

You sit on your beach towel, feeling more relaxed than you have in all your life. You've been in desperate need of a vacation, and now that you are finally here, you couldn't be happier. Your nearly finished drink sits beside you, and you know within the next few minutes, or so, a hot, bare-chested guy will be along to give you another. You figure the bottomless cocktails would be dangerous after a while, but you aren't too concerned. Hell, maybe they will give you the courage to chat up some of the local single guys and end up making the trip more memorable!

It was your cheating boyfriend that had led to the decision to take this vacation. He had been aloof for the past couple weeks, but since you'd been seeing him for two years, you decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. You were away all the time for work, and at first, your absence had led to frequent arguments. But after a while, they stopped, and your boyfriend seemed to be OK with the arrangement. In hindsight, you should have been aware of the signs. But your firm kept you so busy you could hardly blame yourself for not seeing his cheating ways!

You'd caught that asshole sleeping with a former friend of yours truly by happenstance. It made you enraged to have found out by seeing pictures of your friend's breasts on his phone, but to then catch him in the act? It was too much. You suspected he would have his mistress over, and you made your way home early, not believing it to be a possibility but needing to be sure all the same. The evidence was as clear as your boyfriend's red face as you walked in on the two of them amid their carnal act.

Naturally, you evicted him in an instant and deleted everything you shared on social media. You were enraged to have wasted so much of your life on such a scumbag. But there was no use chastising yourself for it now. It was done and time for you to move on. You had both purchased tickets to a week-long resort vacation, and even though you were down your plus one, you had the time booked off, and the funds already set aside. So you figured what the hell and decided that you could use the time off.

So here you are, sitting on the beach, not a care in the world as you drink in the sight of the crystal blue waters and other vacationers soaking up the sun. It is more than worth it, you think. You are finally able to relax and truly enjoy yourself. It will be alright, you figure, when you get back to your life and your work. You will be ready to take the necessary steps to move on, and you find yourself almost excited for the start of a new chapter of your life.

You are nearly asleep when the screams echo in your ears. At first, you think it is a dream, but soon, the cries become more frantic, and eventually, you open your eyes and stand up to find their source. Perhaps someone had spotted a shark in the water, you assume. Such things

are not impossible at this particular resort, you'd read. But the likelihood of one being hungry enough to venture into these waters was near the likelihood of being struck by lightning. Still, even the slightest sign of a fin in the water was likely to startle the casual tourist.

Yet that sight that awaits you is far more terrifying than anything you could have prepared for. A woman is the source of the shrieking, running around the beach in a panicked state. At first, you look around to see if anything is attacking her. But then your attention is drawn to her face. Her visage looks distorted somehow like something is stuck there. It appears orange and extends out from her mouth, and you wonder if something has bitten or attacked her. But as you watch, it seems to expand, becoming curved in the front as it visibly pushes out of her face. If you didn't know any better, you could swear that she is sprouting a beak!

The woman is obviously shrinking, her swimsuit too large on her lanky frame and threatening to fall off at any moment. But she doesn't seem concerned at the moment, occupied by trying to pull the beak from her face as she screams her distress. Yet as she does so, her voice begins to grow more high pitched, almost mimicking the bird she appears to resemble. She stops crying as the sound of her avian screech reaches ears that seem to be melting into the sides of her head.

She tries to grab her beak once more in an attempt to pull it off. Yet her fingers don't seem to be moving right and appear to carry an odd white sheen that glints off the sun. As you watch, they extend, flattening outward as all the joints and bone seem absent or dissolved. A similar shade starts to overtake her skin as several white points sprout out of her skin like weeds before popping outwards, like a 2D image coming to life. You can see her scratching frantically, but her digits are too weak to provide relief. As you stare, transfixed, you realize she is growing feathers. Like a bird.

The white feathers, the orange beak, and the screeching cry all seem to indicate that she is becoming a seagull. But how? These things aren't possible. It makes no rational sense. But there is nothing else that could account for the changes you see before you, save a drug additive to the cocktail you'd ordered. But you aren't the only one on the beach to notice. Everyone can't be drugged at once, right?

Another scream echoes in your ears and your eyes fall upon a man grasping desperately at his back. To your horror, you see something hard forcing its way out of his shoulder blades and reaching up over his head. He reaches up to touch it, oblivious to a similar growth emerging from his stomach as it tears at his shirt. You can see it shine in the light, a yellowish-green tint as it continues its merciless spread. He struggles to maintain his grasp on the thick calcareous plate, thrashing about even as his legs start to weaken, and he falls to the ground, crying out in panic.

He stares ahead, catching your eyes as he mouths the word “help. ” But you have no idea what to do. He seems to be gasping for breath as his chest begins to contract while the thick, yellowed shell crawls over him. Eventually, it seems to force its way under his shorts and rips them off with an audible tear. You know you should look away to preserve his modesty, but you realize that his genitals are melting away as his anus rotates underneath him, merging the two together. The remnants of his penis hang useless, only a sort of limp tube with a rounded opening remaining.

The shell on his back envelops the area where his ass once was, running down over his hips and merging with the one on his belly. You hear a loud crack and you gasp, thinking the shell has snapped his legs off. Yet with a disgusting squelch of melting tissue, you realize that his legs have collapsed, shriveling into dwindling stumps. One leg, however, seems to retain a modicum of muscle. You can see the exertion on the man’s face as he tries to pull himself along with his arms and single working leg, as though trying to escape his own body.

You scan the beach in a drunken stupor, trying to comprehend the Lovecraftian horrors you've just witnessed. Your eyes fall on another group of beachgoers, their mouths protruding into beak-like shapes, much as the woman before. Another man clutches his neck, the beginning of a massive slit that seems to resemble a fish’s gills. A couple of women are sporting a pair of pearl shells while their legs give out from under them and they fall over, crying for help as the calcareous growths envelop their stomachs and breasts.

There are more screams now, more people bellowing out in panic as they too bear witness to the disgusting changes. There seems to be a mass hysteria as the reality of what they are witnessing sinks in. Several people are mutating into shapes that have more in common with the creatures on the beach than their former human features.

One woman shrieks as she holds out a claw where a human hand once was, its vibrating click not quite hidden from the force of her screams. She raises the other hand, as with an audible snap of bone, her palms split down the center. Yet there is no blood or tearing of flesh as the apparent wound fills with muscle and tissue, allowing it to articulate in its present state. She clicks the new joints back and forth, in much the same fashion as the claw on her other limb. Two fingers each start to fuse, a grotesque hard substance covering them as they melt together. They form a series of irregular ridges on the insides and grow pointed at the end. The woman now sports two sets of crab-like claws that click in tandem with her screeches of terror.

You can see something wriggling under the woman’s bathing suit as she screams for help, bulges that look like arms trying to break through. They seem to be writhing uncontrollably,

desperate to touch the ocean air as they lengthen, their movements becoming more complex the longer you stare. You think the woman should be crying in pain, but it does not appear they are bursting from inside of her body, rather emerging from her flesh as a new attachment.

She starts running frantically as 3 pairs of legs tear out of her bathing suit with an audible rip. You can see the same exposed tendons tying them to her stomach as their hard pallid flesh rises from the links to encompass her flattening stomach. Each limb has far too many joints, pointed at the tips as they move outside the woman's control. It seems as though she has three pairs of crab's limbs now as she tries in vain to grasp them with non-existent fingers.

Yet more horrifying are the things writing under the skin of her cheeks. They painlessly pop outwards like wriggling maggots as they start to twitch. Tears run down the woman's face as several sets of crustacean maxilla start rotating in a swinging motion, pulling the very air towards her gaping, circular lipless mouth. She can no longer scream now, evidently lacking the vocal prowess to do so.

One person's change disgusts you more than the others, however. A bigger man trying to run simply falls over, the muscle in his legs having evidently atrophied. He struggles to move the, but it is as though the bones and muscles have dissolved into nothing as the fleshy masses began receding into an oddly bulky body. He tries to pull himself forward with his arms, but soon they too lose the ability to move. He is forced motionless as his ass begins to swell, and a disgusting mottled brown shade sweeps over him, accented by what you conceive to be hundreds of tiny spines.

The more you gaze around, the more obvious the mutations are not limited to a few victims. Almost everyone seems a little small in their clothes as they frantically grasp at changing skin or appendages that belong to no human being. Is it an airborne infection? Something in the water? Whatever it is, no one in particular seems to be spared.

You freeze for a moment, the idea of transforming overtaking you. Could you feel the beginnings of change in yourself? You can't be sure with your heart rate so high. You have to get out of here in case you still have time to escape unscathed.

You try to grab your towel, but stiffness in your arms causes you immense alarm. You realize in horror your fingers no longer move the way you expect. Your face white as a sheet, you glance down to see your ring and pinky merging into one solid lump of flesh. The skin forming underneath darkens to red as the ridges on the underside harden into irregular shapes. Several snaps within the boneless appendages form deep crevasses, and for a moment, you worry that you've injured your new flesh. But the joints form over with red carapace, and you realize

you can articulate your claw in ways that your human hand could not move. You have a crustacean claw!

You look on in horror as the discoloration spreads from your new claw and envelops your arms, causing the muscles and skeletal structure underneath to dissolve. You can feel your radius and ulna, your carpels, your biceps, triceps, and deltoids, all melting into mush as an audible crack resonates through your arm. It is followed by several more as your arm bends with multiple new joints. Your limb is now that of a crustacean!

You don't bother with the towel as you spring up and run, ignoring the tingling spreading all over your body. You aren't as changed as some people you see running, and you wonder that maybe if you get out of the hot zone, there might be a chance that you can be saved, be turned back. You have to believe that. The alternative is too tragic to comprehend.

You can feel your stomach start to ache with what you assume is the development of more legs underneath your own bathing suit. New limbs birth painlessly from your abdomen, creating an alarming tactile sense as their tips connect with your bathing suit. There are six spots in all, and you try to keep the bile down as you feel them start to wriggle. You can detect each joint as it forms, giving the crustacean limbs a greater range of motion. But your still-human brain cannot control them, which disgusts you even more.

You dash towards the hotel, trying desperately to get away from the beach before you change too much. You ignore the sight of your hair falling out around you. You ignore your breasts, how the flesh is no longer sensitive, how the fat and tissue are dissolving into a flat chest. How your chest is compacting in on itself as the bases of your new limbs are brought closer to each other while their insistent twitching grows more and more frantic. You can tell how large your bathing suit is becoming on you, how much harder it is to keep it up as the straps begin sliding down your thinning shoulders.

All around you, people are running, screeching as alien appendages start busting through their clothes and skin. It is a nightmare beyond anything you could fathom, more horrific than any movie. Many are in much worse shape than yourself as their limbs go limp, the bones inside melting as they simply fall over. They writhe on the ground as their bodies dissolve into shells or carapaces, helpless to do anything but await their eventual fates.

The woman from before is squawking audibly now, her bathing suit far too small for her shrinking frame. It falls to the ground as she steps awkwardly out of it, though nothing remains for it to cover. The woman's breasts have already shrunk into her chest, leaving nothing but pale lumpy skin. Soon you see the familiar pinpricks of white that signal the formation of more

feathers. You see her feet as she stomps about, the toes lengthening while orange webbing starts to form between them. You see her trip and stumble over her new feet as she desperately tries to retain balance through her drastic changes.

Her forehead starts to slope as her hair falls out in clumps, causing her all the more panic. You can see how her hips are steadily losing definition as several long black-tipped feathers start to burst out from where her ass once was. Her body is evidently lighter than before as her flapping wings start to give her some lift. She awkwardly hops and hovers around to show her disdain of being mostly gull. You can see her legs diminishing into her rounded avian belly as her stature shrinks to one befitting a sea bird.

Your gaze falls from her to some of the others running ahead of you. Yet you can't afford to be distracted or to lose sight of your goal. You are changing all the while, shrinking as your bones crack audibly in your ears. You can feel your rib cage starting to contract as the bones fade away, and your organs liquefy, the needs of your soon-to-be body much simpler than the human you. But you still have your legs, your lungs, and heart, and you keep running, desperate for any salvation from the nightmarish fate that has befallen you.

Yet it is soon clear that the hotel harbors no safe haven for your humanity. You see a pair of men running towards the beach in apparent response to all the commotion. You wave your one human hand towards them, even as you feel the hard exoskeleton forming down your shoulders. Yet at the sight of you all, they seem to stop. You think for a moment that they are stunned by what has occurred.

Yet even from this distance, you can see what is becoming of their faces. One's neck starts to thicken, a series of tiny tube-like feet moving up his face as his legs splay. His mouth starts to fill in, a look of horror on his frozen face. The other grabs his mouth, several dozen tendrils bursting forth from his jaw as he falls over with weakening legs. The hotel is no salvation. For all you know, the entire resort is subject to this grotesque transformation.

With the realization that there is no escape, many of the beachgoers start to turn back towards the water. Some of them are close, but the mutations to their bodies make it more and more difficult to operate their anatomy. Many have fallen, their limbs no longer able to support bipedal locomotion. You have a passing thought; are all these people to die? Do their changing forms require the seawater that might as well be miles from their motionless bodies? You don't know enough about beach life to be certain, but you don't want to take that risk for yourself!

You need to get to the water. You don't know what you are changing into, but it is getting harder to move. You don't want to be this. . . disgusting thing, whatever it is you are

becoming. But the biological drive to survive overrides your fear, and you find yourself turning around, as so many others are doing.

You immediately begin to regret your decision as your gaze is forced upon the man from earlier, the one that seemed frozen in place. His changes are far more grotesque than you could have ever fathomed. His limbs are gone, simple stumps that have rotated underneath him. The sight makes you thankful for your own legs, even the extra ones pushing from the sides of your body as you struggle towards your eventual goal.

His body is writhing uncontrollably, as though trying to retain some semblance of a human shape before the changes overtake him fully. Yet his shrinking trunk seems to become stiffer and stiffer, making his wriggling pointless. The area where his butt was located, if you can still equate that to the form he now possesses, is rounded, thicker than the rest of his trunk-like body. It is as though the flesh is hardening, an endoskeleton forming underneath to support his frame. The squelching sounds you can still hear are likely the result of his bones liquifying to fit his new form.

But worst of all is his head. His neck is gone, melded with the trunk he now possesses. His eyes are frozen open, forced to stare ahead as the transformation carries mercilessly onwards. His facial features melt as you watch, his nose diminishing to nothing as his mouth remains open in horror. Something begins wriggling from the gaping maw, and if you were able, you'd wretch from the sight of it. It looked like dozens of worms trying to burrow their way out of the circular opening. Yet as you watch, they seem to stabilize into a ring of tendrils that he will now forever use to filter food and detritus into his simple digestive tube.

If you have to guess, you'd say he is on his way to life as a sea cucumber. You can't possibly imagine a worse fate, unable to see, to hear, or touch. There are only a few discernible human shapes sticking out of the echinoderm trunk, but even those are fading. You can see something being pushed out from the back of him, a long cylindrical paste as the man's former human life is extinguished.

You try to ignore the nightmarish shapes as you run, but it is impossible not to stare with empathy at those that can no longer move. The man from before with the shell is staring ahead now as his mouth starts fusing from the lips. His hair falls out, dissolving into the wind. His eyes cloud over until his vision is gone completely. His head proceeds to contract as well, melting into his neck and the trunk of his body. You can see his skin changing from its pinkish hue to an almost pearly white as it continues to melt and contract in on itself until nothing human remains. A crack of bones resounds as his spine, his ribs, and chest all snap while the resulting

slush of muscle starts to writhe and pulsate in a desperate act to maintain mobility. But you are certain that no human cognition remains in that mass of flesh.

His arms begin to snap and dissolve as they are pulled into his new cavity. There is nothing of the former human limb left, no muscle or fingers or bones as with a slurp, it is absorbed into the mass of clam meat inside the shell encapsulating it. Some of the muscles form complex attachments to the insides of the shell, working to pull it closed over the mass of swelling meat. Yet the one leg seems to retain some mobility, hanging out of the side as though seeking something.

The shell starts to close on the wet-looking lump of muscle where once a fully developed human body lay. You can see the lovely shell curving along one side, spiraling with rings of growth. The shell glistens yellow-green in the ocean air as the steadily shrinking Asianic clam instinctively uses its foot to try and burrow into the sand and escape predation.

You spy the woman with the crab claws stumbling awkwardly, her weight being held up by the three sets of limbs underneath. You can see the armor-like exoskeleton covering her chest, her breasts fading away as all the contours of her form are forced in a box-like configuration with pointy bits of an exoskeleton.

An audible snap of bone reverberates as her human legs form the same number of joints to match her other three pairs. You shudder in disgust as her legs bend at unnatural angles, a grotesque reminder of the skin crawling over your arms and the similar fate you are about to undergo. Her hips recede into the pale hardened flesh as her former human limbs rotate underneath where the others lay to aid in her sideways scuttle for shelter. You see the look of pure terror on the woman's still-human face, but she can no longer scream.

You are unable to tear your gaze away as her eyes start to bubble out of their sockets while a complete array of tissue and fibers burst forth within new stalks. Her eyes roll back in the woman's head as they blacken, her stalks swaying in an attempt to see all around her. You can't imagine the horror she is undergoing, to see her entire body all at once as the last bits of humanity fade from her mind.

The woman's changes start to complete as she shrinks, her head contracting as her neck reduces to fuse and form her cephalothorax. She has a distinctive squared back, her one larger claw digging into the earth as she looks for a place to hide from the shadows looming over you all, some of the former humans now with the minds of predators looking for their next kill. As she does, you notice that parts of her carapace seem to be changing color to match the sand. She

is a ghost crab now, using her chromatophores to blend into the surroundings to try and escape predation.

You have a more difficult time stumbling forward as your own hind legs crack, the bones inside of them dissolving and changing the limbs to jelly. No! Not that! You can't propel yourself with your new claws; one is meant for feeding while the other smaller one is more adapted for digging. You can feel your new limbs struggling for purchase on the ground, but you can't move them on your own. Your brain is still too human to deal with alien appendages!

A passing thought makes you regret your decision to come here. No vacation is worth the horrific changes you are being forced to go through. Why was this happening!? You could have been home, resting in bed for a few days, rather than coming to this apparent heaven only to be thrust into hell. No chance for understanding, no chance for salvation. Simply condemned to a cursed configuration beyond your ability to properly comprehend.

Your body shudders as you feel the bones cracking under your legs finally give way, and you tumble onto your side. Your human arm reaches out reflexively, but your fingers are fusing, and your pseudo claw does nothing to slow your fall. But you are smaller now, and the impact does not affect you as much as you had assumed. Soon your other claw is fully formed, and you click both of them open and closed in panic. You miss your fingers, your sense of touch, and interacting with the world in a human capacity.

A sickening squelching resonates through your body as the boneless expanse of your ass migrates outwards. You can feel something extending out of your backside as it curves down towards your back legs. Muscles and neural connections make the thing move as it grows even longer than your shrinking trunk. You can feel it curling downwards as several feathery protrusions burst forth from one side. Sets of paired appendages not unlike minute versions of your side limbs, start wriggling out of your control. The shape reminds you more of a lobster than a crab, but you can't be sure with your limited senses. Does it really matter, anyway?

You can feel your vaginal opening shrinking as well, the sensitive spots fading away, much to your disdain. Your anus is merging with your vagina to form a single genital/excretory pore, migrating down towards the base of your final pair of legs. Inside your ovaries, millions and millions of infertile eggs take root, waiting for your hind limbs to take in a male's sperm and fertilize your future generations.

Your boneless hind legs start to snap in several places as the toes all fuse together into a single-pointed end. Your hips retract, and your multi-jointed legs rotate towards your other fully developed crustacean limbs. With a bit of effort, you can force a set under you, and you are

upright once more. You can't coordinate them on your own, but a part of your brain isn't human anymore. All at once, you feel the spidery limbs propelling you forward in much the same direction as you had been traveling. It seems your diminishing intellect has the same idea as you do.

All over your near-boneless body, the thickening red exoskeleton is spreading, providing a covering to your frame. You find it easier to move as your body continues to shrink, easily half the size of your human mass and still diminishing. You can feel your back tightening as its carapace provides protection to all the new joints your body needs for locomotion.

Your face is still human for the moment, though hairless. What a sight you must make! You can't move your neck any longer, now that it has fused with your body. And you are thankful for that, the inability to see the rest of your form. Yet to your horror, your eyes suddenly sprout forward, rising forth over your skull on new stalks. Before the connections break and you are blinded, you are forced to see every angle of your changing form. You want to scream but are unable to vocalize. And you can no longer hear anyway as your ears dissolve away.

You are thankful for your blindness as several growths push their way out of your mouth, as though crawling their way from the grave. They form the same types of multi-jointed appendages as your legs, though their range of motion is limited. They seem to swim towards your o-shaped mouth, likely for drawing in food. You can feel your mouth collapsing as your lips, your teeth, and your tongue all evaporate away. You are left with the formation of a gizzard, a passive form of mechanical digestion. Never to speak or chew or kiss again.

You can feel your nose flattening into your shrinking head, and you are now left completely senseless even as your legs motor away on instinct. Yet soon, the necessary neurons develop, and your stalk eyes are once more connected to your brain. But the sight that awaits you is not what you'd been hoping for. Your world is split into thousands of TVs, every set muted and gray and nearly impossible to make sense of. You have the compound eyes of a crustacean, and although you can rotate the stalks to see movement around you, your vision is useless for human comprehension. Your still cognizant brain tries to make sense of the vague shapes as your eyes rotate all around. You can no longer make out the details of the stragglers as they change into inhuman shapes, and for that, you are extremely grateful.

You can tell you are still shrinking, that your mass is being reduced while the dunes on the beach rise to mountains before you. It is a discomfiting sensation to be reduced in size, all the swirling shapes swelling larger as your own dimensions diminish with a sickening sucking sensation. You can feel the remains of your bones turn to dust, entire organ systems laid bare

before the bear essentials take root and form the basis of your rudimentary digestive and circulatory system.

All at once, several pinpricks of sensation erupt all over what remains of your face. You can see the two largest stocks in front of your eyes, forming multi-segmented joints that allow you to flex outwards with them. But it is the ones growing beside your eyes, averaging the same length, that grabs your attention. They can pick up molecules on the wind, ones that your changing mind interprets as scents. Another set detects vibrations and movements, and you realize that it provides you the crustacean equivalent of sound. The various antennae and antennules work in consort to present you a view of the world, yet it is one as alien to you as the body you now possess.

The changes seem nearly complete at this juncture. You will never be human again, your fading mind seems to tell you. Never to hold, never to cry, never to laugh or scream or speak ever again. It is getting harder to think as your head continues to shrink, your skull cracking as the bones melt away while parts of your brain reduce in size to fit the limited expanse that is to be your head. You think that is a small blessing to have a peaceful death of self, that you will not live a limited life in fear of what you've lost as a human. You want to give in to the instincts now but are somewhat afraid to, trying to stubbornly cling to a human understanding of the situation while you still can.

You are overloaded from the sensory inputs from your stalk eyes, antenna, and antennules. Your world is broken into fractured images, and you need your antenna to feel around the ground as you continue to shrink. Your antennules pick up a myriad of scents, though little of them are of interest to your crustacean brain.

A massive shape suddenly towers over you, and a primitive part of your brain screams at you to run. Your remaining ability to form images with your human mind interprets the tower as a seagull, a deadly predator to your new species. But before the beak strikes home, you find a vacant shell, crawling inside of it and dodging the beak by near millimeters. You feel somewhat safe here, and even as the shadow dissipates, you have no desire to leave here.

Through your stalk eyes, you can see that another one of your fellows is not so lucky. The gull has a tasty hermit crab in its beak and swallows the squirming crustacean in one gulp. You have no way to tell if that poor crab was once human like you, or if the gull was the woman you'd first seen transforming. But it matters little now.

But you are not out of danger yet. Your new hind limbs and abdominal uropods grab the inside of the shell. Your front pairs of legs lift you up, shell and all as you look for a place of

safety. Your waving antennules soon find what you are looking for, and you run forward, knowing that the sky is full of gulls, and your life is in danger every moment you stay here. Eventually, your legs touch the water, and you dive in, swimming to the bottom of the relatively deep tidal pool. The gills on your legs circulate oxygen, and your motionless body finally starts to relax.

Down at the bottom of the pond, you are safe for now from predation. The last threads of your human awareness are replaced by the simple instincts that will control your life now. You are a hermit crab, driven to hide, to feed, and to find a mate to fertilize your eggs so that you may birth the next generation of your kind.

After what feels like an eternity, parts of your human consciousness begin to reemerge. You have no idea how it is possible. Vague images of hermit crab existence come to the forefront, and that life is as alien to you as the body you have been forced to acquire. You hardly have time to shift through the myriad of images before you realize the situation you are in.

You've been conducting your activities near a tidal pool, the one you assume gave you safety when you first transformed. At this moment, you are fully submerged in the pool, your gills providing all the oxygen you require.

You are not alone here. There is another hermit crab, a male, in the pool with you. The male is one of the transformed humans, of that you are certain. Neither of you is in control of the animals that you have become. The act you are about to perform is all based on the instincts that dominate your actions. The realization of what is to occur dawns on you, and you wonder if that is the cause of your temporary reawakening.

You come out of your shell as the male does, feeling swelling in your genital pore. You crawl over the male, aware of the disturbing sensations of his legs inching over your own. You are a little larger than him, which provides you some comfort. You need not fear his attack. You can sense him creeping up towards your head, your pairs of seeking antennas touching as your stomachs line up, and your various appendages touch to hold your positions.

The mating itself is relatively quick. Your hind legs stimulate your mate to encourage him to release the load in his own genital pore. You feel the male expel his spermatophore into range, and the sticky substance easily grips the grooves of your appendages. Your own genital opening pulsates in rhythm to encourage the spermatophore to enter into your sex. With a

violent motion, you force yourself away from the male, who swims away in fear of your larger form. Your body does not care. You have what you need from him.

The human part of your awareness is repulsed by the act, even though the hermit crab you have become feels fulfilled in an existential way beyond your ability to properly fathom. It is a brief action, and the idea of what you have touched disgusts you a little. But still, you have no control of your performance as your body envelops the life-giving gift the male has bestowed upon you. You feel it entering you for storage as your mind slowly slides away, and your hermit crab self goes about its regular business.

Your consciousness comes and goes over the next couple weeks after that, generally while your body is resting. You exist in and around a single tidal pool, an entire universe to the crab you have become. Part of you doesn't want to remember your human life, and you are distressed beyond all imaging to experience the world in such a foreign way. Your mind despises the notion that you will no longer be human again, no longer to return to the life you once knew. Yet all you can do in those brief moments are observe with interest the first-hand experiences of the hermit crab form you now inhabit.

At last, your body seems to know it is time as your human mind wakes up to pressure in your genital pore. You are no longer in your tidal pool home, and in terror, you realize you are in a vast expanse of water. Unlike your previous sexual activity, you feel a semblance of pleasure pressing from your primitive sex and your mind becomes awash in those simple endorphins, or whatever their equivalent might be. You can sense the vibrations of what you imagine you'd hear as a sort of squelching as your body pleurably expels the first clump of ooze that carries within it hundreds of eggs.

For a moment, you are fearful why your body is designed to eject the egg casing so carelessly in the water. Your hind legs guide the mass towards your abdomen where the odd one-sided filaments you remembered developing clutch onto them like a life preserver. You can feel them attach securely even as your genital pore pulses with another thick ooze of eggs. You allow your human mind to enjoy the one semblance of sexual pleasure it has been afforded since your drastic changes what feels like an eternity ago.

You are aware that your body is entirely aquatic now, existing in the expansive ocean beyond your former home. Here there is a greater risk of predation by smaller fishes and even gulls that take a dive at you. Yet you need to keep your eggs moist and your offspring safe. The vastness of the sea is nearly lost to your primitive senses, but you can appreciate some of the majesty of this new world you have found yourself in. There is little your limited senses can detect, but things gargantuan as fish or as tiny as motile plankton attract your interest, and you

even make a game of trying to match them to human knowledge of ocean life while your mind is awake enough to perceive them.

All the while, your eggs are getting bigger, more developed. It is getting increasingly difficult to keep them in your clutches, and you aren't so worried about it anymore. You are literally carrying thousands of larvae, and although the ocean is vast and full of dangers, you know there is a place in it for at least some of your offspring. Eventually, you can sense the eggs drifting off into the saltwater to their own eventual fate, the tiny developing future crabs swimming on their own power. A part of you is satisfied that you have successfully reproduced, but soon your awareness starts to falter, and your hermit crab body makes it back to shore. Within your familiar home once more, your human consciousness disappears back to the depths of hermit crab instincts until once again, you awake with the urge to mate.