

Mystery of the Missing Flip Flop



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.

One sunny morning on the Outer Banks, the Dunehopper family popped out of their cozy dune burrow, ready to start the day. The sea oats swayed, the waves hummed, and—

THUMP.

Right in the middle of their dune sat something *huge* and *rubbery*.

Papa Dunehopper tilted his eye stalks. "That," he said slowly, "was not here yesterday."

It was a giant human flip-flop, half buried in the sand like a stranded sea creature.

Papa walked around it carefully, tapping it with one claw. *Thwap.* *Thwap.*

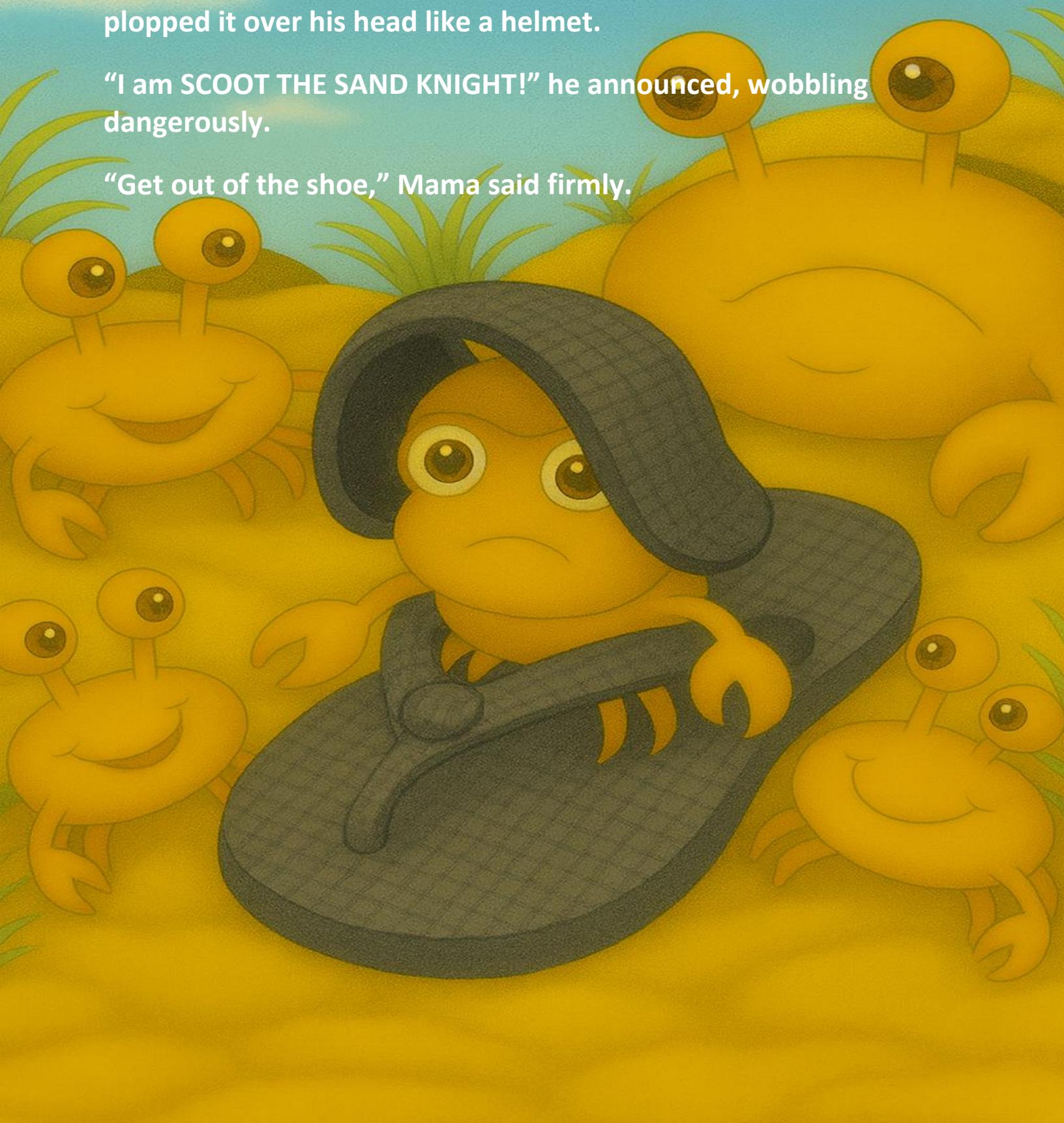
"A curious object," he declared. "Flat. Flexible. Definitely not edible."

Scoot's eyes sparkled with excitement. "I KNOW WHAT IT IS!" he cried.

Before anyone could stop him, Scoot climbed right on top and plopped it over his head like a helmet.

"I am **SCOOT THE SAND KNIGHT!**" he announced, wobbling dangerously.

"Get out of the shoe," Mama said firmly.





Shellby poked the flip-flop with a shell. "Why would a human leave just *one*?"

Sandy sighed and crossed her claws. "It's not really a mystery," she said. "Gulls stole someone's shoe again."

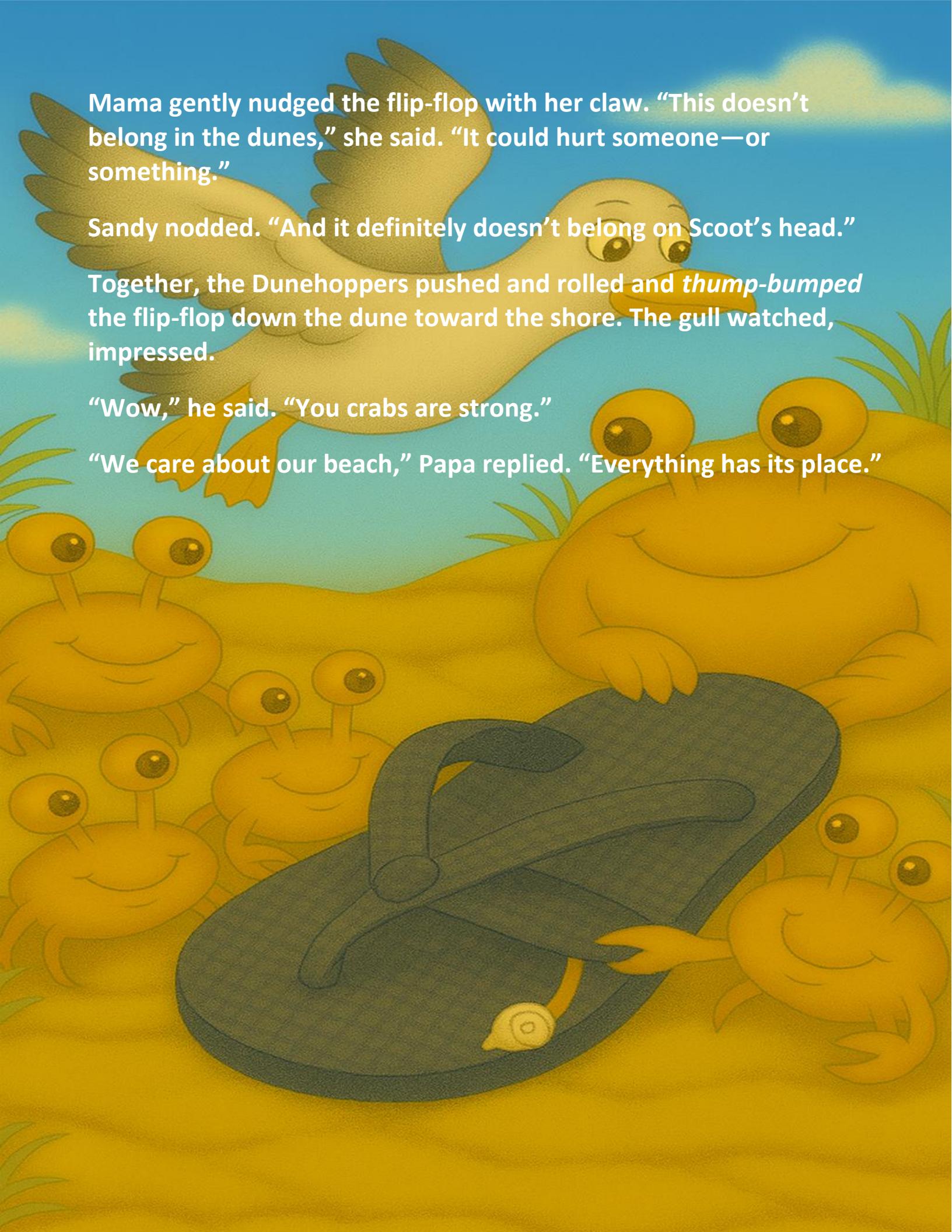
Just then, a shadow swooped overhead.

A seagull circled, flapping proudly, and squawked, "YUP!"

The gull landed nearby, puffed out his chest, and added, "BEST. TREASURE. EVER."

Papa raised an eye stalk. "And why steal a flip-flop?"

The gull grinned. "Shiny things, floaty things, and stuff that smells like snacks. Also... we get bored."



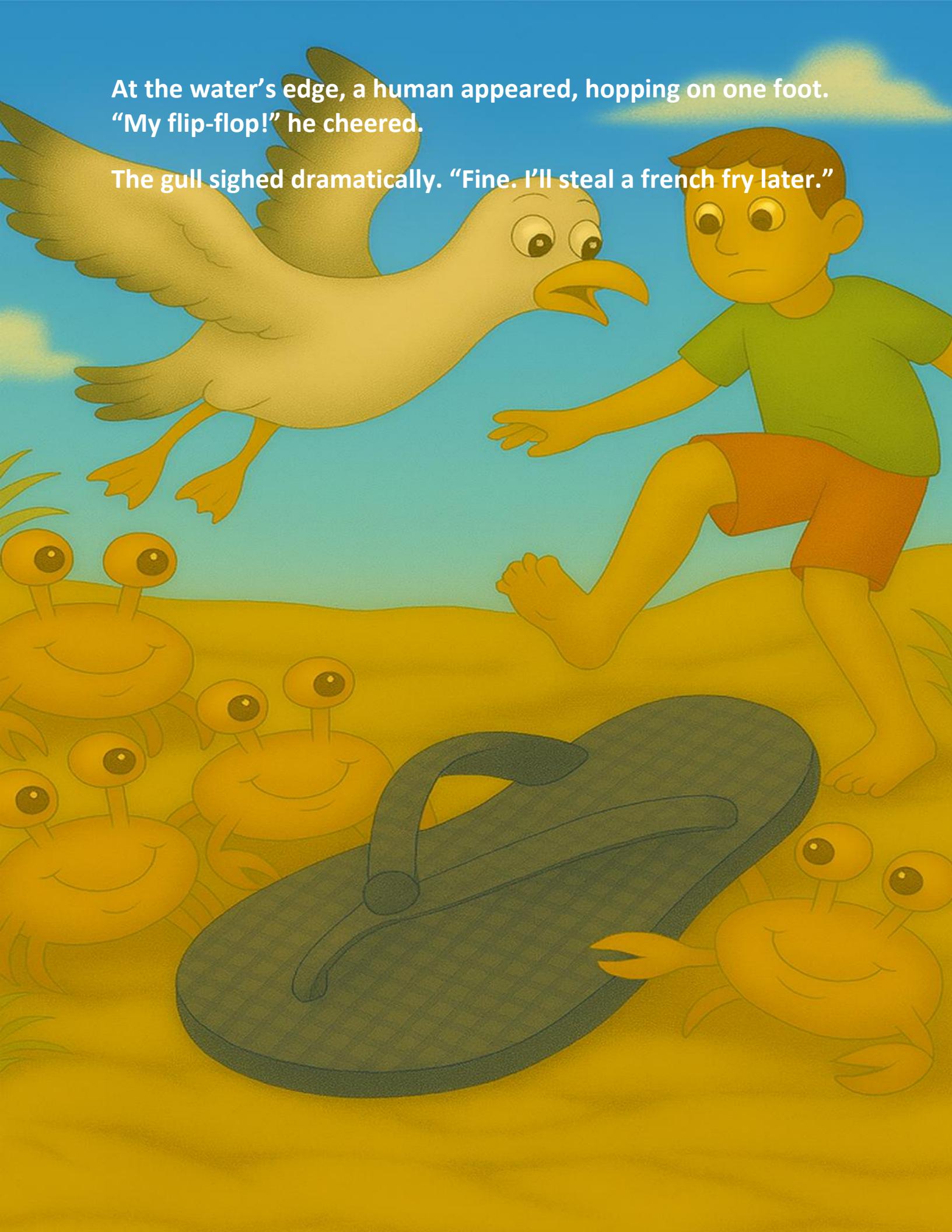
Mama gently nudged the flip-flop with her claw. "This doesn't belong in the dunes," she said. "It could hurt someone—or something."

Sandy nodded. "And it definitely doesn't belong on Scoot's head."

Together, the Dunehoppers pushed and rolled and *thump-bumped* the flip-flop down the dune toward the shore. The gull watched, impressed.

"Wow," he said. "You crabs are strong."

"We care about our beach," Papa replied. "Everything has its place."



At the water's edge, a human appeared, hopping on one foot.
"My flip-flop!" he cheered.

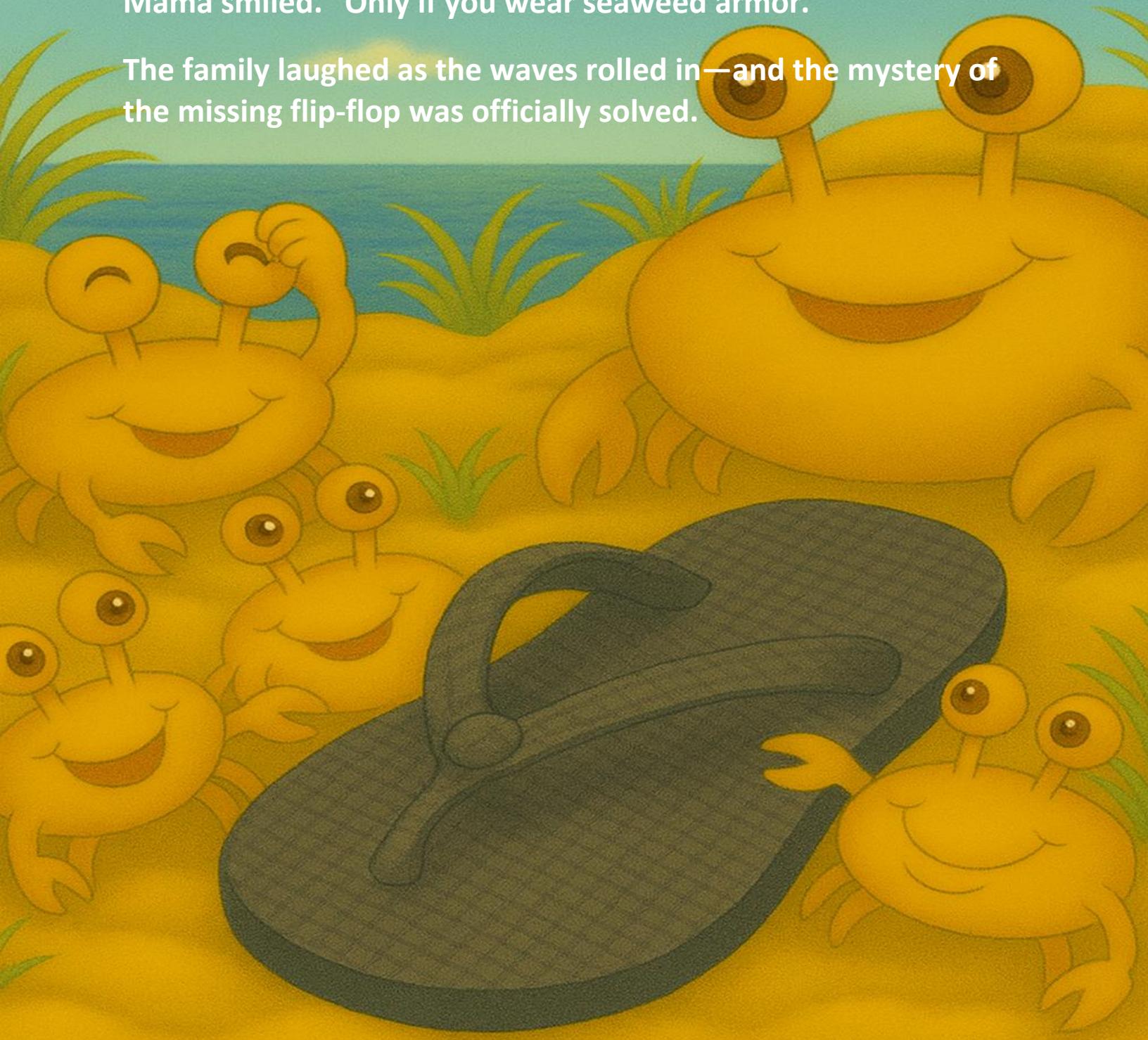
The gull sighed dramatically. "Fine. I'll steal a french fry later."

As the sun climbed higher, the dunes felt peaceful again.

Scoot brushed sand off his shell. "So... no more sand knight?"

Mama smiled. "Only if you wear seaweed armor."

The family laughed as the waves rolled in—and the mystery of the missing flip-flop was officially solved.



Did You Know?

Ghost crabs—like the Dunehopper family—are important caretakers of beach ecosystems. They dig burrows in the dunes that help mix and aerate the sand, and they clean up beaches by eating bits of organic material. But objects left behind by humans, such as flip-flops, fishing line, or plastic, can block burrows, trap animals, or cause injuries. That's why keeping beaches clean helps protect wildlife and keeps dunes healthy for everyone who lives—and plays—there.