

Hooks, Nets and Time a novelette by Linda Nagata

The ocean ran through his dreams. The panting breath of the wavelets as they rose and fell against the pylons became his own breath, a slow, deep rhythm in his lungs that forced him to run. His footfalls reverberated against the black plastic photovoltaic field that doubled as a deck: a square track five kilometers long, encompassing the perimeter of the shark pen. Starlight glinted off the water; glistened in the film of sweat that coated his pumping arms. The rubber soles of his running shoes beat out an ancient cursorial rhythm, a telling vibration transmitted through the deck to the perforated steel walls of the shark pen and then to the coral foundations of the station some twelve fathoms below. Crippled Tiburon would be lurking there near the bottom, listening, measuring the vibrations in his ancient, clever mind, waiting for the hour when his fins had fully regrown and his strength was at once new...and old.

A thin wail twisted through the humid night. Tiburon heard it in the depths and thrashed his powerful tail. The wail grew into a distant howl of terror.

A faint splash.

Zayder sat up abruptly. The dream peeled away like burned film, leaving him in another version of the night. He'd fallen asleep on a lounge chair again, in the open air, on the deck of the Ocean Hazards Collection Station that he managed alone. The blocky silhouette of the shed rose behind him. The structure seemed to be an ugly afterthought to the automated design of the U.N. mandated OHC Station. Still, it served him for housing, and storage for the shark farm: luxury quarters compared to the fishing boats he'd grown up on.

Out on the water, the distant lights of a freighter interrupted the blanket of starlight. In the pen, the swish and splash of a shark fin accented the peaceful wash of the ocean.

Zayder leaned forward, ignoring the dry moss of a hangover that clung to his tongue and the roof of his mouth. He listened, unsure if the howl had been part of his dream. His pulse still hammered in his ears. He'd heard howls like that before: once as a kid, when a man fell off the shark boats in the Sulu Sea. And again, one night when Mr. Ryan came to the station. Zayder had only feigned drinking the cordial that should have sent him into a drugged sleep. That night he'd watched surreptitiously as a bound man went screaming to the sharks.

He listened. He thought he could detect a distant, angry voice from the direction of the freighter, but that was all. And what if he heard more? What was he supposed to do if he discovered mayhem and murder on the high seas? Call Mr. Ryan and complain about the neighbors?

He chose to believe that it had been a dream.

Dawn came. Zayder woke, washed his face, put on his running shoes. Another day. He would spend the morning doing maintenance on the robotic garbage trawlers that had come into the station overnight from their long forays into the South China Sea. In the afternoon he would mutilate sharks, harvesting the regrown fins of the captive beasts for sale on the Chinese market -- the prized ingredient in shark fin soup. So much to look forward to.

But first he would run.

He set off at an easy pace on the only route the station offered: a 5K lap around the photovoltaic decking built atop the steel mesh wall of the shark pen. At high tide the deck was a meter above the water, with the open sea on one side and the enclosed waters of the pen on the other.

Zayder had run this makeshift track twice every morning for almost a year. Boredom had been left behind long ago. Now, his mind automatically faded into a passive altered state before he finished the first hundred meters. Conversations rose from his past to fill his consciousness, insignificant exchanges: a joke offered to college acquaintances in a bar; polite questioning of a professor; a cautious response to the inquiries of a government personnel officer hiring biologists for the wildlife refuge at Moro Bay; and yet another personnel officer, hiring for the marine sanctuary in the Gulf of California, and another and another, until they all seemed to be different versions of the same bad news: *I'm sorry. You have an excellent record and your thesis is impressive, but I'm afraid you're not quite right for us....*

He studied every word, searching for some point where -- if only he'd phrased things differently -- events would have taken a more positive path. An absurd exercise. He already knew the point when his career in marine biology had been lost. It had happened even before he knew what a career was, when he'd been arrested at seventeen for poaching.

It had meant nothing to him at the time. He'd been working for his Dad, hunting pelagic sharks for a dealer, who preserved the bodies and sold them as dramatic ornaments for coastal mansions. Zayder's family had been deep water fishermen for generations. But as natural resources dwindled, what had been an honest occupation gradually became a crime, and an arrest for poaching just another risk of the business.

But the wealthy patrons who supported refuges and sanctuaries around the world didn't see it in that practical light. No refuge manager would want his patron's newsletter to ring with the headline: *Former poacher hired as field biologist.*

It had never mattered how well he did in school.

But he'd come too far in life to go back to the boats, so he'd taken a job with Mr. Ryan instead. Ryan did not believe in nonprofit enterprises. When a U.N. mandate required every corporate entity that generated potential ocean garbage to construct and maintain an Ocean Hazards Collection Station, Ryan had expanded on the design by adding the shark pen.

Shark fins were much in demand and now nearly unobtainable since the wild populations had been hunted almost to extinction. Tiburon's fins alone would fetch twice Zayder's yearly wages each time they could be regrown and harvested. Ryan's select market held the great white shark in high esteem: no other great white had been reported in nearly five years. Speculation held the captive animal to be the last of its species.

But beyond the income from fins, the station was useful to Ryan in other ways. So Zayder finally found himself employed again, master of a remote world built on a reef in the South China Sea.

The deep blue sky lightened as he ran. The pink fair-weather clouds that hugged the horizon gradually brightened until they were bathed in brilliant white. A moment later the rim of the sun appeared above the water. Zayder ducked his head, his thoughts blown back to the present by the sudden blast of daylight.

A hundred meters out on the sun-burnished water a black torpedo armed with a spine of pentagonal fins scudded towards the station: one of the robotic garbage trawlers being driven home by a combination of the light breeze against its adjustable fins, and a solar-powered engine. Its collecting tentacles trailed a hundred meters behind it: some on the surface, some searching out the depths below. Most of them were

laden with a motley collection of old plastics, netting, glass, metal and organic debris bound for the station's recycling bins.

Zayder slowed to watch the trawler come in. At the same moment a white-noise explosion of water erupted from the pen, scarcely a body length away. Startled instinct slammed him backward as the geyser of white water lunged toward him. A solid shape appeared as the pearly water fell away. He recognized the massive, lead-gray profile of a great white shark, its fins fully grown and its maw open, its upper jaw thrust forward to expose rows of triangular teeth. *Tiburón!*

Spray washed over Zayder as he threw himself back, a split second before the five-meter shark slammed onto the deck. The whole structure shuddered. Fracture lines bloomed in the photovoltaic panels beneath Tiburón's belly. The shark fixed him with its manic black eyes. It thrashed on the deck, jaws snapping in an effort to get at him. He felt the rush of air as the teeth closed within centimeters of his ankle.

"*You bastard!*" he screamed. He jumped back again. The shark thrust forward. Its torso was draped on the deck, but its great tail was still in the water, fanning the surface into a violent foam. "Back in, you fucker!" Zayder screamed.

The shark snapped twice more, then grew still. Its eyes still fixed on him, it slid silently back into the water.

Zayder stood on the deck, his shoulders heaving, a torrent of curses spilling from his mouth. Tiburón was the oldest, biggest monster in the pen. Zayder had harvested his fins five times, each time salving the wounds with a regenerative balm that forced the valuable fins to regrow. Five times he'd nursed Tiburón in the recovery channels, where pumps forced a steady torrent of water over the helpless shark as it writhed on the bottom of a narrow steel chute.

"I'll take your fins again this afternoon," Zayder growled. Cautiously, he stepped forward, to peer over the edge of the deck. Tiburón was a skulking shadow a fathom down.

Suddenly the shark turned, cruising slowly out about fifty meters toward the center of the pen until Zayder lost sight of it. A moment later Tiburón reappeared, still a fathom below the surface, his great tail flailing as he charged the wall of the shark pen. Zayder got ready to dodge a second lunge. But Tiburón had his own designs. He rammed the wall of the pen with his snout. The blow shook the structure. Zayder stumbled, swaying to keep his balance. He almost went down.

What the hell was going on? Was the damn fish trying to knock him off the deck?

Tiburón took off again for the center of the pen. Zayder turned, ready to run for the shed and his tranquilizing harpoon, when a low moan reached his ears. "*Help, man. Help me,*" a tired voice croaked.

It came from the ocean side of the deck. Zayder glanced over his shoulder. Tiburón had turned. Quickly Zayder dropped to his knees and leaned over the decking to spy a young man -- probably no more than twenty -- adrift in the light swell, a few meters outside the steel mesh. The sun shone full in his pale face as his bare feet tread the water in quick, frantic strokes. His dark hair floated like an ink cloud around his shoulders, blending imperceptibly with his black shirt. He sputtered, his eyes pleading with Zayder for help.

Looking at him, Zayder grinned in sudden relief. No wonder the shark had been pumped into a manic state. Tiburón had smelled game in the water. And just where had this stray fish come from? He could guess. The garbage trawlers had brought bodies in before -- though never live ones. The trawler tentacles were designed to detect and avoid living organic structures. But Zayder knew that clothing could confuse them.

Just then, the shark rammed the wall of the pen again. The deck shuddered. "Not this time, you man-eating bastard," Zayder muttered.

He dropped to his belly and reached out a hand to the foundering stranger. The water was a meter and a half below. "Here," he barked. "See if you can reach me. I'll pull you up."

The kid shook his head, his mouth twisting in pain. "Can't," he panted. "Hands are bound."

Zayder scowled. And who had bound his hands and dropped him into the sea? Maybe it was better not to know. Zayder didn't want to get sucked into the personal affairs of men like Ryan.

The stranger seemed to read his thoughts. He closed his eyes, leaned back farther in the water and stopped kicking, as if waiting for Zayder to decide whether he would live or die. Zayder cursed softly.

Men like Ryan might have a choice. But he wanted never to be a man like Ryan. Quickly stripping off his shoes, he slipped over the side of the deck and into the water.

The ocean's cool and pleasant hand enfolded him, quenching his doubts. He stroked to the stranger, hooked an arm across his chest and dragged him along the pen wall, nearly sixty meters to a maintenance ladder. He tried not to see the huge shadow that cruised back and forth, back and forth, just a few meters away on the other side of the steel mesh. But he could feel the kid watching.

Zayder didn't blame him. The mesh wasn't designed to inspire confidence. It had a gauge wide enough to allow Zayder to wriggle through if he had to. The shark seemed appallingly near.

To distract the kid, he asked: "How'd you get the trawler to let you go?"

The kid's eyes squinched shut. Then in hoarse English, dignified with a slight British accent, he explained: "I was floating motionless in the water when the trawler took me... It grabbed me around the chest, and dragged me. It was moving so fast, I couldn't fight it. I thought I was going to drown. Then it stopped here. I twisted and kicked until it let me go...*why?* Motion... characteristic of living organisms. The trawler's...not supposed to be hazard to sea life...so I suspect motion... stimulated my release."

Zayder began to regret asking the question. Who the hell was this kid?

He reached the ladder, then hooked an arm around the lowest rung, heaved the kid over his shoulder and climbed out. "I think I can walk," the kid gasped. Zayder didn't believe him. He laid him carefully on the deck, then checked for Tiburon. The fish was cruising out toward the center of the pen again, so Zayder took a moment to check the bindings that held the kid's arms pinioned behind his back.

He discovered two ropes: one at the elbows, one at the wrists. The kid's palms were pale and wrinkled from exposure to water. A lacy network of blood seeped across them from his finger tips. His finger tips? Zayder felt a chill across the back of his neck. This kid had no finger tips. His fingers were torn, bloody stubs, taken off at the first joint. "Holy mother," he whispered. "Who did this to you?"

The kid blinked, an odd look of wonder on his face as he lay on the deck. "The shark," he whispered in his cultured accent. "I was holding onto the mesh. My fingers were inside. I didn't see it coming." He turned his head, to look out across the pen. Zayder followed his gaze. Tiburon had turned. He was driving hard for the mesh again. "I never saw a shark before." He smiled in a dizzy, distracted way. "I can't believe how lucky I am to see one."

Zayder scooped him up and ran for the shed as Tiburon hit the mesh one more time.

The kid had passed out by the time Zayder got him inside. Blood oozed from his fingers onto the bedding, but the severed arteries had closed down and the flow was minuscule. Zayder bandaged each finger. In the air-conditioned shed the kid's skin felt cold, so Zayder stripped off his wet clothes and bundled him in a stale-smelling blanket. Then he sat down on the floor beside the pile of clothing, pausing only to note the pricey designer names before going through the pockets.

He found a credit card and an I.D., both in the name of Commarin Wong. And he found an electronic device, a black cylinder some seven centimeters long and one in diameter. It had an on/off button and a working light. The corporate name embossed on the housing was *Guidestar*, a company that dealt in geographical positioning equipment. Zayder guessed that the device was a transponder, presently inactive. But who was it intended to signal?

He slipped the instrument into his own pocket as his earlier worries returned. Just who had tossed this kid overboard? And wouldn't they come looking for him if they learned he was alive? He gathered up the wet clothes. He should get rid of them, in case anyone came looking.

He'd started to stand, when he caught sight of the bloodstained sheets. Damn. He'd have to get rid of the sheets too. And then there was the matter of the kid himself: Commarin Wong. The name tickled some partial memory. *Commarin Wong*. As if he should have recognized it.

The kid groaned in his sleep. A moment later his eyelids fluttered. He stared at the ceiling for a moment, then he turned his head. His gaze took in Zayder's face, before fixing on the company graphic on the breast of Zayder's t-shirt: *Ryanco*. What little color there was in Commarin's pale face seemed to drain away.

Zayder felt fear run in harsh prickles across his own skin. He didn't want to cross Ryan. He should call in; report the incident. He cursed his shark-hunting youth, and the arrest that had ultimately forced him to work for human sharks. He cursed himself, because he wasn't one of them. "Why does Mr. Ryan want you dead?" he asked, his voice deliberately hard-edged.

A faint, self-deprecating smile flickered across Commarin's pale lips. "He doesn't want me dead," he said, his voice barely more than a whisper, hoarse from a night of strangling on salt water. "He wants me back."

Zayder resented what he believed to be a lie. "That was you screaming last night, wasn't it? They bound your hands and threw you off that freighter, right? Well, you might have noticed, *Commarin Wong*, they didn't send a boat after you."

Again, that self-effacing flash of a smile. "That's what happened," he agreed. "But you have the advantage of me."

"The name's Zayder Silveira. Mr. Ryan's my boss, and I need this job."

"Zayder Silveira?" Commarin shoved himself up on an elbow. "I've heard of you. I read your doctoral thesis, *An Observational History of a Juvenile Great White Shark*. It was a stunning exercise in open ocean research. I'm honored to meet you."

Zayder blinked, astonished at this outburst, and the unexpected reminder of better days. The juvenile stage of the white shark's life cycle had been virtually unknown before he'd netted his subject in the Indian Ocean. He'd tagged the little shark, then followed its beacon for three months. But his research ended prematurely when it trailed the scent of death to carcasses entangled in an abandoned drift net. Before long the white shark became entangled too.

That study had turned out to be the last published account of a living great white. Zayder had hooked Tiburon three years later, but by then he'd been working for Ryan.

"Are you continuing your shark studies here?" Commarin asked. He seemed suddenly invigorated: his dark eyes sparkled with curiosity, his pale cheeks bore a faint flush of excitement. He seemed to have forgotten his injuries, his precarious existence of a few minutes before as he pressed Zayder for more information. "Is Ryan supporting your research?"

Watching him, Zayder felt a flash of anger. He hadn't pulled a man from the ocean. He'd only salvaged a spoiled corporate brat who didn't know enough about the real world to appreciate his own jeopardy.

"Yeah," Zayder said, his voice ugly with sarcasm. "I came here to study the sharks. That's right. Mr. Ryan's real interested in natural history."

Commarin's expression dimmed. He looked away. "You're right, of course. Ryan's not interested in natural history. I know that. It's all money to him." He knotted the blanket in his fist. "That's why I had to leave."

His voice had descended to a barely audible whisper, but there was something compelling in it, leading Zayder to wonder if his judgement had been too harsh. He stood up thoughtfully, and fetched Commarin some water. "Why did you leave?" he asked, as Commarin drank thirstily.

Commarin lowered the cup. For the first time, he seemed angry. "Ryan's my patron, you know. He considers me his prodigy. He's supported me since I was five, the best schools, all of that. I took my degree in genetics. It's what he wanted; not what I wanted. I wanted to study natural history, like you."

Commarin Wong. Zayder grimaced as he suddenly recognized the name. Commarin Wong was the new star of Ryan's genetic labs. Far more than a corporate brat, he was a hand-fed prince raised to augment Ryan's empire.

"That's the expression most colleagues get when they realize who I am," Commarin said resentfully.

Zayder felt himself backing away emotionally. "I'm no colleague of yours," he growled. "I don't know anything about constructing genetically-specific drugs -- and I don't want to. I'm just a grunt Ryan hired to oversee his favorite hobby."

"No you're not," Commarin shot back. "You're the poacher who took a degree in natural history. A poacher. With a black mark like that, it's no wonder you couldn't get a real job. So now you work for Ryan."

"You know, you're a real wise-ass."

"I work for Ryan too."

"Sounds like you owe him."

"I'm not his slave. I'm not going back."

Zayder nodded slowly. Hell, if he had any choice, he'd run too. "So what happened on that ship?"

The fire seemed to go out of Commarin. He lay back against the pillow. "I stowed away on one of Ryan's ships. It seemed like the perfect opportunity. But I didn't do my research first. It seems the captain has had an ongoing problem with stowaways trying to reach the Americas. He didn't appreciate my presence."

"Neither do I. But why didn't you just tell him you were a corporate brat on Ryan's A list?"

"Don't you think I tried? He didn't believe me."

By the time Zayder got Commarin fed and asleep, the morning was almost gone. He dismissed any thought of doing the scheduled maintenance on the garbage trawlers, and instead got his harpoon. It was time to go after Tiburon.

The harpoon's darts were armed with a neurotoxin that would stimulate the shark to bask at the surface in a state of slowly-moving somnolence in which it could be roped and winched to the recovery channels for surgery.

Zayder walked up and down the deck, squinting against the glare on the water as he tried to identify Tiburon amongst the many shadows that swam slowly through the mid-levels of the pen. He hoped to take Tiburon without entering the water. He let his feet pound a rhythm on the deck for half an hour, but the great white never surfaced. Giving up, he went to the shed and pulled out his diving gear.

He didn't go into the water often, but sometimes it was necessary. It wasn't so dangerous. There were only two or three really aggressive sharks, and he could hold them off with the harpoon.

He was coupling the respirator to the tank when Commarin emerged from the cabin, dressed in a set of Zayder's company shorts and t-shirt, the clothing oversized on his smaller frame. He looked drained, but sound.

He watched Zayder for a moment, but his restless gaze didn't linger. It scanned the sky, the ocean, the surface waters of the pen. "You haven't said what you're going to do about me."

Zayder grunted. He hadn't decided.

"You found the transponder?" Commarin asked.

Zayder scowled. "Was that your sissy stick? To call Mr. Ryan when you'd had enough salt water and decided to be a good boy?"

Commarin smiled tightly. "I'm not alone," he said. "I have friends in Brazil. They're waiting for my signal to pick me up."

Zayder punched a flow button on the respirator. He noted in satisfaction that the harsh rush of air made Commarin jump. "You're a lucky man to have a job waiting for you. What'll you be doing? Making lethal genetic weapons for the other side?"

"No. I'll be working on the genetics of endangered species in the Brazilian preserves."

Zayder froze. He'd tried to get work at a preserve in Brazil, one that supported a riparian environment that ran all the way to the sea. Sharks were known to feed in the murky waters of a river's mouth, where the occasional animal carcass would wash out from the forest. *Such a lucky man.*

A gray fin cut the water in the pen, just a few meters away. Zayder tended over a hundred sharks in this pen. They rarely attacked each other, as he kept them satiated on the organic garbage the trawlers brought in.

He watched the fin glide by. He'd learned to recognize each shark as an individual. This one he could identify by the fin alone. "*Tiburon,*" he whispered.

Silently, he laid the tank on the deck and picked up the harpoon.

Commarrin must have noted the change in his gaze, because he turned. His eyes widened as the shark doubled back. It glided even closer to the deck this time. As it slid by, its head rose half out of the water and its ancient eyes seemed to fix on Commarrin.

Zayder had seen this sort of behavior before. "That's Tiburon," he said. "The one that took off your finger tips. Sharks pick their victim. Guess he figures you belong to him now."

"Are they so intelligent?" Commarrin asked. He hurried to the edge of the deck, where he dropped to his knees and leaned out over the water.

Zayder felt his eyes go wide. Tiburon was only a few meters off the deck. The great fish turned suddenly, his tail churning the water as he raced back toward Commarrin.

Zayder got there first. He grabbed Commarrin by his shirt, yanked him to his feet and threw him back towards the shed. The shark turned abruptly and descended back into the water without striking.

"You gotta death wish?" Zayder shouted.

Commarrin didn't answer. His face reflected fear as he looked out across the ocean, where the low rumble of a distant helicopter had suddenly become audible. Zayder darted to the ocean-edge of the deck. He saw the machine, a speck on the horizon, skimming the waves as it bore straight for the station. He turned to Commarrin. "Looks like Ryan's found your trail."

Commarrin nodded grimly.

"I could try to hide you. But it's useless. If they suspect you're here, they'll search the station."

"It's all right," Commarrin said, his expression suddenly as empty as the shark's. "I won't make trouble for you."

Zayder could remember the desire. It was not so long ago when he'd still allowed himself to dream of the great marine preserves off Australia, off Africa. All he'd ever wanted was to know the ocean, to untangle its secrets. He would have done anything to be permitted to study in those preserves.

Commarrin shared that hunger. He'd gambled his life for it, on a wire-thin chance to evade Ryan. And he was about to lose.

Zayder's gaze fixed on the diving equipment on the deck. "Underwater," he muttered. Then he looked up at Commarrin. "They might not look for you underwater."

He sent Commarrin to a network of caves in the reef, just outside the steel mesh wall of the shark pen. He had him take the bloody bedding and clothing with him, because there wasn't time for it to be fully consumed in the recyclers. "You can stay down for fifty minutes, no more."

From inside the pen, Tiburon watched Commarrin drop into the water; the shark disappeared into the depths in parallel with the young man.

Zayder returned to the shed to find the helicopter already down, the rotor slowing to visibility as the craft bobbed on pontoons a few meters off the station. The helicopter's doors had been removed. Mr. Ryan liked it that way.

A bodyguard leaned out from the passenger side to catch the rope Zayder tossed. Another half-rose from his position in the back seat, his automatic weapon cradled across his chest. Ryan held the pilot's seat.

After the rope was secured, Zayder pulled the helicopter close to the deck so the party could climb up. Then he let it drift a few meters out on the swell.

The two bodyguards ignored him. Weapons in hand, they set off through the station. Ryan turned to Zayder. He was a big man, thick-necked and well-muscled like the bodyguards. He stepped into the building's shade and removed his sunglasses. From his Chinese mother, he had dark hair and pale skin. From his Caucasian father, he had blue eyes and the bearing of a shark. "A valuable man was lost at sea last night," he told Zayder. "The incident occurred near here."

Zayder nodded. "A garbage trawler brought him in."

Ryan smiled coldly. "I missed your report," he said. "Where is he?"

Zayder glanced nervously at the waters of the pen. The smile on Ryan's face disappeared, to be replaced by a stony frown. "I didn't get to him in time," Zayder said. "At dawn I saw the great white feeding on the body. The trawler must have classified it as organic garbage and dumped it into the pen."

The pale color of Ryan's face deepened to the coppery blush of sunset. "You didn't try to recover the remains?"

Zayder stared at him impassively. Ryan, still bristling, returned his stare for a long moment. Then suddenly he seemed to relax. The color in his cheeks eased and a sly look came over his face. "Bring me the shark," he said. "I want its fins."

Zayder started. But Ryan had already turned away from him. He barked a brief order, and the two bodyguards reappeared from the shed. "We're going shark hunting," Ryan told them. He turned to Zayder. "Perhaps we can still recover some evidence of our young man from the belly of the shark."

Zayder felt a cold flush of horror. "*No!* The great white may be the last of its species. If you slit its belly, you'll kill it. You'll kill the species."

Ryan's eyes narrowed. "That would be a terrible thing," he agreed. "And I would be very upset if I did such a thing, only to find its belly empty." He pressed his finger against Zayder's chest, then drew a hard line down to his belly. "I might feel the need to similarly gut the man who had misled me."

The bodyguards leveled their weapons at Zayder's chest. Zayder stiffened, but his gaze remained fixed on Ryan's face. "I'll need the harpoon," he said. It was still lying on the deck, where he'd left it after his aborted hunt for Tiburon.

Ryan took a step back, then stooped to pick it up. "I'll handle the weapon," he said. "You find the shark."

Sharks were unpredictable. Zayder had never developed a reliable way of calling them, except to chum the water with blood. Ryan knew that. But Ryan wanted Tiburon *now*. Zayder squinted as his gaze swept across the surface waters of the pen. It had been ten minutes since Commarin slipped into the ocean. Tiburon had seemed to follow. Zayder remembered the fury of the shark that morning, when the pen walls had kept it from its selected prey. "All right," he said. "I think I know where I can find him."

Zayder led them along the deck, some three hundred meters, until they neared the point above the underwater caves in which Commarin was hiding. He imagined Tiburon below, listening to the vibrations

of their footsteps, the shark's blood fury roused by the scent of inaccessible Commarin. He searched the clear blue water inside the pen. Smaller sharks swept past, their movements quick, agitated. Cautiously, Zayder crouched at the edge of the deck. He could feel Ryan's presence close behind him. "Well?" Ryan demanded.

Zayder thought he saw a huge gray shadow in sinuous motion far below. *Come on, Tiburon. You vicious old bastard.*

The shadow turned, circled, then began driving towards the surface. Zayder looked up to see Ryan staring at the charging shark. "He's the last of his species," Zayder said. "And he tends to hold a grudge."

Ryan raised the harpoon; took aim. The bodyguards moved up beside him, edging close to the deck, even leaning over, so they could see the action. The shadow of the shark seemed to grow enormously large as it approached. Sweat appeared on Ryan's cheeks. "*It's not slowing down!*" he hissed.

Zayder readied himself. As Tiburon burst from the water, Zayder dove diagonally across the deck -- and collided with Ryan! Ryan blocked his way -- and he'd failed to fire the harpoon. Instead, he'd thrown himself back, rolling to safety across the deck as the shark crashed onto the black surface of the photovoltaic cells. Zayder scrambled to escape Tiburon's snapping jaws. But the shark was faster. He felt the huge triangular teeth rake furrows in his leg. He screamed and clawed at the deck, slithering away. Twisting around, he looked back in time to see the thrashing shark snap at one of the bodyguards. It took the stunned man in its massive jaws and bit down. The man never even screamed as his spine was snapped. Then the shark shook its massive head. Blood flew as it dropped its victim. It turned to the second bodyguard and lunged, snapping once, twice as the screaming man scabbled across a deck that was suddenly slick with blood. Tiburon's maw closed on the man's leg, taking it off just above the knee.

Then, as if he'd collected his due, the shark slipped quietly back into the water.

Zayder found himself on hands and knees in the center of the blood-washed deck. The wounded man was screaming. The bleeding corpse shuddered on the deck. His own leg felt as if fiery brands were burning into his flesh. He choked on the pain.

Suddenly, the bolt of the harpoon was thrust in his face. He stared at the double image of the steel point as it hovered, out of focus, scant centimeters from his eyes. He looked past the point to see Ryan standing over him, face flushed with fury.

"Where is Commarin?" Ryan shouted. "Where is he?"

"Tiburon," Zayder gasped. "I told you--"

"No more lies! That shark has not fed. Where is he? Where is Commarin? Tell me now, or you'll die. Tell me, because I'm going to find him anyway."

The screams of the wounded man were growing feebler. He was bleeding to death while his boss continued to pursue the quarry.

In the pen, the waters were no longer calm. Sharks were gathering, drawn by the huge quantities of blood that continued to drain into the water. Zayder glanced quickly at the frothing, whirling maelstrom of fins, knowing his own death would lie there if he gave into Ryan.

Tiburon had never given in. Not even after his fins had been cut off five times, five times regrown in the coursing waters of the recovery channels. He'd just gotten bigger and meaner; faster, stronger. Maybe soon, he'd be able to jump over the deck to freedom.

All this passed through his mind in the space of a trembling breath. And then he made his decision. "Fuck you, Ryan," he muttered.

Ducking quickly, he rolled off the deck. He heard Ryan scream at him, but the sound was cut off by the water as he plunged into the pen, just on the edge of the frenzy.

Zayder opened his eyes to the brine. He saw dark shadows dart towards him. The water was murky with blood. He stretched out his body and reached for the mesh of the shark pen's wall. He kicked. Harsh skin scraped his ribs as a shark brushed against him. He kicked harder. His fingers found the mesh. A gray shape loomed out of the froth and murk. Maw open, teeth bared, it bore down on him. He jammed his head through the mesh, wriggled to get his shoulders through. The shark turned and darted away, its dentate skin scraping his thigh as he pulled himself all the way through.

He surfaced under the deck, gasping for air. His eyes were closed in a grimace of pain as he fought the urge to scream. Ryan was on the deck, just above. But there was so much blood in the water! Ryan would have to believe he was dead. He would have to.

"Zayder!" a voice hissed, not an arm's length from his ear.

He jumped in shock. His eyes flew open to see Commarin adrift in the water beside him, still wearing the diving gear, his bandaged hands awkward as he paddled to stay afloat.

A wave of dizziness swept over him. He could sense blood from the wound in his leg pumping into the ocean. He could still feel the frantic thrashings of the frenzy in the currents driven through the mesh. His trembling hands stroked the water. "Ryan knows you're here," he whispered to Commarin. "His goons are dead. But he's the worst of them."

He reached into his pocket to remove the transponder. Sinking deeper into the water, he thrust it at Commarin. "Take this," he hissed. "Make your way around the pen until you find a garbage trawler in port. Check the ready lights on the berth. Find one that's nearly charged. Use your knife to remove the tentacles, then tie yourself to it. It'll take you a hundred clicks out by morning if it senses no weight on its limbs. Your friends will be able to retrieve you safely."

"You're coming too," Commarin said anxiously.

Zayder's lip curled in anger. "Don't think so, Commarin. Tiburon nicked my leg. Blood's still flowing. I've got to get out of the water."

"But Ryan's there."

"I've dealt with sharks before. Now go. Go! Get out of here. I want to see Ryan lose for a change."

But Commarin shook his head. "Not a chance. I got you into this mess. I'm not going to abandon you now. Look, if we can get to that helicopter, we can both get out of here."

"I don't know how to fly a helicopter."

"I do."

Staying under the deck, they moved around the perimeter of the shark pen toward the shed and the moored helicopter. A long gray shadow dogged them on the other side of the mesh: Tiburon. Coursing back and forth, back and forth, the shark's ceaseless motion focused on their slow progress.

They reached the shed without incident. The helicopter bobbed on the light swell only a few meters away. There was no sign of Ryan.

"He was uninjured," Zayder hissed. "He'll have called for reinforcements by now."

The light tread of a foot overhead alerted them. The shark swam past, turned, swam past again.

"Commarin!" Ryan's voice boomed over the hiss/roar of the swell rising and falling against the mesh. "I know where you are, Commarin. Your toothy escort is less shy about showing himself than you are. Come out, Commarin. There's little to fear. You know I'm a practical man."

To Zayder the words seemed to be amplified, reverberating under the deck. The voice might have been that of the shark, a dual entity, inescapable in its reach. He leaned back in the water, conscious of a soft roar in his ears that was the helpless static of oxygen-starved nerves. Some part of him knew he was bleeding to death. Salt water splashed into his mouth. He started to choke. He reached for the mesh to keep from sinking, but suddenly Commarin was there, buoying him up with bandaged hands, hissing something about Tiburon. And then: "We have to try to swim underwater to the other side of the helicopter."

Zayder shook his head, fumbling to find the words to express his fears. "No good!" he whispered. "Ryan's armed. Even if you managed to take off, Ryan could still bring you down. Have to get rid of Ryan first."

But how? His mind seemed to be bobbing about on the surface of a swell. He had trouble focusing on a single train of thought. He felt as if the trailing tentacles of a garbage trawler had become tangled in his brain, each tentacle pulling the neural tissue in a different direction.

One tentacle, one direction. Garbage in, garbage out. He twisted around in Commarin's arms. "A garbage trawler brought you in."

Commarin nodded slowly.

"Find one that's charged and ready."

"No. I told you I won't leave without you."

Ryan's voice boomed again from overhead. "Commarin, Commarin, why so stubborn? When are you going to realize that hiding under the deck is no solution?"

"Not you," Zayder whispered. His gaze wandered to the deck overhead. "I was thinking this time we could go trawling for sharks."

Commarin frowned, but he helped Zayder swim to the nearest trawler's berth. Zayder glanced at the maintenance panel. It indicated the unit was charged and ready to go, awaiting only its turn in the schedule. Tiburon slipped past inside the pen. Zayder was peripherally aware of the wake of the great fish as he lifted his hand to touch the panel. "You want to send it early," he told Commarin, his voice barely audible, even in his own ears. "You press this. But first we take off the tentacles, all but one."

It was an easy operation. The snap-in modules popped out, until only one was left. "Unwind it a bit," Zayder said, clinging to the trawler's housing. "It won't stick to your skin; only to your clothes." Ducking underwater, he struggled out of his company t-shirt, then resurfaced. He took the end of the tentacle in his bare hands. It felt smooth and soft and only mildly sticky. "When I hit the deck," he said, "you launch the trawler."

"Zayder--"

Zayder grabbed the maintenance ladder and started climbing, his steps deliberately loud against the peaceful mutter of the ocean. His head crested the deck, and he saw Ryan.

Ryan seemed surprised to see him. He quickly brought up the muzzle of his weapon. "I thought you'd be shark food by now," he growled.

"Commarin's hurt," Zayder croaked. "Help haul him up. Can't do it myself. Injured...."

Ryan crept forward cautiously. A meter and a half away, he leaned over the edge of the deck, as if to check whether Commarin really was clinging to the ladder. Zayder judged it his best moment.

He launched himself onto the deck, hitting it belly first and sliding towards the startled Ryan with the tentacle held in his outstretched hands. It wouldn't cling to living flesh. But it would happily wrap around Ryan's clothed leg.

Zayder threw it against him as he slid past. Ryan dropped the gun. He bent down, his bare fingers tearing at the tentacle. "*Now, Commarin!*" Zayder screamed.

But Commarin had already launched the garbage trawler. Zayder saw the finned torpedo from the corner of his eye, speeding out to sea. Ryan saw it too; saw the connection that bound him to it. He gave one hard yank on the tentacle as a snarl escaped his lips, and then the craft yanked him into the water. Zayder watched him go: dark, fishy figure in a white, foaming wake.

The garbage trawler would stay out until it had accumulated its weight capacity or until thirty days had passed, whichever came first. Given that it had only one tentacle to gather trash from the water, Zayder knew that it would not return in Ryan's lifetime. He closed his eyes, and laid back against the deck.

It was the roar of the helicopter that roused him. He awoke to find himself strapped into the passenger seat as the craft slowly lifted into the air. Looking down through the open doorway, he could see the shed, the recovery chutes, the black photovoltaic panels that defined the pen, the sinuous bodies of the collection of captive sharks. He thought he could pick out Tiburon among them. He'd taken the great white's fins five times, and every time, he'd forced them to regrow.

He turned quickly to Commarin. "Go back," he croaked. "Go back a moment."

"There's no time! Ryan's people will be here--"

"There," Zayder said, pointing to the shattered section of deck where Tiburon had lunged at him only that morning. The bodies of Ryan's men weren't far away. "Please, Commarin."

Reluctantly, Commarin set the craft down in the water just outside the pen. "What are you going to--"

Zayder unlatched his shoulder belt and slipped out.

"Zayder, wait!"

With Commarin yelling at his back, he stroked to the nearest trawler's berth. It was the machine that had brought Commarin in; nearly half-charged now. Half would be enough. Zayder seized one of the tentacles, pulled it out of the module and dragged it to the mesh. Tiburon cruised into sight. Zayder laughed bitterly. "Looking for another taste of me, you old bastard?" He waited for the shark to pass, then quickly wrapped the tentacle around the mesh and watched it take hold. Then he went back to the

trawler and activated it.

It hummed softly for a moment, then sped out of its housing, the tentacle paying out behind it. Zayder ducked under the tentacle and stroked back to the idling helicopter as quickly as he could. Commarin helped him climb aboard. "What the hell are you doing?" he demanded, as Zayder collapsed into the seat.

"Just get us out of here, quick," Zayder muttered.

The tentacle had already payed out to its maximum reach. Zayder could see the mesh bowing outwards under the strain. "Hit it, Tiburon," he muttered. "Hit it hard."

The shark seemed to hear him. Or perhaps its carefully cultured fury alone led it to attack the mesh. But as the helicopter lifted, Zayder could see the long gray shadow charge the wall of the pen.

The impact caused the deck to visibly shudder. The cracked photovoltaic panel split fully in two. The trawler lurched forward, submerged for a moment, then bobbed to the surface again as the tentacle snapped.

Zayder screamed in fury! The pen had held, and the sharks were still trapped in the artificial confines of a tiny, protected ocean. The helicopter lifted higher into the afternoon. The dark shapes of the great fish swam in their ancient, enduring journey, round and round the closed walls of their sanctuary. All but one.

Zayder saw it as Commarin banked the helicopter. The afternoon sun blazed on the blue water, but beneath the brilliant play of light, an anomalous patch of night sped into the open ocean. He saw it a for a second, maybe two, and then the fish sought deeper waters, its sinister shape disappearing into the blue.

"It's a man-eater," Commarin said. "It killed two men."

"It's part of this world."

Commarin shook his head. "It's part of the past. It'll be hunted down."

"I know." And when Tiburon was finally taken by hook or net, the species would be extinct. No sanctuary or reserve could change that.

Had the notion of sanctuary always been illusory?

His leg throbbed where the shark's teeth had raked him. "I'm going back to the fishing boats," he said.

Commarin looked startled. "No. You're a trained scientist. Come with me. There'll be a place for you--"

But Zayder wasn't listening. In his mind he followed Tiburon through the deep, as a fisherman would, a hunter: the original students of the natural world.

He followed the great shark all the way back to his own fading origins. There were no sanctuaries in the open ocean -- not for pelagic sharks or for deep-water fishermen. There never could be. But he would go back. He would fish, until that life was finally, fully played out on the open sea.

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