

Dunehoppers

and the
Smoke That Didn't Belong



Outer Banks, North Carolina

Dunehoppers and the Smoke That Didn't Belong

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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.

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.



An illustration of a sandy burrow with a cigarette lying on the ground, emitting a plume of gray smoke. Several orange crabs with large eyes are scattered around the burrow, some looking up at the smoke. The background shows a blue sky with a few clouds and green grass blades.

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.

Scout 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!"

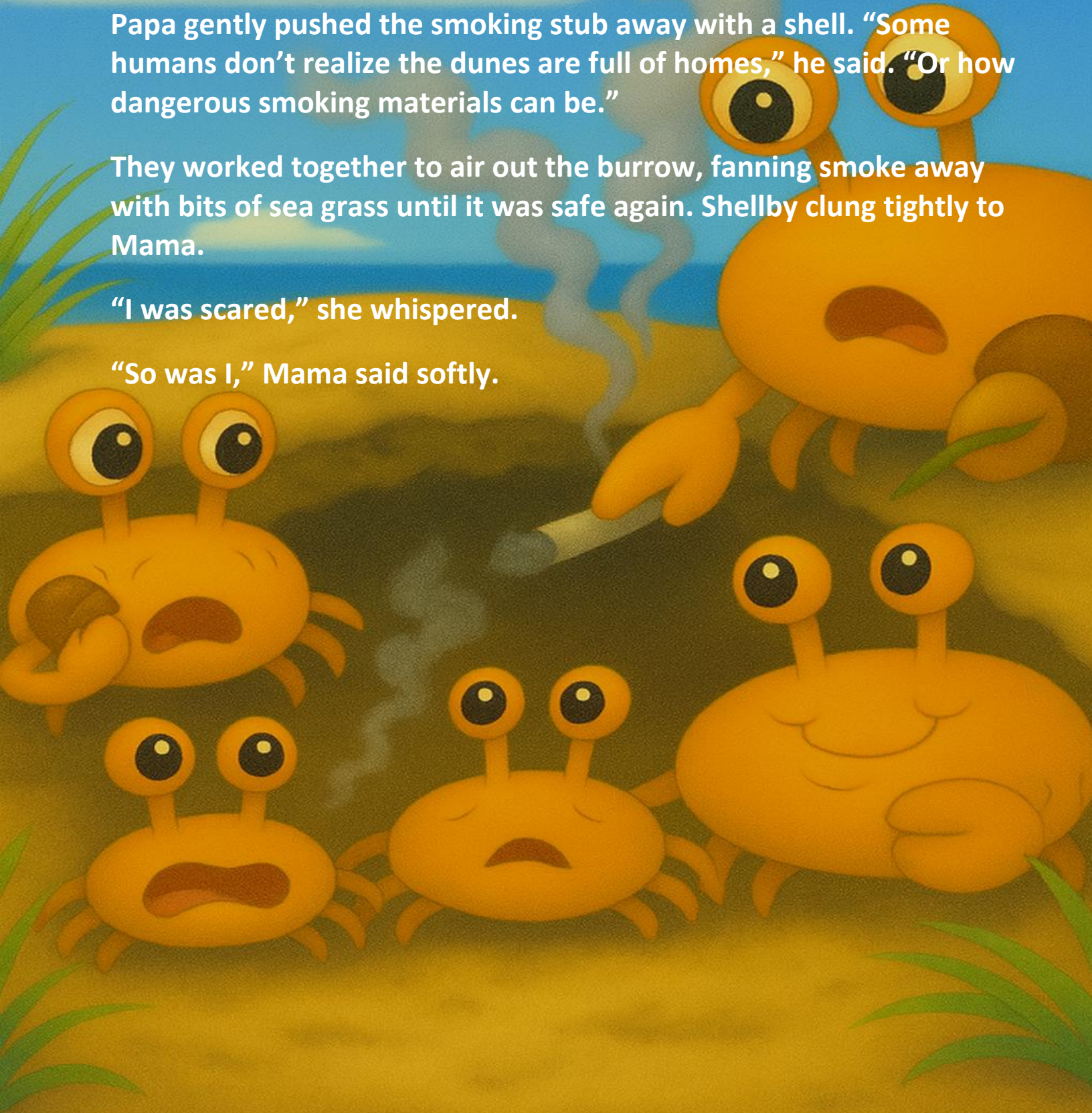
Scout stared at the cigarette in shock. "Why would anyone bring fire into the dunes?"

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:

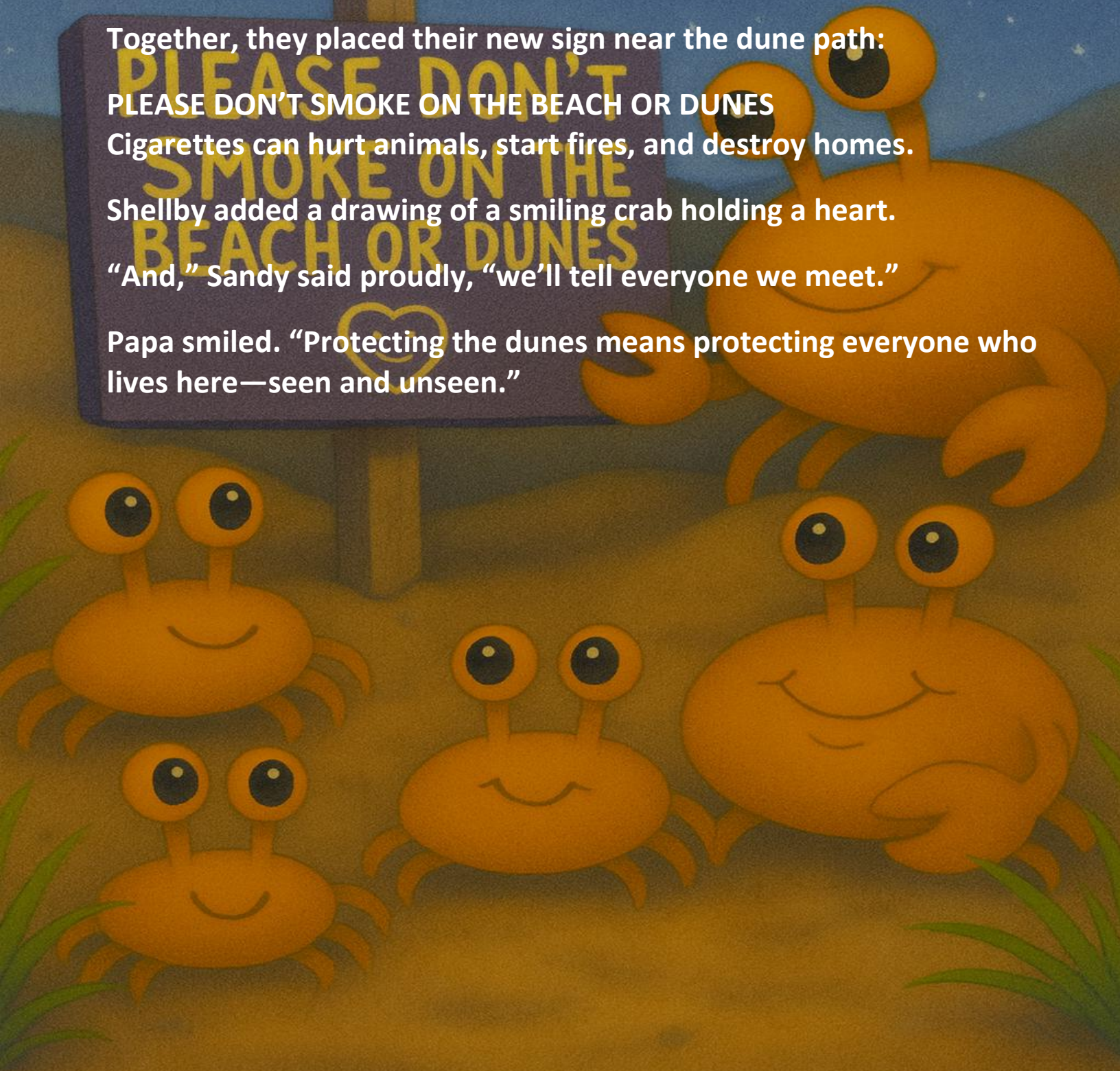
**PLEASE DON'T
PLEASE DON'T SMOKE ON THE BEACH OR DUNES**

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

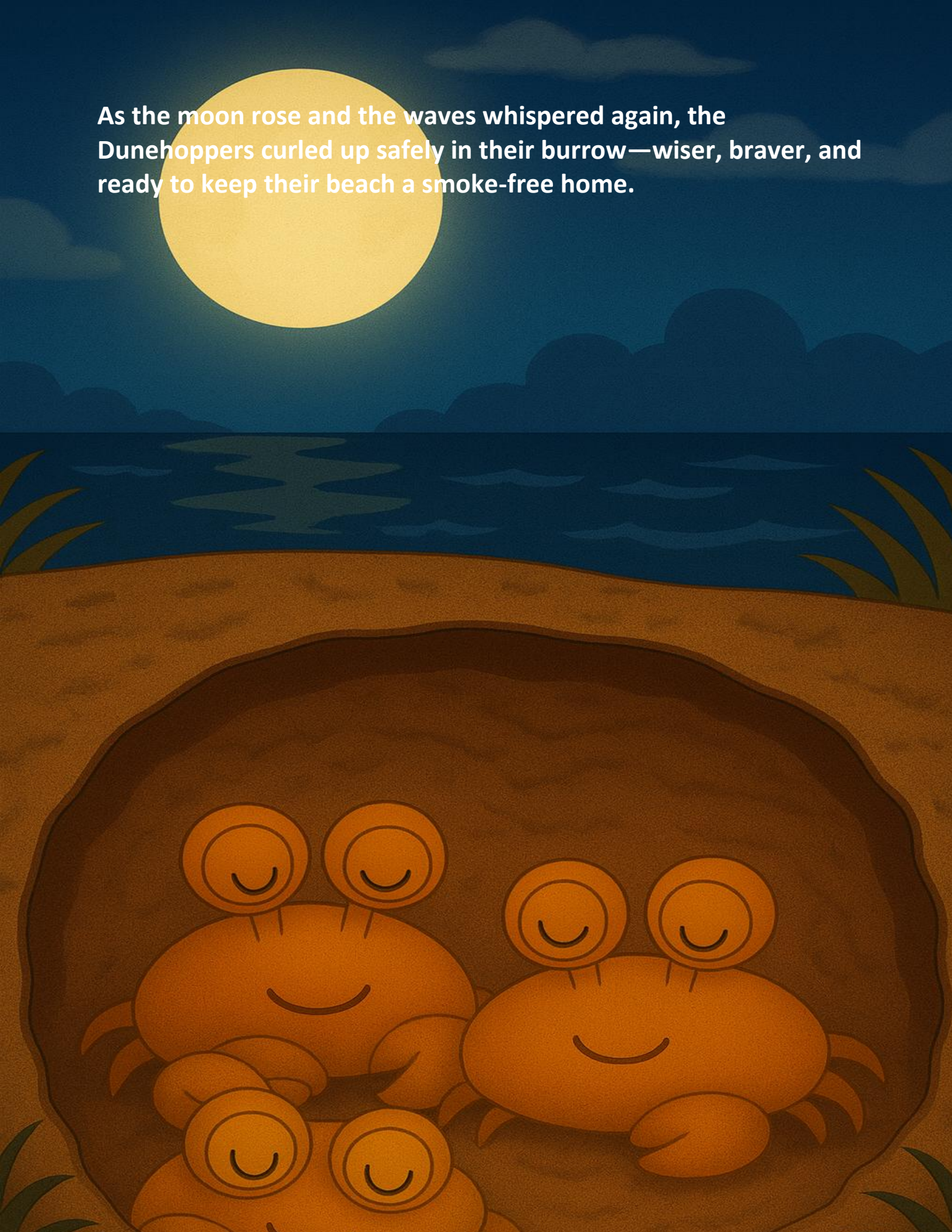
Shellby added a drawing of a smiling crab holding a heart.

“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.



Dunehoppers and the Smoke That Didn't Belong

is a children's story set on the Outer Banks, where the Dunehopper ghost crab family learns firsthand how dangerous smoking materials can be to wildlife and fragile dune habitats. When smoke from a discarded cigarette fills their burrow and later a hot cigarette butt injures Sandy, the family works together to stay safe and understand the risks humans may not realize they cause. Through empathy, teamwork, and courage, the Dunehoppers turn a frightening experience into a lesson, choosing to educate others by placing signs and spreading awareness. The story emphasizes compassion, environmental stewardship, and the shared responsibility of keeping beaches smoke-free so that both wildlife and people can safely enjoy these special places.

About the Publisher

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