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## CLAW-CAMP FOR SOLDIER CRABS

It was early morning and the beach was deserted. At the far end of a very long stretch of sand was a clump of rocks; and in the middle of the rocks was a small clearing. A number of tiny creatures gathered there, waiting and chattering amongst themselves. "What do you think we are doing here?" one asked. Another replied: "Waiting like we were told to, that's all." This seemed okay until another of the little creatures said: "Waiting for what?"

Before anyone could answer, another creature arrived. He was quite round the same as the little ones, but much bigger; and when he spoke his voice was deeper. In fact, he didn't really speak at all - he mainly shouted. "Right!" he said, "You will be wondering why you are here..."

"Yes," came a voice from the middle of the group of little ones, "We were just talking about that."

"Silence in the ranks!" bellowed the big round ball. "You will not speak unless spoken to; and even then you will say nothing, because..." and he paused to glare around the little balls standing before him, "You have nothing to say that I want to hear. So, for now, you will just listen."

The big round ball strolled around for a bit as if he was thinking. Whenever he heard a sound from the group of little balls, he would spin in that direction and glare; then he would stroll on. Finally, he stopped and turned to face them. "My name is Sergeant Grouch, and you are in Claw-Camp. Claw-Camp, you sad-looking lot, is where you will learn to be better than the little crabs that you are."

"Are we crabs, then?" said a tiny voice from the group.

"What's this?" growled the Sergeant in amazement, "You don't even know what you are! I can see I really have got my work cut out." He raised himself up to his full height, which wasn't much higher than it was before, and said: "Of course you are crabs, just little crabs at the moment; miserable little crabs. You are also what are known as recruits; but when I've finished your training, you will be a part of the finest army in the whole wide world. You will be troopers in the great Soldier-Crab Army!"

Over the next few days, Sergeant Grouch taught the little crabs what they had to do if they were to be real soldier crabs. When he thought it was safe, he would take them out to the beach and march them up and down. One most important part of the training was digging into the sand. "This will be your life-saver," he said, "Now watch me." The Sergeant moved to an open space and began rolling around on the sand. As he did, he sank lower and lower until he couldn't be seen at all.

"He's gone," said one of the little crabs. In a few seconds, the sand moved and Sergeant Grouch rolled himself out of the hole he'd dug so that he could be seen again. "I heard that," he said, "And yes, that's the idea. There are times when you will have to be gone."

"What times are those?" asked one of the recruits.

"Never mind that now," growled the Sergeant, "Just get on and roll around. Dig yourselves holes and bury yourselves in them - that means ALL of you!" he roared. Then he watched the little crabs as they rolled around in the sand, giggling and laughing; never really getting any lower than they were to start with. Very few actually managed to bury themselves and the Sergeant was disappointed. "Absolutely hopeless! Unbelievably useless!" he shouted, "Do you want to be soldiers, or not?" When they all said they did, he pointed with his claw at the sand. "Right - again! Roll and dig, roll and dig; and make a better job of it than you did the first time!"

Towards evening they were all back at the rocks and Sergeant Grouch was explaining about the rolling and digging: "It's a cruel world out there, and times will come when you need to hide, in particular from big sea-birds that fly over just looking for little crabs like you."

"Why would they care about us?" asked one of the recruits.

"Because, lad," explained the Sergeant, "To them you are very tasty. If they catch you out in the open, they will swoop down, pick you up in their very sharp beaks, and then they will eat you!"

On hearing this, all of the little crab-recruits moaned, and some began to cry. "I'm glad you understand," said Sergeant Grouch, "So you will also understand that when I give the order to hide, you will obey immediately. What you will NOT do is stand around gaping, wondering why I have given the order; because, if you do, you will be part of a sea-bird's breakfast."

It was pretty clear to the little crabs what they had to do to become real soldiers, and in a few weeks the Sergeant thought they were ready to join the army. It was a very large one and, when they were all marching along the beach together, it was a wonderful sight. As they were marching, Sergeant Grouch told them another good thing about being in the soldier-crab army: "You will go to foreign places; you will see the world."

And he was quite right. They marched along the beach which was a very long one, and the new soldier-crabs imagined this was the world the Sergeant had told them about. Sometimes

they would go around the rocks at the end of the beach and onto another bit of beach that they'd never seen before; and they supposed these were the foreign parts. Then the Sergeant had them turn around and march back the way they came from. Quite often they had the order to hide, and they did as they were told and rolled around, digging into the sand. When the danger was past, they came up to the surface and they marched again.

After a few weeks of marching and digging, marching and more digging, one of the new soldier-crabs asked the Sergeant: "What's it all for? I mean: is this what life's really about - just marching and digging?"

The Sergeant frowned. "Of course it is. What else is life all about? And remember, lad," he added wisely, "You don't have to worry about any of that. Your job is just to follow orders. You don't need to THINK. You're in the army now!"