

Crab Story

Long ago when the world was still new and at odds with itself, nobody understood how to please the great Sky Father. Each man talked to Him in his own way and each was sure he, alone, knew how to please Him. The strongest man talked the most and soon became the leader. But in time he grew old, and other men came forward talking of new ways to please. The ways of pleasing multiplied and clashed till each man crept abroad to slay the other so there would be—once again—but one way to talk to the great Sky Father.

The Sky Father was far from pleased. He sent a great flood to cover the world and drown all the talkers.

All save one man. He saw the flood coming, climbed into his canoe, and saved himself from a watery grave. But then, as he paddled along, he saw that it counted for little because the world had completely disappeared. As far as the eye could see, there was nothing but sky and water.

Still, in spite of the nothingness, this man—our hero-- was a dreamer. Each night as he lay in the bottom of his canoe, he dreamed of a new land growing out of the sea. And each day, as he sat up and paddled, he dreamed of a way to make his dream come true.

“Underneath all this water” he said to himself, “there must be some of the same old mud. If I could get a little of that mud, maybe I could make it grow into land.”

So he sent down a fish to scout out the bottom. But the fish, being a fish, had no interest in mud. As soon as the man put him back into the sea, he flipped his tail and swam off.

The man laid out his plan to a gull:

“You’re a creature of the sky,” he said, “Yet I’ve seen you dive into the sea for fish. Could you not dive all the way to the bottom and bring me back a little mud?”

“I’ll try, said the gull. And he did. Again and again he dove. But being a creature of the air, he couldn’t make it all the way to the bottom-- even when he folded his wings up tight. Then he had an idea. “Why don’t you send down a clam. I can fly up high with the clam in my beak, then drop him. He’ll fall with such force he’s bound to hit bottom and bring me back some mud.”

The scheme worked. But as soon as the clam hit bottom— being a creature of the mud and knowing the gull was likely to eat him-- he burrowed in deep and never returned,

In despair, the hero looked up into the grey sky, closed his eyes and talked to the Sky Father in the most pleasing way that he knew how.

While he was talking, he heard an odd clicked noise. He opened his eyes and saw approaching him the strangest creature he'd ever beheld. It had a hard black shell and a long boney tail; and it was using its tail for a rudder. At the same time, it was beating at the water with a set of short, skinny legs, yet making little progress since the legs were neither feet nor fins. And they were right up under its mouth.

"Who are you" asked the hero?

"I'm a horseshoe crab" said the creature.

"You don't look like any crab I know."

The crab stared at the hero with its double set of eyes. "I'm the oldest of all the crabs. The world was mine before you were here, my boy, and will be mine long after you're gone."

The hero didn't like being called "my boy", and was about to say so, when he noted the creature's very sharp tail. "Are you a friend or a foe" he asked?

"That depends" said the crab, "but one thing is indisputable: I'm the only one who can go to the depths for you and bring back a little mud."

"Oh, you know about the mud?"

"I know about the mud, and I know about the sea, and I know about the sky. I am a creature who's at home in all three places."

The hero wasn't sure if he wanted to be saved by this creature—or even if he believed him. Particularly when he stared into its double set of eyes.

"What's in it for you?"

"A small request. A bargain. When I bring you the mud and you make the land grow again, you must ask the Sky Father to allow the sea to rise and fall two times a day, so I can be in my element without having to travel. As you've already noticed, I find travel difficult; so the sea and the sky and the mud must come to me."

"That's a lot to ask for."

"Ah but without me, how will you get the mud to make the land grow?"

So the bargain was struck, and the world was re-created—still at odds with itself. Only now--where the sea rose and fell twice a day-- was a new territory. Not really land because twice a day it turned into sea. Not really sea because twice a day it turned into land.

The crab dug its sharp black carapace into the new wet softness and said:

"This area is mine. Additional payment for the bargain."

"No addition" said the hero. As he leaned over to remind the crab that the bargain only included the tide, the crab thrust up its sharp boney tail and stabbed the hero in the belly—leaving a hole that all men wear to this day.

“That’s a warning” said the crab. “You and all men after you will wear that hole as a reminder that I, the horseshoe crab, was here first and I make my own bargains. Be grateful I haven’t asked for more, or I’ll stab you again— in a more noticeable and less comfortable spot.”

So, for ever and ever, as long as the moon exerts its pull, the tide territory from its highest reach to its lowest--will never be sea and never be land.

And will never belong to us.