

Storytime: Part 1

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Today, we'll take a break from serious blog posts, and try something new. In this post, I'll tell you a tall tale. (The next blog post will be Part 2, and a future blog post will explain more about tall tales! For now, just think of it as a story.)

It began as a normal Sunday trip to the beach. Well, as normal as a trip with a 10 year old and an 8 year old could possibly be. We arrived just as the afternoon sun started lowering in the sky, and cool breezes rushed over the sand. As our parents lowered our blanket onto the fine, velvety sand, my younger brother, Sandeep, and I sped towards the tide, racing to see who'd get there first. In the following hours, we skipped happily in the water, splashing each other when possible, gaping whenever we saw an especially large piece of seaweed, a pretty seashell, or even just a smooth rock. Then, Sandeep spotted something.

“Hey! Look over there. What *is* that?” I glanced over, and we both began to stare at the whitish shape under the water in a nearby tide pool. Neither of us moved, for the tide had to recede before we could really investigate. As the water pulled away from the shape, a white, smooth shell was exposed. The sand around the shell crumbled and fell as whatever creature it belonged to began to wiggle its way out of the hole it had made for itself, to escape the brunt of the wave. Then, two black, smooth, pebble-like eyes popped out of the sand and peeked warily at us. Slowly, the creature shook off the remaining sand, showing off its bright red legs and antennae. It was a hermit crab!

Just like any curious children, we were astonished, and more than a bit intrigued. In unison, we opened our mouths to yell to our parents, who were close enough to watch over us but not enough to see the crab, about our discovery, but a sound made us both freeze. It was the sound of quiet, annoyed muttering. After a few beats, it stopped, and in its place came clear, audible speech.

“Hey, you! The tide’s gonna come in any second, kids. I can’t go hide under the sand now, with you guys cornering me and all. Can you maybe, uh, give a hand to a crustacean in need? ”

Both of us, mystified, turned back to the crab.

“Did you just...*talk*?” I asked it.

Of course, it chose that moment to remain silent. I continued to try to stare it down. My brother, however, pointed to the ocean. “Look! It has a point. The tide’s rushing in. If we’re gonna figure out if it talked we have to take it back to the blanket! Come on!” I looked down at my bucket, which I had been using to splash water at my brother for the past few minutes. I bent down, dumped out most of the water, added in a few handfuls of sand, and gingerly reached my fingers towards its shell. It didn’t move, and it made no efforts to pinch me.

Instead, its eyes bent to stare at me, waiting.

"Hurry!" my brother yelled, grabbing my hand to signal the urgency of the situation in case I hadn't somehow realized by now. I bent over, grasped the crab's shell gently but firmly, and placed it into my bucket. We ran back to the shore.

Panting, we sat down, peering into the bucket. The crab glared back at us. "What are *you* lookin' at?" it said. Both of us reeled back, stunned.

"You really can talk! Are you magic or something?" Sandeep asked.

Suddenly looking nervous, the crab replied, "Maybe I am, maybe I ain't. Either way, it's none of your beeswax! Okay, gotta go now. Thanks but no thanks. I lost the ship! It's all your fault I won't make it back on time now. Oh, the mistress will be so mad..." It retreated into its shell.

"Ship? Mistress? What kind of hermit crab are you?" I asked.

"Kid, you really think I'm a hermit crab? Really? Wow, what do humans teach in their schools...I'm obviously a MUITAP!"

"MUITAP?"

"Obviously, we never let you know for sure of our existence- can't trust a human looking at what you've done to your own planet – but you've always imagined people like us. MUITAPS? Shapeshifters? Time-travelers? Does any of this ring a bell?"

"You mean...you're an alien?!" My brother exclaimed, obviously excited. He'd always been into space and the prospect of discovering an extraterrestrial species exhilarated him.

"Yup. And you kids...wow, you have no idea what you've gotten yourselves into." With that, the hermit crab reached up, suddenly expanding in size just enough to be eye-level with our hands clutching the bucket, and laid a limb on one of my

hands as well as one of my brother's.

The world bent and twisted around us, becoming hazy at first and then dissolving into a circular solid wall of purple light. Then, the world went black.

To be continued... ☐

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