

Chapter 21-Overboard

Pulling traps on such a hot and rolling day ordinarily would be a chore for Tim. He was fishing in the vicinity of yesterday's tagging, closer to shore but still pushing the limits of the boundaries set by his father. Today, after the stand-off on the *Lady Diane* with Whitey and Blodgett over the tagged bluefin, being offshore on his own boat, just he and Tux, a chance to think, the ocean and birds, traps breaking the rail with keepers, he was peaceful and happy. The seas were high and the sun was hot, but he was happy.

Tux was doing a good job pulling the pot warp that fell at Tim's feet away from the gunwale and back to the transom. Tim would give the command to coil and Tux would pull. We make a fine team, Tim thought. In between coiling, Tux sat in the stern near the outboard motor. Whenever Tim pulled a lobster from a trap, Tux gave a few good barks. He knew what this lobstering game was all about.

Tim was still digesting yesterday's confrontation. He had never seen his Dad so angry, nor had he seen him threaten anyone the way he went after Whitey. Was it the fish? Or Annie? Or an accumulation of stress from starting the co-op and trying to make a living? From dealing with me? Tim didn't know. Partly he was upset, and partly proud that his father took control like that.

Immersed in his thoughts and preoccupied with emptying and rebaiting his traps, Tim didn't notice the big wave that caught them broadsides, on the port side behind Tim's back. Everything loose on the deck slid from portside to starboard, even Tux. The brick-weighted, unbaited trap sitting on the starboard gunwale went overboard too. Tim reached for it and missed. With it went the warp, the line attached to the trap. Instead of trying to grab it, Tim stepped on the shooting line, hoping to stop it with his foot. For a second that seemed to work, but the trap was sinking too quickly. Before he could control the line, the following wave hit the boat, rolling it again to starboard. Tim's foot came up bit, which was all the slack that snaking line needed to wrap around his leg and pull him over the gunwale.

"Coil, Tux, coil!" he shouted before he hit the water. With the tide running, if the trap buoy went overboard too, the boat would be loose and drift away before he could swim back to it. Tux was his only hope. Tim knew, before he hit the water, that survival depended on the buoy staying in the boat and getting himself untangled from the trap warp before he was dragged down too deep by the sinking trap.

At first, the shock of the icy water drove everything from his mind but getting another breath. Valuable seconds went by before he was functioning again. Dropping fast, he realized the line was wrapped around his right leg just above the ankle. He brought his right knee to his chest and tried to pull the line over his foot without success. Too much tension. Dad's not going to like this, he thought, as he pulled off his rubber deck boot. The line came off his leg with it as the deck boot sank, and he was free.

But so was the line. As Tim fought his way to the surface, he kept looking for it and saw nothing. If Tux does his job, I'll find it up top, he said to himself. It seemed forever before he broke out, gasping desperately. The trap warp wasn't in sight, and neither was his boat!

A trough. I've got to be in a frigging trough between the rollers. Get on top of a crest and look around, he told himself. Just then one rolled under him and he looked around. Nothing. No boat. He waited

forever for the next one and looked behind him. There was the boat, broadside to the rollers. No trap warp in sight. He started swimming toward it. The water was freezing. He was freezing. He tried his regular crawl, but the water was so cold he had to keep his head above it to swim. With his face in the water, his chest was so tight he couldn't breathe

"Tux. Hold on, boy, hold on," he called out when he paused on the next crest.

No bark came back. That's good, he thought, he's got the rope in his mouth.

Something big brushed his legs as they dangled. Shark, it's got to be a shark. He forced himself to look down into the water. It was huge, grey or silver blue, a very big shark. The frightening sight almost drove away the cold. Then he saw the dorsal fins. It was a bluefin, not a shark.

He stuck his face in the water and looked again. In front of the second dorsal was an implanted tag. This was yesterday's fish, he was sure of it. And riding across its body was the trap warp, his lifeline, which trailed almost horizontally near the surface. That's why he didn't see it. Later Tim would wonder if the line being there was happenstance, or if Big Blue brought it to him. For now, he didn't care. He clutched the line and pulled.

Nothing, no tension. Let the lack of tension be just slack in the line, let Tux still have an end, he hoped as he began pulling himself along it. He knew he didn't have long before hypothermia would rob all his strength. Should he swim for the boat or move up the line and hope the end of it was still on the boat in Tux's mouth? He chose the line. Hand over hand he pulled it toward him. The bluefin brushed him again, letting him know it was there.

Finally he felt some resistance, then some more. At the top of the next roller he saw the boat, and he was moving toward it. At the gunwale, his head barely showing at the rail, line in his mouth, was Tux. Good old Tux.

"Pull, Tux, pull," he yelled, and got a mouthful of salt water for his effort.

Tux heard him and saw him, and barked. The line came out of his mouth and Tim recoiled backwards.

"Coil, Tux. Just coil."

The tension came back to the line. Tux still had it. The buoy should still be in the boat. Tim summoned some reserve of strength he didn't know he had and pulled himself the last thirty yards to the boat, telling Tux to coil whenever he could get his head high enough. He reached the boat exhausted, too exhausted to hoist himself over the side. There was nothing on the hull to hang onto, either.

Holding the rope in his right hand, he moved to the stern where the transom was cut lower for the outboard motor mounting. Working around to the starboard side of the motor, he put his still-booted left foot onto the small horizontal plate above the propeller and pushed himself up. As part of his body came out of the water, he let go of the transom with his right hand and looped the line over the stern cleat before he fell back into the ocean. Then he repeated the maneuver and managed a second turn around the cleat. As he fell back, he felt the line grab and tighten around the cleat. Now he had some leverage.

On his third try, with his left foot pushing down on the planning plate and his right arm pulling on the cleated line, he yanked himself over the transom and fell onto the deck. Tux was immediately all over him, licking his face. With Tux no longer clamped on the line, Tim saw the lobster buoy fly overboard. That didn't matter now. Tux had saved his life, and Tim kissed him right back.

Despite the very warm day, Tim lay shivering on the deck, still freezing in his wet clothes. They had to come off, all of them. He shed his oilskins and the remaining boot, tossing them on the deck. He got off his jeans and socks and tee shirt, and laid those over the console to dry. Totally nude, he sat on the gunwale and looked at Tux sitting in front of him, head cocked slightly to one side. Tux was almost motionless, intently staring at Tim, not ready to let him out of sight again. Tim's joy to be alive and his love for his dog welled up in him. He slid down on his knees to the deck and gave Tux a huge hug.

"We made it, Tux. We made it."

Tux wasn't big on hugs. Usually he suffered through them. This time Tux knew it was different, and he went back to licking Tim's nose. This burst of affection from normally reserved Tux on top of his relief to be back safely in the boat overwhelmed Tim. He began to cry and that too was a relief. His life. His dog. His dad. His mom. His mom! Could he finally mourn for her? He could. Only Tux was there to see him like this.

Tux never stopped licking his nose, and Tim finally stopped crying. He stood up and padded around the boat. He dug out the spare jeans and tee from underneath the bench seat in front of the console, clothes that his dad insisted he keep on board. Now he knew why. Without any spare socks, he put on his sneakers over bare feet, stowed the loose gear, and decided he was ready to go home. Clothes drying would have to wait.

He took it easy on the ride back to the harbor. He knew how close he'd come, how much he owed to Tux, and maybe as much to that big bluefin. He reached down to give Tux, sitting right beside him, a rub on the head. Yeah, we're a good team. A great team.

First stop inside the harbor was at Peirce Island Lobster. Lea-Ann as usual was at the dock to take his dock line and buy his catch.

"Put these on your dad's account?" she asked.

"Lea-Ann, I'd like my own, now that I've got my own boat. I've got some equipment to replace. I need a new pair of deck boots, for starters."

"You call it, Tim. Was it a good day for you offshore?"

"You could say that," answered Tim laconically.

At least it ended well. He wasn't going to tell her what happened until he figured out how much he would say to his dad. Five minutes after pushing off the lobster company dock, he was tied up at his own, attached to the *Lady Diane*. Dad must be home already, he thought. Stuffing his wet clothes in his backpack, he unlocked his bicycle and pedaled home, Tux running beside him as usual.

He knew something was wrong as soon as he turned on Cranfield. There were two sheriff's cars, the marine patrol cruiser, and one of the town cruisers too. Three of the four had their blue lights flashing. Besides the police, there were several people, their neighbors, milling about and talking.

Tim skidded his bike to a halt by their front door, hopped off and tried to run inside. One of the sheriffs blocked his way.

"Where are you going, son?"

"Inside my house. What's going on?"

"We're making an arrest. You need to back out of the way."

"Who are you arresting?"

"Roger Beaumer. Are you related?"

"That's my dad. He hasn't done anything. Why are you arresting him?"

"I think the warrant says assault with a deadly weapon. I heard he went after someone with a flare gun."

"That's unfair. He was defending us. You can't do that to him." Tim was almost in tears. His worst fears were happening. Going overboard, worrying about how to tell his dad, all of that was forgotten.

The front door opened behind the sheriff and several officers came out. In their midst, handcuffed, head down, was Roger. Annie was there too, bringing up the rear. Roger saw his son at the door.

"Dad, they can't do this to you."

Roger looked up and saw his son. At first he lit up, but then his shoulders sagged.

"Tim, don't worry. Annie will take care of you. They tell me I'll be out in the morning."

"Keep moving, Mr. Beaumer, out to the car."

The police walked him to the car, held his head down, and guided him into the back seat. They closed the door and drove away.

Annie found Tim and put her arm around his shoulders.

"We'll get him out, Tim. We'll get him out quickly."

"Why was he arrested, Annie?"

"Whitey and Blodgett filed charges. They said your father threatened them."

"But they're the ones who threatened you," said Tim angrily.

"I know, Tim, I know. We'll get him out, and we'll get him acquitted."

Ali came out of the crowd of neighbors—her house was nearby of course—and gave him a hug. Tux was next to him also, looking confused, upset that Tim was upset. The world is unfair, Tim thought, damned unfair. There is good, like my dad, and our friends like Annie and Ali. Tux is pure goodness. He saved my life. Even that bluefin.

But there's bad too, he realized, like Blodgett and Whitey. If we let it, the bad will beat down the good. We can't let it.