

Acadia Discovery

C. R. Fulton

THE CAMPGROUND KIDS

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Acadia Discovery by C. R. Fulton
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A special thanks to Seth Darling, the lead scientist at the Argonne National Laboratory. *I deeply appreciate your time, sharing your knowledge and your dedication to bettering our world! The oceans are cleaner because of your work. (At least, they will be soon!)*

- 1 -

I grip the slippery rock as the Atlantic Ocean seethes around it. A wave climbs over my boots, its icy temperature making me shiver. When it recedes, I scramble forward toward a larger rock.

For a moment, I sit, planning my next move and admiring the sunrise while avoiding the sharp barnacles cemented to the boulder. My goal is a higher rock, which might be the farthest part of Acadia National Park that extends into the ocean.

Another brilliant blue wave reaching for me gives way to a frothing white foam. The waves sound like a giant's breathing. *If I time it just right and I jump as far as I can, I might make it to that next rock.* But then again, I'm big boned, definitely

stronger than I am fast. A grin spreads across my face as a sense of adventure pulls me forward.

Sucking in a deep breath, I crouch on the rock, waiting for the rolling waves to ebb. As I launch forward, my foot slips on the slick seaweed, causing me to lose precious momentum.

“Rrrrrraahhh!” Halfway across the span, I know I’m not going to make it. The cold Atlantic swell bites my skin as I plunge downward with barely enough time to suck in a desperate breath. Frigid water rakes me over the boulders. I cover my head in the wild current as I crash into an unforgiving rock. The pain makes me realize exactly how dangerous my position is. *If the water draws me out to sea...* Frantic now, I suck in a quick breath, glimpsing my family gathered around a tide pool farther down the shore. *Twelve years isn’t long enough to live!*

My fingers glide over the thick seaweed, doing nothing to slow my momentum. The wave recedes, tearing me away from the shore. *I must get out!* Paddling for all I’m worth only earns me a deep cut on my finger when it catches a barnacle and a bruise on my knee. Scrambling wildly, I gain an-

other breath, and my heart slams into my ribs. *I'm nearly past the last rocks!* My leg jams into the rock from which I had leapt. I roll hard in the swirling water, throwing my arms around it, seaweed slime smashing against my cheek. The ocean rips at my frame so hard it nearly pulls off my tight-laced boots.

My fingers are slipping! I inch seaward, barnacles scraping my stomach. Just when I'm sure I can't hold on a second longer, the wave lets off its suction. *NOW!*

Growling, I claw at the rock, and the Atlantic gives me a gentle shove upward. I flop into the world of solid ground with a whimper of relief. Shivering sets in hard as the wind steals my body heat. I huddle on the low rock, gripping my knees. But before fear makes me freeze completely, I leap painfully back the way I had come.

When I'm past the broken, ragged surf line, I bend with my hands on my knees, breathing deep and shivering.

"Did you find something?" my ten-year-old sister Sadie shouts in my direction.

The intense thankfulness to be alive makes it difficult to answer. “N...no.”

“Why are you wet?” my cousin Ethan asks, unfolding his tall, string-bean frame.

Mom turns to look at me. “Isaiah, what happened to you?”

I look down at the seawater streaming off me. “Well, a wave caught me.”

Mom just stares at me.

“I’m fine...really.” I shrug it off, but the saltwater I had swallowed makes me feel a little green.

Dad’s wide hand makes quite a splash as he lunges for something in the tide pool. “Got it!”

He holds up something, and I pick my way over the rocks.

“That’s a green crab!” Sadie says as Dad hands it to her. Its claws wave uselessly as she carefully holds the wide shell from the back. “This is an invasive species that’s hurting many native creatures.”

“Let me see him.” Ethan holds out his hand.

“Hold him like this,” Sadie says, showing him how to hold the crab with two fingers.

“I know how to hold a crab,” he says, taking the crustacean. “Oh, look! He’s blowing bubbles!”

The crab’s mouth is covered in bubbles that put my best efforts with milk and a straw to shame.

“He’s aerating his gills,” Sadie says. “Technically, crabs on land are holding their breath.”

“In that case, I’ll give the little guy a dunk.” As soon as Ethan lifts the crab back out of the water, its waving pincher latches on to his finger.

“Ow!” Ethan cries as he dances about wildly. “Get it off!” He lets go, but the crab clings to him.

But none of us can free Ethan from the crab because he is spinning like a top.

“Ethan!” Sadie’s loud shout next to my ear makes me cringe. “Put him under water!”

Ethan dives for the tide pool, plunging his entire arm under. He goes limp as the crab skitters sideways like a lightning bolt. “Ah, that’s better.”

I shiver hard in the brisk wind as Dad pats Ethan’s shoulder, teasing, “Seems like a 14-year-old boy should be able to beat a little crab...”

“I am never touching another crab so long as I live,” he mutters.

I catch Sadie's sly grin, but then Mom grabs my hand.

"Isaiah! Your skin is like ice. Come on, you've got to change your clothes right away."

By the time Mom and I come back from the truck, I'm dry and getting warmer.

We find Dad, Ethan, and Sadie talking with a park ranger. "Tide pools are literally brand-new habitats twice a day at each low tide. When the water goes out, an entirely new set of creatures gets trapped. But some residents are permanent fixtures—like these barnacles here."

She bends, pointing to the white shells cemented to a rock. My finger still throbs where a barnacle had cut me.

"When the tide recedes, the exposed barnacles close up. See, each one is holding enough water inside to survive until the next high tide."

She smiles. "Be careful near the surf. In Acadia, the water never gets over 60°, and the currents aren't suitable for swimming." With one hand shielding her eyes, she scans the horizon. "We are tracking a large storm that's still far out at sea. All

the projections say it will veer farther east. Still, be sure to keep your ears open.”

As she hikes off, she adds, “Everything in a tide pool is alive! Take good care of this fragile environment.”

I turn around, wrinkling my nose at the thought. *Nothing about Acadia seems fragile.* Instead, I seem to be the one who is best described by that word!

“AAAHHH!” I shout as a massive blob of seaweed rises from the rocks and starts to move!

“Ha ha!” Ethan’s voice emanates from the dripping mass. “I’m Kelpman! Fear me!”

With one hand over my heart, I watch Ethan walk stiff legged, his outstretched arms draped with even more seaweed. I can’t even see his head under the long curling strands.

“Oh, gross! It stinks!” Sadie pinches her nose.

“This is a bad seaweed joke,” Ethan says.

“So, you finally admit that your jokes are bad?” I asked.

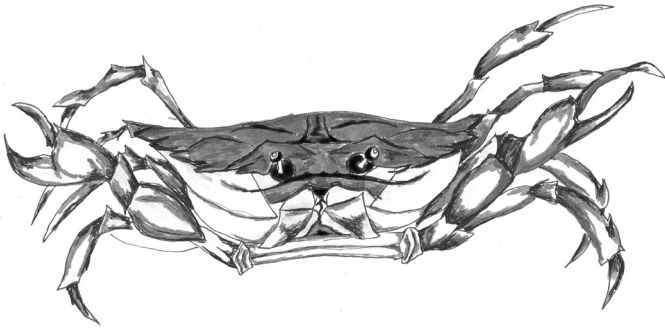
“No. But I just couldn’t kelp myself!” He laughs so hard the seaweed slips. A green crab emerges from the blob to sit on top of his head, its little an-

tenna eyes search everywhere.

“Ethan...” Sadie says, “a crab is on your head.”

“Whaat!” he cries, spinning wildly. I duck and cover as seaweed flings off him in all directions. The crab holds on as long as possible, but Ethan’s crazed motion lends the creature wings for just a moment. Sadie lunges, snatching it in midair.

“Got you, little guy.” She sets the dizzy crab in a pool, and he scuttles off.



Ethan trips, skidding on the slick rocks. “Is he gone?”

“He’s safe back home.”

“Oh, good. Crabs and I do not get along. They’re too much like spiders.”

“Mom, when are we going to set up camp?” I

ask.

“We are staying at the Duck Harbor campground, remember? It’s on an island in the Atlantic, and we must pick up Ethan’s cousin Noah before that. He’ll be camping with us for a few days,” she says.

“Oh, yeah, and we’ve got to take a ferry to get there!” Sadie adds.

“Yes, but Dad and I have a special surprise planned before that.”

I stand up straighter. “What is it?”

Dad grins, his eyes glinting with happiness. “That’s for me to know and you to find out.” He checks his watch. “We better get back to the truck so we’re not late.”

Still, Sadie, Ethan, and I stand looking out at the immense ocean for a moment longer. Recalling the power of the water, I whisper, “The invincible Atlantic.”

“Yeah, it’s like a *real* superhero,” Ethan says.

As we drive quite a distance, we bombard Dad with questions about the destination.

My new nerf gun pokes from my trusty back-

pack; its barrel won't fit inside.

Suddenly, Dad groans. "Oh no! The truck is veering to the right!"

He acts like he's fighting with the wheel, but it's an old trick—one I know well. I search for some sort of sign near the dirt road that we pull into. I see only one covered in rust.

"Cap'n Mac's?" I read in confusion.

"Umm... This isn't a seafood restaurant, is it?" Ethan asks.

"No, sir! At least...I hope not." Dad grins as he stops beside a dock.

"I have always dreamed of whale watching in Maine!" Mom claps her hands. "Come on, the last one out is rotten seaweed!"

She jets from the truck, but I'm in the middle of the back seat. I guess that makes me seaweed of the stinking sort.

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I study the boat that's bumping gently against the dock. It's the smallest one in the harbor, and it's rusty where all the others sport shiny chrome.

"Uhhh," I hesitate. I see the name *Unsinkable II* painted in red across the back. *Does that mean this is the second boat named Unsinkable?*

"Helloooo!" a gravelly voice calls before I can say anything else. "Welcome aboard! Cap'n Mac is me name, and you'll never be the same."

Cap'n Mac has bushy gray hair, an enormous nose, red cheeks, and eyebrows that possibly contain a whole hidden civilization of miniature people.

Sadie and I look sharply at each other. "Do you

think that will be a good thing?" she whispers.

"Now!" He claps his thick square hands together so loud that we all jump. "First, we'll go over the rules. Number one, no bananas on board. *Ever*." He strides up to Ethan, making me wonder if he's going to pat him down in search of fruit. But he takes both Ethan's forearms and holds them up high. Ethan's hands flop like dead fish as Cap'n Mac gives them a shake.

"Number two. One hand for you." Cap'n Mac swings one of Ethan's arms toward his chest, and his limp hand smacks there. "And one for the boat!" He guides Ethan's other hand to the boat's rusty rail. "Thar now, all done with that." He dusts off his hands as if finishing a big job.

"What about life vests for us?" Mom asks, her excitement undimmed by Cap'n Mac or his derelict boat.

"Arrgh, young lady, you've got a sharp mind. Aye, all landlubbers must wear vests at all times! That's rule number three."

Ethan remains frozen in the pose Cap'n Mac used him to illustrate. "Excuse me, sir?"

“Aye, boy?”

Ethan asked the question I had been wondering about. “Um...was there an *Unsinkable I*?”

The captain’s face grows wistful. “Aye, she was a beautiful ship—just beautiful.”

“Well, where is the *Unsinkable I* now?” Ethan’s voice squeaks on the last word.

“She sank,” Cap’n says easily.

I frown, not finding the courage to ask if it happened while whale watching.

“Why can’t we bring bananas?” Sadie asks.

“Everybody knows you won’t see a whale with a banana on board. Load up, crew! The whales won’t wait forever, and they like to show off in the mornings.”

“Dad,” I whisper, “do you think this is safe?” I point to the *Unsinkable II*.

Dad shrugs. “The advertisement said, ‘the most whale sightings *guaranteed*.’ Besides, look at your mother’s face.”

He’s right. I’ve never seen Mom so excited; her eyes are shining as she tightens the straps on Sadie’s bright-orange life vest.

“This will be an adventure.” Dad winks at me as I follow him onto the boat’s deck. Soon, we’re all in our vests except for Cap’n Mac, whose half-buttoned shirt billows in the salty breeze. *I guess he’s not a landlubber.* He cranks the engines, which give a halfhearted sputter.

“Arg! Don’t you do it again!” he threatens the two massive motors on the back of the boat. They give one more cough, then nothing. Cap’n rushes at them with a rebel’s yell. He lands a solid punch to the top of one and a low kick to the other.

Racing back to the wheel, he cranks the key again. With a puff of black smoke, they fire up to a steady purr. He eases the boat forward and then scurries for the ropes still tied to the dock. A millisecond before they snap taut, he throws them off. *He’s definitely done this before.*

“Now, for the whales!” he says, heading for the wheel. Ethan is standing at the prow, shielding his eyes with both hands, scanning the water as we leave land behind.

“Aye! One hand for you, and one hand for the boat, boy!” Cap’n growls.

Ethan slaps one hand onto the rail and the other onto his chest, his eyes wide. I slip one of mine onto the rail as well, quickly getting caught up in the “adventure.” *The deep sea!* A shiver runs down my spine as I imagine everything that lives in this water.

We putter for a long time in the no-wake zone where boats aren’t allowed to leave waves behind. Acadia’s shores have a rugged beauty as they glide silently by. Finally, we reach the wide ocean.

“The big blue!” Cap’n whispers, “The love of my life.” He spies Ethan with two hands for himself. With a mischievous grin, Cap’n pushes a rusty lever, and the *Unsinkable II* leaps forward, throwing me back. Ethan nearly loses his balance.

“One hand for you!” Cap’n roars over the noisy engines. Ethan desperately grabs the rail.

“And one for the boat!” he shouts back.

“Arh!” Cap’n Mac agrees as he cranks the engines up another notch. The wind rips at my clothes, drawing tears from my eyes.

The Atlantic Ocean is the most incredible color out this far—like a midnight blue and a bright

royal blue all mixed together. Mesmerized by the water curling high beside the vessel, I flinch when something breaks the surface!

“Sadie, what’s that?” I ask. Sadie makes her way to me, careful to keep one hand on the rail.

“Where?” We scour the glistening water.

“There!” I shout. This time the creature stays in the air a little longer.

“It’s a flying fish!” she cries excitedly.

Everyone gathers around as the small silvery fish with the winglike fins come up like popcorn. They take longer and longer “flights” until I wonder if they really can fly!

“Why are they jumping like that?” Mom asks.

“Because of that...” Ethan says as he points at a large, ominous shadow racing below the surface.

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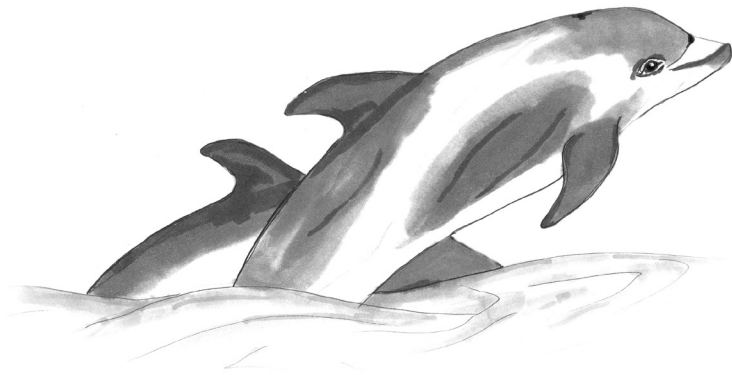
“Dolphin!” I cry as a sleek gray body erupts from the depths so close to me, I could almost touch it! Mom and Sadie are beside themselves, jumping in place, pointing, and shouting.

“There’s another!” Ethan says as the flying fish flee for their lives, taking to the air for safety. But the dolphins seem to enjoy the sheer speed. Their pointed dorsal fins break the surface of the water everywhere!

“It’s good luck when they take you out to sea!” Cap’n Mac shouts, slapping his leg happily.

One leaps so high that it does two full side rolls before making a splashy landing.

“What kind are they, Sadie?” Dad asks.



“I think they’re white, umm... Yes, they’re white-beaked dolphins!”

The next time one leaps, I can see the reason for their name. Their glossy gray bodies give way to a short, light-colored mouth with streaks of gray down their sides.

The engines break their steady rumble with an ominous clunk. Dad and I look at each other wide-eyed. They sputter again, and the pod of dolphins quickly outpaces the *Unsinkable II*.

“Aww!” Mom and Sadie cry together as the boat settles deeply into the gently rolling waves.

“Uh-oh,” Cap’n Mac says, his miniature civilization-hiding eyebrows going up.

Ethan crosses his arms. “An *uh-oh* on the *Un-sinkable II* does not sound good.”

Cap’n Mac points at Ethan. “One...”

Ethan’s voice takes over, one hand slapping onto the rusty rail. “Hand for me, and one for the boat!”

Cap’n Mac nods happily, turning to peer into a large tank. “She’s empty, folks!”

His words make my stomach feel green as I look all around at nothing but “Big Blue” in every direction. *What hope do we have of getting back to land with no fuel?*

“Harhar!” Cap’n Mac slaps his leg. “Jis kidd’in! That’s the bilge, and she ought to be as dry as a bone. Me engines just need a little love tap!”

Cap’n repeats his beating of the engines, and I slump on the rail as they fire back up like before. His shout nearly shatters my eardrums. “SPOUT AHEAD!”

We rush for the bow of the boat, searching for the telltale white spout of a whale taking a breath.

“Two more!” Sadie’s pointing, but I barely catch the white plumes before they fade.

“Two hands for the boat!” Mac’s command

makes us all take hold a heartbeat before the *Unsinkable II* leaps on top of the waves again.

As we speed closer, Cap'n Mac cries, "Look at them birds! We're in luck now."

Hundreds of birds are flying and swooping in a tight knot straight ahead. The long sleek back of a whale curls above the water before a white, almost pear-shaped, plume of droplets shoots skyward with the whale's quick breath.

"It looks just like the geysers we saw at Yellowstone!" Ethan shouts.

"It's a humpback!" Cap'n Mac adds.

"How can he tell?" Ethan whispers.

"Well, each type of whale makes a different-shaped plume," Sadie, the walking animal encyclopedia, says.

Soon Cap'n Mac lets the boat settle, cutting the engines right at the edge of the swirling mass of birds. Now I see the ocean is boiling in a circle, with billions of tiny fish breaking the surface.

"Look, puffins!" Sadie points to a flock of birds diving into the circle. Their huge beaks are brilliant orange and red; their body shape looks almost like

penguins. A seagull swoops low, and something splats on the deck next to me.

“Ha ha!” Ethan laughs at the bird and taunts, “You missed me!”

“IT’S A WHALE!” Mom screams as a giant humpback breaks the surface nose first. Twisting gracefully, its body seems to go on and on as it lifts from the water! Its long, knobby pectoral fins are a bright white. Slowly, gravity takes over, and the whale splashes back to the Atlantic’s embrace.

My mouth hangs open as wonder fills me inside. Seeing him with my own eyes is incredible!

“Sharks!” Sadie is leaning so far over the rail that Dad grabs the back of her life vest.

The sharp fins of sharks cut into our side of the world. I glimpse one’s mouth ringed with sharp teeth as it fills with fish. Dolphins also cut through the tight swimming school of fish.

“Wait!” Sadie says, pointing to the frothing water. “I know what that is! It’s called a bubble ring that’s made by the whales!”

“A what?” Ethan questions.

“The humpbacks are swimming in circles below

the fish, they blow bubbles to keep them in place like a net so they can feed!”

“You’re right!” I point at the bubbling edges of the circle.

The boat rocks wildly, and my vision is filled with tons of whales as one breaches only inches from the boat. I could reach out and touch his shimmering skin that’s peppered with barnacles! But instead I duck as he lands, gripping the railing as tightly as I can. The *Unsinkable II* rocks wildly as the whale’s splash crashes on top of us.

I gasp for air as the frigid water soaks me and then rushes back into the ocean. My ribs might have a bruise from smashing so hard into the railing.

“That was so *amazing!*” Mom’s hair is plastered to her forehead and cheeks, and water is dripping down her delighted face.

We all start talking at once.

“I could see its eye!”

“I think I touched it.”

“Yay!” Sadie shrieks with glee. “Wait!” she says, turning in a tight circle. “Where’s Ethan?”

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Ethan is no longer on the deck of the *Unsinkable II*.

“Man overboard!” Dad shouts, terror constricting his voice.

“Aye, we’ve got a lighter load; let’s make a break for shore!” Cap’n Mac cries. We all turn, staring at him. “That’s a joke! Grab the life ring, boy. He’s sure to surface soon!”

“But what if he doesn’t?” I rip the bright-orange life ring from the wall of the boat and rush to the railing.

We search the rolling water, seething with fins and scales.

“Come on, Ethan!” Mom cries.

“There!” I scream, pointing. Ethan claws his way to the surface with so much force that the upper half of his body surges out of the water.

“EEEHHHHH!” The panic in his voice makes me shudder. A Mako shark fin slices across the water a few feet away from him.

“How did he get so far away?” I groan, twisting hard and launching the life ring like a Frisbee. Its bright-orange string of rope uncoils in the air as it flies toward Ethan.

“It’s the current—a strong one!” Cap’n Mac says.

The ring lands only three feet from Ethan, and he paddles wildly toward it. Small fish slap him everywhere, and he twitches at every scaly touch; but somehow, he reaches the life ring. Mackerel surge through the life ring’s center, slapping Ethan on the cheeks.

“We’ve got him!” Dad grabs the rope with me, ready to haul him in.

“Oh, no,” Cap’n Mac says in an unusually quiet voice.

“What? Is it a shark?” Sadie’s hands are pressed against her cheeks.

“One hand for you!” Cap’n Mac yells. Sadie slams one hand onto the rail.

“BOY!” Cap’n bellows, making me spin toward him. He’s cranking the engines with no result. “Hit the engines NOW!”

I stare at the big engines in the rear of the boat in terror for a heartbeat, trying to remember what he did. With a groan, I rush forward, kick one and slap the other. The engines give a dull click.

“Other way, boy, hurry!” His desperate tone makes my stomach turn. *What danger does he see?*

Shifting, I slap one and kick the other. The engines click, then roar to life.

“Full speed ahead!” Cap’n screams. As the *Unsinkable II* shifts hard to the right, the lifeline snaps taut behind us.

“Hold on!” I shout at Ethan as the surge of the boat nearly rips the ring from his grip. The boiling ball of fish changes around Ethan. They are leaping higher and higher now, slapping his hair as we tow him forward.

“NO!” The word tears past my throat as two huge sharks surface on either side of him. *No, wait!*

It's not sharks. Desperately, I watch as the glossy black skin rises and rises from the water all around Ethan.

“It’s a whale!” Sadie screams, her words making sense of the scene. A humpback is swimming from the depths of the ocean, straight up through the bubble net, its gigantic mouth wide open, and Ethan is in the center.

Relief is written across Ethan’s terrified face as he clutches the life ring tightly as the *Unsinkable II* tows him through the whale’s still open mouth. Cap’n Mac slams the throttle all the way forward. I watch in horror as the two huge jaws slowly begin to close around him.

“Hurry!” Mom screams.

His front half is out, but filled with fish, the whale’s jaws are nearly shut!

“Go!” I bellow. Ethan tucks himself into a ball, the whale’s skin stretched wide by the sheer amount of water and fish as its mouth slams shut centimeters from Ethan’s feet. Sadie collapses to the deck.

Cap’n Mac tows Ethan farther away, and when the boat settles back into the water, we frantically

haul Ethan to the deck. Dad's there, lifting him into the boat. Ethan flops to the deck, dragging in ragged breaths.

Mom wraps him in a towel as he gets to his feet. He's shivering hard, and I remember how cold the Atlantic is near Maine. The wind is cold, cutting through my damp clothes as well.

He stands there, dripping, his face blank. His shirt suddenly wiggles. A fish is struggling to escape from the chest pocket of his T-shirt.

"Ewww!" He jumps as a silvery mackerel leaps free from his chest pocket. Its tail smacks him in the chin. We all stare at it flopping on the deck, trying to grasp what just happened.

"Poor little guy! Everybody wants to eat you," Sadie croons, but it takes her several tries to catch the slimy fish. Finally, she grabs it with two hands. "Be safe!" she calls as she throws it back into the water. "Look, there goes another one!"

We all turn to see another humpback's wide-open mouth emerge slowly from the water. Ethan shivers so hard his words barely come out. "W... what's...a...a whale's favorite sandwich?"

We all watch the enormous mouth shut, our minds blank.

“Krilled cheese,” he whispers as his teeth chatter.

I turn, patting his shoulder. “You’re making bad jokes. That’s a good sign.”

“As it turns out, I don’t like whales nearly as much as I thought I did.”

“Aye, whale surfacing starboard side!” Cap’n Mac cries. When we all rush to the rail, “That’s port side!” Cap’n adds.

Dad nudges us to the other side, and I gasp. A humpback is floating right next to the boat! The *Unsinkable II* suddenly seems so tiny, barely the length of the whale’s head.

“Wow!” I lean over, studying its barnacle-patched skin. The whale rolls, and suddenly we’re eye to eye! The whale seems to be thoughtfully searching the boat, and I’m drawn in by its knowing gaze. We stare at each other, creatures separated by water and air, yet connected somehow.

Mom is reaching over the rail, an expression of wonder on her face.

Ethan inches cautiously over, both his fists white-knuckled on the rail. As soon as the whale sees him, he burps. Enormous bubbles break the surface, and so does a noxious odor.

“Ugh!” Dad grips his nose, and Sadie does the same. The wind shifts as my stomach turns again. The scent of krill and fish mixed with a particularly “whalish” scent combine into a gut-wrenching aroma.

Ethan pinches his nose. “Excuse you, Krilly!”

The whale seems to wave one giant flipper and then sinks below the surface.

“At least he had a nice lunch—which is more than I can say.” Ethan rubs his belly.

“I’m just glad he didn’t get ‘krilled cheese with a slice of Ethan,’” Sadie says.