



RAZORBILL

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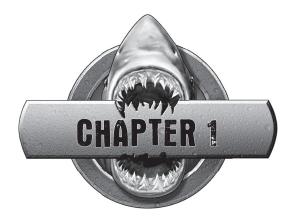
PROLOGUE

FOR TIME BEYOND MEMORY THERE WAS THE ocean and it was empty. Then the first fish, a shark named Tyro, was borne from it. Tyro circled the Big Blue's vastness and found he was alone. So he swam once more through the seven seas and with each stroke of his mighty tail created everything that lives in and under the waters. He chose several sharks to hunt with him and called these the First Shiver, positioning them in a Line from first to fifth, with himself as leader.

First was mighty Finnbarr whose descendants became the great white sharks; second was powerful Longfluke whose children became the bull sharks; third was the cunning Machiakelpi whose sons and daughters became the mako; Ramtail the Battler was fourth and his young became the tiger sharks; and fifth, but never considered last in the Line by Tyro, was Leynar the Magnificent, whose descendants would be the threshers. First Shiver governed with one goal in mind: to protect its members, which numbered all of sharkkind, and to ensure their survival from one generation to the next. For many years, every shark and dweller living in the Big Blue prospered under shiver law.

But after a long life Tyro grew weary. He summoned his Five in the Line and told them that one day a great evil would threaten all of sharkkind and every dweller in the seven seas. When this day came, only a united First Shiver would be strong enough to defeat the evil. After this warning, Tyro gave himself to the Sparkle Blue, where his spirit swims the eternal current to this day. But after their leader was gone, those in the Line bickered and fought about who would be best to lead against the coming danger. In the end, the five sharks of First Shiver could not—and would not—agree, and so swam off by themselves to create their own shivers...





SUNLIGHT DAPPLED THE WARM WATER AS GRAY flexed his powerful fins, gliding to a stop in a thick kelp bed. He used to hide in this patch of green-greenie unseen when he was smaller, but now his tail poked out. Gray made sure it waved back and forth with the warm tide so it wouldn't give him away. He would have been spotted going to the shiver's main hunting grounds, so he had snuck away in the opposite direction toward the lagoon. Gray was a growing fish, but the council, and his mom, Sandy, wouldn't let him hunt unsupervised. That was just unfair. He was twelve years old! He was practically adult for any sharkkind. Almost, anyway.

Even though his name was Gray, he was more bluish on his upper half and white on the bottom, with what he thought was a really cool stripe down each of his enormous flanks. "Everyone's jealous," he muttered. Apparently Gray was big for a reef shark. And ever since he grew larger than Atlas, the old bull shark who was Coral Shiver's leader, every fin watched him with a mixture of curiosity and fear. Like I'm a freak or something, he thought.

Gray pushed that from his mind and concentrated on the task at hand. He'd get into trouble for sure if the council, or his mom, found out he was this far away from the homewaters. And so near the lagoon, Gray thought. But this is where the tasty, tasty lobsters hang out. He gnashed his rows of razor-sharp teeth, imagining the satisfying crunch of a nice, plump shellhead. The lobster that Gray was hunting wandered into the next kelp bed over, which was even thicker than where Gray was hiding now, but no problem. Many sharkkind didn't like swimming through greenie because they were afraid they would get tangled. But not Gray. He swam where he wanted, when he wanted. And today that happened to be in a kelp bed. Now where was that lobster? Being such a great hunter, Gray was positive the dumb shellhead didn't have a clue that certain doom was coming for it.

But suddenly his prey jetted forward, abandoning all stealth and gaining speed. The lobster somehow sensed his presence and made a break for the lagoon where Gray couldn't swim safely anymore, not since his growth spurt. This was a little annoying. Gray used the currents to mask his stalking to perfection! Or not . . . How did this little krillface know he was watching? The

lobster whizzed toward the mouth of the lagoon, where the landsharks had built some sort of floating home. Gray's mom would be really angry if she found out he was this close to the lagoon. But he wasn't about to be seen by anyone except the lobster. "And ol' Lobby will keep my secret once he's safely in my belly," Gray said out loud as he gained speed.

"Watcha doing, Gray?" asked Barkley the dogfish, disrupting Gray's concentration and even startling him a bit. Just a bit, though.

"Can't you see I'm busy?" Barkley could be very annoying. But still, he was Gray's friend and one of the few fish that made him laugh. He was also one of the few reef mates that would still spend time with Gray after his enormous growth spurt the previous year. Most of his old friends got very jumpy when he was around. Gray wondered why that was for a moment, but then set about leaving Barkley in his wake.

"Trying to catch that lobster, huh? Listen to your older and wiser friend—this isn't a good idea." Barkley was born a month before Gray and brought that fact up whenever he could.

"I'm not taking a survey about what you think!" Gray groused.

"Hey, I just don't want to see you with your head stuck in a bucket again." The dogfish grinned, now swimming upside down and eye to eye with Gray. The memory still stung. When Gray was a pup, he explored an ancient wreck of a landshark boat, a galleon, and got his head stuck in a *bucket* which was something humans used to carry stuff around in. It had been wedged on so tight Prime Minister Shocks needed to ask three of the octos from the octopus clan to pull the thing off. Gray was called "bucket head" that entire summer. He pretended not to hear Barkley's teasing and increased his speed, but his friend was annoyingly fast for a dogfish and kept pace.

"Seriously, Gray, Miss Lamprey hunts around here before class. If she sees you, she'll tell your mom for sure," Barkley warned.

Everyone who grew up near the reef was taught by Miss Lamprey. They learned not only about the world in which they lived, but also about the dry world above the water where the two-legged landsharks ruled. Gray thought learning about the *human* world—that's what they called themselves—was a big waste of time. But it did make things easier if you knew the words for things that didn't come from the Big Blue. Especially if you got your head stuck in a bucket.

"Miss Lamprey can keep her pointy snout out of my business. And I thought we agreed to never bring up the *incident* again!"

"Oh, riiight. Totally forgot. Sorry. Let's head back to the reef," Barkley said as he tried to turn Gray by pressing against him. Ha! Fat chance. That used to work, but now Gray was four times the size of the dogfish who nonetheless strained against his bulk. "Seriously, stop being such a flipper! We're going to be late for class!"

"I am *not* a flipper!" Gray told the dogfish. "I'm a total fin!" Being a fin was very cool. Being a flipper wasn't.

"Well, you're not acting very finny!" Barkley said. Gray butted his friend to the side and sped forward. "Hey! Come back!" shouted the dogfish.

"Eat wake, buddy!" The lobster had passed into the mouth of the lagoon. Talking with Barkley cost Gray valuable time. But it still wouldn't be enough time for his prey to make it home. Gray would show the shellhead who was the big fish in this patch of water.

He bore down on the lobster. Gray could feel the warm water whisking through his gills and closed his mouth so it wouldn't slow him down. He could smell the lobster as he closed the distance between them. So delicious! He ground his teeth in anticipation. Closer. The lobster disappeared momentarily into the fronds of kelp near the opening of the lagoon. There wasn't enough to hide in, though. Gray sped through the sparse greenie, opening his mouth for his strike when—whammo!

But it wasn't a good whammo. Not good at all. Gray had hit a hidden shelf in the lagoon bed. He could feel his dorsal fin in the exposed air *above* the waterline! The lobster turned and clacked its claws at Gray while shimmying and flipping its tail back and forth. Was the shellhead doing some sort of victory swim?! Impossible! Crustaceans were just dumb snacks. It sure seemed to be enjoying itself, though.

Barkley cruised to a stop, hovering near Gray. "Wow, that looked painful. And dumb! Was it more painful than dumb, you think? Or the other way 'round?"

Gray struggled, thrashing his tail to free himself. But he was stuck. "If you're finished, I could use some help!"

"Fine, fine." Barkley quickly swam to the shallower side of the lagoon and pushed. This accomplished nothing. He swam a tight circle and tried butting Gray off the shelf. "You know, you might want to lay off the fatty tuna and go on a seaweed diet for a while. I've heard it's very cleansing."

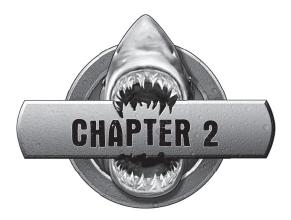
"Shut your cod hole and push!" Gray yelled. They were far too close to the landshark colony. And humans had things called boats to move on top of the Big Blue. One time Gray came upon a human in a rubber covering floating by the bottom of the reef. He was chasing a group of mackerel and didn't notice the human until they were snout to snout. It carried a spine shooter, and sometimes those were dangerous, even to a shark as big as Gray. But the landshark dropped it and blew bubbles instead, waving its arms wildly, looking very fierce indeed! It scared Gray so much he swam away as fast as he could! Close call. But this was more dangerous. Fish of all sizes—even whales!—were caught and killed by humans from boats.

Gray thrashed even harder. With one final ram from Barkley at full speed, he felt the ledge crumble, then disappear. He was free! Gray rejoiced as his dorsal fin submerged and he angled for deeper water.

"That was a close one, buddy!" Barkley chuckled nervously. After a moment, Gray did too. Pretty soon they were both cackling like crazy fish. "Can you imagine what your mom would do if she found out?" Barkley trailed off. Gray was laughing so hard he didn't notice his mother floating off to the side, her eyes blazing. Uh-oh.

"I think I'm going to find out," Gray said to his friend.

But Barkley wasn't there, of course. The dogfish had wisely vanished. How does he do that? Gray wondered silently as his mother frowned, her tail swishing in short, angry strokes.



"YOU'RE GROUNDED FOR A WEEK!" HIS MOTHER said in a clipped voice, the barbels below her nostrils vibrating with emotion. They did that when she got mad. And she was angrier than Gray had seen her in a long while. Even madder than the time when he had talked Barkley into cutting school and got stung by a jellyfish. But seven days and nights of not swimming more than a body length away from the reef bed? Ridiculous! Was he some newborn pup that needed to hide in the greenie? No! Was he a bottomfeeding muck sucker that rooted in the sand for its meals? Disgusting! And again, no! Being grounded was no way for a big fin like him to spend even one day, much less a week!

But Gray's mouth was quicker than his brain so none of these perfectly good arguments made it into the conversation. Instead he blurted, "Awww, Mommm!" "You broke your word to me," she said in a quiet voice. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Gray felt awful. Everyone in Coral Shiver respected his mother, proven by the fact that she had been chosen to be third in the Line. Gray was proud of that. Knowing how dangerous the Big Blue was, any shark in the Line could be your next leader. Usually shivers ranked five after their leader. It was an honor even though their shiver was small and didn't even have succession to the fifth, like a real battle shiver, only to the third.

Atlas was leader, of course. Then there was Quickeyes the thresher as his first and Onyx the blacktip as second. Onyx had these awesome markings down his flanks, almost like they were put there on purpose. But how? When Gray asked about the markings he got yelled at by both Onyx and his mom so he never asked again.

In a shiver, any shark could challenge for position, even for leader. But if you didn't have experience in the Line, you wouldn't be accepted as a contender by the full-member shiver sharks.

Since he was still technically a pup, Gray wasn't even a full member of Coral Shiver yet. "You have to earn the Line's respect before you can join as a shiver shark," his mother had told him when he was younger. Well, he hadn't earned any today.

"I know it's wrong to go toward the lagoon, but when I saw the lobster, I got so hungry!" Gray told her. His mother sighed. "You're a growing shark, Gray. No one says you shouldn't eat." She looked him over from head to tail. He was now almost twice her length. "You just have to be smart about it. You have to do what's best for everyone, not just yourself. Even if that means you go hungry for a little while."

"I'm sorry," said Gray once again.

They entered the ancient lava vent, which was the entrance to the hidden reef and their homewaters. Landsharks lived in a floating base by the other reef, nearer to their shore. Ours is much nicer, thought Gray as he followed his mom's swishing tail down the secret path through the giant kelp bed. There was green-greenie, blue-greenie, and even yellow and brown-greenie. The greenie was long enough that it looked like just another giant seaweed bed from above. And if you didn't know where the path began while swimming in, you'd most likely get lost or hung up. Even landsharks stayed away because their boats got snared by the greenie that floated all the way up to the chop-chop. Crabs used their sharp claws to clip and trim the secret lane of the tangly plant. Supposedly. Gray had never actually seen them do it and didn't really believe shellheads were smart enough to follow instructions like that.

"Gray, the Coral Shiver homewaters are a special place," Sandy told him.

"I know that, Mom. I do live here."

Sandy let out an exasperated sigh. "That's not what

I mean. What we have here is different than many parts of the Big Blue."

Gray got excited. She was talking about the Big Blue in the way that meant open ocean! Would she let him go to the Tuna Run this year? He wasn't allowed last time because he was too young. They *had* to let him go this season! He couldn't help himself, and asked, "Can I go with you into the Big Blue for the Tuna Run? To see how it's different?"

"Absolutely not!" she said so sharply that Gray darted into the thick kelp. When he poked his head out, his mom sighed. She motioned for him to come out from the weedy bed. "I'm sorry I yelled. The open waters of the Big Blue are amazing and wonderful in places. But they can also be dangerous. Sharkkind and dwellers that make their home there aren't as nice as the ones here."

"Okay, Mom," Gray answered. "I'm not planning any trips away from the reef. I promise."

"You won't because you're grounded. And Barkley– come out here!"

Gray turned and saw Barkley hiding in the greenie. His eyes popped open as Sandy stared right at him. He nudged himself forward, smiling nervously. "Oh, here's the path! Silly me, I got lost. Hello, Miss Sandy."

Her eyes narrowed on the dogfish. "Hello to you, Barkley. Now, both of you get to class." And with a whisk of her tail she was gone. "Grounded a whole week. Bummer," remarked the dogfish matter-of-factly. "By the way...told you so."

"By the way," Gray answered, "quit being a flipper."

Barkley led them around the main area of the reef. Most days at least one or two of the groups representing the different types of reef dwellers would meet about something or other. Anemones, starfish, sea cucumbers, jellies, tropicals, even shellheads, would speak with each other. Gray didn't know why. It wasn't as if they were smart like sharkkind. Most dwellers, or non-sharks, never spoke to sharkkind in general except when something important happened.

Even so, Prime Minister Shocks set the schedule so there wouldn't be what he called "unpleasantness" between groups that might make a meal out of each other. A group of urchins was talking with a cluster of brightly colored tangs. Gray knew these different groups each had their own hierarchy, even the shellheads supposedly, but didn't believe they could have anything interesting or important to say. They were colorful, though. He'd give them that.

Gray loved the riot of colors in the reef. Between the dwellers, algae, greenie, corals, mollusks, and plants, it was like an undersea rainbow. He saw a rainbow in the sky once, and it was a pale imitation of the undersea world. And at night the reef glowed even more spectacularly in places where the lumos gave off their pretty lights. "Oh, I see a spot! Follow me!" said Barkley as he swam forward to claim an area near the front of the class and close to Miss Lamprey.

"What a sucker fish," muttered Gray. The dogfish heard and glared.

Miss Lamprey held class in different areas around the reef depending on what was being taught that day. Gray settled in, getting a few irritated looks from groups of angel and parrot fish whose view he accidentally blocked. One particularly annoying parrot fish went right through his mouth and yelled "Move it, wide load!" He almost told the parrot fish he wasn't fat, just big cartilaged, but he knew Miss Lamprey would make him repeat everything to the entire class if she heard. The fish swam around his eyes to be annoying before finding a new place a tail length away. Gray swallowed the urge to put the fish in its place by eating it. He was hungry again. Lately, Gray was always hungry. But he definitely didn't want to get into more trouble by eating a reef dweller.

His mother raised him to never harm anything that lived on or around this particular reef, just as every reef dweller did. There were exceptions, of course. The bottom feeders had their own disgusting ways of eating anything and everything, but sharkkind kept to a higher standard.

"It's not what we do here, Gray," she told him from his earliest days. "If a fish has color, find another. Silver or brown, gulp it down." That's what he learned when he was a pup. Or, even more of a pup than he was now. There was a difference between dumb fish that grouped together and mindlessly swam around (those you could eat) and the smarter ones who could hold a conversation (those you weren't supposed to eat). That's not to say any shark, being big or tough enough, couldn't eat whatever he or she wanted. But the decisions you made spoke to what type of citizen of the Big Blue you were. His mother said that sharkkind who chose to hunt intelligent ocean dwellers were more than bad sharks; they were evil. Gray thought it was worth the wait to find a cluster of dumb fish anyhow. There were always more of them!

Besides, breaking the rules carried consequences. One of Barkley's cousins, Hegger, ate a scarlet grouper when he and Barkley were little. Despite the name, a colored grouper was not a mindless, grouping fish. And this particular scarlet grouper lived on the reef. Anyway, Hegger was *accidentally* stung by an urchin the next day and almost died. Hegger swore it was a payback and he was probably right. Urchins were low down, poisonous sneaks who did that sort of thing.

The lesson in Miss Lamprey's class today was about current and drift in the open waters of the Big Blue. Gray barely listened. When was he ever going to experience that? Never. Gray allowed himself to float upward a bit to stretch his flippers.

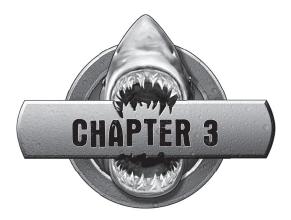
"Umm, Gray?" whispered Barkley. Gray looked over

at the dogfish who smugly reminded him, "You're grounded, remember?" Technically he wasn't a body length from the reef bottom.

Gray grimaced and lowered himself. "Thanks, buddy. Who would have thought you could be so helpful with your snout so far up Miss Lamp—"

"Gray!" yelled Miss Lamprey, cutting him off. "Would you please stop bothering Barkley and pay attention?"

"Sorry, Miss Lamprey." Gray settled almost on the seabed. He sighed and couldn't wait for moonrise. This day was a total bust.



THE CARIBBI SEA WHERE THE CORAL SHIVER reef lay was clear and calm when the moon rose. After class Gray and Barkley went swimming. At least, in the areas where Gray was allowed after his punishment. Tonight everyone was getting along, however, which made them exceedingly dull to watch.

"You want to see if those crabs are still fighting?" Barkley asked.

"Who wants to watch a couple of shellheads whacking and clacking over some snail carcass? Gross!" They swam in silence but in the general direction of the feisty crabs, there being nothing better to do. "I'd give anything to be out in the open waters with cold water rushing down my flanks. I'm the type of fin that needs action and adventure!" Gray told his friend. "But where do I live? The quietest reef in the entire *history* of the Big Blue, that's where!"

"Well it's about to get a lot less quiet." Barkley pointed his snout in the direction of a sea dragon whom everyone around the homewaters had nicknamed "Yappy." Gray didn't even know his real name. "I hope you're happy," the dogfish muttered. "You jinxed us."

Most dwellers wouldn't talk to others not of their kind unless they had some sort of business, or knew them well, or it was an emergency. But Yappy talked with *anyone* he came across, no matter if they wanted to or not. One time everyone thought that ancient Janprickle the urchin had died. Yappy started talking to her and wouldn't stop for an entire day. Nonstop. In a crazy way, it was kind of impressive. Just as Janprickle's fellow urchins were going to *honor* the old dweller in their way by eating her—yuck—she shook herself a couple times and joined the conversation. Janprickle and Yappy talked for another whole day! Not only could Yappy talk you to death, apparently he could talk you *out* of death, too.

And for some reason Yappy thought Barkley and Gray were his best buddies, so it was extra inconvenient for them to bump into him. Even in the weak moonlight, Yappy's bright yellow body made him stand out. He also had blue stripes along his belly and orange highlights on the tips of his weedy flippers and tail. These were supposed to help him blend into the greenie when hunting small crabs and shrimp. But between the nonstop talking and his very bright coloring, it was hard to imagine Yappy blending in anywhere. "Keep swimming. Don't make eye contact," whispered Gray.

Barkley agreed wholeheartedly. "Nod and gnash your teeth like we're talking about something serious and maybe—"

"Hey fellas! Isn't the moon just gilly tonight? You ever wonder what the moon is made of?"

"Yappy—" Barkley attempted to get a word in edgewise.

"I heard if a marlin jumps at just the right angle when there's a full moon, he can spear it with his nose. Do you think marlins eat bits of the moon for fifteen nights, and it grows back the other fifteen?"

Barkley tried again, "Yap-"

"If they *are* eating the moon and not sharing, I say the council should get involved. I mean, who do those selfish, moon-eating morons think they are anyway?"

"YAPPY!" shouted Gray, blowing the much smaller sea dragon back a fluke length. This got his attention.

"Yes, Gray?"

"Barkley and I would love to hear your theories on marlins eating the moon, but we're doing some, umm, serious talking about...things." Gray glanced at his friend to jump in anytime.

Barkley was never slow on the uptake. "That's right. Important shiver business. Sorry, we can't tell you about it. Or we could, but then we'd totally have to eat you."

"I get it. My cousins in the Dark Blue are always up to super secret stuff about prophecies that could mean the

end of the entire Big Blue as we know it! I can't tell you about that, either. Did you know my cousins are giants? Bigger than Gray even! They would just eat that drove of bluefin right up, I tell ya!" Yappy said as he rocked back and forth with the tide.

"Excellent!" Barkley chimed as the sea dragon opened his mouth to say something else. "Let's agree to keep our various secrets safe and swim away without any more talking, so we don't accidentally doom the seven seas." Barkley tried to shove Gray forward.

"Wait, what did you mean by 'drove of bluefin'?" asked Gray, suddenly very interested.

"You guys didn't know? The angelfish are sooo miffed. A double drove of bluefin totally stole a swarm of shrimp from them." Yappy pointed toward the far end of the reef with a back fin. "Never heard such foul language from an angel in my life! Shocking, really."

Gray fairly vibrated with excitement. A double drove of delicious bluefin was swimming around and distracted by shrimp? Near the reef? His stomach rumbled. That was two hundred fish at least.

Sharks counted fish groupings by cluster, drove, horde, shimmer, shoal, legion, and siege. Clusters were tens, droves were hundreds, a horde was in the thousands, shimmers were ten thousands, a shoal was one hundred to four hundred thousand, legions numbered at five hundred to nine hundred thousand, and a siege was over a *million* fish.

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Gray had never seen anything larger than a lower shoal, and those were teeny-tiny krill. They really didn't count unless you could fill up on those ugly, shrimpy things. The older sharks in the shiver said that in the times of their fathers and their father's fathers the Tuna Run was every sixth moon and was always a double or triple siege. Gray couldn't even picture what two or three million fish might look like. And supposedly, a siege of bluefin was so fast and dense it could injure or even kill a shark. Gray was sure they were yanking his tail, though. How could a bunch of fish do that to a shark? Only by overeating, he thought, which was a chance Gray was willing to take if he got lucky enough to see a siege. If he ever even made it to a Tuna Run. But maybe he could have his own little Tuna Run right now!

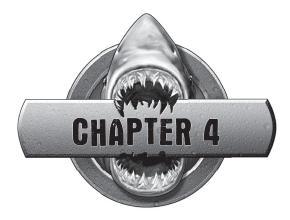
"I do not like that look," Barkley said as he watched the smiling Gray. "Not at all."

"Let's go fishing!" Gray rocketed under and around several brightly colored coral pillars, scaring the heck out of the crabs, eels, and other dwellers trying to stealthily hunt on them.

Barkley struggled to keep up, panting. "Wait, stop!" Just then Gray did stop, reversing himself so fast the dogfish plowed into his tail fin. Barkley let out an "Ooof!"

"Quiet!" Gray told the dogfish. "Look."

There they were: hundreds and hundreds of big, fat bluefin there for the taking!



"GRAY, THAT'S INTO THE OPEN OCEAN FOR SURE," Barkley said. "And you're grounded!"

"Oh, come on! That's still Coral Shiver homewaters." Gray nodded to himself, salivating. "And dumb fish are always fair game! Why, we could get in trouble for *not* eating them!"

Barkley smiled sarcastically. "I know the rules on what to eat and when to eat it better than you, megamouth." The dogfish tapped him on the belly with his tail. "By the way, have you gained weight since this morning?"

"Hey, I'm big cartilaged!" Gray said indignantly. "And if you're done insulting me..." He waggled a fluke at the fish.

"Fine, Overbiter is on duty for shiver business. Let's tell him about the drove. We'll be heroes!" Barkley swished his tail happily at the thought. Gray snorted. "Please! Overbiter is like a hundred and sleeps all the time. He can't swim fast enough to catch these blues. You don't want to make him look bad in front of everyone, do you?

Maybe embarrassing Overbiter wasn't Gray's main worry, but the lemon shark *was* half senile. By the time they explained everything to him, the bluefin would be long gone. Barkley hesitated as he glanced longingly at the tuna feeding on the swarm of shrimp. "I'd hate to embarrass him, I guess."

Barkley drooled a little and Gray knew he had him. "Let's get our fill, and then go tell everyone. We'll still be heroes!"

The dogfish flicked his fins up and down in agreement and flashed forward so suddenly it momentarily surprised Gray. He did not just do that! Gray sped up, overtaking his friend. He aimed for a plump bluefin but never got there. Two others accidentally swam into his open mouth just before he was going to strike, along with a load of shrimp! It caught Gray by surprise and he gagged. This would be a story told around the glowing algae pylons for years to come—Gray the big, bad reef shark chokes to death on dinner! An extremely large blue slammed into his throat, kicking in a reflexive swallow. I really should remember that spot on my throat, he thought to himself. But later! The combo of bluefin and shrimp was scrumptious!

Gray and Barkley laughed and ate. It was crazy! No sooner were they done with one fish than they each caught

another. The pair tried to keep count of who caught the most but gave up; the bluefin were eaten so fast and furiously. Then, as all groupings did, the fish thinned and disappeared. Pretty soon only a couple of woozy shrimp were all that was left. Barkley listed to the side. "Ohh, I think I might have eaten too much. By the way, where are we?"

Good question. How long had they been feeding? Gray wasn't sure. The reef wasn't in sight anymore. In fact, nothing around them looked familiar. Gray couldn't even see the bottom. They were definitely off the reef and into the open waters of the Big Blue now. They would get into serious trouble if someone found out.

Gray was about to say something when he felt a prickle of electricity go up his spine, a fin flick before a gray-and-white blur screamed into view. This alarm system saved Gray's life at least twice when he was younger, once when a huge moray eel hiding in a crevice surprised him. It was a vague buzzing that set him on edge right before danger struck. He now knew it was a survival instinct, but Gray hadn't felt it for a long time, not since his growth spurt.

Just in time, with a stroke of his powerful tail, he was able to deflect a shark's headlong attack at his dorsal fin. It was a tiger shark and he was massive! Larger than Gray was, even!

Barkley was indignant. "What's your damage, jellybrain? We're trying to digest here!" He coasted in front of Gray protectively as the tiger carved a turn and rushed at them once more. It must have dawned on Barkley that being a motionless target wasn't the brightest idea because he dove underneath the gnashing jaws of the tiger. The big flipper only gave a halfhearted snap at the dogfish. He was plainly after Gray, since his size made him the main threat.

Well, he's got that right! Gray thought as he sped up. They were lost, probably in trouble, and now some flipper was trying to eat them! Enough was enough. Gray accelerated out of the tiger's way before slashing his own turn downward and underneath the attacking shark. The tiger lost sight of Gray for a moment and hesitated. It was all the time Gray needed.

"You lose," said Barkley from his hovering position above the momentarily confused tiger. Gray heard a satisfying "Whuufff!" as he rammed the shark in the soft underbelly by his liver. The tiger tried to turn but was momentarily paralyzed. Barkley hammered the dazed attacker next. Or he tried. Because of his small size, he bounced off like a sea horse against hard coral. Gray wouldn't let his advantage slip away, though. He bore down on the tiger, ready to rip a fin off with his razor teeth.

"Wait! Wait!" yelled the tiger. "I'm with Goblin Shiver, and you're dead meat if you touch me!"

Gray chose to ignore this, but had to come to an abrupt halt when Barkley swam right in front of his mouth! "What are you doing?" "Saving our lives!" Barkley whispered before turning to the tiger. "Sorry for the misunderstanding!"

"Misunderstanding?" Gray sputtered. "He tried to eat us!"

The big shark recovered somewhat, and the chance to send him to the Sparkle Blue passed. Gray hoped Barkley knew what he was doing. The tiger wouldn't be easily beaten a second time.

"Listen to your friend," said the tiger. "This is Goblin Shiver territory. You don't have permission to hunt here unless Goblin, or maybe Gafin, give their say-so. And I know you don't know Goblin. So, do you know the urchin king?"

Gray understood little of what the big tiger was saying. "We need permission to hunt?" he asked, genuinely puzzled.

"Of course you do! I thought you were from Razor Shiver, poaching our feeding grounds," the tiger commented, watching Gray and Barkley for their reactions. "But I can see I was wrong. My name is Thrash, by the way."

"I'm Gray and this is Barkley."

"Where are you from?" the tiger named Thrash asked suspiciously.

"Coral Shiv—" Gray began, but Barkley cut him off immediately.

"A coral reef where we rested! But there were landsharks so we left. Now we're here. Nice to meet you!" Thrash dismissed Barkley but swam around Gray, looking him over. "I thought you were a great white, but you're not. You're just a pup! Don't think I've seen a shark like you before. What are you, anyway?"

"I'm a reef shark," Gray answered proudly.

Thrash laughed. "Oh, that's good! Yeah, right, reef shark! Goblin loves a sense of humor. Sometimes." The tiger indicated the direction he wanted them to follow. "Come on, he's going to want to look you over."

Neither of them moved. "Look us over?" asked Barkley.

"To be a part of Goblin Shiver," answered Thrash. "We're at war with Razor Shiver and can always use another shark who knows how to fight. Whatever you are."

Barkley swam between the large tiger and Gray. "Actually, we're not real big joiners, Thrash. We're more rogue fish."

"Rogues swim alone," said Thrash with a hint of malice. "That's why they're rogues."

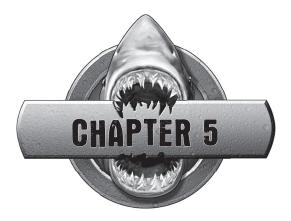
Barkley got flustered. "Sure, we know that, everyone knows that! We're a rogue *pair*. It's a new thing we invented. Again, nice meeting you. We'll be going now." The dogfish kept his voice low when he passed Gray. "Let's get out of here while the getting's good."

Gray followed, unsure why Barkley was acting so strangely but knowing deep down he didn't want to be involved with a maniac tiger shark that talked about wars and had almost eaten him a moment ago. "Yeah, rogue pair. That's us."

Thrash caught Gray's eye before he swam away. "You'll have to pick a side sooner or later, pup. Everyone will have to pick a side." With a chuckle and a dismissive flick of his tail, the tiger shark left.

"Let's go home," Barkley told Gray, who quietly followed his friend.

Their first trip into the open water had been a real eye opener, but not in a good way.



"NO, NO, NO!" YELLED GOBLIN LOUD ENOUGH to attract attention all around his homewaters. He gnashed his teeth so hard he felt one break and saw it drift to the sandy bottom. A crab scuttled over and began probing the tooth to see if there was anything to eat inside it. It almost made Goblin laugh, but the situation was too serious to allow that right now. "We need to keep up *all* our patrols! Razor Shiver isn't going to rest and neither can we!"

"You're telling me what you want, and I'm trying to tell you what's possible," Ripper replied evenly. The big, battle-scarred hammerhead was close to insubordination. But then he ducked his head and added, "I suppose we could promote a couple of the pups into full shiver sharks to make up for—you know—"

Goblin took time to appear thoughtful. His mother, the shiver leader before him, had always told him to do

this. "Good idea. Let them flex their fins a little. When I was a pup, I couldn't wait to get into the thick of things!"

It wasn't as if he was much older than a pup now, being just fifteen. For great whites, fifteen was physically mature. But some of the sharkkind that Ripper was thinking of were a little *too* young and weren't experienced enough to survive a real battle. They could be used for patrols and as an early warning system, though, which would free up his veterans for more important things. Not a perfect solution, but it would do for now.

Goblin stared imperiously at his Five in the Line. Ripper was his first, a giant hammerhead and the only shark who might be tougher than himself. Thrash, the tiger, was his second. Goblin's third was Streak, a blue shark who was small for her kind but made up for it in sheer ferocity. Churn was an oceanic whitetip and his fourth. Goblin had known Churn since the whitetip was a pup. Then there was his fifth: Velenka, a sleek, black mako.

Velenka was undoubtedly the smartest and most beautiful shark he ever met. Such big eyes. She could have been his fourth, maybe even third. She was invaluable as an adviser. Why the mako didn't make a move up the Line was puzzling to Goblin. Velenka hadn't even won her rank by combat, as was custom when a position in the Line opened. It was done by vote after Goblin's last fifth, Hawley, was found floating on the surface in the chop-chop three months ago. Hawley wasn't attacked by sharkkind; there were no bite marks. His corpse was grotesquely swollen as if he had died a week earlier. But Goblin swam with the thresher the night before he was found, so he knew that wasn't the case. He had trusted Hawley most of all, and the thresher worshipped Goblin like an older brother. It was a bitter loss, but that was life in the open waters of the Big Blue.

"What do you want to do, Goblin?" asked Velenka. The mako spoke more than any of the others even though she was only his fifth. It was a little odd, even presumptuous, but Velenka did keep things on point. The others waited for Goblin's answer.

"Can't you see I'm thinking?" He snapped at the mako, his bulk nudging hers out of hover. "Do you have a current you're late for? Someplace more interesting to go?"

"I didn't mean any disrespect," she answered.

"And that's why I'm not feeding on your carcass!" he yelled.

His shiver, now called Goblin Shiver instead of Riptide Shiver, had gotten their tails kicked by the bull sharks of Razor Shiver a day ago. They'd lost two soldiers and hadn't sent any bulls to the Sparkle Blue. Razor and his shiver controlled the best hunting grounds in the entire North Atlantis and also owned a prized territory for the Tuna Run. This annoyed Goblin. It was because of Razor naming his shiver after himself that Goblin had done the same. He would never admit that, of course. Razor Shiver

weren't the only tough gang of sharkkind on the Western edge of the Atlantis, but they were the strongest today. Food was growing scarce, with fewer and fewer large groupings to feed on. Goblin and his shiver would stay near the muck-sucking bottom if he couldn't figure out a way to recruit more warriors and conquer new territory!

And to top things off, Thrash now swam in as though he was being chased by a prehistore nightmare with a story about a *pair* of rogue sharks named Gray and Barkley. And this Gray was a mysterious giant type of Sharkkind Thrash had never seen before! His Five in the Line and the rest of the full members of the shiver were looking at Goblin now, waiting for answers. His shiver sharks hovered listlessly behind the Line, speaking and joking in low voices with each other. At one time there would have been order, every mariner hovering in its own row, waiting for the leader's orders to be carried out by subcommanders. When Goblin was young, discipline and numbers were the mark of a true battle shiver. But now...

Everyone was always waiting for answers from him. It was what Goblin liked least about being leader. Sometimes he wished his mother were still around. She would know what to do, he thought to himself.

Goblin turned to Thrash. "You're sure they weren't just passing through? Maybe from the Sific Ocean?"

The tiger shook his head from side to side. "Nah, they mentioned a coral reef. I think they're from somewhere near shore. They were soft."

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"Beat you, didn't they?" noted Ripper. Goblin saw that the tiger took the insult personally, but if Thrash got mad the big hammerhead could take care of himself. That's why he was Goblin's first.

"Who cares about a couple of yokels from the booniegreenie who don't know anything about the Big Blue?" yelled Streak. The undersize blue was seething. "We lost Scrape and Jonquil to the bulls! Let's attack and even the score!"

Streak would want to fight no matter what because Scrape was her brother. But Goblin was pretty sure the blue didn't care one way or another that Jonquil was gone. He had just joined the shiver recently.

"Bad idea!" cried Churn. "We should take some time to regroup." The whitetip had almost been eaten by Razor himself in the battle and sported a ragged bite mark across the gills to show just how close he'd come to death. Churn was now one jumpy fin and would be for a while longer.

"Coward!" Streak yelled angrily. "Swim off the Line, useless! Go find a turtle shell to hide inside!"

Churn might be jumpy, but he was much bigger than Streak. Goblin was about to lose control as his third and fourth tried to eat each other! But then, the smell of an enemy interrupted the budding fight. Everyone looked over as a solitary bull swam close enough to be seen, but far enough away to retreat. Goblin's spine tingled with the sense of impending battle. He was about to charge the bull when Velenka spoke. "I don't think he's here for trouble," she said.

"How would you know?" snarled Streak.

Velenka took no notice of the blue's tone but answered the question instead. "You know what an attack looks like better than anyone, Streak. What do you think?"

Streak calmed herself and watched the lone bull for a moment. "Okay, he's not on offense. But who is he and why's he here?"

"That's exactly what we should ask him." Velenka swam forward, drawing Goblin with her. "Maybe this has something to do with the two sharks Thrash saw?" The mako seemed happiest when she was puzzling something out. Or scheming. She once told Goblin that her hero was the legendary Machiakelpi, the mako who swam in the First Shiver and supposedly ruled the entire Sific after Tyro left for the Sparkle Blue. Goblin had to admit Velenka was a schemer worthy of Machiakelpi's reputation.

"Keep your place behind me, Fifth!" He took the lead. Maybe this shark was an opportunity. If it was, Goblin wanted the credit for leading. And it wasn't as though he would let Velenka meet the bull without him.



Velenka tried to keep her excitement in check but felt her spine tingling as they swam to meet Kilo. She knew that the bull would play his part and pretend they'd never met before. But could he play it well enough so that Goblin wouldn't sense something out of the ordinary? That was the question. That was why she needed to carefully control the conversation. Goblin might be dim, but he wasn't without instinct. You didn't stay shiver leader for long without good instincts.

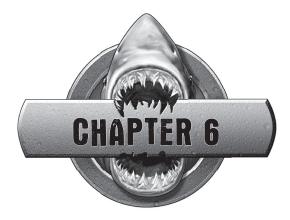
And who was the mysterious giant Thrash had tussled with? No one else had noticed the large tooth lodged underneath the tiger's fin. Was it important? Its shape looked so familiar for some reason. Velenka had knocked the tooth free before anyone could see, and it floated into the darkness below. She didn't need Goblin distracted just now, not when she was setting her plan into action.

Velenka would send Thrash back in the direction the mysterious sharks came from to find their home. Perhaps Kilo and his bulls could be useful in this also. Always bend circumstance to your advantage. Machiakelpi taught that eons ago. Good advice, then and now.

"Maybe I should find out why this bull is here?" Velenka asked Goblin. "That way you can watch for lies when he speaks. Besides, why should this puny flipper talk to you, our shiver leader, as if he's your equal?"

Goblin nodded as they stopped a few body lengths from Kilo. "Good," he said quietly. "Do it."

Velenka smiled as she swam forward. There was destiny in the current! She could feel it!



AFTER SWIMMING FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT the sun was rising by the time Gray and Barkley got back—they reached the reef. How had they gotten so far away?

The worst part was the place was in an uproar. Gray hoped in vain it wasn't because of them.

Of course he was very, very wrong.

Atlas led the Line, along with many other shiver sharks, in a ragged, three-level triangle formation. That was weird. Gray had never seen them do that. What did it mean? They certainly didn't look happy, though.

"Gray!" cried his mom. "Are you all right?" She tried to swim ahead of Atlas but was slowed by Quickeyes and Onyx.

Atlas gave her a hard look. "Sandy, please." Gray's mom nodded, and the Coral Shiver leader spoke again, "Gray, Barkley—are you okay?" Quickeyes and Onyx swam overhead, watching the distant waters. Why were they doing that?

"We are," answered Barkley. Gray quickly agreed with his friend.

"Now tell me exactly where you were, and anything that happened," Atlas ordered. Gray had never seen the old bull shark so . . . *commanding* before. Barkley told the story with Gray adding bits and pieces. Oddly, the more the story went on, the angrier Atlas and the others became. Except Gray's mom. She got scared.

A full council of all the reef dwellers was called. The sharks of Coral Shiver wanted to make the decision by themselves but were overruled by Prime Minister Shocks. Shocks would have probably let Atlas, Sandy, and the others in Line hand out Gray's punishment, but the other reef dwellers demanded their say.

Gray wasn't sure what was happening, exactly, but his mom was even more upset than yesterday. Quickeyes and Onyx took turns staring at Gray as if they wanted to eat him. Overbiter was busy gnawing on his own tail fin. He used to be second in the Line years ago and sometimes didn't remember he wasn't a member of the council anymore. Atlas and the rest never said anything and let him stay. Supposedly he had been a great warrior long ago. Yeah, right.

Shocks sent a weak bolt of electricity arcing into the water, calling everyone in the area to attention. Gray had never seen so many dweller leaders gathered at one

time! There were all kinds of fish; tangs, grouper, lantern fish, angelfish, hatchet fish, clown fish, puffers, wrasse, frog fish, sunfish, doctor, and surgeonfish. Every other non-fish dweller seemed to be here too: big and small rays, eels of all sizes and colors, anemones, urchins, shellheads, turtles, and many, many others.

This would be really neat if I wasn't the reason they were here, Gray thought as he floated above the flat stone that was traditionally known as Speakers Rock. It didn't seem like he would get to speak, but there was no good area for everyone to see him otherwise, so Atlas allowed it.

Barkley was asked questions by the manta rays, their pilot fish nearby. Some of these rays were wider than Gray, and their larger cousins, the giants, were bigger in all ways. Supposedly rays were distant cousins of sharkkind from prehistore times. He didn't really believe it as they weren't very good hunters, living mostly on floating greenie, krill, and shellheads. They did have really cool stingers, but didn't use them for hunting. What a waste!

Gray watched his mother become more and more agitated as Prime Minister Shocks spoke with her. Gray wished he could hear, but they were in a place where the currents masked their conversation. The other dwellers who could listen in seemed satisfied, though. Suddenly the current shifted, and Gray could hear parts of what his mom and Shocks were talking about. "You know what's out there!" his mother said. "Battle shivers are on the move! The Indi King's armada—"

The tide shifted, and Gray could only hear Shock's reply in bits, "... are only rumors!"

Battle shivers? That was the kind of intensely interesting stuff Gray always wanted to hear about the stuff adults whispered and then stopped discussing whenever he or Barkley got close. For a moment Gray thought his mother was going to bite the distinguished eel. Shocks spoke to the next group of dwellers, and pretty soon everyone *except* Gray knew what was happening.

Come on!

Atlas and the other sharkkind in the Line tried to calm his mom, but it wasn't working. Gray felt awful. Why do I keep disappointing her? She broke free and swam toward him. Prime Minster Shocks tried to get ahead of her, but she left the eel tumbling in her wake with a furious tail stroke. "That's totally out of order, Sandy!" he harrumphed.

"I want a minute with my son!" she yelled, close to tears, her barbels quivering. After a stare down, Shocks gave her a curt nod. She approached Gray and said, "Just tell the truth, okay? We'll get through this."

Get through what? he wondered. Gray was becoming irritated. A growing shark has to eat! They couldn't punish him for that. But a creeping feeling in his belly told him that they could.

Prime Minister Shocks let off another low-voltage attention grabber that quieted everyone. "Gray, please swim over here so everyone can listen to you answer my questions."

"Umm, sure." Gray moved to the area where the current would catch his words and broadcast them.

"Why did you leave the reef homewaters last night?" Shocks asked.

Everyone was listening and watching intently and Gray became nervous. "I, umm, I mean, we—" He looked over at Barkley. "We saw some fish and got hungry. They were mixed with shrimp, very delicious, by the way, and also—"

The gathered dwellers' whispering rose in volume as Shocks cut him off. "But wasn't it *you* who convinced your friend to go? In fact, didn't he say that you shouldn't leave the reef?"

"Well, yeah. But he's always trying to keep me from doing fun stuff—" Gray stopped in confusion as the murmurs from the dwellers got louder, in some cases surging to outright yelling. Except for his mother. She was crying now. Atlas glared again. Gray continued with his point, speaking over the crowd so he would be heard. "Hey, I was hungry!" For some reason this made things much worse.

Shocks zapped the water with a heavy charge to quiet the crowd enough so he could speak. "ORDER!" he yelled. "I will have order!" The eel turned to Gray. "Is that why you left the reef and drew the attention of a tiger shark, who was himself a member of a shiver? Because you were hungry?"

"Umm, well, I didn't go out there with the intention of meeting anyone, but, yes, I was hungry."

"So you put your hunger ahead of the safety of everyone on the reef. Is that right? I hope you're at least full!"

It took a moment for Gray to realize what he was being asked. Unfortunately, his mouth was already speaking. "I'm still a little hungry but—wait—what?"

The gathered dwellers exploded, everyone shouting, clacking their claws, basically making any loud noise they could as a sign of their anger. Prime Minster Shocks futilely shot electrical charges into the water. He needed to call the rest of his eel friends to raise the voltage before he got everyone's attention and order was restored.

"Mom!" said Gray as she swam close to him. "I'm really sorry! I'm—"

She cut him off with a slash of her tail. "I know you are, Gray. Look, there's something I haven't told you. You're going to have a brother and a sister. "

"What?!"

His mother was much sadder than he would expect her to be as she told him the news. "You're going to be a big brother. Oh, Gray, I'm so sorry." She sobbed.

"Why are you sorry? Why are you crying?" he asked.

"This is great! I've always wanted brothers and sisters!" Then Gray grew confused. "I really am happy, but why are you telling me now? I don't exactly get it."

There were tears in his mother's eyes as she said, "Because that's the reason I can't go with you!"

"Go with me? Where?"

Sandy was led away by Atlas and the other sharks in the Coral Shiver Line. "Meet me at the Tuna Run! Prove yourself as a strong and good hunter and they'll take you back!" The noise grew so loud that Gray could no longer hear his mother.

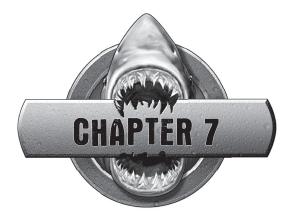
The Tuna Run! He was allowed to go! But what did she mean by take him back?

He grew cold and afraid as Prime Minister Shocks swam near Speakers Rock directly in front of Gray. It was then he noticed that Barkley was also blubbering. This isn't going to be good, he thought.

Shocks cleared his throat to speak. There was absolute silence now. "Gray, you've endangered the shiver because of your own selfish desires. If this was the first time you needed to be disciplined it might be different. But it isn't, so ..." Shocks looked at him sadly but pronounced the sentence in a clear voice. "You are hereby banished from Coral Shiver!"

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THE WORD ECHOED IN GRAY'S EARS LIKE THE TIDES. Banished.

Prime Minister Shock's word was law by the reef, and even though Gray was a big fish, the sentence would be carried out. The octos from the octopus clan were waiting with their foul jets of black ink if he didn't obey. And the seedier bottom feeders who lived on the dark side of the reef—Orin the scorpion fish and his friends came to mind—were poisonous enough to send even Gray to the Sparkle Blue if he caused trouble. Aside from his mom and Barkley, Gray's only ally was Yappy! And that was only because Yappy's family couldn't *stop* him from talking. Not until they caught him, anyway.

For a moment Gray almost chuckled at the thought of Yappy zipping around, with so many others chas-

ing him and yelling, "This is a slippery slope! What will you do when they come for you? Slippery slope! Slippery slope!" But Gray sobered quickly, remembering how Barkley's family ushered him away before he had the chance to react at all. That was probably a good thing. The dogfish could get emotional sometimes.

"At least I didn't give them the satisfaction of throwing me out," Gray muttered. He swam out, head high, on his own. Truthfully, the reef and Coral Shiver homewaters were too small for a fin like him. Gray needed space if he was going to live it up. Maybe Prime Minister Shocks had done him a big, fat favor.

It sure didn't really feel that way, though.

Gray almost began to sob but stopped when he saw a giant sea turtle staring as it leisurely floated by. "What you lookin' at, shellback? You want a piece of me?" The turtle churned its stubby legs a little faster. For their kind this was the equivalent of a panicked rush. Gray was satisfied with the reaction, so he didn't go ram the turtle. "You better not tell anyone I was crying!" he yelled at the turtle's receding figure. "Because I'm not!"



Gray had traveled for three entire days, near as he could figure. When he was near the reef, he could sense the depth of the water and didn't need to open his eyes to tell if it was day or night. In this open water, Gray stayed near the surface to keep himself oriented.

Not that he was afraid to go deeper, of course. He just didn't want to go deeper *right* now. "At least the sun shines into the water the same way," he said aloud. But it was colder and the current stronger. Not like home at all. What I'd give to be grounded by the reef again, he thought sadly.

Gray looked down to where the water darkened. Although he could sense the bottom was there, he couldn't see it. How did dwellers there even know what time it was? It was even colder than the water around him. And always black as night. Gray's stomach churned. He was hungry, but the ocean seemed absolutely empty! It was eerie. And when there were fish, they came and went so fast he actually missed with his strikes. Compared to the ones by the reef, these fish were bigger, stronger, and faster. Gray's stomach growled again, and he grew scared. Maybe he'd just starve in the open waters.

"Hey, Gray!" Gray almost jumped out of his skin. It was Barkley!

"Would you stop doing that?" Gray sputtered, momentarily forgetting his situation. But *only* for a moment. They were a very long distance from the reef. "What are you doing here?"

Barkley was uncharacteristically tongue-tied for a moment. "Umm, nothing. Just stretching the ol' fins. You know me, always trying to broaden my horizons."

"Go home."

Barkley made a rude noise. "Who do you think you are, ordering me around? Takiza the magical fighting fish?"

Gray chuckled despite the situation. Takiza was a legendary fish who supposedly could conjure whirlpools and underwater lightning with magic. There were lots of fantastic stories about Takiza, who went by lots of different names depending on whom you asked. One time he supposedly fought ten great whites, the meanest of all sharkkind, and beat them easily when they threatened a baby dolphin. It was a fantastic tale and obviously just for amusement. "Be a good shark or Takiza will come and put you in your place!" The worst part of it was that Barkley's dumb comment reminded him of the reef and his mom telling him stories about Takiza, which made him even more homesick.

Gray sighed. Even though he was arguing with Barkley, the truth was that he *wanted* his friend to stay. But that was wrong. Gray was exiled and Barkley wasn't. His home was by the reef, and Gray couldn't let him throw that away. "I know what you're doing, but you should turn around."

"And I know what you're doing, Gray. But we've been friends since you were born—I was born first, so of course I remember—and I *want* to come along. I was going to sign up for Miss Lamprey's migration class this year, anyway. This'll be like that, only better! Besides, you think I'm going to let you hoard all the adventure like some adventure-hoarding hermit crab?"

Gray replied with a subdued "Okay, then." It was all he could do not to burst into tears. Tough fin you are, he thought to himself.

They found a swift current, which pulled them deeper and deeper into the open waters of the Big Blue. Gray enjoyed the silence for a time. But with Barkley being Barkley, silence never lasted too long.

"So, where we going?"

"Umm, into the open ocean," Gray answered with as much confidence as he could muster.

Barkley sighed. "Yes, I'm aware of that—being here and all. We're into the Atlantis Ocean now, North Atlantis, by the way. But where do you want to end up?"

"I don't know. I started swimming in this direction after they kicked me out. I didn't have some big exile plan ready to go. You know, you can get annoying in a fin flick!" But Gray wasn't really mad at Barkley. He was mad at himself. He was so upset after being banished that he had started swimming without even thinking about where he was going. He certainly didn't want to end up in the Arktik where he heard the very water froze, forming jagged masses that could crush a shark!

Barkley flexed his flukes at Gray in irritation. "I'm hungry. How about we find some food?"

Finally, something they could agree on. It took a while, but they did find, and more importantly, *catch* some food. First Gray chased a small horde of cod toward

Barkley, who picked a few off. It was either a horde or upper drove. The dogfish thought it was an upper drove of eight or nine hundred. Gray didn't care as he was unable to catch even one since the small horde or upper drove was fast-moving and left the area quickly. But Barkley returned the favor by finding a lower cluster of sailfish. One muscular game fish didn't know what hit it as Gray pounced from below, taking most of it down with an enormous bite.

"Any cod left?" Gray asked after he'd finished off the last of the sailfish.

"You know, sailfish work out constantly. They think their bodies are temples. You might learn from that kind of thinking," Barkley told Gray while jabbing Gray's stomach with his tail.

"Hey, I'm big cartilaged!"

Barkley swam away, leading Gray in a slightly different direction. What was he doing?

"By the way, I'll pick the way we're heading, since it's my exile!" Gray told his friend, perhaps a little too vehemently, as he corrected their course.

"Right. What grade did you get in navigation class again?" Barkley asked innocently.

Oh, now he was playing dirty. Gray had taken the navigation test immediately after eating a puffer fish which had *not* gone down well. It felt as if the fish were inflating in his stomach, which cramped violently the entire day. The galling part was that he got *lost* during

the exam! Miss Lamprey knew Gray was sick, which she took into account, but he got a poor grade that cycle.

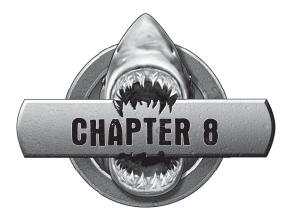
The truth was Gray didn't know where he was going. For the first time in his life, he was swimming without a purpose. That scared him. Before, if he was unsure of what to do, he'd ask his mom. But he couldn't do that anymore. He was about to confess this to Barkley when the dogfish whispered a fearful "Uh-oh."

There were four sharks swimming in a tight pack; a thresher, a bull, a sawfish, and a great white. Miss Lamprey said great whites should be left alone in the open ocean. She said they hunted other sharkkind, even when they weren't hungry. For fun.

"Umm, Gray? How about we make like a sea frog and scoot?" suggested Barkley.

It was a good idea. But too late.

The four sharks fanned out and swam toward them.



THE SHARKS WEREN'T ATTACKING. YET. THEY were in a strong defensive position, though.

"Oh, I don't like this one bit. We're jelly drifters here!" Barkley exclaimed. Gray and Barkley began swimming in a slow figure-eight pattern that would let them speed away in case trouble started. Gray was larger than any of the four by a few tail-tips, but the biggest fish wasn't always the winner in the Big Blue. That much even he knew.

The four sharkkind slowed their advance and hovered against the current. They were barely five tail strokes away. For a moment the only sound was the slow current swishing past their flanks.

"So," said the great white. "Any luck hunting?"

Barkley jumped in before Gray could reply, "Nope. Just seeing the sights. We're moving through. Sorry if this is your territory."

"Oh, it's not!" piped in the sawfish. He stopped talking when the white gave him a look. The great white was definitely the leader. Now that the group was so close, Gray could see they were pups like he and Barkley. If any were older than their twelve summers, it wasn't by much. An uncomfortable silence descended on them all. The thresher girl, who seemed nice, gave a worried look to the great white and indicated they should leave. He nodded and the four were about to turn.

For some reason Gray didn't want them to go. "So, what are your names? This is my friend Barkley and I'm Gray."

"I'm Snork!" replied the sawfish shark, a little too eagerly for anyone in either group. He was about to swim forward, maybe in greeting, but maybe for a sneak attack.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Snork, is it? Keep your distance, okay?" Barkley told the sawfish, whose nose looked sharp and deadly, chock-full of pointy spikes on either edge. Neither of them wanted to be filleted, so caution was a good thing.

The girl thresher didn't like this one bit. "You seem kind of rude, Barkley—is it?" she asked sarcastically, saying "is it" just like Barkley had, mocking him. This made Gray smile, which she saw and continued, "Snork's just being friendly, you know."

"Yeah," Gray piled on, "Snork's just being friendly." Wow, if looks could send you to the Sparkle Blue, Gray would have begun his eternal swim on the spot.

It turned out that Barkley's venomous stare was hilarious to the four sharks from the other group, and they laughed. "Oh, so now I'm the big flipper?" Barkley asked everyone. "I'm just being safe, you know!" For some reason this struck everyone as even funnier.

"You're hilarious!" exclaimed Snork, snorting as he laughed, making Barkley and Gray chortle along with everyone else. Pretty soon Gray's sides hurt he was laughing so much. It took a moment for everyone to catch their breath and introduce themselves properly.

Aside from Snork, the great white leader was Striiker, Shell was the big bull shark, and then there was Mari, who seemed pretty interested in Gray when he said he was a reef shark, but that could have been his imagination. Mari had that really cool thresher's tail, bent back at an angle that just looked awesome. Gray wondered if it made her faster.

"You're really a reef shark?" Mari asked.

"That's what my mom tells me," he joked. Of course he was a reef shark. What else would he be?

"They must grow them real big by that reef of yours," commented Shell. The bull was quieter than the rest. He seemed okay, though.

Barkley grew suspicious. "Enough about our reef. Where do you live?"

Now Striiker gave Barkley the stink eye. "Why do you want to know where we live?"

"Just making conversation." Barkley swished his tail in a way that told Gray he was agitated. "Any reason you're so nervous?"

"I'm not nervous. Any reason *you're* so nervous?" Striiker shot right back.

Mari swam between them, taking position by Gray's right. "Okay you two, enough," she said. "We're not part of any shiver, if that's what you're thinking. We're four friends who swim together because it's safer here if you do that."

"So, you're like a rogue quad?" Gray asked. Barkley waved his tail for him to stop.

Striiker was genuinely puzzled. "Rogue quad? Is that even a thing?"

"I love it!" Snork exclaimed.

Gray explained, "Barkley told this shark we were a rogue pair when he got flustered."

"Aww, did you have to go there?" Barkley said, flipping his fins in embarrassment. "I thought that giant tiger was going to kill us! A flipper named Thrash."

There was an immediate chill in the water. Their new acquaintances moved back a couple of tail strokes from Barkley and Gray. "You know Thrash? Are you friends with Thrash?" Striiker asked evenly.

Gray answered, "Like Barkley said, he attacked us. So, no, we're not friends." He proceeded to tell the entire story of their meeting with Thrash.

Barkley added a lot of description to the fight. Gray wasn't sure it was all true, but it sure sounded good. He ended with, "... and then that muck-sucker asked us to be a part of his gang, and I was like, 'no way, lagoon scum, we're a rogue pair and way too cool for your dumb shiver!' And we let him see our tails when we left." Barkley waved his tail in a derisive manner. It was kind of embarrassing. Almost no one believed that's what happened. Almost.

"You may be the coolest sharks, ever," Snork whispered in wonder.

Striiker shook his head. "And on that note" He rolled a slow turn, beckoning Mari and the other three sharks away from Gray and Barkley. Mari didn't move, sizing them up, instead.

"They did fight Thrash, and they're still here," Mari told Striiker, who turned around. He didn't seem happy.

The bull shark agreed. "And they're not with Goblin."

Striiker glared at Snork before he could add anything, then frowned at both Mari and Shell. "We just met them today! How do we know they can be trusted?"

"How do we know *you* can be trusted?" Barkley huffed. "By the way, what are we talking about?"

Gray had a pretty good idea and nodded to Mari to continue.

"The reason they're still swimming the Big Blue is because there were two of them against Thrash. The reason we're still around is because we four look out for each other. I think six would be better than four," Mari explained.

Shell nodded in agreement. Barkley wasn't so sure. Striiker seemed annoyed but not totally against the idea. And Snork? Well, Snork was being friendly again. "Come on! With six sharks we could be a real shiver! A leader with Five in the Line!" he said.

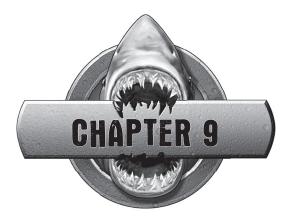
The great white shook his head. "If we wanted that we could have all stayed in our shivers. Mostly." Striiker gave a guilty glance to Shell, who for some reason looked away. He continued, "The one reason we like each other is because we aren't in shivers, which we know from experience is bad!"

"Hey, not all shivers are bad," Barkley protested.

"Yeah, we came from a great shiver," Gray told the four.

"The six of us could be a good shiver! A great shiver, even!" Snork almost bounced in the water as he got more and more excited, flexing his flippers back and forth. "And I have the perfect name! Rogue Shiver!"

And so, on the swim to their new homewaters, Rogue Shiver was born.



THE PALE MOON'S GLOW LIT THE WATERS WITH a soft and eerie light. Gray sped toward the drove of snapper, slowing just enough to let them see him streaking their way. The group of fish angled away from his open maw—right between the walls of a cramped canyon where Rogue Shiver was waiting! The plan worked to perfection once again, and Gray was able to munch his share of snapper as they fled in the return direction after the rest caught theirs.

"We are getting so good at this!" Barkley remarked, finishing off a plump and juicy fish.

Gray nodded. Who would have thought that what had started out with the worst day of his life would turn into the best time of his life? It had been two weeks since Gray and Barkley formed Rogue Shiver with their new friends. After some initial wariness, mostly from Striiker, the group now mixed easily. They learned many things about each other, except for the whale in the water. The one topic nobody brought up was why each was swimming the Big Blue and not in another shiver.

"I'm stuffed," said Snork. "We never ate this well when there were just four of us!" It turned out Snork was nearly thirteen and a half, the oldest of the group by six months, although he didn't act like it. Striiker and Mari were twelve like Gray and Barkley, and Shell had turned thirteen just last month.

"It's probably a good time for hunting or something," Gray said.

Striiker harrumphed. "Let's go home. We don't want to be seen by Goblin Shiver's patrols." For some reason, if anything was more annoying to the great white than having his leadership questioned, it was Gray being nice to him.

"Their name was much cooler when it was Riptide Shiver," remarked Snork as he followed. "Since Goblin changed it, now *we* have the best shiver name in the whole Big Blue."

They actually had performed a shiver creation ceremony. Snork insisted. Even Striiker went along with it, probably because he got to be leader. The others voted themselves in the order they had been subconsciously swimming in. Mari was elected first, Shell second, and Snork third. Gray was chosen as fourth in the Line. Mari wanted to vote Gray higher, much higher in fact, but he wouldn't hear of it. It did seem pretty funny that Snorknow that he knew Snork—was technically supposed to be tougher than him. Gray let it slide. He hadn't been in the open ocean for even one moon, and he knew the others were better suited toward making decisions.

Besides, Gray was happy to wait until the Tuna Run when he would rejoin his mother and Coral Shiver. Gray wanted to ask his new friends to come to the reef but hadn't found the right time. He didn't tell this to anyone, though, because he hadn't mentioned it to Barkley yet. The dogfish's mood was *not* good when he was chosen as Rogue Shiver's fifth.

"Are you kidding me?" his friend wailed. "There are only six of us, total! That's just embarrassing!" But when Mari asked whether he would rather be fifth in the Line or the only general member of Rogue Shiver, Barkley grumbled "Fine. Fifth. Great," and swam away. It took an entire day to calm the dogfish down.

Their new home was only a short swim away and well hidden. Towering brown and blue-greenie waved majestically, forming a wall that made everyone feel safe. You could enter unseen by swimming beneath a short tunnel formed by a fallen cliff. And there was the perfect hiding spot. It was an old landshark ship, *really* old from what Barkley told them. And big!

The ship had three levels, and when it had ridden the chop-chop, humans used wooden planks called "oars" to move the bulky thing through the water! Aside from a large crack in the bottom of the ship now, it was

through these oar openings that a nice current flowed, allowing easy breathing. This was much better than sleeping in open water where you could be spotted, or down in the greenie where you could get something in your gills. There was plenty of space inside, although one room on the end was filled with shiny yellow disks that spilled everywhere because the wooden boxes they were packed into had rotted through. No one liked that area, as the moldy boxes left a tang in the water you could taste, unlike the rest of the ship.

Even though the ship lay three times the depth of the reef, there was still good light from the sun and moon. But it wasn't like the reef where other dwellers would talk with the shiver. Here the shellheads, lumos, fish, and urchins stayed out of the way when Rogue Shiver was around. Gray tried to ask a sea dragon if she knew Yappy, but the little dweller slalomed into the greenie without saying a word. He hadn't thought he'd miss speaking with other dwellers, but he did.

Only when Gray and his new shiver were by the wreck did they relax completely. It had been a good day. No, a great day. Gray found himself staring at Mari's sleek thresher tail as they went inside the landshark ship.

Unfortunately, Barkley saw this and whispered, "Mari cuts a nice wake, eh?"

He felt his face color. "She's okay, I guess."

They hung around the main cabin, enjoying the cool current streaming through the ship. Gray decided on the

spot. It was finally time to tell the rest of Rogue Shiver how he got here.

"You've all heard of the Tuna Run?" he asked.

Striiker snorted. "I've been there twice!" Others in the group rolled their eyes. Apparently the great white spoke about this a little too often.

"Well, I think I should tell you how I got here and why I'm mentioning it now," Gray told everyone.

"Everyone's tired, Gray." Barkley swished his tail furiously. "We don't need to hear any of your long, boring stories." But Gray was determined and told the entire tale. After he was finished, Mari, Striiker, Shell, and Snork stared at Barkley with a newfound respect.

The dogfish misread the situation. "What? Is there snapper between my teeth?" he asked, genuinely clueless.

Snork tapped his saw bill on Barkley's head. "You are the best friend a fin could have!"

Even the normally quiet Shell remarked, "Not many sharkkind would leave their home like that."

Gray never thought he'd see the day when Barkley was speechless, but that day had come. The dogfish stuttered, actually embarrassed by the attention. "Yeah well, that's the way I roll. Anyway, we're talking about Gray who still hasn't said what any of this has to do with Tuna Run! So?" Barkley gave Gray a friendly bump in the flank with his snout.

"My mom wants me to find her at the Tuna Run. If I can prove I'm a good hunter, they'll let me back in." The reaction wasn't what Gray expected.

"You're leaving?" asked Mari.

"I knew they were just acting like our friends!" huffed Striiker. "They only needed a place to stay for a while."

Shell stared at both of them as Snork said in a trembling voice, "Is that true, Gray?"

Gray had enough of Striiker. "You know, you're a real tail bender! I've been nothing but nice, and you just think the worst of me!"

"Tell me I'm wrong!" roared Striiker

Gray was ready to rumble, butting Striiker against the hull of the landshark ship. "If you'd let me finish, I was going to say you could all come back to the reef and be a part of Coral Shiver, you great, big krillhead!"

Striiker was speechless for a moment. "You'd do that for us?" he asked in wonder. "For me, even?"

Gray was taken aback by the vulnerability of the great white. "If you promised not to be such a flipper, then yes."

"But if you think you'd be leading, or even in the Line, you'd be wrong," said Barkley a little too loudly. He had taken up position above Gray and was still amped up and ready to fight the great white. "I mean, maybe one day, maybe. But you know how it is with new members. Take it from your fifth." This got a chuckle from Striiker, which released all the tension among them. Pretty soon everyone was chattering excitedly, with Barkley telling the other four all the great things about Coral Shiver's reef. But everything took an odd turn when Shell asked, "So it was still there when you guys went back?"

"Went back when?" asked Gray.

"The day when Barkley was named fifth and swam off," the bull shark answered. "We thought you went for a visit or something. Some of us do that, from time to time. We didn't know you had been banished."

"No, our home is farther than that," Gray told him.

"And the reef's been there since Tyro swam past it," Barkley guffawed. "Why wouldn't it still be there?"

Everyone grew quiet. A bad feeling prickled up Gray's spine. He looked at Mari for an explanation, but she shook her head and didn't say anything.

Striiker swam forward a bit. "You mentioned you were in a shiver by a reef when you fought Thrash. You shouldn't have done that."

Barkley shook his head. "Gray didn't say *where* our homewaters were."

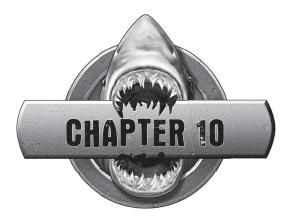
"They found mine," Snork whispered in a haunted voice. The happy-go-lucky sawfish was trembling. "They find every shiver they hear about."

"Mostly, we're from shivers that Goblin found," said Shell sadly. "He's at war with my old shiver, Razor Shiver. The only reason we're still alive is because we have more mariners than Goblin. Not because he doesn't want to destroy those homewaters."

Mari was upset and didn't seem to want to speak, but Gray motioned her to tell him what she was thinking. "Thrash is dumb, but if he told Goblin you were from a reef where he could find new recruits, he *will* find your reef."

"Then what?" Gray asked, growing frantic. "What would he do?"

Snork's voice was faraway and reedy when he broke the silence. He whispered, "They eat anyone who doesn't join."



GRAY AND BARKLEY LEFT IMMEDIATELY FOR THE reef and didn't speak, conserving their energy on the long trip. After two nonstop days swimming with no food or rest, they finally reached the Coral Shiver homewaters. Gray saw that the greenie path into the reef was intact.

But it was quiet. Very quiet.

There was usually noise by the reef. Keen shark senses picked up the sounds and disturbances caused by dwellers and other sharkkind talking or swimming. When you weren't hunting, you'd ignore these as background noise. Now all Gray felt, all he heard, was the gentle tide swishing the greenie back and forth. There were no snatches of conversation, or shouting, or tail strokes from any ocean dweller. It set him on edge. Gray's heart was pounding so hard, it felt as if it would hammer its way out of his body. "Follow me," he whispered.

The entire reef was still and silent. When he got closer, he noticed there were a few tiny, darting fish about, but not many. The larger dwellers had been scared away. Or eaten. He could smell the faint scent of blood everywhere. The beautiful corals and greenie were gouged and torn, as if hit by a mighty undersea storm. A few urchins and anemones were there, but faded their colors into muted browns and grays, the better to hide themselves. For a moment neither Gray nor Barkley said anything, hushed by the devastation around them. Gray had expected the worst, but it still didn't prepare him for this. The reef was totally destroyed.

"Do you think everyone..." Barkley left the question hanging in the water.

"Mom! Mom!" yelled Gray, startling the dogfish. No one answered, though.

"All of them?" Barkley asked himself in a dazed voice. "How can...how?

"NO!" Gray sped around the entire reef but it was the same everywhere. Desolation and stillness. Gray and Barkley cried by the edge of the reef, where they had gone after the drove of bluefin. It was quite some time before either could speak.

"This is my fault," Gray told Barkley.

"Gray-"

He cut his friend off. "If I had listened to you none of this would have happened! If I had listened to Mom! If I—"

Barkley gave him a sudden stinging tail slap to the flank. "You didn't do this! You. Did. Not."

This didn't make Gray feel any better. He knew deep inside that this was his burden to carry. I'm sorry, Mom, he thought silently as the slow tide carried his tears away.

"Gray? Barkley?" asked a small voice. They looked to where a few sad strands of greenie were still in place. There! Something moved. Gray and Barkley tensed, scared and alert.

Out poked Yappy's head. "Is it really you?"

Barkley exhaled loudly. "Yappy! You nearly scared us to death!"

Gray quickly swam up to Yappy and asked loudly, "Who did this? Have you seen my mother? Where is everyone?"

The little sea dragon zipped back into the greenie. "Stop yelling at me!" he squeaked.

Barkley nipped at Gray's tail, almost getting bitten as a result. The dogfish couldn't believe it and yelled, "What's wrong with you? Yappy's our friend." Gray saw the look in Barkley's eyes and was ashamed.

Yappy poked his head out of the greenie again. "Really, Barkley? I always thought you didn't like me!"

"No, Yappy. Sometimes I get annoyed and take stuff out on you. Sorry," said the dogfish. "Do you know where our families are and what happened?"

"I don't know where your cousins are, Barkley. They were on the other side of the reef, so I didn't see. The shiver, they tried to fight. They tried. But there were so many. So many."

"My mom?" asked Gray fearfully.

"I'm not sure." The little sea dragon choked back a sob. "I ran and hid! I'm a coward!"

"You're not a coward!" Barkley told him. "The shiver—were they taken?"

"No! They got away!" Yappy told them. Gray's heart leapt as Yappy continued. "Atlas was shouting, 'Go! Go! We'll meet at the Tuna Run!'" The sea dragon brightened a little. "You should seen Atlas! He wanted everyone to leave, but Overbiter stayed with him, flank to flank! They held them off as Quickeyes and Onyx led everyone away! Sent at least three of them to the Sparkle Blue! But then..." Sadness returned to Yappy's eyes.

Gray couldn't speak, so Barkley prodded in a low voice, "Then?"

"They both were eaten."

Gray felt a hotness growing inside him. A reddish haze descended over his eyes as he thought of someone eating sharks from his shiver family. "Who did that?" Gray asked in a deathly quiet voice.

The little sea dragon's eyes grew misty. "They came at high moon when everybody was resting. But not me. I saw them. I saw . . ."

"Yappy! Saw who?" Gray asked his voice rising, Barkley gave him a look when the sea dragon cringed. "Saw who?" the dogfish asked in a soothing tone.

The sea dragon answered in a shaky whisper, "Bull sharks. They were bulls."

Barkley was struck dumb with a look of disbelief. Gray swam over, but not too fast or close this time. He kept his voice low so he wouldn't scare the sea dragon off. "Yappy, this is no time for stories. Who really did this?"

"STORIES?" he yelled into Gray's face. "Look around, you big lumpfish! Two of my sisters were eaten!" Gray actually backed away from the tiny sea dragon's rage and grief. Yappy got hold of himself. "I'm sorry I yelled. But they were definitely bull sharks. The one who ate Paxson had a weird scar on his snout. Looked like a clam shell."

Paxson was the sea dragon's oldest sister. She had always made fun of her brother for talking with Gray and Barkley. Now she was gone.

"Do you want to come with us?" Barkley asked. "We have another place."

The sea dragon shook his head. "My family's leaving. We have cousins in the Dark Blue. We'll stay with them for a while." Yappy's eyes grew hard for a moment. "When we find those bulls, we'll get them. You'll see." The diminutive sea dragon flicked his flippers in a wave good-bye and left. "See you around. Maybe."

Barkley shook his head. "Yappy and his giant cousins getting revenge on a shiver of bulls. If it wasn't today that would be funny." "But it is today," said Gray. "And it's a good idea. We'll find who did this and somehow, someway—"

Barkley flicked a fin at Gray. "Whoa, whoa," he said. "Didn't you hear the good news? Yappy didn't see our families get taken or eaten. He said the shiver escaped! We'll go to the Tuna Run and find them." Gray was about to ask if Barkley really believed that everyone was still alive and there would be a big, happy reunion at the Tuna Run. His friend saw the question in his eyes and answered before Gray could say anything. "I have to believe that," he said. "We both do."

Barkley was right. No matter what, their families would be at the Tuna Run.

They would find them. Or swim the Sparkle Blue trying.