

Chapter 1 Beginnings

The warm August sun slipped slowly below the horizon, seemingly disappearing into the cold, blue Atlantic.

Zoot awoke from his daily afternoon nap and stretched his long, sleek, black body, as cats do, first one leg, then another, as he rolled in the damp sand beneath the pier on the beautiful Halifax waterfront.

Zoot had lived in Nova Scotia all of his life; the son of a beautiful stray tabby named Eloise and a father that he had never known.

It was a solitary life. His brothers and sisters, there were seven of them in all, had left home to make lives for themselves on various parts of the vast, sprawling Canadian Province, but Zoot, the youngest of the litter, had bigger plans. He dreamed that someday he would travel far from his lair below the old barnacle-encrusted pier.

Each day, just before dusk, Zoot strolled down the long, winding cobblestone walkway that wove its way along the waterfront, admiring the huge cargo ships that had been tied to the dock with great, weighty ropes.

Sometimes, when he was feeling particularly adventurous, Zoot would leap up onto one of the tall posts where the ropes were cinched tightly to the dock and sit there like a great jungle cat, admiring the magnificence of the enormous sailing vessels as they bobbed to and fro in the water.

He imagined himself as a grand old sea captain, shouting orders to his men as the ropes were cast off and his ship set sail for Europe, or the Orient, or some other far off majestic place.

Zoot was much different than his brothers and sisters. Settling down in Nova Scotia had never appealed to him. He had always had a sense of adventure and perhaps even a bit of a mischievous streak. But above all, Zoot dreamed dreams - big dreams.

Later that evening as Zoot strolled along the boardwalk, slithering in and out between the legs of the tourists, he spotted a small, plump figure, scampering down a length of rope that dangled down onto the dock from the side of an old wooden sailing ship.

"Hello there", he shouted. "My name is Zoot - and who might you be?"

The tiny, curious-looking creature glanced quickly in Zoot's direction, scurried down the rope onto the dock, and disappeared into the shadows.

Of course, being a cat - a kitten actually, as he was only fourteen months old - Zoot's curiosity peaked - and it peaked - and it peaked some more until, despite the dangers that he had been told lurked deep within the shadows of the mysterious waterfront, he sprang down onto the dock.

Zoot lay flat on his belly, stretched out like a slinky, as he crept along atop the broad wooden planks of the old weathered dock. The shadows melted into total darkness as he drew near the rope where the odd little figure had first materialized.

Zoot was very cautious, and a tiny bit scared. He had heard tales from the craggy old tomcats who had dared to explore the great unknown of the docks after dark. They told of the evils lurking in the fog of the dank, dark night; of menacing creatures who lay in wait; of cats who had ventured into the obscurity of the docks, never to be seen again.

The creaky, old dock appeared even more ominous as the fog grew thicker. As he crept along, Zoot was overcome by an eerie, growing sense that someone or something lurked nearby, watching, waiting in the ghostly, dancing shadows. As he neared the bow of the vessel where the strange little creature had disembarked, Zoot was startled by a piercing, raspy voice.

"Go way mate", it echoed.

Zoot peered into the impenetrable darkness, his eyes searching up and down the length of the dock.

"I said go way. Ya deaf are ya?"

"Who's there? Come out where I can see you", Zoot replied as he quickly slipped in behind a rusty old anchor perched on the edge of the dock.

Zoot hid in the shelter of the enormous, corroded anchor for quite some time, poking his head out occasionally to take a peek down the long, narrow pier. He was reminded of the times when he had played hide and seek with his brothers and sisters on the emerald green hills that rose high above the waterfront.

Zoot missed his family - and he was very scared.