

Chapter 6

Manuel reached for the alarm clock, frantically trying to stop the obnoxious noise. He searched under the bed but couldn't find it. Exasperated, he opened his eyes and remembered he had put it on top of his bookshelf, figuring that would force him to get up.

He turned it off and wondered whatever made him want to get a job on a lobster boat. He pulled a pillow over his head and decided to go back to sleep. Then he remembered Zeke's promise of forty dollars a day, and he forced himself to stand up. He put on his clothes and damp sneakers and ran down to the harbor. He got there just as Zeke was untying a rope and the *Dancing Mathilda* started to drift from the dock.

"Zeke, stop! Will you wait a second?"

"It's 5:05," said Zeke.

"I know, but ..." Manuel realized the lobsterman wasn't going to turn back, so he took a running start and leaped across the water. He landed on the *Dancing Mathilda* just as Zeke untied the last rope.

"We got a lot to do today," said Zeke as he tried to light his pipe with one hand. "We got to go to Dead Man's Cove, and that always takes a while. Haven't checked the traps there in three days. Bound to be a bunch of 'em."

"Dead Man's Cove?" asked Manuel. "What's Dead Man's Cove?"

"A cove where there's a dead man. Now, go get the pulley ready. I want to check the traps by the lighthouse first. "

They pulled up four traps behind the lighthouse, but there were only two lobsters and a bunch of crabs. Manuel picked up a dark brown crab with long skinny legs. "Yecch, this is the grossest thing I've seen since my mom gave me back my appendix in a test tube. What is it?"

"A spider crab. Now hurry up and throw him back in. I need you to go below and get some more rubber bands."

Manuel climbed up on the edge of the boat and juggled the spider crab from hand to hand while he chanted:

"Spider, spider from the sea,
you are the ugliest thing that ever did be.
You sure do stink and you sure do smell,
I can tell right now you're going to hell—"

Zeke grabbed Manuel by the arm, pulled him back onto the deck, and sat him down on a lobster pot. "I'm gonna to tell you one time, and I'm not gonna tell you again. The ocean ain't a summer camp. It ain't a dance hall or a video arcade. The ocean is somethin' you respect. You stop respectin' the ocean, and you may never see land again."

"But, Zeke, I was just play—"

"You don't play with living creatures, and you don't ever stand on the edge of the boat. Now go git me those rubber bands."

Manuel found the rubber bands and came back on deck just as they hit the open sea. A large wave crashed over the side of the boat, and the queasy feeling started again, but he was determined not to get sick, so he took a deep breath and drank half a bottle of soda.

"There it is." Zeke pointed. "Dead Man's Cove."

A dense fog rolled in, and Lucy let out a piercing screech. The closer they got to the buoys, the thicker the fog got. "Shouldn't we start heading back?" Manuel asked nervously. "I mean, I can hardly see the buoys anymore."

Zeke shook his head. "Fog's always thick here. Don't worry. I know where the traps are."

It took them the rest of the day, but Zeke was right. He had no trouble locating the buoys, and they found thirty-six lobsters in the thirteen traps.

Manuel was smiling as the *Dancing Mathilda* pulled into the harbor. His back still hurt, and his blisters were starting to ooze, but he hadn't gotten sick and had managed to band all the lobsters without getting pinched.

Angus was waiting for him again on the dock. Manuel jumped down and hugged him. "Hey, buddy, check this out." Manuel reached into a paper bag and took out a large lobster. "Zeke's letting me take this biggie home. I've never eaten a lobster before—"

A sailboat pulled up to the dock and Justin and his two cronies climbed out. Manuel spotted his iPod clipped to Justin's belt. "Hey! Hand it over!"

"Hand what over?" asked Justin, smiling innocently.

"Hand over my iPod." Manuel put the lobster on top of a barrel and took a step closer to Justin. "I already told the police you stole it."

Justin stopped smiling and eyed Manuel warily. Then he spotted the lobster on the barrel. "Yeah right.," he said, picking it up. "I'll just tell them that you've been poaching lobsters.."

“Hey, that’s mine!” Manuel lunged for the lobster, but Justin lifted it high and tossed it toward Matt and Lucas. Matt caught it reluctantly. “Matt,” commanded Justin, “why don’t you take off the rubber bands. Then we’ll give him his lobster.”

Matt hesitated, not looking very pleased at the prospect of unbanding a lobster.

“Come on, Justin,” Lucas said. “That’s enough. We’re already late.”

Justin grabbed the lobster and carefully removed the rubber bands. “I have a better idea. Why don’t we give the lobster to his dog?” Justin put the lobster on Angus’s back, and the dog let out a piercing yelp.

Manuel’s heart lurched, and he felt all the blood rush to his head. He pulled the lobster off Angus’s back and dropped it on top of the barrel. Spying the three-pronged buoy hook next to the barrel, he grabbed it and thrust the prongs against Justin’s chest. “You ever lay one finger on this dog again and I’ll ram this straight through your heart.”

Justin froze. Lucas came up behind him and grabbed his shoulders, “Come on, Justin,” he said quietly but firmly. “Let’s go.”

Justin backed away, and Manuel lowered the stick. He watched the three boys climb the hill toward town, and then he wrapped his arms around Angus. “You okay buddy?” Manuel realized his whole body was shaking. He looked up and saw Zeke standing next to him holding the lobster.

“Some people just got no respect for other living creatures,” Zeke said, shaking his head as he put rubber bands back on the claws. Then he handed Manuel the lobster, picked up the buoy stick, and boarded the *Dancing Mathilda*.

As Manuel watched Zeke, he wondered exactly how the buoy hook just happened to have been leaning against the barrel. “Thanks, Zeke,” he shouted. “Thanks for the ... lobster.”