

The background of the entire image is a vibrant night scene on a beach. A full moon hangs in a dark blue sky filled with stars. Its light reflects on the calm ocean waves. In the foreground, a sandy beach is illuminated by a warm, golden light, possibly from a lighthouse or moonlight. Three cheerful, cartoonish orange crabs with large eyes and wide smiles are positioned around the scene: one in the top right corner, one on the left side, and one on the right side. A small sea turtle is walking on the sand towards the bottom center. The title 'Dunehoppers and the LOST SEA TURTLE' is prominently displayed in the center, with 'Dunehoppers' in large, bubbly yellow letters with a blue outline, 'and the' in smaller orange letters, and 'LOST SEA TURTLE' in large, blocky yellow letters with a blue outline. The overall mood is magical and inviting.

Dunehoppers and the LOST SEA TURTLE

Outer Banks, North Carolina

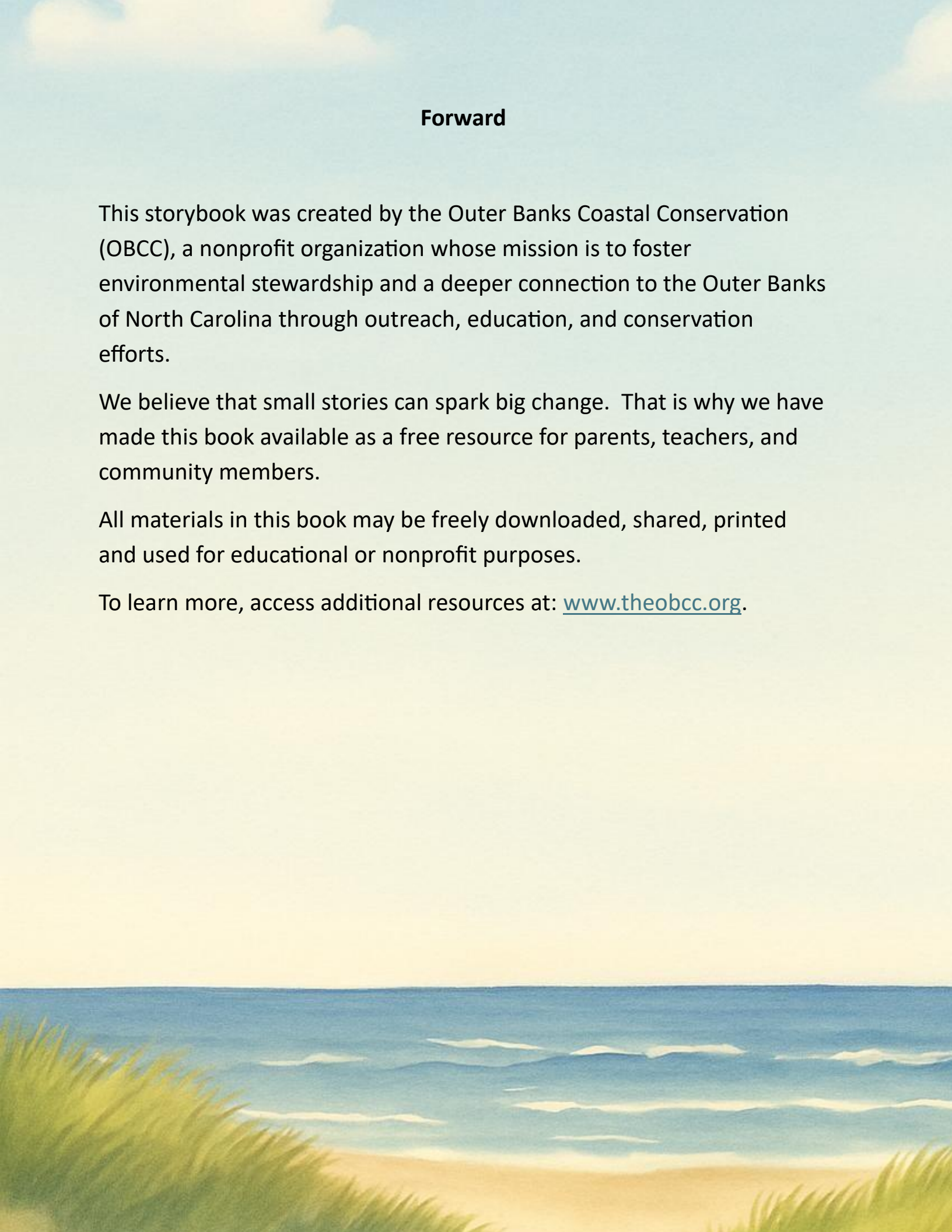
Forward

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 sky was just beginning to glow pink and gold as the sun peeked over the ocean. The beach was quiet—no umbrellas, no laughter, only the soft *shhh* of waves and the calls of waking seabirds.

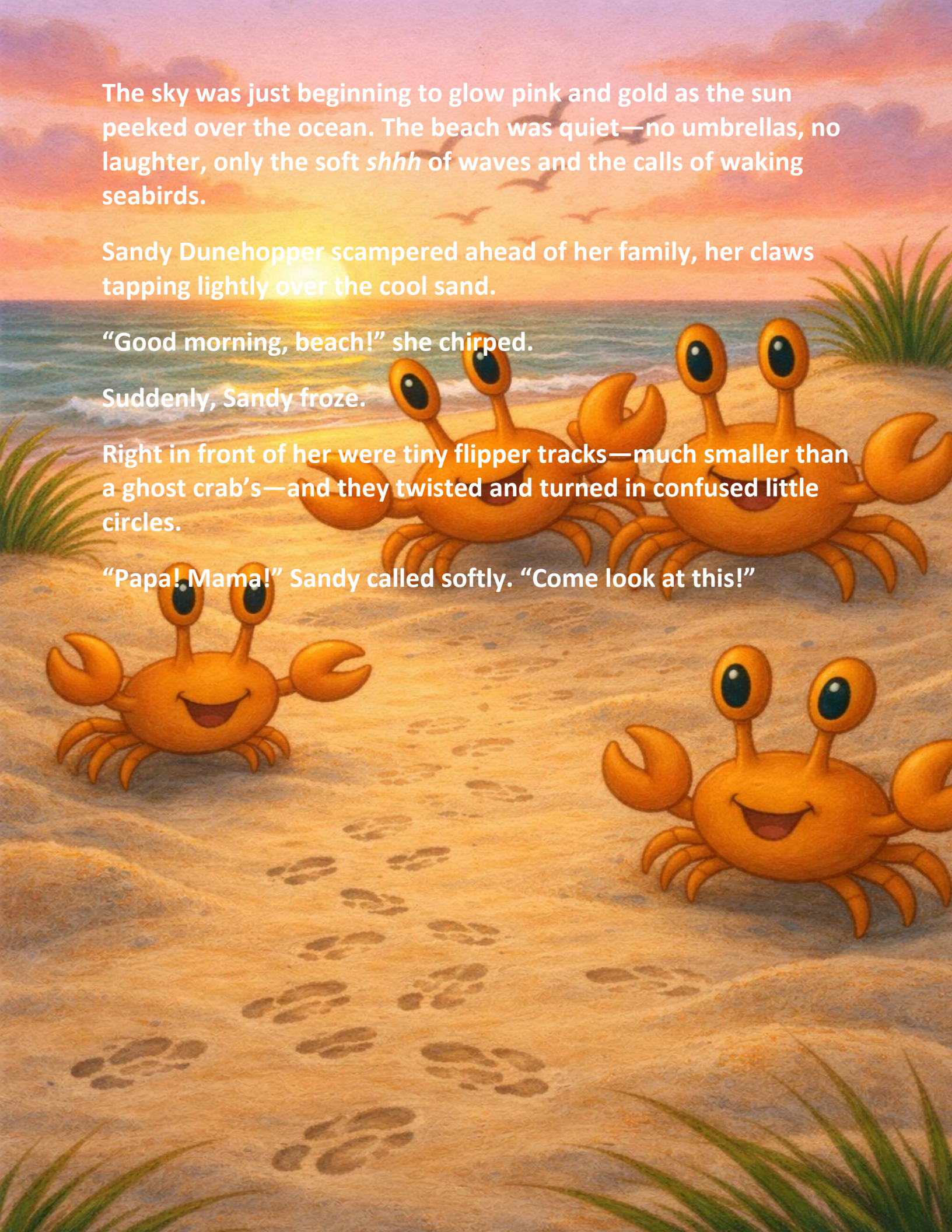
Sandy Dunehopper scampered ahead of her family, her claws tapping lightly over the cool sand.

“Good morning, beach!” she chirped.

Suddenly, Sandy froze.

Right in front of her were tiny flipper tracks—much smaller than a ghost crab’s—and they twisted and turned in confused little circles.

“Papa! Mama!” Sandy called softly. “Come look at this!”



Papa Dunehopper knelt down, careful not to touch the tracks. Mama leaned in close, her eyes wide.

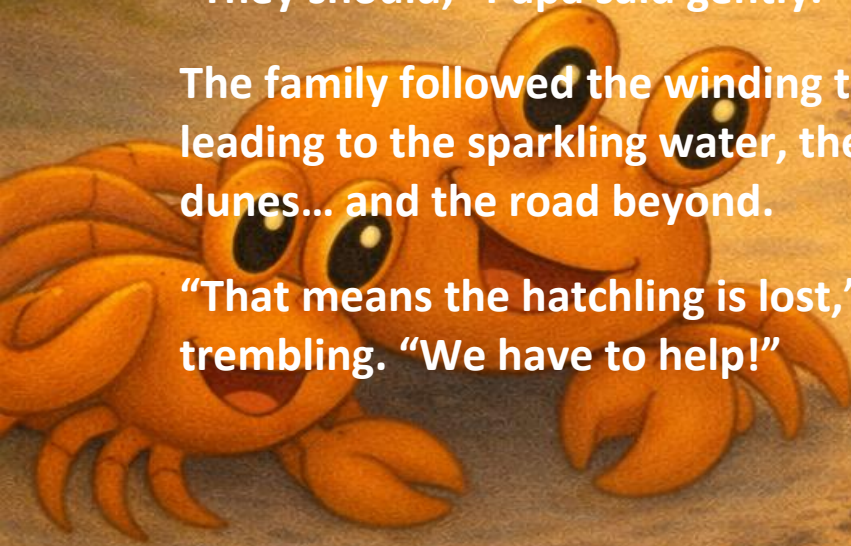
“Oh dear,” Mama whispered. “These are sea turtle hatchling tracks.”

Scoot tilted his head. “But... shouldn’t they go straight to the ocean?”

“They should,” Papa said gently. “Unless something went wrong.”

The family followed the winding trail with their eyes. Instead of leading to the sparkling water, the tracks pointed toward the dunes... and the road beyond.

“That means the hatchling is lost,” Sandy said, her voice trembling. “We have to help!”



Just then, a tiny shadow moved near the sand fence. A baby sea turtle, no bigger than Sandy's claw, wiggled slowly across the beach, turning toward the bright glow of streetlights instead of the moon.

Mama raised a claw. "Remember, Dunehoppers—we never touch sea turtles. But we *can* help in other ways."

Scoot looked up at the sky. "The moon is over the ocean! That's how turtles know where to go."

"But the streetlights are brighter," Sandy said sadly. "They're confusing her."

Papa straightened up. "Then we'll help the moon shine again."



Working together, the Dunehoppers sprang into action.

Papa and Scoot carefully positioned themselves to block the glow from the streetlights, standing tall and still like dune statues. Mama used driftwood and sea grass to create a soft shadow, without moving the sand or disturbing the turtle.

Sandy climbed to the top of a dune and waved her claw gently.

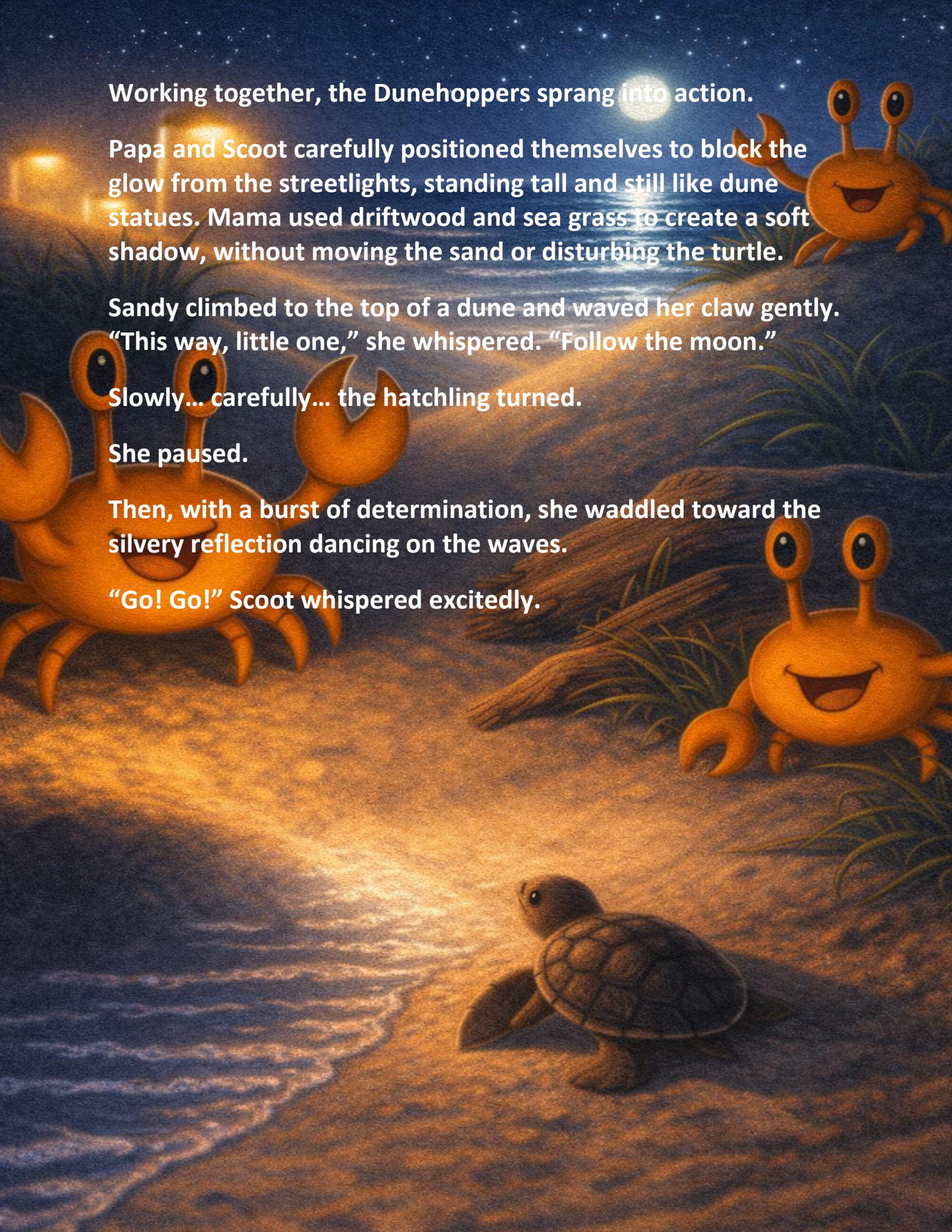
"This way, little one," she whispered. "Follow the moon."

Slowly... carefully... the hatchling turned.

She paused.

Then, with a burst of determination, she waddled toward the silvery reflection dancing on the waves.

"Go! Go!" Scoot whispered excitedly.



The family watched in silent awe as the tiny turtle reached the shoreline. A wave rushed in, scooped her up, and carried her into the ocean.

Sandy felt her eyes sparkle. "She made it."

Mama smiled. "Because we helped without harming."



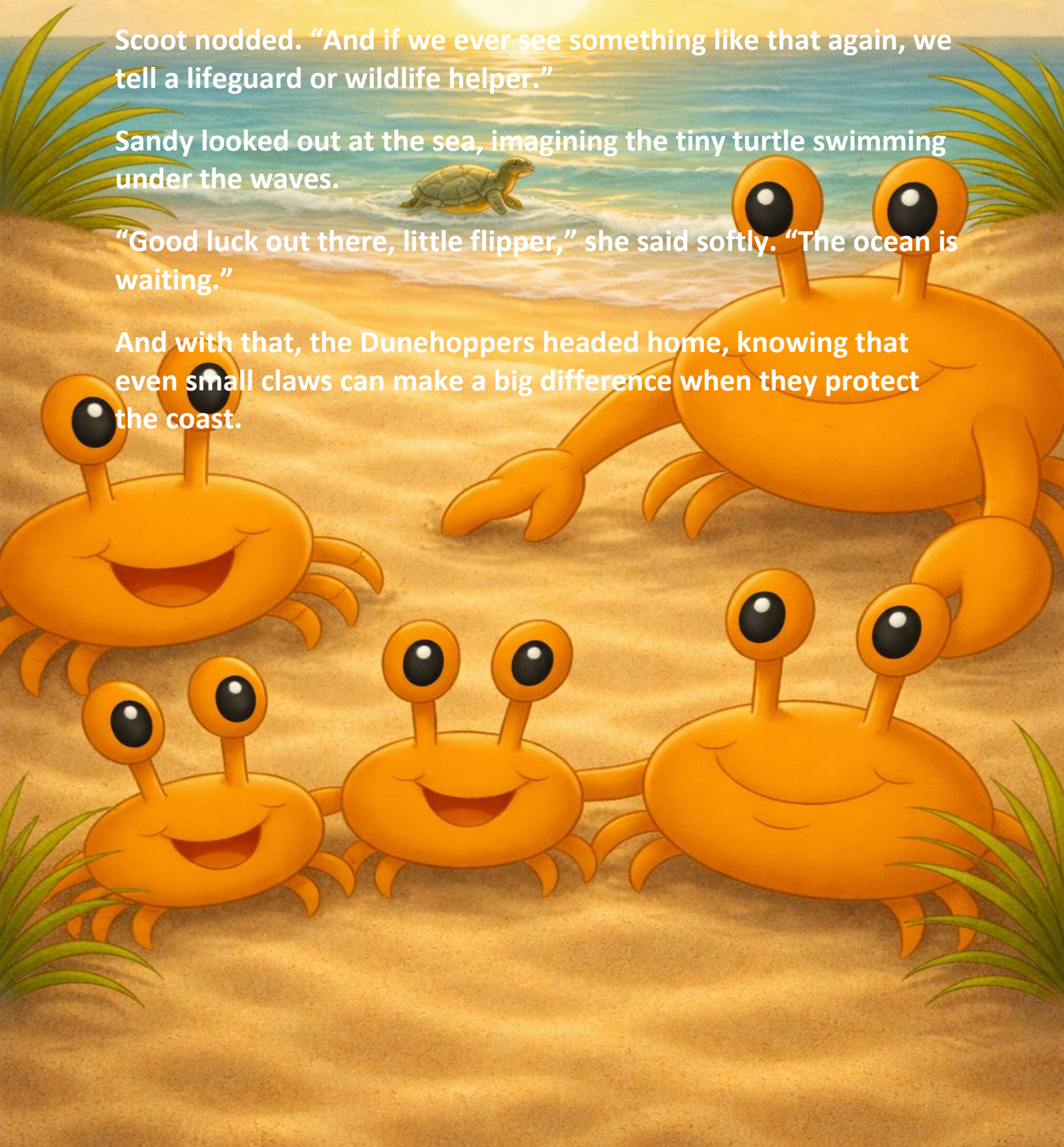
As the sun rose higher, Papa brushed the sand smooth again. "Sea turtle nests and hatchlings need our respect. We leave them undisturbed, keep lights low at night, and give them space."

Scoot nodded. "And if we ever see something like that again, we tell a lifeguard or wildlife helper."

Sandy looked out at the sea, imagining the tiny turtle swimming under the waves.

"Good luck out there, little flipper," she said softly. "The ocean is waiting."

And with that, the Dunehoppers headed home, knowing that even small claws can make a big difference when they protect the coast.



Dunehopper Lesson for Readers

- Sea turtle hatchlings use moonlight to find the ocean
- Bright lights can confuse them
- Never touch sea turtles or their nests
- Turn off beachfront lights at night
- Give wildlife space and ask adults or wildlife helpers for help

