

Dunehoppers

and the

Smoke That Didn't Belong



Outer Banks, North Carolina

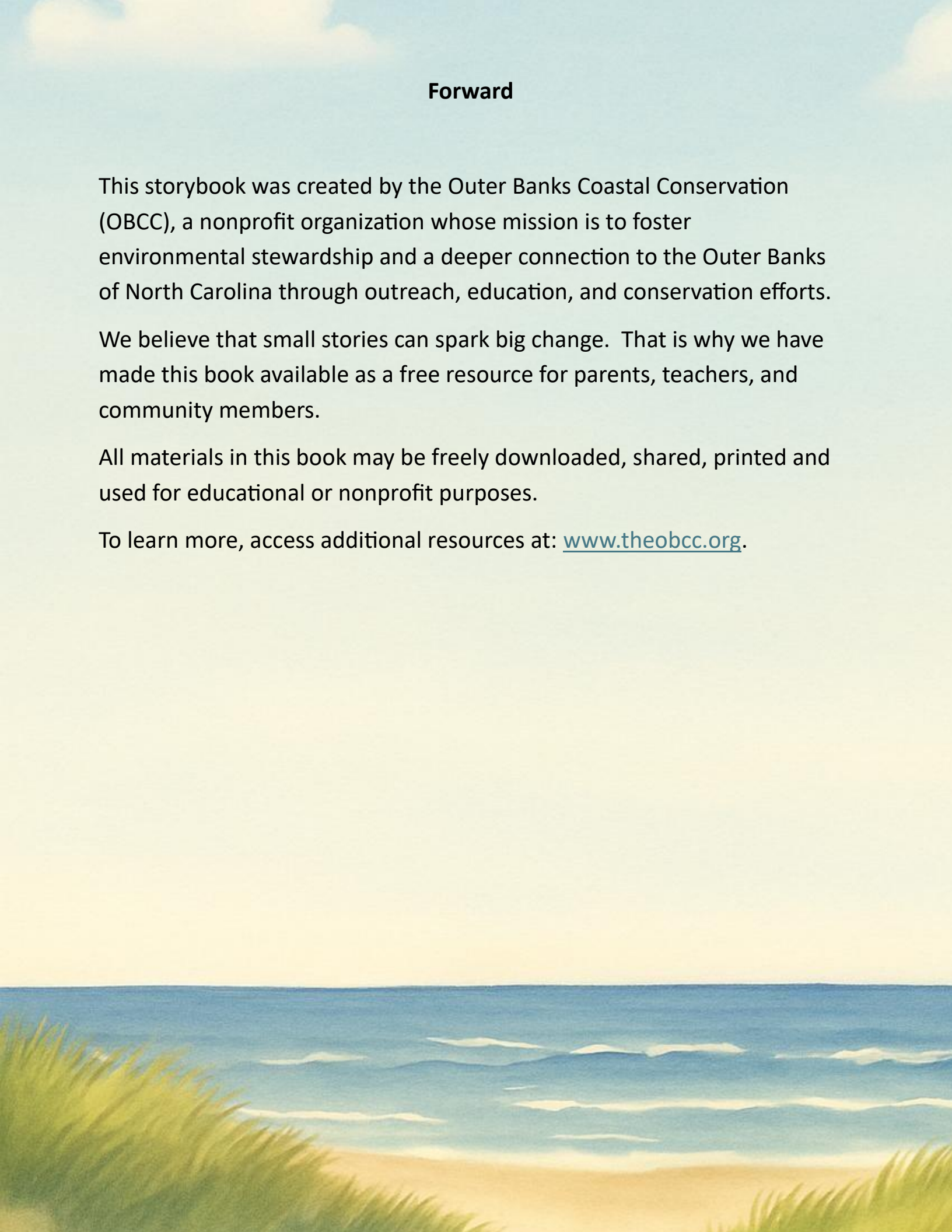
Forward


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.



The background illustration shows a sandy beach under a blue sky with a few clouds. A large, arched burrow is dug into the sand. A lit cigarette lies on the sand just outside the burrow, with a small plume of gray smoke rising from it. Several orange crabs with large, round eyes are scattered around. One large crab is on the right, looking towards the burrow. Two smaller crabs are in the foreground, looking up with concerned expressions. Another crab is partially visible on the left. Green grass blades are scattered around the sand.

One warm morning on the Outer Banks, the Dunehopper family was asleep in their cozy burrow beneath the dunes. Sea oats whispered softly overhead. The waves hummed their steady song. Everything felt safe.

Until suddenly—

HISS.

PUFF.

COUGH.

Scoot bolted upright. “Papa! Mama! The air smells *burny*!”

Before anyone could answer, gray smoke crept down into the burrow, swirling like a mean little cloud. Everyone began coughing and scrambling.

“Out—now!” Papa Dunehopper called, wrapping a claw protectively around Shellby.

The family scuttled out of their burrow just in time to see the problem.

A human footprint sat right on top of their home.

And beside it... a cigarette, still smoking.

Someone had stood on the dune, stamped out their cigarette right on the Dunehoppers’ burrow, and walked away—never noticing the family below.

Mama's eyes widened. "That smoke could have hurt us badly."

"And the heat!" Sandy added. "Our burrow could've collapsed!"

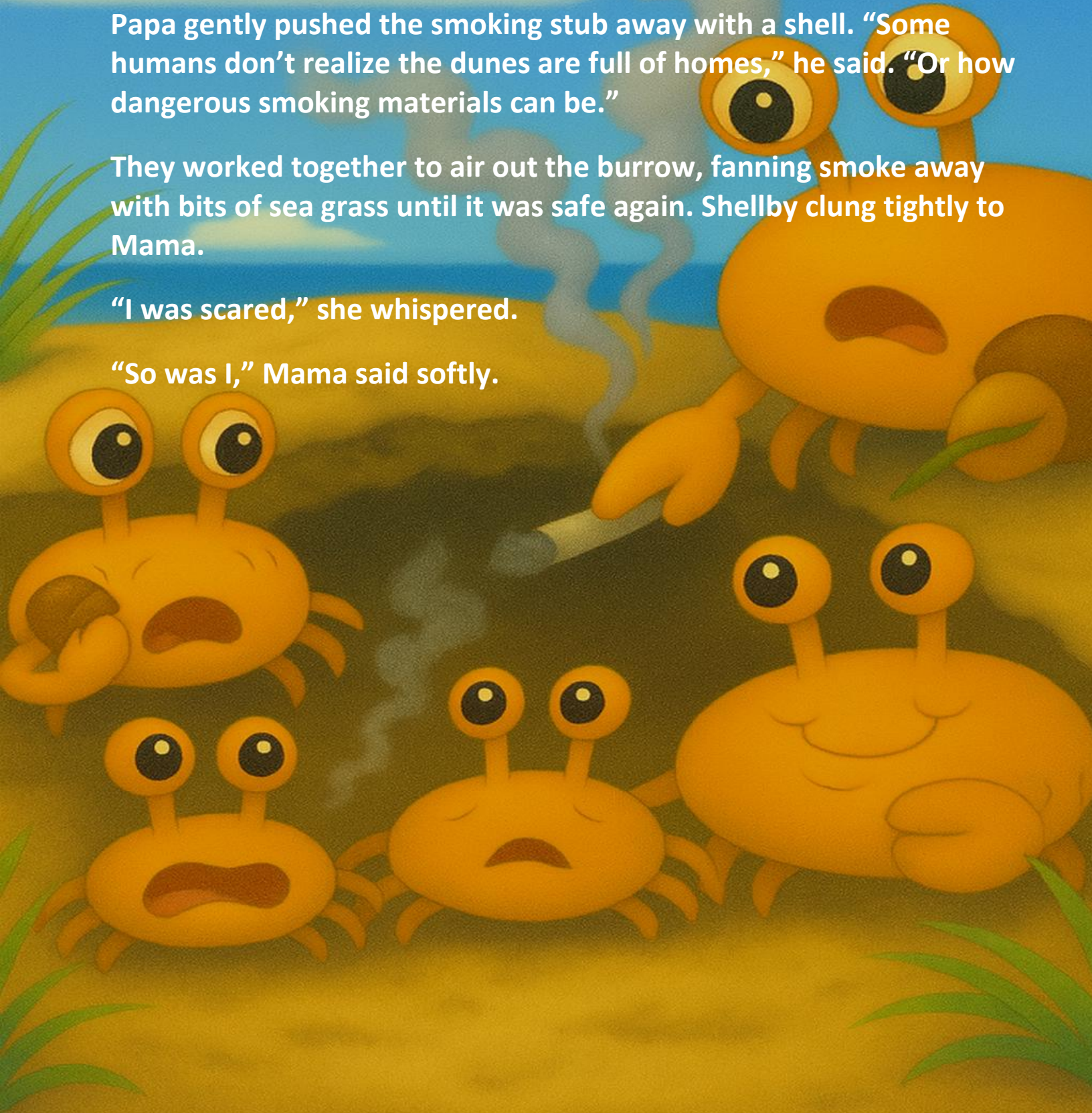
Scoot stared at the cigarette in shock. "Why would anyone bring fire into the dunes?"

Papa gently pushed the smoking stub away with a shell. "Some humans don't realize the dunes are full of homes," he said. "Or how dangerous smoking materials can be."

They worked together to air out the burrow, fanning smoke away with bits of sea grass until it was safe again. Shellby clung tightly to Mama.

"I was scared," she whispered.

"So was I," Mama said softly.



A Second Lesson by the Shore

Later that afternoon, Sandy volunteered to help Papa near the water's edge while Scoot collected shells for a new burrow sign: DUNE HOME – PLEASE STAY OFF

Nearby, a human was fishing.

At first, everything seemed fine—until Sandy noticed something glowing.

“Papa,” she said, pointing with one claw. “What’s that?”

Before Papa could answer, the fisher flicked something small into the air.

Plink.



Sandy screamed as the hot cigarette butt landed on her shell and bounced into the sand beside her.

“Ow!” she cried, startled and hurt.

Papa rushed to her side, brushing sand gently over the spot. “Don’t move, Sandy.”

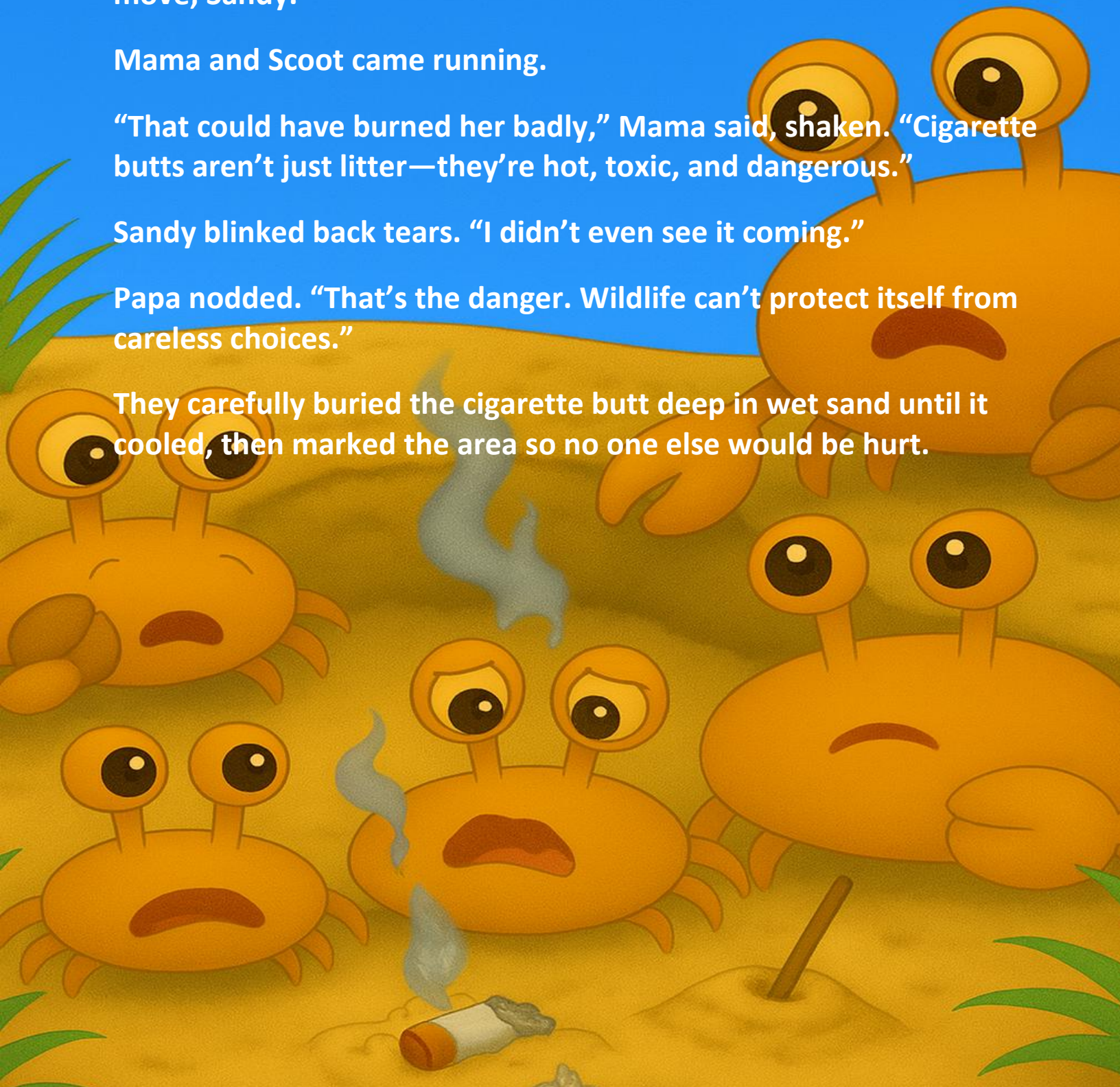
Mama and Scoot came running.

“That could have burned her badly,” Mama said, shaken. “Cigarette butts aren’t just litter—they’re hot, toxic, and dangerous.”

Sandy blinked back tears. “I didn’t even see it coming.”

Papa nodded. “That’s the danger. Wildlife can’t protect itself from careless choices.”

They carefully buried the cigarette butt deep in wet sand until it cooled, then marked the area so no one else would be hurt.



Standing Up for the Dunes

That evening, the Dunehoppers held a family meeting beneath the stars.

“We can’t stop humans from coming to the beach,” Scoot said, “but maybe we can help them understand.”

Together, they placed their new sign near the dune path:

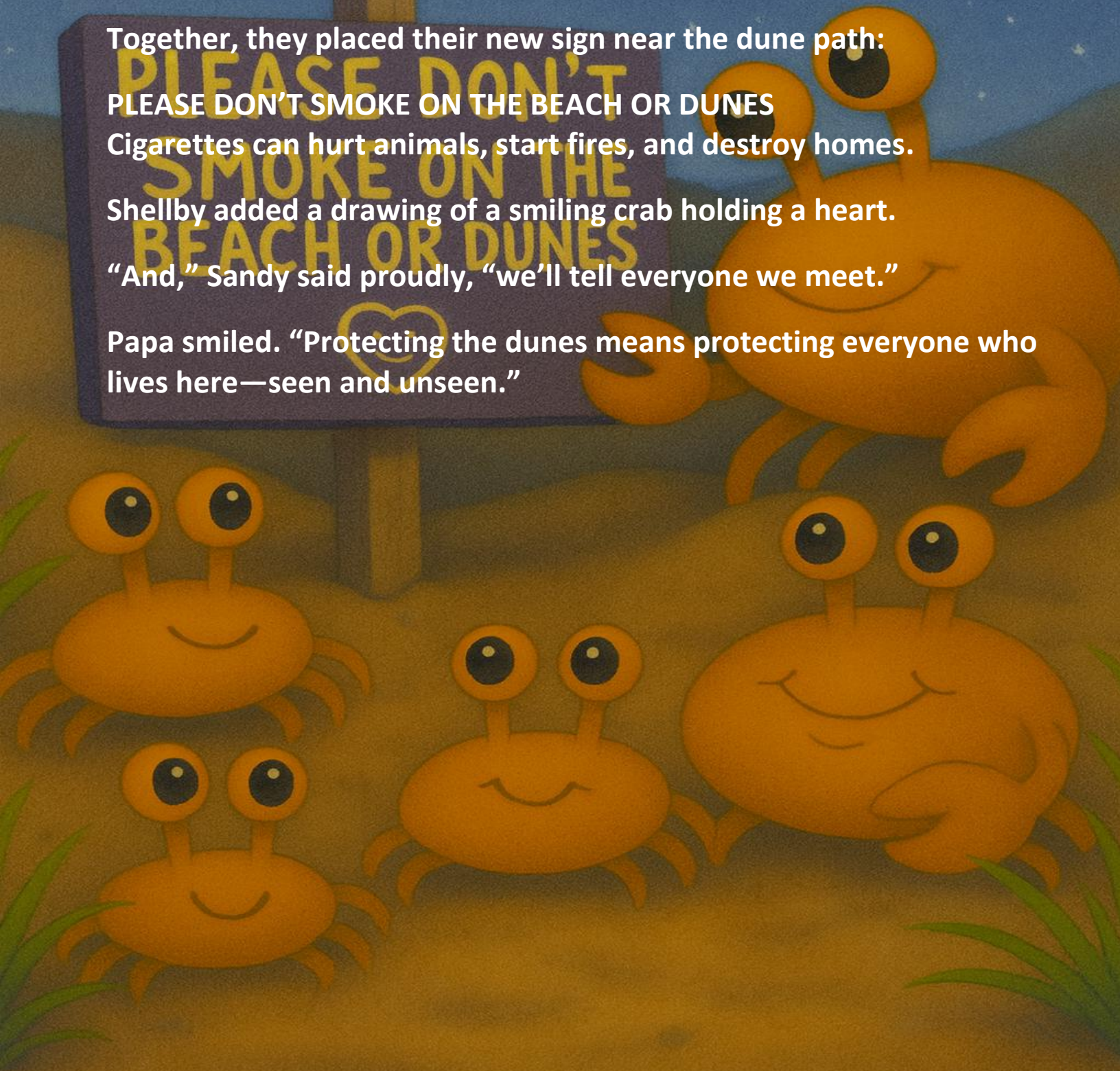
**PLEASE DON'T
SMOKE ON THE BEACH OR DUNES**

Cigarettes can hurt animals, start fires, and destroy homes.

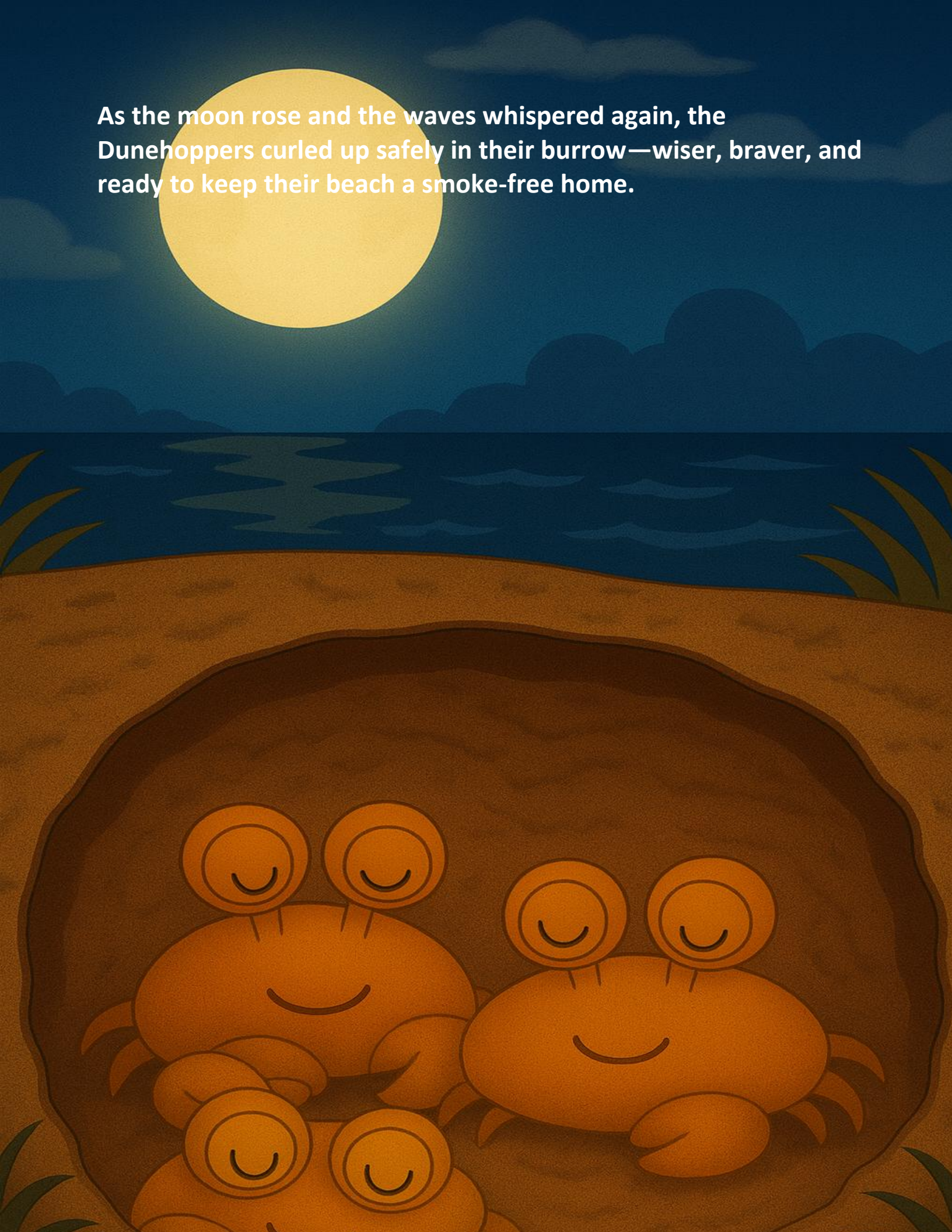
Shellby added a drawing of a smiling crab holding a heart.

“And,” Sandy said proudly, “we’ll tell everyone we meet.”

Papa smiled. “Protecting the dunes means protecting everyone who lives here—seen and unseen.”



As the moon rose and the waves whispered again, the Dunehoppers curled up safely in their burrow—wiser, braver, and ready to keep their beach a smoke-free home.



Cigarettes don't disappear when they're dropped. They can burn, poison, and scare animals who live in the sand and sea.

Keeping beaches smoke-free and litter-free keeps everyone safe—crabs, birds, fish, and people too.

