Moult

by Leon Ofiana, Gold Creek School



The sea wasn't always like this.

Baron used to tell me about the old days, back when the sea was blue, colourful and full of life. Now, forgotten relics and belongings from the Surface Lands drift down, forming tall spires of artefacts from long ago, darkening our ocean. Not many of us know much about life from back then, and the ones who do have long fallen silent.

I scuttle over to Baron and wave a claw at him. As always, Baron doesn't answer, his eyes not even glancing at mine. He was once proud and strong, and would always be happy to share stories and tales. Now, his once royal purple carapace is tattered and grey, and his body shackled by a trap designed to lure and imprison our kind. Despite this, I can see the pain in his eyes, the years lost being bound in one place, and the memories he wishes to forget. Perhaps it was his arrogance that tempted him to enter the trap or perhaps it was merely out of desperation for food, but that didn't matter now.

After checking in on Baron, I move outside the cave we call home, hoping to find some food I can bring back. No matter how many times I leave the cave, looking at this wasteland always hurts. As I move across the grey, sandy floor, I notice a can full of fish, squirming around. Among the struggling fish, I recognise one. She once said, "This can is the safest place to be to escape the hellish rain."

Now the can is getting crowded and fish are cutting themselves on the can's sharp edges. Sometimes, I wonder whether the best solution is even a solution at all. I put my claw inside the can and try to free the fish, but they're too far down for me to reach.

I walk around more and discover even more creatures, each barely clinging on to life in this forsaken world. I attempt to help them in the best way I can, but it's difficult when there's no one else around who's willing to do something about it.

I spot a turtle, entangled in a web of plastic. I try to untangle him, but he refuses. "If the world has fallen, why don't we do joyful things? If the sea is no longer blue, then why don't we hide in the dark?"

I listen to his words and think. Why don't we hide? No one can see in the dark after all. An easy solution indeed. Then the image of Baron enters my mind, with his unmoving body and lifeless eyes. "We don't hide because there are still things left to fight for," I say. "Will you keep fighting?" The turtle pauses and nods, letting me untangle him before swimming off.

I continue to scuttle along the ocean floor and I see a great shark, fins and gills torn and shredded, barely alive. I rush over to his side as fast as I can. "Excuse me. How did you, such a noble and strong creature, manage to end up in a state such as this?" I ask.

The shark turns to look at me, sorrow in his eyes. "There was a great massacre in the shallows," he mutters. "Those dastardly two-legged creatures from above… They murdered many of us and left us to sink. I fought and fought, and now here I lay. There's not much time left for me, little crab, so let me tell you this: To keep silent is to throw an egg against a stone."

I nod and try to heal the shark, pressing seaweed against his wounds, but there's nothing I can do, and the shark dies, having sacrificed himself for his friends. It takes a long time, but I eventually manage to bury the fallen warrior, and leave him in peace, his words forever engraved in my mind.

As I walk down the road, a streak of metal flashes across me and a sharp pain spreads throughout one of my legs. I stumble back. A sea horse wielding a knife in his tail stands before me. "Back off!" he yells. "Not you too…!" He was once a friend, but when his wife fell to the ocean's toxins, he changed. He started to repel those close to him, too scared to have something to lose. He advances with the knife, swinging it around, trying to create distance.

"My friend," I say, "please think clearly. You were once kind and caring too. This isn't you."

"Why?" the seahorse asks as he drops to the ground. "Why should I care anymore when the poison from above is spreading? Soon, the sea will die, along with us. What's the point in caring?"

I sit down beside the seahorse and we stare out into the dark sea. "If the sea's going to die anyway," I begin, "then we should all be there for each other when it happens."

The seahorse looks at me and starts to sob, "Even after I cut your leg…you still comfort me. You're right. I'll…I'll be there for you, my friend." He laughs, "I haven't cried in a while. Look what you've done."

I chuckle, "Well, I guess it's time for me to keep going then. I hope you find others who care as well. Goodbye, my friend."

After I leave the seahorse, I look over to the cave I came from, and I decide it's time to free Baron at last. I scuttle towards the crab trap and slam my claw against it. Not a dent. I look around, scouring the walls of the cave, and spot a claw made of steel, sporting three pincers instead of two. Weapon in claw, I strike the cage once more, steel clashing against the trap. Once again, not a single hint of damage toward the cage. Baron slowly moves for the first time again and looks at me with his eyes. "No," he chitters. "Too late…"

I look at him and see his eyes full of pain. "I... I won't stop," I say. I strike the weapon, over and over, and slowly but surely, the accursed cage begins to show scars. Finally, after many strikes and swings, the cage's lock bursts open, swinging the trap's door outwards.

Baron looks around, “It’s…over?” I nod happily, beckoning him to come out.

Like an old crab moulting from its shell, Baron slowly crawls out of the cage and stares at me. “Thank you,” he says as he walks outside the cave into the open ocean. “It’s time for me to take my leave.” That was the last I saw of him, his fate unbeknownst to me at this time; however, I remain hopeful that he has found a home out there.

After Baron’s departure, I have been helping all other sea creatures I could find. Through my journey, I have learned many things. One fact is clear: a crab can only grow if it moults from its old shell. I guess it’s time for all of us to help the world moult.