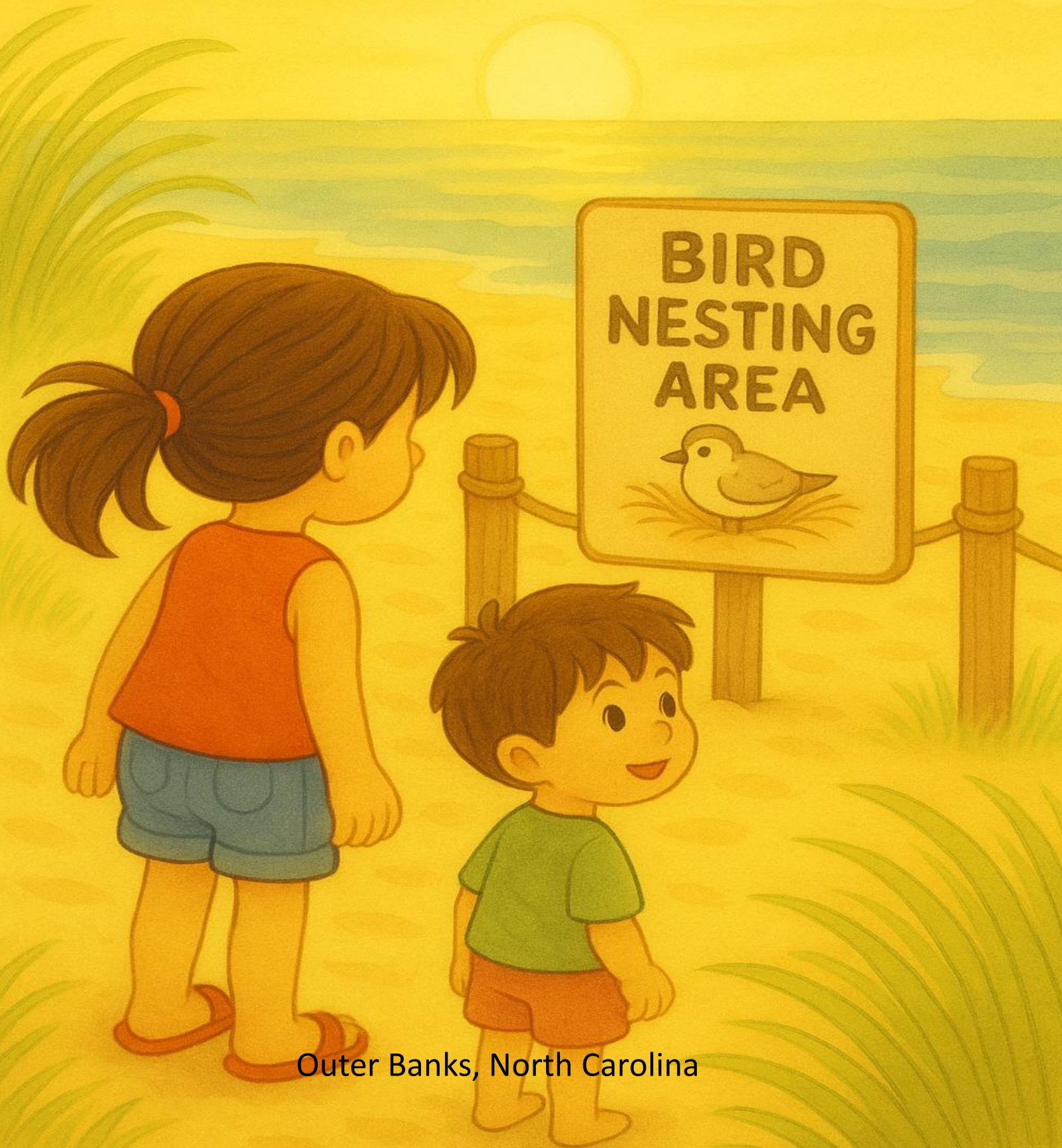


Sky Dancers on the Beach



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.

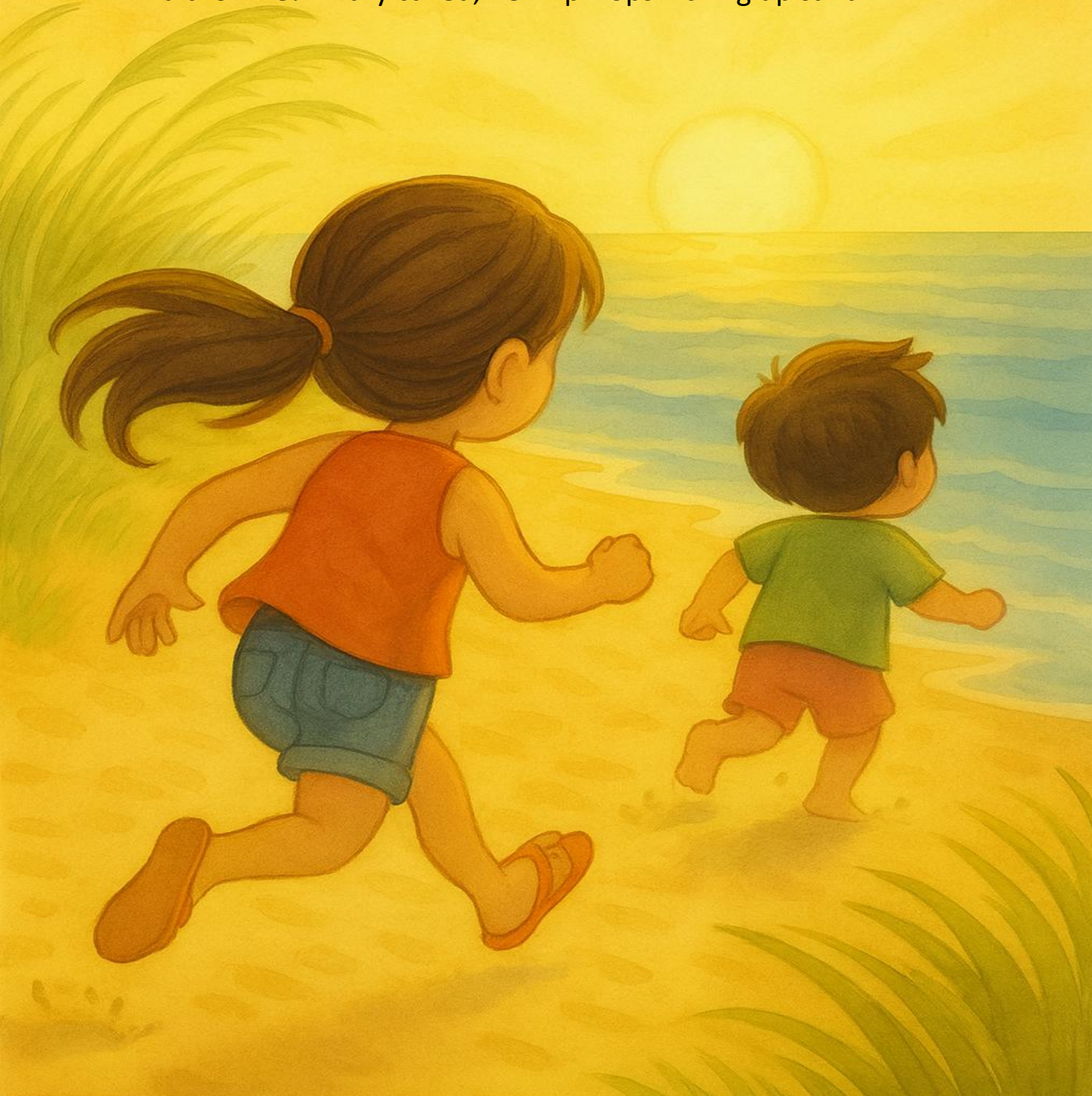
All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

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



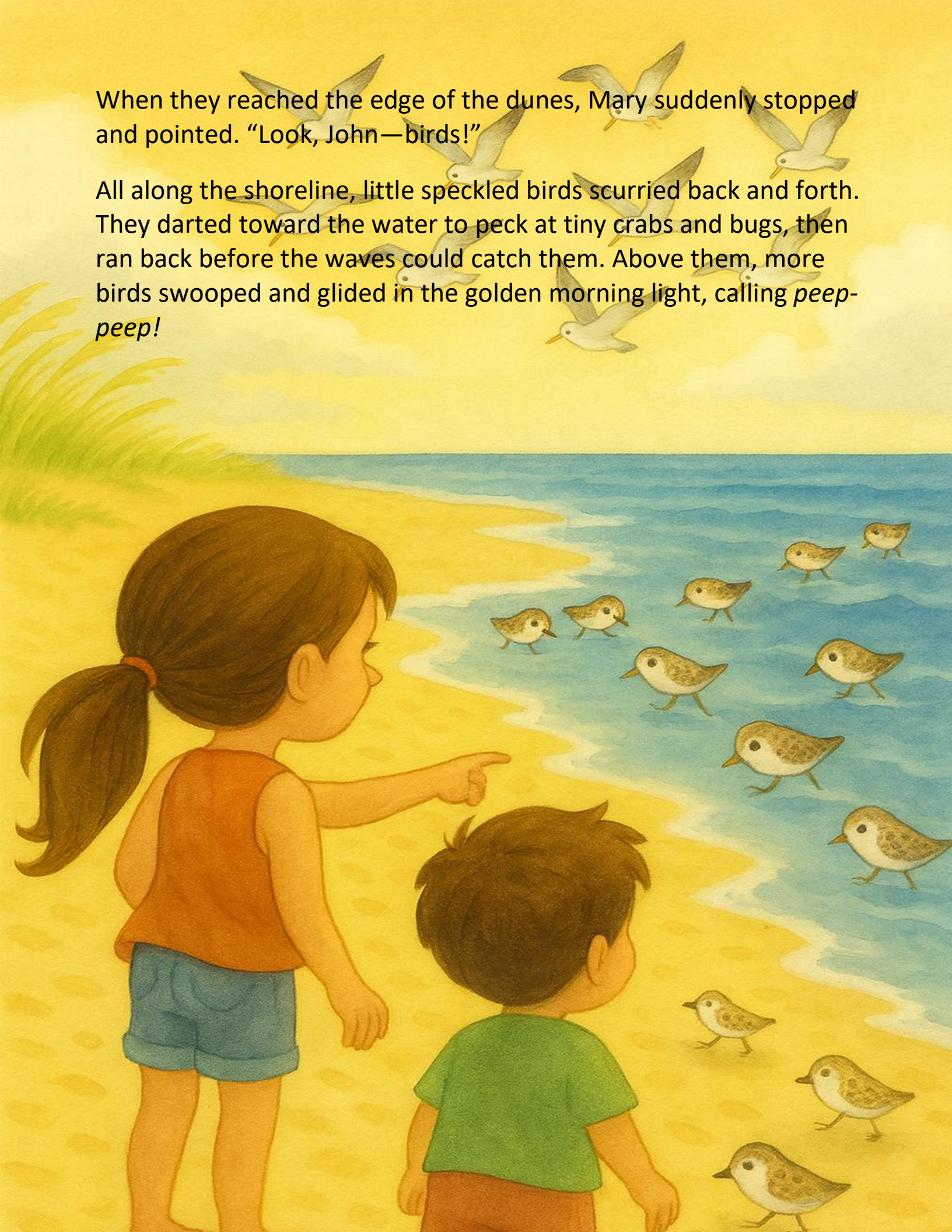
The sun was just peeking over the horizon when Mary and her little brother John hurried down the sandy path to the beach. The air smelled salty, and the sound of waves crashing made John run faster.

“Wait for me!” Mary called, her flip-flops kicking up sand.



When they reached the edge of the dunes, Mary suddenly stopped and pointed. "Look, John—birds!"

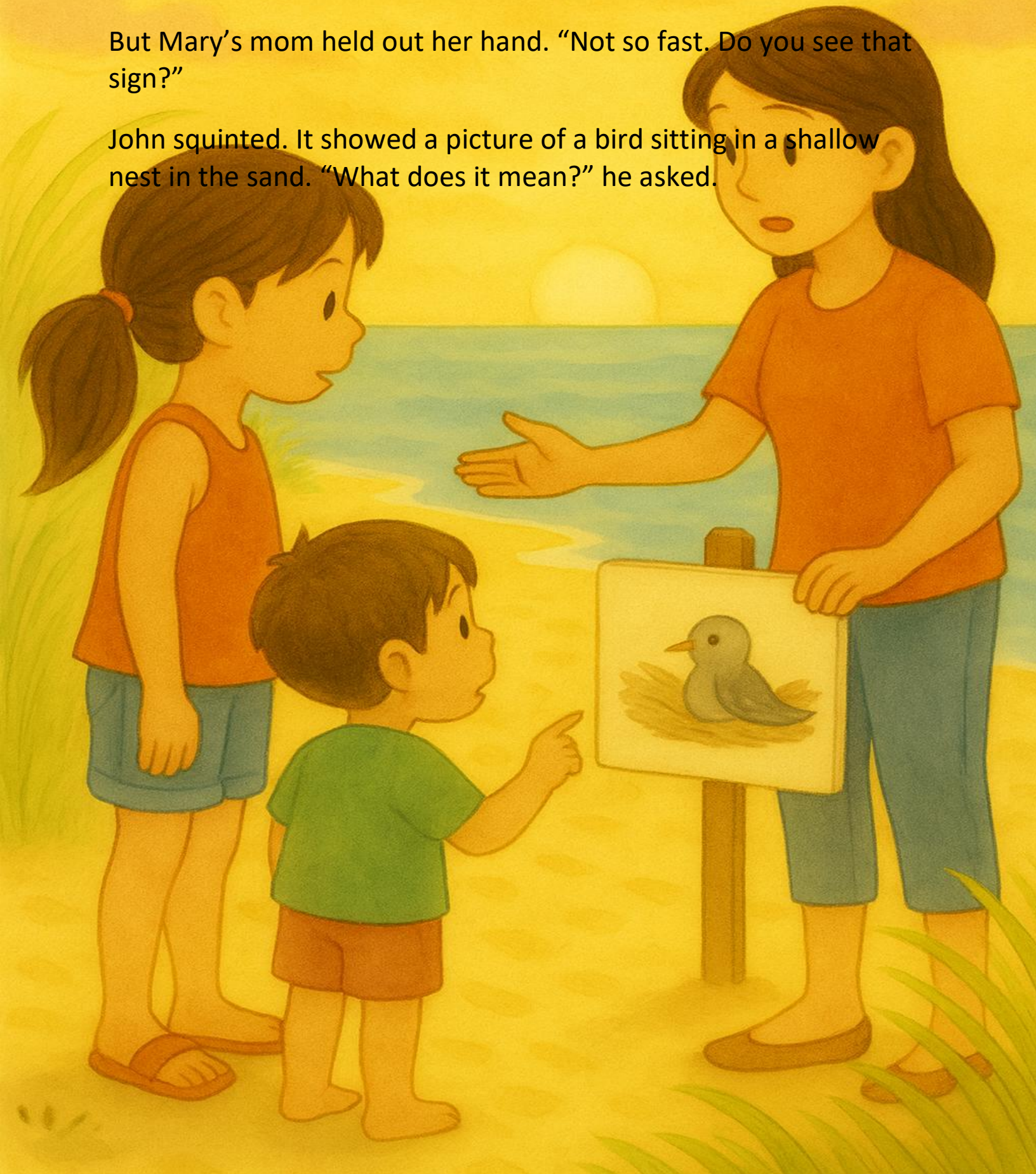
All along the shoreline, little speckled birds scurried back and forth. They darted toward the water to peck at tiny crabs and bugs, then ran back before the waves could catch them. Above them, more birds swooped and glided in the golden morning light, calling *peep-peep!*



John took a step forward. "Let's chase them! I bet I can run faster than those little birds!"

But Mary's mom held out her hand. "Not so fast. Do you see that sign?"

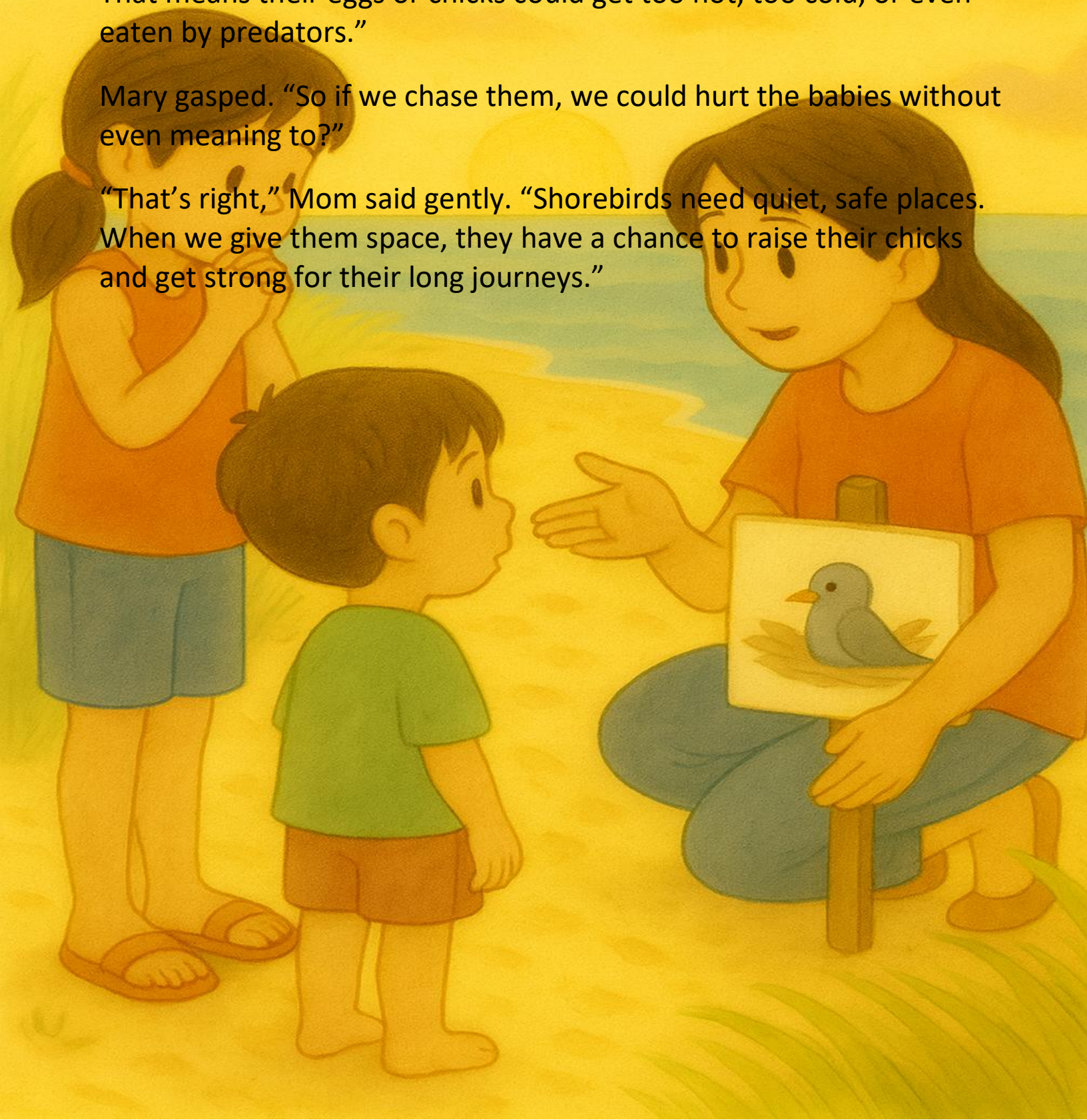
John squinted. It showed a picture of a bird sitting in a shallow nest in the sand. "What does it mean?" he asked.



Mom knelt down so she could look John in the eye. “These are shorebirds. Some flew thousands of miles—across oceans and continents—to rest here. Others are nesting, laying their eggs right in the sand. If we run too close, the birds will get scared and fly away. That means their eggs or chicks could get too hot, too cold, or even eaten by predators.”

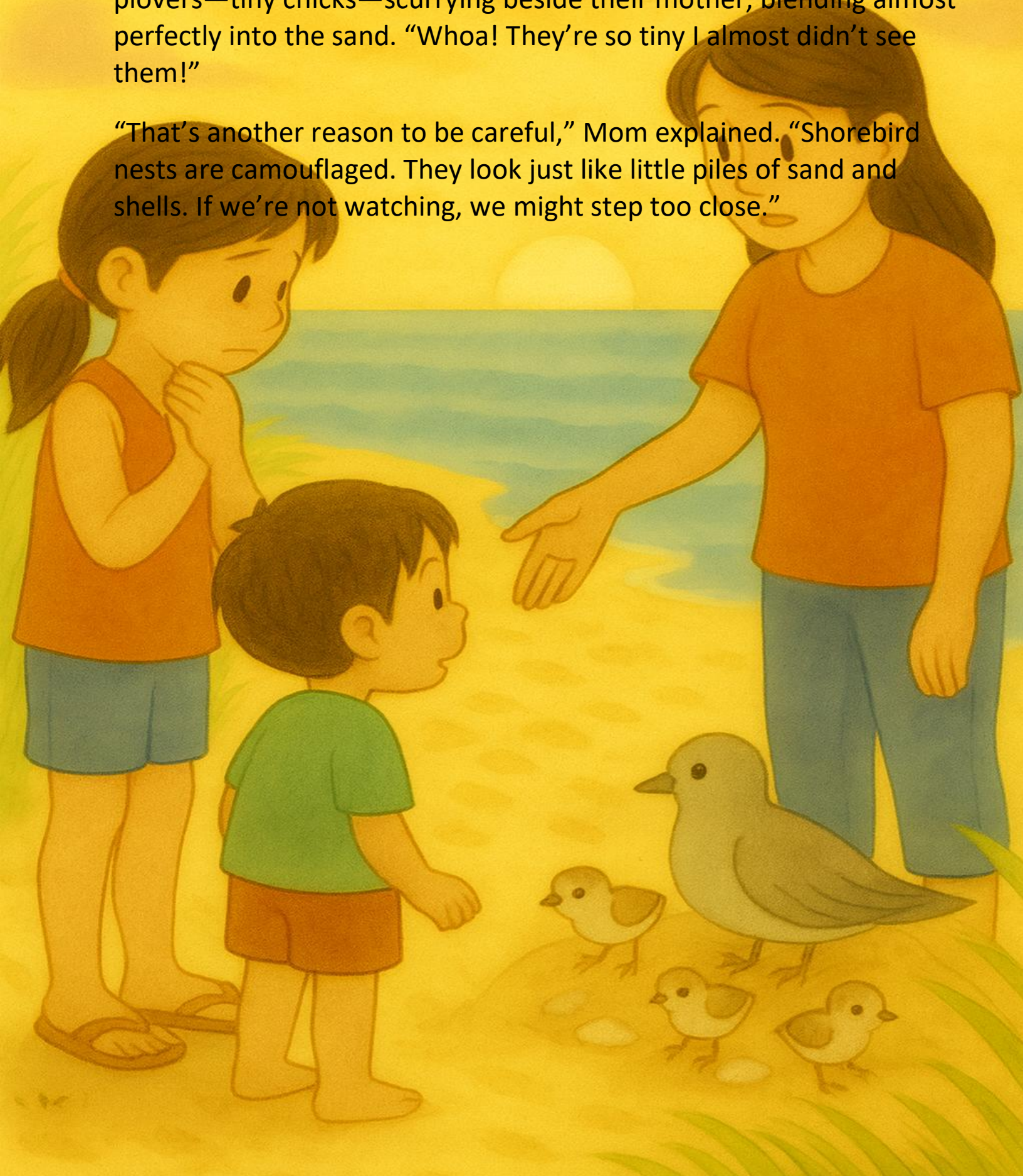
Mary gasped. “So if we chase them, we could hurt the babies without even meaning to?”

“That’s right,” Mom said gently. “Shorebirds need quiet, safe places. When we give them space, they have a chance to raise their chicks and get strong for their long journeys.”



John looked at the birds again. This time, he noticed a few piping plovers—tiny chicks—scurrying beside their mother, blending almost perfectly into the sand. “Whoa! They’re so tiny I almost didn’t see them!”

“That’s another reason to be careful,” Mom explained. “Shorebird nests are camouflaged. They look just like little piles of sand and shells. If we’re not watching, we might step too close.”

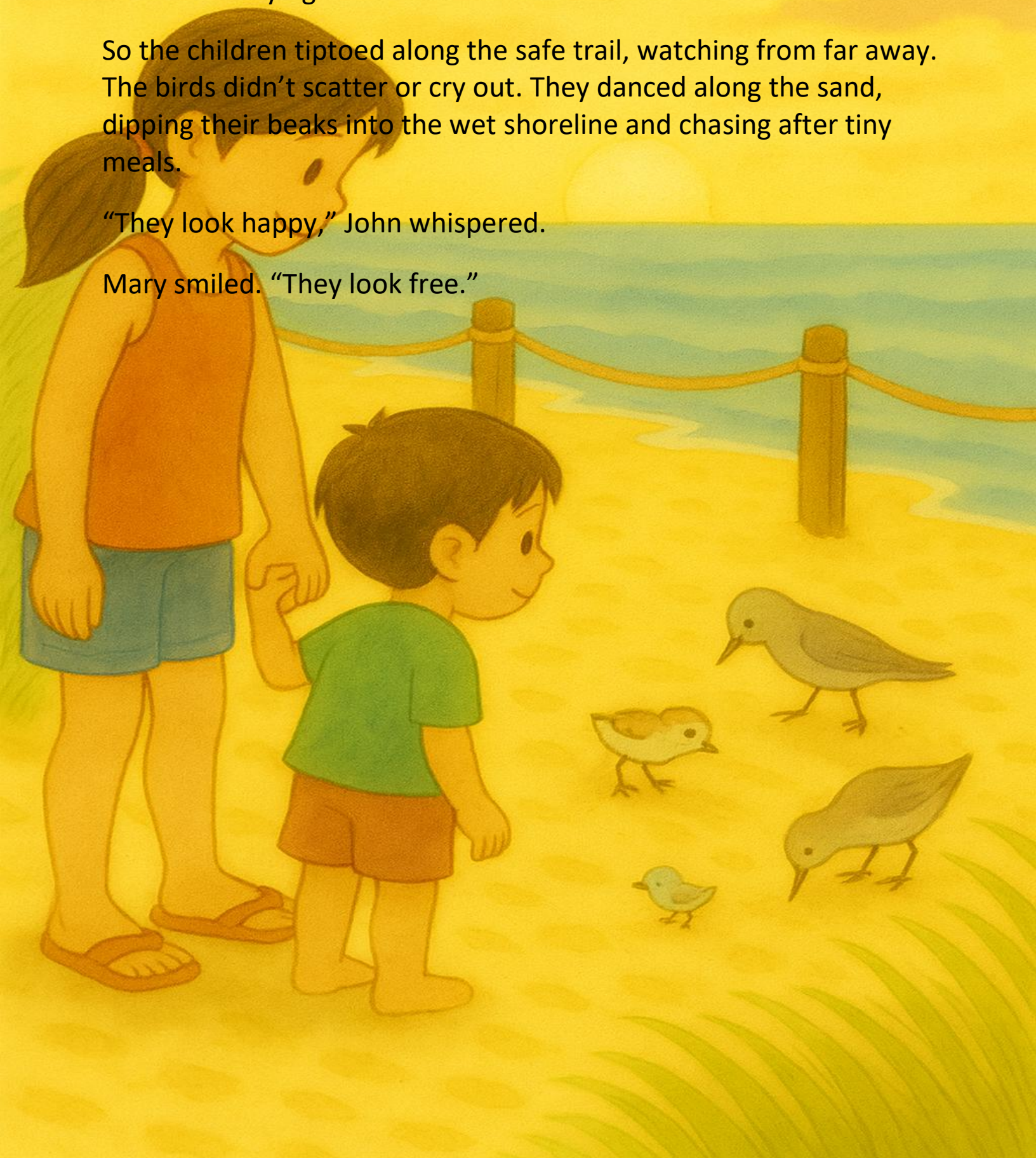


Mary grabbed John's hand. "Let's take the other path, the one around the roped-off area. That way the birds can eat breakfast without worrying about us."

So the children tiptoed along the safe trail, watching from far away. The birds didn't scatter or cry out. They danced along the sand, dipping their beaks into the wet shoreline and chasing after tiny meals.

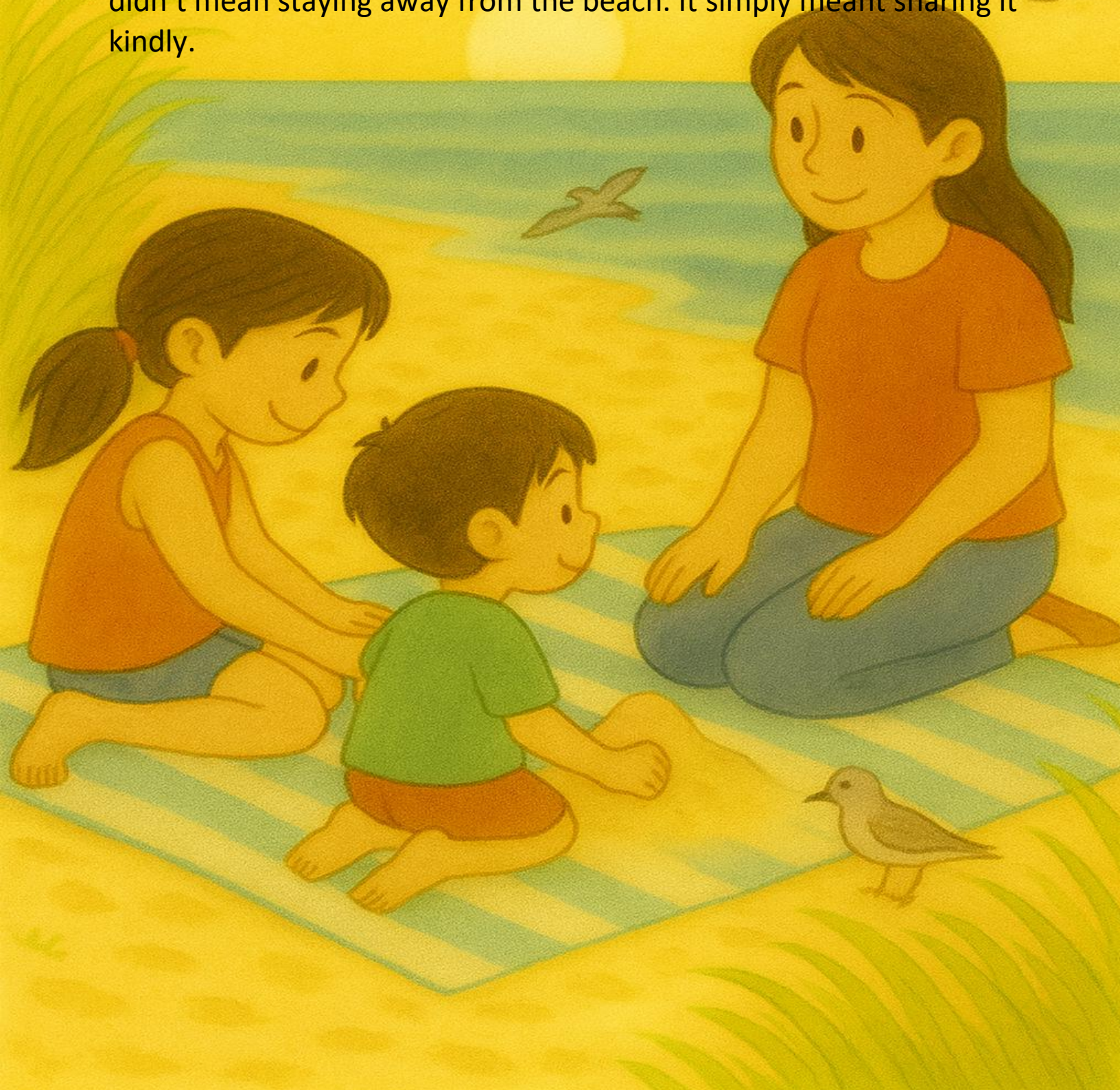
"They look happy," John whispered.

Mary smiled. "They look free."



The family spread out their blanket near the dunes, far from the nests. As they played in the sand, they could still see the birds skimming the waves and gliding overhead. The beach was big enough for everyone—people and birds—each with the space they needed.

That morning, Mary and John learned that protecting shorebirds didn't mean staying away from the beach. It simply meant sharing it kindly.





Did You Know?

- Many shorebirds, like **piping plovers** and **sanderlings**, travel **thousands of miles** each year between their nesting and wintering grounds — some all the way from the **Arctic to South America!**
- Shorebird nests are often **camouflaged** right in the sand, made of small pebbles and shells. Their eggs blend in so well that they're almost invisible.
- When people or pets get too close, parent birds leave their nests to protect their chicks — sometimes for too long. That's why **roped-off nesting areas** are so important.
- You can help by **walking below the high-tide line**, keeping **dogs leashed**, and **avoiding posted nesting zones** during the breeding season.
- Giving shorebirds space helps them **raise their families safely** — and keeps our beaches alive with the sound of wings and waves.

References

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