

# ONE

Most days he woke up, his body twisted with the kind of ache that made him suck his back teeth before sitting up in the dark. But nothing hurt today, not even the distorted muscles in his back, and so it was already shaping up to be a fine day. Even with a heaving sea, a day fine and blue. Dirty blond whiskers haunted his face as he gunned his boat to cruising speed, smacking against the chop with a steady thud, past a rocky outcrop and out of the harbor. Past the first green can, Little Island on the right, past Sawyer Fernald's strings and up beyond the ledge with four runty spruce trees. He knew this route as blindly as a commuter in morning traffic. His family's territory was a three-mile-square area studded with little islands: Seal Rock, Squirrel Island, Sawyer Light and Decker's Gut. The previous year, some of these islands were profiled on the Internet and Decker's Gut had been sold to a prince in Bahrain. People had gotten angry about that—a library in Rockland had been vandalized. Hundreds of tiny islands on an atlas had been scratched out like the eyes of an ex-lover in a photograph.

A fumbling crackle on the VHF radio tipped him off that she was trying to call.

"Jamie—hellooooo. Where am you?" Anja had no radio protocol, never did. The VHF scorched with static, distorting her words.

Jamie wiped bait off his hands, pulled the mike off the clip.

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“Anja,” he said and had to say it once again. “Keep your mouth off the mike. Say it slow.”

“I can’t get the fucky vacuum cleaner to work.” People thought it was so funny to hear Anja swear, but hearing it every day to describe everything (pass the fucking toast, where the fuck is my other sock?) wore him down, especially because it was the word he heard over and over in the harbor to describe every little thing. (“Did you see that feckin’ guy’s boat?” “If they were in my feckin’ harbor, I’d feckin’ fuck ’em up.” “Christ, I feckin’ ’ma-jin.”)

“Anja, did you plug it in?”

“Yes, Jamie! It is plugged in and everything and when it goes turned on, it goes. . . .” (And here she made a sound like a lawnmower running over a stump, further torqued by her inability to keep her mouth off the mike.)

“Anja—I can’t figure it out from here.” At that moment he was headed toward a craggy scruff of islands that delineated his family’s fishing grounds. “I’ll be back at three—we can look at it then.”

“But it needs it now, Jamie. And I’ve got to make the vacuum go, then I need to scrub the pot on the stove or else my whole day will be ruined!”

That part was true, for her routine—maybe two tasks—*would* take an entire day. For after she got through making her lists, strategizing how best to maneuver the vacuum through the house (straight rows? or cross-hatch?), perhaps jotting her feelings about it down in a special notebook, forgetting that she had planned to vacuum at all, then realizing about midway through the morning—yes, indeed, she had planned to vacuum—he would’ve already finished a day of wrestling 300 traps over the wash rail.

“Jamie you didn’t not leave me a note this morning,” Anja said. Even over the distortion of the radio he could hear the pout in her voice. Every morning, he left her a note, something to cheer her day. *Don’t eat too much cheese—I’ll get home usual time, love ya love ya love ya.* Or *I’ll check the propane later, we’ll grill out, have a fine day, love ewe, J.*

“Yeah I was kind of running late this morning,” he said, his thumb releasing the button. When he got up at 4:30 every morning, the poetry wasn’t always there.

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“You can give me one now?”

“What, a note?”

“Yeah huh, just a little one?”

The snow on the radio blew hard, a voice interrupting, “I’ll give ya a note sweet cakes.” Big Steve being funny. They were on an open channel, everyone on the water could hear.

“Anja,” Jamie said, leaning against the wheel. “Kinda busy right now, I’ll make up for it when I get home.”

“Oh.”

Jamie’s eyes rose to the canopy. His thumb pushed in the mike button and he began to mumble through an old ballad.

“Awake, awake, you drowsy sleeper,  
Awake and listen to me  
There’s someone at your bedroom window  
A-weeping there most bitterly.”

“Hey Eugley,” a man’s high voice interrupted. It was Thongchai. “What you feckin wasting your life on the water for? You got all that raw talent, you could be on American Idol.”

The VHF snorted with more comments. Big Steve’s voice. “I thought it was kind of ten-dah.” Jamie resisted nailing Thongchai, who’d recently gotten an OUI and could be counted on to do something stupid at least once a week. It might be a little fun to stir up the pot on this summer morning, get all the yahoos yammering away on the VHF, but then the whole afternoon would be gone. And there were bills to pay.

It was an old superstition that if a summer started out rocky it would not smooth out, yet every season seemed to start off with some damn thing or another, and he’d been doing this since he was 12. The summers never flowed, not in the way people seemed to imagine was the carefree life of the proud lobsterman out on the lone sea. The year before started with broken gear and then there was the summer no one could get his hands on good bait before it went soft. And there were always territory problems—long-held

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grudges over the winter spanning into the first real week of summer, where arguments at the docks and disputes over bottom had to be sorted out all over again. Every summer since he was a kid, there always seemed to be some crotchety hassle with one of the Fogertys over boundaries. And right now he could see the signs of another winning season about to start.

A half-mile separated the Eugley fishing grounds from the Fogertys' like masking tape down the middle of a warring roommates' room, and everyone knew that past Seal Rock was Eugley territory, yet as his boat skimmed up to the borderline, there he could see his strings tangled up with the alien colors of someone else's buoys. As a boy, out on the water with his grandfather Maynard, Jamie saw old Dale Fogerty out on his boat every day and it wasn't hard to recognize Fogerty's red-striped buoys trespassing near his grandfather's gear where the island coves and kelp beds were better for lobsters.

"Pappy, would you look at that?" Jamie would squeak. "They're over the line again!"

If Maynard were ever angry over this blatant pushing of lines, he managed to always maintain his temper. "Just relax, the tide could've carried them over." Maynard had no love for the Fogertys, but he had respect for genuine mistakes. Too much gear in the water and too many people lobstering—there'd always be some sloppiness. Except the Fogertys relied on murky intent to further their careers—it was a known fact—they pushed everyone.

Jamie stood planted on his boat, counter-balancing the swells until he got close enough and cranked the wheel, cutting the engine to peer down at the mess. These definitely weren't the Fogertys' buoys. These were quadruple-striped with fluorescent pink, lime green, black, and Day-Glo orange. The old guys, the highliners, all had one color—yellow, red, or orange. A solid color meant seniority, a long time in the business, but the more licenses that were granted, the more guys had to stripe up their buoys just to identify them. Jamie used the gaff to hook one of the fruity-looking buoys, working at the knots to untangle to see if he could identify it by number or name. He didn't recognize the small etched numbers. They

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belonged to someone very new to the business, someone with no skills in trap placement, for the experienced fishermen knew how the tides worked. He counted how many strings were snarled. His were yellow with one jagged stripe—his Charlie Browns, Maynard's original colors. He stared at his Charlie Browns, now all cozy with the crazy-colored buoys. It would take all afternoon to untangle them.

Jamie snatched the VHF mike off its clip. "Hey, *Delores* here, whaddaya know, some hammerhead's been over here by Seal Rock. What I'm looking at here has more friggin' colors than a Jamaican prom."

A few moments went by as the boat lurched against waves. A voice answered.

"Oh yeah, yeah, down there on the western bottom? I see that's jammed right full."

His salt-cracked fingers reached for the volume knob on the VHF. "I can't pull a trap nowhere—everything's all snarled up."

"Just cut 'em then." His father's voice over the radio—as if that were obvious.

"I'm not gonna cut them," Jamie said, irritated. "I don't know whose they are—they could be some kid's."

"Stop being all sensitive and tell me where they are—I'll cut them myself," James Senior said. He was showing off for anyone who was listening—though that kind of talk over an open channel was dangerous.

Soon enough, Thongchai joined in. "If they're that friggin' stupid to dump their gear all over yours, Eugley—you know what to do."

"I've got it *handled*," Jamie retorted. Though it would've been easier to cut them, he didn't want to start trouble with someone he didn't know.

Big Steve's voice came on. "Eugley, you'd better not be out there 'til nine tonight, untying them by hand there, guy."

It was a slow morning, now everyone had an opinion. Thongchai's high voice returned.

"Want me to come over? I'll rip 'em right out of the water. I'll

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wrap 'em round the neck of the guy who put 'em there. Tell ya what, I'll. . . ."

"I can *handle* it."

Jamie was about to turn the radio off when Anja's voice floated up amid the harsh static.

"Jamie? Do we know where the cheese grater is?"

Jamie put down one of the knots and wearily picked the mike up. "I don't know, can you just figure it out? Check in the drawer by the stove."

"It not there!" He could hear the scrambling clink of metal utensils.

"And Jamie—this is the problem. I am trying to make a sandwich and the problem is the cheese is not cut and I'm not using no knife and you can't make a *fucking* sandwich without the *cheese*, Jamie and . . . oh wait." She paused.

He sighed. "Where was it?"

"In the drawer."

"By the stove?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Anja—remember what we talked about, easy on the cheese."

"Puh."

Jamie put the mike back on the clip and stared at the twisted buoys. He was tired, not feeling particularly generous, but he threw the gears in reverse, backing up to the first string. It could be some high school kid. The young ones coming up, the ones who made honest mistakes—they got a little leniency. If these buoys belonged to a teenager, Jamie had to let them alone—that was the code. As a 16-year-old, Jamie had been green himself, had overshot the distance a few times, tangling up a few of the experienced fishermen's strings. But now that he was a highliner, he had a responsibility to teach kids the right way. He didn't do things like his father, a known hothead who would've just cut them straight off and started the season wrangling with an enemy just for something to look forward to.

He set about untangling his Charlie Browns from the striped buoys. For each striped buoy he pulled away, Jamie wrapped two half-hitches of warp round the shaft so that it lay queer against the

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tide. This was the *back tie*, the first warning to read the tides properly and to stay away from Jamie's strings. Whoever it was, if the guy didn't get the message with the back tie, the next time he would get cut.

He could hear a large boat in the distance, his ears trained to recognize the engine. Out of habit, he dropped the buoys; it sounded like Marine Patrol. A spark off the water caught his eye—a glint of white. *Now what?* he thought.

It appeared to be a cruising yacht, spit-shine clean, slamming against the swells. He stood, his cap low on his brow, and took his binoculars hanging off a nail to get a look. Figured. *The Wet Dream* out of Fort Myers. Stories had already spread throughout the dockside pubs about this particular picnic boat. Dozens of toggles had recently gotten sheared off, ruining hundreds of dollars worth of gear in the harbor. And people argued over whether it was typical early-season mischief or if *The Wet Dream* had something to do with it.

*The Wet Dream* slowed, settling a half-mile away, coming to a stop among a plume of yellow and green buoys—Thongchai's—and Jamie laughed. They couldn't have settled in a worse place. Thongchai was a crazy-ass Thai, more cracker than the reddest of the rednecks in the Point. He'd been one of the guys hollering about the yachties and the cut traps these last few days. If he had any idea that *The Wet Dream* now sat in his territory, his golden face would've turned the color of brick.

Jamie turned a bait bucket over on its end and sat down. His stomach told him it was 9 in the morning. He opened his dinner pail, unscrewing the plastic cap off his liter of Pepsi, and set to work unwrapping the tinfoil off last night's sausage, bacon, and ham pizza. It was the best pizza in the Point, made by Colleen at the Beach Store, who advertised it as "The Vegan." Jamie crammed it, folding the triangular point like ribbon candy into his mouth, and checked to make sure the rest of his dinner, two chocolate puddings, a Ring Ding, and a Hostess fruit pie, were safe from salt water.

Jamie ate, squinting against the glare of the waves. A piece of sausage fell to the knee of his yellow oilskins and he flicked it away.

He had work to do, yet he stayed rooted to the deck, watching. Thongchai could handle his own business. Already the morning was wasted over the snarled traps—so he might as well chalk it up.

Suddenly, two men emerged on the top deck of *The Wet Dream*. Jamie put his pizza down and held up the binoculars. They were middle aged, deeply suntanned, with furred gray chests and curved bellies plunging over their madras shorts. They looked like the kind of dickhead yachties who still went by their college nicknames, like Smitty and Jonesy. Guys who liked to spread both arms across the backs of booths, talk and laugh too loud in restaurants. The ones overly familiar with waitresses. “Hey honey, what’s yer name?” The wrist wavers: “Hey—sweet thing, get yer bucket over here and get us another round.”

Smitty and Jonesy leaned upon the steel cabled rail of their yacht holding rocks glasses as a third man emerged from below deck with a beer in his hand. Jamie had to squint through binoculars to read the guy’s T-shirt:

DIP ME IN CHOCOLATE AND THROW ME TO THE  
LESBIANS

This one with the cool T-shirt had wraparound sunglasses—he looked like a Cooper. Cooper had corralled what meager hair he had left on his head into a thinning ponytail.

Now a woman emerged, joining them. A blonde. The binoculars stayed on her for a moment. Her breasts protruded past the top and sides of her white tank top—her very own personal flotation devices. Jamie zeroed in on her face. Long nose with sun-furrowed lines. Hair deep-fried blonde. She was about as old as her companions, a yacht wife maybe, but certainly no one’s trophy. What was a good name for her? Brandi with an i. Brandi began thrusting her finger at them about something. And he could see by the slight way the men turned away from her that she was bitching about their drinking so early.

Cooper then did something interesting. He produced a nine-iron from somewhere and began swinging it on deck, arcing it high above his head, the sun glinting off metal, shooting a flash of light across the light, choppy waves. The crack of a golf ball conducted

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instantly across the water. Jamie's binoculars followed four or five golf balls high into the blue morning sky. Each time a faint hurrah could be heard from the picnic boat.

The swells swept along with a loose height and fetch. The yachties soon tired of their game and continued to hang over the rail, drinking and staring at the buoys in the water like babies fascinated by tub toys. Jamie watched them with a tortuous blue squint. Nine generations of lobstermen watched along with him.

He saw Cooper lower his golf club into the water and look around, as if: *Do you see anybody?*

*Come on you guys just do it*, said Brandi, squealing, as she stumbled backward, licked her thumb, and wiped her drenched chest.

Jonesy: *Just pull it up.*

Cooper reached overboard, attempted to gaff the yellow and green buoy. It took two tries with a golf club and he began pulling up the buoy and toggle.

Jamie stood up, brushed his blond whiskers. He turned over the engine and swung the wheel of *Delores* hard left. He began hauling toward *The Wet Dreams'* starboard as the bow slapped against waves, coming down hard on the swells. On full throttle, *Delores* could sound like a bear in heat, diesel engine disgorging smoke. It took him less than two minutes to get to the yacht, but by then they'd let the trap fall back into the water.

The smooth and gleaming curves of *The Wet Dream* bounced light from the sun. The yachties stood on the top deck doing their best to straighten their expressions as Jamie banked his boat skillfully right up against the yacht. Up close, *Delores* was less than half *The Wet Dream's* size.

"Hey there!" Smitty called down. He had one foot up on the lower cable rail, and from the lower vantage point Jamie could see straight up his madras leg into a naked tangle. "We just wanted to see if you used wire or wood. We had a bet going that in Maine, you guys still used wooden pots."

Jamie shut off his engine so that the sound between them was clear, wonderfully absent, just the slosh of two boats grinding up against each other and the high squalls of far-off gulls.

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“Are these your pots?” Smitty asked. His face was saturated with high color as if from a deep, bad burn.

“They’re my friend’s *traps*,” Jamie said, emphasizing the distinction in terms. His arms gravitated to the roof of the wheelhouse, his fingers locking onto the edge of the canopy, his favorite stance when stopping for a chat.

“Ah, well, we weren’t planning on doing anything,” Smitty said, shaking his rocks glass so the ice tinkled. Jonesy had one finger in his ear, rooting around. Cooper’s golf clubs lay at his feet. Jamie noticed that Cooper’s boat shoes were monogrammed.

“Fort Myers—that’s a ways from here,” Jamie observed, examining the picnic boat up close. She was all smooth white fiberglass, a calla lily with crisp curves and shadows by the upper decks.

“Sanibel Island, ever hear of it?”

“Nope.” Wherever it was, it sounded nice and sanitized, not like the islands in Maine such as Herring Gut, Cold Arse Island, and Drunkard’s Rock. He imagined what it would be like to bring Thongchai and Big Steve and The Kid down to Fort Myers where Smitty worked. He imagined Smitty at his job, an executive at a glass-encased luxury boat showroom perhaps. Just what would Smitty would do if Jamie and his pals plunked themselves down in his territory and broke out the scotch? Of course, not scotch—more like 30-packs of Coors Lite. Sitting in reclining lawn chairs knocking back beers watching Smitty trying to work a customer into buying tackle and fishing rods.

“Have you lived here all your life?” Brandi asked, shyly.

Jamie gave them the old back road reply. “Not yet.” A roll of the high-hat. *Ta-dum*. It took them a moment to get it and they smiled. It emboldened them, now that they had a real conversation going.

“How many lobsters would you say you catch a day?” Cooper leaned forward, resting his arms on the rail.

“Depends on the day,” Jamie said, truthfully. Here it was, question and answer time. Tourists did this every day—as if he were a fucking information kiosk.

“I heard,” Smitty said, “that a lobsterman up here can pull over 300 pounds a day . . . if you’re good.” In saying this, Smitty’s

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chin tucked down, spreading his unshaven jowls against his neck.

“I guess,” Jamie said. “If you’re good.”

“Are you good?” Smitty asked.

“You want to trade places?”

They liked that and laughed. Smitty and Jonesy craned their gaze around Jamie’s boat, taking in the various dials and instruments.

“Do lobsters really have sex through their feelers?” Brandi asked, with a little giggle. Immediately the men turned on her—it was the damndest thing. Smitty scoffed as if he’d never heard anything so stupid. Cooper’s head turned swiftly, his ponytail jerking across his shoulder. “Jesus—” Cooper snorted and shook his head, looking to Jamie. Brandi seemed hurt over this, her hawkish face crumpling. He’d seen a lot of broken bar girls like her, and it was probably safe to assume it wasn’t the first time they’d turned on her. The problem with women like her was that no matter how many times somebody made her feel like a worthless turd in a bucket, she’d still emerge smiling up on deck the next day.

“You wanna see some lobster?” Jamie said, more to distract the men from Brandi. “Why don’t you haul that trap up again—let’s see what we got.”

Smitty eyed him. “Really?”

“Yeah, my gaff’ll do it, but that nine iron’s just as good,” he said, and once again the men laughed.

“Go ahead—haul her up. I want to see how many are in there.”

Cooper used his golf club to pull the toggle up to the yacht rail, where Jonesy helped to raise the wire trap to the surface. Water poured from the green mesh rectangle choked with kelp. Cooper wrestled with it, trying to get ahold of the unwieldy cage. It was kind of funny to see how awkward a trap was in someone else’s hands.

“Don’t scratch my boat, asshole,” Smitty growled to Cooper. Jamie didn’t offer to help, watching as they tried to latch onto it.

“Relax,” Cooper said. “Have another drink.”

Jonesy and Cooper managed to pull the trap up over the steel cable rail of the yacht and set it down on the teak deck. Jamie could

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see five or six lobsters inching around inside along with kelp, along with some useless cunner and cod.

“Why aren’t they red?” Brandi asked, peering at them.

“How do I open this thing?” Cooper said, grunting to unhook the bungee cord keeping it shut. He got it open and stood up, triumphantly.

“You ever fish for lobster before?” Jamie asked.

Cooper smiled at him. “No.”

“Oh. You’re a natural.”

Cooper thrust his hand into the trap. “Careful,” Jamie said, casually. “They ain’t banded.”

Cooper grinned at him sideways. “Will they take my finger off?”

Jamie loved these guys—they kept setting him up for the classic vaudeville answers. “They’ll take off your whole pecker—with your fingers attached,” he said. This time they roared. Smitty kept pointing at him as if to say, “*Oh you . . . you . . .*”

The lobster that Cooper gingerly pulled out was easily over three pounds, a gorilla. It was green and black, mottled as a calico kitten. Its tail muscles convulsed, flapping violently in Cooper’s hand, startling him to the point of almost dropping it. Brandi shrieked and tried to hide behind Jonesy. They all stood over it, trying to touch it. It was a throwback, Jamie could tell without even putting a gauge to it—too big, too long to be a legal catch.

“Oh my God, I have to take a picture of this!” Brandi gasped and whirled behind her. She dug around in a bag and produced a small silver and black digital camera.

“You want me to take one of all of ya?” Jamie asked. His meaty knuckles stayed fast to the canopy.

“Oh yes!” Brandi said, delighted. Smitty’s smile faltered for a moment as she leaned ponderously across the rail to hand her camera to Jamie. “Careful,” he said as Jamie reached out for it.

“Don’t worry, it’s a piece of shit,” Jonesy said. “She’s already dropped it twice.”

Jamie held the tiny silver electronic in his rough palms. No bigger than a credit card, it weighed as much as a pack of gum. He

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turned it over and heard Brandi instruct him to press the top button to the left.

“Does this thing take good pictures?” Jamie asked.

“Only if you’ve got \$400 to spare,” Smitty said, and coughed sharply into his hand. “It’s got two integrated lenses and eight-point-zero megapixels. . . .” He continued describing its features, but the terms he used had no meaning for Jamie. He’d only ever had a regular camera with film; his parents had one of these digital things, but he’d never used it.

Jamie stared into the glowing viewfinder and snapped a few pictures while they stood for him, smiling.

“So what do you give for Maine lobsters down in Florida?” Jamie said.

They had no idea what he’d just said. Smitty cupped his hand to his ear. “What’s that?”

“If you go to a restaurant down there,” Jamie said slowly, trying to keep his syllables relatively clear, “how much would you typically pay for a Maine lobster?”

“Aw, well, if you’re talking a good restaurant,” Smitty said, rocking back on his heels, “not one of those lobster shacks where you have to take it apart yourself, oh, I’d say, easily a buck and change for two people.”

“You can get ’em at the Sanibel Inn for a decent price,” Jonesy added.

“Yeah, but those aren’t Maine lobsters, those are the Bahamian kind,” Cooper said. “They have those same ones down in St. Kitt’s, remember? It’s the. . . . What is it? The spiny lobsters—no claws. No good.”

“Oh, they’re good,” Jonesy argued. “I mean, divers have to hand pick each one—they don’t put ’em in traps.”

“They’re trash,” Smitty said, as if the subject were closed. “I had a waitress who didn’t know shit try to pass some lobster chowder off as if it was from Maine, and I could tell right away. You can always tell.”

While they were talking, Jamie’s ears picked up the sound of a far-off approaching boat. It was the *Maisie May*, Thongchai’s boat.

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“Why don’t you hold that one up,” Jamie said. And they grinned, holding the lobster up like big game fisherman posing with the bloodied remains of a great white. The lobster continued to protest furiously, assailing their faces and eyes with flailing saltwater.

In the distance, Thongchai’s lobster boat plowed toward them, and soon everyone’s attention turned as it slowed, closing in on *Delores*. As his boat came up, Thongchai cut the engine and drifted. The boats all staggered against the waves—two snub-nose boats like pit bulls growling down a groomed show dog. It was as if all the tracing paper of the yachties’ smiles had been lifted up, leaving only their charcoal expressions. Behind the wheel stood Thongchai. He had an evil look on his face, his crazy broom-straw bangs stuck at angles under his cap. He saw his trap upon *The Wet Dream*’s deck, the warp and toggle hanging like a string off the side.

Thongchai threw down his cap and jumped up on the gunwale of his lobster boat, his lithe body balancing against the waves. He placed a hand on the railing of *The Wet Dream*, his even white teeth showing.

“Permission to board?” he said, sarcastically.

“Okay, okay,” Jamie said, looking into the viewfinder, snapping some more pictures. “Easy there, guy.” Brandi huddled behind Smitty. Jamie could see the anxiety shifting across their faces.

“Thongchai—just hold up a sec.” Jamie looked at the camera, then to Smitty. “Look here—you’ve got six of them lobsters in that trap there, but you’ll have to throw back that one in your hands cause it’s illegal. Still, I’d say that was a pretty fair trade for a camera like this.” Jamie held it out to Thongchai. “It’s got eight megapixels—your mom could use one of these.”

“You can’t keep getting in the middle, Eugley,” Thongchai said, stepping down off the gunwale. His cut-off flannel shirt exposed his brown, muscular arms.

“Well you can’t keep banging heads, neither.”

Thongchai became exasperated. “What the hell am I supposed to do?”

Jamie shrugged. “Tell them.”

Only a sliver of Thongchai’s white teeth showed through his

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lips. He pointed at Smitty. "I'm fishing for my family—my father needs some help. And here you are taking lobsters from my trap like it's no big deal. How would you like me coming to your house and taking your car just cause it was sitting there?"

Jamie knew it would be a good, fine day out on the water. Plenty of time to just set for a while, soak up the sun. Jamie held fast to the canopy, turning his wrist to see the last image on the bitty camera. It was a good one of their faces the moment Thongchai began to board their boat. He leaned over the wash rail to hand the little camera to Thongchai. They looked at each other. There was nothing but bottle-green water for miles. The yachties were way out of their territory, a long way from the rules of civilization, where bribes, charm, an offered scotch on the rocks had no currency. They didn't like where this was going. No one did the full head turn to check with the others—it was more like pairs of eyes sliding left, sliding right, to figure out what to say next.

"Well," Smitty said after a bit. "See now, that's a really good camera."

Jamie regarded Smitty, dismayed. He had it all worked out peacefully, and now this yachtie wasn't smart enough to cut a deal. *This* was why he could never get a full day of work in. *This* was why he couldn't allow himself to mind his own business. Everyone always expected him to deal with these things. Jamie lost his good mood then, framing the flat edge of his palm over his face, shielding his eyes from the sun. He seemed to be looking long into the distance.

"You know how you had your golf club all wrapped up around that toggle when I came along?" Jamie said. "Just figure if I'd been Marine Patrol, you'd be looking at a \$2,000 fine just for touching that trap."

"Fleck that, you're lucky I didn't get here first," Thongchai said, low.

"Or you might want to consider that." Jamie stretched his hand out to his friend.

Smitty drew up, his jowls hunched back into his neck. "Well, we didn't know."

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Thongchai snorted. “You didn’t know. I’ll tell ya what you didn’t *know*. Now I’m gonna take that monogrammed boat shoe you’re wearing and jam it up your ass sideways.”

“Okay,” Jamie said, his hand out. The last of Thongchai’s patience was gone. His face had become as splotchy as Smitty’s sunburn.

Brandi emerged behind the men, then. With tentative steps against the gentle rocking of the boat, she reached both hands out to grip the stainless cable rail, her furrowed, tanned face upon Thongchai. “We’re really sorry,” she said. “We would’ve never done this if we thought we were taking anything from your family.”

Smitty had nothing to add to that—the other men couldn’t look at anything but the deck or out to sea. It was clear from Thongchai’s expression that Brandi had said what needed to be said—that today wasn’t going to start off with a good old-fashioned ass bashing.

Jamie looked at Thongchai. “You good with that?”

“Sure enough.” Thongchai pulled the camera back out of his pocket and stepped back up on the gunwale to hand it to Brandi. “I don’t need this.” She took it back, tentatively.

“And look—it ain’t like something for nothin’,” Jamie told Smitty, once Thongchai was back behind the wheel of his boat. “Keep the lobsters. That’s six good-sized Maine lobsters out of this—none of that Florida lobster shack shit.”

Pretty soon, it all made sense. The yachties didn’t go out of their way to thank Jamie for sparing them, but it was a grudging few steps to get back to some civil smiles. And it warmed Jamie to think that later, when they served up some steamed lobsters and made makeshift bibs out of linen napkins, they’d be thinking about what that camera was worth as they captured the moment with nothing but their five senses. Still, with a little Glenfiddich, the camera incident would eventually turn into a raucous story for the boys down in the yacht showroom one night after work when Smitty finally got the chance to yank loose his sweaty tie.