

LITTLE MISS CRAB AND THE SEA BEETLE

KEYWORD: Discrimination.

Once upon a time there was a little crab named Crusty. She lived at a beautiful beach where there were hundreds upon hundreds of other little crabs, as well as sea beetles and other tiny sea folk. It was a very lovely place. One could see the ocean for miles and miles. On clear days in the distance could be seen great ships passing, and far, far out from shore a small rocky island.

Crusty was just a little baby crab. She was not any bigger than your thumb-nail. That is pretty small, isn't it? But, although Crusty was so small, there came a day when she, like all her little brothers and sisters and cousins, had to take care of herself and get her own meals, for all the big mother and father crabs went away to the rocky island for

a holiday. Out there the water was cold and deep, and when the wind blew from the north, great waves roared and dashed upon the rocks. It was much too dangerous a place for baby crabs, so that is why they were left in their little homes at the beach.

Did you ever see a little crab's house? It is not at all like our homes. The floors are of soft wet sand, and the walls are of sand too, and very low. There are no windows nor any doors either. When a little crab wishes to go out or come in, he just makes a little hole in the wall and passes through. The roof is the only solid part of the house. It consists of a smooth flat stone set upon the sand. Perhaps some of you have noticed these houses. They are generally lying along the water's edge. If you should ever happen to pick up a stone which is the roof of a crab's house, what a commotion there would be. All the little crabs and beetles would scurry away as fast as they could to hide in a neighbor's house. Just think what a fright it would give you if one day a great giant were to come along and lift the roof off your house! Wouldn't you feel like running to hide?

Little Crusty had a great many friends. She was really a very smart little crab. She could run sideways and backwards, too. The friend that she liked best was a big black sea beetle. He was as black and shiny as a shoe button, and had very polished manners. In fact, he belonged to a very ancient and noble family of sea beetles. He was very fond of Crusty, and it was their custom to eat together each day at the Seaweed Pool.

One day when the dinner bell of sea shells rang, no Crusty appeared. The sea beetle waited and waited, and still she did not come. He was very hungry, and yet he would not think of eating his dinner till his little friend arrived. He was a very polite gentleman. Just as he was becoming really alarmed, he saw her hurrying towards him.

He at once offered her his arm, and led her to a quiet nook where their dinner awaited them. Crusty could not eat any dinner, and when he begged her to tell him why, she almost cried. She would have cried, too, if she had not been a brave little crab who knew that crying was foolish. She told the beetle that she had made up her mind to go away out to sea to the island of rocks.

The poor beetle was greatly distressed. His complexion turned quite pale, and he could not eat his dinner, either. Indeed, he felt so bad that a tear actually tricked down his nose, but he wiped it away quickly with one of his feelers, not wishing to let Crusty know that he was crying. He knew that though Crusty was a small crab, she had what is termed "a mind of her own," which really means that she liked to have her own way; and so if she had made up her mind to go to sea, he could not stop her. He just couldn't bear to think of losing his little playmate, though, and he begged her to stay. However, she decided that she would be safer in the deep water.

"You don't know what a dreadful experience I had this morning," said Crusty, "or you would not ask me to stay."

"Tell me about it," he begged her.

"Listen then, and I will tell you," she said. "This morning I was having a fine time playing with the sunfish in their pool, when all at once the ground began to shake and tremble. I did not know what could be the cause unless it were an earthquake, and it made me feel quite dizzy. Just then two great creatures came splashing right into the pool where I was. Such queer looking things they were! Their heads stuck away up in the air in such a ridiculous manner, and they only had two legs to walk with. Fancy having but two legs," she added scornfully. "Why, I should die of mortification if I had only two legs," and she looked admir-

ingly at her own ten pretty little legs.

The beetle drew himself up stiffly with a snap of his jaws, declaring that if Crusty would tell him who they were, he would go at once and pinch them good and hard. He meant it, too. But Crusty didn't know who or what they were. "Don't you think they might be giants?" she asked.

The beetle tickled his left ear with one of his crooked legs, a habit he had which helped him to think.

"But that was not the worst that happened," continued Crusty. "When I was running to hide in the seaweed, I ran over a great foot that was in my way, and you should have heard the awful shriek the creature made. It was simply terrifying. And then the other creature rushed at me, putting down its front foot in the water and tried to catch me. Oh, I was so frightened! It chased me about till I was too tired to run any more, and at last it scooped me up in its paws, and put me in a dirty little tin can. It was so hot and stuffy that I nearly died. If the wind had not blown the can over, I am sure, I should not have been able to escape. Then I hid under a stone until the creatures went away. That is why I was late for dinner, and why I have decided to go to sea. But tell me, have you any idea what they were?"

The beetle thought earnestly for a few minutes and then said hesitatingly: "I wonder now if they could have been Dorothy and Jackie?"

"Yes, yes," cried Crusty excitedly. "That's what they called each other, I remember."

"But Dorothy and Jackie are human beings — people, you know."

"Oh, are they?" queried Crusty. "I've heard of human folks. They are very wicked things, aren't they?"

"No, I wouldn't say that," replied the beetle.

"Why, of course they are," declared Crusty indignantly.

“What did they catch me for, if they weren’t? My Aunt Crabsticks warned me before she went away to watch out for them. She told me that if anyone came in sight, I was to hide as quick as lightning, else I might be caught and cooked for dinner.”

“I don’t think Dorothy or Jackie would ever do that,” said the beetle. “It is only the people who do not know any better that do such things. I am sure they did not mean to be cruel to you. People are often thoughtless, you know. Perhaps they had learned that you were a little younger sister of theirs, and so they were anxious to get acquainted. They might not have meant to be rough and cause you pain.”

“Well,” said Crusty, “if they are my brothers and sisters, I guess I had better forgive them this time; and I shall wait a bit longer before I go to live on the island. But I do hope that some one will teach Dorothy and Jackie, as well as all the other little boys and girls, that it is not right for them to chase little crabs or to put them into nasty tin cans even if they do want to get acquainted.”
