

Amongst his fellow colony of crabs, Gull was considered the undisputed leader, not by any election or formal system of governance, but by reverence and respect. Indeed, Gull had earned his name after courageously battling off a seagull twice his size, an action that he is still astonished by years later. Gull was not a young crab by any means, having lived his expected life span twice over to arrive at a ripe and healthy twelve years old, but for what he lacked in youthfulness he made up for in experience. Gull had seen it all, from lightning strikes, to tsunamis, to the most feared danger by the crab colony, and the reason for Gull's namesake: seagull attacks.

The yellow glare of the morning sun was just peeking above the vast ocean ahead when Gull first awoke. Gull was infamously known as an early riser around the colony, waking up every morning to oversee the morning hunts and assisting his fellow crabs as they dragged dead fish, worms, oysters, and all sorts of meat back to the colony centre to be distributed amongst their compatriots. This morning, hunts were headed by a brutishly large crab named Claws.

There was certainly no question as to how Claws earned her name, for her large pincers stuck out like a sore thumb against her already massive body. To anyone unfamiliar with her stature, merely glimpsing Claws alone would be reason enough to take off and run for the hills for one's safety. However, Claws was well known around the colony as a gentle giant, always friendly and gentle with the young crablets, and more than willing to provide a helping hand to anyone who may

require it. Most importantly, however, Claws' enormous pincers were incredibly effective in hauling large fishes to and fro, keeping the colony well fed. As Claws scuttled into view, Gull could see she was already carrying a fresh piece of fish.

"Wow, what a find!" Gull called out in a series of clicks and snaps. Claws, with her pincers occupied with the task of balancing the piece of food, did not respond, instead continuing to scuttle forward until she was within hopping distance of Gull.

"Fresh off the beach!" Claws snapped back, dropping the wet fish on the sand between the two. Gull could now see the fish in detail, making it out to be a green-headed salmon with light-orange scales. It was a massive catch, likely a weight only Claws could lift alone.

"Shall we take it back to the col-" Gull was interrupted mid-question by the sound of a different fish being dragged along the sand as another crab scuttled into view. As the crab approached, Gull identified him as Pelican: a young medium-sized crab known equally for his impressive work ethic, and his poor temperament. After nearly a minute more of scuttling, Pelican finally arrived within hopping distance of Gull, dropping a pale piece of cod on the ground next to Claws' salmon. He scowled as he noticed Claws' catch was bigger than his own.

"It's still a wonderful catch, Pelican," Gull clicked sympathetically. Pelican had made it no secret his ambitions to become Gull's successor after his passing, which given Gull's age was seeming more and more imminent each coming day.

Regardless, Gull didn't see himself in the business of nominating an heir, having

resolved long ago to let the colony fully decide which crab to follow after him. Even if it were up to him, Pelican would not be the first crab on the list. No, he was too ambitious for Gull's liking, too brash and always competitive. Either way, the decision was not in Gull's hands. If the colony wanted Pelican as leader, then they would have Pelican as leader.

"Let's take these catches back to the colony, shall we?" Gull asked, choosing not to dwell over what he could not control. Without replying, Pelican picked up his catch and proceeded to scuttle towards the colony, scowling as he did so. Claws offered Gull a sympathetic glance before picking up her piece and following suit. After watching both of them disappear from view, Gull scuttled in the opposite direction to find a fish of his own. As he moved swiftly across the wet sand, Gull found himself lost in thought again. Who would be chosen to lead the colony after him? Would it be Pelican? Would Pelican make a good leader after all? Perhaps Gull was judging him too harshly... Pelican had a brilliant mind, motivation, all the qualities of a great leader. Maybe, just maybe...

Gull's thoughts were interrupted by the deafening screech of a seagull flying overhead. "No," Gull thought to himself, "*Whatever the future may hold, there is no point in worrying now. Just focus on the catch.*"

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By the time Gull returned to the colony, the sun had risen firmly above the horizon, baking the beach sands in a soft, warm, yellow glow. Gull scuttled in and

placed his catch – a cod and a couple small oysters – onto the food pile that was accumulating in the centre. For most crabs in the colony, the day was just getting started. Builder crabs – crabs who built and repaired burrows – all crowded around one corner of the colony, planning and constructing the very newest shelters, while small crablets stood at the edge of the food pile, gasping at how tall it had become. Hunting crabs scuttled towards the colony, bearing yet more food while cleaning crabs made sure to pick up any small pieces left behind that could attract unwanted attention. Somewhere on the outskirts of the colony, Gull knew, Scavenger crabs – crabs who scavenged the nearby forests for leaves, sticks, and other useful materials – would be returning from their morning excursion, pincers full of necessities.

Amongst the bustling colony, however, one crab stood alone: Pearl. Named for his talent in scouting out oysters, Pearl was the colony's very best at collecting the molluscs, bringing home dozens upon dozens each time he used to go hunting. Used to. It had been only a month now since Pearl had fallen off a steep cliff, breaking one of his pincers beyond repair and severely damaging the other. He had never been the same since then. Due to the damage to his pincers, he hadn't been – and likely would never again be – able to collect oysters for the colony. Gull could only imagine how he felt, having to abandon his passion only a quarter into his life.

Not wanting to leave Pearl alone, Gull decided to wait next to him until it was time to serve the first meal, once all the hunters had returned with food, and

scavengers with goods. Slowly, Gull moved from where he stood to an open space beside Pearl. Despite Gull's best efforts at subtlety, Pearl took notice.

"How are you doing, Pearl?" Gull asked kindly, making a conscious effort to soften his normally enthusiastic tone. Pearl only gave a sharp click in response, keeping his eyes trained on the food pile as a small crab whom Gull could not identify placed an oyster on top. "*Oh what a terrible time to bother him,*" Gull thought, realising his presence could only upset the poor crab further. It must be painful enough for him to have to watch other crabs do what he used to love so much, let alone having Gull, known for his participation in the morning hunts, right next to him. Either way, Gull was in no state to help, his mind already occupied with the worries of old age, the colony, the future... what was he thinking moving here? Gull had just begun looking around for an excuse to leave when Pearl first spoke.

"How is it fair that I get the same amount as all the other crabs?" Pearl asked slowly, breaking the silence and startling Gull, who had already given up hope of any communication with Pearl.

"Pardon?" Gull clicked back.

"I said, how is it fair I get the same amount as all the other crabs? The same amount of food," Pearl repeated, a little louder this time.

"Well," Gull started, unsure of how to respond, "Not every crab gets the same amount. For example, a larger crab like Claws gets more, since she's bigger than most and needs the extra food, and the small crablets don't need as much, so—"

“Yes, yes, I know that,” Pearl interrupted, a tone of irritation sneaking into his normally patient voice, “I asked how it’s fair that I get the same amount as another crab. A crab like me.”

“Why shouldn’t you get the same amount? You have needs too, after all,” Gull asked, still not understanding Pearl’s question.

“Other crabs do work. They scavenge or clean or build or... hunt.” As soon as Pearl finished his last word, his irritation melted away into sadness. He looked down at his pincers, the left one wrapped in a piece of seaweed and the right one unrecognizably cracked. “Every other crab in this colony contributes in some way. I don’t. So why do I deserve the same amount of food as a crab who works, who scavenges, who cleans, who builds...? They earn their food, and their place in the colony. Am I not just... stealing mine?” Finally, Gull understood.

“Pearl,” Gull started softly, “Why do ”