

## PROLOGUE - THEORA

**T**HEORA'S DAPPLED orange tentacles fade to the same bone white as the sand. Each of her limbs buzzes messages to her central brain; her senses are on high alert for danger.

All is well. For now.

Without the ability to hear, Theora lives in a silent world. But her thoughts are loud. The octopus knows not when she will return home. *But this is what the master wants*, she tells herself.

She swiftly glides along the sea bed, a small cloud of sand following in her wake. One of her tentacles stops her. She pauses and sees that she now holds a jagged grey rock in one of her appendages. Yes, she thinks. Yes. She picks up two more.

She moves more slowly now, maneuvering her webbed body around rocks and coral. Glass bottles and seashells. Her skin blends in with her surroundings, protecting her—hiding her—but she never lets her guard down.

Her bulbous eyes dart from side to side, watching for shadows, nets... and teeth.

*The grotto is near*, she senses. *You are almost there.*

Her thought is interrupted by a warning signal from one of her brains. *Danger*, she recognizes, as she pauses to decipher the message.

Schools of fish swim past. A stingray leads its babies into the distance. A turtle hurries by.

*What are they racing from?*

The suckers on one of her tentacles tells her at the same moment she sees the source of panic.

*Shark.*

Theora leans into the coral below her, turning her skin a brilliant shade of pink. Her tentacles search for a hole in which to hide. The shark senses movement.

Her hearts pound as her brains work to decide what to do.

*Stay. Still.*

She closes her eyes, grips the rocks, steadies herself.

She slowly opens one of her eyelids to see if the shark has left, but it watches her. Beady black eyes. Silver grey skin. Razor sharp dorsals. The shark sees her and darts forward, baring its teeth.

She quickly pelts rocks at the shark's face, stunning it, while three of her tentacles lash out and wrap around the shark's jaw, squeezing it shut.

The shark thrashes back and forth, but its muscular body is no match for Theora's vice-like grip.

As she waits for the shark to die, she recalls the wishes of her master. "You must be my eyes in that corner of the sea. Keep the peace. Attack only if needed. One day, I will come for you."

The shark stops moving.

Theora exhales, dropping the body to the seabed, since she doesn't care for the taste of shark. Her tentacles lead her to the three rocks on the sand. She picks them back up and continues on her journey, hoping for safe passage to the most dangerous region of the sea. Not knowing if or when she will ever return.

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