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The Hermit Crab

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Do you wish to hear more about the crab that steals his house?

Why does he do that?

His back is long and soft, and has no hard shell. If he could find no hard cover, he could not live. All the other crabs would bite or pinch him. So would many fish.

He is called the Hermit Crab.

As the Hermit Crab grows too big for one shell, he finds another. He never stays outside of his shell until he knows that he is about to die.

How does he know that?

I cannot tell.

But he comes out, lies flat down by his house, and dies. He wants his house to live in, not to die in. When he needs to change his shell-house, he hunts for one to suit him.

Then he puts in his long claw, to feel if it is clean and empty. Now and then he finds another crab in it. Then the two fight for it.

If some small thing lives in the shell which the hermit wants, he pulls it out with his long claw. Then he brings the new shell near, and springs from the shell he is in to the shell he wants, as you would spring from chair to chair.

On the end of his long, soft tail he has a hook. He twists his soft body into the new shell. Then he clasps his tail-hook to a small, round post in the top of the curl of the shell.

That holds him fast. His horny legs hang out in front. He can run and carry the shell. He can draw back into the shell and hide.

There is a small, pink, sea-animal, like a flower, that one kind of crab likes.

He wants it to grow on his shell.

It may be that it helps him to catch food.

Or, it may be that he likes it to hide the door of his shell.

This pink sea-creature can build more shell on the edge of the one the crab lives in.

This makes the shell larger. Then the crab need not move so often.

When he moves, he takes his friend with him. He puts out his claw and lifts her off his old shell, and sets her on the edge of the new one.

Then he holds her there until she has made herself fast. Then he slips in, tail first.

The fine red, pink, and white frills of the friend hang like a veil over his door.

They keep fish and other foes away. For this pink thing can sting.

Once I found a nice shell. I thought it was empty, and I kept it for eight or ten days in a box. Then I laid it on a shelf. One day I heard, clack! clack! clack! And there was my shell running up and down the shelf!

In the South Seas some of these crabs do not live in sea shells.

They live in cocoa-nut shells. They eat the meat of the nuts. When it is all eaten they seek for another shell.

Each night these crabs crawl into the water to get wet. They leave their eggs in the water to hatch.



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