by sea oats whose roots held fast in the sand.

Driftwood sighed happily. "Home again—and doing my job."



Fun Facts About Driftwood

What Is Driftwood?

- Driftwood is wood that has been washed into the ocean or sound by rivers, storms, or tides.
- It can come from fallen trees, branches, or roots that float through rivers before reaching the sea.
- Once in saltwater, it becomes smooth and bleached by sun, salt, and waves, creating the soft gray look you see on the beach.

Nature's Recyclers

- Driftwood is part of nature's recycling system. It breaks down slowly, returning nutrients to the sand and water.
- As it decays, it feeds fungi, algae, and tiny marine organisms that form the base of the coastal food web.

Who Uses Driftwood?

- Ghost crabs dig burrows beside driftwood for protection.
- Amphipods and isopods (tiny beach bugs) hide and feed under it.
- Shorebirds like sandpipers and plovers search for food around it.
- Fish and baby sea turtles sometimes find shelter in driftwood floating offshore.

Coastal Architects

- Driftwood helps trap sand, creating new dunes and stabilizing existing ones.
- It acts like a natural barrier, protecting the beach from wind and wave erosion.
- Clumps of driftwood, seaweed, and shells form the "wrack line," a critical habitat zone for many small creatures.

Not Trash!

- While people often think it's litter, driftwood is essential to a healthy beach.
- Park rangers and conservationists say: *"Take trash, not nature!"*
- Removing driftwood can make beaches less stable and take away food and shelter for wildlife.

Driftwood Travels Far

- A single piece of driftwood might travel hundreds of miles, carried by currents and storms.
- Scientists use tagged driftwood to study ocean circulation and how materials move around the globe.

Did You Know?

- Driftwood, seaweed, shells, and other natural materials left by the tide are called “wrack.” They protect dunes from erosion and feed tiny creatures that birds and fish eat.
- Removing natural debris can harm wildlife habitats and make beaches less stable.
- Beach cleanups are important — but remember to remove trash, not nature’s treasures!



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Driftwood's Journey Home

This illustrated storybook teaches children about the ecological importance of driftwood along the beaches of the Outer Banks, North Carolina. It combines a heartwarming narrative with educational science facts to inspire environmental stewardship.

On a quiet Outer Banks beach, a piece of driftwood rests among the dunes, providing shelter for crabs and plants. One stormy night, powerful waves sweep him out to sea, where he encounters floating plastic waste that will never biodegrade. Feeling lost and homesick, Driftwood longs to return to his natural home. A dolphin named Echo and a pelican help guide him back toward shore, riding the tides and winds. When he finally washes up on the beach, people are cleaning debris. A park ranger explains that Driftwood isn't trash—he's an important part of the beach ecosystem, providing food and shelter for wildlife and helping to stabilize dunes. As the sun sets, Driftwood feels proud to be "home again and doing his job."

About the Publisher

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9781972352885

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