

The Danehopper's Native Plant Garden

Outer Banks, North Carolina

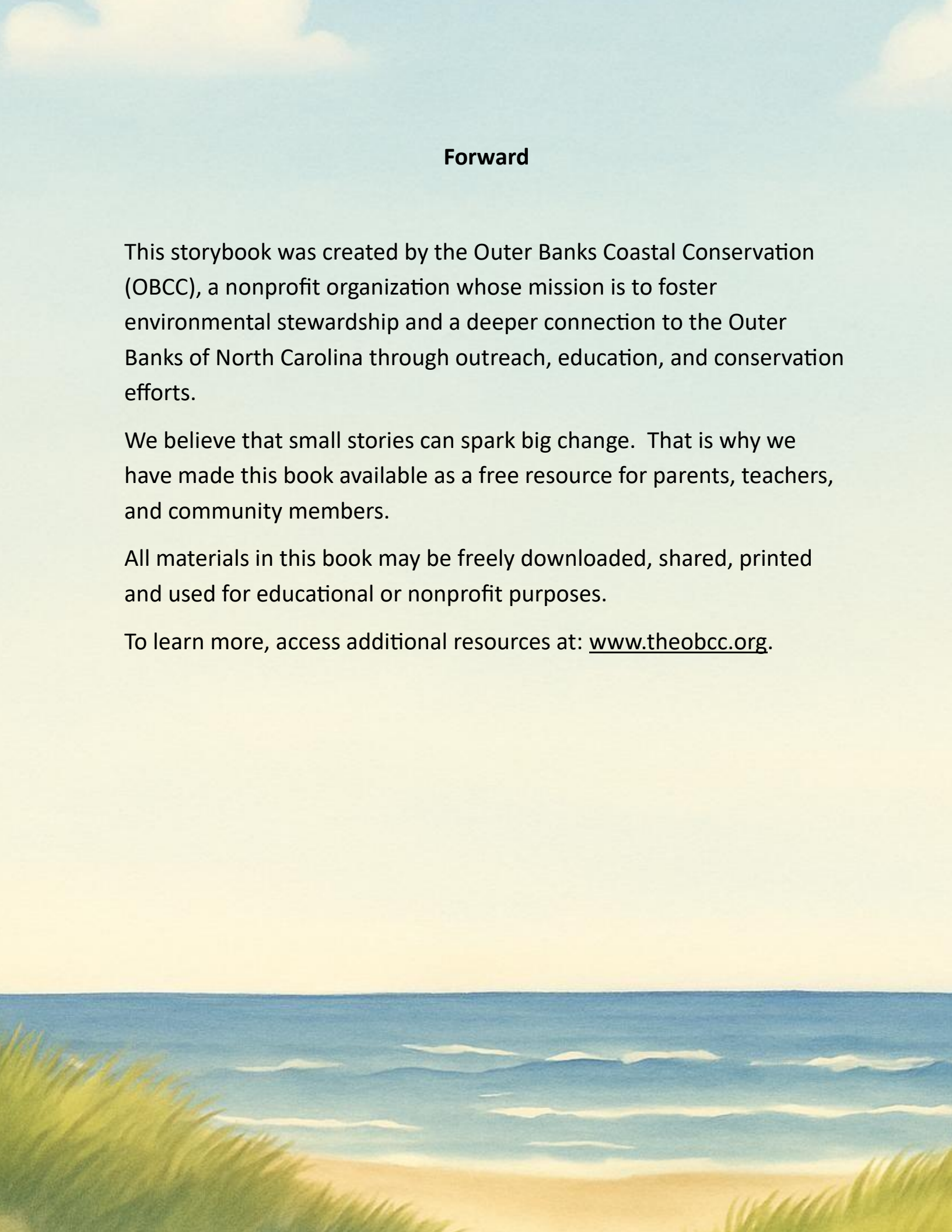
Forward

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.

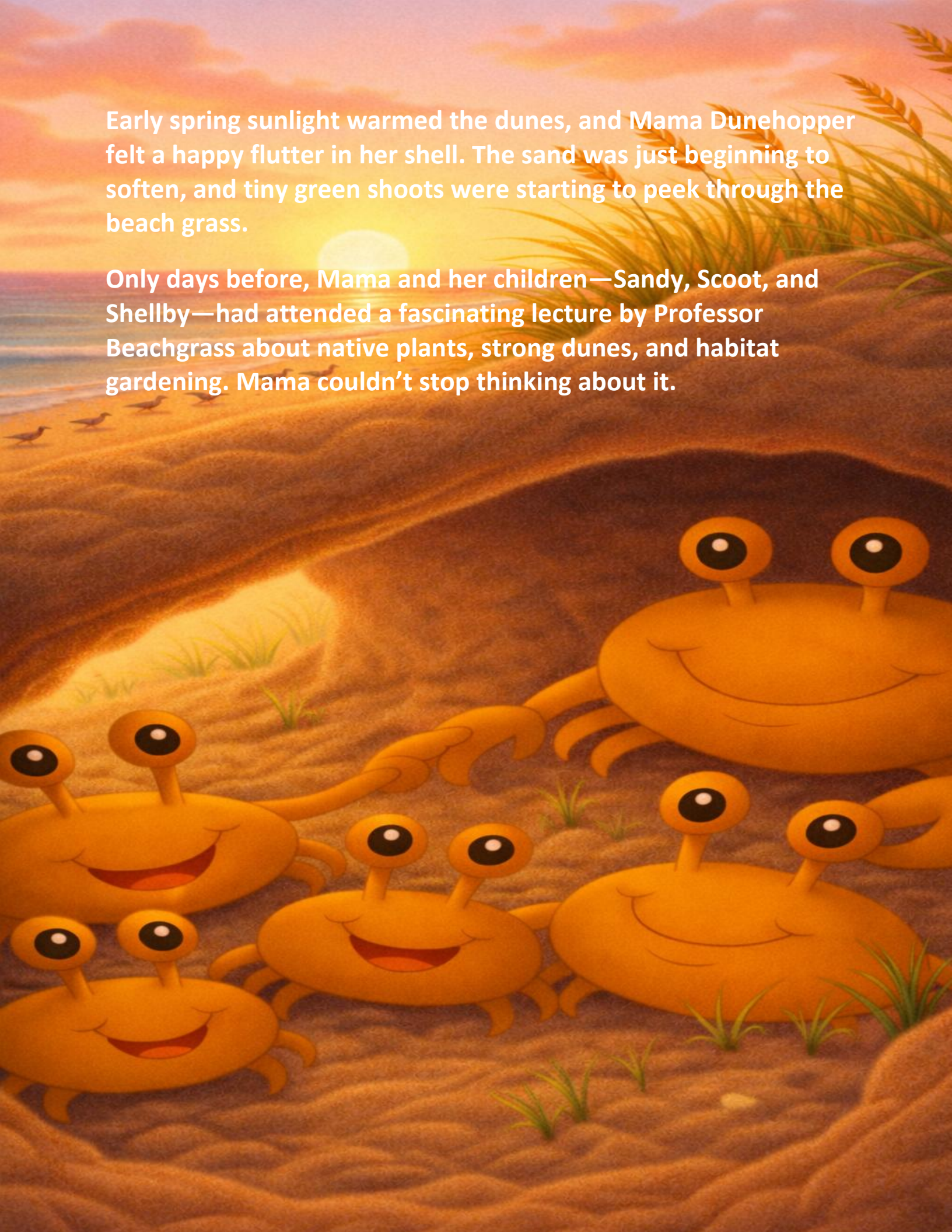
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To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



Early spring sunlight warmed the dunes, and Mama Dunehopper felt a happy flutter in her shell. The sand was just beginning to soften, and tiny green shoots were starting to peek through the beach grass.

Only days before, Mama and her children—Sandy, Scoot, and Shellby—had attended a fascinating lecture by Professor Beachgrass about native plants, strong dunes, and habitat gardening. Mama couldn't stop thinking about it.



“This garden won’t just be pretty,” Mama said as she smoothed the sand near their burrow. “It will help protect our dunes and our neighbors, too.”

She dreamed of a garden filled with cheerful beach sunflowers, waving sea oats, and sturdy American beach grass to hold the dunes together. In a sunny corner, she planned to grow tomatoes and herbs in pots—safe from salty winds but close enough to enjoy the ocean breeze.



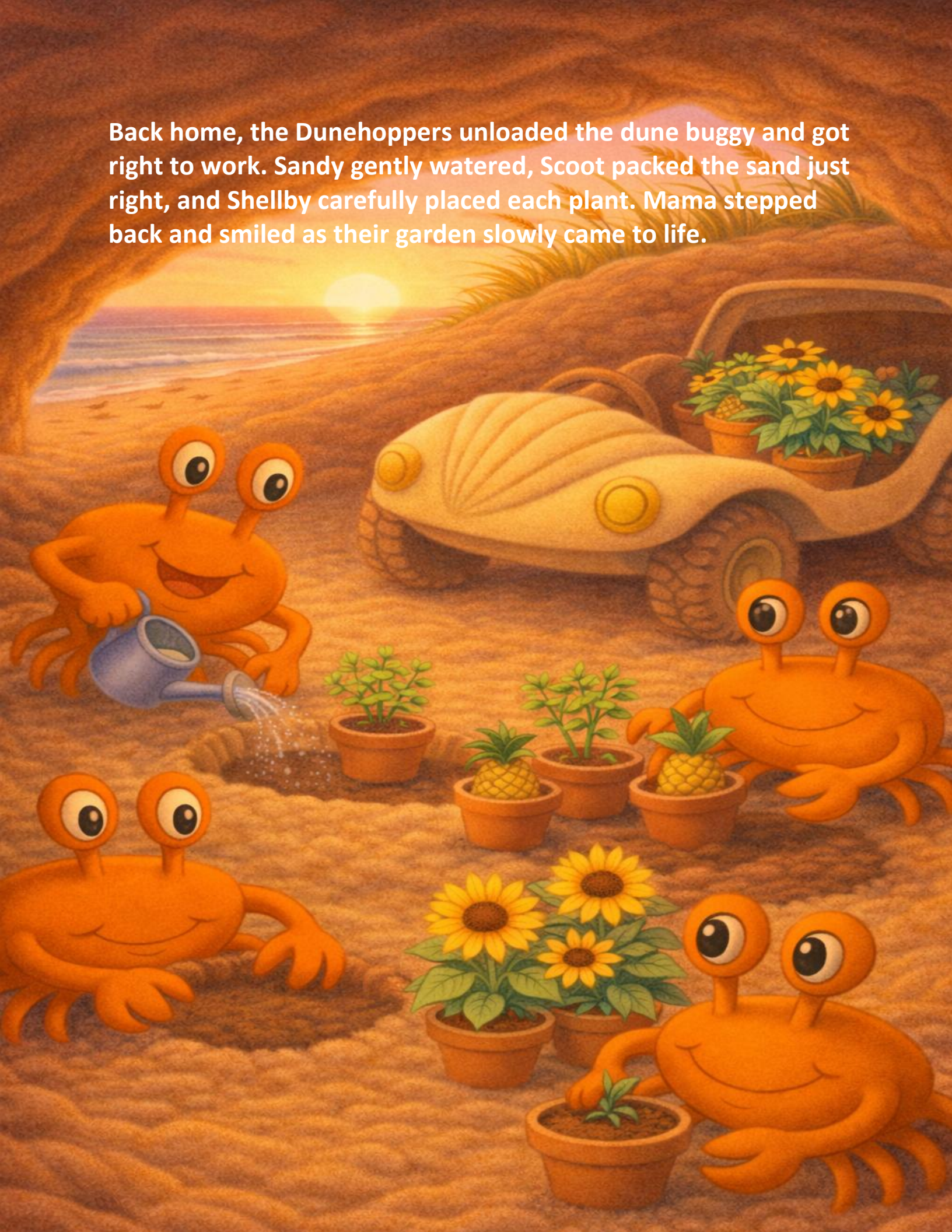
The very next day, Mama and the children hopped into their dune buggy and headed to the local greenhouse. Sandy admired the bright yellow flowers, Scoot inspected the roots, and Shellby carefully read the plant tags.

“Oh, I just love the beach sunflower,” Mama said, smiling. “They look so happy!”

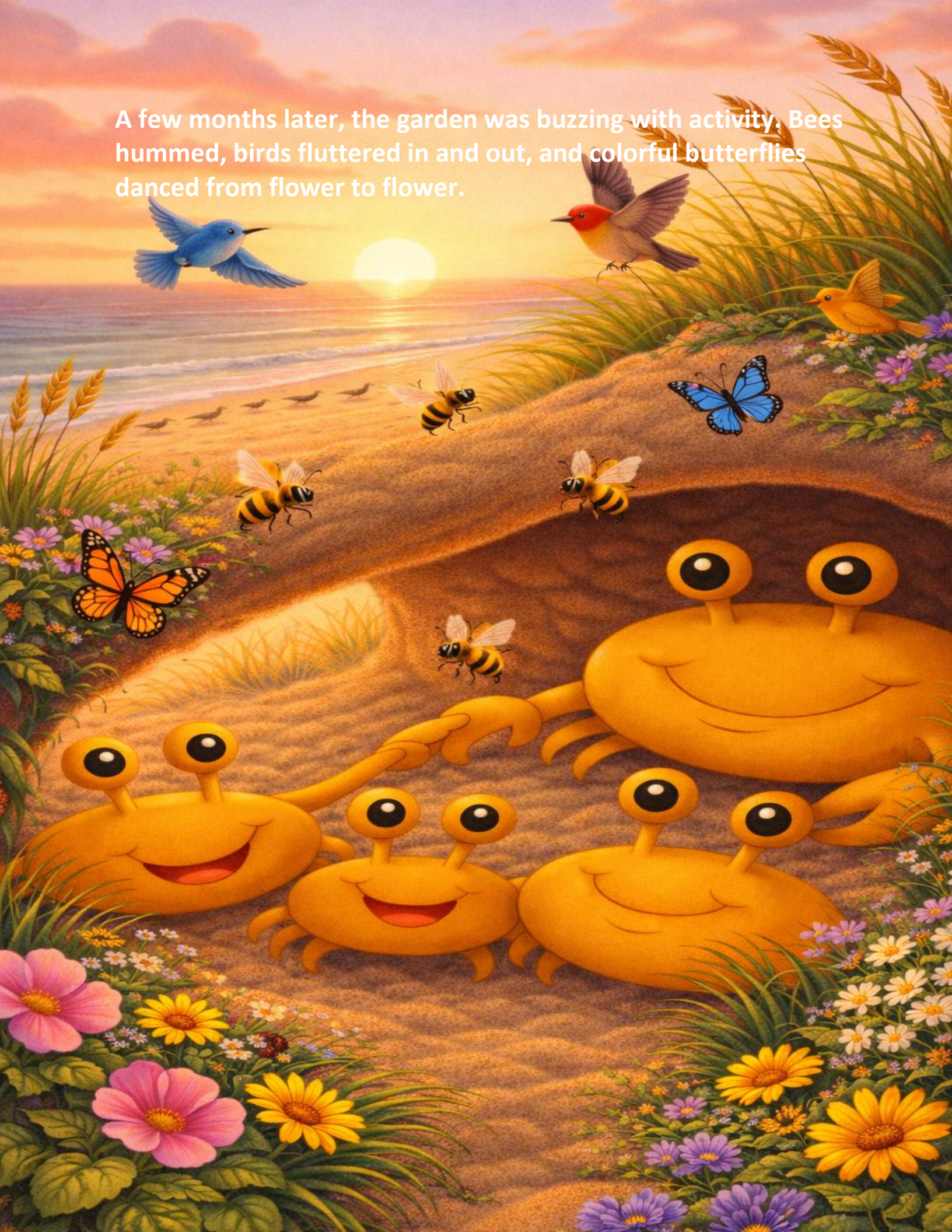
She explained how beach sunflowers handle strong winds, tolerate salty spray, and grow well in sandy soil. “Their spreading roots help hold the sand in place,” she added.



Back home, the Dunehoppers unloaded the dune buggy and got right to work. Sandy gently watered, Scoot packed the sand just right, and Shellby carefully placed each plant. Mama stepped back and smiled as their garden slowly came to life.



A few months later, the garden was buzzing with activity. Bees hummed, birds fluttered in and out, and colorful butterflies danced from flower to flower.



Shellby Meets Buttercup

Shellby soon made a special friend—a monarch butterfly named Buttercup. Buttercup visited every day, sipping nectar and resting on sunny leaves.

“Thank you for keeping your garden safe,” Buttercup said one afternoon. “I’m so glad you never use harmful sprays.”

Shellby beamed. She felt proud knowing their garden was helping butterflies, bugs, birds—and the dunes themselves.



Buttercup's Big Journey

One warm morning, Shellby noticed Buttercup resting quietly on a beach sunflower leaf.

"You don't look like yourself today," Shellby said gently.

Buttercup folded her wings. "I'm getting ready for a big journey," she explained. "Monarchs like me migrate very far when the seasons change."

Shellby's eyes grew wide. "That sounds scary."

"It can be," Buttercup said softly. "That's why safe gardens like yours are so important. We need places to rest, eat, and stay strong along the way."

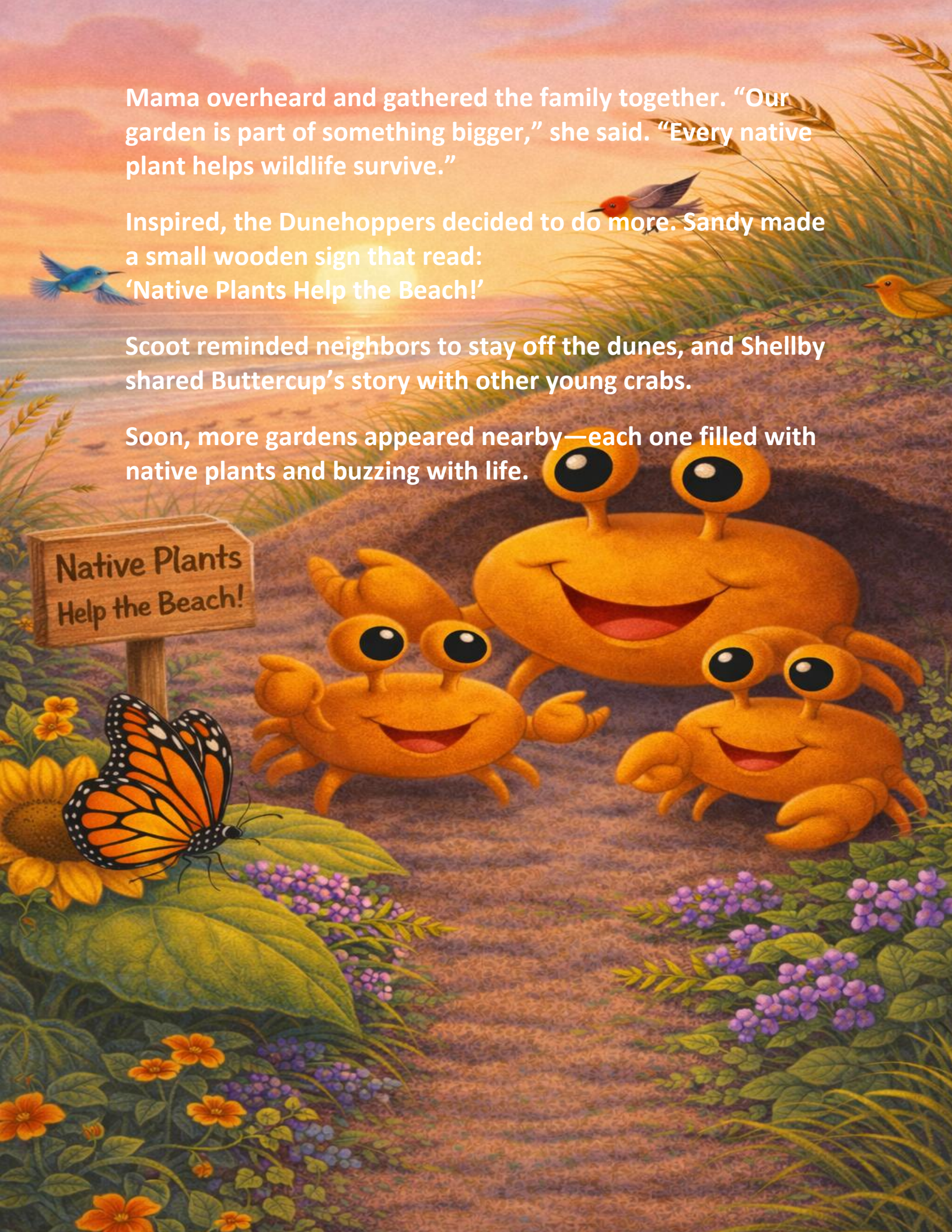


Mama overheard and gathered the family together. “Our garden is part of something bigger,” she said. “Every native plant helps wildlife survive.”

Inspired, the Dunehoppers decided to do more. Sandy made a small wooden sign that read: ‘Native Plants Help the Beach!’

Scoot reminded neighbors to stay off the dunes, and Shellby shared Buttercup’s story with other young crabs.

Soon, more gardens appeared nearby—each one filled with native plants and buzzing with life.



On the day Buttercup left, she circled the garden one last time.

“Thank you,” she said. “Because of you, my journey will be a little easier.”

As Buttercup fluttered away, the Dunehoppers stood together, watching proudly.

They weren’t just gardeners anymore.
They were protectors of the coast.



Did You Know?

Native plant gardens help the beach and its wildlife!

Plants like beach sunflowers, sea oats, and American beach grass are perfectly suited for the Outer Banks. Their long roots help hold sand in place, which keeps dunes strong during storms. These plants also provide food and resting spots for bees, butterflies (like monarchs), birds, and other animals.

When people plant native gardens and avoid harmful sprays, they create safe rest stops for migrating butterflies and help protect the coast for everyone—crabs, creatures, and humans too!

