

# Crab

by Ken Babstock

1 Beyond the sandbar, the sea  
was ash-grim, a flint quilt  
buckling. Houses huddled, slanting  
on the bay's rim like pastel mints on drab  
5 green and granite. Paths  
threaded the cragged bluffs  
to a thumbnail of beach that was ours  
for a summer. Wading through  
shallows with driftwood  
10 sticks, we'd lift away shag carpets of kelp  
and spot them there — claws up,  
scuttling — black eye beads  
like cloves looking back as they spidered  
away from our toes.

15 Stacked up in tide pools,  
in tangled leg locks, they were  
brittle old men, grotesques thrown ashore by the sea.  
For hours I gawked at plasticky joints,  
spotted, knobbed claws, and  
20 wispy ferns at the mouth, how the sea's lens made  
the shells swell, shimmer 'til  
perspective was gone and their name  
had washed up on my tongue—*Dungeness, Dungeness*.  
The boy I was edged closer to them,  
25 brine-spattered, waterlogged, less.

“Crab” from *Mean* copyright © 1999 by Ken Babstock.  
Reprinted by permission of House of Anansi Press.