“You will need ear plugs for your next patient,” Nurse Sim informed me, trying to keep a  
straight face. The waming was not needed as | had already heard the wails of a child  
resounding from the waiting room.  
  
| watched as a worried-looking mother ushered a young girl of about six of age into my  
room. Gesturing towards the chair next to my table, { invited the girl to sit down. ‘What's the 5  
matter?” | enquired. “| got stung by a wasp,” she sobbed, holding up a finger. Taking a closer  
look, | could indeed see a needleike object protruding from it. The flesh around the sting had  
begun to swell an angry red. | took a deep breath. Removing it in one piece would not be easy  
if my patient would not calm down and keep still. RacKing my brain for a solution, my gaze  
came to rest on an old rubber toy sitting on my table. 10  
  
That was when | was brought back to the day | visited the wet market with Grandma  
when I was a kindergartener.  
  
“Grandma, look! I've never seen such a big prawn before!” | pointed at a red creature  
with whiskers and two big claws. | particularly found the claws fascinating - they reminded me  
of excavators, my favourite machines. 15  
  
“That's not a prawn, Ali!” Grandma chuckled. “Its a lobster. Its meat is very tasty, but  
beware of the claws. They are really mean.” Grandma gave me a cautionary wink.  
  
“The lobster was just flown in this morning from Australia. Would you like to buy it?” the  
  
fishmonger promoted the “delicacy” to Grandma. While Grandma and the fishmonger engaged  
  
in their animated chatter, ! decided to check out the lobster. It was in a Styrofoam box with 20  
some water. The Jobster stared at me with its bulging eyes. ! lifted my hand, wanting to touch  
’ its hard shell. To my surprise. it scuttled back a couple of steps. inexplicably, | felt the stirring  
  
of an urge. Despite its armoured exterior, the lobster was a coward after, all! Emboldened, j  
stuck out my pointer finger at the lobster, intending to give it a jab.  
  
An excruciating pain shot up my arm. Giving a loud yell, | jumped up with a start. Tears 25  
stung my tightly shut eyes and my heart palpitated like a runaway train.  
  
“Oh no! Someone, please help Ali” ! could hear Grandma’s anxious plea for  
intervention. Opening my eyes just a fraction, | tried to focus on the source of my misery.  
There, at the tip of my pointer finger, hung the lobster. We were connected finger to claw. It  
was an amazing sight. Had | not been so overwhelmed with shock, | would have actually 30  
laughed.  
  
The fishmonger tried to pull the lobster off my finger. | screamed. “Use that chopper of  
yours and chop off that claw,” Grandma ordered the fishmonger. “! can’t do that! Who would  
buy a one-claw lobster? This lobster can fetch a good price!” By now, the housewives  
browsing at the nearby stalls had gathered to watch the spectacle. 35  
  
Grandma said calmly, “Here, | will pull Ali's finger. You pull the lobster. Together!” With  
the concerted effort of Grandma and the fishmonger, they finally managed to get the offending  
creature off.  
  
Grandma washed my finger at a lap \_at the stall and whipped out a plaster from her  
purse. Gently, she put it on my sore finger. The fishmonger retrieved a dusty rubber toy from 40  
an overhead sheif. “Squeeze it,” she said, smiling. | did as told and the toy squeaked.  
Surprisingly, that made me feel better. The kindness of the fishmonger filled my heart.  
  
“Doctor, can you help make me feel better?” | was jolted back to the present.  
  
“| can't. But Squeaky can,” i said, presenting the toy to her. As my now composed  
patient held on to Squeaky in her other hand, | set out to remove the sting. 45