


## HOW SAMMY WENT TO CORAL-LAND

### Chapter 2: How Sammy Escaped From the Shark and Made the Acquaintance of the Hermit-Crab

by Emily Paret Atwater




*Oh a wily old crab is the Hermit-Crab  
And a crafty old crab is he!  
His home he makes in a stolen cell,  
And the passing stranger he loves full well  
But beware of his hospitality!  
For a hungry old crab is the Hermit-Crab,  
And a wicked old crab is he.*

“Dear me! what a very large place the sea is,” said Sammy. He had gone quite a distance before he realized that the occasion for hurry was now over, and then he rose gracefully to the surface and looked about him. Overhead stretched the blue sky speckled with fleecy, white clouds, and off in the distance a long line of white sand showed the shore line, against which the incoming tide sent its undulating billows. Near the shore circled a flock of sea-gulls, and far away, where sea and sky seemed to meet, the white sails of a ship gleamed in the sun. In every other direction, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the blue waters of the ocean.

Presently a large fish sprang from the waves, his silvery scales sparkling in the sun, then fell back with a gentle splash. This recalled Sammy to himself, and diving hastily below, he swam slowly about looking at his surroundings with a good deal of curiosity.

It was a strange world on which he gazed. Water was everywhere, above, below, and on all sides, and strange weeds and vegetables grew up from hidden rocks. A graceful jelly-fish floated past, expanding and contracting its umbrella-shaped body, and waving about its long arms or tentacles. Strange fish of all shapes and sizes swam about, the larger ones eying the stranger curiously, the smaller keeping at a respectful distance.

But Sammy had a very friendly feeling towards them all, and was just about to speak to a near-by fish, whose appearance seemed to indicate that he might belong to



the Salmon family, when suddenly there was a general hurrying out of the way on all sides. Many of the fish dived quickly below to hide in some convenient spot, and the more rapid swimmers took to their fins with great haste.

Turning quickly to see the cause of the commotion, Sammy discovered a large, and very hungry-looking shark just behind him. The creature had a hideous mouth, with several rows of sharp teeth, and while not dangerous to man, this Dog-Fish, or Blue Shark, has a great liking for young and tender fish.

This fact our hero instantly divined, and sped away as fast as his fins could carry him, Mr. Shark in hot pursuit. Sammy had the advantage of being some distance from his enemy when discovered, but sharks are extremely swift swimmers, and for a time it seemed as if poor Sammy's fate was sealed. No matter how hard he swam the monster slowly gained on him. No race with his playfellows in the stream at home was ever so exciting as this. All the famous swimming qualities of his family were put to the test now, as he darted like an arrow through the water, the cruel shark close behind.


But presently Sammy began to tire. In another moment all would have been over, had he not spied far below him, partly hidden by seaweed, a ledge of large rocks. His instinct told him that under one of those he might find a hiding place. Down he darted, as quick as a flash, and in another instant just as the shark turned on his side and opened his huge jaws, Sammy lay safe, but quivering, in a friendly hollow under the sheltering rocks.

Mr. Shark, disappointed at losing his dinner, swam around and around the ledge vainly trying to find some way of squeezing his big body in among the crevices of the rocks, but at length abandoned the attempt as hopeless, and departed in a very bad humor to look for another victim.

It was some time before Sammy recovered enough from his fright to look about him, but presently his ever-present curiosity overcame other feelings, and he began to examine his new quarters with much interest.

He was in a tiny cave, whose hard bottom was covered with sand and mud deposited by the constant washing of the tide. From the walls and ceiling hung curious weeds, and a few brightly colored shells lay in little holes and crevices formed in the rock.

While thus employed in viewing his surroundings Sammy discovered a crab partly hidden in the mud on the floor of the cave. It was a very strange-looking creature,



for while the fore part of it had legs and claws like an ordinary crab, the rear part was concealed in the shell of a large sea-snail.

As Sammy gazed the crab slowly crept out from the mud, still keeping a watchful eye on the intruder.

"Fine day," said Sammy, pleasantly.

"Charming," replied the Crab.

"Water's a little cool, though," said Sammy.

"It's very comfortable in here," said the Crab, "and the tide is very favorable this morning; it brought me in some fine fat snails for breakfast. By the way, have you had breakfast?" And as he spoke he again retreated into the mud.


"Oh, yes, indeed!" replied Sammy, politely, "I had a good meal some time ago before the shark got after me." And, forthwith, he gave a thrilling account of his adventure, adding something to it after the manner of storytellers, and throwing in a description of his past life and present ambition. To all of which the Crab listened with most flattering interest.

"Remarkable," he murmured. "You have no idea how delightful it is for a poor Hermit like me to hear something of the outside world. I lead such a retired life that it is a real pleasure to entertain a stranger in my humble abode. This little cave is mine by the right of possession, and in it I live, far from the whirl of society, and being secluded in my habits, and somewhat bashful, I always retire into the mud when strangers appear. Occasionally when crabs, (little ones), sea-snails, and small shell-fish wander in in search of apartments I consent to have a short conference with them, but it is a rare thing for me to speak to a fish as large as yourself."

"I am highly honored," said our hero.

"But tell me, how do you happen to have that large shell on your back?"

"That," replied the Crab, proudly, "is the former home of a Sea-Snail, now alas! no more. You see my name of the Hermit-Crab comes from my liking to conceal my tail, which is long and soft, with two or three hooks on it, in the empty shell of some sea animal, snail, or the like. Unlike the ordinary crabs, our branch of the family all possess these tails. Our only hope of prolonging our existence is to protect this weak tail, so as soon as we are born we crawl into some empty shell, and holding on with the hooks, are thus fairly well protected from attacks in the rear. We can carry the shell



about with us, and in time, as we grow bigger, it becomes necessary to find a larger one. The shell in which I now live once belonged to a big snail. It was just the right size for my needs, and, there being no other way out of the difficulty, I was compelled to eat him up in order to get possession of his home. It was a wrong act, the impulse of a moment, and I assure you that I have always deeply regretted the cruel deed,” and the Hermit paused to sigh deeply.


Now Sammy had very small faith in the repentance of the Hermit. In fact he had a suspicion that he was a bloodthirsty old hypocrite, and that those unwary strangers who had come to look for apartments in the past, had never returned alive. This was an uncomfortable thought, so he kept a sharp eye on the Hermit, while he listened to the long description the other gave him of the habits and customs of his family.

Our hero was soon to learn that bragging about one's ancestors and connections was not a weakness confined alone to Aunt Sheen, for many other fish possessed it, and this seems strange when they openly declared that they sometimes devoured their younger and weaker relations.

The Hermit-Crab belonged to a large family called the Crustaceans. All kinds of crabs, lobsters, as well as shrimps, barnacles, sea-acorns, etc., are members of this family, though all belong to different branches of it. The lobster is first cousin to the crab, though somewhat larger, yet the two resemble each other very closely. The crab has four pairs of legs, as well as a large pair of claws. He is a rapid swimmer, though his sidewise motion gives him a very awkward appearance. And, although a great eater, it hardly seems likely that Mr. Crab ever suffers from indigestion, since nature has given him eight jaws, and a large stomach furnished with teeth. He has also a heart, and liver.

The crab, in common with the lobster, possesses one very convenient peculiarity. He can cast off a claw if it is hurt in any way, and he sometimes throws one or two away if he is frightened by thunder, for he is a great coward in a thunder-storm. But, no matter in what way the claw is lost, Mr. Crab can grow another one, although it will not be as large, or as strong as the first one.

The claws of a crab are his weapons, and terrible ones they are, too. With them he defends himself against his enemies, and with them he attacks his prey and tears it to pieces.



His bill of fare is composed of some kinds of fish and lower water animals; and it is said that some crabs feed on sharks and whales. In return fishes, sea-stars, sea-urchins and some shell-fish eat the young crustaceans, and even attack the larger ones.

In the sand of the seashore the mother crab, or lobster, lays her eggs, and there she leaves them to be hatched by the sun. Several thousand eggs are laid at a time, but as many of the water animals feed on the eggs and young, of course all the members of this large family do not come to mature crabhood.

Lobsters like best to live along rocky shores, where the water is clear and deep, and there they are caught in small wicker baskets, or nets.

As for the crab, he loves to hide in the mud, and he can live longer than the lobster when taken out of the water, by reason of the different formation of his gills.


The Hermit-Crab seemed particularly proud of some of his relations who live on land, and told Sammy marvelous tales of their strange habits. Some of these land-crabs will suffocate if dipped in the water. They live in the shades of the deep forest, often a long way from the sea, but come to the seashore at certain seasons to lay their eggs in the sand. When once they have started on their march to the sea nothing can turn them aside from the path in which they are traveling.

Another cousin of the Hermit lives in the East and West Indies. It is called the "Calling Crab," because it has a very large claw which it holds above its head when running, and this gives it the appearance of beckoning to some one. This Calling Crab makes its home in holes, or burrows on land.

Still another land relation is the East India Cocoa-Nut Crab, which lives upon the cocoanuts that fall from the trees. With its large, heavy claws it tears the husk from the cocoanut, and makes a hole in the nut, and takes out the meat. These crabs also make their homes in deep burrows, which they line with the husks and fibers from the cocoanuts. Though a land crab the Cocoa-Nut cousin is fond of the sea, and takes a bath in it every night. These crabs grow to a very large size.

Crabs, and all crustaceans multiply enormously, and are of all sizes from very tiny ones to one respectable Japan crab which covers twenty-five feet of ground. In the tropics they grow very large, and are of many different varieties.

Some crabs live in fresh water rivers and streams, some of the lower forms of the family in the extreme North, and others in dark, under-ground caves.



Like almost all of the crustaceans, the crabs and lobsters cast their shells every year. Besides indulging in this habit himself, the Hermit-Crab had once witnessed the toilet of a large lobster, and he gave Sammy a graphic description of the operation.

It seems that some days before it was time for him to get his new suit, Mr. Lobster retired to a quiet place, gave up all society, and fasted rigorously. Of course this severe treatment soon caused him to lose flesh; he became thinner and thinner and the shell grew looser and looser. After awhile he grew restless. Evidently his peace of mind and body was much disturbed, for he rolled about, scratched himself, and crawled here and there as if distracted. Soon after this his shell split clear up the back, and then such a wriggling, and tugging and squirming as there was until finally the whole outside shell of the lobster, legs, claws, and everything else was forced through the narrow slit in his back!

When the old shell was gotten off it looked exactly like the living lobster; and as for Mr. Lobster himself, lo! he was clothed in a brand new suit of clothes. But although undoubtedly proud of his fine apparel, he was too cautious to show it off as yet. He knew full well that his new shell was very soft and tender, and that his enemies liked him best in this condition, and that, alas! even his own family would not hesitate, if they discovered him, to have a feast at his expense. So, knowing his danger, and being pretty well tired after his struggle with his toilet, Mr. Lobster prudently retired from the gaze of the outside world, until his new shell hardened.

But, when that was accomplished and he sallied forth, courageous and very hungry, you may be sure that an unhappy fate awaited the weak and tender member of fishland that fell in his path!

Surely the life of a fish must be far from monotonous, since he has always the excitement of hunting his own meals, and keeping out of the way of others of his kind who are hunting for him! Still, nervous prostration is quite unknown in that big water-world, and so it is to be inferred that the fishes live only for the pleasures of the day, and do not worry over the possible unpleasant things of the morrow.

"Which," said grandma, as she folded up her sewing, "is often a very good principle to go on. So, children, off to bed with you, and another evening we will learn how Sammy met the Pilot."