

Two Old Crabs by Frankie Rhodes

Location: A coast in North Norfolk. An elderly couple, Janet and Doug, are sitting on deckchairs by the pier. The Annual Crabbing Competition is just beginning.

Characters: Janet, Doug, Announcer

Janet: Sssh, we're missing it.

Doug: I didn't say anything.

Janet: Can't we move our chairs a bit closer?

Doug: Not without falling on top of that family, Jan.

Janet: Well. They're not local. I don't see why they have any right to be here.

An unseen man with a loudspeaker begins to make announcements for the Crabbing Competition

Announcer: AND NOW, WE MOVE ON TO THE MUCH LOVED CATEGORY OF BIGGEST CRAB-

Janet: In fact, I think they should make it a requirement that you can only attend these events if you're from Norfolk. Tourism is *terrible* for the economy.

Doug: Yes dear

Janet: We've been here year after year, seen every blinking crab named Tom, Dick or Harry, and what do we get in return? A front row seat? No. A view of some non-local family's bare-bottomed child.

Doug: Janet-

Janet: Sssh! We're missing it!

Announcer: IN FIRST PLACE WE HAVE THE WONDERFUL-

Janet: It had better not be that Mrs Rooney again

Doug: Well if you wait a second we might find out-

Janet: She wins *every* year. I think she cheats, you know. Buys a crab from Davies and then chucks it in the sea.

Doug: Yes dear.

Janet: Do you remember my amazing catch back in '89?

Doug: Oh, how could I forget

Janet: That young man, the announcer, said it was the biggest one he had ever seen

Doug: It certainly was a whopper

Janet: I don't think I've ever been so proud of anything in my life.

Doug: We've got three beautiful children, Janet.

Janet: Yes, and they were all here to watch me win Biggest Crab!

Doug: Well, I certainly remember how we all celebrated- with crab salad and chips for tea.

Janet: You aren't supposed to do that, of course.

Doug: it's generally frowned upon. You aren't supposed to *keep* the crab.

Janet: Shelley. That's what I called her.

Doug: Oh of course. Well, Shelley did make a tasty meal, didn't she dear?

Janet: (*chuckles*) She did.

(*beat*)

Janet: Those were the glory days, Doug.

Doug: We're still living the glory days, Jan. *These* are the glory days.

Janet: I don't know. I can't see.

Doug: Janet, I'm sure it's going to be fine, even if you can't-

Janet: No, I can't *see* because your bloody great big head is in the way! Move, would you!

Doug sighs and sits back in his chair.

Announcer: NEXT UP WE HAVE THE FAMILY FAVOURITE, TINIEST CRAB-

Janet: What a ridiculous category. What's useful about a tiny crab? You're not going to get a lot of meat out of that now, are you?

Doug: I think it's cute.

Janet: 'Cute' didn't win us the war.

Doug: Well, it's something for the youngsters isn't it.

Janet: But you see that's just something I can't get on board with. All this, 'children are our future' business. I say, bugger that.

Doug: I think the 52% already said that, dear.

Janet: You what?

Doug: Nothing, dear.

Janet: Pardon?

Doug: It's *nothing*-

Janet: Pardon?

Doug: NOTHING

Janet: Well there's no need to shout at me. You should really get that hearing aid checked, dear.

Doug: Yes, dear.

(*beat*)

Doug: Shall I get us an icecream?

Janet: What, while the competition is still going on?

Doug: We've still got a while yet, dear

Janet: Well as long as you don't miss my favourite part.

Doug: I promise. What would you like?

Janet: Oh, nothing big. One scoop is fine.

Doug: Flake?

Janet: Yes. Three.

Doug: Alright dear. Won't be long.

(Doug exits. Janet sits for a moment, looking mildly perturbed, then pulls out some knitting. She begins muttering to herself.)

Janet: Well, just look at the queue over there. It'll be ages before I get my icecream. Disgusting, all these tourists. On a *Sunday*. In the *sunshine*. You'd think they'd all have something better to do than coming here, spending all their money, lounging about on the beach. Oh look, there's Mrs Rooney over there in the queue. What a *horrible* dress. Looks like a tablecloth. Oh goodness, she's looking this way, she's seen me, oh gosh HI THERE DEAR. YES VERY WELL THANK YOU. YOU LOOK LOVELY. WHAT A PRETTY DRESS. I SAID, WHAT A PRETTY DRESS. I SAID- WHAT A PRETTY- oh nevermind. Bitch. Oh god she heard me. ITCH. I'VE GOT A TERRIBLE ITCH. IT'S THESE NEW STOCKINGS. YES. BYE BYE NOW.

(she ducks down into her knitting and sighs heavily.) My goodness. What *is* it about us old buggers that seems to say to everyone, please talk to me. Please waste my time. Please tell me all about your grandchildren.

(Doug begins to walk back over, unseen by Janet.)

Frankly, I couldn't give a flying fuck about your grandchildren.

Doug: Janet!

Janet: Doug! Back already! Where's my icecream?

Doug: I got to the front and then realised I don't have my wallet. You've got it.

Janet: No I do not.

Doug: Yes you do

Janet: And what makes you think that?

Doug: That's what you said, when we were leaving the house. You said you would get my wallet. Because you don't trust me to remember it.

Janet: *(pauses to think)* Well, of course, and you've only gone and done it again!

Doug: What?

Janet: Forgotten your wallet!

Doug: But-

Janet: Next time, I'm taking it, I can't have you forgetting it again.

Doug: (*sighs*) Yes dear.

Janet: Now sit down, it's almost the best bit.

Announcer: NEXT UP, HERE'S ONE FOR ALL YOU LOVERS. THE AWARD FOR MOST DYNAMIC CRAB DUO-

Janet: I swear, the categories get more and more ridiculous every year.

Doug: That's something I can agree on.

Janet: I mean, how can two crabs be considered a couple?

Doug: Well if two crabs are fond of each other, then I suppose-

Janet: But where's the *romance*?

Doug: The romance?

Janet: The romance! What's romantic about sitting around all day by the sea, time ticking by, just waiting to be caught by the Great Big Net of Death?

Doug: (*looks around him*) I really can't think.

Janet: I've seen better pairings on *Coronation Street*.

Doug: You're right.

Janet: Funny, I often am.

Doug: Maybe there's just no such thing as romance between crabs.

Janet: Or at all, for that matter! The art of romance is dead, Doug. It's not what it used to be.

Doug: Oh really?

Janet: When's the last time you pitched up at my door with a bunch of flowers, a heartfelt message through the letterbox?

Doug: Jan, we live together. It's *my* door. I bring flowers home from Morrison's every week with the shopping.

Janet: Nope, I simply won't hear it, it just isn't the same. What with all these phones and tweeting and god knows whatever else. It wasn't like that in *my* day.

Doug: *Our* day.

Janet: Pardon?

Doug: Nevermind. Well, don't give up hope Jan. Maybe something will come along and surprise you.

Announcer: AND HERE'S THE ONE WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR, THE GRAND FINALE: THE AWARD FOR MOST BEAUTIFUL CRAB-

Janet: Ssshhhh!

Doug: I didn't-

Janet: Sssssh!

Doug sighs

Janet: Could you sigh a bit more quietly please?

Announcer: AND JUST LOOK AT ALL THESE AMAZING ENTRIES.

Janet: Pfft. Bunch of ugly fuckers.

Doug: Oh come on Janet, I think they're rather good catches this year-

Janet: I wasn't talking about the crabs.

Announcer: BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WINNER. AND I'M DELIGHTED TO REVEAL THAT-

Janet: This is it-

Announcer: THE AWARD FOR MOST BEAUTIFUL CRAB GOES TO- JANET WILKS!

Janet: what the blinking heck-

Doug stands up and claps ferociously while Janet hides in her knitting.

Announcer: AND HERE WE HAVE A MESSAGE FROM THE NOMINATOR. 'HAPPY 80TH BIRTHDAY FROM YOUR HUSBAND DOUG. YOU'RE STILL THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OLD CRAB I'VE EVER SEEN'. WELL HOW ABOUT THAT. JANET, COME ON UP AND RECEIVE YOUR AWARD-

Janet: You. *You* did this.

Doug: Come on dear, you're a winner!

Janet: If you think I'm going up there in front of all these people you've got another thing coming. All these (*gulps*) non-residents.

Doug: I know how much you've always wanted to win this award.

Janet: Yes, with a crab! *With* a crab. Not *as* a crab!

Doug: Well, I think you're beautiful.

Janet: For a crab.

Doug: In a way, yes.

Janet: Bloody charming. (*she starts packing up her things as if to go home.*)

Announcer: FINAL CALL FOR JANET WILKS. HAS ANYBODY SEEN JANET WILKS?

Janet: I won't stay here and be disrespected a moment longer.

Doug: Janet, please, just let me explain-

Janet: Explain? Like you tried to *explain* to me that you should put the milk in tea first when we all know, that's bloody sacrilege!

Doug: You're old, Janet. There's no denying it. You're grumpy, too. God knows, I can't even be in the same room as you when you fail to beat the Governess on *The Chase*.

Janet: I don't see how this is meant to be reassuring.

Doug: The point is, you're still beautiful. You see this picture-

Doug reaches into his pocket for an old photograph and hands it to Janet.

Doug: That's you, back in 1989, winning Biggest Crab.

Janet: She was a beauty.

Doug: Yes, you were. You *are*.

Janet: I meant the crab.

Doug: When I saw you that day, beside yourself with joy, all I could think was, let me grow old with this woman. Let me watch her get old and wrinkly and insufferable, let me fail to buy her icecream with the wallet I left at home

Janet: You are quite good at forgetting your wallet.

Doug: And that's what this award is about. You. My beautiful old crab, on her 80th birthday.

Janet: Most people just stick to buying flowers.

Doug: Ah, but you should know by now, Janet, I am not *most people*.

Janet: Well, I still don't know, it doesn't seem ethical for the award to go to a person.

Doug: I spoke to the announcer. Turns out they make exceptions when you're old. He loved the idea actually, wouldn't stop talking to me about it. Kept asking me about the grandchildren.

Janet: *(rolling her eyes)* Of course he did.

Doug: Go on, I can tell you're secretly over the moon that you've won. And besides, Janet- Mrs Rooney is going to be *so* jealous.

Janet: Well, in that case-

Doug: Go and accept your award like a queen.

Janet: Oh alright then. I *have* always wanted to wear one of those rosettes.

Doug: We'll pin it on you like a prized pony.

Janet: Don't push it. I'm still upset that I didn't get my icecream.

She goes as if to exit, then turns back briefly

Janet: Doug?

Doug: Yes, dear?

Janet: Thank you.

Doug: Pardon?

Janet: Nevermind. You've *got* to get that hearing aid fixed.

Janet exits. Doug smiles knowingly.

