

Toxins & Scales

The sky was an inky black, the tide was low. It was night, my favorite time in the span of 24 hours and it was all ruined by a pouring sound. The sound of a substance spilling into the water. I heard from others from above the water that the substance was a “chemical”. But there was no time to think, so I quickly scurried away as the chemical was always harsh on my gills. When I was at a safe point, I turned around and watched the toxic liquid spread across the water from afar. It was painful to watch, and I knew it was time to leave.

Oh! My apologies! I forgot to introduce myself! Hi! My name’s Silver, and I’m a fish, well, a Delta Smelt, to be exact. I’ve never actually seen what I look like because I don’t have a “mirror”, the beings from above the water call it. But just because I haven’t seen what I look like, doesn’t mean others haven’t, either. They say that I’m small, slender, and have a metallic colorization on my scales, hence the name Silver. I’ve also heard from others that I live in the San Francisco Estuary.

Now back to the story I was telling you about! As I was leaving the area, I got tired out from how far I was swimming, which wasn’t very far. My fins aren’t used to long distances. So I stopped swimming for about a minute or two. And just as I got my energy back and was ready to start moving again, a huge water current made its way to where I was and washed me back to my original location.

Great. Back at square one and it seemed like another fish got washed here, too. The new fish had vibrantly colored scales, purple and yellow, to be specific and his dorsal fin had an eyespot on it. He definitely wasn't from here. So, I swam up to him to ask him who he was.

"Hi! I'm Silver, what's your name?"

I asked, hoping for a reply.

"Hi. My name's Crypto."

He sounded a bit confused, and I don't blame him, as he just got carried to somewhere he doesn't know by the most sudden water current I've ever seen in my life!

"Crypto? That's a nice name! So, Crypto, where are you from?"

"I'm from the tropical waters, and I'm guessing you're from this place, right?"

"Yep! This is the San Francisco Estuary! How did you end up here?"

"Well, I was swimming away from a reef and then this water current came and dragged me here! I'm sure you've seen it, right?"

"Sure have! Why were you trying to get away from the reef, anyway?"

"Because the humans were putting trash on it."

After Crypto said that, I got a bit confused.

"Wait, what's a human?"

"A human is one of those land mammals that travel on two legs and build stuff all the time, have you ever seen one?"

I finally realized what Crypto was talking about.

"Oh! You mean those creatures? Yes, I've seen those and they're destroying the reefs, too?!"

"Of course they are!"

"Really? They're destroying everything, aren't they?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Does that include your species?"

"No, I'm a Fairy Basslet, we're not endangered. The humans even sometimes sell us in pet stores! Speaking of species, what species are you?"

"Glad you asked! I'm a Delta Smelt."

To my surprise, Crypto was a bit shocked by what I just said.

"Woah! A Delta Smelt?! Aren't those like..on the brink of extinction?"

Also to my surprise, my species was critically endangered.

"Wait, what?"

"Yes, Delta Smelt are endangered. Sorry to break the news to you."

Just like that, my heart was shattered. I've never been told such information. If fish could cry, I would be bawling my eyes out.

"Is there any way to reverse it?"

"I don't know, but we could try."

"Well, do you have any idea how?"

"Of course I do! You just have to confront the humans about it!"

When I realized what Crypto was implying, I immediately got anxious.

“Wait, me? Confront the dominant species who could obliterate me in an instant?
I’m not so sure about that...”

“Oh, come on! I’m sure that there’s at least one good human who would actually
listen to you!”

His reply was believable and had good reasoning. There was no way all humans
were hostile, right?

“Okay, I guess it is worth a shot. But how do we even find a human right now? It’s
night, and aren’t humans diurnal?”

“Yes, humans are diurnal, but a lot still wander around at night, sometimes, so it’ll
still be easy to find one, either way.”

“Seems easy enough. Well then, what are we waiting for? Let’s go!”

Then Crypto quietly mumbled something, but I heard what he said.

“Well it’s about time...”

“What was that?”

“Nothing! I didn’t say anything.”

“No, repeat that, please.”

“I invoke the fifth.”

“What-? Uhh..okay.”

“Works every time! Okay, let’s go now.”

“Alright!”

We swam off, keeping close to the surface of the water in search of a human.

After some time, we found a piece of land, which was surrounded by trees and near the water. And guess what we saw? We saw a human who was holding a bottle of insect killer. The human was approaching a moth with green wings, but the moth wasn't even doing anything wrong!

"Another disgusting bug," the human said.

"But wait...what did he mean by 'another'? Has he done this in the past?"

Then Crypto suddenly spoke up.

"Portal?! Is that you?"

The moth's wings flapped at the name "Portal". The moth was finally aware of its surroundings and flew out of the way of the human and his attack that he was going to use on the moth.

I turned to Crypto, trying to figure out what was happening.

"Crypto, do you happen to know this moth?"

Meanwhile, Crypto didn't seem too confused, at all.

"Of course I do! Her name is Portal, she's a Luna Moth. But I don't think any of us know that human."

We both looked over at the human, who was startled by Portal's sudden awareness. By the looks of it, Portal wasn't too happy about the human's harmful actions, but she didn't want to deal with it, either. So she flew to a tree and hid within the leaves. It looked as though she was sleeping because she lacked movement, but her

eyes weren't closed, which is what land animals usually would do when they sleep, from what I've seen.

But the human, on the other hand, looked mildly disturbed.

"That moth is creepier than the arachnids!" the human exclaimed.

The human noticed me and Crypto, then said something that we took to offense.

"Wow, those two remind me that I've never seen two pretty best friends."

"Excuse me?!" Crypto and I replied in unison, which freaked the human out even more.

"Oh- uhh..I-I'm sorry." The troubled human stuttered in apology.

"Okay, well, we forgive you," Crypto replied.

"But what's your name?" he asked.

The human was reluctant to answer Crypto's question, but he did, anyway.

"Bartholomew, my name's Bartholomew."

"Well, Bartholomew, do you think you can help us with something?"

"Sure, what is it?"

Crypto glanced at me for a second, then looked back at Bartholomew before answering. Because of that, I remembered our original goal, which was to prevent any further damage caused by the humans.

"Is there any way to stop the majority of your species from putting trash and chemicals into the water? It's killing a lot of creatures."

Bartholomew gave Crypto a look of disbelief.

"How am I, an average guy, going to help billions of people stop water pollution?"

Crypto went silent, most likely searching his brain for potential responses. Then Portal ever so suddenly said something.

"Sure, you're just an average guy, but that doesn't mean you can't also get others to help. If there's anything I've learned from observing humans, words spread around like wildfire, take advantage of that."

Me, Crypto, and Bartholomew were all stunned. I don't think there's ever been a moth as smart as Portal in the history of the Earth.

"Exactly!" replied Crypto, still a bit surprised.

"Fair point, I'll try to," said Bartholomew.

"Nice! When?" asked Portal, visibly satisfied with Bartholomew's answer.

"Right now."

Then Bartholomew ran off, probably to tell the other humans.

"Well that was fast! Usually, it takes days to convince those humans." Portal said, with some surprise and a lack of belief in her voice.

"He was probably just a little intimidated-" Crypto said before getting the rest of his sentence cut off by Bartholomew seemingly reappearing and speaking to Portal.

"You were right, strange moth! Words really do spread around fast!"

We were all left speechless, until Portal gave another response.

"Already!?"

"Yep! Look around!" answered Bartholomew, enthusiastically.

"What-?" Portal looked around.

"How? You reversed most of the pollution within an hour!" she asked, completely stunned.

"My best explanation is that if we can start it, then we can end it."

Portal was still in a state of stunned confusion and disbelief.

"..I think I'm done asking questions."

"Okay," replied Bartholomew, then he turned towards me and Crypto.

"So, what do you think about it?" he asked us.

Crypto was just as confused as Portal, while I was overjoyed.

"It's amazing! My gills finally aren't going to be filled with toxins anymore!"

"Thank you," I said in an ecstatic tone.