

# THE BURROW WITH GLOWING EYES



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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It was a sunny Saturday morning in June, and Shellby Dunehopper woke up with a *very* big smile on her face. Sunbeams danced across the sand, seabirds sang overhead, and the tide whispered secrets along the shore.

“Today,” Shellby announced proudly, stretching her claws, “I am going to practice my digging skills.”

Just the week before, Papa Dunehopper had given her a very important lesson: How to dig a proper ghost crab burrow. Not a wiggly one. Not a lumpy one. A *real* burrow — deep, twisty, and safe.

Shellby wanted to make Papa proud.

She scampered over to Mama, who was tidying the burrow entrance.

“Mama,” Shellby said sweetly, “can I go down to the shore and practice digging my very own burrow?”

Mama smiled. “Of course you can. Just be careful — and remember to watch out for predators.”

Shellby paused. “Predators?”

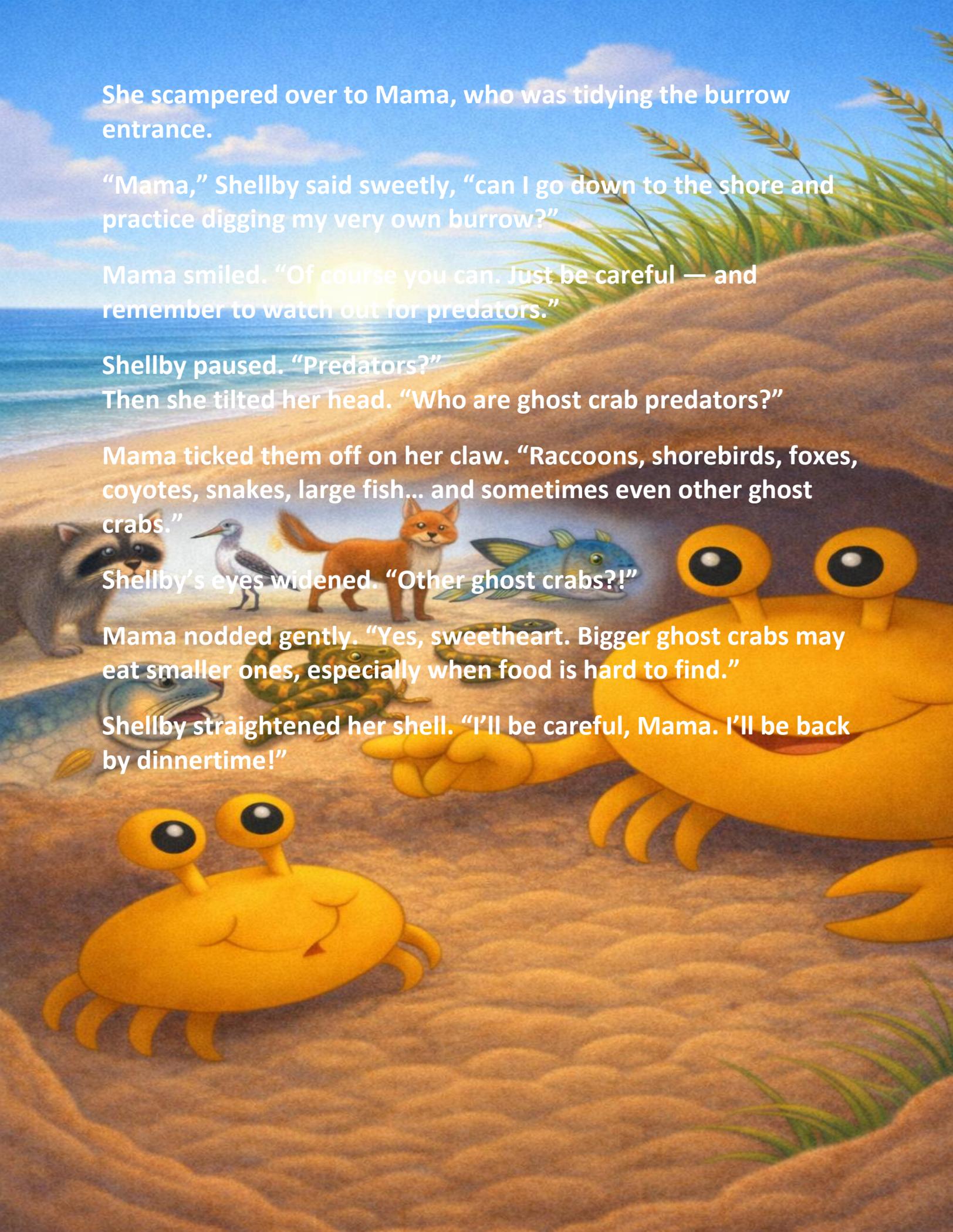
Then she tilted her head. “Who are ghost crab predators?”

Mama ticked them off on her claw. “Raccoons, shorebirds, foxes, coyotes, snakes, large fish... and sometimes even other ghost crabs.”

Shellby’s eyes widened. “Other ghost crabs?!”

Mama nodded gently. “Yes, sweetheart. Bigger ghost crabs may eat smaller ones, especially when food is hard to find.”

Shellby straightened her shell. “I’ll be careful, Mama. I’ll be back by dinnertime!”



Shellby scurried down to the shore and picked what looked like the *perfect* spot — soft sand, a good view, and just far enough from the waves.

“Okay,” she whispered to herself. “What did Papa teach me?”

She lifted her strong front claw.

“Scoop with the claw — like a shovel.”

*Toss the sand out of the hole.*

“Scoop. Toss. Scoop. Toss.”

Sand flew. Shellby dug and dug, working hard for nearly half an hour until her tunnel stretched deep and cool beneath the beach.



Just as she turned to toss another pile of sand, she froze.

Two glowing eyes stared back at her from the darkness.

Then — *flick!* — a long, slender tongue shot out.

“Oh NO!” Shellby squeaked. “That looks like a snake. I am *definitely* in trouble!”

Her heart thumped faster than a sand flea on hot sand.



Remembering Mama's warning, Shellby dug *as fast as she could*, carving a second tunnel for an escape. Scoop! Toss! Scoop! Toss!

At last, she spotted light ahead — but suddenly, two *huge* familiar-looking eyes appeared.

"Oh no," Shellby whispered. "Those aren't snake eyes..."

Her shell tingled.

"That's a big ghost crab."

Yikes! Big ghost crabs can eat smaller ones like *me!*

"I need to get out of here **FAST**," she thought.



Then — *click!* — Shellby remembered something important.

Her emergency hole.

Earlier that morning, she had practiced digging a second exit — just in case.

“I’ll take the secret way,” she muttered.

Carefully, Shellby backed up, turned, and *zoom!* — she scurried through the hidden tunnel.

POP!

She burst out into the warm sunshine, blinking and breathing fast.

“Phew!” Shellby sighed. “That was way too exciting for a digging practice.”

Without wasting a second, she raced all the way back to the Dunehopper burrow.



That night, as the moon rose over the dunes, Shellby told Papa and Mama all about her adventure — the glowing eyes, the snake tongue, the giant ghost crab, and her daring escape.

Papa nodded proudly. “You remembered your lesson — especially the emergency exit.”

Mama gave Shellby a sandy hug. “We’re so thankful you’re safe. Just remember — always stay alert wherever you go.”

Shellby smiled sleepily.

“I will,” she said. “And next time... I’m digging *three* exits.”



## Did You Know?

Ghost crabs are expert diggers—and their burrows are more than just cozy homes! Many ghost crabs dig two or more exits so they can escape quickly if a predator peeks inside. Those glowing eyes Shelby saw? In real life, ghost crabs may share beach space with snakes, raccoons, birds, and even bigger ghost crabs, so having a secret tunnel can mean the difference between a close call and a safe getaway. That's why smart diggers always plan an exit—or three!

