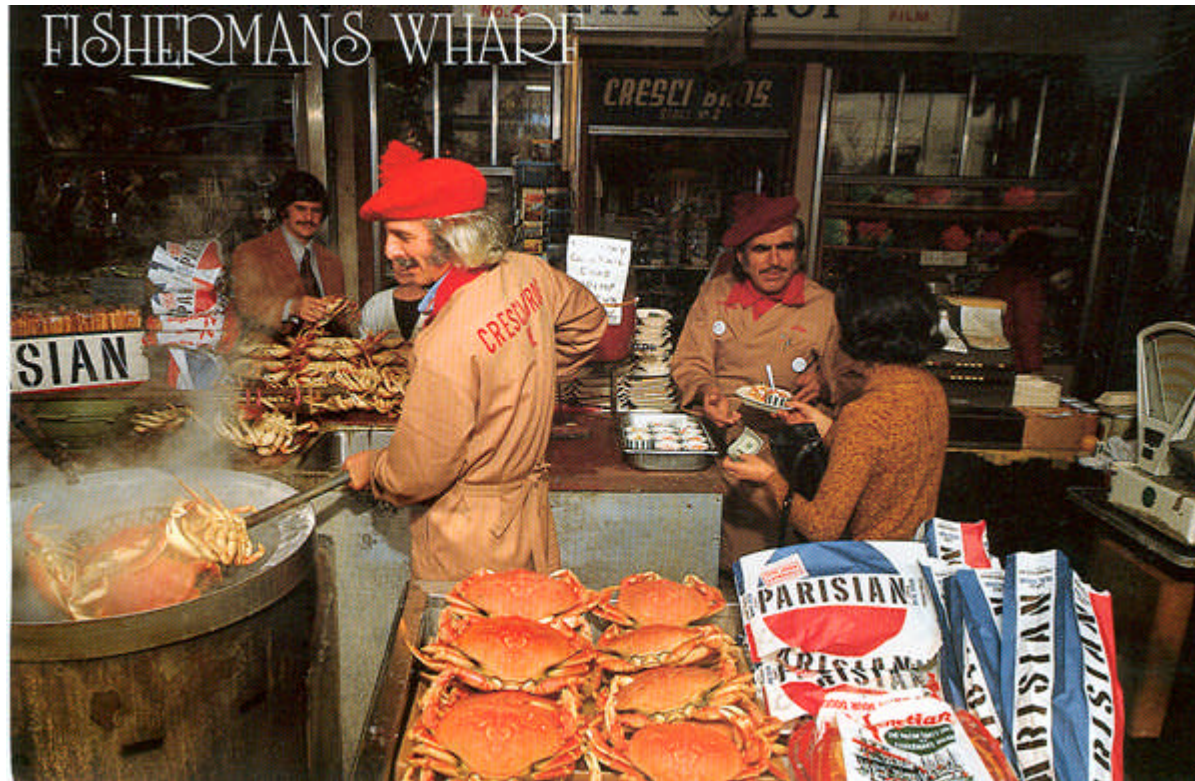


Tony the Toe



As Agent Jenkins slowly regained consciousness, he realized that he was no longer at the Cotillion Country Club sipping Chardonnay with the glamorous Blanche du Ville. Rather, he seemed to have been trussed up, shrunk, and stuffed into a lifelike crab costume along with – he had difficulty seeing directly behind him – maybe half a dozen other CID agents. Worse, his arch enemy, Tony “The Toe” Cresci, was standing not two feet away with a net of some kind and – *ob my god!* He just plunked a similarly costumed Agent Fowler into a vat of boiling water! He’ll remember those ghastly screams for the rest of his life! Which, considering his present situation, might not be much longer. But Tony’s evil laugh rubbed Jenkins the wrong way, and he, in turn, rubbed his bound wrists the wrong way against a sharp spine that protruded from one of the claws. In an instant, he was free! That is, as much as a miniaturized human in a crab costume can be. Slowly, he inched away from the vat of death, but he inadvertently stepped on the pincers of the agent directly behind him, who yelped in indignity. Tony turned around, leered, and grabbed Agent Jenkins. But before he could dunk him in the boiling water, Jenkins yanked down hard on the claw mechanism, severing Tony’s thumb. The gangster yowled in pain and dropped Agent Jenkins, who scuttled to safety under the counter. Of course, safety is a relative term, for what could he do in a crab costume at one-fourteenth normal human size? It is a question neither Agent Jenkins nor this writer is yet prepared to answer.