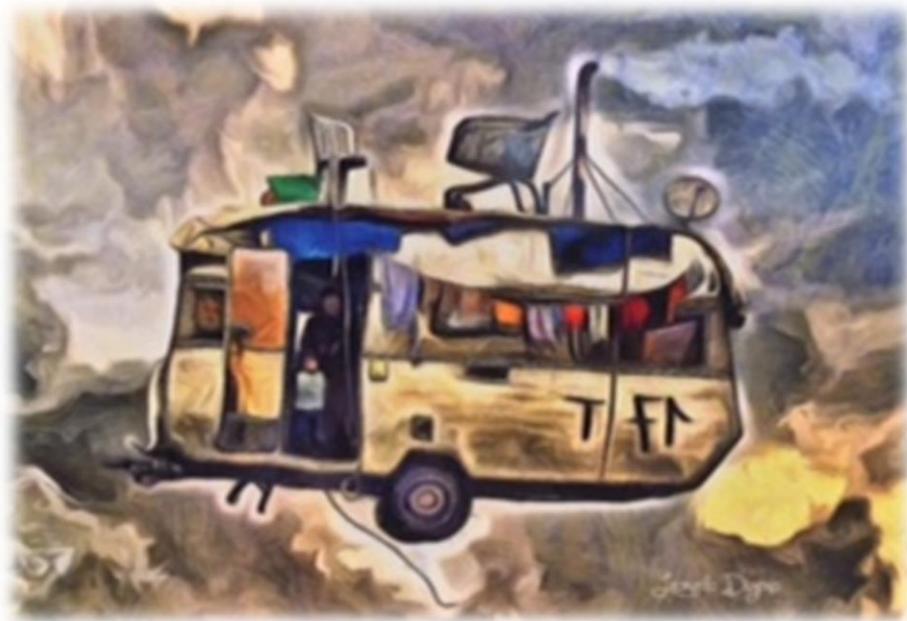


Ethan and the Giant Crabs



by John Bonthron

READY FOR TAKE-OFF

'Grampa, can we go to the seaside?' said Ethan, aged 3.

'Why not,' replied Grampa. 'Get your bucket and spade and put on your wellies with the flashing lights. Oh, and go and tell Grandma. Ask her for some vital supplies, OK.'

'Grampa, what are minty-surprise? I like minty-surprise.'

'Ask Grandma, she'll tell you.'

'Grampa, can we take you HiPad, so we can watch Postman Pat?'

'No, the iPad would interfere with the time-shift-spacial controls.'

'Grampa, what are time-shy-introlls?'

'I'll tell you about them later, when we're ready for take-off. Off you go and get our vital supplies, OK?'

'Grampa, can we take the fishing net to catch some crabs at the seaside?'

'Yes, you know where it is, behind the shed. Careful now with that door, don't trap your fingers. And don't jump down, use the step, OK.'

'OK', said Ethan, jumping down from the old caravan to run into the house.

Ten minutes later, with their towels, sandwiches, fruit and water bottles and a selection of toys stowed for the journey ahead, and wearing their space traveller goggles which looked like sunglasses, they pulled down the blinds, making the caravan dim, like the flight deck of a space ship.

'Ethan, flick that switch for the ultra-bright downlights.'

'OK. Can I do it, Grampa? Can I steer the caravan?'

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'Yes, Ethan, take this time-shift-spacial controller. Don't press any buttons yet, OK?'

'Grampa, is this not the remote control for the motor mover to make the caravan go into the driveway?'

'Only when you use it outside the caravan. When you use it inside with the shiny lights on, it changes function, OK? '

'Grampa, what is changes flunction?'

'You'll see. Right, now look for the big red key, see it? Under the seat. Right, set it to VERTICAL, ready for take-off.'

'Grampa, what is ventical?'

'VERTICAL means straight up and down, yes, that's it. Now take off your wellies so the flashing lights don't interfere with the controller. Good. Now sit up sit up like this, with your legs on the seat while I set the coordinates on my phone. Fancy going to Cellardyke, where I used to go when I was a wee boy?'

'Are there crabs in Sillydyke?'

'Yes, hundreds and hundreds of them. Some as big as elephants.'

'Grampa, I'm not frightened of crabs, even big ones. It's just lobsters you have to swim away from.'

'Well, we'll stick to just crabs, OK? Ready?'

'Yes.'

'Press both green buttons together. Look, use both thumbs. See, the green light is on, so we're set to fly, OK?'

'Are we there yet?'

'Nearly. Now, Ethan, time for you to decide. Do you want to fly forwards or backwards?'

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'No, Grampa, we have to go up the way or we'll crash into the garage or the gate.'

'Well spotted, Ethan. I can see you're going to make an excellent teleporter pilot. OK, press that red button and hold onto your horses.'

'Grampa, where are my horses?'

'Ah, they're invisible, fifty of them. Flying horses. Now, are you ready with the magic words?'

'OK. Can we get ice cream at Sillydyke?'

'No ice cream, just crabs. Now, Ethan, close your eyes and we'll say it together, OK?'

"ABRACRABDABRACRABDABRACAROO."

The old caravan began to rock and shake. The dishes and cups in the cupboards rattled. The knives and forks in the drawers began to chatter to each other with excitement. The shiny downlights began to flash off and on. The caravan rose vertically then twirled until it was pointing towards Cellardyke.

Grampa shouted, 'Giddy-Up, Honda and the Silver Stallions, get us to Cellardyke, as fast as you can!'

Grandma looked up from her garden and waved, 'Remember not to wade in too deep, Ethan, don't let the water get inside your new wellies.'

Then, with a loud WOOSH, the caravan raced off to the seaside.

CELLARDYKE ROCK POOLS

The caravan hovered above a patch of yellow sand, beside a rock pool. Ethan jumped out onto the sand and landed on his knees.

'Grampa, can I get my swimming goggles on? Can I swim and dive down for crabs?'

'No, Ethan, I don't think so. The North Sea is too cold for swimming. Not like Tenerife.'

'Grampa, my feet are all covered in sand. Can you put on my wellies for me?'

Grampa handed him his net and big red bucket. Together they waded into the water, which was shallow because the tide was out.

Grampa lifted the seaweed and two crabs scuttled away.

'Right, Ethan. Go for the bigger one! Scoop it with your net.'

'No, it's too big. It's getting away. Its too big. Help me get the teeny-wee-ist one. I can't do it. You do it, Grampa.'

'Oops, gotcha! Hey, he's a wee beauty. Shall we call him Clarence? Clarence the Crab. That would be good, eh? Get some seaweed and a rock for him to hide under.'

'Grampa, can we call him Malcolm? A girl at my nursery has a wee dog called Malcolm. He doesn't bite, he just barks and licks you.'

'OK, Ethan lad, Malcolm he shall be. Yip, I like it. Malcolm. Malcolm the King of the Rock Pools. Did you know that Malcolm was the first king of Scotland?'

'Grampa, when you were a wee boy, did they always have dogs for kings.'

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'Just at first, then crabs became the kings. In those days we all talked crabbit, the language used by crabs. Why don't you ask Malcolm his real name?'

Grampa carefully lowered the flat stone into the bottom of the bucket and dropped a few small bits of seaweed on top.

Ethan looked down into the red bucket. 'Hey, wee crab, what's your name?'

The crab let out a stream of tiny bubbles which rose to the surface. As they popped open a squeaky voice said, **'Let me go or my big cousin Clawfurd will come and snap off your nose!'**

'Grampa, this wee crab said if we don't let it go, it will get its big cousins to snap off my nose.'

'Oh, no, Ethan, look over there!'

Ethan looked where his grandfather was pointing and saw seven giant crabs climbing over the rocks towards them. The crabs were the size of elephants with huge red claws which were snapping open and shut making a loud clicking noise.

'Quick Ethan, tip the wee crab back into the pond and I'll throw them some bananas, crabs love bananas.'

'No, it's OK, Grampa, I'm not scared of crabs. Just lobsters and sharks.'

The biggest crab caught a banana in each of its two giant claws and stuffed them into its mouth and shouted:

'Hoy you, whitsyarnammie, Aye, you wi' they flashinbooties. Hoy, git them flashinbooties owur here tae me, my wee mannie.'

'Grampa, what did he say?'

'He's speaking in crabbit. He wants your flashing wellies. Maybe you should take them off and throw them to him.'

'Hey, big crab,' shouted Ethan, 'get your Mummy to buy your own flashing wellies.'

'Hoy you, wee mannie, dinnae ye ken Ah'm Clawfurd, King of all Crabs. Gees yer wee flashinbooties or Ah'll snap aff yur nosey, wee many. Dae ye hear me?'

'No, go away, get your own wellies. You're not a nice crab. I don't want to play with you. And you shouldn't speak with your mouth full.'

'Right, men. Go an' git oor wee mannie an' bring him ower here.'

'Ethan, try your magic torch on him,' said Grampa.' And here's Snappy the Diplodocus. Crabs are scared of dinosaurs.'

Ethan shook the torch to activate its light switch.

The magic beam shone on the crabs. Suddenly they began to shrink, getting smaller and smaller and smaller until they were the same size as tiny wee Malcolm.

Ethan shouted, 'Hey, Clawfurd, do you want me to get Snappy to snap off your nose?'

As soon as they saw Snappy, the seven crabs ran away across the rocks shouting:

'Helpit, helpit, there's an awfy big monster chasin' us, watch oot everywan. Helpit! Helpit!'

Still in the red bucket, Malcolm let out another stream of bubbles and in his squeaky voice said, *'Uncle Muckle, Uncle Muckle, save me from these humans. They're going to eat me!'*

A horrible stinky wind smelling of rotting fish blew across from the other end of the rock pool.

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'Oh no, Ethan, is it what I think it is?' said Grampa.

Ethan saw a gigantic green and blue lobster standing at the far end of the rock pool. It waved its huge fighting claw at Ethan and Grampa and spoke in a very posh voice.

'You there, what's all this uproar about? Can't an old lobster get some peace and quiet around here.'

'Hey, Uncle Muckle, I'm not frightened of you.'

Ethan put on his fiercest face and shone his magic torch on the lobster and held up Snappy the Diplodocus.

But the magic torch worked the wrong way and the lobster started to grow bigger and bigger and bigger until it was so big it shut out the sun. The smell of rotting fish was so bad Ethan's nose was itchy and his eyes were watery.

Grampa said, 'Right, Ethan, time to make a swift exit. Tip Malcolm back into the pool and let's get out of here. Back into the caravan, laddie.'

'OK. But Grampa, I'm not scared of crabs, only lobsters and sharks.'

RETURN FLIGHT

Safely back inside the van they watched Uncle Muckle splash about in the rock pool.

'Right Ethan, pre-flight check. Can you tell me what do we have to do?'

'Grampa, you close the blinds.'

'Check!'

'Now you 'witch on the shiny downlights.'

'Check!'

'Make the red handle to ventical.'

'Check.'

'Grampa, can you take off my wellies.'

'Check!'

'Grampa, take off your flip-flops and sit up on your seat like me.'

'Check!'

'Grampa, can I have an ice cream before we go home?'

'How about a banana instead?'

'OK. Grampa, I don't know how to get back to Grandma's. You take the time-shy-introller.'

'Are you sure? You're an excellent tele-porter pilot, you know.'

'Grampa, when we get back to Grandma's, can we watch Thomas the Tank Engine on your Hi-Pad?'

'We'll see what Grandma says, shall we? Now, are you ready with the magic words? Ready, steady, go!'

"ABRACRABDABRACRABDABRACAROO."

The old caravan began to rock and shake. The dishes and cups in the cupboards rattled. The knives and forks in the drawers began to chatter to each other with excitement. The shiny downlights began to flash off and on. The caravan rose vertically then twirled until it was pointing towards Bearsden.

From her kitchen Grandma saw the caravan hover above her garden. She switched on the hob to cook the evening meal, spaghetti bolognese, one of Ethan's favourites.

As soon as the caravan landed, Ethan jumped down and ran indoors to tell Grandma everything that had happened.

'Really!' said Grandma. 'Yes, I think I can smell seaweed and fish on your clothes. Time for a shower while the pasta's cooking. Off we go.'

'Grandma, can we watch *The Gruffalo* on your television?'

'Yes, but only if you eat all your meal and brush your teeth and get into your Jim-Jams, OK?'

'Grandma, can Grampa take me to see the Dolphins at Rosemarkie tomorrow?'

'Yes, if the weather's suitable for flying the caravan. Perhaps we'll all go. Your wee brother Drew would like to see the Dolphins too, wouldn't he?'

'Grandma, can Drew and I get ice cream at Rosemarkie?'