

The Eyes Have It (or Jonah's Revenge)

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The accident happened in the 15-fathom water just off Tribulation Point. I was hauling a pair of rocked-down traps—stuck fast on the bottom—when the rope went tight as a fiddle bow and parted just before the block. The tag-end bullwhipped one of my baby-blues straight out of my head. I once bore an eight-pound child without an epidural and thought I knew the meaning of pain. Oh, so wrong.

I am Roxanne Wakefield, that lobsterman with an eyepatch, famed of coastal lore and day-trippers' selfies the world over. I am the local color, so scenic. I don't mind it, though some days I'd just as soon park a parrot on my shoulder and be done with it. Arrr, ye scurvy boiled-egggers! Damn your eyes and bog-blast your cursed photo-graphs.

Tourists generally take me for a coarse old salt and I'm happy to play the part. When I graduated Princeton Law back in '87 I never dreamed I'd end up out here, doing what I do. But it turns out studying law and practicing it are two very different things. I gave it six months then bid that whole world a fond adieu. Regrets: zero. And now I get to play pirate.

The ferry, *Carol B*, sits idling beside the dock collecting the last of the day's tourists for the return trip to the mainland. No hotel out here on Ram's Head; you don't want to miss that boat. I count a dozen passengers, light for an August Saturday. A well-dressed twenty-something couple stands on the dock waiting to board. I sense their reluctance to be mingled with the hoi polloi. Royals. Cue an eye-roll, singular.

When I look toward the ferry, most of the passengers pretend they weren't staring at me. Today, it is not my eyepatch that has drawn their collective gaze, it is the serious case of crabs with which I am presently afflicted. Not so much a case, really, as a crate. A wooden crate half-full of angry crabs I am converting into dinner. To my right, seated on the open afterdeck of the *Carol B*, Granny and Grampa Daytripper are fascinated.

"What kind of crabs are they?"

"Rock crabs. Some people call 'em Jonahs."

"And they're good to eat?"

"Just the claws, but yeah, wicked good." I pluck a fine specimen from the crate, wrench off one claw and toss the now understandably angrier crab into the sea.

Granny looks quizzical; asks, "Just one claw?"

"I don't like to leave them defenseless when their only crime is being delicious."

Grampa laughs. "That's thoughtful of you."

I like this couple. They remind me of my folks, God rest 'em.

"Well, I think it's inhumane." Still standing on the dock to my left, Princess Gucci has raised an objection. I ignore her and select my next victim from the crate, but Her Highness will not be so easily dismissed. "How would you like it if I twisted off one of your arms?"

I flash her a pirate smile. "No lateral line, ma'am."

"What?"

"Jonah crabs have no lateral line." I gesture with the crab in my hand; it brandishes claws in her direction. "They can't sense pain any more than they can write poetry."

"Still—"

"And they regenerate lost limbs. It's a near-perfectly sustainable food source."

"Still."

Grampa checks his watch, wishing the ferry would get underway. Granny also dislikes the tension and tries to break it. "Do they ever bite you?"

“I’ve been nipped before. But not lately. I’m faster than they are.” I demonstrate by popping off another claw.

“Does it hurt?” asks Granny. “When they bite, I mean.”

“You’d be surprised. Lot of torque in those little claws.”

Princess pipes up again; her tune has not changed. “There can be no justification for cruelty. Ever.”

I fix her with 50% of an icy glare. “Let me tell you about Jonah crabs, ma’am.” I take another crab from the crate and hold it up. “Don’t let this innocent face fool you. Give him half a chance and he’ll steal your car, murder your children, and burn your house to the ground.”

This earns mild tittering from onlookers seated aboard the idling *Carol B*, most of whom appear to have taken my side.

Princess directs her companion—the Prince?—to catch our exchange on video. He produces a smartphone.

“We’re sending this to PETA,” she says.

“Give them my warmest regards.” I hold up the crab for the camera. “Smile, Jonah. We’re going viral.”

Princess sputters, turning reddish-purple with rage; Jonah retracts his eyestalks.

As the royal couple fixates on my unethical animal-treating barbarism, I am briefly distracted by Gary, the handsome young ferry captain who is busy collecting tickets and casting off his lines. I am more than twice his age but he is kind enough to flirt with me from time to time. I smile and wave; he returns a wink and melts me with a tiger growl. “Yo, Roxannimal,” he purrs. I liquify some more.

Thus distracted, I overlook the angry crab in my left hand just long enough for it to latch onto my right thumb. Its grip is just shy of tectonic. I nearly scream.

Bound up in her righteous indignation, Princess fails to note my predicament. She rages on: “I’ve come to expect this kind of

behavior from people like you.” I am at this moment conflicted between the 12 shades of neon-red agony in my pinched thumb and an unfolding scene of Schadenfreudian amusement. Before I am able to speak—or cry—Princess folds her arms across her angora-sweatered chest and laughs.

“He’s got you! Ha!” She points to Jonah. “He’s got your thumb! Talk about poetic justice.”

My reserve of snarky comebacks has fled in the face of searing pain. It is a humbling moment, perfectly timed to coincide with my need of humbling. I grit my teeth and shoot another half-glare in the Princess’s direction, again failing to mind the crab. Jonah seizes further advantage by locking his other claw onto my index finger. Prince and Princess are now howling in unrestrained mirth.

Angry Crab Gets Payback on Unethical Claw-Twister

I knew from previous experience that no power in Heaven or Earth will make this crab unhand-unclaw—me; he will die on this hill. I hold his body in my left hand and twist it firmly 180 degrees, severing his weapons. They remain attached to my right hand. Princess gasps at this atrocity.

I consider stomping what remains of the crab to paste for his offense, but think better of it and toss him into the rippling water. This is my fault, not his.

Jonah's claws are still crushing the bones of my finger and thumb. The Royals watch, smirking, awaiting my next move. I raise my free hand and direct a wave toward the *Carol B*, then set about prying Jonah's clamps from my person. They remain tight as vise-grips, even after being severed. Prince films; Princess continues laughing.

"Funny stuff, huh?" I say to them.

Princess throws me the Royal malicious grin. "Hysterical."

"Betcha can't guess what's funnier."

I detach the second claw and smile.

"You just missed the ferry."

They turn to see *Carol B* weaving through the lobster- and sailboats at anchor, halfway across the blue water of the harbor.

Prince runs to the end of the dock waving and shouting, but his cause is lost.

I give Princess the bad news.

"That boat's not coming back. Not 'til tomorrow morning."

Princess responds with a request that I, lacking the necessary hermaphroditic appendages and adjacent receptacles, am entirely unable to accommodate.

"Listen," I say, "I can help you."

"We don't need your help, lady."

"A mile and a half south on the main road you'll find a red house with white trim. They'll put you up overnight. Feed ya, too."

Princess sniffs dismissively.

"Or you can sleep in a ditch." I tell her. "Your choice."

The Prince has by now returned and starts to ask me a question but is silenced by Her Highness.

I offer further aid.

"Come on, I'll give you a ride."

"I don't think so." Her majesty will not be appeased.

I pack up my crabs and head for home. I give two toots of my horn as I pass the backpacked Royals walking south. They neither smile nor wave. I'm ghosted, just like that.

I have just dropped two dozen rock crab claws into a pot of boiling salted water when a knock comes at my front door. "It's open!"

"Oh, for fuck's sake." Princess is still holding the knob as she considers flight. Standing behind her, The Prince drops a heavy sigh,

signifying defeat.

"Come on in. Hope you like crab cakes."

I should not have said that. Sometimes my mouth gets ahead of my brain. Princess grabs the Prince and shoves him back out the door, which slams with a certain finality once she, too, is on the other side of it. This saddens me. I just blew my chance to show them there are no hard feelings, and find some common ground. Now it's looking like dinner for one. Again.

I go to the garden where I see weeds are mounting successful incursions on multiple fronts. I harvest a fat summer squash, one zuke, and a handful of carrots and herbs.

The first raindrops fall as I walk back to the house, turning to a deluge just after I am safely inside. I drop the harvest in the kitchen sink.

A knock comes at my front door. I dash to the front room, grab the 12-point buck mount from the wall, and stuff it in the linen closet—I've already had my daily quota of dead animal controversies.

I open the door saying, "I was kidding about the crabcakes," and usher the drenched Royals in from the downpour.

A few jet-black tresses are plastered to the Princess's unsmiling face, but the royally saturated Prince looks apologetic. He offers his hand.

"Maybe we could just reboot this whole encounter?"

I wink and say, "Have we met?"

The Prince's smile reveals perfect teeth. "Toby Macek," he says. "And this is Jessica Guillemette."

"Roxanne Wakefield. Welcome."

The hand Jessica extends does not produce the silky-smooth manicured grip I expect. It is a strong hand with the sinew and calluses of a blacksmith's, the hand of a woman who works for a living. A woman like me.

When she meets my china-blue gaze she does so with just one of her own dark-brown eyes. The other is improbably fixed on a point somewhere beyond my left shoulder. She is so intent on it that I turn to see what has drawn her attention but there's nothing there. When I turn back she looks mildly self-conscious.

"Your eye," I say, still gripping her hand.

"Strabismic. From birth." Her good eye darts around the room, moving from one object to the next like the swallowtail butterflies that frequent my flowers.

"Yours?" she asks.

"Work related. Seven years ago."

Jessica nods but says nothing.

"How about I pull the cork on a bottle of Merlot and we find out how wrong we were about each other. Sound ok?"

Finally, a smile.