

The Scorpion and the Crab

by [Robert Heard](#) (April 2022)



Crab, Kitab Na't al-hayawan (book of the characteristics of animals), 13th century.

By the sea, in a windy desert,
Hot and white and dry,
The scorpion, looking from his rock,
Saw a crab nearby.

The strangers were alarmed—

They stared across the sand—
Till Scorpy, lowering his tail,
Held out his pincher-hand.

Then Crabby breathed a sigh,
Likewise he reached out, too,
Though lifting such a heavy claw
On land is hard to do.

Once they'd made first contact,
The scorpion asked the crab,
'Friend, why are you so far from home,
And look so wet and drab?'

Then he squinted very hard,
And his beady eyes could see
The soaking crab was followed by
A wet and washing sea.

The sea that takes away
Every crawling crab,
Reaching through the running tide
For anything to grab.

Then Crabby cried to Scorpy,
Breathless in the sun,
'Listen, friend, I've little time,
The sand begins to run!

'The next wave will be high!
And then the coming tide!
Cousin, though it's up to you—
You only can decide—

'It's only my advice—
But when there blows a gale,
Get bigger claws against the surf,
And much less of a tail!

'And you'll need a heavy body,
But most of all, I pray ... '
But what Crabby's prayer was for,
With Crabby washed away.

For then the tide retreated,
And took him from the sand,
As Scorpy for his cousin reached
Too late a pincher-hand,

Dreaming of his hiding place,
Under a sandy drift,
And all the sticky tongues and snouts
That look for rocks to lift.

Then waking, he cried, 'O cousin!
Hear the desert blast!
Grow yourself a poison tail
Or you'll never last!'

But in the desert wind,
And in the ocean gale,
The crab could only wave his claw,
While Scorpy waved his tail.

[Table of Contents](#)

Robert Heard was born and educated in Toronto, Canada, and is retired from work in the city's library system. His avocations are poetry, and illustration.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)