**It Never Stops Flowing**

By Amanda Wang

“Daddy, are you sure that the sand crabs are happy? They don’t look very happy.”

As my dad and I find a less crowded spot on the warm Santa Monica shore, the invasive

sand creeps into every crevice of my body. I pick up a bright red sand bucket, a shovel so

yellow it competes with the sun, and his hand. The crisp sound of the shovel digging into

the sand makes my ears perk up, and I give another four digs before I finally see tiny,

grey antennas appear, anxious and scrambling to escape the sand. I cup my left hand and

gently push away the sand surrounding the crab. When I have a secure grip on him, I

scurry to the bright red bucket that is filled with salty, ocean water.

“Daddy, I think he needs sand, just so he feels like he’s at home!” I call out as I shovel sand into the bucket.

Within two hours, I have captured 25 sand crabs, and I return with my dad to our red and

orange striped towels further back on the beach. I watch the crabs for another 30 minutes,

as they emerge, submerge, and climb over one other in an attempt to achieve the seemingly impossible task of escaping the sand. As the sun begins to set, and pinks and purples fill the sky, I can sense that it is time to say goodbye to my 25 new friends. With all my strength, I lift the bright red bucket and tip it onto its side.

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 I lift the key tray off of its side, taking only the rectangular block that leads to my father’s car, and call out, “It’s time to go!”

 “Who’s driving? My newly permitted 15-year old, or me?”

 “I think we both know the answer to that question already!”

 After a minute of struggling, my dad and I burst into a fit of laughter as we realize why the car won’t start – my foot isn’t on the brake. This realization is quickly interrupted by a high-pitched whine from the other side of the garage door.

 “Are you sure we don’t want to bring him?” my dad asks, accompanied by his very-own puppy dog eyes.

 “You know he’s not actually allowed inside of the grocery store, Dad. And we have a long list of things to buy today.”

 “Good thing no one can tell me where my dog is and isn’t allowed to be!” He propels himself out of the passenger seat and into the garage, emerging moments later with our four-month old puppy, Dash, between his arms.

 “You do this every morning and it is actually quite annoying,” I passively comment as I pull out of the driveway, and into the broader neighborhood.

 “Oh, stop being so dramatic. We all know he’s nicer to me than you *and* your brother,” my dad responds, as his gigantic smile shoots out the window towards the warm summer skies, and plethora of cacti. He picks up the auxiliary cord, and plays our “Everyday Grocery” playlist, that is exclusively Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Grieg. These melodies fill the confines of the small sedan, and my dad and I sway side-to-side, amidst the same stoplights, signs, and one-way road we have taken my entire life to our local Bashas.

 Once I have pulled into the slanted-parking space, and the car is properly parked, I am distracted by my peripheral, in which Dash’s nugget tail swiftly swings against my father’s uniform khaki pants. My dad opens his door, Dash hurls himself out of the car – an enormous leap for his six-pound self – and drags my dad through two opening, automatic doors.

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I apply just enough pressure to my bedroom door handle, so that it is as close to silent as possible as it opens. For the first time in twelve years of school, I have been awoken by the sound of my phone’s blaring, guttural alarm, and not my father’s soothing whisper, “It’s another beautiful day to wake up and learn!”

 As I step out of my bedroom, and my feet contact the ice-cold, tile floor, I am forced to pass through the kitchen, where my dad is seeping his second cup of tea for the morning. We make eye contact, holding it only for an intense, but brief moment before I swiftly move past his viewpoint and into my secluded bathroom. Moments later, he appears and knocks on the bathroom door.

“Amanda, the deadline is approaching, so let’s stop being childish and just talk about it.”

“Dad, there is literally nothing to hash out; stop trying to make big life decisions for me. This actually has nothing to do with you.”

“It has everything to do with me because it’s about how my daughter is choosing to spend her next four years, and her entry into the real world. I’m also paying, so that should hold some weight.”

“It’s honestly cute that you think you can try and force me to spend some of my most crucial developmental years somewhere I don’t actually want to be, just because you’re paying. Please, cut me off. I’d rather take loans to go somewhere I will actually enjoy than suffer for free. Because I can do that anywhere.”

 “What’s crazy is that you somehow think I’m trying to make you suffer; as if I don’t want what’s best for you! I know you can’t actually understand what it’s like to be a parent, but you’re not so dumb to think that I wouldn’t want what I actually believe is best for you.”

 “Have you ever entertained the idea that I’m old enough now to make these decisions? And know what’s best for me?”
 “How many times are we going to go through this same loop of fighting?”

 “Until you realize and accept that UPenn is an amazing school and where I want to end up, more than anything! And that early-decisioning gives me my best shot.”

 “You know, I really can’t do this whole fighting thing. I knew I shouldn’t have sent you there for the summer. You can do what you want, but I think that you know I’m right. Regardless, the choice is yours. Just remember that I know a lot more than you.” He sighs and outstretches his hand; a sign of complacent acquiescence.

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 My father pulls with great weight on my hand as he helps me off of the charcoal pavement, chuckling to himself. “I’m going to get it, I swear,” I mumble underneath my breath.

“I can’t believe my daughter is eighteen years old and doesn’t know how to ride a bike.”

“And I can’t believe my parents never thought to teach me. And that I’m going to the one university where a bike is NOT optional.”

“We could get you a scooter?” He jokingly nudges my arm, picks the beaten-up, vomit-green bike from the ground, and places it once again in front of me. I hobble over the seat, grip the handlebars until my hands turn three shades lighter, and let out a deep sigh.

“Well, the good news is: you’ve only fallen twice today. Bad news is: you obviously still need me to push you,” he remarks as he aligns himself with the back-wheel.

 I push off of my left foot and begin to pedal. In stark contrast with my dad’s heavy pants, as he sprints to keep up with the moving bike, I refuse to let a single sip of air escape my mouth, and internally scream, “Please don’t fall, please don’t fall,” as I remember my dad’s tips: look straight ahead, and focus on where you’re going. As the pressure of his hands against my back releases, and the sound of his pants dissipates, the words “Keep going! Pedal faster!” encourage me as I speed down the pavement. His laughter fades into the distance as I speed toward and loop around the narrow, dead-end cul-de-sac.

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 As my Uber reaches the end of Galvez Street – my new, routine cul-de-sac – I quickly sprint into my dorm room, and answer the persistent ring of a Facetime call from home.

“One second – I’m closing my door! People are being noisy in the hallway,” I call over my shoulder to the computer screen, where my dad is patiently waiting.

When he sees me reappear, he asks, “So exactly which problems do you need help with? None seem too difficult.”

“Wait, before we start, can I see my doggo? I don’t believe that he’s actually twelve pounds now! The vet probably made a mistake.”

“Just you wait and see. Also, he is objectively my dog now.” I roll my eyes as he disappears from the screen, and I hear him distantly seek Dash, “Your old master is calling you, Dash!”

I see their silhouettes approach the camera, and cannot contain my laughter.

“Good God, you really weren’t kidding! How did he get SO big?! I told you to stop feeding him so much human food.”

“I’d rather have a fat and happy dog with a sense of good food than one who only eats kibble. Besides, there’s more of him to love now.”

“I mean, I guess nothing I say will change your opinion on that one.”

“Okay that’s enough about the dog; what problems do you need help with?” I watch as Dash scurries away; rather than contain a simple nugget tail, he himself has now become – well – a sturdy grey nugget.

“I still can’t believe you let the dog get so big.” I pull out my homework and then prompt my father, “Supplemental Problem G Part B. I don’t understand how I’m supposed to go about this – you know I’ve never formally written a mathematical proof.”

“I do know that, but I also know that I tried teaching you in high school, only to be told it doesn’t matter. As always, you should’ve listened to me.”

He spends the next ten minutes walking me through every detail of the problem, checking in every few seconds – “did that make sense? Did you not already go through this in class?” – and making his own comments along the way – “I teach this same way to undergraduates. I love that they’re forcing you to do this. You can’t tell me that math isn’t cool after all of this!”

As I frantically flip through the pages and take pictures for submission, he prompts, “Okay, so how’s everything else? Do you have time to talk with me and mom?”

“Sorry, daddio. Wish I could, but I have to turn this in really quickly; a bunch of my friends are downstairs waiting for me so we can go to the beach. Love you, thanks for the help – talk to you soon; tell Mom I miss her!” The call ends and I bolt out of the door.

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 My feet sink into the warm, crisp sand, and my unconscious instinct leads me to sprint straight into the water, where a slight breeze pushes against me. The ice-cold water pierces through my skin, and I stand tall. My gaze ahead is exactly that of when I am biking through the beautiful green and elegant archways of campus, as my father’s words remain: look straight ahead, and focus on where you’re going. And as I stare ahead, mesmerized by the rhythmic percussion of waves against the sandy shore, my mind wanders. Where did all of the sand crabs go?