

**SEA CREATURE**

a novel

**VICTOR METHOS**

**Copyright 2011 Victor Methos**

Kindle Edition

License Statement

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author. Please note that this is a work of fiction and any similarity to persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

BY VICTOR METHOS

Novels

The Extinct

Savage: A Novel of Africa

The White Angel Murder

Sea Creature

Novellas

Clone Hunter

To contact the author, follow his latest adventures, or get tips on starting your own adventures, please visit the author's blog at

<http://methosreview.blogspot.com/>

The great beast hovered motionless in the blackness of the sea.

A warm current was passing through and it began twisting slightly with the force, as if it were part of the ocean landscape, a fixture inseparable from the water. Its eight arms were coiled tightly underneath, two long tentacles dangling beneath them. This far below the surface it glowed a faint red; a mechanism to attract prey. It hadn't eaten for days since it was now too large for any of the local sea-life to provide adequate sustenance. But it was patient. It could wait for weeks without food.

There was tumult nearby. It could pick up the slightest trace of motion and its boulder-sized eye slowly opened, catching a glimpse of a six foot tuna that swam in a circle around it, investigating the flashing red light. As the tuna passed in front of it, the beast shot out with one of its tentacles, wrapping it around the tuna's midsection. Each tentacle was armed with hundreds of sucker rings, a serrated tooth-like hook in the center. It was designed to tear into meat and not be removed unless the prey was willing to part with a massive hunk of flesh.

It easily tore the tuna in half, bringing the meat underneath the arms and to a giant beak that swallowed the pieces whole.

The tuna only served to peak its hunger and it remained motionless, attempting to pick up the slightest vibrations. Suddenly, far above on the surface, it heard the thrashing of a large animal. It began to rise . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

"Mary Beth!" Lauren yelled.

It was dusk and the sun had nearly set, the stars beginning to sparkle in the sky, but she could still see Mary Beth paddling farther from shore with Andrew and it made her heart race. Viña del Mar was by far the most luxurious and safest of all summer area resorts in Chile, but the tides were still as strong as anywhere else on the coast.

Her mother had told her Mary Beth was her responsibility. She was far too impetuous and foolhardy considering her station in life, her mother had always warned her. Lauren was the responsible one, the one her parents always turned to when they needed to find out what mischief the girls were up to.

The canoe was painted yellow; easy not to lose sight of and the wood was thick, but Lauren was frightened that a strong current could overpower it and send it off farther to sea. And then she would have to explain to her mother how Mary Beth had to be dragged back to shore by their bodyguards. And where were those damn guards now? She had a suspicion Mary Beth had sent them on an errand to be alone with Andrew.

Mary Beth looked back to shore and waved to her sister. She couldn't hear what she was yelling but she laughed; no doubt her sister was worried.

"Should we go back?" Andrew said.

"She always worries. When we were little girls she was always warning me not to ride my horses or play with boys or go far away from the estate by myself. She reminds me of mother that way."

"Your mother," Andrew said with a shake of his head, "quite the character. Do you know she came to my father's house, screaming her head off, because she found one of my letters in your room?"

Mary Beth laughed, leaning back onto the canoe and putting one leg into the water, letting it drag across the surface. Andrew paddled softly and looked at her bare leg. It was smooth and milky white and her feet were perfect. He looked back to shore and wondered if anyone could see.

"Pull your swimsuit up," he said, his eyes locking on to hers.

She smiled and playfully wrapped her fingers around her waist, tugging at her bikini as it rose up, revealing her hips.

"Higher."

She reached underneath and pulled her bikini to the side.

"Now take it off."

Mary Beth leaned her head back, the moon becoming bright in the sky and illuminating her face. She slipped off her bikini. "What do you think?" she whispered.

There was no reply.

She looked down and saw that she was alone on the canoe, the paddle lying limp across the seats. The sea was still as glass.

"Andrew?"

She looked down over the water. He was a trickster and she could see him getting her excited and then slipping into the ocean, peaking her excitement and only making her want him more.

"Darling," she said, sitting up and leaning over the side of the raft, "I have a present for you."

There was only the silence of the ocean, not even small waves lapping against the wood of the canoe. It was a silence she hadn't heard out here before and the hairs on her neck stood up. She looked back to shore; it was far and she couldn't see if her sister was still there or had gone back to the hotel.

"Andrew, this isn't funny. I'm paddling back to shore if you don't come out right now."

There was a scraping noise, something underneath the canoe. It sounded like flesh against wood. He was underneath the boat.

"I'm leaving now, you can swim back."

There was another sound, the surface being broken as something came up. Across from her, on the other side of the canoe, she saw a glowing tentacle reach up and slither its way over the wooden seats. It was slick and white, turning briefly a blood red before losing its color again. It left a slimy trail along the wood. It began to go to the left and then circled to the right, searching.

Her heart stopped. She screamed and the tentacle thrust forward around her legs and another came from behind and wrapped itself around her face and throat. She felt lightness as she was lifted in the air and the cool water of the sea against her skin as she was pulled under.

A moment later, the canoe was dragged underneath the surface, and the ocean went still again . . .

The fist impacted against Patrick Russell's jaw and sent him flying back into the arms of the crowd.

Gathered in a circle behind the local Catholic Church, the villagers of San Pablo had come for generations and watched the fights on the twelfth of every month; commemorating the uprising of their ancestors against the early conquistadors nearly five centuries ago.

It was a rare treat for a foreigner to be allowed to fight, and rarer still for one not to be attacked by the crowd should he start to get the better of his opponent.

The crowd tossed Patrick back into the circle. His opponent was tall and lean, his fists wrapped in a thin cloth; more to keep his opponent's blood off his hands than protect him. He came in with a jab and connected with Patrick's nose. He came in again and again and his nose bled down his lip and onto his shirt. The man was smiling. He turned to the crowd and held up his arms in victory and the crowd cheered. Technically the fight wasn't over until someone was unconscious or submitted.

He turned back to Patrick who stood with his hands by his face, his nose bloody and his eye beginning to swell. Patrick lunged at him and swung with a right. The man easily ducked and came up with a hook to the ribs and another hook to the cheek which spun Patrick around and he fell onto his stomach.

He looked up to Christopher who was taking in the money and setting the odds, wads of cash in his hands and people shouting bets into his ears. Christopher looked at him and mouthed the words, "Not yet."

He stood up and turned to the man who was checking his hands to make sure they weren't damaged. Patrick came at him with a kick to the groin and the man parried it and smashed his fist into Patrick's face again. He grabbed his collar, not allowing him to fall this time, and sent a knee to his groin, causing him to double over, before sweeping out his legs and throwing him onto his back.

Patrick stared up at the sky and could taste the blood running down his throat. The man was taking a victory lap into the crowd, showing his total dominance in the circle.

Patrick looked to Christopher and crawled over to him.

"How am I doing?" Patrick shouted out of breath.

"Good as you think."

"Odds?"

"Five to one against you. The knee to your balls sent it over."

"Are we done yet?"

"Little more."

The man spun around and stomped on Patrick's ribs, causing him to pull to his side. Then he delivered a kick that knocked the wind out of him before grabbing him by his hair and pulling him to his feet.

The man held up one hand, letting the crowd know that he was about to end it with some powerful blow to the groin or throat or chest. Patrick looked to Christopher who nodded.

The man swung with his fist, aiming for Patrick's throat. Patrick pushed into the man, causing his arm to wrap around the back of his neck rather than impact his throat.

Patrick came up with a headbutt into the man's face before his foot flew up faster than the man could see and bashed into his groin. The man bent over just enough that Patrick wrapped his arm around him in a reverse headlock, and fell back onto the hard ground, the man's head taking all the impact.

Patrick spun around on top of the man to finish with blows to the face, but the man's eyes had rolled back into his head and he was making some sort of sound. Patrick leaned in close: he was snoring.

Patrick stood up as the crowd went completely silent. Christopher stepped out, stuffing all the cash they had just made in his pockets and down his underwear.

"Thanks everyone," Christopher said, "but we gotta be heading back. It was fun. Tell that guy we're sorry and that the next beer's on us. Gracias." He turned to Patrick and whispered, "We need to get outta here before they cut our balls off."

He jumped into the jeep and Patrick looked back. The crowd was still in silence, staring down at their champion who was snoring as loudly as a bear. Someone shouted something and they began to yell and sprinted for the jeep.

"Go! Go!" Christopher yelled.

Patrick turned the ignition and slammed down the accelerator. The wheels spun in the dirt for a moment before the jeep rocketed forward away from the crowd. One man had caught up and jumped onto the back. Christopher grabbed his Nalgene bottle and bashed it into the man's nose, causing him to lose his grip and fly off the jeep, tumbling on the ground and cursing.

Christopher was shouting and stomping his feet in celebration, but Patrick was looking into the rearview mirror at his face.

"I think I need a doctor."

"Here? You're better off not going. Lemmie see . . . just a black eye, you'll be fine."

He drove another few minutes and then stopped the jeep on the side of the road. "You drive."

They began going down the winding dirt road and eventually reached the paved streets near Valparaiso. The day had been hot but as evening fell the temperatures cooled and the wind was blowing through their hair as they made their way into town.

"What'd ya want to do now?" Christopher asked.

"I'm going to bed and sleeping until tomorrow. Then we're going hunting."



The panther was asleep in the shade when Patrick Russell approached it through the jungle vegetation. He was no more than ten feet away, so close that he could see the old blood stains from this morning's meal on the panther's teeth. He looked back to the jeep and saw his assistant, Christopher, reading on his tablet. His legs were crossed and up on the dashboard. He saw him looking and waved. The Chilean jungle was no place for roughing it for him. He insisted on bringing everything of modern convenience. Patrick let him bring his ipad but demanded no cell phones.

Patrick turned back, his Winchester by his side. The cat looked so peaceful, its tail whipping back and forth every few seconds to get the flies off, paws dug into the earth. A few feet from him was the carcass of a small deer, and next to that two small bouncing cubs. It was a female. The hunting guide behind him whispered in his ear to shoot, but Patrick slowly backed away and they walked back to the jeep.

"What happened?" Christopher asked.

"We're leaving," Patrick said.

"Thought you wanted to kill a panther?"

"Changed my mind."

"It was on your bucket-list."

"Hemingway was a coward to shoot one of those things. I'm not doing it."

The guide placed his rifle in the back of the jeep and climbed into the driver's seat. He waited for Patrick to climb in before starting the engine and pulling away.

"It would kill you if it could," he said.

"Well, I think that could be said for just about anybody."

There was another jeep in the distance, speeding toward them on the dirt road, clouds of red grainy dirt kicked up behind it. They were approaching at a fast pace and the guide pulled to the side of the road. This area had been infested with bandits since they had been pushed farther and farther away from the cities. They would sell things on the side of the road and when tourists stopped they would be robbed. But tourists learned quickly and fewer of them were stopping, so they had taken to causing car accidents and then robbing them.

The guide took his rifle out of the back, making sure the other jeep could see it. Patrick put his across his lap and glanced back to Christopher who was applying sunblock to his nose and arms.

The jeep came closer and Patrick said, "It's James." He turned to the guide. "It's my cousin, it's okay."

They pulled up to the side and James had a frantic look on his face. "Pat, we need to get back right now."

"Why, what's going?"

"It's Andrew."

\*\*\*\*\*

Patrick Russell collapsed into a chair at the police station in Viña del Mar. The station was little more than an old house with a handful of officers, but the furniture was exquisite and locally hand crafted, the hardwood floors freshly polished and covered with handmade rugs. There was a large photo on the wall of some political leader and Patrick looked at it a long time as the chief of police tried to get his attention.

"Mr. Russell? Mr. Russell?"

"Yes?"

"I am sorry about your brother but the woman he was with was apparently a very important woman. The American Embassy is very upset. Very upset."

"Mary Beth, I know. She's the daughter of a congressman. We came down here with them."

"For what purpose?"

"Vacation . . . my brother was going to ask her to marry him."

The officer exhaled loudly, as if annoyed by this little revelation of emotion. "When someone drowns in the ocean there is a burial at the ocean. We put their belongings into a coffin and place them into the water if they are rich. If they are poor, we light candles for them and let them float away."

"Yeah, I've seen the ritual. But it doesn't make sense that my brother drown. He was a champion swimmer in college. How could he have drowned in a calm ocean?"

"Perhaps he was drunk? Many tourists do not realize how dangerous these waters can be and they get drunk and fall off their boats and the currents take them."

Patrick stretched his back and stood up. "Do you need anything more from me?"

"No. If we find his body, I will let you know."

"Thank you."

He walked out into the hot Chilean sun. This was the most affluent region in the entire nation, the President's summer villa not six blocks from where he stood, but there were still a few hawkers selling their wares on the side of the roads. They saw him and wanted to approach but they dared not come near the police station for fear of being arrested. Tourists were not to be hassled when they had business to attend to. Too many tourists have an unpleasant experience and the Chilean tourist trade could dry up, the dollars spent farther south or north instead.

Lauren was sitting on the curb, her face in her hands. Patrick walked to her and sat down on the warm pavement, watching the throngs pass them by. Near them to the right was a cart with a butcher cutting up slabs of meat, his wife cooking lamb and chicken on skewers with roasted vegetables.

"Are you all right?" he said.

She burst into tears and dug her head into his shoulder. He turned to her and wrapped his arms around her, leaning his chin against her head.

"It's my fault, Patrick. I let her go on the canoe."

"No, it's no one's fault. Lightning has to strike somewhere."

She pulled away and wiped at the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I don't even know what to tell my parents. What am I going to say, Patrick?"

"I don't know."

She pulled out a tissue and wiped at her nose and cheeks. "I'm sorry about Andrew."

Patrick nodded and then stood up. "I'll be back at the hotel. I have some arrangements to make."

As he walked away from her he noticed a policeman behind him. The officer was walking in his direction, his eyes on Patrick, but when Patrick would look at him he would look away.

Patrick walked down the street, glancing in a restaurant window and seeing the officer still behind him about twenty feet. He kept walking as if he hadn't noticed, stopping once at a fruit stand and haggling over a banana. He purchased it and saw that the officer was standing nearby.

He kept walking and then suddenly turned down an alley. There were trash cans gathered near a door and he ducked behind them and waited.

There were footsteps down the alleyway and Patrick held his breath. He had seen officers intimidate and even injure or kill tourists for their valuables. The police in poorer nations were much of the time criminals themselves.

The officer stood in front of the trash cans and stepped closer to have a look when Patrick jumped up and wrapped one arm around his throat, the other coming behind his head in a scissor lock. The policeman fought at first but when Patrick squeezed and the air was cut off, he relaxed. He saw the sweat glistening against the man's forehead, but he didn't flinch.

"Mr. Russell?"

"Maybe. Why?"

"My name is Inspector Sosa. I was the investigator for your brother."

Patrick hesitated and then let go. "Why were you following me?"

"I did not want to talk to you about this near the other police."

The officer glanced to him and Patrick realized he was still standing too close.

"Sorry."

"It is all right. It is not the first time someone has tried to choke me."

"What is it you want to talk to me about?"

He looked furtively out the alley and said, "Your brother did not drown."

"What do you mean?"

"They do not talk about it here, for the tourists. But your brother did not drown. He was killed."

"What are you telling me? My brother was murdered?"

"Yes, but not by a man." He looked back out the alley. "I don't want to talk here. Let us talk near the beach. Follow me."

They made their way through the crowds and past the hawkers and restaurants and shops. They walked past vast estates and new buildings still yet to be occupied. They walked for what seemed to Patrick a long time before reaching a white sand beach and coming to a nearby picnic table.

Patrick looked out over the sea. He had fallen in love with the ocean since the first time he came to Chile four years ago. The water rolled into shore in small waves and crackled against the beach. The sun was so bright it gave the water a white-gold reflection that matched the sand before it.

"There is . . . something, here, Mr. Russell. I do not know what it is. But it has killed many people. Nobody will talk about it because we cannot have the tourists frightened to come here. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Your brother was killed by it. They will not find the body."

"I was told they found some remains of Mary Beth?"

"It is true. But that is rare. And there was not much found." He looked out over the choppy water, a few bathers in the

shallows watching their children play. "I wanted you to know the truth."

"Why?"

"It has . . . it has killed someone I cared for as well. I do not want you to believe your brother was a drunken fool."

Patrick nodded. "I understand. Thank you for telling me."

The inspector stood up to leave when Patrick said, "What do you think it is? You have to have some guess?"

"A monster, Mr. Russell. There is a monster in our waters."

Patrick Russell woke from a restless sleep and showered and shaved. The hotel was the second most luxurious in Viña; next to the Hotel del Mar on the beach. His room was carpeted with Persian rugs over imported oak floors. There was a wash basin on an antique dresser in the corner and a mirror that looked to be from a previous century was secured to the wall above it. The balcony doors were open, the breeze flowing in over white curtains.

There was a knock at the door as he was shaving. "Come."

His assistant, Christopher Woodruff, walked in and collapsed onto an imitation Louis the XVI chair. He crossed his legs, revealing Gucci leather boots.

"Well?" Patrick said.

"You're right. There've been some serious attacks. And not just on people, entire boats have been attacked. Fucking yachts."

"Has anyone seen what attacked them?"

"Couple of fishermen. Your old buddy is supposedly one of them."

"Rodrigo?"

"Apparently." Christopher rose and went to cupboard near the balcony. He took out a crystal bottle and poured himself a few fingers of scotch in a glass. "These locals tend to exaggerate, so I'm not sure how much stock I would put in their stories. But if they're even half right, this thing is going to make us famous."

\*\*\*\*\*

The docks were crowded but few ships were out on the ocean. Patrick stood on the beach and looked out over the churning water. A strong wind was blowing and he could taste the salt from the ocean on his tongue. He saw the white boat lashed to a slip and walked to it. It appeared empty.

He climbed aboard and peered into the cabin. Rodrigo Gonzalez was asleep in his underwear, his enormous stomach rising and falling with his snores. A silver cross hanging from a necklace was entwined with his graying chest hair and empty bottles of beer were on the floor. Patrick quietly went back near the stern and sat in one of the deckchairs.

"You do not need to sit out there, amigo."

He turned to see Rodrigo wide awake, his eyes bloodshot from recent drunkenness. Patrick went to him and they shook hands.

"Hola," Patrick said.

"Hola."

Rodrigo sat up and went to an icebox in the corner. He got out two beers and they sat on the deck and drank for a while without speaking.

"I have heard about your brother. I am sorry."

Patrick shook his head. "He was going to be married soon and take over my father's business. My father is a rich man, but he says I have no head for money. It's true. I was supposed to be the one that everyone felt sorry for and gossiped about, not Andrew."

"I have lost many brothers. I believe I will see them again and they will see me. Do you believe in God?"

"No."

Rodrigo shrugged. "Hard to see your brother when you are in hell."

Patrick smiled. "I'm not the one that kissed a man."

"I tell you, you could not tell she was a man. Only when her clothes were not on."

He chuckled softly. He missed Rodrigo. Patrick had been coming to Chile every summer for the past four years since he was dishonorably discharged from the Army. Rodrigo had been his fishing companion, his drinking companion, and at times the only person in the world Patrick could talk to.

"I wanted to speak to you about something," Patrick said. "I've heard stories that my brother was killed—that many people have been killed recently—by something in the water."

"What do you mean 'something'?"

"I don't know. A policeman called it a monster. Some people told Christopher that you had seen it."

Rodrigo nodded, staring off in the distance. "Yes, I have. I have one on my boat."

"One what?"

"Stay here."

He went to the bow and fetched something out of a metal container. He came back and sat across from him again and leaned forward. There was something dangling from his finger. Patrick examined it more closely. Attached with little tentacles around his index finger was a small white squid.

Rodrigo took the boat out of the slip and the harbor and went on the open sea. The ocean was by and large calm but there were waves that rocked the ship up and down and it took a moment for Patrick to adjust. He hadn't been on a boat since his training with the Army Rangers.

Patrick played with the tiny animal. The squid was no bigger than a finger but he could still feel its strength as it fought for its life, wrapping a tentacle around his thumb and not letting go. Patrick grabbed it by the head and threw it into the water.

Rodrigo turned the engines off and then came and sat next to him, the ship gliding over the water before slowing and coming into rhythm with the waves.

"I have heard you have been in Chile for three weeks but you have not come to see your old friend Rodrigo."

"I was going to; I just got a little busy. I was going to bring Andrew so we could all go diving for clams."

"The clams are not good this year. The fish are not good this year, nothing is good this year."

"Why? What's going on?"

Rodrigo pointed due north. "There are factories there that put things in the water, ah, cómo se dice? Chemicals? They put chemicals in the water and they kill the fish. But I know nothing else. I know how to fish and how drink and there are no jobs for drinking."

There was commotion nearby, thrashing in the water. Patrick looked over the edge of the boat and saw an oceanic white tip shark biting into the boat, exploring with its mouth.

"They very dangerous sharks," Rodrigo said. "Two fishermen diving here three months ago. The shark bite one in the leg and pulled him to the bottom because it knew the other fisherman could not follow. It killed the man there and ate much of him. Very dangerous."

"This thing that killed my brother, it's more dangerous isn't it?"

Rodrigo whistled through his teeth.

"Christopher thinks if we can catch it it'll make us famous. He says it's a giant squid. Something that's very rare."

"No, not rare. I have heard stories from my grandfather and seen them. Some men here kill them and sell the meat. Every year at the same time the sea gets angry. That is what he told me when I was a child. The sea gets angry and it sends its demons to protect it."

Before Patrick could respond they heard something nearby. He turned and saw a boat heading toward them. Rodrigo picked up a pair of binoculars out of a tackle box and watched the boat for a long time.

He finally put the binoculars down and jumped up to the controls and started the engines. "We need to leave now."

"What is it?"

"Bandidos."

"Out here?"

"They come for the boat. They are as dangerous as the sharks."

The boat dipped slightly as the engine came to life and propelled it forward. It began cutting through the waves and Rodrigo turned the ship in a wide arch back to shore.

Patrick looked behind him and watched the other boat. They were getting closer; their ship newer than Rodrigo's by at least twenty years.

Rodrigo pushed the throttle forward, black smoke coughing up from the pipe next to the controls. Patrick took the binoculars and looked behind them. There were at least five men, two of them armed with what looked like semi-automatic rifles. They wore plain clothing but one of them was in fatigues; possibly military issue.

"They don't look like they're coming to borrow some tools, Rodrigo."

"They're coming to throw us in the water and take the boat. If we had women, they would take them too."

Patrick sat down, his foot incessantly tapping against the deck. He didn't like the waiting, the anticipation. He enjoyed either the fight or rest but not that odd area in between.

Bandidos had always been a problem in Chile, but it was predominantly the more rural parts of Chile. To come on the water near a tourist resort and rob the local fishermen was brazen to the point that Patrick thought perhaps they were either a part of the military or police, or protected by them. In poorer nations, there's little that distinguishes the crooks from the government.

The shore was visible now but the other boat was close, maybe a hundred feet. It was closing quickly and the men were shouting something through a megaphone.

"What are they saying?"

"They are telling us to surrender the boat and we will live. It is not true."

"Do you have any guns?"

"Yes, near the bed."

Patrick went inside the cabin and found a Kimber 84m bolt action rifle. An older rifle made entirely of steel and walnut; no aluminum or rubber parts. He found the ammunition next to it and stepped outside.

"You sure this thing still fires?"

"Maybe."

"Great."

Patrick loaded the rifle and bent down behind the edge of the transom. The other boat was gaining quickly now and wasn't more than forty feet away. Patrick could see the faces of the men. They were cold and detached from a life of hardship and robbery and murder. They wouldn't have any sympathy for an old fisherman and his American friend.

Patrick took up the rifle and peered down the scope. Every time he did so, a small shiver went up his back and his stomach fluttered. He was right back in Falluja or Baghdad or Basra, hiding in tenements and firing down at unsuspecting enemy combatants as they made their way through what they thought was a safe area of town.

After the kill was the most dangerous time. That was the moment he would have to decide whether there was enough time to take down another target, or to pack up and disappear. Occasionally, the Iraqis wouldn't even notice when one of their own went down. They were disorganized and undisciplined but with a suicidal ferocity that made them difficult opponents.

Patrick felt the smoothness of the steel trigger and aimed the scope just under the wheel at the controls. He fired a single shot and a small hole appeared under the wheel and out the back of the control console.

The other boat began to sputter and eventually just came to a stop, the men scrambling to get it going again, looking at Rodrigo and Patrick as if trying to burn their faces in their minds for next time.

"Good shooting."

He pulled the bolt back, an empty cartridge clinking onto the deck, and went to the cabin to put the rifle back. They pulled up to the harbor and Rodrigo carefully put the boat back into the slip before they looked to each other.

"You have never told me you could shoot like that."

"You never asked."

Patrick jumped up in the night, sweat rolling down his chest and back, soaking the sheets. He looked out the windows of the hotel. A breeze was blowing into the room and in the distance he could hear the wail of a ship. His shirt clung to him with sweat and he took it off and poured himself a glass of water from a pitcher on the nightstand.

A slender Chilean woman with emerald eyes sat up next to him, her nude body sleek in the moonlight. She rubbed his arms and kissed his neck and then put her cheek to his back.

"Another nightmare?" she said.

"Yes."

"Do you only dream of war?"

"I try not to."

"Do you dream of me?"

He smirked and turned to her, planting a kiss on her neck and tasting the salt of her skin. "Yes."

"You have seen me for four years. But you do not ask me to move with you to Miami."

"You wouldn't like it there. Hell, maybe you would. But I don't like it there."

"Why?"

"You have to pretend you're somebody else all the time. People expect things from you. No one expects anything from you here. Other than always looking out for yourself."

"Then move here."

"I don't know. Maybe."

She hesitated a moment and then said, "You miss your brother?"

"Yes."

"I had a brother once. He got a fever when he was a boy and he died."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What was his name?"

"Tomas. He was eight when he died. My mother said that God wanted him more than we did because he was so special. What was your brother like?"

Patrick stood and found a fresh shirt and shorts. He put them on and slipped his sandals onto his feet. "Stay here if you like. I'm going out for a while."

"How long?"

"I don't know."

Patrick walked outside and the air was muggy and hot. Viña had almost a Mediterranean climate and was warm year round. You could find whatever you wanted here. They had a municipal casino, modern shopping malls, a natural history museum, even a track for horse racing. It was a beautiful spot that many celebrities spent time at every year but never mentioned in any interviews. No one wanted this place to become a Cancun or Bahamas. It was meant for a select few and no more.

Patrick had stumbled upon it by chance. He had been trekking through the jungle when two members of his party caught malaria. He set up camp and said he would be back to help them. He trekked thirty miles through the jungle and found Santiago and sent a team back to pick up the rest of his party. He stayed for over two weeks in Santiago, well after his party had left, and some of the locals suggested he go to Viña which was just over seventy miles to the north.

With little more than a backpack, he made his way there by hitchhiking and taking the local buses. He spent the rest of the summer in Viña and then returned the next year and the year after that. This year, Andrew had told him his plans to propose and he had urged him to come down and do it here.

He sat on a curb in front of a restaurant and watched the people coming and going. A sports star, some basketball player from LA, was there tonight and a group of local photographers were gathered outside; snapping photos of him sipping wine or laughing or shoving a bite of crab into his mouth.

Patrick rose and walked down to the beach and sat in the sand. He watched the waves roll into shore and the moon lit the sky a soft blue. But the water appeared black and unwelcoming. He had always enjoyed the ocean and had been taught sailing by his father since he was a youth, but the sight of it right now sickened him and he stood up and started back to the hotel.

Andrew had left a void in him. He was the only person Patrick ever cared for. His father was cold and distant and after their mother's death they had no other relatives. On top of that, their father discouraged friends. He had told them that friends had the potential to make them weak and would yell at them whenever other boys came over to play. The only people they really had in their lives were their parents and each other.

There was a small café on the walk home and Patrick stopped and ordered warm milk with sugar. He sat on the veranda and drank down the glass one slow sip at a time as he listened to the conversations around him.

A man next to him asked him for a smoke and he told him he didn't have any. The waitress struck up a conversation with him and he knew she was interested but he didn't pursue it. He finished his milk and left some money on the table before walking back to the hotel.

The bar near the lobby was a good one; they didn't water down their booze like most of the places in the city. Patrick swallowed two shots of rum and then bought the bottle and took it up to his room.

Sitting on the balcony, overlooking the city and the small bands of tourists that were out enjoying the nightlife, he saw a couple who were snapping photos and laughing and staring at the old buildings. It wasn't difficult to tell it was their first time here and Patrick thought of the first time he had brought his wife here three years ago.

It was before the bad times began; when they were still in the honeymoon phase after his return from Iraq. They had made love in a hotel and drank good red wine all night. They lay in the dark nude and she kissed his neck and ran her fingers along his chest.

"Tell me about the war," she had whispered for the first time.

He began to speak and he wasn't there in the warm bed next to the woman he loved any longer. He was under the burning desert sun with a scarf wrapped around his face to try and keep the sand out of his mouth for a few hours.

"There's telephone poles everywhere. It's actually a pretty modern city and there's parts that you are in and you can't forget where you are. We were guarding this truck, I think there were three of us. I figured it was fuel or something but one of the others told me it was KBR—Halliburton—trucks and they were transporting paper plates and salads. Fucking salads.

"We were standing around smoking and guarding these salads and I wondered how many poor bastards lost their lives over salad and why a sniper was on guard duty. We were griping and talking shit and then we heard gunfire across the street. We ran over there and two of our boys were pinned down behind a truck and there was at least ten Iraqis firing at them.

"We dove in and I stood my ground. The bullets were flying by my face but I didn't care. I was sick of this fucking war and if I was going to die it might as well have been today. The ten dropped to five almost instantly and then I fired a few rounds and there was two or three of them. I saw a guy with a rocket launcher up on the roof of the building next to us and I got off two rounds. One hit him in the eye and the other hit the guy behind him loading the launcher through the throat. Everybody else ran after that.

"When it was over, we heard crying. We walked down the street a little, right over where the firefight had taken place, and saw a man crying over his young son who'd been killed. I sat down with him and we cried together."

After that, she didn't ask about the war again. She didn't know what to say or do or how to react and he stopped talking about it with her. He withdrew into himself and soon there was no marriage left to save. They divorced only five months after their trip here.

But he still had Chile and he still had that night in the warm bed with the moon's cooling light over him. He thought of her now and hoped she was happy.

Patrick picked up the bottle of rum and guzzled it until there was only a little left on the bottom. Then he went and lay in bed, staring at the ceiling until the rum did its job and he passed out.



Christopher Woodruff stepped out of the hotel at nearly midnight. The air was warm and he was wearing shorts and his bed slippers. He walked half a block north and turned past a restaurant before pulling out his cell phone and dialing a long distance number.

"Hello?" a male voice said on the other end, groggy from sleep.

"Mr. Russell?"

"Christopher? What the hell do you want?"

"Sorry to wake you, sir." He hesitated, waiting for a pedestrian on the sidewalk to pass him. "I don't know what to say."

"Then don't say anything. What do you want?"

"I'm calling about Patrick."

"What about him?"

"He's taking this thing with Andrew hard. I think we need to stay down here until he works through it."

"This *thing* with Andrew? My son is dead you little fuck."

"I didn't mean it that way. But I still think we should stay down here."

"Fine. Why are you bothering me with it?"

"Um, our credit card was recently declined. I'm sure it was just an error, right?"

"Oh that. No that wasn't an error."

"So, what exactly do you expect us to do, sir?"

"I expect you to be men and make it on your own. You already have the tickets to fly back here. You want to stay down there stay down there. But don't expect me to pay for it you little shit."

Christopher felt anger bubbling inside him. Of all the people in Damien Russell's life, Christopher was the last one that should be treated this way. He was the one that knew all the bank accounts, all the offshore investments to avoid taxes, all the shell companies to swindle the government. He was the one that lined up the prostitutes in Washington D.C. and New York and Milan and Paris and London; and he was the one that would drive them to the hospital afterward and pay them to keep quiet. He was the one that had all the secrets.

"To be perfectly frank with you, sir," he said, "you've already lost one son. Do you want to lose the second too because you're too stubborn to send him a few bucks?"

"You bas—"

"Mr. Russell, I'm being honest with you. Patrick needs this. Reactivate our credit card so we can stay down here a few more weeks. He should have it out of his system by then."

"Go fuck yourself, Christopher! And you're fired."

There was a click and then the cell phone ended the call. Christopher took a deep breath and pretended that he was pushing all the negative energy out of himself with the breath. He walked back to the hotel and went to Patrick's room.

Patrick was lying in bed, a bottle of beer in his hand, listening to a Mozart concerto on the radio. His shirt was off and sweat glistened on his chest. Christopher sat in a chair near the bed and waited until the piece was over before speaking.

"Where were you at dinner?" Christopher said.

"Didn't feel like coming."

"Patty, I set up that dinner so you could meet Maria."

"I didn't really want to meet her."

"You need to find somebody. You're bouncing from one chick to the next and I see it taking a toll on you. Don't you want the white picket fence and the kids and the dog and all that shit?"

"Kids? What if I turned out like my father, Chris? They say you become the parent your parents were."

"You're nothing like him. Believe me." Christopher went and got a beer out of the mini-fridge and sat back down. He popped it open, guzzled half of it, and let out a wet burp. "Speaking of his highness, I just spoke to him."

"What for?"

"Our credit card was declined at dinner. I can't tell you how fucking embarrassing it was to have Maria and her friend have to pay for their own meals cause I didn't have enough cash."

"That's terrible. What'd he do, cancel it?"

"Yeah."

"That's his power over me and . . ." They glanced to each other and Patrick looked down, absently tearing at the label on his beer. "That was his power over me and Andrew. His money. I think without it he wouldn't be able to survive."

"Well we can relate cause without it we're not going to survive. They've been running the card here every week and when it declines this week they're gonna throw us out. Unless there's more fights in you we can bet on, we need to go home."

"I'm not going anywhere, Chris. But you should get back before he gets pissed and thinks I'm stealing you away."

"A little late; he already fired me."

“He’s fired you before.”

“I know and I’m sick of it.” He walked over and lay down on the bed next to him. “This is our chance, Patty. More important, this is my chance. I’ve been researching this the past couple days. Everybody I’ve talked to thinks this thing in the ocean is a giant squid. There wasn’t a single fisherman that even suggested anything else.”

“I know.”

“No one’s even seen a giant squid before. There’s some like blurry National Geographic photos and that’s it. They don’t even know how big they can get. Some people think they can get as big as two to three hundred feet near the bottom of the ocean. That’d be the biggest animal on earth.”

“So what?”

“So wh . . . are you kidding? Could you imagine if we caught or killed this thing?”

“No one would care. It would be all over the internet for a while and then disappear.”

“Maybe, but that’s why I made some calls.”

“To who?”

“Hear me out before you say no,” Christopher said.

“Whenever you say that I’ve learned to say no.”

“There’s this guy whose blog I found. Taylor Hamilton. You ever heard of him?”

“No.”

“He’s like some oil billionaire. Obsessed with these things. I emailed him and then we talked yesterday.”

“And?”

“And he wants in.”

“In on what, Chris? We’re not doing anything.”

“I was really vague about where we were and all that. He says if we bring him in and share the credit, he’ll fund everything. And we’ll get just as much press. He says if we can capture one it’s a guaranteed book deal, maybe even a movie.”

“Not interested.”

Christopher mumbled something about pigheadedness and then got up to leave. He turned before leaving and said, “You and I both know your father controls you through his money. You’re going to need a lot of money for your life and you got no way to get it. This is your chance to get out from under him. Or you can fly back and beg his forgiveness and hope he gives you a job at the company. Your choice.”

Vanessa Kolkowski sat in a deck chair on the yacht and sipped a martini. The party had been going for over three hours and everyone was getting trashed. Her mother—who had forced her to come to this company retreat—was taking tequila shots with her boss, Anderson.

Anderson had a belly and was balding with fat white forearms that made Vanessa sick. He was nothing compared to her father and she didn't understand how her mother could go from a man like him to Anderson. The divorce only went through two months ago; maybe she was on the rebound?

"Hi," a man said as he came and sat next to her. He was older by at least twenty years and Vanessa had seen him with his wife earlier; before she grew sea-sick and went to lie down in a cabin.

"Hi," she said, looking in the opposite direction.

"So I haven't seen you before. Don't tell me; you're with accounting? Cause I know everybody and I don't know you. I never get down to accounting."

"No, my mom works for the company."

"Oh yeah? Who's your mom?"

"Pam Kolkowski."

"Pam's your mom?" The man looked over to Pam. "Oh."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"She your boss or something?"

"Well, not exactly. She's . . . I mean. Yeah, yeah she's my boss."

"Don't worry, I won't tell her you were hitting on me. I won't tell your wife either."

The man thought for a while and then stood up without a word and walked away. It put a smile on Vanessa's face. Men had been paying attention to her from an early age, far younger than she could remember. Her mother had gotten her into modeling and she was used to having all eyes on her. But sometimes it depressed her. Men that barely knew her would tell her they would leave wives and children they had been with for years for her. She didn't intend on getting married for that reason; men just couldn't be trusted.

She finished her drink and stood up. Looking around the deck at the employees mingling with management and kissing their asses made her nauseated. That was one thing her mother did give her through her modeling: freedom from a boss. Photographers could sometimes be just as demanding but her agent could deal with them if they got out of hand.

Vanessa walked over to her mother. Her face was flushed from the alcohol and Vanessa could tell she would be too drunk to drive back to the hotel when they got to shore.

"I'm going to bed," Vanessa said.

"Already? Stay and have some fun."

"I'm really tired. I'm just going to go to sleep."

Anderson, after staring at her boobs the whole time, said, "My cabin's below deck and there shouldn't be anyone there. You could use that."

"Thanks."

She walked off and glanced back once to see her mom running her tongue along Anderson's fat lips.

Vanessa found some steps leading below deck. She was in high heels and had to grip the railing on either side to keep her balance but she made it down and walked through a narrow corridor. She passed a bathroom, a closet, a small office, and then came to a door at the end marked, "ANDERSON J. ORRO: CAPTAIN AND FIRST MATE."

*What a douchebag.*

Inside was as plush as any yacht she had ever been on. There were nice rugs on the floor and all the wood was a dark antique-looking brown. There were spirits in nice glass bottles at a bar and the couch was black leather and circled the room, a flat-screen taking up most of one of the walls.

The bed had leopard print sheets and there was a package of unused condoms laid on the nightstand.

She went to the bar and smelled what was in the various bottles. She found a bottle of vodka and a can of orange juice in a fridge and made a screwdriver with ice. She sat on the bed and drank and tried to see if her cell phone was picking up reception yet.

It wasn't and she put it in her pocket and lay down on the bed. A tiny window was open above her and she listened to the party for a while before dozing, and going to sleep.

Vanessa felt tickling on her leg. Still half-asleep, she moved her legs, thinking it was some of the hundreds of bugs that were always around in Chile. The tickling didn't stop and it began to move up her leg to her thigh and then her hips. She awoke to see Anderson's fat face above her. His hands were caressing her hips and trying to get her shorts off. He stunk of liquor and sweat.

"Get off of me, now."

"Oh come on, don't be such a prude. I saw you looking at me earlier."

"Anderson, get off me or I'll scream."

He grabbed her hands and pinned them above her head, kissing her neck. She struggled and brought her legs up enough that his body wasn't pressed against hers and she tried to bite his face which only made him laugh.

"You like it rough?" he said. "I can do rough."

She screamed.

It wasn't from Anderson or his stinking body or the fact that if he did rape her her mother would probably take his side.

Out of the periphery of her vision, she saw something coming through the window.

It was white and slick with what looked like circles on it. It was as thick as a tree trunk but seemed to shrink to get through the window. The tip slithered down to the floor, running over the rugs and up a table.

"Just relax," he said, "and you might enjoy it. Like I told your mom; I get what I want."

The thing seemed to hear his voice and crawled along the floor and up the bed. She screamed and fought and yelled and tried to pull away but he held her there as the thing climbed up onto the bed. It went over Anderson's back and he smiled, thinking it to be her.

The thing clamped down onto the fatty flesh of his back, sending a massive spatter of blood over the bed, the walls, and the ceiling. Anderson screamed as he was lifted into the air. The flesh ripped and he fell hard to the floor. He tried to get up and run out of the room but the thing moved as quickly as a snake and wrapped around his waist. It began to drag him near the window and the more he fought the tighter it wrapped itself around him.

The thing crushed his midsection to the size of a watermelon. Blood was spewing from his eyes and ears and mouth and nose. He was pounding at it with his fist as Vanessa crawled underneath the bed.

The thing brought him to the window. It was an undersized window, no more than a foot high, and it pulled Anderson through screaming, his bones crunching and his ligaments and tendons tearing as his legs folded behind his head and flesh scraped from his body as he was hauled through the miniature opening.

Vanessa was shaking so badly she couldn't stop. She put her hands underneath her to try and stop them and looked up to the window, praying that it wouldn't come back as tears streamed down her face. She looked to the door. It wasn't more than ten feet away. Slowly, she made her way out from underneath the bed.

She ran for the door and heard something behind her but she didn't stop. The door was locked and she unlocked the bottom one but the top one needed a key. She pounded it with her hands and screamed, "Help me!"

Then, there was only pain.

\*\*\*\*\*

Pamela Kolkowski danced to a Lionel Richie song with some guy from IT she didn't know and then went back to the wet bar and ordered a sex on the beach. She guzzled it and ordered another. These company retreats were the best part of her job. Everyone wanted to get drunk and get laid and most of the men didn't bring their wives.

It had been her idea to choose Chile as this year's location and she didn't regret it. She and Anderson had gone on safari yesterday and stopped the jeep, laying out a blanket and having sex not a hundred feet from a tourist bus showing a group of at least twenty the sights. It was an experience she wouldn't forget.

She looked around and wondered where Anderson was. Then she remembered how he'd offered for Vanessa to go down to his own cabin . . .

*Son of a bitch.*

This had happened a lot since she had been separated from her husband. She would meet a man and the man would be attracted to Vanessa and, though Pamela would know about it, she would wait to see if something overt happened. Then she would lose the man and have to find another.

She knew right when she gave him a blow job in the office that first time that dating your boss was not a good idea. How was she supposed to dump Anderson if he was trying to fuck her daughter?

She stormed down the corridor, checking every door. She got to the last one and it was locked. But she knew where the master keys were. Pamela ran up to the upper deck and got the set that Anderson kept there and then ran back down and unlocked the door.

The cabin looked like the inside of a slaughterhouse. Bits of torn flesh lay on the floor and was stuck to the walls; blood coated the entire room like paint. There was something laying underneath a window and she could make out what it was: a severed arm, with pink nail-polish on the nails. Her daughter's favorite color.



It was nearly dark when Patrick left the beach and walked back into the city. A day of surfing and windsailing and sipping margaritas and beers had relaxed him and eased the heavy gray feeling he had in his guts. He missed Andrew. Many times, they were all they had.

He would call Andrew from whatever location in the world he happened to be and they would talk about Andrew's schooling, the girls he was dating, the problems he was having with his father and how he would run the company differently. They rarely spoke of Patrick's life, Andrew having learned that it was a topic he would quickly change.

After his time in Iraq, he didn't want to talk about himself anymore.

Many tourists were out now on patios and in bars, enjoying the company of women being pimped by local drug lords. There was one in particular that Patrick had heard of long ago. It was difficult to find any information on him other than gossip as many of the locals believed he was in contact with evil spirits and may hear their conversations. But Patrick had picked up bits and pieces.

He was a murderer with every policeman and politician in the city on his payroll. He was also a sadist and many had told Patrick in late night drunken conversations that the man had killed more people than anyone else in this country's history. He would purchase prostitutes for a night and then they would never be heard from again. Some people said he used them for blood magic to speak with the devil. Some said the man was the mayor, or the governor of the province.

In four years Patrick had never seen this man. But he no doubt existed. He was told the results of elections months before they occurred; from bartenders, bouncers and fishermen, based on who the Great and Honorable El Copa preferred.

Patrick saw some American tourists eating chicken with yogurt sauce on a patio and he decided he was hungry. He entered the restaurant and was told it would be a ten minute wait and he sat in the waiting area.

"I like your bracelet," the woman next to him said.

"Thank you."

"Where'd you get it?"

"It's from Borneo. A tribesman whose home I stayed at there made it for me."

"What were you doing in Borneo?"

"Same as I'm doing here I suppose."

"And what's that?"

"Hiding away from civilization."

She smiled. "Didn't know it was looking for you."

"It's sneaky that way."

She put her hand out. "I'm Jane Weston."

"Patrick Russell," he said as he shook.

"Ms. Weston," the hostess said.

"That's me. It was nice meeting you."

"You too."

He watched her walk away, her sun dress wrinkled in the back and sticking to her thighs. He turned to his bracelet and looked it over. It was dark brown leather entwined with bamboo. He thought it looked like something a child would make, but nevertheless it was polite of her to mention something.

A few minutes later the hostess came for him and he was sat out on the patio. Sitting by herself next to him, sipping a glass of white wine, was Jane.

"Hello again," he said.

"Hi," she said with a smile.

"Are you eating alone?"

"Just me tonight."

"Would you mind then if I joined you? I hate to eat alone. Food tastes better with company they say."

"Sure."

He pulled out a chair and sat down, ordering a scotch and water with a beer.

"So where you from, Patrick? Not here I take it?"

"No, Boston originally, but I grew up in Miami. I've been coming here for quite some time though. How bout you?"

"California."

"Really? I love California. The beaches there are some of the best in the world."

The waiter came out with his drinks and placed them down. He then took a bowl of something brown and fried and put it on the table near Jane with lemon and butter. Patrick stared at the bowl, unblinkingly.

"I hope you don't mind," Jane finally said, "I ordered an appetizer."

Patrick didn't respond.

"Do you not like calamari?"

"No, I mean, yes. It's fine. It's fine. I just am, having one of those days I suppose."

She dipped one of the squid in the butter and sprayed lemon juice on it as Patrick watched. She popped it into her mouth and wiped at the oil on her lips with a linen napkin.

"So," she said, "what do you do in Miami?"

"Nothing at the moment actually. I was in the army, but not anymore. My father has an exporting business and I suppose eventually I'll become a part of that in some way. What about you?"

"I'm a doctor."

"Oh really?"

"Don't look so surprised. We Californians like our women to be doctors."

"No, no, it's not that at all. It's just that all the doctors I ever knew were field doctors. Tough guys with scars and tattoos and all. I've just never seen a doctor so lovely."

She blushed and took another bite of the calamari.

They ate and drank well into the night. When they were through Patrick offered to walk her back to her hotel and they strolled in the moonlight and spoke of her practice back home and how her father had been a doctor and how he had wanted a son but gotten only daughters. They spoke of his life in the military and she asked about the war and he changed the subject to something else.

They stopped in front of a large white building with a red Spanish tile roof and the sign outside said it was a bed and breakfast. She turned to him and said, "This is me."

"Well," he said, taking her hand and giving it a kiss, "I had a fun evening. I hope we can do it again."

"I do too. I'm here at the hotel for another week and then I'm off to Mexico for five days. If you like we could have dinner again sometime before."

"I would like that, Jane."

"Okay, well, bye."

"Bye."

He watched her leave and she waved before entering the bed and breakfast. He turned back toward the city, the moon bright in a cloudless sky.

Police Chief Hector Rojas stood on the pier and looked over the white yacht with the black and gold trim. It was a large vessel meant for parties that would last for days. Many of the wealthy that came to Viña would lease or buy them, stock them with food, liquor, drugs and women, and not be back to shore until they ran out of everything. In his twenty-one years with the police force, he had seen many famous American and British politicians throw such parties as well as movie stars and singers and business moguls. The ultra-successful, no matter from what walk of life, seemed to behave like animals when nobody was watching.

They would usually be so drunk or high on drugs that things would go wrong. The ship would hit a coral and they would need rescue, or it would catch fire, or they would run out of gas. One time a movie star, who was known for the amount of girls he had slept with, even rammed another yacht because he had released the captain and wanted to steer himself.

But Hector had never seen anything like this.

He walked back up the ramp and examined the deck while his officers interviewed the witnesses back on the beach. There were empty liquor bottles, half-burned marijuana joints, a few items of clothing and garbage, but nothing more. He went below deck and back to the room and leaned against the door and looked at the carnage.

At first he thought that perhaps someone had taken a chainsaw to somebody in here, but then he saw the blood and entrails and bits of bone that were on the window pane and leading out over the deck and into the ocean. He knew someone was dragged through the window and overboard.

The window measured nine inches by twelve inches.

He shook his head and walked back to the deck and leaned against the rail, looking out over the water. He had left police work in Santiago for this very reason. He was sick of the murders and the rapes and the bank robberies and the shootouts. He was only six years from retirement and he wanted somewhere comfortable and clean to finish out his time. There was nowhere more comfortable or clean in all of Chile, maybe all of South America, than Viña.

"Jefe," one of his officers said, waving for him to come down.

Hector walked back and stood in front of Inspector Sosa and a woman. Her eyes were bloodshot and she had a jacket thrown over her shoulders. Her make-up had smeared over her face from tears and sweat and she was shaking.

"This is Pamela Kolo . . . Kolosk—"

"Kolkowski," she said impatiently, wiping at new tears that ran down her cheeks.

"Kolkowski," Sosa said, nodding, "she says her daughter is missing."

"When did you see her last?" Hector asked.

"She went below deck to sleep in my boss' cabin. She was just . . . she was just a baby."

Pamela put her face in her hands and broke down, bending at the waist as if about to pass out. Sosa put his arm on her and whispered something. Hector turned and walked away.

Sosa led her to a bench on the pier and then ran to catch up with Hector.

"Jefe, wait."

"What is it?"

"You know what this is."

"This is a murder, Pablo. And I expect you to work the case and solve it."

"Que chingados! How many people have to die here before we do something about it?"

"Watch your mouth, Pablo." The chief stepped close to him, no more than a few inches from his face.

"I meant no disrespect. But people are dying and we're not telling them this water is dangerous."

"Do you know for sure it is dangerous? Have you ever seen this great monster? No? Then keep your mouth shut until we find out what the hell is going on."

Hector got into his car and looked to see Sosa still standing there, his hands on his hips, watching him start his car and pull away. He was a damnable fool, but he was a good cop and Hector felt bad he had to intimidate him like that. But this wasn't his doing, and he wasn't going to put up with it any longer.



The mayor's villa was one of the most secluded in Viña. Mayor Ignacio Silva had run an effective administration of the city the past three years, but he was a man that had many enemies. An unpopular anti-corruption measure had passed under his watch. Tourists were the lifeblood of Viña and Ignacio was one of the few locals who did not take this for granted. He knew all too well from his youth selling handmade trinkets on street corners that tourists were sensitive. A few bad rumors and they would look elsewhere for travel; and there were a thousand other places lined up to take their money and welcome them with open arms.

The measure had barely passed the city's municipal council with the approval of the regional intendant who was appointed directly by the president and spoke on his behalf. It was a simple law, modeling an Israeli counterpart from some years back: any business owner caught dealing with drug cartels was subject to a fifty percent surtax.

The law worked beautifully because no violence was involved in its enforcement. The business could deal with drug cartels all they wanted, but they had to pay the government its share. And not just the legal share of what the business earned, but any ill-gotten proceeds as well.

If a business owner hid funds or refused to pay, the police would arrest them. The cartels, unwilling to wage a war with the police over a few low-level small business owners, would move on to someone else. But the business owner would be ruined; some of them receiving as much as fifty years in prison.

The measure cleaned up Viña like no other law in the city's history. Business owners that were prone to work with cartels found it easier to move to a different city and the cartels found it more profitable to engage in gambling and prostitution—something the city officials turned a blind eye to—rather than go to the effort of building distribution channels for narcotics. When given a choice, drug peddlers always choose the path of least resistance.

The unpopularity had come about when the cartels did something unexpected: they didn't respond with violence. These weren't the cartels of twenty years ago; these new generations didn't want national attention and intervention by the army. So they chose a different path: they funded bandits to attack goods moving out of the city. The merchants were upset that they were being preyed upon, but there was only so much the mayor of the city could do when crimes occurred outside of the city.

Eventually, the cartels cut the bandits loose but they had nowhere else to go and now the city was surrounded by roving bands of criminals with no work and no prospects for income. It was a problem that simply did not seem to go away.

Ignacio sat at his desk, reading the news on his computer, when his phone buzzed and his secretary said that the chief of police was here to see him. Ignacio said to let him through and a few moments later Hector walked in and sat across from him without being invited to do so.

"Hola, Hector. Como esta?"

"Bien." Hector crossed his legs. "We had another attack."

Ignacio stopped reading and turned to him, placing a pen in his mouth and chewing on the tip. "How bad?"

"Very bad. Two people are dead."

"Anybody see it?"

"No. But there is—"

"Then we don't have a problem."

"But, Patrón, we have much blood and the two people are missing."

"They could have been murdered by each other for all we know. We don't know anything, Hector. What have I told you about making guesses?"

Hector shook his head. "I do not think we can hide this much longer, Patrón. I want to talk to the newspaper."

"I wipe my ass with the *Valparaiso Times*. They are a piece of shit newspaper." His face grew hot as he saw the headlines from last year, accusing him of embezzling funds from the city's account.

"But people need to know it is dangerous."

Ignacio leaned forward on his elbows. "Hector, you are a foreigner to this city, but I was raised here since I was born. I love this city. And this city cares for me. We are lovers that way; we need each other. I protect this city first, Hector, before even my own family, I protect the city."

"I know, Patrón. No one is saying that—"

"If anyone were to find out it is dangerous, the touristas would stop coming. They come for our beaches. No beaches, no touristas. Sí?"

"Sí."

"Without touristas, our businesses suffer and go bankrupt and they move. When that happens, poverty comes. With poverty crime and corruption. You do not see it now, Hector, but this could destroy us. We must be very careful. Do you understand?"

"I understand. I just do not like it."

"We must all do things we do not like, Hector. If you do not like it enough, you can always find other work. We could use good garbage men or people to work the gambling tables at the casino."

"No need, I will do as you ask."

"Magnifico. Go now and deal with the families of the missing turistas. Tell them to go home and stay by their telephones and you will call them with updates."

"Sí." He rose and left without saying goodbye.

Patrick picked up Jane at her bed and breakfast and they headed down to the beach. She had never been surfing before though she grew up fifteen minutes from one of the best beaches in the world. Patrick was intent on teaching her. They reached the shore and a strong wind was blowing, the waves choppy and large. He decided it wasn't good weather to teach someone new to surf so he rented a boat instead and they took it out a quarter mile from shore and turned the engine off. They had bought brunch from one of the local food shacks on the beach and they began to eat and talk of their lives back home.

Patrick would look into the water and then away almost every minute. Jane noticed and asked him about it.

"It's nothing."

When they finished they rode around, going up the coastline. The beaches varied from white sand to black rock to cliffs and they would stop and Jane would snap photos. They saw a colony of seals on some rocks and they rode closely by, listening to the barking and watching the little ones swim up and sniff the boat.

"Let's stop here," she said as they passed near a secluded beach.

They stopped and anchored close to shore. They laid out towels and took in the sun, Patrick rubbing suntan lotion on her back.

"How come you're scared of the ocean?"

"I wouldn't be on it if I was."

"You're tough so you overcome it, but I can tell you're scared of it."

Patrick was quiet but she didn't change the subject. She just waited patiently until he was ready.

"My brother was killed last week out here."

"Oh no, oh Patrick I'm so sorry. What happened?"

"They told me he drowned, but then I heard that it was something else."

"What?"

"An animal attack."

"Like a shark?"

"We don't know for sure. There's just gossip right now."

"What was your brother like?"

He began to speak and found he couldn't stop. He talked of their childhood, of his father, of his mother's death, and why he joined the military. He spoke of his father's business and how he had recently been cut off.

"You don't have any money?" she asked.

"Nope."

"What are you going to do?"

"Get a job maybe, or live on the beach. It doesn't really matter."

"But it does matter. You can't stay in this town if you don't have money. They hate foreigners coming to live here. They'll run you out eventually."

"Then I'll go to another town."

"And do what? I've spent a lot of time here, Patrick. I was in the Peace Corps here. They only want Americans visiting, not living here. You won't find any work. You'll have to live off of charity like a homeless person because that's what you'll be."

Patrick stared off in the distance in silence. The word "homeless" had struck a nerve. He had seen so many at the VA. So many soldiers who looked fine on the outside but had been torn apart on the inside. They would live on the streets because they couldn't deal with wives and children and parents and bosses anymore. They let their hair grow, their guts grow, and they would eventually be found in alleys and underpasses, drunk or nodding off from drugs. It was a nightmare that kept him up at night.

"I'm sorry," she finally said, "I've overstepped my bounds."

"No, not all. I was just thinking."

They climbed back into the boat after another half hour of tanning and after returning the rental Patrick took her back to her bed and breakfast. They agreed to meet for dinner tonight and go to the casino afterward. As she was saying goodbye, she leaned in and gave him a long kiss. He couldn't help but smile all the way back to the hotel.

Christopher sat at the beach, working on his ipad under a pink umbrella. He needed to plan his next move. Randomness and being caught off guard was not something he would allow to happen. He needed to be one step ahead of everyone else, needed to see the turns that were coming up.

The fact was, Patrick was probably never going to join him so the question he was asking himself was whether he should join up with Hamilton on his own or stick with Patrick.

"Hey," Patrick said walking up from behind him.

"Hey. What're you doing here? I thought you were out on a date."

"I was. We're meeting up for dinner tonight." He sat down in the sand, watching a yacht drift by with several women in bikinis waving hello. "Call your guy."

"What guy?"

"The oil billionaire."

"Seriously?" Christopher said, sitting up. "You're serious?"

"Yes, call him. But we need a contract in place saying he's funding everything and all of that. I also want some money up front."

"How much?"

"I don't know, enough for us to live on for a while I guess."

"I'll work out the details, don't worry about it."

"I think you might be getting your hopes up for nothing. For all we know there's not anything out there."

"Maybe, but I don't think so. I heard about another attack from some of the fishermen. This one was pretty bad; blood and body parts all over the place. Happened on a yacht not too far from here."

Patrick rose, wiping sand off of himself. "Just make sure we get some money upfront. Tell him we know all the local people and we'll arrange the deckhands and fisherman that we need but he's got to lease a big boat and all the equipment."

"I think that's plan. He sounded really excited on the phone when I was telling him. But, I gotta warn ya, he sounded a little weird."

"Weird like 'I'm an eccentric billionaire' or weird like 'I'm gonna rape you while you're sleeping' weird?"

"More eccentric billionaire. Don't think he could rape us, he's in a wheelchair."

"Well, just make sure—"

"We get some money up front, got it."

Taylor Hamilton sat in his estate's gardens and painted the sunrise. His wheelchair was chrome with black padding on the seat and arm rests. It responded to voice commands and he asked it to back away a little, judging his work.

He glanced quickly at the monitor that had been set up next to the easel. It was linked to his home daycare. The daycare was run by state licensed employees and, truth be told, was probably the finest daycare in the state. But that was not why he had set it up. He liked to watch the children. Boys, girls, teens . . . he enjoyed watching them as they played or ate or slept.

When he was a young man and not bound to this machine, he remembered there was no child he couldn't have. Now, he had to watch.

His assistant, Stewart, walked up from behind and waited patiently until he was done with his painting. He had just finished a workout in the gym and his six foot four frame was red and sweating, his muscles engorged with blood, veins popping out through his tanned skin.

"What do you think?" Hamilton asked.

"Exquisite, sir."

"Quit kissing my ass and tell me what you think."

"It's shit."

"It is shit, isn't it?" He threw the rest of his paint over the canvas and sighed. "Get me some ether and a glass of absinthe."

"Yes, sir. I did want to talk to you about something."

"Go ahead."

"The gentleman called again . . . about the cure."

"And?"

"They would like a contract specifying that you will be funding the entire expedition and that they are guaranteed half of all book and movie deals."

"Fine. Have the lawyers draw it up."

"They would also like an advance of twenty thousand dollars."

"Wire them the funds to whatever bank account they want."

Stewart stood quietly.

"Yes, go ahead."

"Sir, not to question your decisions, but we have traced their call to Viña del Mar. We can hire the best fishermen and experts in the world. We don't require them. And promising them half? If this cure is found it could be worth millions."

"Billions, Stewart. If we find what I think we're going to find, it will be worth billions."

"Then I don't see how we need or want them."

"We don't. But I will have them nonetheless. Are you familiar with Chileans?"

"No, sir."

"They are a lazy people. They will work for us because we pay them but they will not work when we are not watching. We need local help in the recruitment and supervision of these men. It doesn't matter anyhow; I have no intention of giving them anything. Their contracts are meaningless. They were smart to ask for money up front however, but it's worth a twenty thousand dollar loss."

"As you say, sir. I will begin recruitment of a captain and vessel."

"No need, I'm going down myself."

"Sir, in your condition—"

"My condition is no worse than it was last year or will be next year. I want to be part of this myself. You find us a large, powerful vessel. I'll handle the rest."

"As you wish."

Hamilton ordered his wheelchair around and took the cobblestone path through his gardens and around the mansion. There was a separate home in back, white exterior with dark brown shingles and a cross hanging over the door. He said a prayer before entering and then rolled in.

The entire first floor was made up of shelves and on each shelf was a specimen of squid in formaldehyde. He was not a biologist and didn't know the squid's anatomy or physiology, but had set up this home nonetheless. He enjoyed coming through here and looking at the dead specimens, but the true treat was near the back of the home: a large fish tank taking up an entire wall. Inside, a three foot Humboldt squid. It was fed well and had some space to exercise, but Hamilton had noticed it growing weaker by the day. They needed their freedom and withered away without it.

He rolled to it and stared into its large eye. He had no doubt; because of them, he would walk again.

The great white shark tilted its pectoral fin downward to the east and slowly glided in a large arch around toward the beach. It had picked up vibrations in the water through its lateral line—small jelly-filled sacks along its outer skin—that could detect the electrical currents of live prey. It was an adaptation bred through 400 million years of evolution and one that made eyesight and hearing irrelevant. The lateral line combined with the ampullae of Lorenzini in the shark's snout enabled it to hear the beating of a living organism's heart and, some said, gave it a sixth sense.

The shark dipped lower in the warm water as the vibrations continued. The size of a semi-truck, its half-moon tail gently swayed from side-to-side, propelling its twenty-two feet and forty-five hundred pounds through the water like an arrow. It came underneath the prey and detected the beating of several hearts and the faint trace of urine. This prey had limbs and the shark could intuitively tell from its shape that it carried little fat. It did not identify it as a seal but was curious and swam around the prey slowly, listening to the vibrations and attempting to trace the scent of urine. It approached one of them from underneath and gently rubbed against it. Its outer skin contained denticles; sharp backward facing bits of calcium that were the same shape and material as its teeth. The prey bled and attempted to flee back to shore.

The shark, aroused by the blood, began to follow.

The prey was slow and the shark dived as far down as it could go, preparing to thrust upward into the prey at the midsection and take a large chunk of flesh out of it. It would then swim around nearby and wait for the prey to bleed to death before coming in to feed.

But the shark picked up something else as it dove into the depths. It was something with a massive heartbeat. It moved and it seemed to move in every direction at once and the shark's senses felt overwhelmed. The thing was far too large to be trifled with.

The shark shot to the surface as quickly as it could and felt the mass behind it follow. The shark tilted to the right and then the left, its tail pumping back and forth so quickly it created a small current from its mass jetting through the water. But the thing was too large and too fast to be outrun. The shark felt it behind it, heard its heart. Its lateral line picked up movement in all directions and couldn't tell which way the thing was coming.

It made one last attempt to lose the creature by shooting to the surface like a rocket. The mass of gray and white broke the surface and its tail propelled it ten feet into the air.

As the shark was rising, a tentacle wrapped around its tail and slammed it back into the water. The shark struggled and snapped its teeth wildly as it was pulled underwater backward. It caught a portion of flesh and tore it away, only the pain making it realize it was its own tail and that it had been folded in half. It heard nothing as it was pulled apart at the midsection as easily as seaweed. Its head, still receiving signals through its central nervous system, saw the black opening and heard the crunch as the creature chewed once, and swallowed.

Patrick stood at the pier, staring at the massive ship. It was black with gold trim and the upper third was white. It was named *Challenger I* and it made him think of the shuttle that had malfunctioned and exploded.

He scratched at his chest; Christopher had made him buy a wool suit from a local thrift store and he wore it with loafers and a nice imitation Rolex watch.

"I hate this," he said.

"You gotta look nice for this guy."

There were a handful of men that stepped off the ship. One, a large muscular man covered with tattoos, was pushing Taylor Hamilton in a wheelchair. The wheelchair was brought over and Christopher thrust out his hand.

"Mr. Hamilton, it's an honor."

"Nice suit," he said, turning to Patrick without shaking hands. "Was it hard to get it out of your grandfather's grave?"

Hamilton laughed and Patrick could see several black, rotting teeth in his mouth. "I'm just kidding." He stuck out his hand

and Patrick shook. "Taylor Hamilton."

"Patrick Russell."

"You made the right choice in not going this alone boys. If this is what I think it is, there's money in it for both of us. Walk

with me," he said with a sardonic grin. The muscular man began to push Hamilton down the pier toward shore and the

men followed. "I've been reading some reports about the attacks that took place here. Interesting events."

"Have you ever seen a giant squid?" Christopher asked.

"No, nobody has. But I was close once, in the Bahamas. Something was attacking fishermen there. But by the time I got

there the rainy season had started and whatever it was had moved on."

"You won't have that problem here," Christopher said, "it's always warm here. Even in the winters."

"So I've heard."

They reached the shore and Hamilton turned around to face them. "We've got everything covered boys. Do you see that

man there," he said, pointing to a man on the deck of the ship dressed in a red wetsuit, "that's Mitch . . . well, Mitch

something or other. One of the top experts on cephalopods in the world. Damn Australian though, so watch your wallets

and your women," he said, laughing again. "You will supervise all the Chilean deckhands and Mitch will be your

supervisor." He began turning his wheelchair around. "All right boys, play nice with each other while daddy's gone."

Patrick turned and looked at Mitch who was busy going through some bags and counting equipment. He walked to the

ship and up the ramp and stood behind the Australian who was counting the number of harpoons they had onboard.

They weren't the small harpoons used for catching sharks by some of the locals; these were massive weapons used by

whalers for centuries to stick through the tough hide of a whale and then hang on until it drowned.

Behind them was an A-frame with a small one person submersible underneath. The sub was cylindrical and the two ends

were thick, transparent plastic. A machine meant for deep dives.

"Hi," Patrick said.

The Australian looked to him and smiled. "Hello hello," he said, coming up and shaking hands. "Mitch Roberts."

"Patrick Russell. This is Chris."

"Oh right, the local boys. Nice to meet you."

"Those are some serious weapons," Patrick said.

"Well we got ourselves a serious squid. At least that's what Taylor was telling me."

"That's the rumor. Nobody's seen it though."

"No, they probably wouldn't. They're like vampires that way; hide from the sunlight unless they're hungry."

Patrick noticed an open box. The equipment inside was taken apart, but he could tell right away what it was. "Are those

depth charges?"

"Good eye, mate. Yeah, they are."

"You're planning on blowing this thing up?"

"No, in fact Taylor and I got into a sciff over that. He wants it alive, but I took some precautions anyway. Don't think we'll

be needing them but I feel better with them here. To be honest I'm not entirely sure how they work. He's got a man here

for that. I'm a biologist." Mitch looked over to Christopher who had picked up a contraption and was turning it over in his

hands. He grabbed it from him and said, "Careful, mate. That's a detonator with a small explosive. Could take your arms

off."

"Well," Christopher said, yawning, "we got some people to hire. Better get to it."

"Nice meeting you, Mitch."

"You too. Looking forward to working with you."

They walked off the ship and were far down the pier before Christopher said, "Nice enough guy."

"I don't trust him. Those weren't just depth charges; he had some mines there too. It's against international law to lay

mines in a sovereign nation's waters. He's not playing above board."

"Let me ask you this; other than me, do you trust anybody?"

"No, not really."

"Then you're not having to do anything different with these people."

Patrick looked back to Mitch who waved to him from the ship. "Yeah, but I still don't like this."



Mitch Roberts finished his cataloguing; the harpoons, the rifles, the depths charges, and a few other things he couldn't identify and wasn't told what function they would serve. He went down below deck to his massive cabin and took a shower and changed into some jeans and a football jersey of the Socceroos stating prominently, "FIFA 2010."

He came to the deck and flipped on sunglasses. It was pleasant weather but hot and he thought about running back down and changing into some shorts but decided against it. He had a country to explore.

He walked down the pier and saw Hamilton climbing into a limo, Stewart easily lifting him in before buckling the safety belts and getting in beside him. Stewart made him uneasy. There was a calmness about him that didn't match his gigantic body and Mitch recognized some of his ink as crude prison work.

Hamilton's second was sitting on the beach talking on a cell phone. David something or other. A former Navy man and an alcoholic who hadn't stopped drinking for a moment on the trip down here. Mitch walked to him and waited until he was done with his phone call before speaking.

"You hungry?"

"Yeah," David said, stuffing the phone back into his pocket. "You been here before?"

"No, never."

"I know a place."

He led him up the street and they waited on the side of the road for a taxi though there didn't seem to be any out.

"So," Mitch said, "how do you know Taylor?"

"I've done a few of these things with him."

"What things are those?"

"These hunts or expeditions or whatever the fuck he calls them. Waste a time is what I call them. He could give that money to me and I'd put it to much better use."

"He didn't tell me he's done this before. How many times?"

"Forty, maybe fifty."

"That many?"

"The old man wasn't always a cripple. He got some disease, Huntington's Disease I think, when he was in his twenties. Don't feel it's right he can't walk so that's all he does. His businesses run themselves so he just travels around and looks for cures. Here's one."

A taxi came to a stop in front of them and David climbed in without waiting for Mitch. The cabbie was fat with a mustache coming down past his chin and he spoke in quick, almost unintelligible Spanish and David gave him some directions.

"What about you?" David asked. "How'd he find you?"

"I wrote a paper about a chemical found in squids that could have uses in the treatment of disease. He called me almost the day it came out in the journals. Must follow 'em pretty close I figure."

"I told you; that's all he does."

"Seems like a waste. You got a little time left you should enjoy it instead'a worrying about going back to something you'll never have again."

"You don't think this squid's got the cure?"

"I haven't the foggiest. When I wrote that paper I was thinking of genetic disorders relating to the endocrine system. Hormonal imbalances, things like that. Taylor was the one that brought up curing Huntington's. All I told him was that it could be possible. I never said it was possible."

"I wouldn't tell him that. He thinks he's found his cure."

The taxi came to a stop in front of a flat two story building. David waited quietly until Mitch pulled out some cash, American dollars which everyone took here, and paid the driver. They stepped outside and walked in to the building.

It was a clean space made almost entirely of wood. Even the cash register was encased in a nice maple. It reminded Mitch of a saloon like he'd seen in the old American westerns. They sat at a table near the center and a waitress wearing a strapless top and tight black pants took their order. She brought out several shots of tequila and a local drink known as fanschop; which was basically tap beer and Fanta, and they drank them down, David guzzling them as if he were abandoned in a desert and just found water.

"Since you've never done one of these with the old man, I'll tell you what to do. You got questions you come to me first and ask and only go to the old man if I don't know what to do. He doesn't like to be bugged and if he feels like you don't know what you're doing he'll drop you off at the nearest port and you won't see a dime. He's not scared of getting sued. He's an equity partner at a big law firm in Texas and they do all his work for free. They defended some of the Enron guys."

"Sounds like a bit of ass."

"He's a monster," David said, staring off the in the distance.

The way he had said it gave Mitch an uneasy feeling and he began to think that maybe coming on this little adventure was

not the best idea he'd ever had.

It was well before noon when Patrick walked in to the bar in Valparaiso and looked around. The bar was a mass of filth and stunk of human sweat and urine. In the corner were two old dogs chewing on some bones and the bartender was spitting in a glass before wiping it out with a rag.

Rodrigo was sitting at a table with two other men, a dozen empty beer bottles already littering the table. Patrick walked over and sat next to him.

“Patrick, como esta?”

“Bien.”

“Cerveza?”

“No, gracias.”

“Did you just come to look at my pretty face or to drink?”

“Just look at your pretty face. And to tell you that the man we talked about has showed up.”

Rodrigo made a whistling sound through his teeth. “Why he wants one of these things?”

“I don’t know. Chris says he’s obsessed with them.”

“You know in old times, some of the fishermen used to worship them as demons. They would sacrifice part of every catch to the demonio del mar so it would leave them alone. Some of the men would get so they were comfortable around them and then the demonios would attack them and drag them to the bottom of the ocean.”

“So you’re saying you’re turning down the money? It’s more than you make in two years for just a few weeks work.”

“No, I didn’t say that. I just say some people used to think they’re demons.” Rodrigo guzzled his beer and stood up. “Ho K, let’s go catch a demon.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Patrick drove Rodrigo back to his boat and he gathered a few things: clothing, his old tattered bible, two of his rifles, and the rest of the beer in the fridge. They took Patrick’s jeep back to the hotel and Christopher had already checked out. He gathered their few bags and loaded them in before hopping into the back.

“I’m gonna miss this place,” Christopher said.

“Can’t afford it, even for a couple nights.”

“I know, can’t I just miss it.”

They drove down the winding path and out of Viña into the surrounding jungle. Valparaiso and Viña were really one city with no separations, but the atmosphere could not have been different. Where Viña was luxurious and catered to every whim, Valparaiso had nearly fifty percent unemployment and a rampant homelessness problem. Roving bands of wild dogs filled the city streets, attacking residents and tourists alike. Men, women and children were all at risk of being mugged or kidnapped at any time of day or night and there was not a single place in the city one could consider safe. The fire department was also a volunteer department with few volunteers and fires routinely could be seen on the surrounding hillsides, the department too depleted or too drunk to do anything about them.

But, knowing that not every tourist could afford to stay in Viña, though they may want to play there, Valparaiso had many hostels; catering to everyone from tourists to people that were just passing through, to criminals and people backpacking through South America.

They pulled to a stop in front of an old building painted blue with the doors falling off. Chickens were running around in front of it and an old man was passed out drunk a dozen feet away.

“Lovely,” Christopher said.

“Be glad you got a place to stay at all.”

They unloaded everything into the room. It was one space with a bathroom off to the side with no door. There were three cots set up and a small black and white television against a wall. Rodrigo flicked the television on and jumped onto a cot.

“It’s only for two days,” Patrick said. “Then we get the luxury of that ship.”

“I’m having second thoughts,” Christopher said, “maybe we should just call your father and beg his forgiveness?”

Rodrigo let out a wet burp and then farted. They both looked to him and he grinned like he was twelve.

Hector was woken at noon by one of his officers. He answered his phone, still groggy, and nearly fell out of his bed trying to sit up. He told him to wait a minute and turned on his lamp.

"What is it?" he said.

The officer explained to him what he had gathered from the fisherman. The tourists had brought in somebody else, someone with a lot of money. There was a large ship here with many men and they intended to kill whatever had been attacking people in the water. A reporter from the *Valparaiso Times* had come down to interview someone about it.

"I'll be right there."

Hector opened his blinds and looked out to the sun-soaked day. It was clear and there was no wind and he opened his windows so he could smell the salty ocean air coming in.

He dressed and decided to skip shaving. For breakfast he had eggs and a cold beer. The eggs were rubbery and didn't taste good. Since his wife had passed almost three years ago, he hadn't had a decent breakfast. He dumped most of it in the sink and then went out to his old Subaru and drove down to the docks.

A massive ship took up the view from the beach. It looked like a warship he'd seen on documentaries about World War II. There were men on the deck busily setting up equipment. One thing he noticed immediately was several shark cages.

He pulled his car to a stop in front of the pier and began walking to the ship. He walked up the ramp and stood a while on the deck, watching the men. Several were locals from Valparaiso but there were a few white men as well.

"Who's in charge here?" he shouted.

Patrick stepped forward. "I guess that would be me right now."

"I know you; you are the one that lost your brother." He looked to the other men who resumed their work. "What's going on here?"

"We're going on a little sea trek."

"Sea trek?"

"Yeah, you know, a little adventure."

"To do what?"

"Nothing big. It's like a fishing trip."

"I know what you're doing. And you can't go."

"Why not?"

"You're bringing too much attention. You have to move this ship right away."

Patrick wiped some oil off his hands with a rag he had sticking out of his back pocket. "You're the police chief, right?"

"Yes."

Hamilton rolled up the ramp just then and saw Hector. He went past him without saying a word and Patrick had to stop him.

"What is it?" he said.

"This is the chief of police for Viña. He wants us to leave."

"Why?" Hamilton asked Hector.

"Too much attention. This is dangerous too. You may hurt yourselves."

"Patrick, just bribe him and be done with it. Give him whatever the going rate is and get rid of him. You're our local; I don't want to deal with this."

"Bribing a police officer is a crime," Hector said.

"Really? Well maybe I should just call President Piñera and ask him? I'm sure if I donated ten thousand dollars or so to his next campaign, he would be happy to hear me out."

One thing Hector had a knack for was knowing when he was outgunned. He always felt that way with Ignacio, and he felt that way now with this man in the wheelchair. He could just be bluffing, but any man that could pay all these men and get a ship like this with all the equipment was clearly a man that had money. Hector decided it wasn't worth the risk.

"Very well," he said.

Hector got into his car and called Ignacio.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ignacio finished his lunch of shellfish, crab and a bit of brown rice. He had received Hector's phone call nearly an hour ago but lunch was something he cherished and would not interrupt for anything.

When he was younger, his family could only afford one meal a day and as he worked in the city shining shoes or selling trinkets or combing the sands at the beaches for lost change, he watched the tourists and wealthier Chileans eat their fine meals of lamb or salmon or steak with bisques and salads and fluffy white rolls.

While most of the downtrodden and poor that saw these things grew resentful and came to despise the rich, Ignacio used it as inspiration. He had no education, his family was comprised of criminals and vagabonds and the mentally ill, and he had a speech impediment that took him fifteen years to get rid of, but he knew he would join the ranks of the wealthy one day. Persistence, he understood, was king. Nothing else mattered; not where you came from, not your talent, not who you knew. And persistence was what he had in ample supply.

"Gracias," he said to the waitress as she cleared away the table.

A few patrons in the restaurant came and said hello to him and spoke of their love for the beautiful city and how they intended to vote for him again in his reelection bid. He nodded and thanked them softly and waited until they had left before finishing his water and wiping his lips with his napkin. He left a forty percent tip and walked back to the kitchen of the restaurant and thanked the chef personally before leaving and climbing into his Range Rover.

He drove slowly through the streets, listening to a Puccini opera on the CD player. He knew these streets well; they fit around him like clothing and he felt at times as if he could live on these streets and would still be just as happy as in his mansion up on the hill overlooking the ocean.

He passed a pub with a second floor balcony where patrons sat and ate and drank until well into the night. He had gotten into a fight there, in the back of the pub near the dumpster. As he was walking home from a day of shining shoes, three boys attempted to mug him. The money he had was enough to feed his family for the next week. He knew he would not give them the money and he made up his mind that he was going to die there, right then. But he was going to take at least one of them with him.

The boys were older and outweighed him each by at least twenty pounds, but Ignacio had nothing to lose. He didn't care if he was injured, and he didn't care if he was killed. The first boy slapped him and then grabbed him by the shirt to punch his face and Ignacio bit down into his neck so hard that blood began to spray from the wound and he pulled away with a chunk of flesh in his mouth. The boy screamed and ran away, which gave Ignacio enough time to grab a wooden box from near the dumpster and smash it into another boy's head.

The three of them fought for what seemed like hours, but was perhaps no more than a matter of minutes. One of the boys took out a knife and Ignacio felt the small slices across his chest and arms and face, but he didn't stop. They were not going to make him back down or quit.

As the other boy held him, the one with the knife rushed at him to stab him in the chest. Ignacio twisted away, causing the knife to glide over his shoulder, scraping away a large chunk of skin, and plunge into the other boy's arm. The boy screamed and Ignacio pulled the knife away and with both hands, smashed it down into the boy's leg, halfway up to the hilt.

The two boys hobbled away and Ignacio collapsed, bloody and in pain, but alive and with his money.

Ignacio reached the docks and turned his car off. He watched the workers on the ship and saw the shark cages and the rifles and harpoons. He saw a man in a wheelchair come down the ramp and load into a limousine before being shuttled away. He stepped out of the car.

The sun was hot in the sky and the heat came off the ground and cooked you from both top and bottom. He walked up the ramp and saw Hector sitting on a chair. He pointed to a white man that was standing over one of the shark cages as it was being assembled.

"Are you Patrick?" Ignacio said.

"Yes."

It was just then that the four police cruisers came to a stop at the docks and a half dozen officers stepped out and approached the ship.

"I am Ignacio Silva. I am the mayor of Viña."

"What can I do for you?"

"I was told you refused to move this ship when my chief of police asked you to."

"We have every right to go out on the ocean. There's nothing you can do to stop us, it's a free country. I think the best thing is to just let us do our business and get out of here."

"There's nothing I can do to stop you? Really?"

Christopher sat across from Patrick in Viña's jail. They didn't speak and there was no one else sharing the cell with them so they could hear entire conversations in both Spanish and English from the staff and officers in the station.

The cell had two couches and a drinking fountain with a porcelain toilet behind a screen. The floor was hardwood and it had several words and names carved in it from the men that had been held here.

After nearly three hours, the cell door opened and Ignacio walked in. "You," he said to Christopher, "the old man has paid your bail. You are free to leave."

Christopher looked to Patrick, who nodded to him. He stood up and walked out.

Ignacio came and sat down next to Patrick. "So, what do you think of our jail?"

"As jails go, it's the nicest one I've been to."

"We try to be civilized here. We handle most crimes with fines unless it's serious. And then we send the offenders to Santiago to deal with. Many of them, just by being charged with a crime, will get lost in the jail system there as they wait for their court dates. There are men that have spent years in jail because the jails have forgotten about them. Is that what I should do with you and your friend? Send you to Santiago?"

"It wouldn't be my first choice."

Ignacio smiled. "I know you follow orders from the man who pays you, so I am not angry with you. I know you are the one that lost your brother. His name was Andrew, yes?"

"Yes."

"You lost Andrew to the beast. I too lost a brother to the beast. In a small way, we are alike."

Patrick sat silently a moment and then said, "You telling me he didn't drown?"

"No, he did not drown. He was taken from you by a creature. The locals here call it, 'el fantasma de los océanos.' The ghost of the ocean."

"How long have you known about it?"

"A long time."

"And you let people swim here anyway?"

Ignacio shrugged and stood up. "You are free to leave."

"What about our ship?"

"The man you work for is very rich. He will put money in the right places and I will have to let you sail. But I can slow you down for a time. At least for now, you will not be going anywhere."

As he turned and left Patrick stood up and followed him. He stepped out into the sunlight and saw Christopher waiting for him by a limo.

Christopher followed Patrick as he went back to the ship and explained the situation to Mitch and Hamilton. Hamilton immediately got on his cell phone and began making some calls. Mitch just said, "Didn't get corn-holed there in the slammer, did ya?"

A police unit borrowed from neighboring towns was standing guard by the ship. Everyone was allowed a few hours to gather their things and step off. Reporters were shooed away and Hamilton had given orders not to talk to any of them yet. The mayor would be getting his, he assured everyone, but better not to upset him right now.

Patrick and Christopher decided they didn't want to go back to the hostel yet so they walked the streets for a while and then went to a local bar. It was an upscale place but like any bar the floors were dirty and near the bathrooms it stunk of vomit and urine. At a table in the center of the bar was Mitch and three other of Hamilton's men who'd beaten them there.

"Boys!" he said excited, "come join us."

They pulled out chairs at the table and sat down.

"What're ya drinking?" Mitch said.

"Just a beer," Patrick said.

"Wine for me."

"Beer and wine?" Mitch said, chuckling. "How about you pull your tampons out before I get those for you? Everyone found this amusing and laughed. "Just joshing ya mates. Well known fact that Americans can't hold their liquor. Beer and wine it is."

"Who said Americans can't hold their liquor?" Patrick said.

"Just a well known fact. You sound like you want a chance to challenge that fact, mate."

Christopher said they didn't but Patrick didn't notice him.

"All right, how?"

"Tequila shots. First one to give or pass out loses."

"Fine."

The men cheered and Christopher mumbled something about how childish this was. Mitch ordered and the waitress brought out twenty tequila shots. The tequila was thick, like syrup, and the bottles behind the bar had worms in them.

"Cheers, mate."

They took their first shot. The tequila went down smooth but had a strong aftertaste. It warmed Patrick's belly and they took another. They would wait almost a full minute in between shots and then hold up their shot glasses at the same time and down the liquid. After five shots, the warmth Patrick felt in his stomach began to turn to nausea. After ten shots, he didn't feel it anymore.

They ordered another twenty drinks. Christopher tried to stop them, but Patrick was too into the game now. Mitch sat across from him with a smile on his face; there was no way he was going to let him win.

Two more shots, back-to-back this time. They waited another thirty seconds and then took two more. The aftertaste was coming back and Patrick ordered a Coke to clear the taste from his mouth.

"How ya doing, mate?" Mitch said, his words slurring.

"Fine. Hey Mitch, why wasn't Jesus born in Australia? Cause they couldn't find three virgins and a wise man. Wait, Chris is that how it goes?"

Mitch laughed so hard one of the men had to grab him so he wouldn't fall out of his chair. Patrick began to laugh too but tasted vomit in his mouth and stopped.

The room was spinning but Patrick picked up another glass and swallowed as Mitch did the same. Three more shots, one right after the other. Patrick couldn't see clearly and his stomach and bowels burned. Whenever he drank too much he needed to have a bowel movement and he wasn't sure how long he could hold it. Mitch leaned back in his chair and appeared calm, but Patrick saw the strand of drool that was hanging down from his mouth.

Two more shots, and then a thirty second wait. Patrick felt vomit in his throat. Before he could take a swallow of Coke to keep it down it shot out of his mouth and over the table. The men cheered and laughed as Patrick slid off the table and onto his back, staring up at the ceiling.

Christopher helped him up and out of the bar.

The night air was cool and some of the shops were still open, a few tourists browsing clothing stores. Chris carried him back to the jeep and Patrick was singing a Phil Collins song. He fell back in the seat, vomit over his shirt and pants, and sang louder as the jeep roared to life and Christopher pulled away from the bar.

They drove through the winding streets and then left Viña and headed for their hostel in Valparaiso. It always amazed Christopher how the two could be so close and completely different from one another. He had been told by some of the locals that if one wanted to get lost and never found, Valparaiso was the place to go. The address system there didn't

work and even the police couldn't find most addresses unless they grew up there and knew where everything was by heart.

There were some neighborhoods that were known for such violence no policemen would dare enter them, even during the day. Christopher filed this information away; you never knew when you would have to get lost and never found.

He parked the jeep in front of their hostel and Patrick was still singing. He pulled him down and put his arm over his neck and carried him in. He laid him on the bed and collapsed next to him. Christopher was not known for physical strength at a hundred and forty five pounds and just helping Patrick to the bed had worn him out.

Patrick stopped singing and began to sob quietly. Christopher thought he was hearing things and then saw the tears pouring down his cheeks.

"I killed him, Chrissy. I fucking killed him."

"Who?"

"I fucking killed him. There were so many. There were so fucking many but they said we had to get what we wanted. They were our enemies, we had to get information." Patrick brought his hands up over his face.

"Patrick what are you talking about?"

But he didn't respond. He just wept for a while and then stopped and began to sing again. Before long, he passed out and Christopher took off his boots.



Rodrigo came to the hostel a little later and Christopher asked him to watch over Patrick and makes sure he was okay. Then he went outside and got into the jeep and drove up the tallest hill in Valparaiso. He knew the area well; the streets were purposely too narrow so that police cars couldn't come through.

He parked the jeep and took any valuables he had and locked them in the glove box. This area catered to tourists and some of the local gang bosses had issued orders that tourists weren't to be robbed so they could partake in the illicit businesses there, particularly the drugs. But much of the time the bosses were ignored as much as the laws.

Patrick got out and began walking up the winding streets. The houses were little more than tin shacks and during the rainy season, if there was a particularly bad storm, they would just begin to slide down the hill on mudslides.

Outside of a two story home were lined up women in skimpy clothing. Christopher walked to them and looked them all over. They bored him and he asked one of them where the boys were. On a corner across the street were gathered a handful of Chilean males, no older than nineteen. He walked past them as if window shopping and chose a slender one on the end.

"Hola," he said.

"Hola. En busca de un buen momento?"

"Siempre. Inglés?"

"Jeyes I speak English."

"Do you have a room nearby?"

"Jeyes."

Christopher followed the man into the house. It appeared like any normal home in Chile. There was old furniture with clear plastic wrap around the couches and love seats and a coffee table with a bible and art book filled with religious paintings on top of it. A painting of the Virgin Mary hung above the fireplace; her heart burning through her clothing as she stared off in the distance. In the kitchen were pots and pans and dishes, dried red peppers hanging as ornaments over the oven and dining room table.

He was taken upstairs to a room with a large bed covered in a canopy. The boy led him to the bed, and then shut the door.

\*\*\*\*\*

When they finished, Christopher got up and dressed. He looked the boy over; he was strong and muscular and was lying on his side flipping through a magazine. Christopher sat in a chair and admired him for a long time. This was the best time in the boy's life. Christopher knew exactly where he would end up. It would be addicted to heroin or alcohol, the other drugs available in the region too expensive for the normal street hooker. His youth and his strength would fade hit by hit and bottle by bottle until he could no longer sell himself. That's when he would turn to crime and end up just another old man serving out his time in prison.

But for now, he was beautiful. Christopher pulled out a package of cigarettes and lit one with a match.

"What do you know about Ignacio Silva?" Christopher asked.

"El alcalde? Not much. I met him once. He came here and walked through the streets and stopped and talked with us. He is vergy nice."

"Does he have a reputation for anything?"

"Repu . . ."

"Reputation. Estado."

"Oh he is vergy strong. The, how you say, ah, las pandillas?"

"Gangs."

"Jeyes, the gangs are no scared of anygone. The gangs are scared of him."

"Why?"

"He is not like other people. He is vergy strong."

"I'm glad you're so descriptive."

The boy looked at him puzzled, an innocent smile on his face. Christopher took one last puff of his cigarette and rose. The boy turned to him, looking at him seductively, and Christopher pressed the tip of the cigarette hard into his thigh, putting it out.

The boy screamed and jumped out of the bed, a string of obscenities spewing from his mouth in Spanish. He picked up the lamp and threw it but Christopher was already out the door and it hit the frame and shattered as Christopher laughed and ran out of the house.

The trip had been a disaster from the beginning.

Kyle Morrison stood on the rented boat overlooking the shore and waited for Nancy to finish haggling with one of the street merchants over a dress and piece of jewelry. When he'd taken her to Kenya last year, he had expected the street merchants as every travel guide warned him about them. But Viña del Mar was supposed to be different. Why didn't the local police just round up all these damn street merchants and ship 'em off?

On top of that, he had looked forward to a breakfast of ostrich eggs and the hotel didn't have any. He had to settle for blue bird eggs and some sort of fried sausage.

Nancy turned to him and waved, the muscles bulging in her shoulders. Kyle's impatience faded. She was sexy. Twenty-three years old and a personal trainer. Kyle never got girls like her until he was rich. When he was the fat kid in high school that came from an alcoholic father and a mother that ran out on them, and when he was the scholarship kid in college with all the elites looking down their noses at him, he never would have gotten a girl like Nancy.

But now he couldn't keep them away. The money was the draw and he saw the look of disgust on their faces when he made love to them, but he didn't care. They were his. He bought them like he bought his boats and his condos and watches.

"Get over here," he shouted, "we're leaving."

She ran over, pressing her hat to her head. Like a dog, Kyle thought.

Nancy climbed aboard and he slapped her ass and she yelped playfully. He yelled to the two workers he had hired and they pulled the anchor and started the engine. The boat pulled out of the slip and he sat on a deckchair, sipping wine out of a forte cab wine glass.

"I love this dress," Nancy said, rubbing his shoulders. "Do you like it?"

"It's all right."

"I want to wear it tonight at the party. There's going to be the president there. Isn't that what you said? That the president would be there?"

"I guess. I don't know if I want to go though."

"Why not?"

"That shit bores me. Gotta wear a tux and all that. Sounds boring."

"But I really wanted to go, sugarballs."

"Eh, I don't know. Maybe we'll stop by."

She leaned down and kissed him and then ran below deck, coming back out with two glasses and a bottle of champagne.

"Let's drink this instead."

Nancy poured two glasses and handed him one. Kyle took it, sipped it, and then put it back down and took up his wine glass.

"I want to go to that little island we went to yesterday," she said as she leaned in close and nibbled on his ear. "I want to fuck you on the beach."

He turned to the worker at the controls and told him where to go. He finished his wine in one gulp and then kissed her hard. He bit down on her tongue until she pulled away and he laughed.

They began running their hands over each other's bodies and he slid his tongue down her neck and over her plump breasts. He bit the top of her left breast and she giggled.

The boat suddenly began to slow and he thought they were nearing the island. He bent down and bit her thigh and could smell her perfume and lotion and it aroused him. He looked up to make sure the deckhands weren't watching, and he didn't see them. One had been near the controls and one was at the bow repairing a fishing rod that had snapped yesterday.

The boat came to a stop and Kyle stood up and went to the controls.

"What is it?" Nancy said. "What's wrong?"

"Where the fuck did Juan and that other guy go?"

"Maybe they went below?"

Kyle walked to the steps leading below deck and examined the two rooms. There was a kitchen with a table and then a bedroom. There was no one there. He went back up to the controls and looked around at the vast blue water surrounding him.

"Those fuckers fall in?"

A scream cut through the air and they both turned to it. Juan was sticking out of the water, covered in blood, his organs bulging from an open wound in his stomach as something had wrapped itself around him and was holding him above the surface.

There was one final guttural scream as blood erupted from his mouth, his chest and abdominal cavity crushed to paste. Kyle could see what looked like a white tube around him. The tube began to slither over the body and then pulled it under.

“Holy shit!”

He jumped up to the controls and slammed the throttle forward. The boat dipped low too fast and Nancy flew out of her chair and hit the transom before flying into the water. She screamed and grabbed at the boat but couldn't pull herself up.

“Kyle! Help me!”

He laid off the throttle a second and looked back, looking at her beautiful face as her make-up ran down her cheeks.

Fuck it, he thought.

He pressed down on the throttle again and bolted away as she frantically screamed behind him. It was a horrible scream; one of someone that knew they were about to die. It lasted only a few seconds and then was abruptly cut off. He looked behind him and saw only the water and a few birds diving down.

The island was in view now. It wasn't large, only a half square mile or so, but it would do for now. He just needed to calm down for a minute and think. The guys had fallen into the water and were killed by something. But he didn't hear any splashing. That means they were probably taken off the boat but what the fuck could take a man off a boat?

Nancy's scream entered his head again and he shook it away.

He got the boat nearly to the beach; the bottom scraping against rocks and sand. He jumped out into knee-high water and ran for the safety of the beach.

The sand was hot underneath his feet and he collapsed onto all fours. He looked up to see a line of trees; the center of the island was thick jungle. He glanced back to the water but didn't see anything; his boat gently bobbing up and down with the waves.

As he tried to stand he heard the thunderous sound of fiberglass and wood crushed and sucked under the surface. He turned just in time to see the bow of the boat, sticking out vertically in the water, pulled underneath. In the few seconds he had turned away, it had been pulled out to sea almost a hundred feet and then under the water.

Something whipped out from the ocean. It rocketed toward him and seemed to block out the sun as it came down. It scraped along his body and tore his clothes and skin alike.

He screamed and wet himself before running into the jungle.

Kyle was sobbing and he looked down and saw blood cascading over his body and to his feet; droplets flying off of him as he ran through the vegetation.

There was a crash behind him. He looked back to see something rip through the branches. Before he could scream it wrapped around his face and threw him into a tree, smashing his ribs. It flung him back to the beach in one motion and then dragged him into the water. He clawed at the thing around his face but without air and his ribs broken, his strength faded.

He gave up as he felt the cool water against his back. He sensed himself flopping as his lungs began to burst and the last thing he heard was a high-pitched hiss and he thought of a snake, before his skull was crushed.

The sandy winds of Basra blew against Patrick's face. They had given him goggles and a scarf to wear under the helmet but it never helped. There was always the sand. In his shoes, in his food, in his eyes, in his ears and nose and even his ass. He slept with it at night and woke with it on his face. It got to the point that he began to feel unsettled without it nipping at his skin.

The house in front of him had a large front yard and a garden. A child's toy, what looked like a tricycle, was out front. He stared at the tricycle a long time. He saw the sun come up and then go down and the blackness of night took over, and then the sun came up again and he felt it burn the patches of skin on his face that were exposed.

"Russell," his commander shouted, "get yer ass in that house."

Patrick lifted his weapon and walked toward the house, three men behind him. The front door opened and inside . . .

Patrick jumped up out of bed and fell to the floor. He reached underneath his pillow for his gun but it wasn't there. His eyes came into focus and he heard Rodrigo snoring in the cot next to him. The throbbing in his head made him wince and he stood up and went to the kitchen. Putting his hands under the faucet, he drank until his belly was full.

Patrick used the bathroom and then got into the shower. It was little more than a hose attached to a sprinkler head in the ceiling but the water was warm and relaxed his muscles and washed off the salty sweat. He was still drunk and he vomited in the shower and felt better afterward.

He dressed and ran his hands through his hair before looking for his wallet and realizing it was gone. He headed outside.

The jeep wasn't there. He turned to go back inside and ask Rodrigo where Christopher was when he saw something out of the corner of his eye. There was movement in the bushes closest to the hostel. He walked over and peered in but didn't see anything.

The last thing he remembered was pain in the back of his head, and then the ground rushing toward him.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was a floating sensation at first. Something like the state right before sleep when one is dozing off. It was euphoric and pleasant, like slipping under a warm blanket, but it only lasted a moment. Then there was the wet ground underneath him and the spatter of rain drops on his face.

Patrick woke underneath the jungle canopy. Though it was raining, the moon was clearly visible in the sky and the light broke through the vegetation and sparkled on the drops of water clinging to the leaves of the jungle. He thought, for only a split second, that he had died.

Then the shouting in Spanish hurled him back to where he was. He looked up and saw several men standing outside of tents and passing around a drink. They were hard looking men with worn faces and one of them was wearing an Indian Jones-style hat with a large scar running down over his face, covered up briefly by a large bushy mustache.

Pain distracted him. There was pounding in his head from the wound on the back and he felt the stickiness of dried blood on his neck. He looked down and his arms and legs were tied like a pig about to be put over a fire.

One of the men walked over and yelled something in Spanish. The man's Spanish was quick with no breaks; Spanish not meant to be understood by tourists. Dizzy and with a migraine flashing lights before his eyes, Patrick didn't understand and the man sent a powerful kick into his ribs, knocking the wind out of him.

One of the other men said something in a calming voice and walked over as the other man went back to the tents. This man was tall and wearing canvas shorts and a button-down shirt. He wore a hat and had black stains on his face from dirt. He looked almost like a tour guide except for a leather strap used as a belt that held several grenades and a handgun.

"Hola," he said. He waited for a response but received none. "How do you feel? Do you need some food?"

"No."

"You have been unconscious for five hours my friend. I was afraid Jose cracked your skull and you were dying."

He offered his hand and Patrick held up his arms, showing him they were tied. The man grabbed both his wrists and hoisted him to his feet. As he sat up the blood rushed from his head and he nearly fell over but the man wrapped his arm around him and helped him to his feet. He pulled out a large knife and Patrick froze. He had survived war, disease, and brutal physical abuse at the hands of his father growing up and he thought it strange that this is how he would die.

"You do not seem frightened?" the man asked.

"I'm not scared to die."

"I can see that. Many people would be begging for their life right now. Are you going to beg?"

"No."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to see if I can take you with me."

The man laughed, revealing a mouth that was missing several teeth, the remaining yellowed and chipped. "Good," he said. "I like you."

He bent down and cut the cords that were binding his feet. He did the same for his hands and then stepped back and put the knife away.

"I am Martín. Who are you?"

Patrick looked around. The other men weren't even paying attention. "Patrick."

"Patrick? Yes, I like that name. Like St. Patrick. I like."

"What is this place?"

"This, my friend, is where you will be staying as my guest for the next days."

"Why?"

"Because you are American and Americans are rich."

"I'm not rich. I don't have any money."

"No? Maybe not. But someone who loves you does. Someone who will pay to see you back, no? Oh, I can see you looking to the jungle. It is very bad for you to run, my friend. Very bad. We will have to shoot you and tell your family you are still alive. We will cut off your ear and send it to them or your finger; very bad."

"What do you want? Money?"

"Is there anything else? You tell me, is there anything in this world that money cannot get for you? If you can name something, I will let you go."

"Money can't buy you a good heart."

The man thought for a moment and then said, "Perhaps you are right, my friend. But I am not letting you go."

"I didn't think you would."

"Good, then we understand each other," he said with a smile. "Let me show you where you will sleep."

Martín led him through the camp. There were perhaps a dozen tents set up, two or three men to a tent. All the men were armed with pistols and knives but no rifles. Patrick guessed the ones with the rifles were set up as sentries around the camp.

In the center of the camp was a truck with no wheels. It was lifted off the ground by cinder blocks and rubber belts were wrapped around the rims. The truck was running and the belts were turning and they led to a machine with various wires sticking out of it.

"A generator," Martín said, "my idea."

"Smart."

"Gracias."

They came to large tent just off the center of the camp that was guarded by two men in camouflage uniforms. These men were armed with Kalashnikovs. Martín opened the flap of the tent and motioned for him to go in. Patrick saw on the other side of the tent two more men with Kalashnikovs.

He climbed into the tent and sat down. There were two other people inside. They were older and white, a male and a female. They looked like a couple and were both wearing wedding rings. The blood had gone from their faces and they were trembling, sweat soaking the man's shirt in the chest and under the arms. He waited until Martín closed the flap before speaking.

"Do you know where we are?" the man asked. "They blindfolded me. Are we still in Chile?"

"I don't know."

The woman didn't say anything; just stared at the ground. Her lips were chapped and cracking and her knees were cut up and bloodied.

"I'm Darren and this is my wife Cheryl. We've been here for three days. Are they going to let us go soon? They said if my business partner wired them some money they would let us go."

"I don't know."

"He seemed to like you. Could you talk to him? I tried telling him that if I could go to Santiago and speak to someone at the bank I could have a hundred thousand dollars for him right away. Could you talk to him?"

The man had such a desperate look in his eyes, such hope in his voice, that Patrick couldn't tell him that he was as much a prisoner as he was. "Sure. Next time I talk to him, I'll tell him."

The man smiled, and began to rock gently back and forth. He seemed pleased by that answer and he looked to his wife and nodded as if everything was going to be all right.

"I'm in marketing," he said. "I work for Strubb and Gilmore in Los Angeles. Have you heard of us?"

"No," Patrick said. He was looking around the tent, through the flap. The two guards barely spoke and never moved.

"My wife says I'm a workaholic but I don't know. When you really enjoy your job I don't think it's bad to spend a lot of time at it. My grandfather told me once—"

"Darren, I think it's probably best if we don't speak right now and work on figuring out a way to get out of here."

"Oh, right. Yeah, I don't think that's going to happen unless we pay them. Those guards are there the whole night."

"The whole night? They never leave at all?"

"Not both of them. Last night one of them left for a little bit but the other one was still there. But I fell asleep so I guess I can't say."

Patrick leaned close to the flap and looked outside. There were two tents across from theirs: one had two cots and was the same as the others. But one had three people sitting down on the ground, the flap only half-open. One of them was white and wearing a Hawaiian shirt. He had a long beard and his clothes were in tatters. He looked like he hadn't cleaned himself up in at least a few weeks.

"I wouldn't worry about getting out right away," Darren said. "I think we'll be here a while."

One of the men opened the flap of the tent across from them and he got a good look at the three white people in there.

Two were male, one female. He suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

The female was Jane.

Christopher drove around the surrounding hillsides of Viña all night and drank whiskey out of a bottle. The bottle was black and had a picture of a goat on it. When it was half-empty, he felt nice and warm and ready to take on the world. Unfortunately, it was five in the morning and the world was asleep. So he drove to the top of a hill overlooking the ocean and drank as the sun came up.

It was a sunrise unlike anything he had ever experienced. He had read or heard about beautiful sunrises affecting people and thought them ridiculous for their sentimentality. But this was something else entirely.

The light baked the water and it looked crisp; it lit up the surrounding cliffs and beaches and there were some caves that he could see just below him that were lit a golden brown. The sky was a deep pink and the clouds looked burnt.

He sipped at his bottle.

Other than the sunrise, what he noticed about the view was Hamilton's ship. It sat like a mountain jutting out of the sea. But it was empty as the workers had all been sent home until everything could be straightened out with the city.

He started the jeep and headed back to Valparaiso and their hostel.

Rodrigo was still asleep, an open bible next to him. Christopher checked around the hostel. He walked up front to where the manager was and where, they supposedly, served breakfast. There were a few tourists in there eating soggy toast with even soggier bacon but Patrick wasn't one of them. He asked the manager if he had seen his friend, but he hadn't.

He ran back to the room and woke Rodrigo.

"Where's Patrick?"

Rodrigo sat up, rubbing his eyes, and looked around. "He's not here?"

"No, and the manager says he didn't see any other cars come and go. Where is he?"

"I don't know. He was here and we was sleeping."

"Damn it, Rodrigo."

Christopher ran out of the hostel and got into his jeep. There were two dirt roads going around the surrounding jungle and he chose the one closest the hostel and began to drive. The road winded through the jungle but the vegetation was so thick he couldn't see more than a few feet in.

He drove the entire length of road anyway and then went back and took the other one. He drove for two hours and then decided that it was pointless. He went back to the hostel and thought that perhaps Patrick had gone with Jane and as he was about to call around to the various hotels to find her, he noticed something on the ground near a bush. He went and picked it up; it was a leaf with some dried blood spattered across it. He stared at it like it could tell him something.

The police would be no help; they didn't care about this neighborhood. There was only one place in the city he could think to turn to.

\*\*\*\*\*

Seven year old Francisca sat at the piano, licking her ice cream cone, as the instructor went through the various notes. She had been taking lessons now for two months but this was the first time that the man in the wheelchair was here. He said hello to her when she had walked in and he smiled to her whenever she looked back to him. He was nice and he had sent the large man with the tattoos out to get her an ice cream.

She understood English well as her mother had been teaching her at home so she knew something was wrong when the other man ran inside.

"Patrick's missing," the other man said. "I need your help to find him."

"Missing where?" the man in the wheelchair said.

"If I knew where he wouldn't be missing."

"Don't get your pussy in a bunch, remember who you're talking to."

"I know, I'm sorry it's just he was really drunk and I left him at our hostel in Valparaiso and—"

"Valparaiso? What the hell were you doing there? I have two rooms reserved for you at the Hotel del Mar above the casino."

"Oh. You never told us that."

"My assistant texted you the information. Go get your bags and check in there. Valparaiso's no place for you two."

"I know, that's why I'm worried about Patrick."

"Does he have any women?"

"One, but I stopped there first and she wasn't there."

"Could he be at a whore house?"

"No, that's not like him."

"Stewart?" the man yelled out. The muscular man with tattoos came over. Francisca couldn't hear what they said then as

the piano instructor had her put down her ice cream and begin to practice, but the men left after that. Before leaving, the man in the wheelchair smiled and said that he would see her again.



Hunger made Patrick's stomach growl. They had been in the tent for hours and evening was now falling. He looked out to Jane's tent as much as possible, making sure she was okay, although he wasn't certain what he would do if she wasn't. Darren had been wrong. The guards left or slept or read all the time. They were antsy the entire day until two other men came and relieved them. Ex-military would have better discipline. These guys were just amateur bandits trying to make a quick buck.

As darkness began to fall outside fires were lit around the camp. Meat and canned foods were being cooked and beer was brought out. Patrick sat quietly and waited. He saw Martín outside getting drunk, but no food came for him.

After the men had finished eating, a few scraps were gathered together on a large platter. A portion was given first to two mangy dogs, then some was dumped in Jane's tent, then the rest dumped into Patrick's tent. A jug of dirty river water was brought out and placed next to the scraps. Darren and his wife began to eat but it churned Patrick's stomach. Some of the food was portions that the men had chewed and spit out or the leftovers that had crusted onto their paper plates.

"So," Darren said, "what do you do?"

The question was so ridiculous Patrick couldn't help but laugh.

"What?" Darren said.

"Nothing. That just seems really trivial right now."

"Gotta pass the time somehow."

"I didn't really do much of anything except hunt."

"What were you one of those bums livin' off of welfare?" Patrick glanced at him and he said, "Sorry."

There was commotion outside. The men were drunk now and rowdy. Two men were arguing about something and then they both seemed to come to an understanding. They walked to Jane's tent and Patrick heard a scream.

The two men were dragging Jane out of the tent and into the forest. She was kicking and clawing and trying to bite but the men only found it funny and were laughing as they began to tear at her clothes.

Patrick looked to the two guards in front of him and they were smiling. One of them shouted something in Spanish akin to, "Save some for us."

Patrick bolted from the tent. He grabbed the first guard's Kalashnikov and twisted it up and slammed the butt into the man's chin, knocking him cold.

The other guard tried to swing his rifle around but Patrick lashed out with a kick to his groin and it caught the man unprepared. He hesitated a split second but that was all Patrick needed and he twisted away the Kalashnikov and fired into the man's chest. The guard collapsed onto his back screaming and Patrick turned toward Jane.

It had happened so quickly the other men weren't prepared. The two men holding Jane let her go and went for their guns but Patrick rushed them and fired several shots as they dashed for the safety of the jungle. One of them collapsed from a wound and the other disappeared into the trees.

Patrick turned around and fired quick bursts at the men running around him. There was enough confusion that they weren't exactly sure where they were shooting at in the dark. He ran to grab Jane and she began to scream and fight.

"It's me! It's Patrick. Hey! It's Patrick."

Their eyes locked and he lifted her to her feet. Voices from all over the camp were coming near them and he sprinted for the jungle, not letting go of her arm.

The vegetation was thick and the canopy so dense that the moonlight couldn't come through. It was absolute blackness for long stretches and then the canopy would thin and a soft blue glow would illuminate the trees and shrubs and bushes. Patrick ran until his legs burned and his lungs felt as if they were about to explode. The air was warm and humid and it made it difficult to breathe. His face and arms were raw from the harsh shrubbery scraping his bare skin and he noticed for the first time that he was up to his ankles in mud.

They made it to a clearing with waist-high grass. The moon shone fiercely in the night sky and without any light pollution the sky was blanketed in stars.

"I can't go anymore," Jane said.

Patrick stopped, his hands over his heads and his breathing heavy. "We shouldn't rest out in the open."

"I can't."

They stood in the grass, panting and sweating, listening for any sounds in the surrounding jungle. They could hear monkeys in the distance and then a roar and the jungle went quiet for a long time. The monkeys began softly and before long were at full pitch again.

"How long were you there?" Patrick said.

"A day maybe. I got into a cab and the cabbie locked the doors and drove me to a warehouse. Some men were in there and they paid him for me."

"Are you hurt?"

"No, but I haven't eaten or drank anything."

"We should keep moving."

"Okay, okay, just give me one more minute."

Patrick checked the clip in the Kalashnikov. He had a handful of rounds left. It was an interesting weapon and he had fired them for fun in the deserts of Iraq when they had captured them from enemy combatants. They were at least twenty years out of date but they were tough rifles, easily firing in mud and sand and absorbing impacts that would shatter many other automatic rifles. He slung the strap over his shoulder and looked in all directions.

"I think we should head this way and see if we can find a road."

They began walking and soon they were out of the clearing and back into the blackness under the canopy. The crickets were deafening; you couldn't think clearly or even carry on a conversation with their chirps filling your ears. Bugs were everywhere and Patrick had to constantly swat at them to keep them out of his nose and mouth. But the smell was halfway pleasant. Somewhere between rotting flowers and wet earth.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't know where we are. Do you have any idea?"

"No, they blindfolded me."

"We need to find a road. Roads always lead somewhere."

They walked for what seemed like a long time but the vegetation didn't get any thinner and there were no signs of cars or houses or towns. Patrick stopped and leaned against a tree. He felt like they were going in circles and it was too dark to leave markings on trees or the ground.

As he was about to suggest that he climb a tree to have a look around, he heard something nearby. He listened quietly, holding his breath, and recognized the sound; it was a stream.

"Let's go," he said.

"What is it?"

"There's a stream nearby. We can follow the water down. People always build near streams. We'll find someone."

As he began to walk in the direction of the stream, there was another sound that registered. It was farther off in the distance and in another direction, but it was there.

It was the voices of men.

Christopher left the Hotel del Mar after a shower and a change of clothes. He felt like a new man. He had gotten used to the luxury and he enjoyed the finer things. There was no harm in that. He was extremely glad that he had searched the internet and found Taylor Hamilton.

Though he grew up wealthy, after his father's death his step-mother had inherited everything based on a will his father had written practically on his deathbed. Christopher was certain the will was a forgery and spent his entire fortune fighting it. In the end, the courts ruled against him. Destitute and without a family to turn to, he fell in with the wrong crowd. It was at this low point in his life that he met Patrick's father; Cameron Russell.

They had met in a restaurant Christopher was waiting tables at. A group of men were being rowdy and the cowardly manager had asked Christopher to take care of it. When he told them to settle down, one of the men rose to fight and before he could do anything, Christopher smashed a bottle over his head. The man collapsed unconscious and Cameron laughed from across the restaurant and congratulated him on his balls and left a large tip.

Three months later there was an opening for an office assistant with Russell Imports. Patrick got the job after only a five-minute interview with Cameron. The office assistant turned to administrative assistant and the administrative assistant to executive assistant and then personal assistant. Christopher was taken out of Russell Imports and placed next to Cameron, wherever he went. He picked up dry cleaning, got cars washed and suits tailored; this was true, but he also negotiated contracts, fired subordinates and set up meetings. He was learning the business from the inside out. Neither Andrew nor Patrick had shown much interest in the business and Christopher had hoped that Cameron saw a future for him in the company hierarchy.

With Andrew gone and Patrick not interested, that was now a strong possibility. If he could convince Cameron to take him back into the company.

Outside a jeep waited for him, and next to that were three others. They were loaded with mercenaries Hamilton had hired to search for Patrick. Many of them were full time military men or police officers moonlighting as guns for hire, but some of them were different. Some of them were boys of no more than sixteen or seventeen with looks of terror on their faces.

Hamilton rode up next to him and surveyed the men.

"I'm getting a discount for the children they sent us."

"I think you should," Christopher said.

"I hope your room was satisfactory?"

"Well above satisfactory. Thank you so much for that. I wasn't suited for hostel life."

"No, I didn't think you would be. You seem more refined than your friend. Better taste. You and I are alike that way I think."

"Can I ask you something? Patrick is my best friend, and no matter if you were helping me or not, I would be out there looking for him. But why are you spending all this money helping me? You could just as easily cut us out and go look for this octopus yourself."

"It's not an octopus. And I have my reasons for helping you and for wanting Patrick."

"Like what?"

"Do you honestly think I would get to where I am in life but just jumping blindly into things? I've done my research and checked up on you two. Patrick's talents are going to be very helpful to me. If he can control that other thing."

"What other thing?"

Hamilton looked to him, confused, and then his face softened into a smile. "He never told you, did he?" He laughed.

"Well, I'll save that for when we find him. You can ask him yourself."

"Señor," one of the men said as he ran up, "the men are ready."

"Christopher, why don't you wait here for the men with me? They'll find Patrick."

"No way, I have to be out there too. I'd go crazy just sitting here."

"There's nothing you can do anyway. Stay here with me and we can talk about your future. I've checked up on you as well young man."

Christopher looked out to the jeeps. The men were loading rifles and readying flashlights. "Maybe I could help though?"

"No, you couldn't. We've been told some bandidos have your friend in the jungles. They kidnap tourists for ransom.

There's going to be bloodshed because these men I hired are ready for a fight. Better you stay here with me."

The first jeep roared to life and peeled out, the men inside hollering and banging the side of the jeep like a drum.

"All right," Christopher said, "I'll stay."

Angel looked over to Javier who was just barely slipping on his fins. The moonlight off the water of the Pacific this early in the morning was something to behold. He had seen it many times in his travels to Mexico and the Caribbean with his job at the phone company but his homeland of Chile had the best water for it; clear and blue, but only near Viña. In many parts the water was green or muddy or farther up shore a slick gray from chemical byproducts dumped into it from the companies that came to Chile for the cheap labor and loose labor laws.

Javier finally got on his fins and then adjusted his regulator and his mask and gave the thumbs up. They both fell backwards into the water from opposite sides of the boat.

Within a few feet down the water was black as tar and Angel flipped on his industrial flashlight in the plastic casing. Javier did the same and they pointed their lights at each other and gave the mutual thumbs up indicating they were ready to go. As they descended, two black bodies with long beams of light jutting below, Angel kicked softly, feeling the cool water against his exposed cheeks. He enjoyed these times below the surface. It was a place where the rest of the world couldn't reach him. There were no bosses yelling at him and no wives nagging him. Here, he could be himself.

He checked his watch and then the depth gauge. They were thirty feet. The line that had been damaged was at seventy feet. He felt his ears pop and looked to Javier. He had occasionally had trouble with the pressure but he didn't seem to notice.

They were slowly making their way to the bottom though Angel couldn't see it. He wanted to slow down even further, to really enjoy this time when they were weightless and alone. But Javier was new and thought only of efficiency. He was rushing to the bottom too quickly and Angel thought that if he tried rushing like that to the surface he was going to get them both killed from decompression sickness.

There was movement to the right and Angel swung his flashlight around to see a tuna dart away from the beam. They were some of the fastest fish in the sea and for fun Angel tried to keep up with him, his beam zigzagging through the water as the fish tried to escape its glare.

Javier turned his light on him and sat there looking at him like he was crazy. Angel shrugged and they continued down.

The bottom was soft sand and coral. As the beam ran over the coral they were lit vibrant blues and reds and greens. Javier motioned to the thick black tube half-buried in the sand. They both came down together.

The tube was fine where they were looking but they knew their coordinates for the damage could be off by as much as two hundred feet. They touched the tube with one hand, and began to kick, slowly drifting up its length.

Angel looked to Javier who was focused, head down, on the tube. This was a marvel of engineering and Angel guessed he didn't even really appreciate it. A lot of the younger guys saw this as a paycheck but Angel remembered the days when they had no phones in his youth in Valparaiso. He would come to the pier every day and watch the big ships load up and go out to sea, laying tubing and wire on the ocean floor.

They kicked for a few minutes until reaching a section of tube that looked like it was fully buried. They swam to it and brushed off sand, trying to pull the tubing up. They got the sand off and saw a tube that had been ripped in half.

The tubing was at least a foot thick and made with solid rubber. It had specifically been designed to withstand shark attacks as the fish were occasionally attracted to the electric currents passing through underneath.

Javier looked to him and he shrugged. He had no idea what could tear the tubing in half. The only thing he could think of was if a ship's anchor caught on to it and pulled as it sped away. But few ships could anchor in over seventy feet of water.

Javier bent down to examine the tubing closer when Angel noticed something behind him. It was a faint glow of red.

He pointed his light up and caught only a glimpse as the creature charged forward at incredible speed. Angel screamed, bubbles filling the space in front of his mask, as the beast sped by overhead. It seemed to go on forever, like a submarine had shot past them. One of its enormous appendages wrapped around Javier and he disappeared, ripped through the water by the massive animal.

The creature was so immense it had created its own current and as it sped by the force of the current knocked Angel five feet back. His mask flew off his face and he couldn't breathe, his view taken up by white flesh flashing a deep red.

He grabbed his mask and slipped it back on over his face, taking a deep breath from his regulator. The creature had passed and he was surrounded by the deep blackness of the ocean again.

He looked to the surface, and began kicking.

Angel clawed and kicked and with each movement he grunted. The blackness began turning a light blue and he kicked harder. The scuba equipment was slowing him down and he took in a deep breath and unstrapped it.

He could see the surface, panic gripping hold of him. He saw the underbelly of the boat and the sunlight that had begun to break over the horizon.

Angel glanced down once and saw the head of the creature as it raced in behind him. It twisted around and he caught a glimpse of the human-like eye. He shrieked as the legs spread wide, revealing the black cavern of the mouth, and it enveloped him whole.

The jungle seemed to close around Patrick, swallow him like some monster out of his nightmares and hold him in its belly. The deeper they went, the more alien it became. They were hearing animals they had never heard before and even the vegetation seemed to grow more aggressive. What had once been bushes and willows was now needles and poisonous tips that made the skin flare in hives.

Patrick glanced behind him to ensure that Jane was all right and as he was looking back he felt the ground sink underneath him. Both his feet were sinking lower and lower and he realized with horror what it was.

"Quicksand, stop!"

Jane had one foot in the pit and Patrick pulled it out and she jumped back. He was instantly knee deep and sinking quickly. She ran over and grabbed his arms and pulled but by then he was already up to his waist. The sand felt like nothing he had ever experienced. It was as if monkey hands were wrapped around his waist and legs and they were pulling him deeper and deeper into the earth.

"Get me a branch."

"No need," someone behind him said. He turned to see Martín standing with a pistol in his hand. He walked closer; a flashlight in his other hand illuminating the quicksand. It was a thick goopy substance, gray with bits of brown, and Patrick was up to his chest. He reached for the dry earth to pull himself up and Martín fired a round into his hand. Patrick didn't scream or flinch, but he pulled his hand away as the blood began to pour out of the wound.

"Do not worry, my friend. You will be dead from suffocation before your hand is infected." He walked over to Jane. She backed up until she hit a tree. He leaned in close to her. "You know, maybe I will rape her now and make you watch? You must care about her since you tried to kill my men for this bitch," he said, running his hand along her face.

"I don't know her. I was just doing a good deed. You can do what you want."

"Nice try, my friend. Your lying is not as good as your fighting, heh?"

"Do you want money?" Jane said. "I can get you money. Take us back to the city and I'll get you money."

"No, I think we are past money. Those were good men your boyfriend tried to kill. Poor Juan may die in the hospital."

Patrick was up to his chin and bits of quicksand were getting in his mouth. He reached out for the dirt and Martín pointed the pistol at his other hand and fired. The round missed and went into the jungle floor. Martín stepped close and bent down. He placed the barrel of the pistol against Patrick's head and in one swift motion Patrick thrust out of the pit and grabbed something on Martín's belt.

Martín twisted away and stood up. He pointed the gun at Patrick.

"Jane," Patrick screamed, "get down!"

Martín was confused until he looked down to his belt. He looked to Patrick who was holding a pin from one of his grenades. Before Martín could get out another word, the explosion tore through the air. Bits of flesh and bone and organ flew twenty feet around them as the top half of his torso was blown apart. The legs took a few steps and then collapsed into a mass of slick, wet flesh.

The quicksand now hid Patrick's mouth and it slowly rose until his eyes were covered. He reached up, his head submerged, and felt Jane's hands as she desperately tried to pull him out.

He held his breath as long as he could, and then the blackness took him.

Christopher was the first one to the hospital. He found a woman sitting in a chair outside of Patrick's room. She was thin and frail and covered in filth. She glanced up at him and Christopher realized who she was.

"You must be Jane."

"Yes."

"I'm Christopher."

"Oh, hi. Yeah, Patrick was talking about you."

"Where is he?"

"He's all right. He's getting some stitches in his hand right now."

"What happened?"

"He almost died in quicksand but your men found us and pulled him out."

"I heard he was shot. You sure he's all right?"

"It was in the hand. He'll be fine."

Christopher collapsed into a chair and leaned his head back, staring at the ceiling. "Fucking country. They took him right out of our room."

"He saved my life."

"What?"

"He saved my life."

"Patrick?"

"Yes."

Christopher shrugged. "When can we see him?"

"I was just in there. You can probably go if you want to. He's in the last room on the right."

He rose and turned down the hallway. The hospitals here were not the hospitals back home. In several of the rooms he passed he saw dried bloodstains on the ceilings and the floors looked like they hadn't been cleaned in weeks. The nurses threw bloodied bandages on the floor, assuming the cleaning staff would get to them later, and the doctors seemed to rarely wear gloves.

He got to the room and looked in to see Patrick sitting up in bed, a doctor stitching closed a small hole in his left hand.

"Quicksand?" Christopher said, stepping into the room. "What are you in a fucking Tarzan movie?"

"If it helps I think I shit myself in the quicksand."

"Well you look good now. How's the hand?"

"Hurts like a son of a bitch. But no tendons were torn or anything. Just went right through my palm so I should be good to go in a few weeks as long as it doesn't get infected in this place. So I guess I owe you one? Thanks, Chrissy. I don't know what to say."

"Wish I could take all the credit but Taylor was the one that hired those men. He was really concerned about finding your dumb ass. Who gets so drunk they get kidnapped? Seriously?"

"I think I'm done with booze for a while. Is Jane out there?"

"Yeah."

"I told her to go home. She's been sitting with me the whole time."

The nurse finished the stitches and then spoke ultra-fast Spanish that Patrick didn't understand. She left without saying goodbye.

"Did you understand any of that?" Patrick said.

"I think she said kiss your ass goodbye cause that fucker is getting infected." Christopher rose and walked near him, lifting up the bandage to look at the stitches again. "I think we should get you stateside and to a real hospital."

Patrick sighed and looked up to the ceiling. A TV in the corner was playing a Spanish soap opera. "I've been thinking about what you said. I think you're right; I'm gonna call my dad and tell him I want to come home."

Christopher bit his lower lip and stared down to the floor.

"What?" Patrick said.

"What?"

"I know you too well. What is it?"

"Well, it's just . . . I mean, I totally didn't intend for this to happen, but . . . Taylor offered me a job."

"Doing what?"

"Personal assistant."

"You're shitting me?"

"Get this, he and your dad know each other. Some geezer club where they go golfing twice a year in Florida. Says your dad has said some nice things about me."

"My dad? Are you sure?"

"Surprised me too."

"My dad once killed our dog because he barked too loud at a mouse in the yard."

"He's a bastard of an old prick but I guess he said some things. Taylor wants to hire me, with a raise."

"You gonna do it?"

"I think so. He's not so bad, actually."

"I don't trust any of them, Chrissy. Be careful."

"I know what I'm doing." He put his hand on Patrick's forearm. "I'm gonna come check on you tomorrow."

"All right."

"Let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks."

Patrick was alone again and he reached for the remote and turned the television off. There was a single window in the room and he stared out of it at the sun beginning to break through gray-black clouds that slowly drifted across the sky.

He heard yelling down the hall. It was Jane. He jumped out of bed but before he got to the door two police officers stepped in.

"Senör Russell, you are under arrest," one of them said.

"For what?"

"Attempted murder."

"Bob, honey?"

Bob stepped off the transom of the boat and walked to the door leading below deck. The sun was hot on his face and he had to squint. He checked his pockets and then cursed at himself; he'd lost his sunglasses again.

"Yeah?" he shouted.

"Can you get the beer out of the cooler and bring it down here please? Lunch is almost ready."

"Let's eat up here."

"It's too hot up there."

He cursed again and walked over to the cooler that was near the bow. The boat was dipping low and then coming high on the waves; the ocean was violent today though there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

"Fucking Chile," he yelled.

"What?"

"I said, fucking Chile."

"You want chili?"

"No—nevermind."

He took out a six pack of beer and walked it below deck to the small kitchen. His wife was standing near a sink cutting vegetables as meat fried on a Foreman grill. Her friends, Jeff and Suzanne Milton, were sitting at the table that was bolted into the vessel and playing checkers.

"Thanks, sweetie," his wife said. "Lunch is done in five minutes. Can you last?"

"Sure." He turned to Jeff. "Wanna help me take the poles down?"

"Yup."

They climbed back up to the deck and then went to the stern. Two fishing lines were held in place in swivel holes and Jeff sat down in one of the deck chairs near them.

"I don't want to go down yet," he said.

Bob joined him, putting his feet up on the transom. "Me neither. Grab us some beers, will ya?"

Jeff rose and got two bottles and came back. He popped them open and squeezed half a lime into each bottle and handed one to Bob.

"The fishing here is terrible," Jeff said. "Worse than Cuba."

"Cuba wasn't so bad. We got that marlin."

"That was in Cuba? I thought that was off San Diego?"

"No, that was Cuba. That thing wiggled in the boat and cut Betty's ankle, remember? We had to go to that little hospital in Havana where the doctor was like fifteen."

"Oh yeah. That was Cuba."

One of the fishing poles bent slightly. Bob leaned forward and grabbed it, feeling the tension, and then leaned back. The pole went straight.

"Probably got caught on something."

They talked for a few more seconds and the pole bent again, dipping down farther this time before coming back up. Bob handed his beer to Jeff and stood up. He went and looked over the transom into the dark water. The fishing wire was twisting in a slow circle; they had hooked something and it was flailing and trying to get away.

"Think we got a bite."

Jeff walked over and put his hand on the pole. He leaned it back as far as it would go and it bent forward. He pushed it toward the water, letting the line go slack, and then grabbed it with both hands and pulled back as hard as he could. The pole bent nearly in half and then whipped out of his hands and into the water.

"What the fuck, Jeff?"

"Oh shit. Sorry."

"What the hell did you do that for?"

"It wasn't like I did it on purpose, it flew outta my hands."

"Fucking shit. That was a Scott bamboo. It was like thirty-six hundred bucks."

"I said I was sorry."

The rod jutted from the water behind the boat. It was bobbing up and down and then would get sucked under the surface and then come back up. Bob went and got his net. It had a ten foot aluminum pole and he leaned over the transom and flung it out.

It landed just a foot or so short of the fishing rod and he pulled it back and threw it again and missed. He stepped up to the transom, spreading his legs for balance, and threw it out again, catching the tip of the rod in the net.

"Hey, I got it!"



There was an explosion of foam and water and Jeff was thrown backward and hit the deck hard on his head and lost consciousness.

Bob saw only water, streaking blue and gold reflections of sunlight. He was pulled into the ocean face first and felt the sting of impact across his body.

There was only darkness around him and his lungs ached. Bubbles escaped from his mouth and he looked upward to a blinding light as he began to kick. He broke through the surface and sucked in air before coughing up sea water. He vomited clear liquid in front of him and began to tread water, wiping his face with his hand.

He looked for the boat and saw it to his right. He was easily thirty feet away.

Jeff stood and stumbled to the transom, holding his head. Blood was leaking down over his neck and he held his hand to the back of his head. He was shouting but Bob couldn't hear what he was saying as a large wave engulfed him and pulled him under. He kicked to the surface again when the wave had passed and began to swim toward the boat.

Each stroke was more painful than the next and he realized that one if not both of his shoulders were injured. He could feel several of his fingers going numb and knew the impact had flared up his arthritis. But he kept swimming; his legs growing weak.

Jeff ran to the upper deck and started the motor. His wife ran out from below and Jeff pointed to him and said something and she screamed. The boat began to swing around and Bob stopped kicking.

He leaned back as another wave swept over and dragged him underneath the surface. He opened his eyes under the water, and something was there.

It was off in the distance, near the boat. A red glow.

He came to the surface and watched as the boat was speeding toward him. And then, it stopped.

The motor roared and smoke began to billow, but the boat didn't move. Jeff looked down at the motor just as the back of the boat dipped under the surface.

Jeff was thrown from the upper deck into the water and the boat went upright. His wife screamed as she held on to the railing and as if it had fallen into a hole, the boat was sucked under the surface.

Bob treaded water, horrified and going into shock. He shouted for his wife and for Jeff but no one responded. Above him he heard a plane as something wrapped itself around his legs. He looked up to the sky, and then disappeared into the sea.

Seba Calderon circled in the small twin-engine plane over the churning ocean. He had spotted something below but as he swung around he saw only the waves, a few schools of blue fish casting a moving shadow through the water.

He did one more circle and then decided to head back. He looked back to Alexis. The cameraman was yawning and rubbing his chest, his camera pointed at the ocean. The stock footage they had been asked to take was due in less than an hour if it was to make the news tonight and he asked Alexis if they had enough.

"Yes, let's go back. I'm very hungry."

Seba turned the plane around and headed to shore. They passed the beach, taking a quick look at the women in bikinis, and then headed to the private airport two miles inland. The runway was long and surrounded by thick vegetation and Seba landed the plane perfectly, gliding to a smooth stop as Alexis began gathering his equipment. They stepped off the plane and climbed into the van.

Seba drove to the news station in Santiago. He was doing eighty miles per hour on the winding, narrow roads and Alexis said a prayer and crossed himself.

They reached Santiago in forty minutes and sprinted into the building and up the elevator to the fifth floor. Production was gearing up and they ran to editing and threw the tape into the machine. Seba looked back to his friend and whispered to him, "We shouldn't drink before a shoot."

"It is fine. We made it."

The editor was flipping through the tape, an unlit cigarette dangling from his mouth, when he saw something on the lower right quadrant. He rewound and watched it again.

"What's this?" he said.

Seba and Alexis stepped behind him and watched the footage. They could clearly see a man floating on the surface and in a few seconds he disappeared.

"I don't know," Seba said. "We didn't see anything."

"I can't use this if there's somebody swimming on it."

"I told you, we didn't see anybody."

The editor, swearing under his breath, rewound the tape and zoomed in on the lower quadrant, magnifying by four. The man was clearly visible, hovering in the water. He was white with a gold watch and no life vest.

The next frame took the men's breath away.

A massive white tentacle looped around the man's legs just underneath the surface of the water, and he shot into the depths like a bullet.

Taylor Hamilton finished his morning exercises on the balcony of his hotel room. The Hotel del Mar was the casino's hotel and one of the finest in all of South America. It was designed and built by the same architecture firm that handled several of the casinos in Las Vegas and there was a certain Vegas-like feel to it.

The building was circular and at night it would be lit up a deep gold or blue. A topless pool was on the first floor and Hamilton only briefly glanced at the women before returning to his exercises.

He finished his set with a breathing exercise he had learned in India, a quick succession of short breaths followed by a pattern of long breaths before he would still his mind, and focus on one thought. The thought, as he was taught the exercise, was supposed to be a number or a word. He instead liked to focus on things like money, believing that his thoughts would bring more of it near.

Not that he needed the money, but one could always use more.

There was a knock at his door and he swiveled around and went inside his luxury suite and answered. Stewart stood there, all nearly seven feet of him. He was red and sweaty from working out and seemed out of breath.

"You need to turn on the television."

Hamilton had learned that Stewart rarely spoke, but when he did, it was always something that absolutely needed to be said. Without asking further questions he went and turned on his television.

"What station?"

"Channel six. It's a recap of last night's news."

Hamilton changed the station and there were three people at a news desk discussing something. In the upper right hand corner was a still photo of a man in the ocean; the photo blurry from being magnified. And underneath him was . . .

"Call the president's office."

"Of America?"

"No, Stewart. Not of America. Call the President's office here. They won't patch you through unless you tell them that I'm an American investor looking to invest a lot of money. They'll give you the direct line of the regional governor and he's who I need to speak with."

Stewart nodded and walked out.

The news played the full clip. Hamilton couldn't suppress a smile. He ended his exercises early and went to go shower.

Patrick Russell woke in jail for the third time in his life. The first time had been for a drunk and disorderly charge in Turkey. The Turks were not as understanding as their more moderate politics would lead one to believe. There was talk of lashings and beatings and a full year in jail. In the end, a local commander in the military had heard he was a soldier and released him as a courtesy.

Patrick rubbed at his eyes and sat up on the couch as there was no bed. A full breakfast of Chorizo and eggs and juice had been placed through an opening in the cell on a table. He walked over and sat down and began to eat. Though his hand hurt and he was still as dirty as ever, he felt good considering where he had woken up in. But this jail was hardly a jail at all. He had stayed in less luxurious hotels.

There was some commotion down the hall as Mayor Silva walked in. One of the guards shook his hand and said something about his reelection. Ignacio thanked him and continued down the hall to the holding cells. Another guard opened Patrick's cell and Ignacio came in and sat on the couch.

"You know I should set up a room for you here if you plan to make this a habit."

Patrick turned back to his food. "Does the mayor come and visit all of his inmates?"

"Just the ones with rich fathers that have the American embassy call me at three in the morning."

"My father did that?"

"I would assume it was your father. The man in the wheelchair, no?"

"No, he's not my father."

"Oh." Ignacio brushed a piece of lint off his pant leg. "Do you know what you're charged with?"

"Attempted murder."

"You shot two men. One in the chest—and he still might die, you know—and one in the ass. There were body parts of a third found in the jungle but they were not sure what happened with him so you have not been charged with murder."

"They kidnapped us. I could've done a lot worse."

"Yes," he said, leaning forward, "I believe you could have. I received some reports from the men there and they said you were like a demon. Where did you learn to fight like that?"

"Military."

"Ah. I was in the military too. If you are born in a certain low caste, to be successful you can join a gang or the army. Besides the church, there is no other way out if you are born poor in my country."

"Have you charged any of them for trying to kidnap us?"

"No."

"So you're just charging the foreigner, huh?"

"You are an American who shot two Chileans. The public will not be very happy if I were to let you go." He smirked and stood up to leave. "But I've never cared what the public has thought anyway. You are free to leave."

"What about those men? Will they try and come after us?"

"I wouldn't worry about those men. I had most of them shot in the jungle. The rest will not be a problem." Ignacio began to walk away and then stopped and turned around. "One more thing: the man in the wheelchair has contacted the regional governor and will have his proper permits to set sail soon. I suggest my young friend, you not be on that ship when it sails. Go back to America and your soft life. This is no place for you."

Hector sat in the waiting room of the mayor's office. It was plush with leather furniture, a large oak desk for the secretary and deep brown wood paneling. Floor-to-ceiling windows took up the wall in front of him and it looked out onto a rose and tulip garden. A slight breeze was making the flowers gently rock back and forth and he watched it a long time.

"Hector," the secretary said, "when are you getting married?"

"Whenever you are ready."

She smiled. "You are too much man for me. But my sister . . ."

"I tried Rosa, I truly did. But all she wanted to talk about was the bible."

"She was going to be a nun once. Then she fell in love with a boy and by the time he broke her heart she was too old and did not want to do it."

"She would make a good nun."

The door to the mayor's office opened and Ignacio stepped through. He collapsed on the chair next to Hector and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"Where were you?" Hector asked.

"The jail. What is it you want, Hector? I have a meeting with su santidad el gobernador."

"You have not seen the news?"

"No, why?"

"I think we should watch the news."

They stood and walked into his office. A large plasma screen was mounted on one wall and they sat down as Ignacio flicked it on with the remote.

Across the bottom of the screen in Spanish were bolded the words, "Giant Squid: Monster of the deep claims the life of a tourist."

The video was played again and then they had an expert from the University of Santiago speaking about the biology of the creatures and how little is actually known about them.

"They have been playing this all day," Hector said. "It is on a repeat on every station. I did not think it would get this much attention."

"There is nothing more entertaining for people than death, Hector."

The report then showed a photo of a man that Hector recognized. It was Taylor Hamilton, the man in the wheelchair. The report stated that he had issued a reward of one hundred thousand American dollars for anyone that captures the creature.

They watched the rest of the report which lasted about half an hour and then the station returned to a soap opera.

"What are we going to do?" Hector asked.

"We need more men. Those fool fisherman are going to get themselves killed on the sea."

"How many more?"

"As many as you can get. I have a feeling, Hector, that we are in for a long day."

John Kerrington had come to Chile in search of his big break. He had hated America for the twenty-eight years he had lived there except for one year when he lived on the beach in Santa Monica.

He had met a young man that also lived on the beach and when the police eventually caught on and would do routine checks of the local spots where they liked to sleep, they rented a shack that they shared with over twenty other people.

Most of the days were filled with smoking pot and drinking and surfing. A lot of the day was spent fucking as everyone shared everything, but tempers and jealousies flared and that caused too much drama. Eventually, they decided, the shack would have to be a place for just men as the women were fought over constantly.

But he grew sick of his life and the people around him and decided to take his meager savings and move to the South America.

There was Brazil at first, but it was similar to America in a lot of ways so he tried Peru next, but it was far too different. And then he found Chile.

It was perfect. It had just the right mix of savagery and civilization that he needed. He began work on the boats; the fishermen hiring him on a per diem basis. He would wait at the docks and sip his coffee and eventually some old fisherman that didn't feel like working that day would hire him for enough to pay for his hostel and food for that day or couple days.

He became such a fixture on the dock that he eventually landed a job on a commercial fishing boat that had lost a crewman at sea. The captain was a stern man of about fifty and had lost a son early in life. He had told John much later that he reminded him of his boy.

John scrimped and saved every peso he earned, choosing to live in a tent on the beach rather than waste money on a hostel any longer. For two years he lived out of his tent eating little more than fish and rice and a few delicacies he caught himself here and there.

But eventually, he had enough money.

He bought a boat and began fishing on his own. The catches were small at first but he knew the trick. The Chileans had two flaws: they used any excuse not to work, and they were superstitious.

All the fishermen took three hour lunches and this was John's busiest time. He didn't stop to eat or even use the bathroom unless he hopped into the ocean to relieve himself quickly before climbing back in. In those three hours, with no other competition nearby, he captured more fish than many of the other boats did for the entire day combined.

The superstition of omens based on the clouds and ominous bird or fish movements meant that many fishermen left the water for long periods of time; occasionally even days at a time. Feeling no such need to adhere to myths and folklore, he worked even harder during these periods.

Eventually, he hired a deckhand. And then another boat, and another after that. Soon, he was the premiere fishing captain at the docks. With twelve vessels and over thirty employees, no one could compete with him, and eventually many of the fishermen sold their ships to him and found other employment.

John sat at the café, a café he had longed for intensely when he lived in a tent not a mile from here, and enjoyed a lunch of crab and grilled pig intestine with a honey glaze. A television was playing up in the corner and he saw a newsflash interrupt the soccer match. Some of the patrons groaned but he took another bite of crab and watched.

He nearly choked on his food.

Many of the locals had talked to him for years about the ghost in the ocean. Some had told him that it was only one animal that would come back to feed every fifty years and that was possessed by the devil.

Their superstition never ceased to amaze him. He knew exactly what it was and why it was here.

A local manufacturing plant had greased the palms of all the politicians and were dumping their byproducts into the ocean. It was far cheaper to do so than store it or dispose of it at approved dumping sites. This enabled them to offer their products cheaper and put their competitors out of business. What they told the politicians they bought was that after the competitors were gone they would stop the dumping. Most of their competitors were now gone, and there was no inkling that the dumping would stop.

The chemicals killed much of the smaller fish that could process them. The larger fish ran out of smaller fish to eat. The larger predators ran out of large fish and so on. Something like this was unpredictable, but he had figured *something* would happen. Nature had a way of balancing itself; one way or another.

The news story said that a wealthy American investor was paying \$100,000 cash for the body of the animal, dead or alive.

John paid for his meal and left the café.

"Mr. Kerrington?" Alonzo said.

"Yes."

"Your boat is here."

John stood on the beach and looked to the vessel he had just bought from the Chilean government less than a year ago. It was large, at least sixty feet with three decks, and could hold up to twenty crewman, though he wouldn't be taking anywhere near that.

He took his duffle back and went down the pier and climbed aboard. The crewmen followed; all trusted employees he had worked with for years. They started the engines and pulled out into open water.

They began slowly at first, dumping blood and guts and half-dead fish into the sea behind them. Then they picked up the pace and at one point threw half a goat into the ocean. It was a waste, but one he was willing to make.

Alonzo came to the upper deck and stood next to him, watching the men below. "What will we do if we capture it?"

"We'll sell it. But more than that, we'll sell our story. Can you think of any Chilean newspaper or television station that wouldn't want to interview us?"

Alonzo thought a moment and then said, "No. It will be big news. I think even my mother will see it in Peru."

"I didn't know you were from Peru?"

"Yes."

"Hm. Hey, get my rifle from below deck would you, Alonzo?"

"Yes."

John leaned against the railing of the upper deck, the wind whipping his hair, and watched the ocean. He loved the sea, more than any woman he had ever known he loved the sea. It wouldn't betray him; it was always honest. Even when it was trying to kill him.

Alonzo came back up with the rifle and John chambered it and placed it across his shoulders, stretching from side-to-side. He took aim down the sight and scanned the water in front and then in the rear of the boat.

"Do you think we will find it?"

"I don't know," John said. "I think it's attracted to blood and guts but we don't even know that about it for certain. It's all just a guess. No one's dealt with one of these things before."

There was shouting below deck and the men had gathered on the side of the ship. The net they had laid out snared something. Just underneath the surface, next to the boat, John saw a single red tentacle glide by.

"Get out the dynamite!"

The men brought out a box of dynamite and John ran down to help. They pulled up on the net, but the creature was fighting them and was strong as a semi. It heaved one time and nearly pulled all of them in.

"Get another net."

Another net was cast into the ocean over the one they already had and he saw several flashing red squid legs next to the boat. He took one stick of dynamite and lit it and threw it out about ten feet.

The shockwave tilted the boat up but did no damage. He took two more sticks and did the same. The blast should be enough. He looked over the edge to see if he had killed it when a tentacle rose from the ocean and slapped around his thigh.

He screamed and the men grabbed him. Alonzo took a machete that was hanging on a nail and ran to his boss. He chopped down on the tentacle with all his strength at it sliced through the flesh of the beast.

Before John was back on his feet Alonzo lighted and threw a stick of dynamite.

"No!" John shouted. "That's too close."

The explosion was deafening and frothy white water erupted over the crew as the boat was hoisted into the air. They heard shrieking, like a large cat being run over. It had come from the water. When the boat had settled back down, Alonzo looked in and saw a pool of bluish blood come to the surface as the nets went slack.

John stood and looked over at the blood. A smile parted his lips; they had killed it.

Jane picked Patrick up from the jail in Christopher's jeep. She had cleaned up and showered and he realized he had forgotten how lovely she was. He looked down to himself and saw caked mud, blood, and dirt.

"Hey," he said, climbing in to the passenger seat.

"Hey. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay."

"What about your hand?"

"It's fine. The jail's not as bad as you think. They had a nurse come look at it."

She pulled away and onto the main road. "So they just dropped the charges like that?"

"Just like that."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I don't think they like having tourists messed with out here."

"What happened to the men that kidnapped us? I've been thinking about it and I want to follow through, Patrick. I want to press charges against those bastards."

"I don't think you can."

"Why not?"

"I think the mayor had most of them killed."

They drove out of town and onto the road leading to Valparaiso. They stopped briefly at the halfway point and used the bathroom at a restaurant and got some drinks. Sitting out on the curb in front of the restaurant, waiting for Jane to come out of the bathroom, Patrick saw a group of young boys across the street.

One of the boys was bragging about something he had found and he held it up. Patrick couldn't see what it was but it was wrapped in a plastic bag and the other boys seemed impressed. They began to argue about who could hold it and a fight broke out.

One of the older boys stole the bag and ran off. Patrick looked over to the restaurant's patio where people were lazily taking in an early lunch or late breakfast and saw two police officers watching the boys. They were laughing at what had occurred and then went back to their meals.

"Ready?" Jane said as she stepped outside.

"Yeah."

They drove the rest of the way in silence, Patrick guzzling three bottles of water with his feet up on the dashboard. The surrounding jungles were filled with plants of all colors and it reminded him of a landscape painting from the French impressionists. The type of paintings his mother used to hang up around their house.

They came to his hostel and packed up all that he had there. Rodrigo had gone back to his boat and Christopher was already at the hotel.

Patrick came back to the jeep and they began driving back.

They reached Viña and the Hotel del Mar in less than an hour and pulled to a stop in front of the valet service. Jane jumped out of the driver's seat and came around to help Patrick out before she threw the keys to the valet and they went inside.

The hotel was about as luxurious a place as Patrick could've imagined and he was taken back for a moment when they walked past the topless pool and saw children running around all the nudity and their parents not seeming to notice.

They went up to the top floor. There was another pool and it took up half the floor. The edges of the pool were the hotel's glass windows and it looked out over the beach which wasn't too far off.

They made their way down the corridor and to two white double-doors that were trimmed with gold flecks. Jane knocked and Christopher answered the door.

"Hey! There he is." He went to hug Patrick and then changed his mind upon seeing the dirt and mud caked on him. He stuck out his fist instead and Patrick bumped it with his.

They went inside and Hamilton was sitting on the balcony speaking on the phone and sending an email on the iPad in front of him. His assistant Stewart sat on a leather couch in the front room reading a bodybuilding magazine.

They walked out onto to the balcony and Hamilton held up a finger indicating one minute. He looked Patrick up and down and gave him a disapproving look.

He hung up the phone and said, "I have the permits. We're ready to go. How's your hand?"

"Fine."

"I was shot once a long time ago. Hit me in the shoulder and I was too drunk and too busy getting laid from some Parisian hooker that I didn't notice till the next morning. Good job on those sons a bitches."

Christopher said, "I don't think he knows."



“Knows what?” Patrick said.

“It’s appeared, Mr. Russell,” Hamilton said. “The leviathan has surfaced and we’re going after him.”

Patrick stood on the beach next to Christopher, watching a dozen men load the ship with all the supplies. Mitch was out on the ocean surfing; the only one out there for recreation.

The shore was clogged with ships. Every fisherman on the coast had heard of Hamilton's reward and many had come down in vessels no bigger than speed boats to catch the monster that killed a tourist. Some of the smarter fishermen joined up and formed groups, pooling their money and renting larger vessels; armed to the teeth with explosives and semi-automatic weapons and harpoons.

"I thought he wanted it captured?" Patrick said.

"He does. He just put out this reward so the city could have this mess to worry about. Takes the pressure off us. None of these morons are gonna find the thing anyway."

Hordes of policeman were on the docks and beaches, stopping fishermen wherever they could from loading dynamite and high-powered rifles onto their boats. One of the fishermen set off a stick of dynamite not fifty feet from shore, the explosion causing an underwater shockwave and knocking the man into the water. A police boat had to go and pick him up.

Mitch glided into the beach with a shout and then picked up his board and ran over to them. His wetsuit was bright red and had several patches sewn on it; most notably the British and Australian flags.

"Heard you had a bit of excitement, mate."

"It was nothing."

"Don't be modest now. You took out some boys is what I heard. And saved the damsel in distress. Pretty little bird that."

"Yeah, she is."

"Oh ho, sorry, mate. Didn't mean to step on your toes."

"No, it's fine."

He slapped Patrick's shoulder. "Well hope your hand's up to a good fight. These little creatures can pack a helluva punch on those fishing lines."

Mitch walked away and back to the hotel and Patrick watched him go.

"Why are we here, Chris? He has more qualified people than us to hunt this thing."

"Tell you the truth, I don't know. I asked him the same thing and he just told me he knows what he's doing." He pulled his foot out from one of his sandals and stuck it in the soft sand. "You gonna call your dad?"

"I don't know now."

"I don't think you should. I think you should come with us and kill this fucker and be on the cover of *National Geographic* with us."

Patrick looked out over the water at the masses of ships that were packed tightly near shore. "I'm not sure it's gonna be so easy."

\*\*\*\*\*

Hamilton had decided they would have one more night onshore and then leave in the morning. The voyage was slated for two weeks but Hamilton thought they would need to extend it longer than that. Mitch had told Christopher they should plan on at least a month at sea.

Patrick had bought new clothes from the hotel shop, paid for by Hamilton, and sat in the casino at a blackjack table in his new black pinstripe suit that Christopher had picked out for him. Rodrigo was at the bar getting drunk and Mitch was playing craps.

"Where's Jane?" Christopher said, sitting down and throwing a hundred dollar bill on the table.

"She's packing. She was supposed to be going to Mexico but she's heading home."

"You sure about that?"

Patrick looked up to see Jane walk into the casino. She was dressed in a black evening gown, her hair done up and shiny earrings sparkling under the casino lights. He asked for another card, busted, and then got up and went to meet her near the entrance.

"I thought you were packing?" he said.

"I was. I mean, I did. But I don't . . . I mean, I guess . . ." She chuckled nervously. "I'm not making much sense am I?"

"You're okay. What's going on?"

"I just don't want to leave yet, Patrick. Leave you I mean. I never thought I would be, but I'm sick of this country. It's not like it was when I was here before. Let's go somewhere else. Together."

"Where?"

"Mexico. Or back to the states, I don't care."

"I don't know what I'm going to do yet. How bout for right now we get drunk and gamble and talk about it?"

She took his hand and they went back to the tables.

Patrick laid several hundred dollar bills out and received chips in return. He split them with her and leaned in and kissed her soft lips, tasting her honey lip balm.

The sand was in Patrick's nostrils and he held one finger to his nose and snorted it out of the other nostril. He was still looking at the tricycle and didn't notice the major yelling at him from behind. He glanced back and saw the three soldiers that would be going in with him. They were boys, two of them only nineteen. The third one was PFC Martin; a big Texan with the constant stink of chewing tobacco on him. He pulled down his scarf and spit a long strand of brown on the ground, half of it getting onto his chin and body armor.

"We ready to go, Captain?"

Patrick stared at the brown goo on his body armor, already crusting from the desert heat. He looked to the man's face and noticed for the first time a small scar on his upper lip.

"Captain Russell? Are we ready to go?"

"Yeah. Follow my lead. No heroic bullshit."

He turned back toward the house and glanced at the tricycle as he came to the door.

Patrick took a deep breath and lifted his leg, bashing his heel just under the doorknob. The door splintered and swung open. He rushed in, his rifle in front of him, finger caressing the trigger. He swung to the right behind the door and then the left. He came to the center of the room as the three men spread throughout the house.

They cleared the kitchen, the bathroom, the bedroom, the second bedroom, and a small office. The only thing that was left was the door leading to the basement. The major had sent in another team of four and they stood behind them. Patrick looked to their team leader and nodded and the team leader nodded back.

He kicked in the door and went first into the basement.

The stairs were old and rickety wood. He reached the bottom but it was dark. His rifle had a night-vision attachment and he flipped it on. He went underneath the stairs and ducked, resting on one knee as he scanned the space.

There was movement near a washing machine. He held his breath.

The movement increased and then in one motion a man jumped out and fired, the gun lighting his night-vision screen as bright as the sun.

Soldiers began firing in the confusion. Someone screamed that they had a man down. Patrick took aim at the Iraqi, and fired.

The back of his head blew out onto the wall and he collapsed on the floor. People were shouting to get the lights and they came on.

The man was no older than eighteen. He still had the bad teenage mustache of someone still going through puberty.

"Captain," someone said, "it's Martin."

Martin was slumped over, blood pooling between his legs on the concrete floor. A round had gone into his cheek and out the base of his neck, severing his spine.

Anger welled up inside Patrick and he clinched his jaw.

"Sir," another PFC said, peering into a side-door, "you need to see this . . ."

Patrick woke up in bed, nude. Jane lay next to him, asleep on her side, her gown thrown over a chair against the wall. Her hair caressed his shoulders and tickled his arms. He leaned over and kissed her and she stirred but didn't wake.

He rose and walked out onto the balcony of his hotel room. It overlooked the ocean and he sat on a chair and watched the waves roll into the beach and foam and crackle before disappearing. He counted five before Jane came and sat next to him in a bathrobe.

"I want to leave today," she said. "Come with me."

"Not yet. I have something I have to do."

"You're not talking about going after this thing are you?" Patrick didn't say anything. "Patrick, you can't be serious. These people are . . ." She looked around to make sure no one was out on any nearby balconies. "These people are dangerous. Taylor's crazy."

"He seems all right."

"Something's wrong with him. The way he talks; his thought process, I don't know. Something's not all there."

"Chris works for him now. I don't know if I'm ready to leave him."

"You don't know if you're ready to leave him or your brother?"

He looked at her and then away, back out over the ocean.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I know you two were close. But he's gone, Patrick. Killing a squid isn't going to bring him back."

"He's paying me decent money for a few weeks work, Jane. And there's a chance I could get some fame from this. No one's ever seen a giant squid. Could you imagine if we caught one? They have no idea how big these things get. Chris was saying this could be the biggest animal in the world."

"And you're going to kill it because Taylor Hamilton has a hard-on for it?"

"They don't want to kill it. They want to capture it."

"Why?"

"Fame I guess. Maybe he's just obsessed with these things and wants to be the first one to capture it, I don't know."

She stood up, closing her robe tightly. "This is stupid, Patrick. This is stupid and immature. I'm getting on a plane tonight, with or without you."

Patrick sighed as she got into the shower and leaned against the balcony railing with his elbows and watched the early morning surfers on the beach. There were only five or six of them; all adrenaline junkies. Some of their friends or relatives had video recorders on the beach and were recording the surf in case one of them was attacked.

There was a knock at the door and Patrick went and opened it. Mitch stood there with a smile on his face and two ginger ale bottles in his hand.

"Mind if I come in?"

"Sure."

Patrick went back to the balcony and Mitch joined him, giving him a ginger ale. "For your stomach," he said.

"They don't seem scared," Patrick said, looking at a new carload of surfers that parked near the beach and began to unload their boards.

"Nah, something weird really. You say 'shark' and people get to running out of the water. You say 'squid' and people think it's funny. But I tell you, mate, it isn't funny."

"You've seen these things up close?"

"Well nobody's seen one. Not a live one. But I saw a dead one once off the coast'a Greenland. It had washed up on the shore and I flew out to get a glimpse of it before it rotted away."

"What was it like?"

"It was a fifty-two footer. Beautiful white with hooks the size'a fingers in its rings. It had somethin' tied up in its legs and me and another fella opened them up and there was a ten foot white tip shark wrapped in it, all scared up from the rings. But the eyes'a the squid, that's what stuck with me. It had angry eyes. We think that's why it died; it drown trying to kill the shark. It would've rather died than let go of its prey. Yeah, for me, I'll take a good sized shark any day."

Jane stepped out of the shower in her bra and panties and saw Mitch. She casually took her gown off the chair and went back into the bathroom to slip it on.

"Fun night?"

"None of your business," Patrick said. "Why you here anyway?"

"Can't I come and just chit chat with my fellow sailors?"

"No, you can't. You want something."

"Got me pegged. I need you to do something for me."

"What?"

"One of our crew got picked up last night on some criminal charge. He had a gutful'a piss and havin' a good time. I'd like you to see if you could get him out for me."

"Out of jail? How would I do that?"

"Word is you got in with the mayor."

"He's had me arrested twice, I'm not sure *in* is the right word."

"He also let you go twice. Everybody been telling me he's a bit of a hardass, but for some reason he's taking a shining to you." He took a long drink of ginger ale and then said, "My bloke's got a wife and two kids back home and she ain't got no other income. I'd consider it a personal favor if you could talk to the mayor. And I never forget my favors."

"All right, I'll talk to him. What's your friend's name?"

"Roger Wilcraft. I appreciate this, mate. You need anything, from now on, you come to me." He softly punched his arm and left the room, glancing into the bathroom on his way out and catching a glimpse of Jane putting on make-up.

Ignacio paced nervously outside the governor's office. The governor, Nico Amadeo, was a difficult man to get to know and even more difficult to like. He was unpredictable and violent, and Ignacio was never sure exactly how a meeting with him would go.

It was rumored one of his many mistresses had informed him a few years ago that she had gotten pregnant. In response, he beat her so badly she miscarried. After the miscarriage he set her up in an apartment of her own with a salary from the government for document reviewing.

"He is ready for you, Mr. Silva."

"Thank you."

The office was massive and Ignacio had always thought that perhaps this office had been shared by three or four different people before the government bought the building in the 1980's. Nico sat behind his desk with one boot up on the edge and the phone glued to his ear. He motioned for Ignacio to sit down.

Ignacio did so and looked around the office. There were photos of family and fishing trips and dedications. But it was all a sham. He knew Nico's wife lived in a separate residence and was lucky if she saw her husband once or twice a year. His children were raised by nannies and his father had been placed in a care facility for the elderly long ago, before he was considered elderly.

Nico hung up the phone and leaned back in the chair. "This is not good, Ignacio."

"I know."

"What of the men who kidnapped the tourists?"

"I told everyone that many of them were shot and the rest escaped."

"Do you have donkeys training them? How did they let one turista cause so much trouble?"

"These are average men, Nico. If we used the military for these as I wanted—"

"No, if anyone knew we did that it would be my head. No military. Just find people in the prisons that have at least had some training. And tell them to find turistas that are easier targets, heh?"

"I will, Patrón."

"Good. Now what of this fish?"

"Everyone knows about it. I could not stop it."

"It will bring some people to try and see it, but couples and families will not come if they think it is dangerous. Families are who spend their money here."

"I know."

"You know? Then what will you do about it? Will you fuck every tourist that comes in as a bonus? How, Ignacio, will you fix this?"

"I will capture it."

"And then what?"

"Then we will build an aquarium around it. It will be the first giant squid ever captured by man. People will come from all over the world to see it. And our beaches will still have families."

Nico thought about this a moment and then a small smile crept over his lips. He pressed a button on his phone and his assistant answered. "I am sending Ignacio to you. Get him whatever he needs. I have decided to capture it and put it in an aquarium. What do you think of my idea, Roberto?"

"I love it. It is a great idea, Patrón."

"Ignacio, I have accepted this idea. Capture it and put it in an aquarium. Yes, I like this idea. We can have el presidente dedicate it and have all the cameras there."

"It is a great idea, Patrón."

"Yes, I believe it is."

Patrick walked to the restaurant from his hotel. The day was hot but enjoyable and he watched the tourists shopping in the elegant stores or strolling along the streets snapping photos of old buildings and statues.

The restaurant was called the Parisian Bistro and it actually was reminiscent of the cafés in Paris. There was a veranda and people sat sipping cappuccino and surfing the internet on laptops or reading. One man was making a drawing of the waitress with pencil and charcoal on a white pad and Patrick glanced at the drawing as he walked by.

He scanned the interior of the restaurant and saw Ignacio sitting by himself. He sat next to a window and watched the tourists on the street as they looked into the restaurant and stopped by the entrance, scanning the menu hung near the door.

Patrick walked to him.

"Hello, Mayor."

He took a sip of cappuccino leaving a bit of foam on his upper lip. He wiped it with a napkin and motioned with his head to the chair across from him. Patrick sat down and looked out the window as Ignacio took a bite of his egg white omelet.

"Do you want anything to eat?"

"No, I'm okay."

"Your ship is sailing soon. Are you going to be on it?"

"Yes."

"That is a mistake, blanquito. You should go back to America and leave that ship alone."

"Why do you care?"

"I don't. But you're here so I will give you my advice."

"I need to ask you a favor."

Ignacio laughed. "What have you done to earn a favor? You Americans never stop amazing me. You come to my country, get thrown in jail twice, I let you go and you come with your hand out asking for a favor. What happened to the cowboys, blanquito? I thought Americans were independent and never asked anyone for help?"

"The cowboys died out. We're into handouts as much as anyone else now."

"Okay, at least you are honest. What is the favor?"

"There's somebody being held at the jail named Roger Wilcraft. I would like him released."

"Yes, I've seen this man. How do you know him?"

"He's supposed to sail on the ship with us."

"And he is a friend of yours?"

"Actually, no, I've never met him. But someone asked for help and they seemed to think that I may have some pull with you. The guy has a wife and kids back home."

"Hm, a wife and kids, you say? And tell me, do you know why he is in jail? Did this person explain this to you?"

"No."

"He raped a maid at the hotel, blanquito. How do you think his wife and kids would react to that?"

"I didn't know that's what it was."

Ignacio took another bite of omelet and swallowed some water out of glass. "She is not coming forward. She has been paid I would think. I could hold the man if I wished. But there is no point. I was going to release him anyway."

"Thank you. Is there anything I can do for you in return?"

"Actually there is. I need—"

His cell phone rang and he picked it up off the table and answered it. He spoke in Spanish for a few moments and then looked to Patrick, his eyes wide.

"Gracias," he said as he hung up. "I think I will not be needing that favor."

"Why?"

"The squid. Some fisherman have caught it."

People were swarming on the stretch of beach in front of the upscale Ocean Pearl Resort in Viña. Camera crews were there from several stations and many of the locals were crowding in to see the catch, held back only by a handful of police and a few barricades.

Ignacio pulled his car to a stop in the parking lot of the resort, Patrick behind him. They got out and Patrick had to hold himself back from breaking into a run. He followed Ignacio who walked casually through the crowd and nodded hello to one of the police officers as he went past him. He turned and pointed to Patrick and said something and the officer let him through as well.

The stink was the first thing Patrick noticed. Even before he could see anything and at least fifty feet from the water, the smell of rotting flesh filled the air. It smelled like putrid fish and feces and though it made Patrick nearly gag, Ignacio seemed not to notice.

They got past the reporters and the officers standing around watching, and saw the animal laying on the sand. Its tentacles seemed to stretch from one end of the beach to the other. Its suckers were the size of golf balls and Patrick could see the sharp hooks inside them, glistening in the sunlight.

Mitch was near the posterior surface of the animal taking samples.

“Who caught this?” Ignacio said.

Several men began shouting and yelling and laughing and telling the story of how they had conquered the monster. They had used the carcass of a goat and several buckets of cow blood and had lured the monster to the surface. Then they’d blown part of its brain away with dynamite, dragging it behind the boat back to the beach.

Patrick could see the large gash near the monster’s eye where the explosion had caught it. He looked into the eye and it was staring back at him, glossy and black.

Patrick heard Ignacio swear under his breath.

“What’s the matter?”

“I did not want it dead.”

Ignacio walked over to the cameras and began speaking about the wonderful job the fisherman had done and what a service it was to their city. Mitch handed a few jars of flesh scrapings he’d taken to an assistant and walked over to Patrick, pulling off the latex gloves from his hands and throwing them over the carcass.

“Guess that takes care of our little trip,” Patrick said.

“Not exactly.”

“Why?”

“This is a giant squid all right, one of the biggest ever recorded. But it’s not the one we’re looking for.”

“How do you know?”

“Look at the clubs; the ends of its tentacles. See those toothed suckers? Those teeth aren’t chipped or cracked and they’ve hardly a scratch on ‘em. They’re brand spanking new. And the body doesn’t have any scarring or evidence that this squid has ever gone up against a shark or a whale. This here’s a baby.”

“A baby?”

“Yeah, it’s a baby. No more than four or five months I would think. Which means mama is still out there. And she’s got to have one helluva appetite.”



The pod drifted lazily near the surface, the warmth of the sun on their backs. At nearly seventy feet and 125,000 pounds, they had almost no natural predators with the exception of man. Their spermaceti—the substance covering their outer dermis and giving them the name “sperm” whale—is used to make candles and soaps and cosmetics. Hunted nearly to extinction, the sperm whale was no longer a common sight and they chose to swim in the open sea rather than closer to shore.

But the warming oceans had been killing off life slowly and food was more and more scarce. The warmth was something they had never experienced and did not understand. They had a set pattern of location during certain months and it seemed as if the seasons no longer made sense. Now, they had no choice but to come in close to shore and risk an encounter with the massive whaling vessels that awaited them.

The pod consisted of one gigantic bull, four cows and two calves. The calves swam in the center of the pod for safety, its colossal relatives surrounding it from attack by the only oceanic predators that could attack and kill a calf sperm whale: orcas.

A pod of orcas had recently attacked the whales. Two of the orcas had rushed up from underneath to bite into the soft belly of one of the calves but the bull had spotted them in time. It smashed its gargantuan tail into the snout of one of the orcas, crushing its skull, and the rest of the orcas had fled to find easier prey.

But there was something else in the water now.

Using echolocation, the bull had sensed it long ago. It lurked underneath them almost half a mile in the darkness where the sun couldn't reach. And it had been following them since the morning.

There was no creature that imposed fear on the bull and it felt none now; just an odd curiosity. The pod had not eaten for two days and it was time for a dive. They began their slow descent, the bull at the head, into the unknown of the deep sea.

They made various clicks and wails and groans in their downward plunge, attempting to track prey. With foot-long conical teeth, they ate everything that moved.

The bull picked up movement ahead. Whatever had been in the depths was now coming up to meet them. Nervous groans escaped from the cows but the calves were clicking in excitement, still young to life and unaware of the dangers that it could hold.

The pod moved in unison and their clicks were coming back more quickly; too quickly. Whatever was underneath them was shooting to the surface at an impossibly reckless speed.

The bull raced ahead, wanting to meet any challengers head on. It let out a deep, bassed groan, something akin to a war cry, and sped away from the pod into the darkness. The pod saw his tail beating away the waters and its girth began to slowly disappear.

They followed him with clicks and groans, but then the clicks and groans stopped. They were getting no response from below.

One of the cows stopped the dive, fear tingling its belly, and turned upward toward the surface. The rest of the cows followed suit, nudging the calves along. But one calf broke away. It began to race downward, following the bull.

Its mother called for him with high-pitched squeals but the calf didn't stop and only picked up its pace. The mother began after it.

The calf saw the light dimming but it rarely needed light. They hunted in the darkness more than the light and using its clicks it could detect exactly where everything was; the sounds painting an image as clear as a photo in its mind of its surroundings.

The mother was nearly to him now and the calf sped up. It would follow the bull. As a male, the calf emulated the bull and felt a connection with it that it lacked with the cows. It would find the bull and help it to defeat any challengers.

There was suddenly a scent in the water. The calf didn't recognize it at first but the mother knew right away what it was: blood.

Warm blood was pouring forth from the bottom of the ocean as if there were a volcano bleeding on the sea floor. The calf found it intriguing, the scent of blood tickling its belly and causing its digestive glands to begin the process of digestion though no food was available yet.

The calf followed the blood down even farther until it sensed the motion of huge amounts of water being displaced. There was activity below and it used its clicks to identify it. It made out one massive body swimming in a circle. It slowed and tried to make sense of it but didn't know what it was.

As it drew closer, it could see the image of what had occurred in the blackness as clearly as day: the bull was dead.

Its corpse was spinning in a downward spiral away from the surface. But there was something else there as well. Something bigger than the bull and it was connected with it somehow.

Then it saw the writhing legs and tentacles that tore at the bull's belly, organs and bones being ripped away with cloudy

bursts of blood.

The calf watched the spectacle until its mother came to it. The cow came underneath and pushed it with its head, forcing it up to the surface. Eventually the calf turned on its own and began to rise.

The calf came to a sudden halt and felt burning in its tail. It groaned as its mother pushed and its tail felt as if it were tearing away from its body.

A tentacle had wrapped around the calf's tail and was pulling it deeper into the darkness. The cow, frantic, pushed harder and the tender flesh of the calf began to rip and bleed as it screamed a high-pitched panicked call.

The calf was being dragged down. It was writhing, pulling its body from side-to-side, trying to beat its tail or twist or any other motion it could make.

The cow followed the calf down farther still and held it up with her head. In one powerful motion it struck the calf just over the tail and its flesh ripped away from the tentacle in a chunk. It began to pound its tail furiously and mother and calf rushed to the surface.

They rejoined the pod and began to swim farther from shore, moaning for the loss of their protector.

Below in the darkness, the great beast listened until the thumping of the sperm whales faded into the distance, and then it began to feed.

Mitch Roberts walked in to Hamilton's suite and saw him bite into a rare steak and greasy blood dripped down his lips. He wiped it with his hand and held his empty wine glass up. Stewart stepped behind him and filled it from a bottle on the table.

A small tremor of fear went through Mitch's belly, as it did every time he saw him.

Mitch had dealt with men like him before when he worked for a private security company after his time in the Royal Australian Navy. They would lease security personnel for adventures they had dreamed of going on their entire lives but were too busy to bother with. Then, in their golden years, knowing death was close, they would fulfill every fantasy they ever had. This, Mitch knew, is when they were the most dangerous.

"Sit down, Mr. Roberts."

Mitch sat and watched the pink grease ooze from the old man's mouth and it made him sick. He looked out over the beach instead.

"So what did you learn about the fishermen's catch?"

"It's not our squid. It's a giant squid, don't get me wrong. But it's not the one we're looking for."

"Did you find a decent amount of loligo beta in it?"

"I took a quick look but didn't see much. It was a juvenile and loligo's the mating protein, so I wouldn't expect to find much anyway."

"It's still out there then?"

"I would think so. It's being driven toward shore from a lack of sufficient food so there's no reason to think there's suddenly sufficient food farther out. But it might start going north for greener pastures soon. Can I ask you something though? What if we get it and there's not enough loligo in it?"

"You'll still be paid either way if that's what you're concerned with. But I understand the risks, Mr. Roberts. I have been confined to this wheelchair for twenty-five years. I would rather have never walked at all so at least I wouldn't know what I was missing. But I think about it every day.

"They tell you when you are in therapy that you must come to terms with your disability if you are to live with it. I myself was never able to. I have been searching for a cure to Huntington's disease ever since I began having balance problems in my twenties. This, this beautiful monster, this is the closest I've ever come. You are a biologist. You of all people have to appreciate the use of one species to cure a disease in the dominant species."

"The preliminary tests with loligo were inconclusive, Mr. Hamilton. It may not be anything."

"I will take a chance on inconclusive over certain paralysis and death any day."

"I just want you to understand this is no guarantee. When I wrote my paper about effects of loligo on the brain tissue of tamarins, I didn't have an eye to go hunting giant squid. I thought we could replicate something similar down the road, maybe fifteen or twenty years from now."

"I don't have twenty years, Mr. Roberts. I don't have five years. This is my last opportunity at a cure and survival."

"Understood. Well, what now?"

"Get the preparations in order. I want to sail as soon as possible."

Mitch stood up and began walking out of the suite. He glanced back once and saw Hamilton attempt to finish his wine but his hands were trembling so badly Stewart had to step in and help him.

Christopher finished a day of shopping on Hamilton's credit card and headed back to the hotel for a shower and change of clothing. His suite was next to Hamilton's and he could sometimes hear Beethoven or Mozart coming from the old man's bedroom.

He undressed and got into the shower. It was white tiling with black and gold trim and clearly meant for more than one person. He enjoyed the space and let the hot water run over him a long time before he shaved and used fragranced body-wash to cleanse the sweat off of him.

He dressed in an Armani suit, gray, with a white shirt and green tie. It felt good to be able to spend again without worrying about the consequences. Cameron Russell had given him a credit card as well and for many years checked the bills monthly. Toward the end of his employment though, he had given Christopher free reign.

There was a knock at the door and Christopher opened it, revealing the full height of Stewart standing with his hands crossed over his stomach.

"Mr. Hamilton would like to see you now."

Christopher used some cologne, put on the silver Rolex he had just bought, and headed over there.

He found Hamilton on his balcony where he seemed to spend most of his time and walked over to him.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, please sit down, Chris. Do you mind if I call you Chris?"

"No."

He sat down and Stewart brought him a fizzy clear drink without being asked. He took a sip; it tasted like champagne but with a stronger alcohol kick.

"Good drink?" Hamilton asked.

"I like it. What is it?"

"Hasn't been given a name yet. It's something I've developed. A type of champagne that can pass for a mixed drink. People without taste feel they need champagne, as if the drink adds class to them, but what they really desire is to get drunk. I give them both. That's how I am so successful, Chris. I know that what is on the surface is not what is underneath. You have to cater to both if you are going to succeed."

"Can I ask you something, Mr. Hamilton, and have you promise to be honest with me?"

"Of course."

"Why do you want me here? You have Stewart. You can pluck a fresh Harvard MBA for an assistant. You don't need me. Why am I here?"

"You're wrong about plucking an assistant. What I need they don't teach in universities. In fact I'm not sure you can teach it."

"What is it?"

"Loyalty, Chris. Loyalty. I need someone so loyal they are willing to abandon principle and even reason to ensure that I get what I want. That is what I need. I think you can be that person."

"Cameron told me a lot about you. He's a grouchy old fool and I've heard stories about how he treats his assistants. I knew I wouldn't have much of a problem recruiting you." He reached over and took a drink from Christopher's glass.

"Cameron told me about the prostitutes. The one in Singapore particularly impressed me. You were arrested and blamed for that and you kept your mouth shut. You were willing to go to prison for your benefactor. Now you tell me, where can I buy that kind of loyalty?"

"He hired me to take care of him and that's what I did."

"And he didn't appreciate you. Since his wife died, Cameron has lost his civility and his gratitude. That is what makes us level-headed; our gratitude. He no longer has that for his wealth or his station in life. But I do, Chris. If you work for me, I promise you, you will be rewarded beyond your dreams. You will be a rich man."

"Look at Stewart. He may not seem it, but he is a millionaire thanks to me. He owns two strip clubs, a gym and a restaurant. But he continues to change my diapers and give me my medicines. That's loyalty, Chris. That's what I'm looking for and that's why you're here. But let me ask you something: do you have that kind of loyalty for me? Can you just switch it off for Cameron and turn it on for me? If you can't, I understand and there will be no hard feelings. But I need to know now; will you join with me?"

Christopher saw the glint of the Rolex on his wrist as the sunlight reflected off of it. He twisted his wrist one way and then the other, feeling the weight of it against his skin.

"You have me, Mr. Hamilton. I'm yours."

Ignacio sat in his office, lost in thought as jazz played on his desktop. He stood up and paced the room a while, twirling some meditation spheres in his hands. The soothing hum of the spheres vibrated his palms and made his fingers tingle. His chief of police entered the office and sat down on a couch. He crossed his legs and waited until Ignacio finished pacing before speaking.

"This is not what I wanted, Hector."

"What did you want?"

"I wanted to capture it. I wanted to put it on display and have something unique for our city that people from all over the world would come to see."

"Do you really want people from all over the world here?"

Ignacio smirked. He had dealt with people like Hector all his life. They felt that Viña was their city, not meant for outsiders, even other Chileans. But that view is what had kept Viña an exclusive resort town that couldn't seem to find its voice to take the next step.

Ignacio knew his city could become one of the top tourist destinations in the world, along with Las Vegas and Rome and the Caribbean, but it would take having to kill the old narrow-minded view of the city as belonging to the residents to achieve that.

"Have the Americanos left yet?" Ignacio asked.

"No, they are not leaving."

"Why not?"

"They think the fishermen killed only one of the animals."

"They think it's the wrong one?"

"Sí."

Ignacio stopped twirling the meditation spheres and put them back into the open case on his desk. "Get a boat ready, we are going to capture it ourselves."

"The Americanos are crazy. That was the animal that killed the turistas. There is no other."

"Get the boat ready, Hector. And begin gathering some men."

Hector sighed and stood up. "Sí, jefe."

Night over Viña was beautiful as nowhere else on earth. There were few clouds and the moon and stars reflected brightly off the surface of the Pacific, the heavenly bodies shining so radiantly that the streets hardly used illumination.

Jane sat on the veranda of a café and sipped iced tea. She looked around to the other patrons and noticed they were all tourists; few of the locals could afford even the iced tea she was drinking at a place like this.

A couple of Mormon missionaries were walking the streets tonight, stopping to speak with locals here and there. They were young boys and Jane had seen many of them here in her time with the Peace Corps.

They would pay their own way to go to distant lands and preach a Gospel they believed in with all their hearts. They would pitch in whenever they could and Jane had once needed their help.

After a massive rainstorm, a mudslide engulfed the village she was staying in. The Chileans were a stubborn people and many of the locals refused to heed the warnings and leave. At least fifty men, women and children were missing.

The missionaries came and helped her and the other volunteers from the Peace Corps as they began to dig people out of the mud. There were few survivors, but one moment of exaltation had occurred when a two year old boy was pulled out near his home. His parents and siblings were dead, but by some miracle he survived. Jane wondered where he was now and what he was doing; if he remembered her at all.

Patrick came almost half an hour late. He looked disheveled, his shirt untucked and his hair messy. He sat across from her and nearly tipped over her glass, his face flush with excitement.

"What's going on?" she said.

"I've just been helping out with the ship. You should see this thing. It's like a mini war ship crossed with a cruise liner."

She absently played with her straw, dipping it into the tea and pulling it out again, watching the dark liquid drip off the end. "So you're really going?"

"Yeah, I'm really going."

"For a month?"

"That's what it's slated for. I don't know, we'll see how long it actually takes."

"The experts on the news seemed pretty convinced that they already caught the squid that killed those people."

"Our expert doesn't seem to think so. If he's wrong he's wrong. I get paid anyway."

"I can't wait for you."

"I know."

They sat in silence and watched the people on the sidewalks. There was a man painted chrome standing on a box across the street, dancing whenever someone put money in a hat he had placed in front of him. But the police shooed him away within minutes.

"I don't want you to go."

"Jane—"

"No, this is bullshit. I don't want you to go."

"Come with me then."

"You don't mean that."

"Yes I do. You would have fun. I'm not kidding; it's like a cruise ship. They got buffets."

She felt a burning in the pit of her stomach. She'd had this feeling before and she knew, just knew, deep down that she would never see him again if he got on that ship. She stood up and threw some cash on the table.

"You're an asshole."

"Jane, wait a second. Jane."

She stormed out of the restaurant and walked to her car. As she climbed in, she put her face in her hands, and cried.

The ship had been cleaned from top to bottom the previous night and the metal railings and steps gleamed in the sunlight from a smooth layer of wax. The men had boarded and unpacked and Taylor Hamilton sat on the deck and looked out over the water with his second on one side and Mitch on the other.

Patrick stood on the port side and looked to the ocean. He had uneasiness in his stomach and he had tried to settle it with Tums but it hadn't worked.

He didn't understand what had happened last night, but he had never understood women. The truth was he cared about her, but they hadn't known each other long. He knew there was a spark there, he could feel it whenever he saw her, but sparks came and went in life and there was no reason for this one to—

"Hi."

He turned to see Jane walking up the ramp, one of the men lugging some bags behind her.

"What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't let it end that way, Patrick. I called Christopher and he arranged for me to have a cabin."

"We're going to be gone a long time. What about your practice?"

"It'll survive. I have two partners and they'll cover for me until I get back." She walked to him. "I was married once, Patrick. I wanted you to know that. He got injured in a motorcycle accident and during his recovery he got addicted to pain pills . . . pills that I gave him. He got drunk one night and took too many. He survived in the hospital for three weeks before we decided to relieve his suffering."

"I don't know—"

"You don't need to say anything. I just wanted you to know that because I wanted you to know that I've experienced loss. I think we have something special and I'm not losing that too."

She leaned in and gave him a long kiss, the man behind her grinning, and then she pulled away and flipped her hair behind her shoulders. "Now, where's a girl to get some breakfast on here?"

"Mess hall's down below deck. They got a nice buffet going."

"Come join me."

"I will. I'll be down in a minute."

She kissed him again and then headed to the stairwell leading below deck. He watched her walk, the smooth elegance of her steps. She was refined; more refined than he was and it intimidated him a little. He constantly felt like he was making a fool of himself around her. But she never said anything if he was, and he admired her for that.

"That's a mistake," Mitch said, walking up to him, cleaning a small device with a rag.

"What is?"

"Having her onboard. It's a mistake."

"Her choice. By the way, I got your man free."

"I got word last night. Looks like I was right about you and the mayor."

"Maybe. He's a strange guy though. Distant."

"Look who's talking, mate."

Patrick had actually thought of it before; for some reason, Ignacio reminded him of himself and gave him an uncomfortable feeling.

"What are you going to do for him in return?" Mitch asked.

"He didn't really get a chance to ask for anything."

"Can I give you a bit of advice? You got powerful friends you keep them as friends. There's nothing like an enemy that used to be a friend. My two cents, you call him today and ask what you can do for him."

Patrick was about to respond when he saw something out of the corner of his eye. A young girl of no more than six or seven walked across the deck with a kitten in her arms. She came next to Hamilton near the railing and he began pointing to things on the horizon or on the ship and talking to her about them.

"Whose kid is that?"

"Hm, don't rightly know. That's a mistake too."

Patrick watched her as she stroked her cat and listened to Hamilton as he opened a map and began describing things to her.

That sick feeling returned to his stomach.

Rodrigo met Patrick at his cabin as the ship left the docks and headed out into the open Pacific.

They walked to the top deck together and watched as fishing lines were secured and shark cages lined up port and starboard with scuba gear and handheld harpoon guns laid before them.

It wasn't long before the ship began to rock in rhythm with the sea and the docks and beaches and glimmering hotels were specks on the horizon.

The water was a sapphire blue and foamed around the stern from the powerful propellers. Patrick saw some dolphins near the bow, jumping out of the water a few feet, their gray-blue skin glistening in the sun before submerging once again.

The primary function of the deck right now seemed to be the fishing lines. They dragged netted hooks with chunks of meat attached behind them but the men were focused completely on the lines. There were at least eight stations set up along the deck and they sat in hard, blue chairs, their eyes on the water.

Patrick could've done what Christopher did and work as Mitch's assistant in ensuring everything was running smoothly, but he asked instead to be assigned to one of the fishing chairs.

After a quick breakfast in the mess hall he sat near the transom, his feet up, absorbing the sun on his cheeks. Jane had gone to her cabin for a nap and promised that she would make him lunch and they would eat up here at his station.

The man next to him was listening to an ipod attached to some speakers and the music was a soft Latin song with acoustic guitar and flute.

He looked to the man and said hello.

"Hola," the man said. "You the American?"

"That's me. And you are?"

"Felix."

"Nice to meet you, Felix. o meet y e

Felix nodded but didn't turn to him. He kept his eyes on the water, occasionally tapping his pole or pulling up on it.

The engines suddenly shut off and the boat dipped slightly and then began to glide over the surface like a rubber toy in a bath. The men seemed to focus even more and sat up straight in their chairs and set drinks and food down on the deck.

The sun grew brighter as the day dragged on. Patrick was sweating and he cursed himself for not bringing any sunblock.

He glanced back aft and saw Rodrigo in one of the chairs, his feet up and a hat over his head, soundly asleep.

He turned back to the water, and decided to do the same.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was nearly two hours later when Patrick woke up. His hands, legs, and feet were burnt and he poured some water over them out of a bottle. He stood up and went below deck and found Jane still asleep. He let her alone and decided to go to the mess hall and get something to eat.

The breakfast buffet had been changed to a make-your-own-sandwich station and he made a turkey with Swiss and got some chips and lemonade. He sat at a table by himself and ate and then decided to go for a walk around the ship.

He could tell the vessel was definitely old military with the narrow corridors and small doors and thin ladders leading to upper floors. Patrick guessed there were about thirty men onboard and many of them appeared to be professional fishermen.

But there was the other side of the ship too; the one that had a large game room with arcade games, flat-screens with satellite cable, and a blackjack table next to some slot machines. There was a cigar room with fine leather couches and a humidified vault with endless rows of cigars, and a bar where some of the men were already getting drunk.

He climbed down a floor and could feel the hum of the engines underneath his feet. He began walking down the corridor, just seeing where it took him, when he heard voices. They were soft and he couldn't make out what they were saying but as he approached he could tell it was Hamilton's voice.

He checked the door and it was locked. He put his ear against it but the voices were too muffled and he couldn't make anything out.

There were a few other rooms but they were full of supplies, one with an old cot against the wall and one of the men sleeping on their side.

Patrick made his way back to the top deck and saw Christopher with Mitch looking over the fishing lines.

"You really expect to catch it with fishing lines?" Patrick asked as he walked up.

They looked surprised and stopped speaking immediately. Patrick got the impression he was not allowed to hear what it was they were discussing.

"No, mate. I don't. But I do expect to bring it up to the surface where we can net the bugger." He pointed to some colored



buoys trailing the boat. "See those there? Leaking blood with flashing lights on the bottom. Not a squid in the ocean that can resist that. It'll come up, and we'll nab it when it does." He looked to Christopher. "We'll talk later."

As he left Patrick stood there and looked Christopher over. He was wearing tailored shorts with a silk shirt and yachting shoes. Sunglasses were pushed up into his hair and an ipad was tucked under his arm, open to a calendar and to-do list.

"Seems like we haven't talked lately," Patrick said.

"I know. Sorry about that. Just a lot to do. Some of these fucking Chileans, man, they'll rob you blind if you turn around.

They go and sleep below deck when they think nobody's looking. You have to keep an eye on them."

"I take it you accepted that job with Hamilton then?"

"Yeah, a hundred and ten K a year, Patty. You fucking believe that? Your old man would'a killed me before paying me that much."

"Just be careful, Chrissy."

"Hey," he said, slapping his arm, "aren't I always?"

Night aboard the ship was an entirely different atmosphere. Patrick and Jane sat on the couch trying to watch a movie in the game room and the men were drinking and laughing and eating all around them. It was one giant party with an endless supply of whatever anyone wanted.

At one point a joint began to get passed around and Jane turned to him and said, "I want to do it."

"Do what?"

"Get stoned. I haven't smoked a joint since college."

"Seriously? Aren't you a doctor?"

"Oh please. It's hardly a drug. No one's ever died from marijuana."

The joint came over to them and Jane took a long puff, held it as long as she could, and then began to viciously cough as she passed it to Patrick. He took a few puffs and passed it along.

"Wow," she said, "that's more powerful than the stuff I remember."

They relaxed into their seats and after half an hour another joint was passed around; this one a different type of marijuana that some of the men said was only grown in the highlands of Chile by a tribe that still lived in huts and hunted for food.

It was smooth going down, like warm sake, and it had a piney taste. Patrick held on to it for a while before passing it on to the next person.

"I am really stoned," she said.

"Me too."

"Let's go to the deck."

"Okay."

They left the game room and went through the maze of corridors to find the ladder leading to the deck. They climbed out into the night air, the moon so vivid Patrick thought it might've been daylight.

"Over here," Jane said as she ran to the railing.

They stood over the water, watching the reflection of the moon on the surface of the shadowy water.

"Listen, do you hear that?"

Patrick quieted his breathing and focused on the darkness surrounding them. There was no land visible in any direction and he felt helpless on a vast sea that had neither mercy nor reason. It chilled him and then he heard what Jane was talking about.

In the distance was the mournful cry of whales.

"I hear it!"

"It's amazing that they can communicate. Killer whales have different cultures. The ones in the arctic have different sets of clicks and noises from the ones in the tropics. They have different languages. Do you think they're smarter than us?"

"I've never seen a killer whale city."

She laughed at the thought and then gave him a kiss on his cheek. "We're in a long line of species that have ruled the earth and then went extinct. Protozoa, fish, birds, reptiles, mammals and then us. What do you think will be next when we go extinct?"

"Squid," a voice in the dark said.

Startled, Patrick looked to see Mitch Roberts relaxing in a deck chair sipping a bottle of beer.

"Didn't mean to scare you, mate."

"You been there the whole time?"

"Sitting in the dark's not usually my bowl of rice but I have to say, the nights out here make me want to crack a fat." He took a pull from the beer and then offered some to him. "Bit of the amber fluid?"

Patrick took a pull so as not to be rude and then handed it back.

"What do you mean squids?" Jane asked.

"Well they're evolving; developing so bloody fast you can see it. Their frontal cortex, that's the part that's gonna be determining what the next apex species will be, that's developing faster than any other species. The longer they live, the more they're learning. Our frontal cortex, as a whole, is shrinking. We're growing dumber and they're growing smarter."

"You really think we're growing dumber?"

"Oh no doubt about it. The best way to measure it is entertainment. And when it comes to entertainment, America is the trendsetter. Whatever's popular in America will become popular in the rest of the world. So, what's popular in America?"

"I'll tell you what: shit."

"Look at the top shows and you'll see nothing but drunks and morons. Sports heroes are turning out to be junkies, politicians sex maniacs or idiots. The fools are running the ship, cobber. The idiots are held up as role models and every successive generation will emulate them."

But the squid, cobber. I tell you, the bloody squid are not like that. Most species with intelligence, like chimps or hyenas or dolphins, they have some kind'a what you'd call rudimentary morality. Not perfect morality, they're still animals, but they display mercy and compassion and giving like we do. The squid doesn't do that. It kills for pleasure even when it puts its own life in danger."

He finished the beer and placed it down on the deck before picking another one out of a six pack next to him.

"I was diving offshore in California couple years back, Baja I think, studying the Humboldt squid and one of my assistants, Grieg, was there. We started feeding them to get more of 'em around and we got up maybe four or five. And they aren't big, bout a meter and half at their largest. So they ate everything we had and the mood changed. Many predators, even sharks, would'a swam off after they knew dinner was over. But the squid attacked. One ripped off Greig's mask and another pulled out the tubing of his air tank. Then they just held on to his legs and pulled him down so far that I couldn't reach him. By the time I got help there, he had already drowned. They figured out that we couldn't breathe underwater. That's higher reasoning, Janey girl. It's rare."

He took a swig of beer and continued.

"Now the squid are growing in numbers cause their only predators are sperm whales and the whales are nearly extinct from us. So we have a species that is getting smarter, that has no use for morality, and that can analyze prey to find weaknesses. Once the whales are all gone, they'll run the ocean. When we're off the land, it's not too science fiction to think they may take over."

Mitch stood up and guzzled the rest of his beer, the foaming liquid running down his neck and over his collar. "But what the hell do I know I'm rotten right now. Too much'a this piss beer. Good night Ms. Jane, Patrick."

He stumbled across the deck and went down below. Jane sat in his deck chair, gooseflesh covering her arms and legs.

Patrick looked from her out to the sea, the water glistening blue from the moon; and beyond the blue, emptiness.

Patrick awoke and felt next to him for Jane but there was no one there. He sat up and stretched his back and looked for his clothes.

He came out to the deck and saw that the men were already full on into the day though it was barely seven in the morning. It was bright and cloudless but cool from an ocean wind. He saw Jane in one of the shark cages, Mitch instructing her.

Patrick went to them and listened as Mitch told her about a time when a great white broke into a cage he was in and how flimsy the cages used to be when he first started diving.

"Morning bright eyes," he said. "Just showing your woman here the finer points'a shark cage diving."

Jane hopped out of the cage and gave him a kiss. She was wearing shorts and her legs were smooth and lotioned and Patrick could see the men leering at her.

"What time did you get up?" Patrick asked.

"Not too long ago. An hour or so. You eaten yet?"

"No."

"There's waffles with whip cream and fruit."

"Actually I need some exercise. I was going to jog around the deck."

"There's a gym here. It's on the lowest deck; I don't know what you call that. Just go down the stairs until you can't go anymore and you'll find it."

"It's on the lower deck near the stern," Mitch said as he picked up a harpoon gun and placed it in one of the cages.

There was yelling near the port side. The men jumped out of their chairs and rushed over and were shouting at one of the fisherman who was strapped into his chair, his rod bent to the point of snapping in half.

"He's got something," Mitch said.

They ran over. The man was swearing in Spanish and pressing with his feet against the railing of the ship to pull the rod back as far as it would go. Two other men grabbed him and buckled him in to the chair with another rubber strap which was bolted to the deck.

The man tried his best but finally caved and shouted for help. The same men grabbed the rod and pushed from the front as the fisherman pulled. Soon, the line was going slack and they were pulling up to the surface whatever they had caught.

Mitch ran back and got one of the harpoon guns. Patrick watched as he took out a small vial of thick, white liquid and attached it to the tip of the harpoon.

"Sedative."

It was close now. The rod was nearly straight and either the fight had left whatever it was they had hooked, or it was coming to the surface on its own.

Bubbles rose and burst and the fishing line snapped back to an upright position, the fisherman nearly flying out of the chair, his straps holding him in place.

A ten foot mako shark thrashed on the end of the line, the six inch hook jutting out of the side of its mouth. It would thrash wildly and then attempt to dart away, only to have the line tug at its face and bring him back.

Patrick had never seen one from this close. He had gone fishing in some of the most dangerous waters in the world, but only come into contact with blues and white tips and lemons and bulls. Never a mako. It was a magnificently designed animal; the fastest fish in the sea, clocked at over seventy miles an hour.

As Patrick watched in wonder the crowd began to disperse. One of the fishermen walked up with a rifle and before anyone could do or say anything he shot the mako in the head. The shark spun in a circle, a cloud of crimson blood spraying out of its head near its snout, and disappeared in the deep.

"What the fuck are you doing!" Mitch yelled.

"Qué?"

"My arse! Who told you to shoot it? Que le dijo que se dispara?"

The man didn't respond and he looked to his fellows for help but they turned away, knowing what was coming.

Stewart was nearby and Mitch turned to him and yelled, "Get this man off my ship!"

The man still had the rifle in his hands and Mitch grabbed it from him as Stewart took his arms and twisted them behind his back. He lifted him like a doll and brought him to the edge of the railing, pushing him over as the man fought and screamed.

"Stop!" Patrick ran over and grabbed Stewart's arm. "Stop it now."

Stewart ripped his arm away and pushed Patrick back at the chest. He let the man go and stood upright to his full height, towering over Patrick.

Patrick didn't back down and came to within inches of him, staring up into his eyes.

"Now now, boys," Mitch said. "Calm down. Look, I overreacted." He looked to the fisherman. "Go back to your station. If I

see you with another gun on this trip I'm going to let Stewart finish. Entiende usted?"

"Sí. Gracias, señor. Usted no tendrá ningún problema de mi."

"I hope not. Ahora van."

Stewart didn't move as the fisherman snuck past him and ran below deck. Patrick felt his stare and knew what it was he wanted to do. He could see it in his eyes. He had learned to read eyes. People lied, but their eyes couldn't. Stewart's eyes told him he had killed before, and would have no problem doing it now.

"Let it alone, Stewart," Mitch said. "That's enough. It's resolved."

Stewart walked away without a word.

"That, mate, was a bad enemy to make. You should'a let him thrown the man overboard. We would've gotten him out in a minute."

"I don't like bullies."

"Me neither but I hate poachers even more. That was a beautiful animal that man killed for no reason at all. He needed a good frightening."

Patrick took a deep breath and said, "I'm going to go work out."

It was dark and quiet when Juan Rojas finished his dinner and decided to go to the deck and finish his inventory of the lifeboats. There were ten, more than triple what they needed for the twenty-one passengers onboard, but the old man in the wheelchair had insisted that all lifeboats needed to be in good working order. And Juan was not about to disappoint him.

He had met several people like the man in the wheelchair. His services had been rented to American Navy trainers to help train their men, and to Iranian businessmen looking for a week's vacation fishing in foreign waters. He loved being on the ocean and this was as good a way as any to reach that goal.

But the ocean was like a woman and could be cruel and distant when left alone for too long. Juan had lost two wives and a good job working construction in Santiago in order to be on the ocean, sometimes for such little pay it wouldn't even cover the cost of his meals during the trip. But the old man paid handsomely, and Juan was happy to work a little harder to impress him.

He stepped up from below deck and felt the chill of an ocean wind. He put his beanie on over his head and slapped on his work gloves. He glanced around and when he was certain no one was watching he took out his flask of *navegado*—a heated red wine with orange slices and sugar—and took a long gulp. It warmed his throat and belly and he wiped his lips on the back of his glove before walking to the life boats.

He had completed checking six of them and found various items missing: from first aid kits to rations and life vests. He found number seven and opened up the small door.

The lifeboats were white bottoms with red covered tops to keep out sun and rain. They were meant to preserve life for fourteen days; two weeks worth of food and water stashed in each one. Juan thought two weeks on this ocean was far too short—some people could be lost for months—but it was what the designers had wanted.

He climbed in and checked all the seats for belts before going through the first aid kit. He checked for bandages and antiseptics and water purification tablets and aspirin and antibiotics. He then counted the life vests and the packages of rations and bottles of water. Everything appeared in order.

He sat down on one of the seats and pulled his flask out. His wife had made him a batch of the drink before he had left but he had to heat it every few hours. It was no good cold when it tasted like some sort of fruit punch.

He heard something outside the lifeboat. A light scratching. He thought perhaps the boat was loose on the deck and scraping against something.

Juan climbed out of the lifeboat and walked to the front. There was nothing. He went around, sliding his hand on the lifeboat's smooth exterior, and came to the back and saw that there was nothing there either.

He figured it must've been the wind. The ocean wind had played tricks on sailors since the days when his ancestors fished these waters. There were even stories he had heard from elders that the wind could speak to you if you were quiet enough to listen.

He lifted the flask to his lips, and the world spun.

Juan couldn't tell stars from water and they melted together in fragmented scenery of illumination and darkness.

He hit the cool water hard on his side and felt the snap in his wrist as the bone fractured. He was in blackness; complete and absolute. He kicked, though his heavy boots made it difficult, and broke through the surface, inhaling a massive gulp of air.

He couldn't see the ship. He twirled in the water as he kicked to stay afloat but couldn't see the ship. His wrist ached and pain was shooting up his arm. He spun around and around again and finally, to what he thought was the west, he saw the ship's lights twinkling in the night.

He began to swim to it, stroke by painful stroke. He must've fallen off. He was drunk and he had fallen off the ship. His wife would've been so angry. She didn't want to make him any drinks.

He stopped abruptly when he saw he wasn't making much progress. His legs felt odd and he reached down into the water . . . and felt the slick flesh of stumps where his legs had been.

A scream echoed through the night as the shock began to wear off. There was pressure suddenly from the ocean; a pushing sensation of something rising underneath him. He screamed again, toward the ship, toward the sky, but nothing came. Nothing but what was underneath him.

He felt the pressure again around his chest and his head, and as his head was crushed, bits of bone and brains filled the water and began to float to the surface. To be picked off soon by small fish, that would later be eaten by bigger fish, which in turn would be eaten by man.

Nothing was wasted in the sea.

For two days Patrick had been working out in the gym on the lower deck. It was a cargo hold of some sort; meant to hold enormous crates bound for exotic locations. But the crates had been replaced with the finest gym equipment money could buy.

There were four treadmills, a few elliptical machines, and the rest of the space was taken up by free-weights. The floor was covered in a thick black rubber and Patrick enjoyed finishing a set with dumbbells or barbells and throwing the weight to bounce off the floor with a loud thump.

There was never anyone in here with him and he would take his time to finish. Yesterday had been a two hour workout and today was approaching the same length. He would workout until all his muscles felt like jelly and he had no stress left in him. No energy to feel the stress even if he acknowledged it was there.

Then he would shower, dress, have breakfast or lunch, and spend the rest of his time with Jane.

He was growing closer to her by the hour and oddly enough, farther away from Christopher. He had asked Christopher to join him to workout and he had replied that he had more important things to do.

Patrick finished and headed to the showers on the mid-deck. He heard voices in the room near the gym again, and again he checked the door and it was locked. He assumed it was some sort of planning room. Somewhere that Hamilton could go undisturbed and work on whatever it was he thought was important.

Patrick showered, taking his time, and then dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. He headed upstairs afterward and saw that the deck was slowed down, the men at their stations and not another living soul that he could see.

There was one part of the ship he hadn't been to yet: the control room. It wasn't that he wasn't allowed up there, but Hamilton was usually there and he wanted to avoid him as much as possible.

He climbed the stairs to the upper deck and found the control room door. He opened it and saw Christopher standing next to Hamilton, Stewart sitting in a chair asleep. Hamilton would discuss something and then Christopher would voice his approval. Patrick shut the door.

As he was walking back to the deck he saw one of the men arguing with Mitch. The man was frantic and shouting and making hand gestures as Mitch was attempting to calm him down.

"Hey, Patrick, I think your Spanish is better than mine. What's he trying to tell me?"

Patrick listened and said, "He's says one of his friends is missing. Juan Rojas."

"Tell him I know who Juan is and he's probably passed out drunk somewhere on the ship."

Patrick translated and listened to the man's reply. "He says they've searched the entire ship. He's not here."

"Well we'll search it again before panicking."

Patrick translated and the man threw up his hands and stormed off.

"I'll tell ya what, mate. These Chileans aren't afraid to tell their bosses what they think of them."

Patrick saw Rodrigo at one of the fishing stations. "Just be nice and don't expect too much," he said as he walked away.

Rodrigo had his feet up and had a mass in his cheek from chewing tobacco. He leaned over the railing and spit a gooey blob of brown.

"Buenos días. You look tired, Patrick."

"I've been working out on the lower deck."

"You don't work out on a boat. It is bad luck."

Patrick looked out over the ocean. "Nothing's happened yet. You seen Jane?"

"No. But I saw her yesterday with the gringo over there," he said, motioning with his head behind him to Mitch. "You have to be careful with that one."

"I don't trust him either."

"I meant the chica."

"Patrick," Mitch shouted from across the deck. "I need your help." He went over and Mitch said, "We're organizing a little search party for that missing bloke. Mind helping?"

"Not at all."

"All right, you take the lower decks and I'll send a few men your way. I'll split the rest up between the middle and upper decks."

Patrick headed down, wondering where the hell Jane was, when he saw Christopher on the middle deck going over some supplies. He had his head down over his ipad and looked like he was lost in thought.

"Anything good?"

Christopher turned to him and then back to his ipad. "What'd ya mean?"

"I mean in the crates. Anything good?"

"Just supplies. I don't think we brought enough for how long Taylor wants to stay out here."

"Shore's not too far."

"No."

Patrick, for the first time he could remember, felt uncomfortable around Christopher.

"I'll see ya."

"Yup."

He made his way to the lowest deck and began searching all the rooms. Christopher had been his friend for so long that Patrick had forgotten he was also an employee. He had never thought about what would happen once that tie was severed.

Patrick was near the gym and as he walked to the storage room across from it, he heard voices again in the only room down here that was locked. But the door wasn't locked this time.

It was slightly ajar and he peeked in. He saw the little girl from a few days ago sitting on a chair wearing nothing but the bottom of a swimsuit with no top, her cat clinched tightly in her hands. She looked frightened and was trembling. Patrick opened the door farther and looked in.

Hamilton sat nude in his wheelchair, Stewart sitting behind him reading. Hamilton was sweating and red, his frail body covered in varicose veins and white body hair.

A wave of anger and disgust washed over Patrick and without thinking he sprinted for Hamilton.

Stewart was on his feet and hooked Patrick in the jaw. The blow sent him reeling backward, but Stewart didn't stop. He kicked him in the groin and as Patrick bent down a knee bashed into his face and sent him against the wall.

Stewart grabbed a chair and threw it at his head. Patrick ducked and it collided with the wall behind him. He then reached down to a strap around his ankle and Patrick saw the gleam of a knife.

The blade rushed at him and it was thrust near his face and Patrick spun out of the way as it caught his shoulder. Hamilton was screaming something and the girl was crying.

Stewart grunted like an animal as he swung downward with his knife. Patrick moved and kicked into the man's face. He was tall and strong, but he was slow.

The knife was swung in an arch, trying to catch his belly, and it sliced through his clothing and caught flesh. Patrick rushed him and managed to grab the hand that held the knife. He gripped two of Stewart's fingers and bent them back almost to the forearm as they snapped and he screamed.

Patrick picked up the knife and in one powerful swing, thrust it into his face from underneath the chin, the knife buried up to the hilt. A small bump protruded from the top of Stewart's skull.

The corpse collapsed to its knees and fell over. Patrick could instantly tell he was badly wounded. The knife had cut through the thin layer of fat and muscle over his belly and blood was beginning to drizzle over his pants and down his legs.

He kicked Hamilton's chair, sending it flying back into the wall, and pain shot through his belly. It was a blinding pain that made him fall to the floor. He looked up to see Hamilton frantically pushing a button on his chair.

Patrick got up again just as three men rushed through the door. They tackled him and pinned his arms. One had a rifle and he stood up and bashed the butt against his skull, and the world went black.



Pain woke Patrick up. His head throbbed so badly he thought his skull might be getting crushed in a vice or ran over but when he opened his eyes he saw that he was laying on the floor in an empty room. He twisted onto his back and looked to the ceiling and then around the room. There was a porthole to one side and the sun was shining in.

He sat up, his vision blurry, and made his way to a wall and leaned against it. His abdomen burned from one side of his ribs to the other, but the bleeding had stopped. He lifted his shirt and saw the thin slice across his belly like a smile.

He looked out the window again. His head throbbed and he wasn't sure how long he'd been out. The likelihood was that he had a concussion.

A friend of his had been injured in Iraq when a mortar hit their humvee and he was unconscious almost nine hours. He woke up and said he was fine and passed all the tests the physicians had for him. Two hours later, he was dead. His brain had been swelling against the inside of his skull and it eventually crushed the soft tissue of his hippocampus and cerebellum.

It made him uncomfortable to think of Iraq and he pushed it out of his mind.

He rose and made his way to the door. It was locked from the outside. The portholes were too small for him to get through and he scanned the rest of the space for an escape, but there was none. So he lay in the center of the room, his hands behind his head, and waited.

He waited what he guessed was hours; running through his life. He knew his father wouldn't miss him; Andrew was the one that broke his heart. But Christopher and Jane probably would. Rodrigo certainly would; his nickname for him was bien blanquito. Referring to him as the only good gringo he had ever known.

There was something in that that Patrick needed. Something about being thought of after you're gone that brought him some comfort.

The door creaked and opened and Hamilton rolled through with two men. They were armed with rifles and behind them was Christopher.

"How's your head?" Hamilton asked.

"It's been better."

"You killed my assistant and bodyguard, Patrick. He was a good assistant; never questioned anything. Just did exactly as I instructed him. It's going to be difficult to find another one." He looked to Christopher and grinned. "Difficult, but not impossible."

Christopher looked away, refusing to look at either of the men.

"You saw something you weren't supposed to see."

"You mean you raping that little girl?" Patrick said. "You're a sick fuck."

"We all have our temptations, Patrick. The things in our lives that we hide from the rest of the world but that haunts us when we're alone. It's challenging to fight. It's a habit I picked up in Vietnam actually. Did I ever tell you I served as well? It was at the insistence of my father who was grooming me for politics. He thought a distinguished military career would be a boon and counteract the stigma of being a billionaire's son.

"He wanted me in the champagne brigades. Air National Guard, something like that. I chose instead to go to the jungles of Pleiku. There was a group of men there, Patrick, a squadron of elite soldiers that would have sent a shiver down your spine just by looking at them. They abandoned all civility, morality, anything that linked them to civilization. In that war, it was encouraged. Everyone was seen as an enemy.

"I joined with them and before I knew it I had abandoned hope of ever getting out. Other squads would wear regulation uniforms and we would come out of the jungles when we had to and we looked like monsters. We had beards and long hair and our clothes were ripped to shreds. We carried ears and teeth from enemies we had killed, hair from women we had raped. Tell me, young man, could you come back from that and think you would have normal tastes?"

"I've seen war too. I've seen the killing and raping. What you were doing to that little girl has nothing to do with war."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. The mind is infinitely complex. Who knows what influences our behavior?" He sighed and stared off into the distance, as if wiping a memory from his mind's eye. "Regardless, the more pressing question is what to do with you now. I could drop you back on land, but I have a feeling you may not let this little mishap go as easily as I would like. I could shoot you and dump the body into the sea, but I wonder if that would come back to me at some point. I have a few good years left and I would hate to spend them in court. I have no doubt I would win; juries are easily bribed or intimidated. But my most precious commodity is time right now and I can't waste a second of it. What do you think, Christopher? What should we do with your old friend?"

Christopher was looking in the opposite direction, not saying anything. He glanced up once and their eyes locked and Patrick knew instantly that he had made his choice.

"Let him go, but put him in a raft. He might make it back to shore, he might not. Either way your hands are clean. If he does start causing trouble, you can bribe almost anyone here to ignore him. It wouldn't be a problem."

Hamilton nodded in approval. "You see, Patrick? How long have you known Christopher? How close were the two of you? And in a short amount of time his loyalty has transferred to me. That is man, Patrick. That is his soul: do what's best for you and everyone else be damned." He looked to the two guards. "Take him up to the deck when it's dark and throw him in a raft. Have some more men with you when you do it, he's quite the little fighter."

Hamilton left and Christopher stayed, staring at Patrick.

"I'm sorry, Patty. I don't know what else to do."

The door slammed shut, and Patrick was alone again.

Night came quickly and Patrick was feeling the pain from wounds that adrenaline had covered. His shoulder had a puncture in it as well and it was aching and sending shooting pains down his arm to his fingers. His belly still burned and it wasn't scabbing as any movement he made opened it back up.

The door opened and several men appeared. They pointed their rifles and Patrick stood up.

They led him through the corridors and up the ladder, over the middle deck but away from the mess hall. They got to the main deck and it was dark but the moon illuminated everything around him in its icy glow.

Mitch and Christopher stood with Hamilton near what looked like a long board sticking out from the railing, two men holding it flush.

"I know this is a bit silly," Hamilton said, "but I've always been a big fan of the old pirate movies from the fifties and sixties. I thought how wonderful it would be to make someone walk a plank."

A barrel pressed into his lower back but Patrick didn't move.

"Come now, young man. Don't be foolish. We both know my men can easily pick you up and throw you into the water. Perhaps breaking or cutting off a few things along the way. This is much cleaner and simpler."

As Patrick walked past them he saw Mitch staring down at the deck, unable to look him in the eyes.

"Where's Jane?"

"Don't worry about her," Hamilton said. "We will take good care of her."

"Mitch," Patrick said, panic in his voice, "you promised me a favor. You know what I want in return."

Mitch didn't acknowledge him as the men pushed him up onto the board.

Patrick looked down to the dark sea. There was no raft; just an ocean that appeared black as pitch from up close and shimmering blue from far away. He walked to the edge of the board, and looked up to the sky. A single cloud was drifting over the moon and darkness descended briefly before passing and the light came back over him.

The board was pulled out from underneath him, and he fell.

The first thing Patrick noticed about being in the ocean at night was the beauty of the moon through the water. It appeared wavy and white and perfectly spherical. Its rays broke through the water and lit up everything around him for a few feet; blackness beyond that.

He swam to the surface, treading water, and looked up to the ship. Mitch was the only one still remaining. He disappeared from view a few moments and then came back and threw down a rubber box.

"Good luck, mate."

The box was a raft and Patrick pulled the cord and it began to inflate on its own. When it had stopped inflating he climbed onboard and lay on his back. The raft was maybe three feet by six feet; enough for one person. There were no rations, no cover from sun, no water.

He began to drift on the small waves away from the ship and he watched as it shrunk into the distance. Before he had even caught his breath from the fall, it was gone.

There was no oar and he began to paddle east, back toward shore, with his hands. He was no match for the current and the raft hardly moved. He took off his shoes, lying flat on his stomach and scooting back until his legs were in the water. Kicking the water, he felt like one of those old GI Joe dolls with the flippers that children would put in bathtubs; watching as they helplessly flailed for five or ten seconds and then sputtered out.

He climbed back into the raft, out of breath and with his legs burning. He knew he had to get out of his wet clothes and he stripped them off and laid them as flat as possible. The moonlight made his skin appear whiter than it was; like smooth alabaster. Gooseflesh covered him and he ran his hands along his body, trying to warm it.

But the night wasn't cold and there was no breeze. Civilization had been stripped from him; his only link to it a piece of rubber holding him above the water. Nude and under the moon, adrift at sea, he felt utterly and completely alone.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sleep was nearly impossible, but Patrick had managed to doze off a few times throughout the night. He would hear splashing nearby and jump up, look around him, and then lay back down.

He tried desperately not to think about what was out here and attempted to fill his head with memories of old girlfriends and football games and speculations about what his old army buddies were up to now.

When the sun finally came, it came with vengeful force. The sunrise made the sky look like it had been lit on fire. The clouds were a soft red and the water seemed to absorb the color of the sky. On the horizon, it was difficult to tell where

the sea ended and the heavens began.

It only took a couple of hours for Patrick to have to dip into the sea to cool off. The sun scorched him from head to toe and parts of the raft would grow so hot he thought they would melt. He had to constantly dump water over himself and the raft and though annoying at first, it gave him purpose and occupied his mind.

He took his shirt and wrapped it around his head, then leaned back onto the raft and closed his eyes.

Ignacio came to the docks and watched the small vessel as the three men ran through a safety check. It was something done for his benefit, to assure him that they were professionals. But when no one was watching, such things never took place.

Hector came next to him. "It is a little small."

"It's perfect."

"They loaded all the dynamite that you wanted, Jefe."

"Good. Make sure they have everything that we need."

"We?"

"I'm going with them."

"Why? There's no reason. You have never even fished."

"I worked for some time on a boat when I was younger. I'll be fine."

"This is not a good idea. We need you here. What am I to do if Nico calls looking for you?"

"Tell him I'm unavailable. He won't ask anything after that."

Hector shook his head. "Why do you want to go?"

"I don't know."

"That is a stupid reason."

"Remember your place, Hector."

"I meant no disrespect, Jefe. I was nothing before you found me. I have nothing but love in my heart for you. That is why I do not want you to throw your life away for no reason."

"I didn't say *no* reason. I just said I didn't know what the reason was." He slapped his shoulder. "You need to get more fun out of life, Hector. Doing things randomly is the best way to do that."

"Then I'm coming too."

"No, you're not. The city could not spare to lose both of us at once."

Hector snorted. "You think too much of me."

"I trust you, Hector. I do not trust many people."

He nodded.

Ignacio looked over the ship one more time. "I need to pack. Tell the men not to leave until I get here."

"Sí, Jefe. Que tenga suerte."

Mitch ran into Jane's cabin early in the morning and shut the door behind him. She looked up from bed, thinking it was Patrick, and saw him standing before her.

She wrapped the sheets around her and sat up. "What are you doing here?"

"Where's the key?"

"To what?"

"The room, Jane. This is an emergency; we don't have a lot of time. Please, where's the key?"

"You're scaring me."

"I'm not the one you need to be scared of. Now where is it?"

She was silent a moment, looking at him. He was out of breath, like he had run here, and he looked like he hadn't slept last night. "On the table by the television."

He grabbed the key and went to the small kitchen and checked the fridge. There were several packages of frozen dinners, fruit, some Chilean soup and wrapped fish and shrimp; enough for her to eat for three or four days.

"You're confined to your cabin, Jane. Don't come out for anything. I'll be back in a couple of days with more food."

"What? What are you talking about? Where's Patrick?"

"Don't come out for anything," he said, going to the door.

"Mitch what the hell is going on?"

He opened the door and looked back to her. "Patrick isn't here anymore. You're the only woman on a ship full of men who think they can do whatever they want because they will never see you again. You just do as I say and don't question me. I have the key, so don't open the door for anyone else. No matter what they say."

He shut the door behind him and locked it as Jane hopped out of bed and ran over. She began pounding on the door and screaming but it was muffled and Mitch looked both directions down the corridor.

He ran his fingers through his hair and exhaled in relief. He was valuable to Hamilton; but the man was unpredictable and—something he only recently learned—probably a sociopath. No matter how valuable, he wasn't sure he would survive if he displeased him.

The key went into his pocket and he walked away, the pounding on the door fading and disappearing as he climbed the ladder to the main deck.

Patrick had been sleeping on and off throughout the day but he was more tired than ever. He felt like sweat had drained his body of its moisture and he could see the early signs of dehydration, though he hadn't even been out a day.

His first concern was water but he knew he was helpless to do anything about it. Sea water was so dense from salt that a few glasses would dehydrate you and a few more could cause kidney failure.

This wasn't the first time he had been alone on the ocean. When he was a boy, they had taken a vacation to California near Santa Monica. Andrew had gone out wake boarding and flew off his board, smashing hard into the ocean and knocking himself unconscious.

Patrick rushed to him without thinking. He hadn't planned on swimming and had eaten two slices of pizza and a large coke. He felt bloated and slow, but he made it to his brother and took him in his arms.

As if he had fallen off a cliff, he felt the sensation of lightness and a powerful force against his body that flung him away from shore. He had been caught in a current, and it was pulling him out to the open sea.

The current dragged him under the surface and he held tightly to Andrew so as not to lose him. He kicked until his legs gave out but it didn't cause him to move. He could see the surface light growing dimmer as he went farther under.

Then it felt as if he had fallen out of a funnel into another world. The current released him and below he saw several blue sharks swimming in slow circles. Wrapping one arm around Andrew's waist he pulled up with the other and reached the surface, gagging and coughing.

He was alone and didn't see the beach and rather than panic, calmness came over him. Acceptance. He held Andrew tighter, and simply watched the sky.

They got out almost a quarter mile before some Japanese tourists in a boat spotted them and picked them up. But he remembered that feeling of helplessness before the ocean and it had never left him.

He checked his wounds and saw that his shoulder had scabbed over but his belly looked red and irritated. It was getting infected. He touched it and burning pain rang through him.

Patrick dipped his shirt into the sea and wrapped it around his head again.

Ignacio sat at the stern of the boat. There were two fishing stations set up but he was in a deck chair that was bolted near the ship's transom. Bits of foam would spit over his arms and bare legs and it felt like raindrops against his warm skin.

There had been three men but Ignacio had taken one of their places, though he still paid him for the full trip. The other two were older fisherman with weathered faces and scarred hands from a life at sea.

His father had been such a man. A man that believed hard work was all one needed to get by in life. He worked in one of the factories that Western companies had built because of the cheap labor in the country.

His father had worked so hard for so long that his body gave out and he collapsed one day at the age of fifty-one and never got up again. Hard work, Ignacio decided, was to be used sparingly. It was something the ruling classes told the lower classes to make them believe that they too could one day become the ruling class, but his father had never seen enough money to own more than one pair of shoes his entire life.

The fishermen began throwing animal entrails off the side of the boat and were already drunk, though only the smell of their breath gave them away. They had brought with them a few harpoons but they seemed as something from the past century; wooden shafts with razor-sharp steel tips. Their plan was to drag the squid to the surface and then puncture its brain.

They had told him stories of giant squid they had killed. Red ones and white ones and purple and black. They said that they were shy creatures who would avoid men at all costs but they were seeing many of them now.

"It will come soon," one of them said as he sat on the transom with a beer. "It will wait until we are away from shore and other boats and then it will come."

"How many of these have you killed?" Ignacio asked.

"Many. Hundreds perhaps."

"In the West they did not believe that such things existed until recently. I don't think they would believe that you have killed so many."

"They can believe what they want to believe. My family still eats."

"My father told me stories about these animals. He said that they are possessed by demons."

The man shrugged as he took a sip of beer. "Who knows? Maybe they are. There are stories of them taking men in the night near the beach. They have had shacks built right on the sand. This was a long time ago in the time of my grandfathers. But they had shacks and there are stories of them coming close to the beach and stealing men out of open windows."

"Do you believe those stories?"

"I have seen one act that it was dead when it was caught in a net. When we cut it out it attacked us and then slipped back into the sea. They are not like other animals. They are very smart."

"Do you believe they—"

The radio crackled from the boat's control center on the upper deck. Ignacio stood and climbed up the short ladder to the upper deck, which was nothing more than a place for a man to stand with a wheel, radio, throttle, and a few other devices. He picked up the radio and listened.

"What is it?" the fisherman shouted.

"A distress call. Turn the boat north."



Another night spent on the ocean, but the night was not as bad as the day. It was the sun that was going to kill him, Patrick knew. Floating on the largest body of water on earth with some of the deadliest predators in the world swimming underneath him and sunlight was going to be his death.

But the night had brought its own dangers. Predators mostly fed at night and at one point he felt pressure underneath the raft from something swimming close by.

The sun had only been up for what he guessed was an hour but the heat had returned. He climbed over the side of the raft and into the cool water, hanging on with one arm.

There was splashing nearby. He turned to see a gray-brown fin coming toward him.

“Shit!”

He climbed back into the raft as the fin went below the surface. He sat motionless, searching the water around him. His raft began to move.

It twirled clockwise and he felt a bulge underneath. Instinctively he pounded his fist against it and it disappeared.

The fin appeared again a few feet away and he could see the full girth of the animal. It was a smaller shark of about four feet, its eye exploring the strange item in its realm. It came close to the raft again and Patrick yelled and bashed its snout as it approached for an exploratory bite.

The shark thrashed to the side and darted away but its rough skin scraped the side of the raft.

Eric sat back, his heart in his throat, and laughed.

Never in his wildest dreams did he think he would have to fight off a shark from a raft. If someone had asked him a few weeks ago where he would be now he would've said on a beach with a hot chica next to him, sipping margaritas and sleeping most of the day; going out to bars and clubs and beach parties at night. Life, it seemed, did have a sense of humor.

Something caught his attention; a sound. It was a slow hiss coming from the raft. He leaned over and examined the outer edge. A small puncture appeared where the shark had scraped.

He put his hand over the hole and pressed tightly but he could feel the escaping air against his skin. He tried pressing his wet shirt to it, but it was no use.

The raft was deflating.

Mitch stood by the railing of the ship and looked out over the sea. Last night there was a measure of excitement onboard as one of the fishermen pulled something to the surface but it turned out to be the carcass of a dolphin that had drowned in their nets.

He looked up to the control center and could see Hamilton and Christopher speaking with Hamilton's second, who really acted as the captain, second mate, and navigator as Hamilton had never sailed a ship in his life.

Mitch had spent the morning dealing with panicked crew members. They no longer wanted to be here, even for the money. They figured there would be other voyages that paid as much but that were less dangerous.

Mitch walked to the control center. He sat on a chair against the wall and waited until Hamilton was done speaking to his second. Christopher looked to him and walked over.

"What is it?"

"I need to speak to Taylor."

"About what?"

"About the men that are missing."

"How many?"

Four over the past three days. One of the men said he heard screaming coming from a cabin last night and when he ran over the room was empty but the port window was open."

"These people are lazy. They probably just hopped on some lifeboats and went back to shore to spend their money on hookers and booze."

"I checked the lifeboats. They're all there."

Christopher looked over to Hamilton who was busy discussing the day's navigation. He wanted to go to a small island near the coast of Peru but his second was telling him that was a bad idea because of all the hidden coral near the island. More than one ship, even ships as large as these according to him, were sunk on those corals.

"Well something happened to them," Christopher said. "Maybe they brought their own rafts and took off?"

"In the middle of the ocean? And why would they take off separately?"

"Fuck, I don't know. These people are a mystery to me. They want work desperately and then when they get it they act like they're doing you a favor." He glanced once more to Hamilton and then said, "I don't want you to tell him about this."

"Why not?"

"Because first off it wouldn't matter; he's getting this squid no matter what. But more importantly, he'll want to go back to shore and get more men. That means more time for us out here on this fucking ship. Let him have his fun for a few more days and when the workers have had enough and are close to mutiny we'll head back."

"That's mad. We both know what this is."

"I just told you what it was. What you're thinking is impossible. They don't get big enough to pull men out of windows."

He stood up. "We're being hunted. That means you too, little Chrissy." He turned to walk out and said, "May want to keep any windows closed at night, mate."

The raft had deflated to the point that it was submerged. Patrick still had his feet in it though the water was up to his chest. The ocean was calm but his abdomen stabbed at him with every movement and because he had to keep moving, it had started to bleed.

He saw the small clouds of red come up to his chest and tried tying his shirt around the wound but the blood still seeped out into the sea.

A flock of birds that he couldn't identify were dipping into the water some thirty feet away and they would come up with bits of flesh in their mouths.

The raft finally became nothing more than a hindrance as it tied up his legs and prevented him from kicking. He let it go, and watched as it came to the surface and drifted away.

He was closer now to where the birds were dipping and saw a black mass floating on the water. He thought it was an upturned boat at first and he began to stroke toward it.

That's when he saw the first fin.

It was larger than the one that had scraped the raft, but more cautious. It circled around him slowly and then sped away in the opposite direction; only to appear in front of him again.

Patrick kept his strokes as light as possible; smoothly entering the water with one arm and then lifting it slowly as the other arm slipped in. He didn't kick and tried to keep his breathing steady.

As he approached the boat, he saw the glistening skin and white ragged flesh that floated in the water. It wasn't a boat; it was an animal.

He stopped and nearly swam the other way, but saw that it wasn't moving. The birds were tearing at the flesh and would come away with small pieces and swallow them whole. Some of them were sitting on it and tearing into it with their sharp beaks but it didn't move.

It was massive; easily larger than a city bus. Patrick could see the torn belly and the open mouth with the foot-long conical teeth: a sperm whale.

Its tongue had been ripped out and all the organs were gone, but its general shape remained. He saw that the birds had eaten out the eyes.

The carcass appeared solid and, choking back his repulsion, he swam to it.

It smelled like rotted fish and he breathed through his mouth as he swam past the head and to the torso. He reached out and touched it with one hand. It was spongy and then solid; like Twinkies covering stone. Patrick reached up with both hands and dug into the hide. He was trying to pull himself up when he felt the scraping behind him.

He screamed as the shark rubbed its denticles across his back, testing to see what he was. It swam out about twenty feet and then turned around, its fin slicing through the water as it came to him. Determined that he was made of something edible, it opened its mouth.

Patrick swung his leg up but he couldn't get a good grip with his hands. He swam up the carcass and grabbed the vacant hole where the whale's eye had been and used it for leverage to swing his legs out of the water.

The shark jerked away from him and bit into the whale, its eyes rolling back in its head and revealing the thin white membrane used as a shield when it fed. It swung its head from side-to-side and came away with a mouthful of hide and fat.

Patrick pulled himself up, his abdomen burning and leaking blood over him and down the whale's hide into the water. He lay on his back, the sun baking his already sunburnt skin, and kicked at one of the birds that came over to investigate.

The infection was causing a fever and sweats; except that he had no moisture to leak onto his skin. He turned to one side and looked into the water. The shark had come back for another bite and Patrick could feel the vibrations as it tore away some more of the whale.

Mitch put his ear to the door of Jane's cabin and listened. There were no sounds and he guessed she was asleep. Quietly, he put the key into the door and unlocked it. He twisted the handle and stepped inside.

There was pain and he went deaf as something shattered against his head. He fell to the floor as Jane dropped the remaining part of the lamp and ran out the door.

"Jane," he yelled.

She ran up the corridor to the ladder and bolted up the steps. Mitch stepped out of the room, rubbing the side of his head, his hand coming away with blood.

He ran to the ladder and up to the main deck. The sun was bright and it blinded him a moment before his eyes adjusted.

He saw Jane running for the control center.

He chased after her but it was too late. She had made it in.

"Ah, Jane," Hamilton said, "so good of you to appear. I was wondering where you had disappeared to."

"Mitch," she said out of breath, "he locked me in my room and wouldn't let me out."

"Oh?" he said, looking over to Mitch as he stepped into the control center. "Well that is troubling; troubling indeed. Well sweet girl, we'll take care of you."

Christopher was sitting in a chair by the door. He stood up.

"Christopher, be a dear and take Jane down to my quarters. I will be down shortly to ensure she is all right."

"I don't want to go to your quarters. I want to speak to Patrick," she said.

"I'm afraid that's not possible my dear. Patrick has left us, you see. He decided he didn't want to be part of our little venture and took one of the lifeboats and went back to shore. We'll drop you off there soon but for now I'm afraid you'll be unable to contact him."

"What? Why would he do that?"

"The ocean is not for everyone. It can get to some people. Get underneath their skin and make them do things they wouldn't normally do. Like abandoning such a beautiful creature as yourself."

Christopher took her gently by the arm. "Come on, let's go."

"No," she said, pulling away, "I'm not going anywhere."

Christopher leaned in close and whispered, "He's dangerous, just come with me now and we'll figure out what to do."

Mitch watched as she was dragged out of the cabin in shock at what was happening. She had been kidnapped once already by Chileans, now by Americans. It was too much for her.

"I don't appreciate you doing that, Professor," Hamilton said, riding up to Mitch.

Mitch stared at his beady eyes and the black sacks under them. The man was certainly dying and had the stink of death on him. Mitch thought it suited him well.

"What can I say? I wanted her all to myself."

Hamilton considered him, and his face lightened. "Well that I can understand. But *you* must understand that everything on this ship is mine. Including her. If you wanted her you should've asked me."

"Will do next time, Cap." Mitch looked out the door to see if anyone was near. "Mm, there is one more thing."

"What?"

He considered what Christopher had said. If it was true they would go back to land that would be his chance to grab Jane and get off this ship.

"The men that have been disappearing."

"Oh, that. Yes, I have been kept up to date on that. What of it?"

"You know there was another disappearance last night?"

"Nothing happens on this ship without my knowledge. Now what of it?"

"Don't you think it would be prudent to go back to shore and get more men?"

"Nonsense. We can certainly handle an oversized appetizer. The men have no doubt fled anyhow. It's what I get for paying them their wages up front. But I was informed they would not work otherwise."

"This isn't laziness."

Hamilton waved him away and turned back to his second.

Mitch stood there amazed. The old man was delusional. He had denied it to himself from the moment he met Hamilton, but there was no denying it now.

He left the control center and went down to the engine room. Next to the engine room was a locked storage used as an armory. There was a thick padlock, but he had been given the combination to store several harpoon guns and some of the explosive devices Hamilton insisted on bringing.

He put in the combination and opened the door, shutting it behind him.

There were rows of semi-automatic rifles, ammunition, low-grade explosives, and harpoon guns lining the walls and

stacked on the floor. It appeared like the armory of some small rebel army.

Mitch grabbed a pistol and found a box of ammunition. He rummaged through the room until he found the other box he was looking for. It was no bigger than a laptop but contained a dozen bottles of ketamine tranquilizer. He found the tranquilizer gun and slung it over his shoulder at the strap before leaving the room and locking it again.

Patrick couldn't open his eyes any longer as the sun made his retinas ache. His infection had spread over abdomen and chest and he found himself vomiting, though nothing would come up.

Thirst had taken control of him and he reached down into the putrid water next to the whale last night and taken in handfuls. They made him feel better a few hours and then tortured him after that. His sides ached and his stomach was convulsing. He had started to hallucinate and heard voices in the sea.

Last night he hadn't slept at all as sharks had come in droves, biting off enormous lumps of flesh and splashing water onto him as they writhed and jerked. At first it filled him with horror, the sounds of hide and fat and tissue torn away. But he grew accustomed to it enough that he could tune it out.

But he couldn't ignore the sun any longer. He reached down off the side of the whale to drink some more water and saw the black empty eyes of an oceanic white tip as it spun around in a frenzy, lashing out at anything nearby. It spotted his arm in the water and rushed for it.

A shot rang through the air and then another and another. The white tip was hit in the dorsal fin and body and it darted into the depths in pain.

Patrick could see an outline near him and hear rumbling in the water. He felt vibrations in his back. He closed his eyes and rolled over, too weak to even hold his head up.

The boat came to a stop next to the carcass and Ignacio had the fisherman shoot one of the larger sharks that was feeding. The other sharks, confused and in a frenzy, began to lash out at each other and then disappeared into the depths.

One of the fishermen hopped onto the carcass and lifted Patrick up to Ignacio who pulled him onto the boat.

Patrick felt sensations against his skin and then motion. Someone reached down and lifted his head, their face near his. "It is all right. You will live."

\*\*\*\*\*

Patrick awoke, enveloped in the soft sheets of a hospital bed. There was an open window letting in the afternoon breeze and he could hear voices in the hall. A nurse was tending to a patient in the other bed and she noticed he was awake.

She began to speak to him in Spanish but his throat hurt so bad he couldn't speak back. There was an IV connected to his arm and liquids dripped from three separate bags into the lines.

The nurse poured him some water from a cup and he drank it, the water stinging his throat on the way down.

He lay back and closed his eyes again, falling quickly to sleep.

Rodrigo Gonzalez packed the items in his cabin as he finished a cold beer. He had heard what had happened to his friend and he was disgusted that he hadn't put a bullet into the old man's head the day he found out.

But it was too late now and it would do nothing to bring Patrick back. He would go to shore and his boat and come out here and search for him. It had been three days since he had been dropped into the sea. Rodrigo had been informed by some of the other workers that he had taken a lifeboat and left on his own, so he left it alone. He knew Patrick well and it seemed like something he would do.

It was only recently that Christopher had told him what had actually happened. When he confronted Christopher about it, all he said was, "That's life, Rodrigo. Friends come and go."

But that was not life. Not the life Rodrigo knew. He had no family other than a drunken brother living on the streets of Mexico somewhere. Friends were all he knew.

He looked over his cabin to make sure he hadn't missed anything. The last bottle of beer called to him and he popped it open and guzzled half of it, throwing the rest out of the porthole in the wall.

Rodrigo went out into the corridor and up two ladders. He stopped at the mess hall and gathered a few items out of the fridge there; bread and sliced meat and cheese with boxes of cereal and crackers and a case of bottled water.

He carried everything up the ladder to the main deck and went to the lifeboats. He opened one and placed the items inside before heading back down for another case of water.

After he had made three trips, he was satisfied he had enough for a month. It would take him two days to get back to shore, but why risk it?

He peered into the lifeboat and was impressed. It came with navigation equipment, a radio, a rifle mounted on one of the walls, and a GPS locator.

He stepped back and considered how one was to get it into the water, when he heard a scream from the other side of the ship.

Rodrigo quietly listened to make sure it wasn't something he'd just heard in his head and there was another scream and a man's voice crying for help. He sprinted in the direction of the voice. It was coming from the starboard side of the ship near the stern.

He got near to the voice, and froze in his tracks.

The man was in his boxers, halfway out of his porthole in a cabin. The porthole wasn't large and the man was being pulled through by a copious red tentacle wrapped around his legs; the tentacle coming out of the sea, as thick as a horse.

The man was screaming as his flesh scraped off against the metal of the porthole. He came through, both arms seemingly broken, and plopped onto the deck, passed out from the pain.

Rodrigo saw a fire extinguisher and an axe hanging up nearby and broke the glass with his elbow and got the axe as the tentacle easily lifted the man into the air.

He ran to him, screaming, and slammed the axe down with all of his weight against the tentacle.

The flesh split open but was too thick to sever. Blood began to spit over the deck. There was a sound then unlike anything Rodrigo had ever heard in his life. It shook the very ship and the deck below his feet and deafened him. It was a roar.

The ocean foamed as something massive rose from beneath. Rodrigo didn't wait to see what it was.

He lifted the man off the deck and put him on his powerful shoulders. He sprinted back toward the bow, looking for any way into the ship, shouting for help. He got all the way to the lifeboats before one of the creature's legs whipped out in front of him. It bashed into the metal of the ship, narrowly missing him, and the metal groaned and bent inward.

Rodrigo ducked under the leg and kept running, the weight of the man beginning to make his legs burn.

Another leg shot out in front of him and one behind. They swept toward him together. He jumped over the one in front of him but the one behind him caught his calves and wrapped themselves around like a boa constrictor.

It flung him upside down and the man fell from his grasp onto the deck. There were other voices now and gunfire coming from the deck as Rodrigo was pulled over the ocean.

The moonlight illuminated a glowing red mass and it seemed to go on forever. There was another roar but this one sounded like a shrieking monkey, and as Rodrigo was lowered he saw the black pit of the mouth and the sharp edges of the beak.

Another leg wrapped around his upper torso and they twisted in opposite directions, splitting him in half, his organs spilling out into the sea before his corpse was lowered into the mouth and swallowed.

The men on the ship began firing shot after shot, yelling for the explosives as several legs blasted out of the deep and wrapped around sections of the ship. The antenna above the control center was crushed and one of the railings were ripped out of the deck and flung into the sea.

The ship tilted to the side as the creature pulled down and two of the men lost their balance and fell into the black water screaming.

The rest of the men scattered and ran to the entrance leading below deck, covering as another roar shook the ship.



Patrick awoke from a deep sleep and found Ignacio sitting next to him reading a leather-bound edition of Moby Dick.

"Are you getting inspired?" he whispered, his voice metallic from a raw throat.

"It's my favorite book when I was a boy. I would read it on the fishing boats I worked and dream of adventures away from the ghettos I lived in."

"You saved my life."

"That's, how you say, three you owe me."

"How did you even find me?"

"We received a distress call with your coordinates. At least the last coordinates where your ship saw you. It took us more than a day to find you."

"Who sent the call?"

"I don't know. It was a male voice. Someone on the ship was still your friend."

Ignacio rose and lifted the sheet, looking at his belly. "It looks much better. They filled you with antibiotics for two days."

"I've been here two days?"

Ignacio nodded. "You're lucky, my friend. One of my favorite American expressions is: I hate to say I told you so. But I told you so."

Patrick chuckled. "Don't make me laugh. It hurts too much." A thought suddenly pounded in Patrick's head. *Jane*.

"I need to get out of here."

He tried to rise and Ignacio pushed him back down. "You're not ready yet."

"I need to get back on that ship."

"Why? What happened there?"

He explained, but Ignacio didn't react. He appeared passive, a slight smirk on his lips as if he was expecting exactly that.

"I will send the police," Ignacio said. "We have a unit equivalent to your Coast Guard."

"Do you know where they are?"

"No, but we will find them."

Patrick shook his head. "I can't just lay here while she's on that ship because of me. I'm going too."

He sat up, pain rocketing from his head to his feet. He swung his legs around the hospital bed and then remembered he didn't have any clothes.

"I would appreciate if you could loan me some clothes."

"You're in no state to be searching the ocean by yourself. I will take you."

The roar woke Mitch from his sleep, a sound from his nightmares. He jumped from his bed and looked out the porthole. He couldn't see anything but he heard the footfalls down the corridors.

As if hit by a speeding truck, he felt his body fly through the air and slam into the wall as the ship was rocked to its side. It hovered at an angle for a few seconds and then a deafening groan filled the air as the ship swung back into a horizontal position.

Another roar. It seemed to shake the metal beams and the walls and the floors.

Mitch got up and ran to the chest next to his bed. He got out his pistol and loaded it before grabbing the tranquilizer gun and loading a bottle of ketamine inside. He placed the strap around him and threw on his boots before running out of his cabin.

There were men running down both ends of the corridor. Some were ducking into rooms and a couple ran into a storage room. A few jumped down the ladder leading farther below in the ship.

"What's going on? Lo que está pasando?"

None of the men replied. He ran toward the ladder and went up to the mid deck. It was empty. As he reached the top step something pounded the ship as if it had hit a mountain and he had to grip the ladder with both hands as he nearly flew off. His feet were dangling as the ship tilted to the side and then fell back.

He ran down the corridor and to the top deck. His mind was racing but he figured that they must've hit coral or land, the second falling asleep at the wheel as he had done before.

When he got to the top deck and into the night air, he saw a ship that looked like it had gone through a war.

The control center was torn in half, jagged hunks of metal strewn over the deck. The lifeboats had been smashed and the railing ripped away from half the ship.

He turned, and saw a vision that made his heart stop.

Its legs and tentacles were wrapped around the metal frame as if it were crushing life from it and even in the night Mitch could see the lone circular eye, glowing yellow in the moonlight.

It was nearly a quarter the size of the ship, with legs as long as soccer-fields. It reached out with one and grabbed a fishing station, crushing the chair to bits and ripping out the bolts as it lifted it in the air. It placed the metal into its mouth and pulverized it to nothing.

The tranquilizer would be no use. He needed to get to the armory. He sprinted for the entrance below deck and the creature spotted the movement and turned toward it. It lashed out with a tentacle and Mitch dived into the entrance as the tentacle crashed into the door, knocking it off its hinges. He got to his feet and dashed for the ladder and jumped in headfirst, narrowly missing the tentacle as it went overhead.

He ran for the armory and saw Christopher coming out of Hamilton's room. He looked ashen white, and as frightened as a little boy. Jane pushed her way past him into the corridor.

"What the fuck is going on?" Christopher said.

Mitch froze and stood silently.

"Mitch what the fuck is going on?"

Mitch's eyes were wide and his mouth opened, but no words came. The tentacle had come between his legs and he looked down and didn't move.

It went past him, searching the corridor, and Christopher jumped back into the cabin as Jane screamed and he grabbed her and pulled her in.

Mitch held his breath.

The tentacle searched the grates of the corridors and ran along the walls. It was glistening and would leave a trail of clear slime as it slithered around and finally it began to retract.

It was nearly through his legs when Mitch felt a single drop of sweat roll down his forehead and to the tip of his nose. He reached for it but it was too late; it rolled off his nose and through the air.

He saw it silently drip onto the edge of the tentacle, and it stopped moving.

Mitch decided he had to run. He looked down the corridor and he lifted one foot into the air to begin a sprint but the tentacle rose in between his legs. He screamed as he was lifted into the air and in a motion almost too fast to see, the tentacle retracted through the opening and was gone, the screaming fading into the distance before being abruptly cut off.

Patrick sat in a deckchair, sipping soup at Ignacio's insistence. The wind was in his face and the sea air was both comforting and revolting at once. He was taken back to the darkness spent on a lump of flesh in the sea, the ocean's ancient predators around him feasting, their black eyes spying him suspiciously as they gorged themselves on flesh.

"We've gotten word," Ignacio said as he came and sat next to him. "There was a distress call sent two hours ago. The ship is three-miles to the northwest. We should be there shortly."

"What was the distress call about?"

"They don't know. It was ended before they could investigate."

Patrick glanced up to the man steering the ship. "Did you call the police?"

"Yes, they are meeting us there."

They sat in silence a long time and after an hour or so Patrick fell asleep. He dreamed of violence and pain, sounds in the dark around him. Movement, splashing, feeding and grunts.

\*\*\*\*\*

Patrick awoke with a start. He pulled away and reached back. Something was grabbing him at the shoulder.

He felt the softness of Ignacio's hand and looked up at him, confused as to where he was and what he was doing. It was the pain that brought it all back. Pain had the ability to remind one that reality is actually real.

"We're here," Ignacio said softly.

Patrick looked out to a ship that had been devastated, smoking mounds of metal and iron and wood where once there were cabins and decks and stations. The ship looked abandoned and casually bobbed up and down with the moderate waves that churned the surface of the ocean.

Ignacio ordered the boat nearer, to a ladder that was jutting out of the ship's stern. They turned off the engines as they neared and the boat softly glided in and collided gently against the ship, settling against it.

Ignacio reached up and grabbed the first rung of the ladder.

"The police are on their way," he said. "You should wait here for their arrival."

"No. I need to see what happened."

Ignacio got him to his feet and then let him climb first. The ladder went up fifteen feet and it took them much longer than it should have to scale it.

When he reached the deck, they stood and surveyed the ship. The deck was utterly destroyed. The harpoon canon, one of the fishing stations, the A-frame with the submersible, and the entrance leading below deck were the only things left standing.

"What the hell happened here?" Patrick asked.

"I don't know. I've never seen anything like this."

They walked to the entrance leading below deck. Patrick began to go down and Ignacio held his arm and said, "Wait."

He ran back to the edge of the ship and had the captain throw up a rifle. Ignacio returned to Patrick and they went down together.

Below deck was dark and there was an inch of water on the floor. That meant there was a leak somewhere or someone had damaged one of the water tanks. The lights were off but the red lighting spawned by the emergency generator had lit up the mid deck in a soft, crimson glow.

Ignacio shouted to see if anyone would respond but it stayed quiet. Patrick made his way to the mess hall and looked in but it was empty. He walked to Jane's room and the door was open. They went inside and checked the small closet and underneath the bed but nothing was there.

They continued searching the rest of the mid deck. At the end of the corridor was Hamilton's room. The doors were locked and Patrick tried to open it but it was jammed shut.

"Let me."

Ignacio stepped back and fired at the lock on the door. The round ricocheted off the lock and hit the ceiling before lodging into the wall. Ignacio shrugged.

"I have a better idea," Patrick said.

He took the rifle and began to bash the lock with the butt. The first and second and third hits did nothing but mark up the steel. But the fourth bent the lock and the fifth and sixth bent it further. The final blow broke the lock at the weakest point and Patrick pushed the door open and they entered.

Ignacio looked around and said, "There's nothing he—"

Patrick suddenly went deaf; a ringing in his ears as he saw Ignacio fly through the air and land on his back.

Hamilton sat in the corner of the room with the shotgun; white and trembling. His face was contorted in terror and he pointed the shotgun at Patrick.

Patrick jumped behind an overturned table and the blast filled the wall behind him with small holes from the pellets.

Another blast ripped through the table and Patrick crawled away, against the wall, as splinters of wood rained over him.

"I know about Iraq," Hamilton bellowed, madness in his voice. "You think I would bring you to my ship without knowing everything about you?"

He fired again, nearer this time, and several pellets hit Patrick's arm and he gritted his teeth from the pain.

"You're a killer, just like me. You and I are the same."

Another shot boomed through the space and tore away a giant chunk of the table. Patrick dove from behind the table and grabbed Ignacio under the arm. He dragged him out of the room as another blast hit the inside of the door, jarring it shut.

Patrick turned to Ignacio, prepared to see the cold hand of death gently brush past his eyes, leaving the blank stare that he had seen so much in his life. The stare that occasionally the living seemed to absorb if exposed to death too much too quickly.

Ignacio coughed. Veins stuck out of his neck as he sat up, his shirt torn and black with powder residue. He ripped it open, exposing a thick Kevlar vest underneath. He tore off the vest and let it fall to the floor as he tried to get his breath back.

Patrick collapsed against the wall, exhaustion and pain infecting every muscle. He held tightly to his abdomen that was throbbing as if cut all over again.

"I thought you were dead."

"I have had better men than him try and kill me." Ignacio sat up and took a deep breath, caressing the purple bruises over his chest.

"He's still in there."

"I doubt there is much damage he could do now."

They heard muffled voices nearby. They were coming from underneath the metal grating of the floor.

Patrick helped Ignacio to his feet and they ran out the corridor and saw Jane climbing the ladder, Christopher behind her, a pistol held in his hand.

"Jane!"

Christopher turned, and their eyes locked. Before he could react Patrick had the rifle up into firing position and pulled the trigger.

"No!" Jane screamed.

The round entered into his flesh like a sharp knife into warm bread and exited just as smoothly. Christopher was flung into a wall and slid down, the pistol falling limply by his side. Patrick ran over.

"No," Jane said again, "what are you doing?"

"Move, Jane."

"No. He helped me. He's the only reason I'm still alive. He helped you too. He called in where you were when they threw you overboard."

Patrick looked down to his friend. Blood was beginning to seep from the wound in his shoulder. Without thinking, Patrick bent down and took off his shirt and pressed it to the wound.

"I thought—"

"Not in a million years," Christopher said. "I had to get you dumped overboard. The fucker just would'a shot you if I hadn't."

"I aimed for the acromion. It's painful as hell but not fatal. You'll be fine. We need to get you to a hospital though."

Patrick placed his arms underneath Christopher's body and lifted him, a groan escaping both their lips.

Suddenly Patrick was off his feet and Christopher dropped to the floor with a thud as the ship was rocked sideways. Jane grabbed a railing and held on until the motion stopped as suddenly as it had began.

A thunderous roar shook the ship, followed by a screeching that sounded much like an injured cat.

They looked to each other but didn't say anything. Patrick went to Christopher and had Jane apply pressure to the wound.

Ignacio came over and took a quick look.

"He'll be fine for now."

"Wait for me here," Patrick said.

He bolted up the ladders to the main deck and ran to where the boat was. The space was empty except for barren sea and he ran around the deck, staring at the water, but didn't see any sign of the boat or the captain.

They were trapped.

As Patrick ran to the entrance leading to the deck below, the sea erupted.

Foam sprayed over the ship in a massive wave and Patrick could hear the sound of something rising to the surface. Water flooded the deck and soaked his feet. He turned, and saw two massive white legs flash red as they wrapped around the ship and pulled something up.

The creature was easily twice as large as the whale he had nearly died on. The mouth could swallow a car and the two beaks rimming it like lips appeared sharp as knives. Its eyes were yellow with a black globe in the middle and they appeared dead, until they saw Patrick. Then a covering came down halfway over the eye as the creature roared and pulled itself up farther onto the ship.

Patrick bolted below deck. He sprinted back to where he had left everyone as he heard thumping behind him, legs and tentacles grasping for him in every direction. He could hear metal folding above him; the creature was trying rip into the belly of the ship.

He found Jane tightening Ignacio's shirt around the wound in Christopher's shoulder. Chris was sitting up but sweat was pouring down his forehead and Patrick could tell he was in pain.

"Where are the weapons, Chris?"

Christopher reached into his pocket and came out with a set of keys, handing them over. "One level down. Farthest on the right. I don't think shooting it is gonna do anything."

Patrick ran to the ladder, Ignacio rising and following him. They tried several doors but they were all open. He came to the last one on the right and it was locked. He tried several keys before finding the right one and they stepped inside. He was taken aback for a moment but the feeling quickly passed and they began going through the room.

Ignacio ran his hands along a few of the rifles and looked over the mines. "He has better weapons than my country's army."

Patrick didn't respond as he was busy going through a chest in the corner filled with rifles. He stopped near the bottom and stared at the largest one.

He had found an Accuracy International L115A3 sniper rifle. He had never seen one before as the army rarely used them because of cost. For how big it was, it was incredibly light in his hands and he held it up in front of him and looked down the scope. There was ammunition next to it and he loaded it up.

He rummaged the room further and found what he was looking for: depth charges stacked against the wall. They were large and he could only carry two of them. Ignacio picked up another two and they found the remote detonation device on a shelf.

They ran back and Jane stood as they neared.

"The bleeding's not stopping, Patrick. I need to get him to a hospital."

"There's police on their way. Can you hold on?"

Christopher stood up, his shoulder screaming in pain. "Don't worry about me. How we getting the fuck outta here?"

Patrick looked up the ladder leading above and could hear the ship being ripped apart. "We got these depth charges. Are they enough?"

"I don't know. I don't even know how to use them."

Patrick looked to Ignacio. "We know who does."

\*\*\*\*\*

The door opened with one kick and Patrick swung to the side as Ignacio was on the other. They each held a rifle and waited a moment to see if any blast would come, but nothing did.

"Taylor," Patrick yelled, "you in there?"

There was silence before a meek voice replied, "Yes."

"We want to talk to you. That thing is gonna tear this ship apart. We need your help to get outta here. Do you understand?"

"What do you need?"

"The depth charges. How do you work them?"

"Come in and I'll show you."

He looked to Ignacio. "I'd like to take you at your word but you already tried to kill me twice. Don't think a third time's gonna happen."

"I'm out of ammunition."

Patrick quickly glanced into the room and saw the old man in his chair, the shotgun across his lap. "Put the shotgun down on the floor. Let me know when it's there."

It's there."

He looked in again and saw the gun leaned against his wheelchair. He stepped into the room, the sniper rifle held low and walked to Hamilton, picking up the shotgun and throwing it across the room.

Ignacio lifted the rifle and put it to Hamilton's head.

"No," Patrick said. "We still need him."

"We're going to die here. I think I would like to see him die first."

"Ignacio, put the gun down."

He lowered the rifle, and swung out with the back of his hand across Hamilton's face. A small dribble of blood came down his lip.

"How do you work the depth charges?" Patrick said.

Hamilton wiped at the blood with the back of his hand. "You join them in the middle and twist clockwise. The detonation device turns on automatically when one is armed. You just press the button in the middle. A monkey could do it."

Patrick looked to Ignacio and nodded. They began to leave the room when Hamilton yelled for them to stay.

"There's one more thing," he said, "they have a radius of one hundred and fifty feet. You blow one any closer than that and you'll blow a hole in the ship."

"That thing's on the deck right now."

"Doesn't matter. You can't blow them that close. You have to get it away from the ship."

"How?"

"How the fuck would I know?"

Patrick turned to leave and then stopped. "Where's the little girl?"

"I don't know."

He lifted the rifle. "Where's the girl?"

"Honestly, I don't know. She must still be on the ship somewhere or left on one of the lifeboats."

"Where's all the workers?"

"They jumped in lifeboats. I don't know what happened to them after that. I went to get on one too and they threw me off the cocksuckers."

They turned to leave.

"Wait," Hamilton shouted, "what about me?"

"You can rot here."

They found Jane and Christopher near the ladder. Blood was soaking through Ignacio's shirt but Christopher was acting as if he didn't notice.

"He says we can't blow them near the ship. It's gotta be at least a hundred and fifty feet away."

The ship suddenly lurched to the side, throwing them against the wall. It twisted the other way and then went still. They got to their feet and Patrick looked up the ladder.

"We have to lure it away."

"How?" Ignacio asked.

"The submersible. One of us could take that and lure that thing away from the ship."

"And light the depth charges?" Christopher said. "There's better ways to kill myself."

"I'd be the one going."

"What do you know about piloting a submersible?" Jane said.

"No," Christopher said, "it's actually easy. Taylor was going to pilot it himself so it's made for amateurs. You've piloted choppers, I bet it wouldn't be that much different."

"That's ridiculous. Patrick, you're not doing this."

"If anyone else has a better idea, I'm all ears." He waited for a response but none came. "Okay, I'm gonna go check out the submersible. Stay here."

He slowly climbed up the ladder. He looked down both directions on the upper level but saw nothing. He went down the corridor to the other ladder leading to the main deck and climbed to the top. In front of him, a tentacle was tearing off pieces of metal grating from the floor.

It convulsed and changed size and shape. It could be as thick as a car and then it would seemingly suck inward and become as thin as a pipe.

Patrick went to the far wall, his back pressed against it, making his way toward the main deck. The room was no bigger than fifteen feet and the tentacle was ripping apart the stairs leading up to the control center.

Patrick got to the door and looked outside. He saw the creature, legs digging into steel as if it were soft dirt. It was trying to get inside the ship, the legs whirling around it, grasping anything near with crushing strength.

He leaned back inside and turned to see the tentacle rising in front of his face. He held his breath as the slick flesh went up his leg, over his abdomen and up to his face. The tip went over his face, leaving a trail of transparent slime, sticking over his eyelids. It continued up the wall and over the door and then began coming back down.

Patrick exhaled, dropped the rifle that was around his shoulder, and sprinted. The tentacle lashed out and hit his legs, causing him to fall down the ladder. The metal grates of the floor rushed toward his face and he brought his hands up to protect himself but stopped a few inches above the floor and hovered. Wrapped around his ankle, the tentacle convulsed and the suckers imbedded into his flesh. It began to pull and he slowly rose, dragging against the ladder. He grabbed one of the rungs and wrapped his arm around it, interlocking his fingers. The tentacle felt the resistance and pulled harder. His arm pressed against the metal and turned white and the blood rushed to his face. He began to grunt and shout as the tentacle began to tear the flesh off his legs. The pain shot through his shoulder and back and he was ripped off the ladder and brought up to the main deck. It began to drag him through the door and he clawed the floor, trying to grab anything. The tentacle bashed him into the wall and hauled him toward the door. Patrick saw the sniper rifle on the ground where he'd dropped it and he grabbed it and put the strap around himself as he was taken out the door into the sunlight. The creature pulled and Patrick was flung thirty feet in the air before hitting the deck with a loud thud. The wind was knocked out of him and he felt the sting of a broken or sprained ankle. The tentacle swung back toward him and it had him by the midsection, lifting him into the air. Patrick placed the rifle against his shoulder, feeling his lungs about to burst from the pressure of the creature around his waist. He looked down the scope and fired. The shot caught the side of the ship. He fired again and hit the creature in the mantle. The tentacle rose high in the air, bringing Patrick upright. He aimed, and fired two rounds in succession. Each round hit the black of the eye. The creature groaned in pain and roared. Patrick dropped back to the deck, the rifle flying out of his hands and over the side of the ship into the water. He got up to run and then collapsed; his ankle twisted and useless. The creature was squealing and whipping its legs at anything nearby. Its eye was closed shut, a thin film of blood seeping out of it. Patrick began to crawl. He made it to the door and then inside before the creature could react. Ignacio was there. "No time for the submersible," he said, "we'll have to sink the ship too." He was holding two of the depth charges. Patrick took them. "What are you doing?" "Go back below deck and wait for me." "Are you crazy? You're injured." Ignacio grabbed the depth charges and stepped outside, Patrick yelling at him to stop. He ran about ten feet before seeing the full girth of the monster before him. It had pulled itself out of the water and onto the ship, the massive steel frame bending under its weight and tilting to the side. Its legs seemed to work independently of where it was looking or focusing its attention and he was reminded of medusa; a mind and body with independent serpents. The creature's massive eye turned only slightly, and a leg thrust out and knocked Ignacio to the deck. He stood and was running back when another leg swept underneath him and lifted him high into the air. He screamed as he was brought over the creature, fifty feet above the water, looking down into the black maw as the beak spread open, and bit him in half. Patrick looked away; there was nothing he could do. He took both depth charges and tucked the detonator into his waistband. He crawled back out through the door and began shouting. "Hey! Hey! Over here. Over here!" The creature thrashed out, the tentacle missing Patrick by inches. It wrapped around the structure, the metal bending under its gargantuan strength. Patrick crawled halfway into the structure, leaving only his legs outside, and then shouted again. The creature released the structure and came down over his legs and coiled like a snake. It lifted him upside down and he flew through the air as the tentacle retracted back to the body. Blood in his head, his vision twisted, his legs crushed from the grip of the tentacle, Patrick nearly passed out. He gripped the charges tightly as his vision began to fade. He came over the mantle and saw the gigantic eye and the beak opening wide for its meal. He released the charges as he saw the beak widening, the creature lowering him to his death. Patrick, in his last moment before the blackness took him, pressed the detonator.



Patrick looked to the broken and bloodied body of the large Texan. His men had the side door open and as anger pumped through him like fire, he went and looked inside.

There were two men, huddled in the corner. What Patrick thought looked like their wives were in the other corner, gripping tightly to a small child, terror in their eyes. The major came down and peered in. He pulled on Patrick's shoulder and had him step out of the room.

"Russell, these men are enemy combatants. Get me my information."

"That haji there was a combatant, Major. But I think these are the people that live in the house."

"Don't tell me how to do my fucking job, Russell. I want some information. Now get in there and get it for me." The major pulled out a thick hunting knife. "Get it anyway you can."

He put the knife in Patrick's hand. Patrick stepped through the door, and shut it behind him.

The two women were crying now and the men tried to comfort them with soft words, useless words. These were not combatants. Combatants would have fought him. Patrick looked down to the knife. It gleamed in the dim light of the room and he could see his reflection in it. In a basement a lot like this one, he had been a child in a corner, hiding from his father.

He threw the knife on the floor and turned to leave when the major stepped in.

"I knew you'd do some shit like that, Russell." He stepped close. "I didn't want no snipers on my squad, but they said I had to take you. Why would they say that, Russell? Your daddy pull some strings to get you on my squad or you suck some dicks to be here? Answer me, boy."

Patrick stood at attention, as one always did with superiors that wished to yell at you for a time. He watched a spot on the wall that looked like a grease stain and didn't take his eyes off it.

"I told you to get my information, boy. Are you disobeying a direct order?"

"Sir, no Sir. The captain has determined that these Iraqis have no information, Sir."

"Oh, so you running my missions now?" He stepped nose-to-nose with him. "I told you I want my information. If you can't get it, I will." He reached down and picked the knife up. The major looked to the men and then turned his attention to the women. "Thing about these haji's they can take some pain. But ain't nobody able to watch their woman take some pain. Russell, go get me my real men. Get the fuck outta the house and watch the door."

Patrick didn't move.

"I gave you an order, Captain."

"Sir, the captain has determined these Iraqis have no information, Sir."

"Your ass is mine, Russell! After I get me some pussy."

The major leaned down, the knife gleaming like a lightbulb. He grabbed one of the women by the arm.

Patrick looked to the door and then back to the major. He was forcing the woman onto her back.

"Shit."

He ran to the major and kicked him in the jaw. The major flew to his side, the knife up in a defensive position. He was on his feet in a second and swung with the knife. Patrick tackled him and pulled the knife away, lifting it high in the air and bashing the hilt down into the major's nose.

Blood began to pour and he bashed with the hilt again and again until the major was unconscious.

The door opened and several soldiers came through, in shock at the scene.

"Private Mendez," Patrick said, "call the MP's and get—"

Shots rang in the air. Patrick jumped as the major fired a round into the head of the woman, her brains spilling out onto the floor. He aimed for Patrick and Patrick pulled out his sidearm and fired a single round into the major's forehead. The major's head fell back to the concrete, his eyes lifeless and cold in an instant . . .

Then, there was the dusty smell of the courtroom. The defense table with the nicks over the smooth surface and the names carved with pens. The jury of soldiers in the military court; the resonance of the foreperson's voice. *Not Guilty of Homicide due to self-defense.*

\*\*\*\*\*

There were only fragments of memory: a sound booming through his head, making his body quake, deafening him. There was wet goop over him, a roar that pierced even his deafness.

The creature swallowed one of the depth charges, the impact of the blast blowing apart its beak, leaving wet lumps of ragged meat in its place. The second charge detonated near its funnel over the head, blowing away bulky chunks of flesh and brains and eyes. Its grip loosened and it fell backward into the sea, several legs caught on ragged metal, tearing away

With the weight of the creature as it sank.

Two massive holes were blown into the ship and it instantly began to sink. He remembered hands over him and the tight blackness of a lifeboat. There was rumbling and jarring and then calming sleep.

"What about Hamilton?" somebody shouted.

"He can try and swim back."

Patrick remembered one portion of the helicopter back to shore: Jane sitting with him, speaking in his ear though he had lost much of his hearing from the blasts and heard nothing but a droning, muffled ringing. But he could make out one thing that she said: *Hamilton went down with his ship.*

The hospital was filled with men in white who ran to him and then away and then back. They poked and prodded and cut away portions of flesh.

He woke up in the burn unit two days later, a sticky petroleum jelly-type cream over one-third of his body. Jane sat in a chair by the window, asleep. She was wearing the same clothes as when he had been brought here.

He opened his eyes fully and saw her outline. The straight line of her jaw, her full lips, the collarbone that thrust out of her skin. She was beautiful. And she was his.

"You don't need to stay," he gasped, his voice little more than a whisper.

She stirred and woke, a smile parting her lips as she saw him. "Yes, I do."

Rising, she came and stood by him, slipping her hand into his.

"Christopher?"

"He's back at the hotel," she said, looking down at his sheets. Her fingers ran over his arm and the bandages around his body. She knelt and gave him a kiss before sitting back down in the chair. "I'm not going anywhere, so you'll just have to deal with it."

A smile came to him, causing pain in his burnt cheeks, and he closed his eyes and decided to sleep a while. He felt her hand slip back into his before drifting off into the arms of a dreamless sleep.

END

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victor Methos is an adventurer, wildlife conservationist, and general adrenaline junkie. He began his writing career with short fiction and his short stories and poems have appeared in literary journals, science fiction and fantasy magazines, and poetry journals. To contact him, get tips on starting your own adventures, or to learn how to help with the conservation of our disappearing wildlife, please visit his blog at

<http://methosreview.blogspot.com>