

The
Adventures
of
Crabby

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For my beautiful daughter Sofia,
with all my love and endless adventures.





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Welcome to the Adventures of Crabby

Crabby is a small red Lego crab who lives in a crevice on a brown rock of a Lego Beach Club set. He belongs to Sofia Kontorinis, a nine-year-old girl who loves adventure and has a wonderful imagination.

Crabby is a mischievous crab who also loves adventure. He interacts with Sofia's world in a very strange way. He stows away nestled deep in her ponytail, which allows him to experience her adventures firsthand without anyone ever noticing that he is there. Crabby also has adventures in the world of Lego, where he explores Sofia's many Lego sets and befriends other Lego characters.

I hope you enjoy reading about the wonderful adventures of Crabby.





Crabby in Sofia's World



Crabby and the Mango Ice Cream

Crabby was not your average crab. For one thing he was made entirely of bright red Lego plastic. For another, he lived not in the ocean, but in a little crevice on the Lego Friends Beach Club of his human, Sofia Kontorinis. He had two claws, six little legs, and absolutely no adventures to his name.

This is unacceptable, thought Crabby, watching the Lego world go by. So, on a day like any other, Crabby made a decision. He would go on an adventure. He did not know what an adventure was, exactly. But he was fairly sure it involved leaving the rock, and he was very sure it involved not asking anyone's permission first.

Small steps, he told himself, and took one. Then another. Eight little Lego legs is not a fast way to travel, but it is, Crabby discovered, a very determined one.



The path across the Beach Club Lego was longer than it looked. He passed the sun lounge, where a Lego lady in sunglasses lay relaxing. He passed a little palm tree, whose single frond he inspected closely in case it was hiding something interesting. It was not.

And then, at last, he arrived at the ice cream stall. It was, without any exaggeration, the greatest thing Crabby had ever seen. Rows of little plastic scoops sat lined up along the counter — pink, white, brown, and there, right at the end, a bright, glorious orange.

Mango, thought Crabby, and something in his small plastic chest ached with longing. *I do not know what*

mango is. I only know that I require it immediately.

There was, of course, a small problem. The mango ice cream belonged to the stall. The stall belonged to the ice cream Lego man, who stood behind the counter with his cheerful smile.

Undeterred, Crabby crept up onto the counter, quickly clamped one claw firmly around the mango scoop, and pulled. It came free with a small, satisfying click.

For one glorious second, Crabby stood there holding it, triumphant, a mango ice cream almost as big as his entire body raised over his head like a trophy.



Then suddenly he heard the ice cream man's voice, shouting "catch that crab! Its stolen my icecream!" Oh no, thought Crabby, *RUN!*

And so began Crabby's first great chase.

He half-scuttled, half-toppled off the counter, with the mango ice cream still clutched tight in one claw. He bolted straight past the surfboard, under the sun lounge and directly into the shade of the palm tree, where he pressed himself flat against the little plastic trunk and did not breathe.

The ice cream man came running close behind. He was shouting angrily at the crab but lost sight of Crabby during the chase. Exhausted, Crabby did not move for a very long time. He was still holding the ice cream. He took a bite and decided that it was possibly the best thing that had ever tasted.

Crabby did not go back to his usual spot at the Beach Club that day. He found a new one — just behind the ice cream stall near the toilet. Here he could keep half an eye on the counter, just in case an opportunity presented itself again.

It was the first adventure of many. Crabby had absolutely no idea just how far his little legs were about to carry him.

Crabby and the Perfect Hiding Place

Crabby was bored. He was lurking in his usual crevice in the Beach Club Lego, trying to solve a very important problem. *I need*, Crabby thought, tapping one claw thoughtfully, *a secret hiding place to follow Sofia on her adventures.*

There has to be somewhere, he thought. *Somewhere close to Sofia. Somewhere safe. Somewhere that moves when she moves, so I never get left behind.*



He was still turning the problem over when Sofia sat down at her little desk to brush her hair before school, and gathered it all up into a ponytail. Crabby stared.

Well, he thought slowly, scuttling closer along the windowsill for a better look. Well, well, well.

It was, he realised, examining it from every angle, really quite remarkable. Thick. Bouncy. Gathered up nice and snug, with all sorts of promising gaps and tunnels near the base where a small crab might tuck himself in and go entirely unnoticed. It moved wherever Sofia moved. It went wherever Sofia went. And best of all — nobody thinks to look for a crab in someone's hair.

This, Crabby announced to no one in particular, *is genius. This is possibly my greatest discovery since I discovered ice cream* There was, of course, only one way to test a theory like this, and that was immediately.

Crabby waited until Sofia bent down to tie her shoelace, and then made his move — three quick scuttling steps and a determined leap. He caught the very end of the ponytail, missed his footing, and spent one heart-stopping second dangling by a single claw before hauling himself up, claw over claw, into the thick of it.

Made it, he thought, breathless, wedging himself into a snug little pocket near the hair tie. Excellent landing. Nobody saw a thing.



Sofia straightened up, entirely unaware she now had a passenger, and went to find her shoes.

It took Crabby a moment to get used to the swing and sway of it — considerably bouncier than the Lego, and prone to sudden direction changes whenever Sofia turned her head. But he found, rather to his own

surprise, that he liked it. From up here he could see everything: the kitchen, the hallway, the world going by outside the car window. All without lifting a claw, and all without anybody ever guessing he was there.

As Sofia grabbed her bag and headed out the door, her ponytail swinging cheerfully with every step, Crabby settled deeper into his new hiding spot.

No being left behind anymore. Wherever Sofia goes, I go. This is it. This is the place.

And from that day on, it was.

Crabby goes to Gardening Club

Crabby was bored. He was watching Sofia get ready for school when he suddenly had an idea. *I'm going to Freshwater Bay Primary School*, he thought, creeping into Sofia's ponytail. Crabby was bubbling with excitement as he enjoyed a short car ride to the school from the safety of Sofia's hair.

First up was Spelling Mastery. This went smoothly enough, though Crabby privately felt the word "crustacean" ought to have come up at least once. Music class was trickier — every time the class sang, Sofia's ponytail swished in time, and Crabby had to grip on with all eight legs, muttering to himself about the injustice. Maths class was, in Crabby's expert opinion, the most sensible lesson of the day, mostly because nobody moved very much and he could have a bit of a rest.



By lunchtime, Crabby was rather looking forward to a quiet snooze. Sofia, however, had other plans. She grabbed her hat, met her best friend Emma by the door, and the two of them dashed off to Gardening Club.

"We're on weeding duty today," Emma announced, far too cheerfully for Crabby's liking.

Weeding, thought Crabby, as Sofia knelt down by a row of tomato plants and started pulling at the dandelions. *Marvellous. An entire lunchtime dedicated to yanking things out of the dirt. Truly the pinnacle of school life.*

Bored, and fairly sure nobody would notice, Crabby slipped quietly out of the ponytail and down into the garden bed for a proper look around. That was when he spotted her: a plump, cheerful green caterpillar named Wiggles, munching



happily away on a tomato leaf.

“Oi,” said Crabby, sidling up. “That’s not weeds, that’s tomato.”

The caterpillar looked up, mid-chew, entirely unbothered. “It’s delicious, though.”

“That’s not the point!” said Crabby. “Sofia and her friend are trying to grow tomatoes — real ones, red and juicy — and you’re eating the plant before it’s even had a chance.”

Wiggles considered this, chewing thoughtfully. “I didn’t think about it like that. I just eat what’s green and nearby.”

“Well, there’s plenty green and nearby that isn’t tomato,” said

Crabby, waving a claw at the dandelions Sofia and Emma were busily pulling up. “Those weeds, for instance. Nobody wants those. You’d be doing everybody a favour.”

The caterpillar crawled over, sampled a dandelion leaf, and her whole face lit up. “Oh, that’s much better. Crunchier, too.”

“There you go,” said Crabby, quite pleased with himself. “Weeds for you, tomatoes for them. Everybody’s happy.” “I’ve got friends who’d love this,” said Wiggles, already turning to go. “I’ll tell them all to come and eat the weeds instead!”

And off she went, wriggling away through the garden bed to spread the word, leaving Crabby alone with the tomato plants and a rare feeling of having done something rather good.

He scrambled back up into the ponytail just as Sofia stood up, dusting the dirt off

her knees. “Emma, look!” she said, pointing at the tomato plant. “This one’s got heaps of leaves still. Maybe it’ll actually grow properly this time!” “Lucky one,” said Emma.

Not luck, thought Crabby smugly, settling back into his hiding spot as the bell rang for the end of lunch. *Diplomacy. Very possibly the greatest diplomatic achievement of my career. Someone really ought to give me a medal.*

Nonna’s note: Crabby has a small chat in a garden, and everybody gets what they need — tomatoes for the girls, weeds for the caterpillars. That’s the best kind of clever, little one.

Nonno’s note: In my day we didn’t negotiate with caterpillars, we simply squashed them! But I admit, Crabby’s way probably works better for the tomatoes.

Ari’s note: WOOF. Nobody invited me to Garden Club. I would have eaten the weeds AND the caterpillar.

Crabby and the Rottnest Crabs

Sofia had her backpack on before the sun was even properly up. “Boat day!” she announced, spinning in a circle in the kitchen, ponytail whipping around with her.

Boat day, thought Crabby, gripping on for dear life from his usual spot tucked deep in Sofia’s hair. *Nobody asked ME if it was boat day. I have not packed. I have not prepared. I could be seasick. Crabs get seasick. Probably.*

Sofia’s best friend Emma was waiting at the jetty with her mum and dad, hopping from foot to foot with excitement. The ferry to Rottnest Island was big, white and loud, and when it pulled away from the dock, Crabby felt his stomach do something very strange.



I am not scared, he told himself, wedging himself between two strands of hair as the boat bounced over a wave.

By the time the ferry pulled into the jetty at Rottnest, the water had turned the colour of blue lolly-ice, and Sofia and Emma were both leaning over the railing, squealing about quokkas before they’d even gotten off the boat.

“Can we swim first?” Sofia begged. “Please, please, please?”

They found a little bay with sand so white it looked like sugar, and the girls kicked off their sandals and ran straight in, shrieking at how cold it was and then not caring at all. Sofia dove under, and for one heart-stopping second Crabby went with her — down into the blue, bubbles everywhere, salt water fizzing past his claws.

This is fine, he thought, upside down. *This is completely fine. I am an excellent swimmer.*

When Sofia came up laughing, Crabby scrambled out of her hair and dropped onto

a rock at the edge of the bay to catch his breath, dripping and dazed. That was when he heard the voices. “My goodness who are you?” said someone, sounding surprised.

Crabby spun around. Three crabs were staring at him from a crack in the rock —



one who looked like she was mid scuttle, one sitting very neatly with her claws folded, and one who was still scuttling into place, clearly running late.

“I am a Lego crab,” Crabby said proudly, drawing himself up to his full height. “And my name is Crabby.”

“I’ve never seen a Lego crab before,” said the adventurous-looking one, scuttling closer with alarming speed. “I’m Bitey. This is Pinchy.” She jabbed a claw at the neat one. “And that’s Scuttle, he’s always late, don’t wait for him.”

“Have you ever swum with a quokka?” Bitey interrupted, eyes gleaming. “No” replied Crabby.

“Then you haven’t lived,” said Bitey. Before Crabby could argue, she grabbed his claw and towed him off the rock and into the shallows, Pinchy sighing and following behind, Scuttle trailing three seconds after everyone else as usual.

They led him along the edge of the bay to where the sand dipped into a little pool, cool and clear, ringed with smooth stones. Fish darted between Crabby’s legs. A quokka watched suspiciously from the dunes but did not swim, no matter how hard Bitey tried to convince one to come closer.

Up on the beach, Sofia had climbed out of the water and was wrapping herself in a

towel, teeth chattering happily and patting her damp ponytail absent mindedly.

She's looking for me, Crabby thought, and something in his chest went warm and a little bit soft, which he immediately decided was just seawater. "I have to go," he told the others, already backing toward the rocks. "Sofia needs me. It's a whole responsibility. You wouldn't understand."

"We'll be here," said Bitey. "We're always here." "See you around, Crabby," said Pinchy. "Wait — see WHO around?" said Scuttle, to nobody, because everyone had already gone.

Crabby scrambled back up through the wet sand, up Sofia's towel, and into the safety of her ponytail just as she flopped down onto the beach next to Emma, both of them pink-cheeked and sandy and grinning at the sky.

I've made new friends, Crabby thought, settling in, quite pleased with himself. *It turns out Rottnest Island is a wonderful place.*

Crabby goes Fishing with Nonna and Nonno

Crabby had been listening to the fishing trip plan all week. Nonno had been talking about it since Monday – the rods, the bait, and the spot where fish practically jumped onto the hook if you knew what you were doing. Nonna had been packing the esky since Wednesday – sandwiches, fruit, little biscuits in a tin, enough food for approximately fourteen people despite there being only three. Sofia had been excited since Thursday, running around looking for her bucket and spade.

On Saturday morning, while Sofia was bent over her bag double checking her sunscreen and bucket, Crabby made his move. Up the back of the chair. Onto Sofia's shoulder. Into the hair. *Perfect*, thought Crabby, gripping on as Sofia straightened up. *Here we go.*

The drive to the beach was wonderful. Crabby couldn't see much from inside the ponytail, but he could hear everything. Nonna and Nonno were talking excitedly and Sofia was laughing in the back seat with her face turned to the window.

The car smelled of sunscreen, Nonna's biscuits and a faint salt tang that got stronger and stronger as they drove until Crabby could smell almost nothing but salt and sea.



The beach was wide and white and the waves were rolling in big clean sets, breaking turquoise then white then rushing up the sand. Seagulls patrolled the shoreline with professional intensity.

Nonno set up the fishing rods with the focused joy of a man doing his favourite

thing. He had a whole system – the rods went here, the bait bucket there, the chairs at precisely this angle to the water – and he moved through it with the efficiency of long term practice, humming to himself.

Nonna set up the esky, the blanket, the umbrella and the biscuit tin, in approximately ninety seconds. Sofia kicked off her shoes and ran immediately to the water's edge. Crabby, in Sofia's hair, finally decided it was time. He climbed quietly to the edge of the hair, looked down at the sand, and dropped. He landed in the soft dry sand and looked at the ocean. *Right* said Crabby, *let's go!*



He found Bitey first. Bitey was wedged in a piece of driftwood near the waterline. "Hi Crabby" said Bitey. "How is your fishing trip going?" Pinchy arrived next, scuttling out from the rocks at impressive speed. Pinchy was larger than both of them, with one claw noticeably bigger than the other – the famous pincher claw. She was also, despite the name, actually the most sensible of the three, which wasn't saying a great deal.

Scuttle arrived last, because Scuttle was always late. Not because he was slow, but because he was always distracted. He came sideways around a rock with his head turned completely backward, watching something behind him with enormous interest, and nearly walked straight into all of them.

"Hello" said Scuttle. "There's a pelican back there. Magnificent creature. Enormous. Has a fish already." The four of them then proceeded to spend the morning in the excellent way that crabs spend mornings at the beach, which is to say in constant motion, investigating everything, and having vigorous disagreements about the best spots to be.

Bitey found a mussel and was extremely possessive about it. Pinchy discovered a rock pool and catalogued every single creature in it, occasionally picking things up to look at them more closely. Scuttle followed another crab for twenty minutes purely out of admiration for its speed, until the crab disappeared into a hole. And Crabby – well, Crabby ran at the waves. But not into them. He wasn't a water crab and he knew it.

Sofia was at the water's edge doing exactly the same thing. Running at the waves. Laughing. Letting them chase her back up the sand, her feet kicking up white foam. Crabby watched her and felt something warm that wasn't the sun.

As the sun turned the waves golden, Nonno and Nonna started packing up for the long journey home. Crabby waved goodbye to his friends and scuttled back up to his usual position in Sofia's ponytail, ready for the drive home.

Crabby and the Great Magpie Chase

It was magpie season, which for every Western Australian child means one thing: bike helmets and wary glances at the sky for swooping magpies overhead. Sofia wasn't worried. She had never been swooped in her life. She skipped across the grass toward the playground, ponytail bouncing, completely unaware that her usual passenger was about to have the single worst afternoon of his entire career.



It happened on the monkey bars. Sofia swung herself up and across, hand over hand, laughing, and on the third swing her ponytail whipped out sideways with enough force that Crabby lost his grip entirely. He sailed through the air in a small, clumsy arc and landed with a soft thump in the bark chips below. He was

completely exposed, in broad daylight, in the middle of a public playground. "Oh no!" exclaimed Crabby.

He didn't have long to panic about it, because that was the exact moment a large, very interested magpie landed three meters away and tilted its head at him with the unmistakable expression of a bird who had just spotted lunch. Crabby did the only sensible thing available to him. He ran. For something with eight legs and absolutely no experience sprinting across open ground, he moved with astonishing speed. He scuttled sideways under the slide, around a sandpit shovel, and straight through a forest of unsuspecting ankles, while the magpie hopped and flapped after him with great enthusiasm.

"Excuse me – sorry – coming through!" Crabby yelled to nobody in particular, since nobody could hear him anyway, weaving between a toddler's sandals and a dropped juice box.

Up on the monkey bars, Sofia reached the end and dropped down, completely oblivious that her ponytail was now lighter by one extremely panicked crustacean. "Mummy did you see that?" she called out happily, jogging over toward the swings, hair swinging free and empty behind her. Mummy smiled. "Great job, sweetie". Neither of them noticed the small commotion happening near the sandpit, where a magpie was now hopping in determined circles around the base of the slide, beak snapping at empty air.

Crabby, meanwhile, had wedged himself into the narrow gap between the slide's plastic edge, claws braced, heart pounding somewhere inside his shell. The magpie's



beak jabbed at the gap, missing him by a hair's width. "Personal space" Crabby hissed, "is an important concept you menace!" The beak jabbed again.

Crabby scuttled along the gap to the far end, popped out the other side, and made a desperate dash across open bark chips toward the only safe harbour he could see: a large rock half buried in the sand. It wasn't ideal, but it would have to do. He dove under it just as the magpie skidded to a stop above him, head cocked, peering down at the rock with deep suspicion.

For one long, terrible moment, bird and crab stared each other down. Crabby was flattened beneath the rock, the magpie tilting its head this way and that,

clearly unconvinced that lunch had simply vanished.

Then, from across the park, a far more interesting development: somebody's abandoned sausage roll dropped on the grass near the picnic tables. The magpie's priorities realigned instantly. It gave the rock one last suspicious look, then took off toward the sausage roll.

Crabby, relieved, exhaled and allowed himself a few seconds of lying very still before getting back to business. Sofia was back near the swings now, climbing on for another go, hair swinging loose and free. Crabby had approximately ninety seconds to fix this before someone spotted a crab casually strolling across a public playground. He ran. It was, without question, the fastest sideways scuttle of his life, across bark chips, over a fallen leaf, and dodging one curious toddler who pointed and shouted "crab!". Finally, with Sofia's ponytail swinging temptingly close as she swung on the swing, Crabby made one final desperate leap.

He caught hold just as the swing reached its lowest point, claws sinking into familiar, safe, ponytail territory, and held on for dear life as the world swooped past. By the time Sofia and Mummy packed up to leave, Crabby was tucked back in his usual spot, utterly exhausted, claws still trembling, having just lived through what he privately ranked as the single most terrifying experience of his life. "Good park day?" Mummy asked. "Best ever" said Sofia happily. Crabby, somewhere near her left ear, did not agree, but he was far too tired to argue about it.

Crabby goes to Emma's Birthday Party

Crabby was bored. So when he heard Sofia was going to a birthday party he got very excited. The birthday was for Sofia's best friend Emma, who was turning ten. Mummy had wrapped the present the night before. Sofia had chosen it herself – a craft kit with approximately four hundred small pieces inside. Crabby had watched all of this from his usual crevice in the Lego, and thought the craft kit looked excellent. He also thought the tissue paper looked like excellent nesting material, but that was beside the point.

Emma's house had a jumping castle in the backyard. Crabby saw it through the car window as they arrived and felt his claws tighten on the ponytail. It was enormous.



It was inflatable. It was making a continuous low roaring sound from the generator, like a large, cheerful, bouncing volcano.

Inside the house, the party was already in full swing. There were children everywhere – running, shrieking, appearing suddenly

from behind bushes, disappearing just as suddenly. Someone had a water pistol. Sofia spotted Emma's sister Sophie and ran towards her at full speed. Crabby experienced the ponytail becoming briefly horizontal.

The jumping castle, it turned out, was unavoidable. "Sofia come on!" shouted Sophie, already bouncing, her plaits flying upward with each jump. "Okay!" Sofia shouted back with enthusiasm. In an instant she hopped straight onto the castle.

She jumped. Crabby held on. She jumped again. Crabby held on harder. *This is fine,*

he thought, as the world went up and down and then up again. *This is completely fine. Crabs are naturally buoyant, we are built for dynamic environments. The ocean is essentially a very large jumping castle if you think about it.* On the next jump, Sofia bounced into Sophie, and they both collapsed sideways in a heap of giggles.



The pass the parcel was easier. The children sat in a circle on the grass and Emma's dad played music from his phone while the parcel went around. When the music stopped, whoever was holding it unwrapped one layer. Sofia got a layer with a small packet of stickers inside. She was very pleased.

The cake was chocolate, which Emma had chosen, and it had ten candles and Sonic the hedgehog on top. Everyone sang happy birthday. Emma blew out all ten candles on the first try, which was received with enormous applause. Sofia ate her cake very fast and got chocolate icing on her nose and didn't notice for quite a long time.

In the ponytail, Crabby could smell the chocolate cake and felt, not for the first time, that being a secret stowaway had certain limitations. He could not eat cake. He could not sing happy birthday, obviously. But he could watch Sofia blow bubbles with Emma, iridescent spheres floating up into the afternoon sun and popping one by one. He could hear her laughter through the ponytail, a small constant vibration.

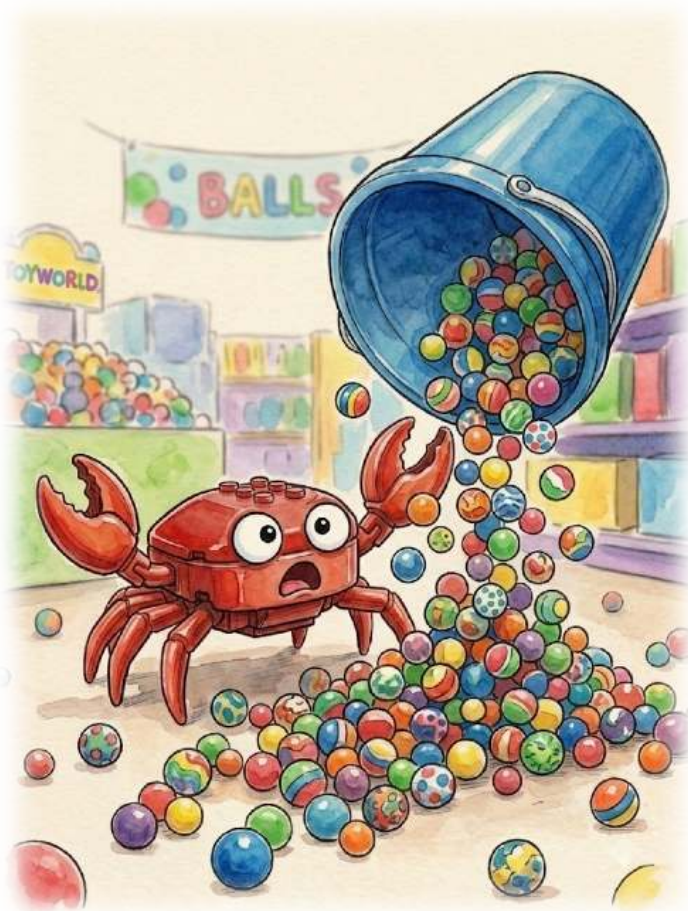
On the way home, Sofia clutched her party bag on her lap and told Mummy

everything that happened, at considerable speed. The jumping castle. The water pistol. The bubbles. "Did you have a good time?" Mummy asked. "The best" Sofia said simply and completely. She reached up and fixed her ponytail, which had come a bit loose. Crabby tucked himself back into position. Yes, he thought, *the best*.

Crabby goes to Toyworld

The thing about Toyworld, Crabby decided, was that it smelled funny. Not bad, exactly. Just...plasticky. Synthetic. Like someone had bottled the concept of fun and sprayed it all over the ceiling. *I like it here*, he thought, from his spot deep in Sofia's ponytail.

Sofia, naturally, loved it immediately. "Mummy!" She stopped so fast that Crabby lurched sideways and grabbed a clawful of hair to stop himself tumbling out. "Mummy look at that!" She was pointing at a display tower of slime kits, each one a more alarming colour than the last. Glittery purple. Toxic green. A shade of pink that Crabby was fairly sure didn't exist in nature.



Mummy steered her gently away. "Let's look around first, okay?" They went past the Lego section, where Sofia spent a great deal of time looking. Then they stopped at a giant bin of bouncy balls, hundreds of them, in every colour, piled up to Sofia's chin. This, Crabby realised, was where things were going to go wrong. He didn't mean to do it. He was simply adjusting his position, shifting his weight from one claw to another, when his left claw snagged on a loose strand of Sofia's hair and he lurched forward, over her ear, and grabbed the first thing he could reach. Which happened to be the edge of the bouncy ball bin. The bin

wobbled. *No*, thought Crabby, *no no no*. The bin tipped.

Approximately four hundred bouncy balls exploded across the floor of Toyworld in every direction at once. The sound was extraordinary. Sofia shrieked with delight. Mummy spun around. Three other children immediately dropped to their knees to chase balls under the shelves. A display of bubble wands toppled like dominoes. A shop assistant appeared from nowhere, already looking tired.

"Oh gosh," said Mummy, going pink. "I'm so sorry — I don't know how—" "It's fine," said the shop assistant, in the voice of someone for whom it was not fine.

Deep in Sofia's ponytail, Crabby had gone completely still. *That was not me*, he thought very formally. *That was gravity. Gravity did that.*

To his credit, Crabby behaved himself for the next seven minutes. He watched Sofia deliberate over a craft kit with a focussed seriousness. He watched Mummy check the price tag and put it back. He watched Sofia's face. "But Mummy—" "We'll see." "But it has glitter glue!" "I said we'll see."



The second incident was absolutely not his fault. A small boy, maybe three years old, had been staring at Sofia's hair from across the aisle for a full thirty seconds. Then he toddled over, reached up and grabbed Sofia's ponytail with both hands. Crabby threw himself sideways into the thickest part of

the hair and froze. Sofia yelped. "Mummy! That kid is pulling my hair!" The boy's mother appeared instantly, mortified. "Harry! We don't grab! Say sorry!"

Harry did not say sorry. Harry looked fascinated. His eyes drifted upward along the ponytail, searching, like he'd felt something that shouldn't be there. Crabby stopped breathing. Harry's eyes narrowed. "Crab!" said Harry, and toddled away. Everybody laughed and had no idea what he meant.

They left with the craft kit. Sofia swung the bag as they walked back through Claremont Quarter toward the car park, already planning what she was going to make: a card for Nonna, a bookmark for Nonno and a glittery picture of Ari the dog.

Crabby settled deeper into her ponytail, rocking gently with each step. He thought about the bouncy balls. The boy named Harry who had grabbed his hiding spot. He thought about the smell of plastic and the squeaky toys and four hundred balls hitting the floor at once. He paused. There had been one genuinely excellent moment, when all those balls had burst across the floor in every colour, and the whole shop had gone briefly, brilliantly chaotic.

He wasn't going to tell anyone about that. But he thought about it for most of the drive home.

Crabby goes to the Hairdressers

Crabby was bored. He was lurking in his usual crevice on the Beach Club Lego when he heard Mummy call Sofia. "Are you ready to go to the hairdressers?" she said. "Almost," replied Sofia. Crabby didn't waste a second. When Sofia bent down to put on her shoes he quickly scuttled up her leg and into her hair.

"Just a trim," Mummy told the hairdresser, settling into the salon chair beside Sofia. "Nothing dramatic, she likes it long." Sofia, perched in the big swivel chair with a black cape around her shoulders, beamed at herself in the mirror. Tucked deep inside her ponytail, now released from its tie and fanned out loose across her back, Crabby felt the bottom drop out of his stomach. *Scissors*, he thought. *There are*

about to be scissors. This was, without question, the most dangerous outing of Crabby's career.



The hairdresser, a cheerful woman named Ruth, ran a comb through Sofia's long hair in one confident stroke. Crabby flattened himself sideways against Sofia's scalp, gripping on with all eight legs, doing his absolute best impression of a

hair clip. The comb swept past half a centimeter from his claws. *Too close*, he thought. *Far too close*.

"Just tidying up the ends," Ruth said, snipping away at the very bottom of Sofia's hair. She was nowhere near Crabby's hiding spot, but close enough that he heard every single click of the blades and aged what felt like several crab years. Sofia, completely unbothered, was busy reading a book balanced on her knee. "Can I get a fringe?" "Maybe next time," said Mummy from the chair beside her, eyes closed halfway through her own colour treatment.

Crabby, meanwhile, had quietly relocated three more times, first behind Sofia's left

ear, then up near her crown, then finally tucked into the thickest part of her hair at the very back, as far from the scissors as physically possible.



"Please stop fidgeting," Ruth said, more to the hair than to Sofia. "Your hair's doing something funny today." "It does that," Sofia said, completely used to it by now.

Just when Crabby thought the worst was over, Ruth reached for the hairdryer. The roar of hot air hit like a hurricane. Crabby clung on with every ounce of strength he had, claws dug in, legs braced, while the hair shook and rattled and howled. "Almost done," Ruth called cheerfully over the noise, completely unaware she was nearly blow drying a crustacean directly off a child's head. When the dryer finally clicked off, Crabby lay still for a long moment, dazed, wind swept and deeply rattled.

"All done!" Ruth spun the chair around so Sofia could see the mirror. "What do you think?" "I love it!" Sofia said, shaking her head side to side to watch her hair swish. Mummy reached over to tie Sofia's ponytail back up. "Hold still a second," Mummy said, gathering the hair into her hand, and very nearly gathering Crabby straight into the hair tie along with it. He flattened himself out of the way just in time, heart pounding, as the elastic snapped into place a whisker from his claws.

Out in the carpark afterwards, Sofia admired her reflection in the side mirror, swinging her freshly trimmed ponytail back and forth with great satisfaction. "Best haircut ever," she declared. Crabby, still catching his breath somewhere near her left ear, privately disagreed. As far as he was concerned, it had been the single most terrifying twenty five minutes of his entire life. "Never again," he muttered to himself. He would of course go again. He always did.

Crabby goes on the Plane

Sofia's ponytail bounced through Perth Airport, and hidden deep inside it, eight little legs gripped tight. *This is not stowing away*, Crabby thought, as Sofia's Baba wheeled the suitcase past security. *This is a strategic accompaniment. Someone has to keep an eye on Sofia for fourteen hours. It might as well be me.* He'd snuck in that morning, right after Sofia tied her hair up, and now there was no going back – not that he wanted to. Crabby had never been on a plane. He fully intended to enjoy every second of it, sideways and undetected, as always.



The trouble started somewhere over the Indian Ocean. Sofia had fallen asleep against the window, and Crabby, bored and restless, decided a quick mission down the aisle was in order. He slipped out of her ponytail, scuttled along the headrest, and dropped onto the little tray table of the man in 34C – who was mid sip of his juice. "What in the –" the man spluttered, staring at his lap, then

at the empty tray, utterly unable to explain where the small red visitor had gone, because Crabby was already gone, flattened against the underside of the seat in front.

That could have gone better, Crabby admitted. Emboldened, Crabby's next stop was the food cart, parked innocently in the aisle while the flight attendant helped someone with a bag. He found the little foil lids on the dessert cups irresistible, and to his delight, he opened one to find chocolate mousse inside. One clawful of chocolate mousse later, he was sporting a fine brown moustache and left several tiny footprints across the cart's top shelf. "Did someone get into the mousse?" the flight attendant asked her colleague, frowning at the smudges. "Maybe turbulence" said the other, unconvinced.

Crabby was already halfway back down the aisle, sliding under seat 36A just as Sofia



stirred and reached up to touch her ponytail. He made it back with seconds to spare, tucking himself in just as Sofia yawned and asked her Baba how much longer until London. He stayed still for almost a whole hour, which for Crabby was practically a personal best.

But when the in flight movie started, and someone three rows up had the volume too loud, Crabby simply had to investigate. Again, he climbed down the seat, across a sleeping stranger's blanket, and pressed himself against the chair, marvelling at the movie being shown from the little screen.

That's when the seatbelt light dinged on, and the pilot's voice crackled overhead "cabin crew, please prepare for a little turbulence." The plane gave a gentle shudder. Crabby, caught mid scuttle, was flung sideways into someones dropped boarding pass, wrapping himself in it before rolling to a stop against a shoe. The shoe's owner looked down. Blinked. Looked again. *Nothing to see here*, Crabby thought desperately, holding very, very still. *Just a boarding pass. A completely ordinary non crab shaped boarding pass.*

When the turbulence finally passed, Crabby unrolled himself and bolted back down the aisle. He arrived at Sofia's ponytail breathless, mousse still faintly visible on one claw.

Sofia woke properly this time, and peered out the window at the lights appearing below. "Baba look – its London!" Tucked deep inside her ponytail, exhausted from his adventures, one small red crab peeked out just far enough to see the city lights twinkling below. *A successful mission*, he thought, as his eyes closed. *No one saw anything. Nothing happened. And that mousse, for the record, was excellent.*

Crabby goes to Buckingham Palace

London was hot and sticky. *It's way too hot to be outside*, thought Crabby, peering out from Sofia's ponytail as she joined the crowd gathering outside Buckingham Palace's tall black gates. Sofia was buzzing with excitement, pointing up at the gold tipped railings, the red brick facade, and the flag snapping in the wind. But Crabby only had eyes for one thing: the guards. Enormous men in bright red coats and towering black furry hats, standing so still they barely seemed to be breathing.

Impressive, Crabby thought, sizing them up from his hiding spot. *But I can be stiller.*



Watch this! This, of course, was a terrible idea, but Crabby did it anyway. While Sofia was busy taking photos, Crabby slipped down from the ponytail, scuttled across the pavement and positioned himself directly behind the nearest guard's polished black boot, holding himself as rigid as a statue.

The guard, trained to ignore pigeons, tourists and the occasional dropped ice-cream, fortunately did not glance down at the small red crab. Crabby held his position proudly for almost thirty whole seconds, before a gust of wind sent a chip packet tumbling past. Instinct took over and he lunged for it. The chip packet, as it turned out, was still half full, and exploded in a small salty shower directly onto the guard's boot. The guard's eye twitched. Just once.

Time to retreat, Crabby decided, and bolted back across the pavement, dodging a pigeon, a pram wheel, and Sofia's foot, before diving back into the ponytail. Sofia asked if they could see inside the palace, but they couldn't on that day. They could, however, walk to the edge of the gardens, and Sofia pressed her face to the railings to peer at the palace windows, wondering if the king was home.

Later, in the gift shop, disaster nearly struck again. A display of small toy corgis, the

Queen's famous dogs, sat in a great pyramid near the till. Crabby, catching sight of them from Sofia's shoulder, was convinced one of them had moved. I must



investigate, he thought. He was one claw away from launching himself at the pyramid when Sofia reached up to adjust her ponytail. Crabby had to freeze completely still, clinging on for dear life, while the corgis remained exactly as they'd always been. Just toys. Not moving at all. "Fine", he grumbled silently. *I'll stay put in Sofia's ponytail*, thinking that another adventure could end in disaster.

By the time they left the palace behind, Sofia was full of stories to tell about the guards, the gold gates, the gardens, and had no idea that her ponytail had its own small collection of adventures to match, salty chip crumbs and all.

Crabby goes to the London Science Museum

The Science Museum was enormous, all glass and steel and buzzing with excited kids, and Crabby, tucked in Sofia's ponytail, had never seen so many buttons to press in his entire life. *This*, he thought, eyes wide, *is the greatest place ever!*

Sofia raced straight for the Exploring Space gallery, where a real rocket engine hung from the ceiling, and Crabby bent his neck so far out of her ponytail that he nearly

lost his grip entirely. A rocket. An actual rocket. Sofia do you understand what this means? We could go to the moon! Sofia of course understood nothing of the sort, since Crabby's thoughts were entirely his own secret, but she did tug her Baba toward the moon landing display.

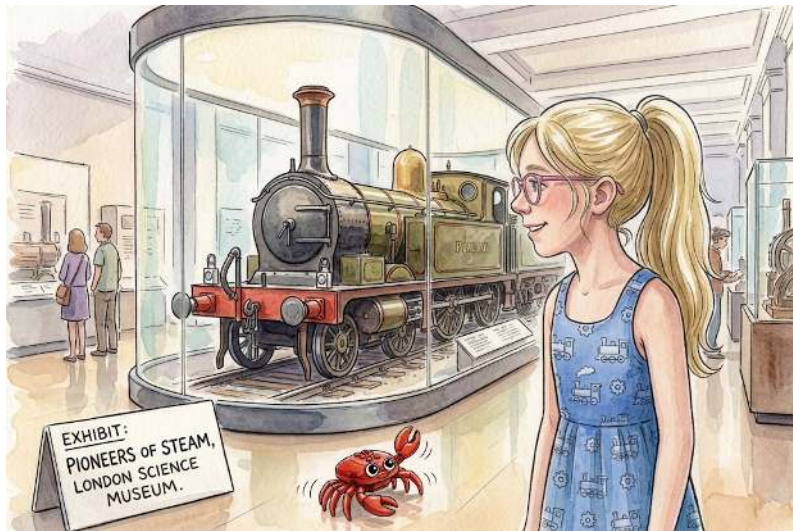


It was in the Pattern Pod, a gallery full of buttons, levers

and spinning gadgets for little hands, that things began to go sideways, quite literally. While Sofia was reading a plaque about symmetry, Crabby spotted a big red button at floor level, clearly meant for children to press. It was, in his professional opinion, exactly his size. So he slipped down from the ponytail, scuttled between a dozen pairs of sneakers, and threw himself claw first onto the button. A giant mechanical arm overhead whirred to life, sweeping a pattern of coloured lights across the ceiling to gasps from nearby children, all who assumed some clever engineer was responsible.

You're welcome, thought Crabby, before a small boy's shoe nearly flattened him mid celebration, sending him scrambling under a display case in a most undignified panic. He made it back to Sofia just as she moved on to the Wonderlab, where a

demonstration was underway involving a Van de Graaf generator - a big silver ball that made volunteers hair stand on end. Sofia watched, delighted, as a girl's ponytail rose straight up like a startled octopus.



Crabby, still hidden in Sofia's ponytail, eyed the silver ball with deep suspicion. *Absolutely not*, he thought. *I have heard of static electricity. I do not trust it. It sounds like something invented specifically to embarrass crabs.* He needn't have worried. Sofia wasn't picked as a volunteer, but the close call was enough to keep him lying low for a

solid twenty minutes, right up until they reached the Making the Modern World gallery. This was home to Stephenson's Rocket, an actual steam train from 1829. Crabby climbed down for a better look.

Here disaster struck in the form of a pencil. A little boy nearby had dropped his, and it rolled directly under the train's display barrier, right into Crabby's path as he attempted a quiet scuttle back toward Sofia's shoe. Unable to resist a mystery object, Crabby seized it in both claws and attempted to drag it free, only for the pencil to jam sideways against the barrier's metal foot. For one heart stopping second, Crabby was stuck fast, pencil wedged, claws straining, in full view of anyone who happened to look down.

Nobody did. A tour guide chose that exact moment to loudly announce the top speed of the Rocket in 1829, and every head turned toward the train instead, giving Crabby just enough time to abandon the pencil entirely and fling himself back into the safety of Sofia's ponytail, heart pounding, utterly rattled. By the time they left, Sofia had a bag full of postcards and a head full of facts about rockets and steam engines, completely unaware that her ponytail had provided front-row seats to several small scientific catastrophes of its own.

Crabby goes to Kos

It started, as these things often do, with Crabby overhearing something he was absolutely not supposed to hear. "We're going to Kos!" exclaimed Sofia, curled up on the sofa in London. "The whole island is gorgeous, I'm so excited!" Crabby went rigid in his usual spot, nestled deep in Sofia's ponytail. *Kos. Greece. An island. And nobody – nobody - had thought to mention this before to the small crab stowed away in Sofia's hair.*

They'll leave without me, he thought, panicked, claws trembling. I'll be found weeks from now, dried out on a London windowsill, and the newspaper headline will read: 'devoted crab, forgotten. A tragedy'.

He was, of course, not going to let that happen. Crabby knew that the trouble was with the passports. Crabby had seen Sofia's baba tuck the little navy books into a drawer, and he understood - with the confidence of a crab who understood almost nothing about international travel - that no passport meant no plane. So that night, while everyone was asleep, Crabby got to work. A bottle cap became a cover. A scrap of red ribbon, folded just so, became a stripe down the middle. And on the inside, in a pencil that wobbled considerably, he wrote:

Name: Crabby

Nationality: Beach, Perth, Western Australia

Special abilities: Hiding. Bravery. An excellent crustacean.

There, he thought, tucking it into the ponytail beside him. Fully documented. Fully legitimate. They cannot possibly object now.

Heathrow airport was, Crabby decided, the most stressful place he had ever encountered. The security queue snaked forward for miles. Sofia bounced her ponytail with every step, and each bounce sent Crabby's passport sliding a little further out. *Stay in, stay in*, he willed it, pinching the ribbon spine with two claws. This is not the moment for a customs incident.

It was, unfortunately, exactly the moment for a customs incident. The passport



slipped free entirely and fluttered down - landing with precision directly on the shoe of the security officer scanning boarding passes.

The officer bent down, picked it up, and turned it over. "Whose is this, then?" he asked, holding up the tiny booklet. "Somebody's dropped a very small passport." Sofia's baba laughed, assuming it was a toy. "Sorry, kids and their things" he said, plucking it from his hand and dropping it straight into his carry on without a second glance. Crabby, still wedged in the ponytail, allowed himself a single shaky breath.

The plane itself brought new disasters. Somewhere over France, the seatbelt sign chimed on and the

aircraft dropped through a pocket of turbulence that sent Crabby sliding sideways, claws scrabbling for Sofia's hair elastic. *This is fine*, he told himself, *this is completely fine, crabs are extremely aerodynamic*. Crabby held tight on the hair elastic for the rest of the journey, managing to stay put in Sofia's ponytail.

Kos, when they finally landed, was absolutely beautiful - white buildings, a sea so blue and a heat that made Crabby grateful for the shade of Sofia's hair. The beach near their hotel came with its own residents: a scuttle of local crabs sunning themselves on a rock, who eyed Crabby with the particular suspicion locals reserve for tourists.

"You're not from around here" said one, looking unimpressed. "I am an international traveller" Crabby informed him, drawing himself up to his full height. "I have a passport."

At the taverna that evening, disaster struck again with a souvlaki. A skewer,



wobbling off a passing waiter's tray, clattered down directly onto the table beside Sofia's plate, sending a chunk of grilled tomato flying, which landed, with astonishing accuracy, square on Crabby's shell. The waiter, apologising, rushed to tidy the mess. *Do not scream*, Crabby ordered himself, going

utterly still. *Crabs that scream get noticed. Play dead. Play decoration. Play anything but crab.* Sofia, quick as anything, removed the tomato from her hair, narrowly missing Crabby. A close call, he thought, staying as still as possible. *What a silly tomato.*

That night, on the hotel balcony, Sofia's baba pointed out across the water to where the lights of Turkey blinked faintly on the opposite coastline. Sofia leaned on the railing beside him, and Crabby, safely tucked in the ponytail, watched the same lights.

Crabby and the Great Nisyros Rescue

On a sunny afternoon, Sofia and her baba took a ferry from Kos to the smaller island of Nisyros. Nisyros is famous for a volcano, and apparently very good grilled octopus. Crabby, tucked into his usual spot in the ponytail, was not thrilled about the volcano part. *An active volcano*, he thought, gripping a strand of hair rather too tightly as the little ferry pulled away from the harbour. *We survived a customs incident and a tomato assault, and now were sailing towards a mountain that explodes. This family has no sense whatsoever.*

The crossing was smoother than he expected, salt spray and sunshine and the wide blue Aegean sea rolling by. By the time the boat pulled into Nisyros' small harbour Crabby had almost relaxed.

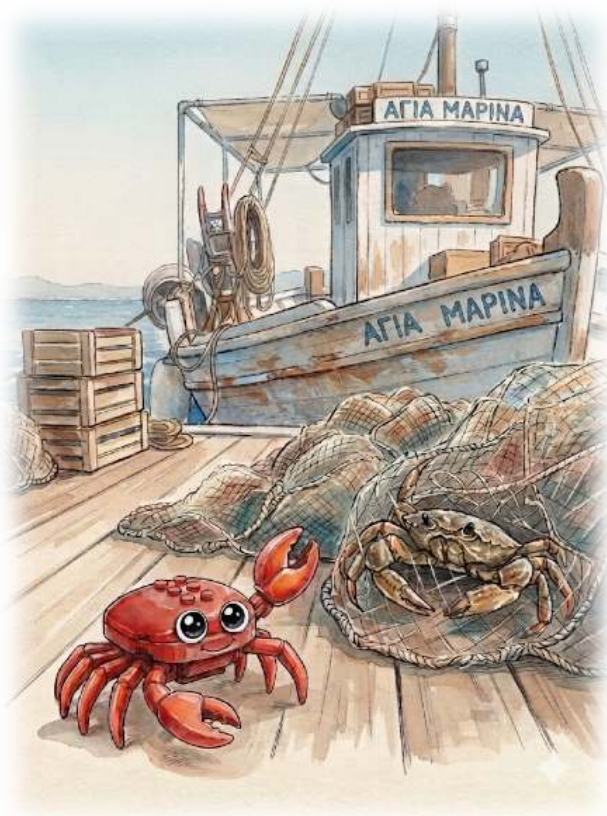


The jetty wall at Pali, it turned out, had residents of its own. While Sofia's baba organised the suitcases, Sofia wandered to the waters edge to peer into the shallows. Crabby, peering along with her, spotted two local crabs perched on a mossy rock, mid argument. "Im telling you Giorgio, it's a hundred meters to the volcano" one was saying, waving a claw. "It is not a hundred meters, Yianni, it has never once been a hundred meters, you say that every single summer".

Crabby, unable to resist the conversation, leaned far out of the ponytail; "it's about eight kilometres actually. I read it on a sign." Both crabs went very still and stared up at the strange red crab sitting in a childs hair. "... does it talk?!" Yianni asked Giorgio, not quietly at all. "Obviously I talk" said Crabby. "I am an extremely well travelled crab. Perth. London. Kos. Now here. I have a passport too."

Despite this rocky start, the three crabs got on rather well. Yianni and Giorgio filled Crabby in on harbour life: which rocks held the warmest sun, which fishing boats to avoid, and the ongoing, deeply serious feud with a gull named Aristotle who thought he owned the third mooring post. *Friends*, Crabby thought, unexpectedly pleased. *Actual local friends. Look at me, networking internationally.*

It was Yiannis idea to show Crabby the fishing nets, "just to look" he insisted, which led directly to disaster. The nets were coiled at the end of the jetty, and Yianni, showing off slightly, scuttled up onto a folded pile to demonstrate how the mesh caught the light. He was mid sentence when all of a sudden, a fisherman, hauling the net up for the evening catch, swept the whole pile into the boat. Yianni vanished with it. "YIANNI!" Giorgio shouted, scrabbling to the very edge of the jetty.



Crabby leapt into action, scrambled down Sofia's arm and quickly dropped onto the deck, Giorgio close behind. "There!" Giorgio panted, pointing a claw at the net, now heaped in a plastic crate near the stern. "He's in there somewhere!" The fisherman's crate was chaos - fish flapping, a startled octopus attempting an escape of its own, and somewhere underneath it all, one very scared, very stuck, Yianni.

Right, thought Crabby, snapping into what he privately considered his finest hour. *Distraction, extraction, disappearance. In that order.* The distraction came courtesy of Giorgio, who marched straight up to the fisherman's ankle and gave it an

extremely hard, deliberate pinch. The fisherman yelped, hopped sideways, and turned to swat at whatever had bitten him - giving Crabby exactly the gap he needed to dive into the crate. He found Yianni wedged between a sea bream and a

length of net, claws tangled, eyes wide.

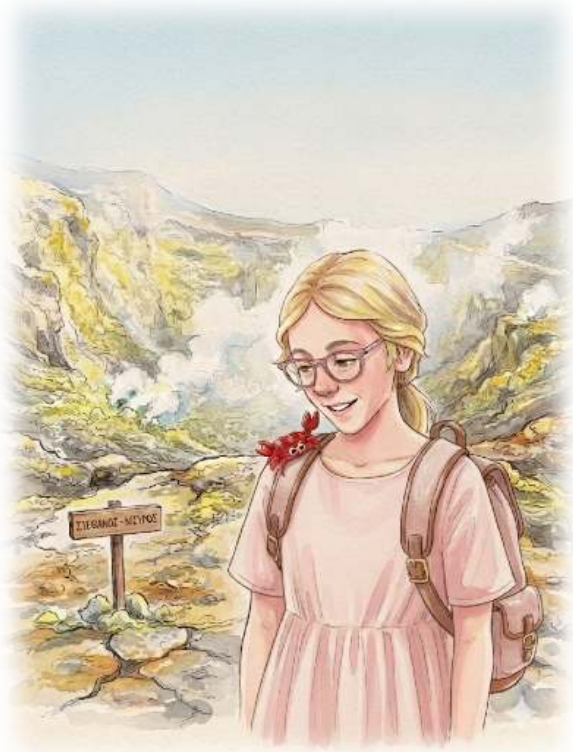
"Thank goodness you are here" breathed Yianni anxiously. "You're welcome" said Crabby, already working a claw under the net's edge. "Hold still. Also please never touch fishing equipment again!"

The mesh gave way just as the fisherman turned back around, ankle still hurting, in time to see nothing at all - because Crabby had already hauled Yianni free of the net and both of them were flattened against the inside of the crate, perfectly still. *Play dead*, Crabby thought, heart going very fast indeed. *Play anything but crab*. The fisherman shrugged, rubbed his ankles, and went back to steering.

The escape back to shore took considerably longer than the trip out. Crabby and Yianni waited until the boat swung close to the jetty again, then made the jump together. It was a genuinely undignified scramble across a coiled rope and a very startled seagull, before finally landing safely back on the mossy rock, dripping and thoroughly rattled. Giorgio was there within seconds. "You absolute idiot" he told Yianni loudly. "I know" said Yianni, embarrassed. "You could have ended up as somebody's dinner!" "I know Giorgio" he replied sheepishly. Crabby, catching his breath nearby, allowed himself a small, private moment of pride. *International crab, seasoned traveller, and now, apparently, a rescue specialist.*

Crabby and the Volcano of Nisyros

"We're going to the volcano today" Sofia's baba announced over breakfast, and Crabby, mid sip of a stolen drop of milk from Sofias glass, nearly fell straight off the rim. *The volcano*, he thought, gripping on for dear life. *The actual, literal, explodes sometimes volcano. The one Yianni and Giorgio can't even agree on the distance to. And we are going to it.*



The Stefanos crater, when they finally reached it, was nothing like Crabby had imagined. No lava, no fire - just an enormous, pale, moon like bowl carved into the earth, hissing gently in places, with a smell that hit Crabby's antennae like a slap. *What*, he thought recoiling so hard he nearly lost his grip on the hair elastic, *is that absolutely dreadful smell?!* "Sulphur" said a small voice from below. "You get used to it. Eventually. Mostly." Crabby looked down to find Yianni and Giorgio had beaten him there, tucked into the shade of a display sign at the crater's rim.

"You two again!" said Crabby, recovering himself. "Are you following me?" "We live here" said Giorgio, "and we heard you were coming up to the crater" added Yianni. "Given your, ah, track record with new experiences, we thought you might need supervision." "I do not need supervision" said Crabby proudly. At this exact moment a puff of steam hissed up from a nearby vent and he leapt sideways so violently that he nearly took half of Sofia's ponytail with him. Yianni and Giorgio exchanged a look that needed no translation.

Sofia, unaware of the small drama unfolding just behind her ear, walked around the rim path, peering down at the yellow crusted vents and the strange, cracked ground

below. *Actually*, Crabby admitted to himself, once his heart had returned to its normal rhythm, *it is rather magnificent*.

It was Giorgio who suggested the closer look. "There's a ledge, just past the rope" he said, gesturing with a claw. "Best view on the whole crater. Locals only, obviously." "Obviously" laughed Crabby, "lead on". This, in hindsight, was the mistake.

The ledge was indeed a very good view - right up until Yianni, showing off exactly as he had with the fishing nets, took one step too many onto a patch of crust that looked solid and was, in fact, considerably less solid than it appeared. The ground gave way with a soft crunch, and Yianni dropped straight through into a narrow gap below, vanishing with a yelp. "YIANNI!" said Giorgio as he scrambled to the edge. "Not AGAIN."



Crabby, hidden behind a rock the size of a dinner plate, felt his stomach drop along with his friend. *Twice in one week. This crab is going to be the death of me.*

There was no time to waste. Steam curled up from the gap where Yianni had disappeared, and a very muffled voice called up, "I'm fine! Its warm down here!" "Also I appear to be stuck!"

Getting a crab out of a volcanic fissure, it turned out, required rather less courage and rather more logistics than pulling one out of a fishing net.

"We need something long" Crabby said, thinking fast. Giorgio eyed Sofia's bag she had set down nearby

while she photographed the crater, - inside it, a long paper straw, bought for a

cappuccino freddo at the kafeneon. "That'll do" said Crabby. What followed was, by Crabby's own private assessment, one of his more delicate operations. He eased the straw from the bag without disturbing a single postcard, walking it to the fissures edge, all while Sofia stood two meters away discussing crater formations and remaining, thankfully, entirely oblivious.

"Grab on," Crabby called down the gap. A claw appeared, gripped the straw, and with Crabby bracing his back legs against the rock and Giorgio hauling from the other side, Yianni emerged in a small avalanche of loose pumice, coated head to claw in pale volcanic dust and looking thoroughly unimpressed about the whole thing. "You absolute idiot!" said Giorgio, also unimpressed. "I'm sorry" said Yianni, "but I just couldn't help myself."

They made it back over the rope moments before Sofia turned around, straw mysteriously back in its bag, three crabs arranged with elaborate innocence on three separate rocks.

By the time they arrived back at Pali, Yianni had mostly shaken the dust from his shell, and Giorgio had extracted several promises from Yianni never to go "just one step further" ever again. *A volcano, thought Crabby, settling into the ponytail. Survived. Rescued. Documented. What an extraordinary life for a small crab.* He said nothing out loud, obviously. Some things a crab keeps to himself.

Crabby and the Wild Pig of Kipi

The house in Pali sat so close to the sea that Crabby could hear waves crashing on the rocks all night long. He found this extremely rude of them, as some crabs were trying to sleep in a ponytail and required peace and quiet to do so.

He was, though, very impressed with his accomodation. The little house had blue shutters and white walls and the sea was so close he could smell it from the pillow. That evening, while Sofia ate yemista with Yiayia, three little shapes scuttled up out of the rocks below.



“You’re the Perth crab,” said the first one, a small crab with a shell the colour of a ripe olive. “Yianni told us about you. I am Maria.”

“I am Popi,” said the second, who was slightly rounder and immediately began inspecting Crabby’s claws with great interest. “Are you made of Lego?” “Yes I am” said Crabby proudly.

“I am Dimitra,” said the third, the smallest of the three, who said nothing else and simply stared at Crabby with curiosity.

Yianni and Giorgio arrived moments later, tumbling down from the garden wall. “We told the girls about you,” said Giorgio.

Maria, Popi and Dimitra looked at each other in a way that suggested they were already extremely fond of Crabby.

Five crabs now, Crabby thought, watching them arrange themselves along the wall like a small committee. Practically an army. An army that follows my lead, obviously,

being the most experienced and well-travelled crab among them.

The next morning, Yiayia announced she needed figs, and that the good ones — the proper ones — only grew at Kipi, a piece of land a short walk up the road that had belonged to her family since before anyone could remember. Sofia begged to come along, and Yiayia, pleased, handed her a basket to collect the figs.

Which meant, of course, that six small figures followed behind at a very safe distance, hiding behind stone walls and clumps of wild capperi the whole way up.

“Why are we following her again?” whispered Popi. “Because that is what we do,” said Crabby, with the weary patience of a crab explaining something obvious to a beginner. “We watch. We protect. We remain completely undetected at all times.”



“You have a leaf on your head,” said Dimitra. “That is camouflage,” said Crabby. “Strategic camouflage.”

Kipi turned out to be a walled square of dry earth with olive trees, a few rows of tomatoes gone slightly wild, and one enormous fig tree, its branches heavy and green and dropping soft purple fruit into the grass. Sofia set down her basket and reached up for the lowest branch, humming to herself.

The six crabs arranged themselves in the shade of the wall to watch, and for a few minutes it was, Crabby thought, actually rather perfect. Warm stone under his claws. Figs falling. Sofia humming, the way she always did when she thought no one

could hear her.

Then suddenly the fig tree shook. Not from Sofia. From something much lower down, and much bigger, moving through the tomato rows with a great deal of snorting and absolutely no interest in being quiet about it.

All of a sudden, an enormous wild pig stepped out into the open, and put its snout straight into the basket of figs.

“THAT IS NOT A GOAT,” said Giorgo, in a voice several sizes too big for him.

“OR A DOG,” said Yianni.



“IT IS A MONSTER,” said Popi, already halfway up the wall.

Sofia froze for exactly one second, the basket forgotten, and then she ran, she ran fast, straight back down the path toward the house, arms pumping, sandals slapping against stone.

Which was, for six small crabs, a serious logistical problem.

I am not scared, Crabby thought, back in the ponytail clutching with every claw he owned as the world violently lurched sideways.

Following close behind Crabby were Maria, Popi, Dimitra, Yianni and Giorgo running for their lives, shrieking in a way that Crabby

found completely reasonable.

Halfway down the path, Sofia’s foot caught a loose stone and she stumbled, one hand flying up instinctively to steady her hair — and closed, for just a moment,

around the small, very frightened crab, holding him safe against her scalp until she'd caught her balance again.

Sofia ran all the way down to Yiayia's blue-shuttered house, through the door, and did not stop until the door was shut firmly behind her. Yiayia found her there a minute later, breathless and hiccupping with laughter and fright all at once. "A pig, Yiayia! In the Kipi! It ate the figs!"

"Ah, that old thing," said Yiayia, unimpressed, already reaching for a cloth to wipe Sofia's dusty knees. "He comes for the figs every summer. Harmless. Loud, but harmless." She said it so calmly that Sofia's panic dissolved almost instantly into giggles.

Tucked safe in the ponytail, Crabby lay very still and said absolutely nothing for quite a long time. Later, once the house had gone quiet and the others had scuttled home to the rocks, Crabby stayed very still against Sofia's warm shoulder as she lay reading. He slowly fell asleep, exhausted from the days chaotic events.

Crabby and the Paniyiri

That evening, the whole village of Nisyros seemed to be walking in the same direction, and Sofia was walking with it, hand in Yiayia's, in a dress that had been declared, by Yiayia, as "the good one."

Crabby, tucked into his usual spot in the ponytail, had no idea where they were going, and had decided, on principle, not to ask.



Crabby admired the beautiful view as a string of lights came into view above the village square, strung between two enormous trees like a net for catching stars.

There were long tables covered in white paper. There was a man with a piano accordion warming it up with a wheeze that made several children laugh. There was the smell of lamb turning slowly on a spit, and lemon, and somebody's grandmother's very strong perfume. This, Crabby understood with delight, was a big party. A proper one. The kind with music.

"You're here!" hissed a voice near his left claw, and Crabby nearly fell straight out of the ponytail in fright.

It was Popi, wedged into a fold of ribbon on Sofia's dress, looking extremely pleased with herself. Behind her, clinging to a button, was Dimitra, silent as always, and below on the ground, weaving between chair legs with the confidence of crabs who

had lived here their whole lives, came Yianni and Giorgio. Maria was scuttling behind Sofia, keeping a careful eye on all four of them, the way the eldest of any group tends to.



“How did you—” Crabby began. “We followed the smell of lamb,” said Giorgio as if this explained everything, which, to a crab, it did.

Five crabs, Crabby thought, settling back into the ponytail with the air of someone whose evening had just improved considerably. An escort. Practically a royal procession.

The paniyiri began properly once the sun went down. The accordion was joined by a violin and a bouzouki and suddenly half the square was on its feet, arms linked, moving in a long curling line that wound between the tables like a snake made of

people.

Sofia was pulled into it almost immediately, swept up between two cousins Crabby didn’t recognise, and for a while all he could do was hang on and watch the world spin past in flashes of lamplight and skirts. It was, if Crabby was being honest with himself, extremely fun.

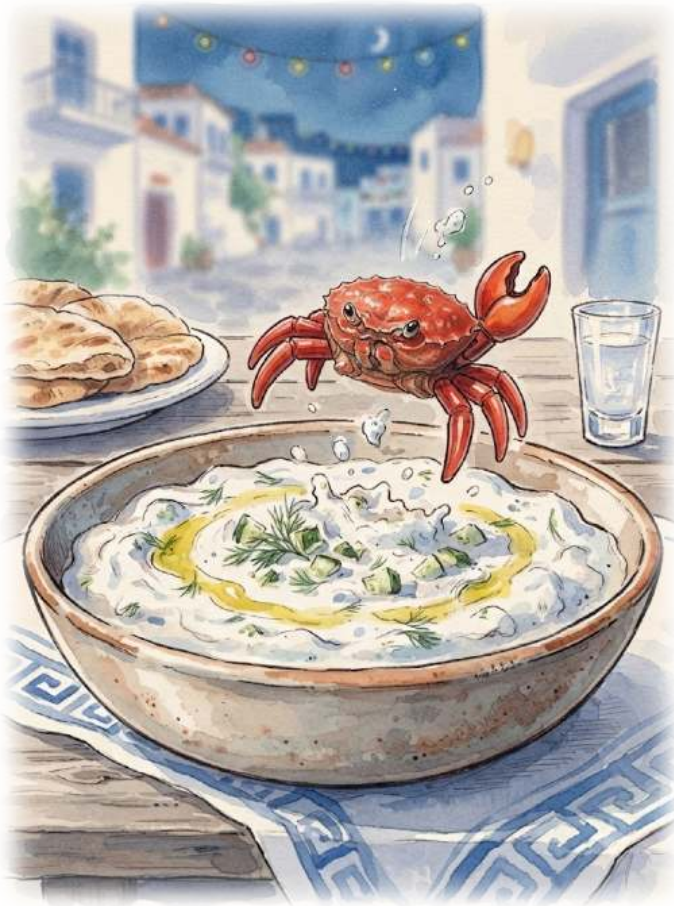
“Do you want to climb down and dance too?,” said a voice, and Crabby turned to find Popi who had scuttled all the way up to his ear.

“Really?,” asked Crabby.

“Come on!” said Popi, “it will be fun!” and pushed Crabby gently to the floor. “Loosen your claws. Feel the three steps.” Popi demonstrated, meanwhile saying “left, right, kick” and they started to dance. “That’s it. That’s the whole dance. Everyone’s been doing it since they were smaller than us.” Crabby begun tapping out left, right, kick and Popi had absolutely seen it. “There it is,” she said, delighted. *I am really enjoying this, Crabby thought, Greek dancing is so much fun!*

Somewhere below, chaos had found Yianni, as chaos tended to. It started when Yianni decided the spit of roasting lamb represented an excellent opportunity for a nice meal. He had made it as far as one dangling, dripping, extremely fragrant piece

of lamb fat when the man turning the spit, reached down to check the coals and very nearly closed his enormous hand around a small crab attempting a heist.



“YIANNI,” bellowed Giorgio, from three tables away, in a voice not remotely designed for subtlety. “You absolute idiot!”

Yianni did the only sensible thing available to a crab in his position, which was to fling himself sideways off the spit stand, sail through the air in a shower of dripping fat, and land with a small, damp thump directly inside a bowl of tzatziki.

There was a beat of silence. Then a small child at the table pointed and announced, at full

volume, that there was “a crab in the tzatziki”, only to be completely ignored by the



adults.

“He’s fine,” said Maria, arriving at speed and hauling a yoghurt-soaked Yianni over the rim of the bowl by one leg. “He is always fine. That is the problem.”

“I tasted it going in,” Yianni reported later, dripping cucumber, entirely unrepentant. “Needs more garlic.”

Back in the ponytail, Crabby had missed the entire lamb-spit incident, on account of being fully committed, both claws, to the dance, which Popi had now upgraded to include a small triumphant claw-flourish at the end of each phrase.

“You’ve got it,” Popi said. “You’ve actually got it.” The Greek dance came apart the way they always do, into laughing groups of people catching their breath. Sofia dropped into a chair at last, flushed and grinning, reaching up without thinking to tuck a loose piece of hair back into place — her fingers brushing, for one full heartbeat, directly against Crabby’s shell.

He went rigid. She didn’t even pause, just smoothed the hair down and reached for a glass of water, already turning to say something to Yiayia, already somewhere else entirely.

She didn’t notice, Crabby thought, going slightly weak in all eight legs at once. Obviously. Why would she notice. I am extremely well hidden.

Popi, who had noticed everything, wisely said nothing. By the time the last of the sky went dark and the accordion player finally let his instrument rest, the six of them made their way home along the harbour road in a loose, tired, contented line —

five small local crabs and one small Lego crab who had learned to Greek dance. “Same time next paniyiri?” said Popi. “I suppose,” said Crabby, “if you insist.”

Tucked warm against Sofia’s shoulder as she drifted off to sleep, hair smelling of lamb smoke and lemon, Crabby ran the steps once more, very quietly, very privately, in the dark. *Left, right, kick.*

It really is, he decided, a wonderful dance.

Crabby and goes to Emborio

Emborio, it turned out, was the kind of village that seemed to be built entirely out of stairs. Sofia climbed them holding Yiayia's hand, past crumbling stone houses with their windows boarded shut, past a bell tower, and past a fig tree growing straight out of somebody's old chimney. The path opened out onto a terrace with a view so enormous that even Crabby, tucked in the ponytail, had to admit it was rather good.



Below them, the whole island seemed to fall away in soft grey-green folds down to a sea gone gold with evening light.

"To Balconi," Yiayia announced, pointing to a small taverna tucked into the hillside, its tables spilling out onto a terrace basking in the last of the daylight. "Best view on the island. Also," she added, lowering her voice as though sharing a great secret, "the best keftedes."

A restaurant, Crabby thought, settling in as Sofia was seated at a table with a red checked cloth. *Excellent!*

But he had not accounted for the cats. There were, Crabby estimated, an alarming number of them, and they appeared to regard the entire terrace as their personal dining hall, weaving between chair legs with unbothered confidence. A ginger one draped itself across the low wall like a scarf. A small black-and-white one sat directly beneath a table, staring upwards with patience.

“Cats,” said a small voice near Crabby’s ear, and he nearly leapt clean out of the ponytail.

It was Yianni, of course. Followed by Giorgio, scrambling up a nearby chair leg. Maria arrived at a rather more dignified pace along the terrace wall, Dimitra appeared silent and watchful in a flowerpot, and Popi popped up directly on the tablecloth.



“How did you even find me,” Crabby whispered, “in a whole village?” “You smell like Lego,” said Popi, which Crabby chose to take as a compliment.

“Is that saganaki?” said Giorgio suddenly, already gone. He reached the neighbouring table first, where a large family was busy admiring the view and entirely failing to see a small crab now working a corner off a piece of saganaki with the focus of a surgeon.

Maria followed, lifting one single olive from a bowl and retreating before anyone glanced down. Dimitra, from her flowerpot, contributed nothing to the theft but an excellent early-warning system, tapping twice on the pot’s rim whenever a waiter approached.

Yianni’s contribution was, predictably, less graceful. He made a valiant lunge for a chunk of grilled octopus at the next table over, misjudged the distance entirely, and landed with a soft plop directly into someone’s glass of retsina.

“I’m fine!” he announced, bobbing, before being fished out - unnoticed thanks to the dim lighting - by Maria’s claw and set dripping and faintly wine-scented on the

terrace wall.

What a disaster, Crabby thought, watching the ginger cat's ears swivel toward the commotion with alarming precision. He was still composing this thought when Popi appeared with half a stuffed vine leaf balanced triumphantly on her shell.

"For you," she said. "Thank you!" said Crabby. He tried it. It was, he privately thought, extraordinary. It was at that exact moment that the black-and-white cat beneath the table decided to investigate the small red shape of Crabby, quite without permission.



Crabby felt the shadow before he saw it - a great looming stripe of grey moving up from below the tablecloth, two green eyes fixing on him. He did not scream, on account of being a highly experienced crab, but he did make a noise that was extremely close to one.

"Move!" shouted Popi, and shoved him off the edge of the table, both of them tumbling down the tablecloth just as a paw, soft and curious, patted the empty space where Crabby had been sitting a half-second before.

They landed in a heap in Sofia's lap. For one long, terrible moment, Crabby lay frozen against the fabric of her dress,

absolutely certain this was the end of everything, that he would be discovered here, in Emborio, by his own human.

Sofia's hand came down - not in alarm, not searching, just an idle, unthinking brush to smooth her napkin back into place - and in doing so gathered up both small crabs along with a fold of cloth. She gently, without looking, tucked them back up near her ponytail, out of sight of curious cats and curious eyes alike.

She never once looked down. "Close one," Popi whispered, still catching her breath. "Thank goodness" said Crabby. "She was so close to seeing us!"

By the time the plates were cleared and the last of the light had gone violet over the sea, the six of them regrouped on the terrace wall for a full accounting of the night's events: one stolen olive, half a vine leaf, a corner of saganaki, one very damp Yianni, and four near-misses with cats who had, by the evening's end, given up entirely and gone back to sleep.

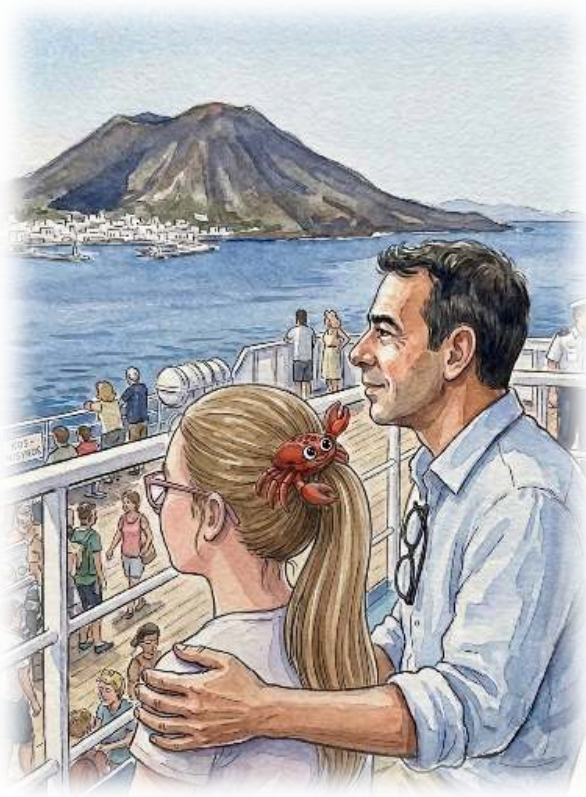
"Best dinner of the summer" said Giorgio. Dimitra, from her spot on the wall, said nothing at all, but reached over and gave Yianni a small, silent pat on the back, still faintly smelling of retsina.

Tucked back in the ponytail on the long walk down the stairs of Emborio, Crabby watched the lights of the village go small and gold behind them, and decided, privately, that this had been an excellent evening, and that he would absolutely be doing all of it again the very next chance he got.

Crabby and the Nisyros Ferry Ride

The ferry from Nisyros to Rhodes was, Crabby decided, an excellent place for a nap. Sofia's ponytail swayed with the rhythm of the boat, salt spray misting the air, and Baba stood at the railing watching the waves roll by.

Giorgo and Yianni had already scuttled up to say goodbye, and Maria, Popi, and Dimitra weren't far behind — old friends by now, all six of them. "You're really going all the way to Rhodes?" Popi asked, settling onto the deck chair arm. "To see our cousins, yes," Crabby said.



It started with the wind picking up — nothing dramatic, just enough to make the ferry flags snap and the waves go choppy and grey. Baba's hat, sitting on the railing where he'd set it down to help Sofia with her bag, suddenly went flying away.

"Baba, your hat!" Sofia shouted, but it was already gone, tumbling along the deck, caught by a gust of wind that sent it flying straight toward the gap beneath the lower railing.

Crabby's first thought was that someone else will get the hat. His second thought was that the "someone else" in question would need to be small enough to fit through the railing gap and fast

enough to catch a hat mid-tumble. Unfortunately there was, at that exact moment, no one else around.

Well I am extremely small, Crabby thought, watching the hat skid closer to the edge. But I am also not extremely fond of being blown into the Aegean Sea.

Tiny brave Crabby went anyway. He quickly scuttled out of Sofia's ponytail, down her shoulder, and hit the deck running — or the crab equivalent, which is more of a determined sideways scuttle. He threw all eight of his legs around the hat's brim just as it reached the railing gap. The wind shoved at both of them. For one very long second, Crabby was fairlâ sure he and the hat were both going into the sea together.

Then suddenly a second set of claws grabbed the other side of the brim. "Popi!!" "You looked like you needed backup," Popi said, digging her small claws in hard. Between the two of them — one crab barely bigger than a bottle cap, one barely

bigger than that — they hauled the hat backward, inch by inch, until it thumped safely onto the deck boards, several feet from the edge.



Crabby lay on top of it, breathing hard, claws aching. "We got it," shouted Crabby triumphantly, laughing with relief. "Thank goodness. Lucky the gust of wind didn't take it straight over."

Under the brim, hidden from view, Crabby finally caught his breath. He had not, in the moment, thought about being small at all — there simply hadn't been time to think. It was only now, safely on deck and thoroughly out of breath, that the size of the whole undertaking

caught up with him.

"Being small," he said slowly, "was rather beside the point, actually. The hat didn't care how big I was. It just needed someone willing to go get it." Popi grinned.

By the time the Rhodes harbour came into view, pink and gold in the afternoon light, Baba's hat was safely back on his head, and Crabby had been thoroughly praised by five separate crabs.

"Will you come back to Nisyros someday?" Giorgio asked, as the ferry engines slowed. "For sure," said Crabby. Sofia gathered her bags as Baba called that it was time to disembark.

I didn't feel big at all, going after that hat, Crabby thought, settling in for the walk down the gangway. I felt exactly as small as I actually am. He would never say this out loud, obviously. But he thought it rather firmly, all the way to the cousins' front door.

Crabby goes to the Water Park of Rodos

The water park in Rhodes smelled like chlorine, sunscreen, and great fun. Sofia and her two cousins Mihali and Mirto went running through the entrance with great excitement. “We’ve been coming here every summer since we were young” said Mihali. “We know every slide.”

Every slide, Crabby thought, holding very still in Sofia’s ponytail. This sounds so exciting, I can’t wait to sneak out and have a ride!



Popi, Yianni, and Dimitra had ridden along secretly tucked into Sofias bag, and the moment Sofia set it down under a sun bed, all three crept out to join him, keeping low behind the bag’s zipper where the shade made them nearly invisible.

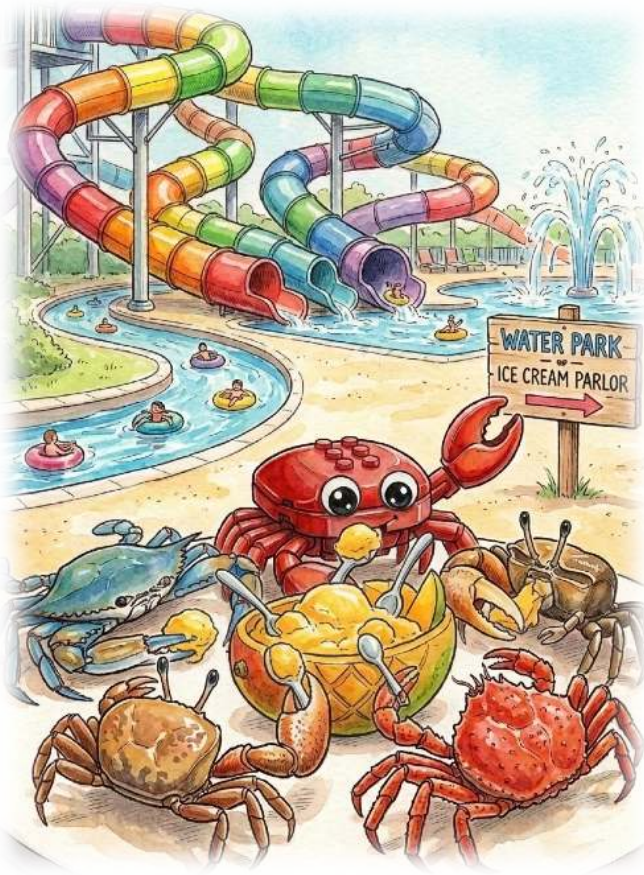
“Plan,” Yianni said, in the tone of someone who had clearly been waiting all morning to say it. “We stay under things. Towels, sunbeds, shadows. Nobody looks at shadows.”

“Nobody looks at shadows,” Dimitra agreed, “until a shadow moves. Which is why we only move when a human’s attention is somewhere else. Screaming

children. Splashing. Ice cream. Any of those work.”

Crabby considered this a remarkably sound strategy. “Agreed,” he said. “Rule one: no crab is ever seen. Rule two—”. “There’s an ice cream stand at the bottom of the big blue slide,” Popi interrupted. “That’s rule two. We’re going.”

Ice cream, thought Crabby, what a fantastic idea, I absolutely love ice cream! So the four crabs carefully scuttled towards the ice cream stand being very careful not to be noticed. As soon as the girl serving ice cream looked away, the four crabs snuck in and each took a scoop of the mango ice cream, Sofia's favourite. *Yum*, thought



Crabby. This is delicious! As soon as they finished the ice cream Popi announced “let’s go to the water slides!”

The big blue slide was three interlocking tubes twisting down toward a splash pool. Getting there was tricky: a dash under a row of sun beds while the people faced the pool, a scramble along the base of a drinks machine, and one heart-stopping pause behind a stack of pool noodles while a lifeguard’s shadow passed directly overhead.

“Nobody saw,” Yianni whispered, once the shadow moved on. At the base of the slide, where the tube walls curved down toward the splash pool, Mihali’s voice rocketed past somewhere above,

shouting with excitement the whole way down. A few seconds later came Mirto’s, voice higher and more delighted.

“We should ride it,” Popi said. “Properly. Not just hide in it.” The thought of a crab to riding a water slide definitely appealed to Crabby. “Let’s go!” he said with excitement.

The four crabs secretly scuttled up the stairs to the top of the water slide. Yianni climbed onto a stray thong someone had lost days ago and decided to use it like a sled. “Watch this,” he said, grinning, and shoved off before anyone could stop him.

He vanished around the bend with a shout entirely too large for something his size, timed perfectly between two human shrieks. “Well,” said Dimitra, already climbing onto a second thong, “someone has to make sure he’s alright.”

She went. Then Popi, wedging herself onto a third abandoned thong with a look of pure delight. Crabby stood alone in the hollow tube, listening to the fading shouts of his friends and the far grander shrieking of actual human children somewhere above him. Crabby found a fourth thong and off he went.

The ride down was, by any measure, completely undignified — a blur of rushing water, echoing tube walls, and his own voice reaching a pitch he would later insist was a trick of the acoustics. He shot out the bottom directly behind Popi, and came to rest in a heap against Dimitra, all four crabs tucked snugly out of sight in the splash pool. Inches above, an entire pool full of humans splashed and shouted without the faintest idea they’d been in the company of four crabs the whole way down. “AGAIN,” said Popi, already climbing back toward the thong pile.

They went six more times. Each run got a little bolder — Yianni started timing his shrieks to land exactly on top of Mihali’s, so the two shouts blended into one and nobody noticed the extra voice. Dimitra perfected an entrance so smooth she barely made a ripple. Popi, on run four, discovered that if she rode with her claws spread just right, she could make the thong spin, which she now considered mandatory for every subsequent trip. Crabby, on his final run, allowed himself to actually enjoy the spin.

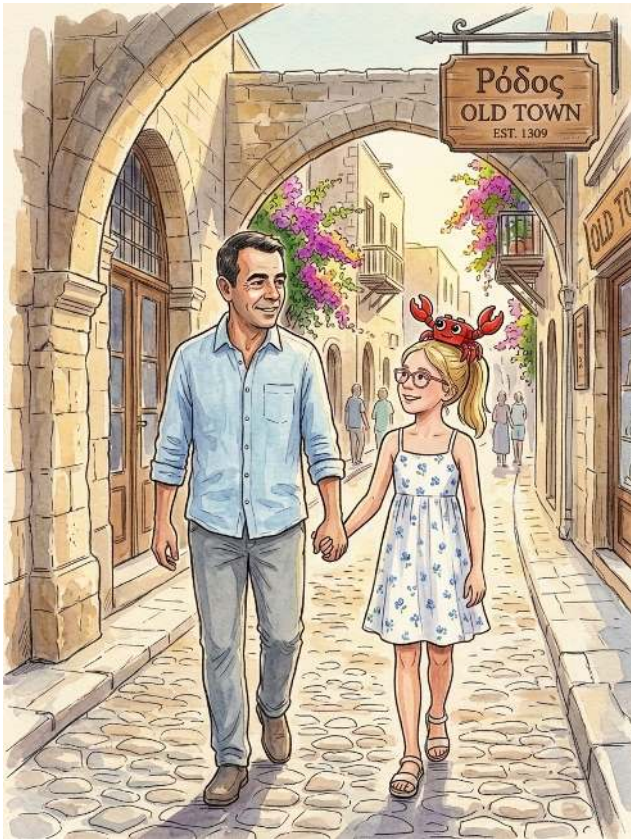
By the time the sun dipped low and the humans began gathering towels, four thoroughly waterlogged crabs made the long journey back across the pool deck, timing every dash between distracted lifeguards and splashing children, and arrived at the picnic bag without a single human ever having glimpsed so much as a claw.

From somewhere in Sofia’s ponytail, muffled and thoroughly exhausted, came Crabby’s voice: “What a wonderful outing. We had so much fun. I can’t wait to come back next year!” And so Sofia and the four exhausted crabs made the trip back home.

Crabby and the Great Nutella Heist of Rhodes Old Town

The cobblestones of the *paglia poli*, in Crabby's professional opinion, were a disaster. *Whoever designed these clearly never considered the needs of a crab travelling*

secretly in a ponytail, he grumbled, gripping on with all eight legs as Sofia bounced down a narrow lane between walls of pale stone. Every bump sent him swinging like a tiny red pendulum.



Sofia was busy anyway — busy being amazed. Knights' armour in shop windows. Cats sunning themselves on ancient steps. Bougainvillea trees spilling pink over archways so old that Baba said knights had walked under them hundreds of years ago.

So busy, that she did not notice she was being followed. Yianni scuttled along the top of a low wall, doing his best impression of a decorative pebble. Giorgio trundled behind a flowerpot, occasionally forgetting to stay hidden and letting one claw poke out. Maria

rode inside an empty gelato cup someone had left on a windowsill, looking extremely pleased with her transport. Popi and Dimitra travelled behind, arguing in hisses about whose idea this had even been.

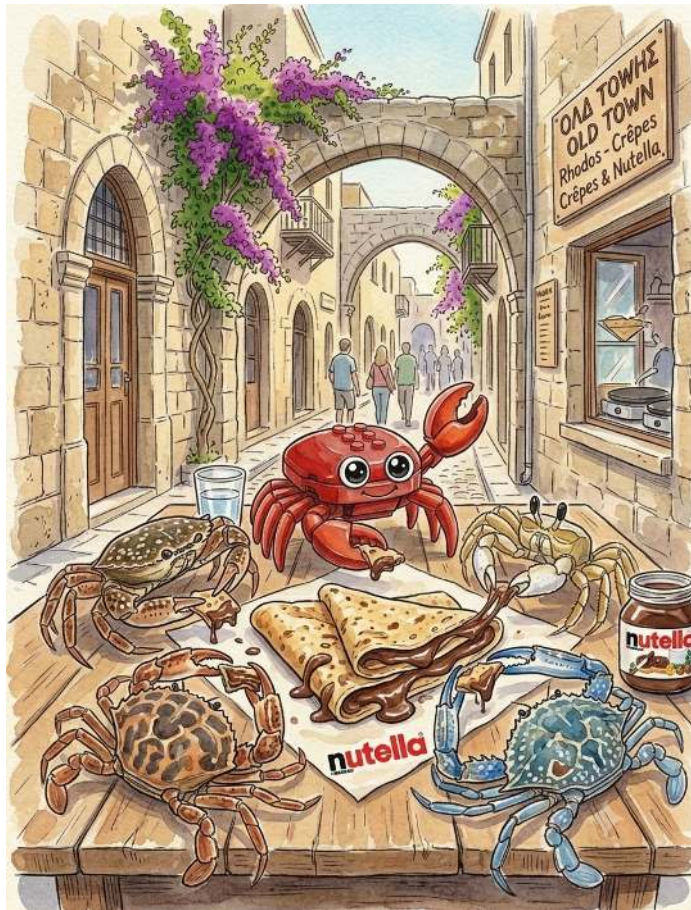
"Would you all please try to look less like a crab parade," Crabby whispered down at them. "We are meant to be a secret operation." "You're the one talking out loud," said Popi. Crabby quietly laughed.

The trouble — or the opportunity, depending which crab you asked — arrived at

a small stall near the Street of the Knights, where a man was folding thin golden crepes over spoonfuls of glossy chocolate.

“Nutella crepa, please!” Sofia said, and Baba handed over some coins, and thirty seconds later a warm, chocolatey, faintly sizzling parcel was in Sofia’s hands.

The six crabs went very still. *That*, thought Crabby, *smells like something worth tasting*. He was not the only one thinking it. Yianni had already abandoned the wall. Giorgio had abandoned the flowerpot. Maria tipped straight out of her gelato cup without a backward glance.



Sofia sat on a stone step to eat, swinging her legs, utterly unaware that five Greek crabs were closing in from five different directions like a very small, very determined army.

“On my signal,” Crabby whispered. “You don’t get to give the signal,” said Dimitra. “This is our town.” “Fine. On somebody’s signal.”

There wasn’t really a signal. There was just a moment where Sofia turned to point out a cat to Baba, and in that moment, six claws moved in as one.

Yianni got a smear off the edge of the crepe. Giorgio, overexcited, got rather more than a smear and immediately regretted his ambition, chocolate now covering

half his shell. Maria took a neat, tidy pinch, because Maria did everything neatly. Popi and Dimitra grabbed the same drip at the same time. And Crabby, from his post in the ponytail, simply reached down, hooked one claw over Sofia’s shoulder, and

helped himself to a small taste. *Magnificent*, he thought, chocolate on his red claw. *Absolutely magnificent*.

“Baba,” she said slowly, looking down at her crepa, which now had five suspicious little dents around the edge and a smudge of Nutella on the step. “Did you pinch some of my crepa?” “Me? Pinch your crepa?” Baba looked around at the stone lane, the shop windows, the very beautiful surroundings. “I didn’t, agapi mou.”

Sofia’s eyes narrowed. She looked at the step. Then she felt her ponytail, where something red-clawed was holding extremely, extremely still and trying very hard to look like a hair clip. *Do not move. Do not so much as breathe. You are a hair accessory. You have always been a hair accessory.*

Sofia looked at the Nutella smear on the step. Then she picked her crepa up, broke off a generous corner, and set it down gently on the stone. “For the cats,” she announced loudly, to nobody in particular, and turned back to Baba as if nothing at all was happening.

Immediately the six crabs descended on the crepa. By the time the crepa was gone — mostly into Sofia, partly into six extremely satisfied crabs — the whole gang had regrouped under a bougainvillea bush to compare notes.

“Best pinch of the summer,” Yianni declared. Giorgio was still picking dried chocolate off his shell. Popi and Dimitra had called a truce over the last remaining smear, which they’d agreed to split with the exact precision of a courtroom ruling. Crabby, back in the ponytail, settled in for the walk back through the Paglia Poli, very content with the delicious snack he had tasted.

Crabby and the Sandcastle of Kopria Beach

Kopria Beach was, in Crabby's expert opinion, the finest stretch of sand he had inspected all summer — and he had inspected quite a lot of sand this summer. Fine grain, he thought, giving it a professional pat with one claw from his spot in Sofia's ponytail. Good packing consistency. Excellent castle potential.

"Race you to the water!" Sofia shouted, her pink glasses sliding a little as she ran, already sprinting down the beach with her cousins pounding along behind her. "Wait for me!" called Mirto, her brown curls bouncing, legs pumping hard to keep up.

"I'm winning!" shouted Mihali, confident and already three steps ahead of both girls. Behind them, tumbling out of a beach bag that Baba hadn't quite zipped properly, came five very determined stowaways.

"Finally," said Yianni, shaking sand out of one leg. "I thought we'd be stuck in that bag forever. Now — who's ready to watch me build the biggest sandcastle this beach has ever seen?"

"Nobody's watching you do anything alone," said Maria. "We're building it together. That's the whole point of a team, Yianni."

Popi was already skipping in circles, kicking up little sprays of sand like confetti, and Dimitra trailed behind everyone else, eyeing the wide-open beach nervously. So many strangers. So much space. Nowhere to hide if things went wrong. They chose a spot near a cluster of smooth grey rocks and got to work. Maria was directing operations, Giorgio was hauling wet sand in a bottle cap, Popi was decorating the walls with shells mid-dance, Crabby was patting down the base with great authority, and Yianni was attempting increasingly tall and increasingly wobbly towers.

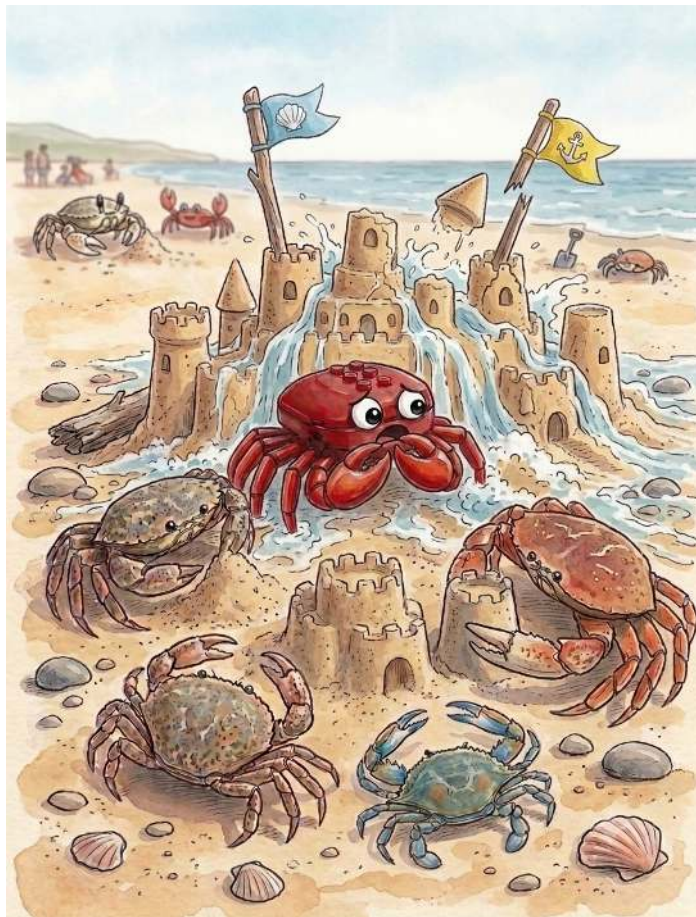
They were three towers in when suddenly a loud voice came from behind the rocks. "Um — excuse me. Who said you could build here?" Everyone froze. Two crabs stepped out from the shadow of the rocks — one small and petite, the other broad-shouldered and calm beside her.

"I'm Irini," said the small one, glancing nervously at all five strangers at once. "This is Tsambikos. This is — this is sort of our beach".

"We don't know you," Tsambikos said in an authoritative voice, claws folded. "A crab's got to be careful about strangers on his beach. No offence."

Yianni puffed himself up. "We're Nisyrian crabs. We've been all over Rhodes. I don't think you understand who you're talking to." "I understand you're standing very close to Irini's favourite rock," said Tsambikos.

Dimitra shrank back so far she nearly vanished into the sand entirely. *Here we go, thought Crabby, feeling the familiar cold drop of a plan going wrong. Another beach, another set of locals who'd rather we all just disappeared.* The argument might have gone on much longer if the sea hadn't chosen that exact moment to send in a big wave.



It rolled higher than any before it, sweeping straight over the half-built castle and flattening two of Yianni's towers into a sad, sagging lump.

"NO!" wailed Yianni. For one second, everyone just stared at the wreckage. Then, without any plan or discussion at all, the six crabs and two suspicious strangers found themselves digging at exactly the same spot, patting the same collapsed wall, trying to save what was left before the next wave came.

"Pack it wetter here," said Tsambikos, claw-deep already. "It holds against the waves better. Also — why did the sandcastle break up with the tide?"



he asked. Nobody answered. He grinned anyway. “Because it needed some space.”

Giorgo groaned. Popi laughed so hard she nearly toppled a wall herself. And somehow, in the scramble to rescue a sandcastle and survive a very bad joke, nobody had time left to be suspicious of anybody else. By the time the tide properly turned, there was no way of telling who had built which part.

Irini had taken over decorating with Popi, worrying out loud about whether the shells were symmetrical enough while Popi twirled around her, entirely unbothered. Tsambikos was deep in a serious architectural

discussion with Maria about drainage moats, pausing every so often for another terrible joke that made even Maria laugh. Giorgio had stopped bailing Yianni out of trouble and started actually enjoying himself, and Yianni — for once — wasn’t trying to be first at anything. Dimitra had even crept out from behind the rocks to help smooth a wall next to Irini, the two of them bonding quietly over exactly how many things could go wrong with a sandcastle.

“I didn’t think outsiders would know anything about proper sandcastle building,” Irini admitted, patting a turret into place. “I didn’t think locals would let outsiders anywhere near their beach,” said Maria. “Turns out we were both a little wrong.”

They built the biggest castle Kopría Beach had seen all summer — seven towers, two moats, a shell-covered wall, and a driftwood flag that Popi insisted on placing herself, with great ceremony. *Funny*, thought Crabby, watching from his perch on the highest tower, sand in every joint of his small red Lego body. *This morning they*

wanted us gone. Now look at it. One castle. Eight crabs.

Down on the shore, Sofia, Mihali, and Mirto came running back from the water, dripping and breathless, and stopped in astonishment at the sandcastle towering in front of them. “Whoa,” said Mihali. “Who built that?” “Must have been magic,” said Sofia, grinning, utterly unaware of the small crowd of tired, sandy, thoroughly happy crabs resting in its shadow.

Baba appeared a moment later with three mango ice creams balanced carefully in his hands, and Sofia’s whole face lit up. “Best day ever,” she announced, taking a huge bite, already forgetting about the mystery castle entirely.

I wouldn’t say no to a small taste of that, thought Crabby, eyeing the mango ice cream with great interest. *Purely to check it’s up to standard, of course.*

Crabby and the Donkeys of Lindos

Lindos, Crabby decided, was not built for crabs. The whole village climbed straight up a rocky hill in a tangle of whitewashed steps and narrow alleys, all the way to an ancient acropolis perched at the very top like a stone crown. Bougainvillea spilled over walls in great pink waterfalls. Cats dozed in doorways. And winding up through the middle of it all, patient and sure-footed, went a slow procession of donkeys.

Now that, thought Crabby, peering out from Sofia's ponytail as she climbed the steps beside Baba, *is a superior mode of transport. Four legs. Very low to the ground. Excellent for someone of my proportions.*

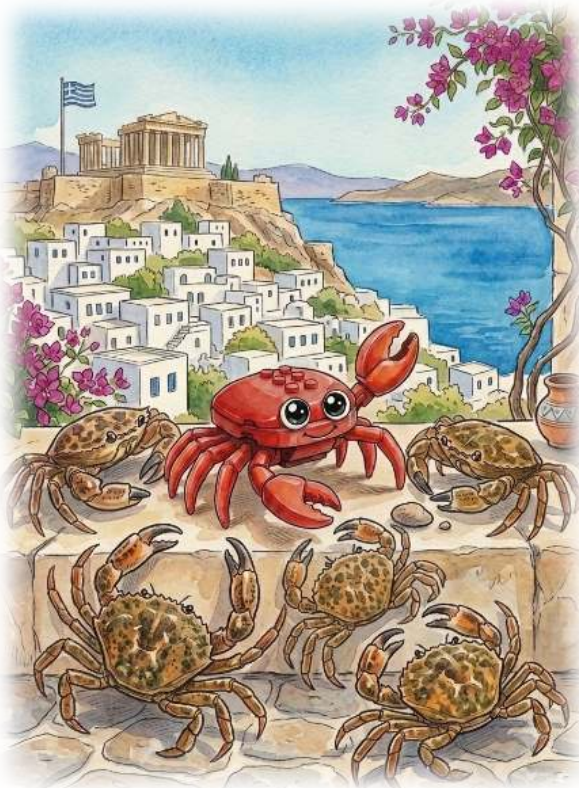
Sofia climbed on ahead, chattering to Baba about the cats and the flowers and whether donkeys got tired going up so many steps, entirely unaware of the small red passenger riding in her ponytail. She was also unaware of the five extra

passengers currently smuggling themselves up the hill in Baba's backpack.

"Donkeys," said Yianni excitedly, poking his head out of the backpack's side pocket, "were MADE for crabs to ride."

His first attempt — a running leap toward a donkey's hoof from behind a flowerpot — ended with him bouncing harmlessly off a woven saddle blanket and landing upside down in the dust, legs waving. "That was a practice attempt," Yianni announced, righting himself.

His second attempt, aimed at a donkey pausing to drink from a stone trough, ended with him slipping

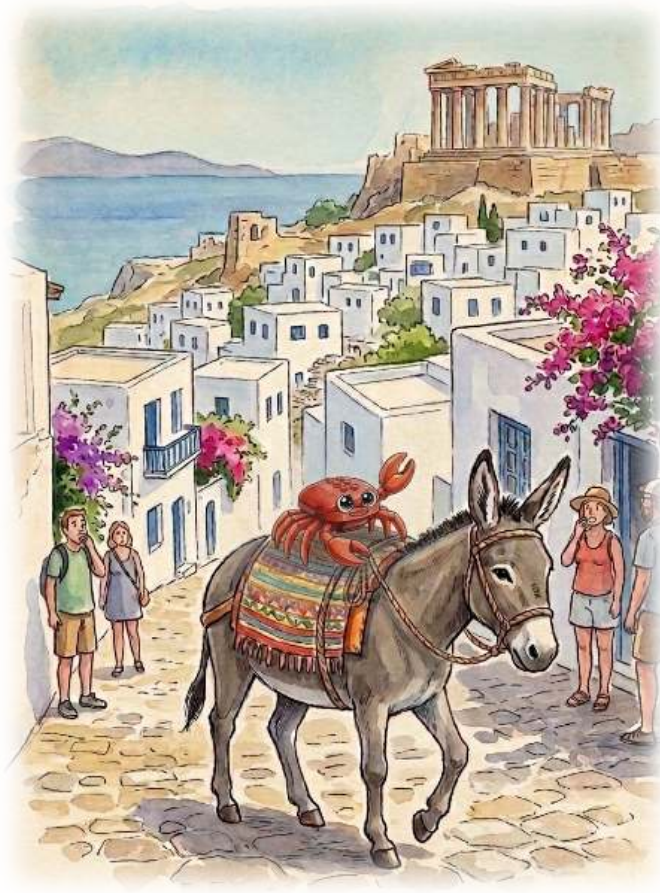


straight off the wet rim and into a puddle. “Also practice,” he said, dripping.

Crabby watched all this with the particular superiority of someone who has decided, quietly and privately, that he could absolutely do better — so, when Sofia crouched down to retie her sandal beside a donkey resting in the shade, Crabby made his move.

He scrambled up a stirrup strap, lost his grip, and slid straight back down into the dirt. *Fine*, he thought. *A minor miscalculation. Purely a footing issue.*

He tried again from the other side, got one claw hooked over the saddle blanket’s edge, and was promptly shaken loose when the donkey swished its tail at a fly.



Also fine, he thought, spitting out a mouthful of donkey hair. *Unforeseeable circumstances.* “You’ve fallen off twice,” said Dimitra, watching nervously from a nearby step.

Giorgo, who was quietly sitting by some tiny stone steps against a high wall said “Why don’t you try these steps?”

Crabby, still shaking dirt from one claw, looked at the little stone staircase next to Giorgio - exactly wide enough for a small crab’s claws.

Third attempt, thought Crabby. He scuttled up Giorgio’s steps, reached the top of the wall at exactly saddle height, and this time, when the donkey shifted its weight, Crabby didn’t panic —

he simply gripped the woven blanket with all four back claws, and held on.

The donkey walked a short way up the lane before its owner noticed a small red crab riding proudly atop the saddle blanket. This was followed by a good deal of surprised Greek shouting, and a swift and careful crab rescue by the donkey's owner. Crabby ended up deposited onto a nearby step, from where he scrambled unnoticed back up into the safety of Sofia's ponytail while she was busy admiring a cat in a doorway.

Three tries, thought Crabby, settling back in with great satisfaction as they continued up toward the acropolis. *Some crabs would call that a lot of failure. I call it three opportunities to eventually get it right.*

Below the wall, Yianni was still picking dust out of his shell and insisting his puddle landing had been "basically intentional," and Dimitra found herself oddly proud of a crab who simply refused to stop trying.

"He fell off twice," she said to Maria. "And got on the third," said Maria. "That's most of how anything ever gets done."

At the top of the hill, the acropolis stretched golden and ancient against a brilliant blue sky, the sea spread out far below in every direction. Crabby surveyed it all from the ponytail with the deep satisfaction of a crab who had, eventually, ridden a donkey — a triumph that Sofia would never even know had happened.

I wouldn't say no to trying a cat next, he thought, eyeing a particularly smug-looking tabby dozing on a nearby wall. *Purely for research purposes.*

Crabby and the Wait at the Airport

Rhodes International Airport, Crabby decided, was the single most boring place he had ever been smuggled into. *Queues*, he thought grimly, peering out from Sofia's ponytail at the long, slow-moving line snaking back from the check-in desks. *Nothing but queues. Where is the adventure in a queue?*

"Are we there yet?" Sofia asked, tugging Baba's hand. "We haven't even checked in the suitcase yet, *koukla mou*," said Baba, sliding their bags forward another half a metre with his foot.



Sofia sighed the enormous sigh of someone who has been standing still for what feels like several years and shifted her weight from foot to foot. Crabby, riding along in the ponytail, felt every shuffle and did not feel much more patient about it than she did.

This is intolerable, he thought, watching a departures board flicker through gate numbers that meant absolutely nothing to him. *I am a crab of action. I require sand. I require waves. I require literally anything happening.*

Nothing happened. The queue moved another half a metre. By the time they reached the check-in desk, Crabby had counted the tiles on the floor twice, invented a game where he guessed which

suitcase was heaviest by the way its owner dragged it, and become extremely well acquainted with the pattern on the back of the jacket belonging to the man in front



of them.

Perhaps, he admitted reluctantly, counting tiles is its own sort of adventure. A very small, very dull one.

Security was worse. Sofia had to take off her shoes, and Baba had to empty an alarming number of pockets. Crabby had to sit absolutely, perfectly still in Sofia's ponytail as she walked

through the metal detector, praying with every fibre of his small Lego body that a scanner wasn't about to discover a stowaway crab. Nothing beeped. Nothing noticed. Crabby exhaled a breath of relief.

"Gate B14," Baba read off a screen, "boarding in fifty minutes." Fifty minutes turned out to be a very long time when you are nine years old, or when you are a small crab with nothing to pinch and nowhere to explore. Sofia tried reading her book. She tried a game on Baba's phone. She pressed her nose to the window and watched planes taxi past, slow and patient, in absolutely no hurry at all.

"Why do the planes just sit there?" she asked. "Everyone's waiting their turn," said Baba. "Even planes have to queue." Crabby found this outrageous — enormous metal machines capable of flying across entire seas, reduced to waiting politely in a line like everybody else.

When their gate number finally flashed up and the boarding call came, Sofia leapt up so fast she nearly tipped Crabby sideways out of her hair entirely. Even then there was another queue, slower than the first, shuffling down a long connecting bridge toward the aircraft door.

Of course, thought Crabby, resigned now rather than furious. One final queue. The

universe does love its queues. But this one, at least, ended in a seat by the window, with Sofia buckling in beside Baba and pressing her face to the glass as the plane began its own long, patient taxi toward the runway. To his delight, Crabby looked out of the window to see the group of Nisyrian crabs, now firm friends, waving goodbye.

“Here we go,” Baba said, and the engines roared. The ground began sliding backward faster and faster until, with a lift that made Crabby’s claws grip tight to a strand of hair, Rhodes fell away beneath them into a patchwork of blue sea and white coastline.

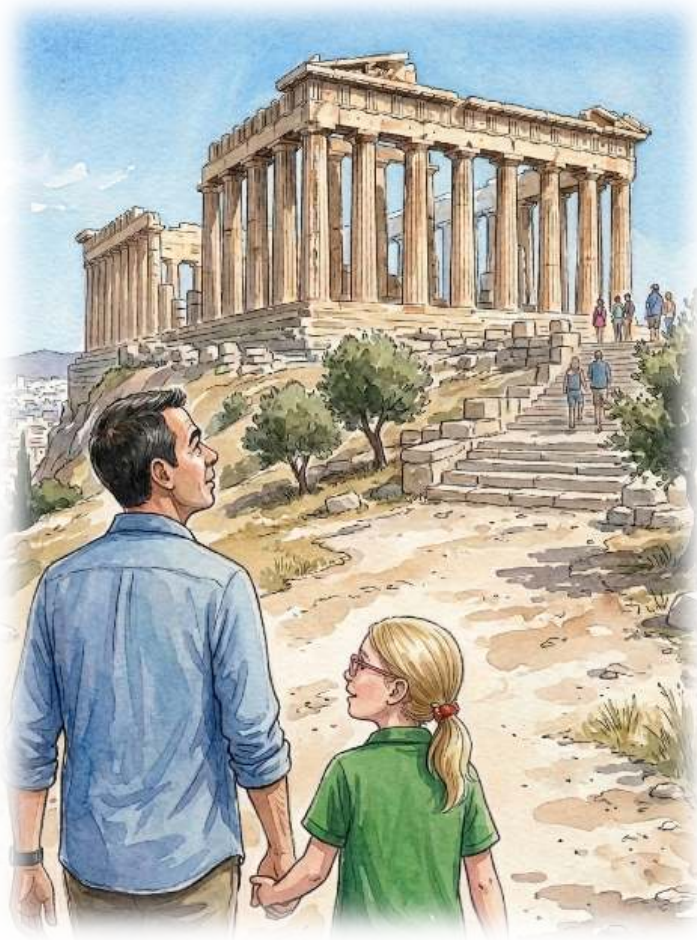
Worth it, Crabby thought. *Every single dull minute of it. Worth it.* Less than an hour later, the plane began its descent toward Athens, flying low over a city criss-crossed with roads, until the wheels touched down at Eleftherios Venizelos with a gentle bump.

“We made it,” Sofia announced happily. *Finally,* Crabby said silently, settling back with quiet satisfaction as the seatbelt sign switched off. *I can’t wait to see what adventures we have in Athens!*



Crabby and the Hill of Athens

Athens, Crabby decided by mid-morning, was hot in a way Rhodes had never quite managed to be. The sun sat high and white over the city, bouncing off pale stone streets and glass shopfronts, making the whole world shimmer. By the time Sofia and Baba started up the long path toward the Acropolis, Crabby was already regretting his decision to be riding in a ponytail directly beneath a Greek sky in the middle of summer.



This, he thought, fanning himself uselessly with one claw, is not a beach. This is an oven with excellent views.

Sofia didn't seem to mind nearly as much. She skipped ahead of Baba up the worn marble steps, sunhat bobbing, water bottle sloshing in the little bag on her back. She paused every so often to peer at a lizard darting between rocks or a cat sprawled flat in whatever thin shade it could find. "It's SO hot," she announced to Baba, fanning her face with her hand.

"Drink your water," Baba said, and Sofia obediently took a long gulp from her bottle.

Crabby, who had no bottle, no hat, and no shade of his own besides Sofia's hair, found himself thinking about the unfairness of it all — right up until Sofia paused at a stone wall to rest. She tipped her water bottle slightly as she drank, and a single

cool drop splashed backward onto Crabby's shell.

Oh, he thought, startled. *Oh, that is wonderful!* It was just one drop of water. But in that heat, on that hill, it felt like the single greatest thing that had ever happened to him.

By the time they reached the top, the Parthenon rose in front of them, vast and golden-white against the blue sky. Its columns stood exactly as they had for thousands of years, worn smooth by wind and sun and the footsteps of more people than Crabby could possibly imagine.

Baba found them a strip of shade cast by a low wall, and they sat together, sharing a bag of nuts he produced from the backpack. This was, Crabby felt, exactly the sort of moment a small crab could take advantage of.

Nobody was watching the bag because Baba was pointing something out to Sofia across the rooftops. The nut bag sat right there on the wall, practically abandoned, asking to be investigated by someone with excellent claws and a strong sense of injustice about not having been offered a proper share.



One nut, Crabby reasoned, already halfway down Sofia's ponytail. *A tiny one. A tax, really, for services rendered as unpaid emotional support crab.*

Crabby reached for the bag. He seized a nut roughly the size of his own head. And that was the exact moment a large orange cat decided that the rustling paper nut bag was the most interesting thing that had happened to it all day. The cat crept over to investigate more closely.

Crabby, terrified, immediately launched himself straight back up the ponytail, scrabbling claw over claw while the cat skidded to a halt directly in front of Baba's shoes.

"Oh — hello!" Sofia laughed, reaching down to scratch the cat's chin, which gave Crabby exactly enough cover to burrow deep into her hair, nut clutched to his chest, heart going like a tiny drum.

Down below, the cat gave up and flopped back into its patch of shade, and Baba never did notice one nut fewer in the bag.

They looked out at the whole of Athens spread below them, rooftops and streets and hills rolling all the way to a hazy blue line of sea. Crabby, still catching his breath, allowed himself one small bite of stolen nut.

Look at all of that, he thought — and found, rather to his own surprise, that his mind had stopped thinking about complaints, or nuts, or narrow escapes from orange cats, and started cataloguing everything else instead. The shade. The view. A whole ancient hill. I complained about a mountain of good things today, he admitted. And nearly got eaten over a stolen nut. It's been a full morning.

A small breeze finally rolled across the hilltop, lifting a strand of Sofia's hair and cooling Crabby's shell for one blissful moment before it passed on. He didn't take that one for granted either.

Best hill I've ever been dragged up, Crabby decided, settling into the ponytail. *And I mean that. All of it. Even the hot parts. Even the cat.*

Crabby and the Long Flight Home

Sofia knew, before she even boarded the plane in Athens, exactly what was coming. "I always feel sick on long flights," she told Baba matter-of-factly, buckling herself in beside the window. "Every time. Especially at the bumpy bits."

"Do you want to stay here instead?" Baba teased gently. Sofia considered this seriously for a moment, the way she considered most things, and shook her head. "No. I want to see Mummy and Ari".

Crabby, riding along in his usual spot in the ponytail, thought this was possibly the bravest thing he had ever heard anyone say, in his own small crab opinion. He, personally, would have avoided anything that would make him feel terrible. Sofia simply decided that getting there mattered more than the feeling awful part, and climbed aboard anyway.



Now that, he thought, settling in as the plane taxied out, is a braver decision than most of what the Nisyrian crabs get up to.

The first few hours were easy enough — a meal on a little tray, a film Sofia watched half of before falling asleep with her head against the window, and Crabby dozing contentedly in the warmth of her hair. But somewhere over what Crabby assumed was an enormous stretch of ocean, the plane began to shudder and bounce. The seatbelt signs lit up with a soft chime, and Sofia woke with the particular pale, quiet stillness of someone who knows exactly what's about to happen to their

stomach.

"I don't feel very good," she told Baba, in the small determined voice of someone who has been through this before and knows the drill. Baba was ready in an instant — sick bag, water, a steady hand on her back — and Sofia, though miserable, didn't cry or complain, just breathed slowly the way Baba reminded her to, and got through it, one bumpy wave of turbulence at a time.

Crabby, meanwhile, found himself facing an unexpected difficulty of his own. With Sofia curled forward, eyes closed, entirely occupied with feeling terrible, nobody at all was paying the slightest attention to a small red crab currently free to do whatever he liked. Well, he thought, glancing around the darkened cabin. *I suppose someone ought to make good use of this.*

He climbed down onto the tray table and inspected an abandoned bread roll with great professional interest. He



investigated the gap beneath the seat in front, where he discovered a rogue peanut, three crumbs, and someone's lost hair tie.

He was in the middle of another considerably more ambitious expedition — toward a half-finished cup of orange juice balanced precariously on the neighbouring passenger's tray — when the plane hit a genuinely large bump, and Crabby, along with the juice, and several nearby snack wrappers, went flying.

He landed, directly in Sofia's open palm, exactly as she opened her eyes to ask Baba for another sip of water. For one horrified second, Crabby lay completely still, certain

this was finally, catastrophically it.

But Sofia, pale and tired and entirely focused on not being sick again, simply blinked at the small red shape in her hand, and absentmindedly placed him back into the ponytail without a second thought, and closed her eyes again.

That, Crabby thought, heart still going very fast indeed, *was way too close*. He stayed exactly where he was for the rest of the flight after that, watching Sofia get slowly, steadily better as the turbulence eased and the hours wore on — pale, then less pale, sipping water in careful small amounts, dozing again, waking hungry, which Baba said was always the surest sign she'd turned the corner.

By the time the plane began its long descent into Perth, Sofia was sitting up properly again, peering out the window at the coastline sliding into view below — pale gold beaches, the wide blue curve of the Indian Ocean.

"I knew it would be worth it," she said to Baba, tired but pleased with herself. "I always know it will be. That's why I don't mind so much anymore."

She knew exactly what this flight would cost her, Crabby thought, watching the ground rise up to meet them, *and got on the plane anyway*. The weary passengers disembarked the plane, ready for the journey home.

Crabby and the Long Wait in the Suitcase

The house was exactly as Crabby remembered it, and after so many weeks away, he was rather looking forward to a proper explore before settling back in.

Sofia dropped her bag by the door with an enormous, satisfied sigh, the sigh of someone who has been travelling for several days and simply wants her own bed. “I’m SO tired,” she announced, and flopped straight onto the couch while Baba wheeled the big suitcase in from the car.



Crabby, seizing what seemed like a perfectly sensible opportunity, slipped quietly out of Sofia’s ponytail while she lay there with her eyes closed. He scuttled off across the floor to investigate the suitcase Baba had just left standing open by the stairs. It was half-unpacked already, socks and swimsuits and a stray sandal spilling over one edge.

Just a quick look, he told himself, clambering up over the edge and in amongst the folded clothes. Just to check for anything interesting inside.

He found, tucked into a side pocket, a single nut from the airport that had somehow escaped being eaten. He was in the middle of a very satisfying inspection of it when he suddenly heard footsteps, a rustle of fabric, and — with a soft zip and a heavy clunk — the suitcase lid came down.

Everything went dark.

For one long, still moment, Crabby did absolutely nothing at all except sit very quietly among the folded t-shirts, waiting to see if the lid might simply pop back open on its own. It did not. *Well*, he thought. *This is definitely no good. I'm stuck in the suitcase!*

A lesser crab, he suspected, might have scrabbled and panicked right there in the dark, hurling himself uselessly against the zip. Though Crabby knew that flailing about in a suitcase accomplished exactly nothing except tiring himself out for no reason.



So instead, he settled himself comfortably against a rolled-up towel, folded his claws, and waited.

He listened to the muffled sounds of the house around him — Baba's footsteps going up the stairs, the distant clatter of Mummy preparing dinner, and Ari's claws clicking across the tiles.

Someone will open this eventually, Crabby told himself. Though a small, unhelpful voice in the back of his mind suggested that perhaps nobody would, that perhaps the suitcase would simply sit closed in a cupboard for months, forgotten.

A little scared, he thought instead about the nut in his claw, still perfectly intact, and decided there was no particular reason not to enjoy it while he waited. So he sat in the dark, eating his nut, feeling rather proud of himself for staying so remarkably calm about the whole situation.

Time passed strangely in the suitcase — long enough that Crabby had finished the nut and catalogued every fabric at claws reach. Before long he finally heard footsteps approaching again, closer this time, and the zip beginning to slide.

Light flooded in all at once, blinding after so long in the dark. There stood Sofia, pyjamas on, peering down into the suitcase in search of her favourite stuffed toy, which she was fairly sure Baba had packed somewhere near the bottom.

Crabby stayed very still, hidden underneath one of Sofia's dresses. He waited until she scrabbled around to find the toy, and as she turned away, Crabby scuttled straight out of the suitcase.

Crabby felt rather pleased with himself. Not because the suitcase adventure had been fun, since mostly it had been dark and cramped and a little bit frightening, but because he'd sat with all of that, quietly, without giving up on the fact that someone would come.

Being closed in a suitcase, he decided, as Sofia walked off toward her bedroom, is nothing at all, once you decide not to panic about it.

Crabby and the Wide Awake Night

Crabby's body clock, it turned out, had not quite made it home from Greece, even though the rest of him clearly had.

At two o'clock in the morning Perth time, he was wide, wide awake — every claw alert, every thought sharp and clear, as though it was the middle of a bright Rhodes afternoon. Beside him on the pillow, tucked into Sofia's arm, sat Purply, a well-loved purple stuffed rabbit, staring at the ceiling with the same button-eyed stillness he always had.

This is absurd, Crabby thought, lying stiffly nearby. My legs think it's lunchtime. My eyes will not close. This is deeply unfair.



He tried lying very still with his eyes shut, but his mind wandered off entirely on its own toward donkeys, sandcastles, thongs, palaces and airport queues. At this point he gave up and admitted that sleep was simply not coming.

Suddenly a small, slightly muffled curious voice beside him said "hello?"

Crabby nearly fell off the pillow. He had never, in all his adventures, ever heard Purply say a single word.

"You can talk?" he whispered. "Only at night, apparently," said Purply, sitting up properly, one ear flopping over his eye. "Nobody's ever awake to ask, so nobody's ever found out".

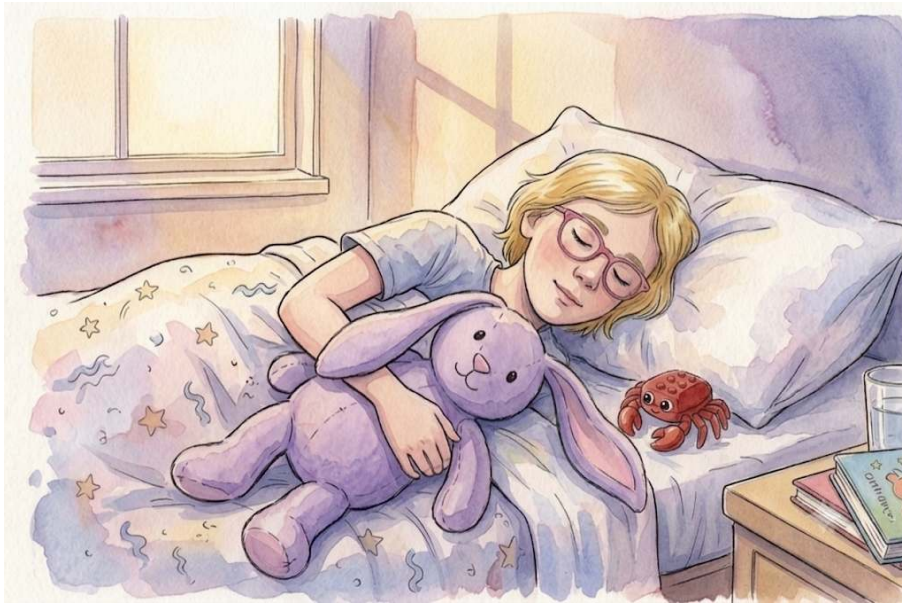
"I have jet lag," Crabby complained. "My body still thinks it's daytime somewhere else entirely."

"I don't have a body clock at all," said Purply, "and I still can't sleep. I think some nights are just wide awake nights."

Crabby considered this, and allowed himself to be talked into what Purply called "a proper look around the house, since we're both up anyway."

They climbed down together, down the folded corner of the doona, and scuttled off on a slow tour of the sleeping house.

The kitchen, in the middle of the night, was entirely different — moonlight falling in long pale stripes across the floor, the fridge humming its low steady hum. Purply found a stray biscuit by the toaster and a suspicious smear of jam near the bench



edge, and the two of them shared both with great satisfaction.

In the lounge room, Ari (the silly brown furry thing) lifted his head from his bed at the small sounds of their passing, and blinked sleepily at a crab and a rabbit standing side by side on the table.

I could simply resign myself to being awake forever, Crabby thought, somewhere around what felt like the hundredth lap of the hallway, Purply hopping along cheerfully beside him.

Then he suddenly noticed something — the house had gone from pitch dark to the faintest grey, a thin line of light starting to edge in around the curtains, birds beginning their first sleepy calls outside.

“Back to the pillow before anyone wakes up,” said Purply, already scrambling for the bed. “I go quiet again once the sun’s properly up. Rabbit rules.” “Will you talk again tomorrow night?” Crabby asked, settling in beside him.

“Depends if you’re awake to ask,” said Purply. By the time Sofia stirred and yawned into the ordinary business of a Perth morning, he had gone perfectly, convincingly still again, one flat ear and all.

The jet lag will pass, Crabby thought, eyes finally drooping properly for the first time in days. Not today. Probably not tomorrow either. But eventually. And apparently, not always alone.



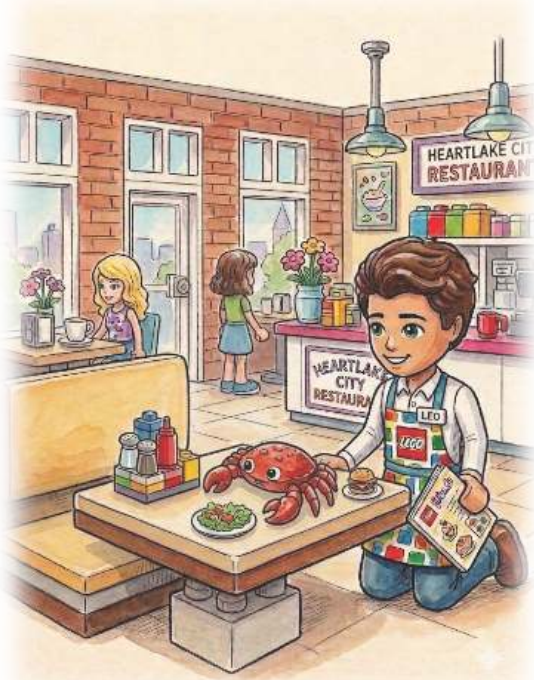
Crabby in the Lego World



Crabby goes to Heartlake City Restaurant

Crabby was bored. It was a gloomy winter's day and he was lurking in his usual crevice in the Lego. Crabby was certainly feeling up to mischief today and wondered what he could do. It was late in the day and Crabby was feeling particularly hungry. He looked over and by chance saw the Heartlake City Lego Restaurant. *Perfect* thought Crabby and he scuttled across.

The Heartlake City Restaurant was the most popular spot in all of Heartlake City. It had red and white checked tablecloths, little candles in the centre of every table, and a menu full of delicious meals. Marta was the chef today, and she had been cooking since sunrise. There was a lasagne in the oven, a chocolate pudding cooling on the counter, and a pot of pumpkin soup bubbling away.



Leo was the waiter, welcoming guests and showing them to their tables. Tonight the restaurant was almost full except for one last table. Suddenly Leo heard a voice; "Hello, my name is Crabby and I'd like a table for one." To his surprise he looked down and saw a tiny little red crab sitting on the welcome mat.

Leo was baffled. Heartlake City Restaurant only ever had mini dolls come to visit, not small crustaceans! "You're a crab!" said Leo with surprise. "Where did you come from?!" "Well I live in Sofia's Beach Club Lego" said Crabby, "I was feeling hungry so I came over to visit." "Very well" said Leo. "Come this

way and take a seat, even if the seats aren't meant for crabs."

Crabby was seated at table four, the round one by the window with the best view of the kitchen. He studied the menu with great seriousness. When Leo came to

take his order he requested the soup, a margherita pizza, lasagne and a chocolate cupcake. Leo carried the order slip to the kitchen with a slightly stunned expression. Marta looked at it. Then she looked through the kitchen window at Crabby, who had already rearranged the salt and pepper shakers and the little candle into a disorganised mess.



"My goodness, is our guest a crab?!" cried Marta. "Yes" said Leo. "He came from the Beach Club Lego because he was hungry." "Awww poor little guy," said Chef Marta, "we should definitely feed him!"

The first three courses went beautifully. Crabby had the soup, which he inspected very carefully before snapping his claws in approval, the pizza, and the lasagne. He ate with remarkable enthusiasm for a Lego crab, which is to say he prodded everything extensively and seemed extremely pleased about it. It was when Leo popped out of the kitchen to check on the other diners that Crabby made his move.

He slipped off his chair, scuttled to the kitchen door, nudged it open with one claw, and walked straight in. The kitchen of the Heartlake City Restaurant was, to Crabby's eyes, the most wonderful place he had ever been. There were pots. There were spoons. There was a little row of Lego herbs lined up on the windowsill. There were bowls and trays and spatulas and, right in the middle of the table was the chocolate pudding - still cooling, perfect and smelling absolutely incredible.

Crabby reached out one claw and very gently poked the pudding. It was perfect. He climbed up onto the table, knocking down two of the herb pots, and sat down directly next to the pudding as if he owned it.

That was when Leo came back. "Crabby! Get off the table! That pudding is for table two! It's someone's birthday!" he shouted. Cheeky Crabby did not get off the table.

It took Chef Marta, Leo and their friend Andrea to herd Crabby back outside.



On the birthday table was a little girl named Imani, who was celebrating her seventh birthday with her family. When Leo carried out the chocolate pudding with a candle in it, Imani's face lit up.

Then she noticed what was also on the tray - Crabby had somehow climbed onto the tray, nobody was quite sure when, and he was sitting beside the candle, both claws raised, looking like a tiny red birthday decoration.

Imani screamed with delight. "A crab! There's a crab on my birthday cake!" Her parents looked alarmed, and Leo was mortified. But Imani was laughing so hard she could barely blow out the candle. Crabby pointed at the candle encouragingly and finally Imani blew it out. Everyone at the table cheered and Crabby snapped his claws triumphantly. "That," said Imani's mum, laughing, "was the best birthday surprise we have ever had".

By the time the restaurant closed for the evening, Crabby had eaten a cupcake, knocked over the specials board (twice), taught himself to spin a plate on one claw, and been personally thanked by Imani's family for making the birthday unforgettable.

Finally Chef Marta and Leo sat down at Crabby's table after the last

guests had left. The kitchen was clear, the candles were blown out, and the restaurant was quiet and warm.

Crabby was still there, sitting on the table, looking at the last remaining cupcake. He looked at Leo. He looked at the cupcake. He looked at Leo again. Leo pushed the cupcake towards him. "Go on then. You've earned it." Crabby placed both claws on it with immense satisfaction.

"Do you think Crabby will ever come back?" asked Chef Marta. They looked at Crabby, who was already scanning the room for anything else interesting. Chef Marta was planning to make two chocolate puddings next time. One for the customers, and one, just in case, for a very small, very cheeky, extremely beloved uninvited guest.

And so Crabby became the restaurant's most regular visitor, turning up whenever he was hungry, always pinching something he shouldn't, always making someone laugh, and always, somehow making the whole evening better. The chalkboard outside now reads: "Today's special - whatever Crabby doesn't steal first!"

Crabby goes to Rapunzels Tower

Crabby was the most mischievous little crab in the entire Lego kingdom. He had bright red claws, a lopsided grin, and a habit of getting into places he should absolutely not be. And now, scuttling sideways along a cobblestone path, Crabby had spotted his next great adventure: Rapunzels tower.

It rose up in the middle of a meadow, tall and round and magnificent, with purple flowers climbing the walls and golden light glowing from the windows at the top. It was clearly the sort of tower that did not have a "Welcome Mischievous Crabs" sign, which, in Crabby's experience, was exactly the kind of place worth visiting. He scuttled up to the base of the tower and began to climb.



It took twenty minutes, and a great deal of sideways shuffling, but eventually Crabby hauled himself over the windowsill and tumbled right onto the wooden floor of Rapunzel's room. He looked up. A girl with the longest golden hair he had ever seen stared down at him, frying pan raised above her head.

"Intruder!" she shouted. "Help!" Crabby shouted back. There was a pause. From Rapunzel's shoulder, a tiny green chameleon blinked one enormous eye at Crabby, then the other. "Wait, stop!" said Pascal, "he's just a little crab!" Rapunzel slowly lowered the frying pan. "Ok ok" said Rapunzel, "Pascal is usually right about these things."

Crabby was relieved. Finally he spoke. "My name is Crabby and I've come to see your tower. I'm very pleased to meet you!" Rapunzel looked at him for a long

moment, then broke into a wide smile. "I'm Rapunzel, and nobody ever comes to visit." "Mostly because of the climb" said Crabby. "No, mostly because of Mother Gothel" Rapunzel said. "But she's not here today." Her eyes lit up: "Which means – do you want a tour?" "Absolutely" said Crabby.

Rapunzel showed Crabby her paintings, which covered every single wall from floor to ceiling. There were swirling suns, forests, stars and flowers. Crabby looked at them all very seriously, nodding his little head. "Beautiful" he said.



She then showed Crabby her bookshelf. Crabby immediately pulled out three books and stacked them into a wobbly tower to stand on so he could reach the higher shelves.

It was the frying pan that started the chase. Crabby had only wanted to see if it was as good a weapon as Rapunzel claimed. He'd picked it up with both claws – it was enormous compared to him, and waved it around experimentally. It slipped. It spun. It bounced off a shelf, knocked over a pot of purple paint, and sent a great purple wave sloshing across Rapunzel's freshly mopped floor. Rapunzel gasped.

"Uh oh, run!" exclaimed Crabby. What followed was the most chaotic chase in the history of the tower.

Crabby quickly scuttled sideways under the bed. Rapunzel's hair whooshed past as she dove after him. He came out the other side, scuttled up the bookshelf, and launched himself off the top shelf onto the curtain, swinging across the room. "Pascal, get him!" Rapunzel shouted. Pascal leapt from the windowsill, puffed himself up, and planted himself directly in Crabby's path, eyes whirring in opposite directions.

Crabby skidded to a stop on the purple paint floor. He looked at Pascal. Pascal looked at him. "Ok" said Crabby, "You're actually quite frightening!" Pascal turned a smug shade of gold.

Rapunzel arrived, out of breath, hair flying in all directions, frying pan back in hand. She looked at the paint splattered floor. Her knocked over bookshelf. Her curtain, swinging gently to a stop. Then she laughed. "You" she said, pointing the frying pan at Crabby, "are an absolute disaster!" "I prefer adventurer" said Crabby. "You're covered in my paint!" exclaimed Rapunzel. Crabby looked down at his claws. They were indeed, entirely purple now.

They cleaned up together, Rapunzel scrubbing the floor, Pascal holding the mop with his tail, and Crabby doing his best to help, which mostly meant getting in the way and leaving more purple claw prints.

By the time the sun started to dip low and orange, the tower was mostly back to normal. Crabby's claws were still purple. He'd decided to keep them.

"You should come back" said Rapunzel, leaning out the window as Crabby began the long, sideways shuffle back down the tower wall. "But maybe, no touching the frying pan!" "No promises" said Crabby. Pascal flickered a cheerful shade of pink. Crabby smiled and scuttled off sideways into the golden evening, already wondering what he would get up to next!

Crabby goes to Hogwarts

Crabby was bored. He was bored until, out of the blue, an owl suddenly dropped a letter on his head by mistake. The letter wasn't for him. It was for someone called Neville Longbottom, and it appeared to be a Herbology essay that was two weeks overdue. The address at the top said Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in very impressive curly writing. Crabby looked at the letter. "Where's this then?" he asked the owl. The owl gave him a long stare. "Is it far?" The owl ruffled its feathers. "I'll take that as a no," said Crabby, and set off.



Hogwarts, it turns out, was a castle. A massive castle, with towers and turrets and staircases and enormous stained glass windows throwing coloured light across the stone floors. Crabby stood at the entrance and looked up. *Right*, he said to himself, *this is going to be good*.

He went in through a gap in the enormous doors and immediately found himself in a long corridor lined with portraits of witches and wizards who were all watching him with deep suspicion. "Is that a crab?" one portrait whispered to another. "Extraordinary," said another. Crabby waved at them cheerfully and scuttled on.

He found the boy in a courtyard, with messy black hair, round glasses, and a Gryffindor scarf that had seen better days. He was sitting on a stone bench next to a girl with very bushy hair and a boy with rather large ears, all three of them eating sandwiches and looking at a piece of parchment. "Hello!" said Crabby, appearing around the corner of a stone pillar. All three of them jumped. The bushy haired girl's hand went immediately to her wand. "I'm Crabby, is this Hogwarts?" The boy

with the glasses stared at him. "Yes it is! I'm Harry, and this is Hermione and Ron." Ron leaned over to Harry. "Is this normal?" he whispered. "Absolutely nothing is normal about a talking crab" said Harry.

Hermione, who had already put her wand away and was looking at Crabby with a very focussed expression said, "You're a Lego crab. Inside Hogwarts." "Correct," said Crabby. "How?" she asked. "Through a gap in the door" responded Crabby. Hermione gasped.



"Do you want a tour?" said Harry, because Harry had learned over the years that when strange things turn up at Hogwarts, the best response was usually to go with it. "Oh," said Crabby, rubbing his claws together. "Absolutely." Ron looked at the ceiling. "We're going to get detention," he said, "I can feel it."

The tour started well. Harry showed Crabby the Great Hall, which had a ceiling bewitched to look like a cloudy sky. Crabby looked at the four long tables and the thousands of floating candles. He climbed up onto the Gryffindor table to get a better look at the ceiling. "You can't—" Hermione started. "He's done it," said Ron. Crabby left a trail of tiny claw prints all the way

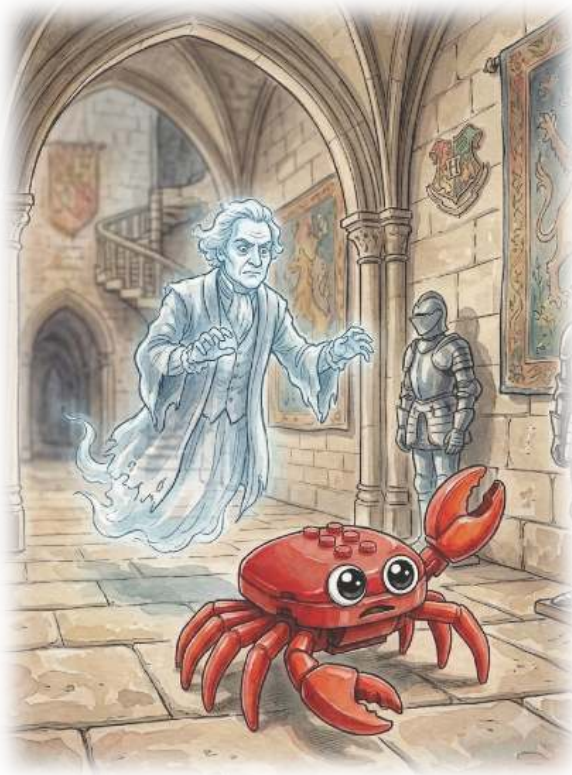
down the Gryffindor table. He didn't notice, as he was too busy looking at the ceiling.

Then they showed him the library, where Madam Pince fixed them all with a stare so severe that even Crabby went quiet. He did, however, pull three books off the shelves to stand on so he could reach a higher shelf, then forgot to put them back.

Then they showed him the Owlery, where hundreds of owls lived in the rafters. The owls all swivelled their heads at once to look at Crabby.

Finally, they showed him the moving staircases. They were magnificent, great stone stairways that shifted and swung and changed direction all by themselves. Crabby had been watching them, completely captivated, while Harry explained that you had to time your step very carefully or you'd end up on the entirely wrong floor. "So you have to jump?" asked Crabby. "Not exactly jump, just—" Crabby jumped. He landed on a staircase just as it started to swing. He skittered sideways with the movement, and then the staircase swept around to meet a corridor on the fourth floor.

"Crabby!" Harry yelled. "This is incredible!" Crabby yelled back. Then he rounded a corner and suddenly came face to face with Hogwarts resident ghost, Peeves the Poltergeist. Peeves was a ghost of pure chaos, bobbing in the air, purple hat at a tilt,



mouth open in a wide, wicked grin. He stared at Crabby. Crabby stared at him. "Ooh," said Peeves with the delight of a poltergeist who had found a new toy. "What's this? A little crawly crabby wabby?" "Don't," said Crabby. "Little crabby wabby thinks he's big and—" Crabby snapped his claws at him. Peeves cackled a horrible, delighted sound, and dove straight at Crabby. Crabby ran.

The chase that followed went down in Hogwarts history. Crabby shot around the corner of the corridor, claws clattering on stone, Peeves diving after him. Peeves picked up a vase from the shelf as he went and threw it. It missed Crabby by an inch and exploded against the wall.

Crabby skidded left at the next corner. He'd found a suit of armour, ducked behind it, and for a few seconds was absolutely certain he'd lost him. Then Peeves flew straight through the suit of armour and appeared right in front of Crabby's face, upside down. "Boo!" said Peeves. Crabby scuttled right. Peeves swooped. Crabby went left. Peeves threw an ink bottle that smashed against the wall above his head

and rained purple ink all over him.

Harry, Ron and Hermione came pelting around the corner at full speed. "Crabby run towards us!" Harry yelled. Hermione had her wand out. "Wingardium Leviosa!" A large bucket from a nearby cleaners cupboard rose off the floor and hung in the air directly above Peeves. The bucket dropped. It went straight through him, but the water in it did not. It hit Peeves in a great cold splash. Peeves let out a screech, then he looked at all of them. He looked at Crabby, standing in the middle of the corridor dripping with purple ink, claws raised, completely unafraid. "Good chase, crabby wabby," he said, and then drifted upwards through the ceiling and was gone.

The four of them stood in the corridor. Crabby was purple. Almost entirely purple now, ink in every crack and crevice, dripping from his claws, sitting in a purple puddle on the stone floor. Then Harry started to laugh, and Ron joined in immediately. Even Hermione pressed her hand over her mouth and couldn't keep it in. Crabby looked down at himself. "I look fantastic," he announced.

Hermione cleaned him up with a spell and they walked him back to the castle entrance as the sun turned the castle walls gold. Harry gave Crabby a Chocolate Frog for the road. Crabby had never had a Chocolate Frog before.

He ate it in two bites and looked extremely satisfied. "You could come back," said Harry at the door. "I mean—you'd probably get detention. But you could come back." "You'd definitely get detention," said Hermione. "Worth it," said Ron. Crabby licked his claws and smiled. "I'll be back," he said. "Tell the owl."

The three friends watched Crabby go. "You know," said Harry, "I don't think even Hogwarts was ready for that." "Nothing is ever ready for that," said Hermione, as they watched Crabby scuttle back to his usual crevice in the Beach Club Lego.

Crabby goes to Hagrids Hut

Hagrids Hut sat at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, a round little stone building with a copper kettle, a pumpkin patch out the front, and a general air of warmth. Smoke curled from the chimney. From somewhere inside came the sound of something very large shifting its weight on wooden floorboards.

Crabby had spotted it from halfway across the grounds. He was halfway through the pumpkin patch, pausing to investigate each pumpkin individually, when the



enormous wooden door opened and Hagrid appeared, wearing an expression of deep surprise. He looked down and Crabby looked up. "Right," said Hagrid, "you're a crab!" "A Lego crab," said Crabby. "And my name is Crabby." "Hagrid," said Hagrid. There was a pause, then Hagrid's enormous face broke into an enormous smile. "Brilliant. Come in, come in, mind the step it's big." Crabby minded the step, which was indeed enormous, and went in sideways.

Harry, Ron and Hermione arrived ten minutes later for their usual Saturday visit and found a scene that stopped them in the doorway. Hagrid was at his table, pouring tea into mugs the size of buckets. Sitting on the table, helping himself to a rock cake almost bigger than he was, was Crabby. "It's Crabby," said Harry. "Harry! Ron! Hermione! Come in, come in, I was just getting to know your friend here." "Sit down, sit down, tea's ready."

Hagrid set down enormous mugs in front of each of them. "Rock cake?" he offered. Everyone took one out of politeness. Crabby took another.

After tea, Hagrid took them outside to show them his pumpkin patch, which he was extremely proud of. The pumpkins were magnificent, huge and round and orange, lined up in rows like a small army. "This one," Crabby said, stopping at a particularly enormous specimen, "is excellent!" Hagrid beamed. "That's my best one." "Its tremendous," said Crabby.

"Now," said Hagrid, standing. "I've got something to show you. He's a bit shy, but I think he'll like you."



In a large pen behind the hut, sitting in a nest of straw and regarding the world with enormous golden eyes, was a creature the size of a large cat. It had the body of a fox, the wings of an owl, and deep amber feathers.

"A Fwooper?" Hermione asked, leaning forward. "Just a baby," said Hagrid proudly. "Found him at the edge of the forest. His wing was hurt, and he's not ready to fly yet."

The creature fixed its golden eyes on each of them in turn: Harry, Ron, Hermione, and then Crabby.

"Huh," said Hagrid. "He usually hides when there's visitors." The creature stood up from its nest, took two careful steps, and stretched its neck out towards Crabby. Crabby raised one claw, very slowly, and held it out. The creature sniffed it. "He likes you," said Hagrid. "He never does that."

Crabby hadn't moved. He was standing completely still, letting the creature sniff his claws and butt its soft head against him. "What's his name?" asked Crabby.

"Haven't named him yet," said Hagrid. Crabby looked at the creature for a long moment. The golden eyes looked back. "Butterscotch," said Crabby.

The trouble started, as usual, with Crabby. The idea was Hagrid's. Butterscotch, he explained, needed to practice using his wings — just gentle stretches, nothing too

ambitious, building strength. "Could you just walk around the pen with him?" Hagrid asked. "Encourage him a bit? He likes you." "Of course," said Crabby.

This part went fine. Crabby walked around the pen, and Butterscotch followed, occasionally flapping his wings in small experimental bursts that sent wisps of straw spinning into the air. The problem was the gate. Hagrid had left it unlatched, just a fraction, just while he nipped back to the hut to get Butterscotch's afternoon feed.

Butterscotch immediately noticed the gap in the gate. He nudged it with his nose. The door swung open. Butterscotch took three running steps and launched himself into the air, wings beating in great uncoordinated sweeps. He was flying. "Butterscotch!" Hagrid came thundering back from the hut, feed bucket clanging. "Oh no, oh no, Butterscotch come back!"

Butterscotch did not come back. Hagrid made large desperate beckoning gestures at the sky with both arms, which was completely ineffective. So Crabby climbed to the top of the pumpkin patch fence, which was the highest point immediately available to him, and waited.

He watched Butterscotch's wobbling flight. The creature was tiring, wings losing their frantic beat, starting to glide in a wide slow circle that was getting lower. He moved to the right spot on the fence and held out both his claws.

Butterscotch spotted Crabby and landed neatly in his claws. Crabby curled both claws gently around him. "Good flying," he said. "How'd you know he'd come to you?" Hagrid asked.

Crabby thought about it. "He knows me," he said. "I named him." "You can come back," Hagrid told Crabby. "Any time you like. I mean it. There's always tea." "And rock cakes?" said Crabby. "Always rock cakes." "I'll be back Tuesday," said Crabby.

They walked back up to the castle as the afternoon light went copper across the grounds. Crabby rode on Harry's shoulder, which had become his usual spot. "Bye everyone," said Crabby to the gang. "Bye Crabby," said the children together. And so Crabby scuttled back to his usual crevice in the Beach Club Lego, exhausted from the day's events.



The Adventures of Crabby



Join Crabby and Sofia on their exciting journey! With new friends to meet and wonders to discover, the world is full of surprises for this mischievous little crab. A charming tale of friendship, courage, and of course, mischief.

