

# The Kraken Story

Pascal Kulcsar

## PROLOGUE:

They once said:

“Beware the infernal realm of the god Poseidon, shaker of the earth, breaker of mountains, master of the seas.

Son of Cronos, brother of Hades, he rides the waves armed with his trident, awakening the beasts from the deep.”

But they ignored that even monsters dream.

And that beneath fury, love waits, silent and patient as the tide.

Do not fear the creature you think you fear.

The Kraken is no curse.

Its heart beats in rhythm with our fears, our losses, everything we refuse to love.

It watches mankind from below not to destroy us, but to understand.

Perhaps even... to love us.

So when the depths tremble, it is not the anger of gods we hear,  
but the longing of a being the sea has never stopped loving.

Let us show mercy to it, as it would to us.

For in the darkest trenches, something is awakening.

An ancient breath.

A shiver in the black.

A memory rising, slow, vast, almost human.

Mac Down carries the ocean in his gut and the world's anger in his heart.

But that heart bleeds with a void only the sea understands.

And sometimes, in the silence of night, he thinks he hears another heartbeat far beneath the waves.

A presence calling to him.

A presence he has already seen, already felt in a dream, in a tear, in the gaze of Jessica.

If she falls, he will sink.

And if he sinks, the Kraken will rise.

For the sea keeps only those who dare to love it.

And perhaps, where everything fades, love will return monstrous, pure, impossible.

For the oceans do not belong to us.

We belong to them.

And some hearts, even swallowed by the deep, refuse to die.

The sea shivers.  
The depths stir.  
A pulse crosses the night, born from the bottom of the world slow, immense, almost human.  
The wind stops, the surface turns still.  
Something has awakened.

And Mac, without knowing, has felt it.  
And it was on that night, when the sea opened under the moon, that an ancient breath swept  
across the world...  
and everything began.

# CHAPTER 1 : THE SLEEP OF THE ABYSSES

Beneath the restless surface of the Pacific, in this late spring, the ocean breathes like an immense beast.

Sunlight breaks there into shards of jade and gold, scattering into shifting sprays distorted by the swell.

The waves, tense and nervous, slap the skin of the world, and under them, in the dense green saltwater, glide six shadows, six giants with quiet hearts: sperm whales, carved from night and from the flesh of myth.

Their breath pierces the sea like columns of crystal, geysers blending water, wind, and light. Each exhalation is a star's sigh, an echo from the deep.

They move, heavy and majestic, through the wavering clarity. Their massive backs rise, black mirrors polished by millennia of travel.

The first, an old scarred male, advances with the slowness of a weary god. His scars tell of wars no one has witnessed, of winters made of salt and silence.

Suddenly, he tilts.

A silent signal, an ancestral command, and the others follow him, solemn and obedient, gliding in his wake like constellations made of flesh.

They dive straight toward the night, where light dies, where cold begins.

Far below, much farther down, stretches the Nazca Ridge off Chile, an immense scar splitting the skin of the Pacific.

The abyss there is a blue almost solid, wrapped in a silence of lead.

The world of men no longer exists here: only pressure, slowness, and memory remain.

Between underwater mountains and canyons of shadow rests a colossal form, motionless, ancient as fear itself.

The Kraken.

A gigantic decapodiform, forty meters across, its arms studded with blood-red nodules, guarding its nest of translucent eggs, pale as sleeping moons.

Warm currents make the membranes quiver, and each vibration feels like a heartbeat, gentle and unsettling at once.

But intruders approach.

The six giants, guided by hunger, dive deeper still.

Their sonar snaps, rolls, and spreads in muffled waves.

The Kraken senses them. Its eyes open slowly, two black pearls in the liquid night.

The silence shatters.

The battle erupts.

A turmoil of water and flesh, a thunder without sound.  
Tentacles lash the sea, coil, tighten. The whales' jaws snap, crush, tear.  
Blood bursts forth, dark red, dissolving at once into drifting purple clouds.

Blows echo like storms trapped beneath the world.  
The scent saturates the water; even the stones, even the shells, seem to tremble.

To defend its eggs, the creature strikes until the last pulse of its heart.  
Its arms, one after another, split and tear.  
But it does not flee.

It rears, immense, in one final surge of rage and love intertwined.  
The entire ocean seems to bend under its silent scream.

Then everything falls still.  
Calm returns, with a silence almost sacred.

The whales circle slowly, heavy and sated after devouring the eggs.  
They vanish into the night, swallowed by the depths.

Among the swirling debris, nothing remains but a field of shattered shells and blood.

And there, held by chance, a single egg, thrown aside by the storm of battle, rolls gently,  
carried by a soft warm current.  
It settles between the broken flanks of an ancient wreck: a ship lost for centuries, covered in  
coral, in glassy encrustations, in forgetfulness.

Inside one of its gaping holds rests a ceramic jar, cracked but upright, its wide handles draped  
in algae.  
The egg slips inside, docile, resting against the damp inner walls.

Around it, the sea grows quiet, as if it understands.  
And in the jar, life waits.  
Innocent, still invisible, yet beating with the promise of a return, a cry, a love soon to be born.

## CHAPTER 2 : THE SELF-MADE MAN

Pacific Ocean. Nazca Ridge, Chile. Two days later.

The sun beats down, vertical and merciless.

Around the Self-Made Man, the sea shimmers like a plate of molten steel. The waves, small and tight, strike the hull with a sound like burning metal. The air smells of hot oil and wet rope. A heavy wind lifts whiffs of algae and diesel.

The old wreck-hunting vessel moves forward in great, groaning strides, creaking at every joint, its sides covered in rust and dried salt.

Four men hurry across the deck: sun-scorched silhouettes, clenched jaws, bodies exhausted but stubborn. The nets groan under the weight of their catch, a tangle of ropes, mud, and fragments of history.

Mac Down, twenty-one, African American, with a sharp, clear gaze, directs the maneuver. His dark skin glistens with sweat, his shirt sticks to his chest, and his breath matches the rhythm of the sea.

“Easy, Ailfred!”

His voice cuts through the noise like an order rising from the deep.

The net slides onto the deck, dripping brackish water and spreading the smell of silt and dead wood.

Mac shakes his head, disgusted.

“Bottom trawling... this really isn’t the way to go.”

Ailfred, massive, red-haired, with sun-hardened skin and knotted arms, snorts loudly without replying.

Beside him, Joe, round-bellied and calm-faced, pulls at the hand winch, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his lips.

The wind threatens it; he shields it with a habitual, almost ancient sailor’s gesture.

Mac steps forward and nudges a waterlogged scrap with the tip of his boot.

“Just more marine mush...”

Behind him, a heavy step echoes. The deck vibrates.

Garald Collinsons approaches. Fifty years old, tall, lean, with a beard flecked with gray and a red cap screwed onto his skull. In his steel-colored eyes, the sea seems to have left shards of storm.

“Mac Down!” he says, his raspy voice rolling with a faint trace of a lost Irish accent. “Will you never understand what can move a treasure hunter?”

He crouches, plunges his hands eagerly into the muck, and gently lifts a small piece of waterlogged wood. The fragment drips, dark and glossy.

“Look at that! Probably a Spanish galleon. History carved into the very fibers of the wood... and you call this mush?”

Mac lowers his head, offering an apologetic smile.

“I’m sorry, Garald. But you have to admit, most of what we bring up is... disappointing.”

Garald rises slowly, his pupils narrowing.

“You have no faith, kid. You think you want to be a treasure hunter, but you’ve never been hungry.”

His voice roughens, turning to gravel.

“I’ve known the cold, empty nets, the sea that takes more than it gives. I swore that one day, I’d be rich. Free. My own master.”

A shadow passes through his eyes: the memory of Jimmy, his brother, swallowed by the sea during a storm years ago. The past has never stopped resurfacing for him.

Mac meets his gaze.

“I study every night. I learn. I want to understand history, not just sell it. One day, I’ll be an archaeologist.”

Garald lets out a harsh laugh, dry as a slap.

“An archaeologist? Poor kid. I have a boat, a crew, and Californian investors who believe in me.”

He steps forward suddenly, grabs Mac by the collar, his breath thick with rum.

“Look at you! You’ve got nothing. Not even the fire you need to survive out here.”

Mac, voice tight, whispers:

“Fortune favors the bold...”

Garald releases him with a sharp gesture. A predatory grin twists his mouth.

“Then be bold. Get that haul stowed and clean this damned deck. And don’t forget: you’re not my equal. Not yet.”

He turns on his heel. His boots clang on the wet boards.

“What heading, Garald?” Joe asks.

“We’re heading back to Anaheim Bay.”

“Damn Italian boat!”

Garald’s voice booms, shaking the metal walls. He slams his fist on the railing, then vanishes into the cabin, swallowed by darkness.

Joe slowly lifts his eyes and shakes his head.

“Now you see why he lives alone? He’s a sea wolf... but without a pack. Only his ego can stand him. Even Ailfred and I can’t reach him. And we’ve known him for years. Him and his brother, God rest his soul.”

Mac frowns.

“His brother?”

Ailfred approaches with a canteen. He takes a swig, wipes his mouth, then fixes his gaze on Mac.

“Jimmy. His little brother. Died in a storm. The nets went wild in the swell and dragged him under. Garald could never pull him out. Since that day, he hasn’t slept a full night. They dreamed of fortune together, of freedom... of becoming kings on their own sea.”

“Why didn’t he go into fishing then?” Mac asks.

Joe places his calloused, battered hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Greed, kid. And after Jimmy died, he couldn’t stand his father anymore. The old man passed a few years later, eaten away from the inside. Since then, Garald has had only this: the boat and his bitterness.”

Mac stays silent for a moment, staring at the horizon.

“What a story... Now I understand him a little better.”

He turns back to the net, methodical. The damp mesh lowers slowly into the hold, spilling dirty water, shells, and fragments of blackened wood.

Between two planks gnawed by time, something catches the light: an ancient jar, with wide chipped handles, full of seawater.

It rolls gently, held back by the mesh.

Mac leans closer.

“An amphora?”

Joe shrugs.

“A souvenir from the deep, kid. Leave it. We’ll check it at the port.”

But beneath the stagnant water, hidden from the eyes of men, a faint tremor disturbs the silence.

A rough shell, stuck to the ceramic wall, throbs weakly.

A heartbeat. Then another.

The ocean around it seems to hold its breath.

And in the jar, life waits.

## CHAPTER 3 : ANAHEIM BAY

At dawn, the Self-Made Man cut through the thin mist covering the coast.  
Between Seal Beach and Sunset Beach, Anaheim Bay opened like a quiet wound, bathed in pink and golden light.  
The sky, rinsed clean by the night, still exhaled the scent of salt and warm sand.  
The first waves licked the side of the boat with a weary sigh.

In the air drifted a blend of diesel, spray, and kelp, the sharp familiar fragrance of California ports at daybreak.  
Seagulls circled around the mast like white thoughts.  
Their piercing cries shredded the morning silence.

On the shore, the buildings of the Marine Research Center gleamed under the rising sun  
immaculate cubes, steel and glass reflections, like a soulless city built by science.

The boat drifted slowly toward the dock.  
The mooring lines slid into place, the creaking pulleys singing their usual refrain of habit and fatigue.  
Mac Down, standing at the bow, watched the awakening coast.  
He loved that fragile moment when the sea seemed to hold its breath before surrendering men to the land.

On the dock, someone was waiting for him.  
A young girl with sun-browned skin, black hair fluttering in the wind, sitting in a wheelchair.  
Her raised arms looked as if she wanted to catch the birds.

“Hey, handsome!” she shouted brightly.

Mac burst out laughing and raised his hand in return.  
He jumped onto the dock, bag on his back, smiling with exhaustion but sincerity.

“Salie Durango, my first fan! Your mom let you come greet a poor, broke student?”

They hugged briefly.  
The child smelled of sunscreen, sugar, and sea air.  
Her eyes shone like two shards of onyx.

“So?” she asked eagerly. “Did you finally find the Inca treasure?”

Mac sighed, shaking his head.  
“Just marine mush and pieces of wrecks.”

“Garald said it was the treasure of the century!” she protested.

Mac lifted his chin toward the horizon, a spark of challenge in his eyes.  
“The treasure of the century is the one I’ll find, Salie. And when I do, I’ll be the richest guy in the country.”

A voice boomed behind him:  
“Hey, Mac!”

He turned. Garald was striding forward, his shadow biting into the light.  
His poorly trimmed beard caught the morning reflections.  
His smile was only a stretched façade, a scar of vanity.

“Good morning, Salie. How are you?”

The girl instantly looked away, her hands tightening on the armrests.  
The captain’s tone always chilled her.

“You know who’s in charge here, don’t you?” Garald snapped, without waiting for an answer.  
Then, to Mac:  
“You didn’t forget anything, I hope?”

Mac hesitated.  
“You... you can’t be serious?”

Garald shrugged, satisfied with his own cruelty.  
“You want to be a great archaeologist, don’t you? Then work. When I’m back from vacation, everything at the center better be done. Or you’re fired.”

His boots smacked against the concrete.  
The air quivered in his wake like after a slap.

Salie watched him leave, then said in a trembling voice:  
“He’s a tyrant!”

Mac smiled sadly.  
“I don’t have a choice, Salie. He’s my boss. If I want to keep studying, I have to swallow his poison before I can break free.”

He took out his phone. The screen vibrated, a name appeared familiar, painful.  
His gaze froze, suspended between longing and fear.  
Then he switched the phone off and slipped it back into his pocket like someone burying a memory.

“Why didn’t you answer?” Salie asked, puzzled.

“Nothing important.”

She raised an eyebrow, her smile returning, sly this time.  
“It was Jessica, wasn’t it?”

Mac laughed, but the sound was hollow, like an engine coughing.  
He placed his hands on the wheelchair handles.  
“Come on, let’s go. Garald wants me at the lab before noon.”

“Loser!” she teased, laughing again. “Loser!”

Their laughter drifted on the wind.  
Behind them, the sea beat the jetty with a slow, steady rhythm, like a heart that remembers.

## CHAPTER 4 : THE RESEARCH CENTER

In the evening, the Marine Research Center still vibrated with muffled activity. In the distance, behind the thick windows, the swell could be heard crashing against the dikes of Anaheim Bay. Cold lamps cast an aquarium-like glow over the stainless-steel benches and bleached walls. The air smelled of drying silt, algae dust, and the damp rust of instruments.

Mac wore a large white apron. His soaked sleeves clung to his skin. Warm water slid over his fingers as he patiently cleaned fragments of wreckage with a brush. Around him, the filtration machines hummed, low and steady, like a mechanical breath. An old radio on a shelf crackled out a muffled rap track, lost between frequencies.

Before him, a glass bin overflowed with relics: shards of pottery, pre-Columbian figurines, oxidized tools, shells encrusted with salt and silence. Each fragment seemed to whisper a word from another time.

Behind him, a vast aquarium stretched across the entire wall. Fish, crustaceans, and jellyfish floated inside like slow thoughts. It was a miniature sea, a world of reflections where past and present blended.

The door suddenly opened with a metallic squeal. “I see Cupisnique, Mochica, Chimu, and Lambayeque no longer hold any secrets from you!” A man entered theatrically, an insolent smile on his lips.

Short, stocky, black sunglasses, rebellious blond strands, tattoos winding over his forearms: Bruce Fushun, familiar whirlwind.

“Bruce Fushun!” Mac exclaimed, amused. “The greatest fisherman in Anaheim Bay!”

“You know I’ve dreamed of that since the orphanage,” Bruce replied, falsely modest, puffing out his chest.

“For me, the obsession is here,” Mac said, pointing at the table. “Understanding the pre-Hispanic Empire. Its history haunts me.”

“Crappy empire,” Bruce replied without hesitation.

Mac frowned, his brush suspended in midair. “Show some respect for my work.”

Bruce burst into loud laughter, then grabbed Mac by the shoulders with rough, brotherly affection.

“Why are you still working for that old shark Garald? Everyone knows he drains everything he touches!”

Mac sat on a stool, his face tired.

The blue light of the aquarium played over his cheekbones like an inverted sea.

“He’s the only one who gave me a chance,” he said quietly. “And with him, I can study... and survive.”

“A jerk all the same,” Bruce concluded, pulling a bottle of amber alcohol from his back pocket.

He lifted it toward the ceiling, his tattoos gleaming under the light.

“To our express drinking session!”

Mac burst out laughing, this time sincerely.

“To our joyful reunion, my friend.”

They clinked their glasses. The sound rang against the metal, clear as a fragment of truth.

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Later, the bottle was almost nothing but a memory.

The crackling radio spat out a distant beat, and the lamps flickered now and then.

The laboratory bathed in a troubled half-darkness, a blend of shadow, alcohol, and laughter.

Bruce poured two full glasses and handed one to Mac.

They toasted again, louder, heavier.

Mac’s glass clacked against the table.

Their voices faded into the low hum of the machines.

And somewhere, in a forgotten corner of the water tank, the jar still slept.

Under its murky surface, a shadow moved slowly, almost imperceptibly.

A muted pulse, a buried beat.

“What are you planning to do now?” Mac asked, slurring slightly, still caught in his laughter.

Bruce raised his arms, striking a dramatic pose, his feet tapping the floor.

“What I love the most! Spanish flamenco dancing!”

Mac stared at him, bewildered.

“No... No, not that!”

Too late.

Bruce had already shoved his USB stick into the sound system.

A burst of guitar exploded, saturated, furious.

The room vibrated with the music.

Bruce spun around, arms spread, stomping the floor, shouting off-key, laughing wildly.

Mac, cracking up, finally joined him, bottle in hand.

Their laughter filled the space, bouncing off the walls, mingling with the breath of the machines.

And behind them, on the work table, the wide-eared jar rested peacefully.  
A bubble rose, then another.  
The water quivered slightly, as if crossed by a current from elsewhere.

At the bottom, the rough-shelled egg slowly cracked, in a barely audible snap.  
A thin bluish line of light crossed its fragile surface, trembling, almost alive.  
The sea unseen but present seemed to hold its breath.

And in that suspended breath, something a pulse, a gaze, a promise was just born.

## CHAPTER 5 : THE AWAKENING

Morning slipped into the laboratory like an intruder.

The harsh sunlight filtered through the golden slatted blinds, slicing the room into burning stripes and cold shadows.

The air was heavy with the smell of spilled alcohol, dried salt, and warm metal.

The machines still hummed faintly, like sleeping whales.

Bruce snored in an armchair, mouth half open, one hand dangling, the other gripping an empty bottle.

His eyelids twitched, and each breath made the leather jacket on his chest tremble.

On the floor, Mac slept half on a pile of wreckage, his cheek resting against a plank soaked with seawater.

His right arm hung inside the jar, as if he had sought the coolness to soothe a feverish dream.

Around him, the light refracted in the puddles, casting shifting fragments of gold and turquoise across his face.

A phone vibrated first timidly, then it rang.

A crackle, an echo from another world.

“Damn...” Bruce grumbled.

He got up, staggering, eyes bloodshot, sweat plastering his hair to his forehead.

His dragging step stirred papers, a rag, and the cold smell of alcohol.

“What a night...”

He wrapped himself in his jacket, pushed open the exit door, and shut it with a sharp thud.

The noise jolted Mac awake.

He lifted his head, mouth dry.

“Bruce?”

Silence.

Only the soft lapping of water replied.

He rubbed his forehead, wincing.

“What a headache... How can that dwarf drink so much?”

Then, glancing up at the ceiling:

“Thank you, Einstein. Must be a question of relativity.”

A faint smile touched his lips, but vanished just as quickly.

“And damn, his birthday is coming... I can’t forget the guitar.”

He straightened slowly, instinctively drawing back his arm.  
But his movement stopped cold.  
His breath caught.

A small, black creature, tiny but perfectly formed, was curled around his forearm.  
Ten supple, glistening tentacles, two ending in cartilaginous tips.  
On his damp skin, the suckers clung like little hearts beating in unison.  
Two round, luminous, almost human eyes stared at him without blinking.

“An... octopus?”

Mac’s voice cracked, suspended between fascination and fear.

He leaned toward the jar.  
The water rippled gently, as though it breathed.  
A faint scent of iodine and silt rose to his nose, mixed with a strange warmth, almost animal.

“You... you’re a stowaway,” he whispered.

He glanced nervously around.  
His eyes fell on a plastic trash bin across the lab.

“Well... do I toss you, or keep you for dinner?”

He tried to pull the little creature off.  
The tentacles tightened, stronger, stubborn.  
A sharp shiver ran up his arm.

“Let go of me!”

Then something exploded inside his head.  
A sudden image, a memory.  
The ground vanished beneath him.  
The air turned cold.

FLASHBACK

A five-year-old boy standing before the gates of an orphanage.  
His tiny fingers clutching his mother’s hand.  
The wind blowing, carrying the smell of tears.

“Mom! No! Don’t leave me!”

The hand withdraws.  
Metal slams shut.  
The sound cuts the air like a blade.  
A muffled cry dies in the wind.

END OF FLASHBACK

Mac opened his eyes, gasping.  
The laboratory returned slowly, with its too-white light and too-sharp shadows.  
His arm was still trembling.

“Okay... All right, little one,” he whispered, his voice low and strained.  
“You win... for now.”

He stood up and staggered toward the aquarium.  
The water inside shimmered softly, a hypnotic green.  
He plunged his arm in, shivering at the cold.

“You have to let go now, all right?”

The creature still watched him.  
Its eyes seemed to understand.

Mac tapped the glass lightly with his fingertips.  
“I promise: tonight, I’ll take you back to the sea.”

Two tentacles gently struck the glass, as if in reply.  
The gesture made him jump.

Then, slowly, the little octopus released him.  
It slipped into the water, undulating like a dream, and hid between two large stones.

Mac watched it for a moment, unexpectedly calm.  
“All right,” he said, exhaling. “A shower... and then breakfast.”

He left the room.  
The door slammed behind him, cutting the world away.

Silence fell again.  
The light thickened, filtered through the windows.  
The aquarium water grew slightly cloudy.

The creature, still nestled between the stones, abruptly changed color.  
Its bumps turned a dark red, almost bloody.  
Its body seemed to swell, breathe.

In a flash, it struck.  
Its tentacles wrapped around a passing hermit crab and pierced it cleanly with its two cartilaginous fangs.  
A sharp, brief, animal crack.  
Then, nothing.

A faint wisp of blood drifted through the water.  
The aquarium returned to its calm.

But something, imperceptibly, had shifted.  
Somewhere far away, the ocean seemed to remember its child.

## CHAPTER 6 : JESSICA

The Californian sun streamed across the restaurant windows like liquid gold.  
Outside, the street vibrated, saturated with heat and muffled sounds engines, laughter, birdsong.  
The air smelled of burnt coffee and hot asphalt.

Inside, the air conditioning struggled lazily against the sunlight.  
Glasses gleamed, spoons clinked, and a soft electronic jazz track drifted from a speaker.

Mac ate alone, eyes red, a lukewarm coffee before him.  
His hands trembled slightly.  
He chewed without appetite, still haunted by the morning scene: the cold touch of the tentacles, that almost human gaze.  
His mind beat to the rhythm of that memory.

A gentle voice behind him:  
“Hello, my love.”

Time froze.  
He slowly lifted his head.

Jessica.  
Twenty years old, radiant, her blond hair like a tide of gold, her light dress caught by the breeze, the scent of amber and vanilla around her.  
Her skin glowed faintly in the light, and her eyes held the transparency of mornings too sincere.

“Jes... Jessica!”

She approached, without hesitation, and kissed him softly.  
Her lips tasted of mint.  
A brief spark, a vertigo.

Then, in a whisper:  
“Why, Mac? Why are you pulling away?”

The word “why” hung between them like a wave refusing to fall.

Mac lowered his eyes.  
“I’m sorry. You shouldn’t get attached. It’s... complicated.”

Jessica frowned, hurt.  
“Your letter before you left I read it. You think I’m going to let you run away?”

Mac attempted a fragile smile.  
“There’s no other woman, I swear.”

She brought her hand to her neck.  
Her fingers touched a pendant: a small ancient witch’s head, tarnished silver.

“You gave me this. At the beginning. Two years already.”

She closed her fingers around it.  
“I don’t want to give that up. Not you.”

Mac took her hands slowly, as if holding something sacred.  
“I love you, Jessica. More than anything.”  
He paused, searching for his words.  
“But my past... it always comes back. I can’t escape it.”

She leaned closer, her face near his, eyes full of fierce tenderness.  
“Then face it with me. Together we’ll win.”

Mac looked at her for a long time.  
His fingers trembled.  
Then he let go of her hands and sank back into his chair, drained.

The glasses chimed in the breeze.  
Outside, the calm sea seemed to smile at other lovers.

“I know I’m acting like a bastard,” he murmured, eyes drowning, “but I’m not ready for that part of my life.”

His meal remained untouched.  
He pushed the plate away sharply. The clatter of the cutlery vibrated through the warm air like the end of something.

The restaurant door opened in a rush of salty wind.  
Bruce walked in, black sunglasses, a lazy stride, an insolent smile.

“Hey, Jessi! Still gorgeous, huh.”

Jessica turned, pain filling her gaze.  
In one sharp movement, she tore off her necklace the one Mac had given her and threw it onto the table.  
The metal chimed against the wood.

“Think carefully, Mac.”

Her voice trembled, but she didn’t look back.  
She walked away, straight, proud, passing through the door and disappearing into the crowd like a flame going out.

Bruce watched her go, mouth slightly open.

"She's still hot as hell," he said dreamily, before dropping heavily into the seat beside Mac.

Then, lifting his sunglasses:

"And you're an asshole."

Silence fell.

The word remained suspended, sharp and true.

"No, worse: a big asshole."

Mac hid his face in his hands.

"Please, Bruce, not now."

"You're really missing a few fries from your order," Bruce replied, eyeing the plate.

"What now?" Mac sighed.

"Can I?" Bruce asked, already pulling the dish toward himself.

Mac shrugged, defeated.

"Go ahead, help yourself."

Bruce shoved a loud bite into his mouth, still staring at him.

"We've known each other since the orphanage, man. Even back then, you were tough with girls. You made them all cry."

Mac gave a humorless smile.

"I was a kid."

Bruce pointed his fork at him, accusing.

"No. You were already broken. You're doing a transfer, Mac. You're afraid to love because your mother abandoned you. You think every woman will leave."

Mac clenched his teeth.

"Not now, Bruce."

But Bruce went on, his voice deeper:

"You keep running from the same ghosts. Believe me, you're walking straight in your parents' footsteps."

He set down his fork and locked his gaze on Mac.

"Everyone writes their own destiny."

Silence vibrated, full of unsaid words.

Bruce continued, calmer:

"Turn the page. Otherwise nothing will ever be built."

Mac stood abruptly, the chair scraping the floor.  
“I don’t forget the past.”

His fists tightened.  
“I’ll become rich, powerful, free. And when I am, I’ll get Jessica back. My way.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow, half amused, half sad.  
“You’re chasing a treasure you’ll never find. And her... she won’t wait forever.”

Mac stared at him, a cold spark in his eyes, then turned on his heel.  
The door opened, letting in a gust of sea air, and closed on his shadow.

The waitress approached, placing the bill with a timid smile.

Bruce shrugged, sheepish.  
“Thanks for the meal, man.”

His gaze fell on the abandoned necklace.  
He hesitated.  
Then, almost tenderly, he picked it up, letting it slide into his palm.  
The metal, still warm, heated his skin.

Outside, the noon light blazed on the windows.  
The sea, a few streets away, rumbled softly.  
As if something beneath the surface was listening.

## CHAPTER 7 : THE RESEARCH CENTER

The afternoon stretched out in an ochre light, suspended between calm and drowsiness. Through the large laboratory windows, sunlight filtered in golden sheets that carved pale trails of fire through the dust. The air smelled of salt, rust, and wet wood.

Mac, wearing his apron, sleeves rolled up, cleaned fragments of wreckage with the patience of a monastic scribe. His fingers, reddened by saltwater, moved across the swollen grain of the planks, the corroded nails, the shells stuck like ancient scars. Every piece of history seemed to speak to him in a forgotten language.

“Nothing but broken ships... frigates, schooners, corvettes... from every nation,” he muttered.

He placed them one by one into bins, sorting the ghosts of the past like someone burying the dead.

Eventually his arms fell to his sides. He remained still, eyes lost in the shifting reflections of the water. The aquarium cast a blue glow across his face, as if the sea itself wished to speak to him.

“Jessica... my love...”  
His voice faded into the hum of the pumps.

Bubbles rose slowly along the glass, like thoughts he could no longer shape.

Inside the aquarium, a shadow moved. The young decapod, barely larger than a hand, approached with curiosity. Its movements had the grace of a drifting cloud underwater. Its eyes, two obsidian pearls, reflected the laboratory’s light.

Mac didn’t see it at first. He kept speaking softly, lost in thought.

“Why so many wrecks off the coast of Chile?” he whispered.

He picked up a plank, examined its shredded fibers. “They were destroyed the same way, no signs of battle... but by what?”

A soft sound pulled him from his thoughts: a regular tapping, almost musical. He turned his head.

The small cephalopod was striking the glass with its two tentacles tipped with translucent little fangs.

Mac smiled, surprised.  
“Well, there’s our stowaway.”

He stepped closer, wiped the fog away with the back of his hand, then tapped gently in return.  
The creature answered like a mirror.

“Incredible...” he breathed.

The water shivered lightly.  
The small decapod rose slowly, its tentacles undulating with mesmerizing slowness.  
When it reached the surface, it lifted one tentacle out, hesitating, and placed it on the rim of the tank.

Mac instinctively stepped back.  
“Easy, little one!”

But the tiny octopus was already wrapping itself around his forearm, its suckers feeling the skin as if reading the memory within it.

Mac let out a nervous, helpless laugh.  
“You’re supposed to stay in your aquarium, you hear me?”

The little creature squeezed gently, then loosened its grip, like a heartbeat.

Mac felt the freshness of the water travel up his arm, all the way to his shoulder.  
A strange sensation: not fear, not pain, but a diffuse warmth, almost soothing.  
He felt his heartbeat slow, his breathing fall into rhythm with the tank’s soft pulse.

Then, in a gentle impulse, he lowered his arm back into the water, letting it glide against him.  
The water vibrated more strongly, brushing his skin like a living breath.

“You feel lonely, don’t you?” he murmured.  
“I understand.”

The decapod seemed to relax, its colors shifting from deep black to iridescent blue.  
Tiny oxygen bubbles broke softly at the surface.

For a moment, the entire world seemed to stop around them.  
Light, sound, time: everything began to float.

Mac stayed there, silent, hand immersed, eyes lost in the sway of the water.

And in that laboratory silence, he felt with strange certainty that he was no longer alone.

## CHAPTER 8 : GARALD

Late evening.

In his private residence, Garald Collinsons sat behind his desk, cluttered with maps, files, and empty bottles.

His open shirt revealed a lean, sinewy chest, tanned by salt and anger.

With his phone pressed to his ear, he ground his teeth, eyebrows knitted, temples throbbing.

“Hello, Mr. Singer? Collinsons speaking. Yes... I know. The *Misericordia* still hasn’t been located.”

A tense silence stretched on the other end of the line, dense as a swell of lead.

Garald closed his eyes, inhaled slowly, then squeezed the letter opener until his knuckles turned white.

“Don’t lose your temper, for God’s sake! You think treasures grow at the bottom of the sea?”

His voice cracked on the last syllable, hoarse and irritated.

He listened a moment longer, jaw clenched, then slammed his fist on the desk.

“Ending the contract won’t change anything!” he shouted. “The competitors won’t have more luck!”

His breathing quickened.

A vein pulsed at his temple.

In Garald, anger was always a tide rising without warning.

He threw the phone onto the table; it bounced before landing with a dull thud.

His hands trembled.

At last he murmured, voice low and strangled:

“Fine... fine. Results before the end of the year. I promise.”

Silence fell abruptly, almost deafening.

The air smelled of leather and whiskey.

Garald seized the letter opener and hurled it against the wall.

The blade sank into the wood with a sharp crack.

He remained there, motionless, staring into the dim light.

The shadow of the sea rippled softly on the wall, reflected through the window.

“What do these shareholders think?” he muttered, voice muffled.

Then, louder:

“That the sea can just be dragged up and milked for their profit?”

His voice faded into the distant rumble of the waves.  
He collapsed into his chair, hands gripping the table, breathing short and fast.

On the desk, among the crumpled maps and coffee-stained papers, a yellowed photograph lay almost hidden under a file.

Two smiling boys stood on a makeshift boat, the sea behind them, and behind them a proud, sunlit man: their father.

Garald stared at it for a long time.  
His trembling fingers brushed the image, tracing the silhouette of one of the boys.  
His face hardened, then cracked open.

“Jimmy... my little brother,” he whispered.  
His voice shook, barely a breath.  
“Why does the ocean still deny me your presence?”

His eyes misted.  
“God knows I need you. But... a Collinsons never gives up.”

He lifted his head, swallowing his emotion with a sudden gesture.  
The desk was bathed in the golden light of the day’s end.  
Outside, the Pacific shone with copper tones, like a bright wound.

Garald stood, staggered slightly, and walked toward the window.  
His reflection appeared in the night, doubled in the glass: two men the one he was, and the one he wished he had remained.  
His hands still trembled.

“Everything I desire belongs to me...” he whispered in a rough voice.

Then he turned away.  
Outside, the sea seemed to laugh at him.  
Its reflections danced on the bay, mocking, alive, almost human.

And in the silence, Garald felt the absurd sensation of a breath from the open sea brushing against the window.

## CHAPTER 9 : THE EXPERIMENTATION

Noon.

The sun struck the laboratory windows like a blowtorch.

In the air drifted scents of algae, iodine, and warm metal.

The pumps hummed steadily, and the water in the tank, lit by the neon lamps, shimmered with an almost unreal green clarity.

Mac, apron on his back, contemplated his work proudly.

The cleaned fragments of wreckage gleamed under the lamp, polished like ancient pebbles.

Each piece seemed to breathe, as if it still held the memory of storms.

“Good work, Mac. Good work.”

He rubbed his hands vigorously, satisfied, then turned toward the aquarium.

Light reflected in moving patterns, projecting aquatic shadows across the walls.

“It’s almost dinner time, but before that...”

He approached and tapped gently on the glass.

The water vibrated in concentric circles and, from the bottom, the young decapod emerged already larger, denser than the day before.

Its marbled skin contracted like a living muscle.

“Hello, my friend. They say octopuses are very intelligent...”

Mac tapped the glass in Morse: short long short.

A code he used with Bruce back at the orphanage.

A smile touched his lips.

“Come.”

The creature hesitated, then replied with the exact same sequence.

The sound reverberated in Mac’s mind like an inner echo.

A shiver ran down his spine.

“You really intrigue me.”

He took a packet of freeze-dried food and poured the powder onto the surface of the water.

The particles dispersed like stars in the liquid.

Again, he tapped on the glass: eat.

The octopus remained still, its bright eyes fixed on him.

A small fish, curious, swam up and swallowed the crumbs.

“At least you got the message,” Mac said with a smile.

Suddenly, the decapod changed color violently.  
Its skin turned dark red, its bumps glowing with an almost incandescent light.

In a flash, it sprang forward and seized the fish.  
Tentacles wrapped around it, the hooks pierced the flesh, and blood spread through the water in purple clouds.

“What—?! What?!”

Mac stepped back, stunned.  
The sight was both magnificent and terrifying.

The creature devoured its prey slowly, almost reverently, before retreating into the tank’s shadows.  
For a moment, only the bubbling disturbed the silence.

Mac regained his senses, shook his head, and picked up his notebook.  
His scientific instinct resurfaced.

“Such vigor... such cutaneous reaction... remarkable.”

He grabbed a bucket of food, removed a small piece of dead meat, and dropped it into the tank.  
The piece floated for a moment before sinking slowly.

Mac tapped: eat.

Nothing.  
The creature stayed in the shadow, unmoving.

Mac frowned.  
“Why?”

He observed for a long while. Seconds stretched.  
Then a smile formed on his face.

“I understand.”

Another fish, larger, approached the meat, drawn by its smell.

At that instant, the decapod’s skin shifted again.  
The red bumps swelled, its body tensed, ready to strike.

In a silent leap, it lunged.  
Tentacles wrapped precisely around the fish, squeezing until it stilled.  
The hooks pierced the flesh with a muffled crack.

Mac pressed both hands to the glass.  
“He’s too big for you!”

But it was already too late.

The creature was gorging itself on blood, its suckers pulsing like a heart.  
A dull vibration seemed to resonate through the floor.

The young man froze, hypnotized.

The tank water clouded, bubbles multiplied, as if the creature was breathing harder.

“He wants only living prey...” Mac murmured.

Satisfied, the octopus let itself fall to the bottom, its colors slowly dimming.  
The tentacles relaxed, and it disappeared into a crack between the rocks.

Silence returned.

The hum of the machines resumed, monotonous, but something had changed:  
the air felt heavier, charged with a low, almost electric tension.

Mac, pale, wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“Garald is not going to like this...”

His gaze drifted to the aquarium.

Under the surface, his own eyes met two others dark, still, alive.

And in that watery mirror, one could almost swear a smile was forming.

## CHAPTER 10 : SALIE

Early evening.

The city blazed under a golden light that made the windows shine like liquid mirrors. The warm wind carried the smell of salt and caramelized sugar, mixed with the distant hum of cars and the cries of seagulls.

Neon signs flickered lazily, reflecting the Pacific just a few steps away.

Mac walked slowly, his hands on Salie's wheelchair.

Her thin arms rested on the armrests, her black hair fluttered in the evening breeze. She laughed at every bump on the sidewalk, as if the whole world were a carousel.

"As usual, my dear Salie," Mac said with a tired but sincere smile.

They stopped in front of the ice cream shop, a small café with pink neon lights where the air smelled of vanilla and warm waffles.

Mac pushed her up to a table on the terrace.

A waitress approached, a pencil tucked behind her ear, a kind smile on her face.

"Two Dame Blanchés, with extra whipped cream," Mac announced solemnly, raising his hand like a general at the front.

Salie widened her eyes and pretended to protest.

"You want to make me huge!"

Mac burst out laughing.

"It could only do you some good. Look at you, a gust of wind could lift you off the ground."

The waitress walked away.

A light silence fell between them, punctuated by the clinking of spoons and the soft knock of glasses on neighboring tables.

Sweet scents floated in the air, comforting, almost unreal.

Salie looked at him for a long moment, a mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

"So, the treasure? And Jessica, still hanging on to your amazing abs?"

Mac looked away, a shy smile tugging at his lips.

"Garald keeps secrets. He only gives us information when it suits him."

He played nervously with a paper napkin.

"But I'm still studying the fragments. Maybe they'll speak before we head back to sea."

"And Jessica?" she asked with the spontaneous truthfulness of children.

Mac sighed, his gaze lost in the copper reflections of the sky.  
“We’re going through... turbulence. But it’ll be okay.”

Salie rolled her eyes, exasperated.  
“Another grown-up problem!” she said theatrically.

They both laughed.

The waitress returned, placing the two ice cream bowls on the table.  
The cream was already melting at the edges, beaded with sugar and light.

“Enjoy,” she said as she walked away.

Salie grabbed her spoon and plunged her weapon into the white mountain.  
Mac did the same, a conspiratorial smile on his lips.

“I have a surprise for you,” he said with a mysterious tone.

“Oh yeah?” she asked, mouth full.

“This weekend, I’m taking you to SeaWorld in San Diego.”

She froze, spoon suspended in midair.  
“The dolphins? The orcas? For real?!”

“For real. Promise.”

Salie let out a cry of joy.  
“It’s going to be an awesome day!” she shouted, eyes sparkling.

Mac laughed and covered his ears.  
“What was that?!”

“That I adore you, handsome!” she replied, laughing with all her teeth.

Passersby turned, amused.  
Mac bowed with exaggerated modesty, making the girl laugh even harder.

Then they ate in silence a soft, suspended silence, filled with a rare kind of peace.

The light slowly faded, tinting the streets with copper and pink.  
A summer scent drifted through the city.  
In the distance, the Pacific breathed, immense and calm.

And in Mac’s heart, for the first time in a long while, something a bubble of emotion, of tenderness, of human warmth rose gently to the surface.

## CHAPTER 11 : LANGUAGE OF THE DEPTHS

Clear morning.

A pale light fell at an angle through the portholes of the Marine Research Center, carving golden rectangles across the floor.

A soft rumble vibrated through the walls: the steady breath of the pumps, the echo of the sea inside the pipes.

Mac, apron on, cleaned, sorted, and stored fragments of wreckage.

His movements were precise, almost ritual.

Each shard of wood, each corroded nail seemed to hold a story only he could decipher.

The neon light slid across his bare arms, across his tired but sharp eyes.

“Frigates, schooners, corvettes... from every nation,” he muttered.

Then, with a sigh:

“Nothing but pieces of ships. Ghosts with no voice left.”

His thoughts drifted between calculations, theories, and memories.

The night before, he had again dreamed of black water, of a heartbeat beneath the sea—immense and familiar.

The door creaked open.

A smell of diesel and kelp filled the room.

“Hey, Mac!”

Bruce had just entered, dressed like a fisherman back from the open sea: damp boots, tarred jacket, his skin tasting of salt.

His smile carried the fatigue of men who live on the water.

Mac looked up, amused.

“Well, well, the Andalusian singer! How’s the king of flamenco doing?”

Bruce lifted his arms in a dramatic gesture before collapsing onto a stool.

“I’m done, man. No juice left.”

Mac laughed, hugged him quickly, then wrinkled his nose.

“So, your fish farm is working at least?”

“Oh, hell yes!” Bruce said, dragging the stool closer to the aquarium.

“I’m expanding the tanks. Soon I won’t even need to go out to sea.”

He looked at the glass absentmindedly.

“Guess we all end up wanting to tame the water, huh?”

His calm gaze fixed on a dark corner of the tank.  
A large crab was crawling over the gravel, frantically searching for food.

Then suddenly, a shadow moved behind it fluid, fast.  
The decapod appeared.

Bigger than the day before. Almost monstrous.  
Its skin pulsed with purple reflections and its eyes glowed like embers underwater.

Before Bruce could pull back, the tentacles shot forward and latched onto the crab.  
The two fangs pierced the shell with a sharp, bony crack.  
Blood diffused into the water, a scarlet cloud in the green light.

Bruce jumped back, his stool screeching across the floor.  
“Holy shit, that’s disgusting!”

He pointed at the aquarium with a trembling finger.  
“Garald brought you that thing?”

Mac turned slowly, expression unchanged.  
“No. He’s my stowaway.”

“Your what?!”

Mac approached the glass, eyes fixed on the creature.  
He spoke in a low voice, as if to a child.  
“I found him in a big-eared jar the day after our famous drinking night. Since then, he grows... he learns.”

Bruce blinked, caught between fear and disbelief.  
“He’s voracious, your little monster. And you want to keep him?”

“Not for long. I’ll release him tomorrow. He’s strong enough now.”

Mac tapped the glass with three fingers, a familiar rhythm: come.

The creature reacted and approached slowly, undulating with an almost hypnotic grace.  
Its suckers throbbed like tiny hearts.

Bruce stared, mouth open.  
“You taught him Morse code?!”

“Not really,” Mac replied. “Just a few words.”

He pointed to an old wooden chest placed at the bottom of the tank.  
“Watch. That’s his home.”

He tapped a quick sequence on the glass: home.

The octopus stirred, then instantly glided to the chest, slipped inside, and closed the lid with a fluid motion.

Bruce widened his eyes.

“That’s insane! You trained him!”

Mac shrugged, a restrained pride in his smile.

“Let’s say... tamed him. Like a dog.”

“Like a dog?!” Bruce repeated, incredulous.

He stood up and went to the computer, wiping his hands on his pants.

“Have you at least looked up its species? Maybe he predicts lottery numbers. You and I could get rich.”

Mac laughed softly, without taking his eyes off the glass.

His hand slid over the cold surface of the aquarium and tapped another sequence: come.

“I’m just trying to communicate. And tomorrow, like I said, I’m returning him to the sea.”

Bruce was already typing, eyes narrowed behind his glasses, navigating databases and cephalopod images.

The screen projected a bluish light on their faces.

Mac, distracted, played with the creature’s tentacles in the water.

The octopus slid between his fingers, soft and silent.

A strange bond settled between them, almost soothing.

Then suddenly, a detail on the screen caught Bruce’s attention.

“Wait...” he murmured.

He leaned closer, tapped a few more keys, eyes fixed on the scrolling data.

The smile on his face slowly faded.

“Impossible...” he breathed.

Information appeared in red:

Unknown species.

Classification indeterminate.

Suspected abyssal origin.

Bruce lifted his head slowly.

His tone had darkened.

“Mac... what is that thing?”

Mac, until then smiling and at ease, froze.  
His fingers stroked the decapod with unconscious tenderness.  
His reflection wavered in the aquarium's water.

The creature stared at him with its large, dark eyes.  
Calm. Aware.

As if it already knew exactly what it truly was.

## CHAPTER 12 : THE *MISERICORDIA*

Late morning.

In his office, the still-gentle light filtered through the blinds like a breath of amber.

The air smelled of leather, warm dust, and the distant sea.

The ceiling fan turned slowly, carving shadows that swept across walls lined with maps and nautical engravings.

Garald Collinsons twirled his pen nervously between his fingers.

His gaze was fixed on an old chart spread across the desk, a promise and a threat all at once.

“Singer is giving us until the end of the year to find the Inca treasure,” he said, his voice hard, sharp as a harpoon blade.

He threw the pen; it bounced on the wood before coming to rest.

“It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack!”

Before him, Joe and Ailfred stood motionless, glasses of whiskey in hand.

Their silence weighed like a mute swell.

Joe tried a careful approach:

“Calm down, Garald. We still have time.”

But Garald was no longer listening.

Already leaning over the map, he traced an invisible line with his finger, where the earth’s crust plunges into the bottomless blue of the Nazca Trench.

His lips moved, as if reciting an old prayer.

“Commander Filippo Frassinetti, journal entry, July 20th, 1860...”

He looked up, eyes burning.

“The *Misericordia*. Italian three-masted ship, forty-five meters, a thousand tons. She was returning home with Inca gold. And that night...”

He stopped, then slammed his index finger onto the chart.

“He wrote that monstrous creatures crushed her. Word for word.”

A frozen silence fell across the room.

The ticking of the clock suddenly filled all the space.

Joe cleared his throat.

“Legends, Garald. Sailors in delirium, storm-borne hallucinations.”

Garald lifted his head. His pupils were contracted, metallic gray.

“Legends?”

He struck the map with his fist.  
Joe's glass trembled; whiskey spilled over the rim.

"And what if those creatures were real?"

His voice was no longer that of a businessman.  
It was that of a hunter.  
A voice rising from the gut of someone who has lost everything and needs to believe in something impossible.

Garald clasped his hands together and leaned forward.  
"Commander Frassinetti, assigned to the *Cosmos II*, Neapolitan flag, seventeen hundred and sixteen tons one of the largest Italian sailing ships of its time saw the horrifying scene with his own eyes... the *Misericordia* and her unfortunate captain, Lombardo."

Ailfred raised his glass, a mocking curl on his lips.  
"Another drunken sailor story about mythical monsters."

He emptied his drink before adding, more sharply:  
"According to other sources, the *Misericordia* was sunk by the American frigate *Constitution*, under Captain Bainbridge."

He set his glass down with a sharp thud.  
"Frassinetti was too proud to admit he'd been humiliated by an American. So he invented his monsters to save his career."

Garald tapped the map with the tip of his index finger, his shadow trembling over the yellowed paper.  
"It's there, somewhere. And I will find it."

He looked at his two companions, a firelit smile on his lips.  
"God's name, guys, I've known you for over twenty years. You were already working with my father may he rest in peace. Never once have I fed you lies."

Joe swirled his glass, thoughtful.  
The light inside it shimmered like a piece of ocean.  
"The *Misericordia* did carry Inca treasure," he said slowly. "The Italians were just luckier than the Spaniards that time."

"Luck... or curse," Garald murmured.

Ailfred slammed his glass onto the table; the sharp sound echoed in the office.  
"I think once the debris is sorted and studied, their secrets will finally speak. And then we'll head back to sea."

Garald remained silent for a moment, then slowly nodded.  
His eyes drifted to the corner of the desk, where an old photo frame rested.

He picked it up.  
Two children on a fishing boat, their father behind them, proud.

Jimmy and himself, thumbs raised.  
Smiles from another life.

The fire in his eyes took on the color of mingled gold and blood.

“Mac Down is still working on those fragments,” he said in a heavy breath.

He set the frame down gently, almost tenderly, then straightened, his silhouette cutting through the light.

“I’m heading to the center.”

His fingers brushed the map one last time.  
“It’s time to solve this mystery once and for all.”

Outside, the sea glittered under the sun, calm and deceptive.  
But as he looked at it, Garald thought he saw a strange ripple in the distance  
like a shiver running across the skin of the world.

## CHAPTER 13 : IDENTIFICATION

Same late morning, different place.

The laboratory was bathed in a white, almost surgical light.

The air smelled of salt, resin, and warm metal.

The machines hummed in a continuous murmur, punctuated by the steady ripple of the aquarium.

Mac, focused, sat studying his computer screen.

His face was carved in the cold glow of the monitors, his eyes burning with a rising fever.

Behind him, Bruce leaned over the back of the chair, arms propped up, intrigued but wary.

“Look at this, Bruce...”

Mac’s voice vibrated with contained excitement.

On the screen, images scrolled: scanners, measurements, diagrams of tentacles.

“It’s not an octopod,” Mac said slowly.

He paused, his fingers brushing the keyboard.

“It has ten tentacles.”

Bruce squinted at the screen.

“So... a decapodiform?”

Mac nodded, pupils dilated.

“Exactly. Ten appendages, including two cartilaginous ones shaped like spears. That’s what explains its attack power.”

Bruce ran a nervous hand through his hair, uneasy.

“I told you he was a glutton!”

Mac didn’t answer.

He stood, turned, and slowly approached the aquarium fascinated, as if drawn by a force he didn’t understand.

Under the neon lights, the young decapod glided through the water in a perfect swim.

Its marbled, dark reflections shifted with every motion.

Bubbles rose and burst at the surface in a silence almost ceremonial.

“He grows so fast,” Mac murmured.

His fingertips slid across the glass, as though trying to feel through it the texture of this foreign intelligence.

“His behavior is fascinating. His skin reacts before he attacks like anticipation, a cutaneous language.”

Bruce, now sitting at the computer, arms crossed, forced a crooked smile.  
“Man, you might’ve just found a new species.”

He tapped his foot, suddenly electrified.  
“Do you realize it? You’re rich!”

“Rich?” Mac repeated, distracted, still watching the creature.

“Yes! If this is a unique discovery, the scientific world is gonna go wild for you.”  
He waved his arms, euphoric, his forehead nearly pressed to the screen.  
“You your name your octopus! Everyone will talk about it!”

Mac frowned.  
“Calm down. We need proof first.”

He paced a few steps, thoughtful, hand on his chin.  
“I’ll contact a marine biology specialist. It needs proper examination before anything else.”

Bruce took off his glasses, laughing.  
“And above all, we need to give him a name. Every discoverer gets that right it’s tradition!”

Mac stopped dead.  
The word hung in the air.

“A name...”

Bruce clapped his hands.  
“Luck’s finally turning, buddy! Get your tux ready for Stockholm! The Octopus Nobel is calling!”

He rushed forward, typing frantically on the keyboard, while Mac, pensive, let his fingers draw a slow, silent dance in the air toward the tank.  
Inside, the creature drifted gently, following his movements like a conscious reflection.

Mac set his hand on the glass. On the other side, a tentacle pressed against it soft and cold mimicking his gesture with unsettling precision.

For a moment, man and creature remained like that, separated by a few centimeters of glass and water—two breaths aligning.

Then Bruce’s triumphant shout broke the silence:

“KRAKEN!”

Mac jumped, startled, turning around.  
“What?”

Bruce grinned widely, his teeth flashing under the blue light.  
“Kraken! Like the Scandinavian legend! The monster, the sea leviathan, sailors’ worst nightmare!”

Mac remained silent, staring at the screen, then at the creature.  
The words echoed in his mind like something rising from the bottom of the world.

“Kraken...”

He looked at the octopus, hypnotized by its slow, dark reflections.

“It’s big,” he said softly.

“And powerful,” Bruce added, his nervous laughter bouncing off the walls.

Mac let a smile form almost tender, almost solemn.  
“Then that’s who he’ll be,” he murmured. “The Kraken.”

Under the surface, the creature seemed to stir.  
Its tentacles traced a spiral pattern in the water almost a sign.

And for the first time, Mac felt with eerie certainty that it understood what had just been said.

## CHAPTER 14 : THE INSTITUTE

Marine Biological Institute of Long Beach, at noon.  
Bluish light filtered through the blinds like calm water.  
The laboratory breathed the scent of forgotten coffee.  
Activated screens blinked softly, casting aquarium-like reflections across the walls.

Anya Brothers, thirty years old, amber-skinned, her black hair tightly braided, worked at her keyboard.  
Her fingers moved across the keys with the precision of a musician quick, disciplined, almost silent.  
Only the steady click of the keyboard broke the murmur of the vents.

“Finally...” she breathed, removing her glasses. “Lunch break.”

She stretched, long and slow, her neck stiff, her shoulders numb from hours of numbers and reports.  
The neon lights crackled above her, harsh and cold.

She grabbed her jacket, ready to escape this world of steel and formalin.

But a sharp beep echoed from her screen.  
A brief, insistent sound like a summons.

“What now?!” she growled, already irritated.

She put her jacket down, slid her glasses back on in a mechanical gesture, and leaned toward the screen.  
A blinking notification appeared:

Subject: Urgent Expertise – Unknown Species.

Her brows arched. She opened the message.

The words appeared, sparse, almost too precise:

“Hello,  
I would like to have an extraordinary decapodiform cephalopod examined, entirely unique in its kind.”

Anya remained still for a moment, chin between her fingers.  
Then she let out a small laugh.

“A unique cephalopod, huh? Another dreamer...”

She was about to delete the message, but something in the tone stopped her.  
It wasn't the messy writing of an amateur or a joker.  
The sentences were structured, calm written by someone who knew what he was looking at.  
Someone methodical.

Biting her lower lip, hesitant, she murmured to herself:

"The guy's got vocabulary... not just some random fisherman."

A silence.  
Then a sigh.

"No... this is another nutcase convinced he's found some prehistoric sea mammoth..."

She enlarged the message.  
Her eyes skimmed the signature:

"I'll tell you more once we meet at my professional workspace, the Marine Archaeology  
Center of Anaheim Bay.  
Signed: Mac Down."

She straightened up, brow furrowing.

"Anaheim Center?" she muttered.

Her tone sharpened.

"Those people have a reputation for looting more than researching..."

Abruptly she removed her glasses and set them on the desk.  
Her gaze traveled across the institute's sagging shelves:  
dusty flasks, hand-labeled jars of formalin, old microscopes stained with salt.

Everything breathed the fatigue of forgotten knowledge.

A bitter half-smile tugged at her lips.

"With this place's state... a quick 'fast, well-paid' job wouldn't hurt."

She slowly put her glasses back on as if donning armor and cracked her fingers above the  
keyboard.  
Her eyes gleamed with a new light: a mixture of annoyance and curiosity.

She typed, crisp and precise:

"Thank you in advance, Mr. Down.  
See you Monday, late morning.  
Sincerely,  
Anya Brothers, Marine Biological Institute of Long Beach."

She paused, reread, then hit Enter.  
The message sent with a metallic ping.

She leaned back in her chair, arms crossed.  
A thin smile formed.

“Thank you, Mac,” she murmured. “See you Monday.”

She stood, finally ready to leave.  
But as she passed the bay window, she stopped for a moment.

In the distance, the ocean shone under the sun, an almost unreal blue.  
Anya felt a strange sensation tighten her chest as if something beneath that calm surface had just called out to her.

## CHAPTER 15 : THE PARK OF GIANTS

SeaWorld, San Diego – California.

The sun struck the park's walkways with a white, vibrating light, bouncing off the wet concrete, the blue pools, the souvenir stands saturated with sugary smells.

The salty air carried bursts of laughter, children's cries, the mingled scents of warm plastic and popcorn.

Mac gently pushed Salie's wheelchair. She was radiant, her eyes wide open to this kingdom of foam and glass.

Her smile lit her child's face with a purity almost painful.

He leaned toward her, amused:

"Hold on tight, princess of the seas. This is the kingdom of giants."

- In front of the penguin aviary, they laughed, ice cream cones in hand. The birds stared at them from behind the frosted glass, sliding with absurd grace.
- Nose against the glass, they admired the exotic fish: a rain of living rubies and sapphires. Their reflections danced across their faces like shards of stained glass.
- A little further on, they burst out laughing during the dolphin show, water jets splashing the stands, the sun drawing arcs of light in the droplets.
- The seals won applause, the orcas emerged huge, carving silver arcs through the light. Waves rose all the way to the stands.

Then, beneath the colorful awning of a snack tent, they sat side by side, fries and hamburgers in hand.

The air smelled of frying and soda.

Around them, the shouts gradually dissolved into the murmur of wind and seagulls.

A sharp beep tore through the moment: Mac's phone.

He flinched slightly.

Salie raised a mischievous eyebrow, her mouth full of ice cream.

"I bet it's Jessica!"

Mac sighed, lowering his eyes to the screen where a name appeared—bright and soft at once.

"Are you psychic or what?"

"So?" she insisted.

He hesitated. His gaze drifted for a moment, as if the words were too heavy to carry.

"She's asking me to trust her. Not to mess everything up."

He stayed silent for a few seconds, swallowed a bite, then added in a low voice, almost extinguished:

"I love her, but I don't want to hurt her."

Spontaneous as ever, Salie exclaimed, cheeks puffed with fries:  
“You hurt her because you love her!”

Mac let out a sad laugh, full of mixed bitterness and tenderness.  
“No... I want to protect her from my past.”

The girl frowned, perplexed, her eyes suddenly serious.  
“I don’t understand anything about your grown-up stories,” she said. “You’re really twisted when it comes to love.”

Mac shook his head, a melancholic smile on his lips.  
“You have no idea, kid.”

She laughed again, light as air, her clear laughter blending with the sound of artificial waves from the nearby pool.  
Sparkling droplets hung in the air like fragments of stars.

The sun began to set.  
The light turned golden, almost unreal.  
Around them, the park filled with a strange softness, suspended between joy and farewell.

And Mac, silently, felt vaguely that at this very moment beneath the laughter of children, beneath the peaceful surface of the pools something else was watching.  
Something that breathed.  
Something that waited for him.

## CHAPTER 16 : THE BOND

Following morning.

The research center was bathed in a pale, almost milky light.

Daylight filtered through the portholes in wide silver bands, and the air carried the scent of cold coffee.

The pumps hummed softly, a continuous breath, like the beating of a heart underwater.

Mac paced in front of the aquarium, hands buried in his pockets, gaze tense.

His steps made the metal floor creak a nervous, syncopated rhythm.

From time to time he glanced at the clock on the wall; its hands seemed to drag like tired swimmers.

He sighed, pulled out his phone, and held it to his ear.

“Hey, Bruce?”

His friend’s muffled, raspy voice crackled through the speaker:

“(Off) Sorry, man. Big work going on at the tanks, I can’t move.”

“I understand,” Mac replied. “I’ll call you as soon as the examination is over.”

“(Off) Good luck, Mac! I bet you’re holding the treasure of the century.”

A faint smile crossed Mac’s face.

“The treasure of the century, huh? Maybe...”

He hung up slowly, remaining silent for a moment, staring at the phone as if reading an omen in it.

Then he turned toward the aquarium.

The water swayed gently, glowing with a green, troubled light.

At its center, suspended in the liquid calm: the Kraken.

Motionless, colossal already for its size like an enigma the sea had sculpted to remember its nightmares.

Its tentacles drifted slowly, caressing the empty space.

Mac stepped closer, breath tight.

He tapped the glass lightly with his fingers:

“Come.”

The water quivered.  
The creature moved, undulating with an almost solemn slowness.  
A tentacle reached toward the wall, touched the hand resting on the rim.

The contact was first cold, then warm but alive.

Mac shivered.  
He smiled despite himself.

“You might end up in a big tank someday, doing tricks for the kids,” he murmured fondly.

The Kraken tilted its head slightly, as if it had understood.  
Its eyes gleamed with a strange, almost human light.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

A clear, abrupt sound, shattering the silence like a shard of glass.

Mac jumped.  
“The biologist!”

He took a step toward the door but froze.

Something was holding his hand.

He looked down.

The Kraken had grabbed him.  
The suckers pulsed, stuck to his skin.

Mac tried to pull free gently first, then more forcefully.  
Nothing.  
The creature wasn’t squeezing; it was holding him.

And suddenly, the world lurched.

Flashback.

The wind blows cold, cutting.  
A five-year-old child stands alone before a gray building.  
His tiny fingers cling desperately to a woman’s hand.  
The hand trembles, then pulls away.

A door opens creaking.  
A mother’s silhouette, an absence shaped like a person.

“Mom! No! NO!”

The woman turns her eyes away, pushes him gently.  
The hand slips.

Tears away.  
The door closes.

Silence.  
Then a cry the cry of a child torn away from the world.

End of flashback.

Mac reopened his eyes, gasping.  
His fingers trembled.  
His gaze met the Kraken's.

And in that black pupil, he thought he saw not the sea, not a beast  
but a distress identical to his own.  
An ancient fear: the fear of being left alone, the fear of being abandoned.

He took a deep breath, throat tight.

Then gently, he curled his hand into a fist and leaned toward the glass.

"Let go of me, little one..." he murmured, his voice hoarse.

A silence.

"I'll come back."

The suckers detached one by one slowly, reluctantly.

Mac withdrew his hand, the skin marked with red circles.  
He looked at it for a long moment, then whispered:

"Looks almost like a seal."

He cast one last glance at the creature, motionless in its clear water.

"Hold on," he murmured. "It'll be fine."

Behind him, the doorbell rang again.  
This time, he went to open it.

## CHAPTER 17 : THE MEETIN

Outside, the late-morning sun struck the sheet metal of the hangar, making it overheat and ripple.

The air vibrated, saturated with salt and gasoline.

On the dock, the white car from the Long Beach Marine Biology Institute waited, engine off, under the trembling light.

Anya Brothers stood in front of the door, tapping her foot.

She had just hammered the doorbell for the third time.

“Seriously...” she sighed, annoyed.

She lifted her eyes toward the faded sign: Marine Archaeology Center Anaheim Bay.

The washed-out letters looked ready to crumble, gnawed by wind and years.

Anya wrinkled her nose.

The air smelled of diesel and stale seawater.

At last, the door opened.

Slowly.

A man appeared in the gap: Mac Down.

His face was drawn with exhaustion, dark circles under his eyes, a stiff smile.

Behind him, the shadow of the laboratory cast a blue-green glow.

“This is... this is about what?” he asked, voice rough.

Anya straightened her posture, dry and professional.

“Anya Brothers, Long Beach Marine Biology Institute.”

She extended her hand, precise, almost military.

“I’m here for the decapodiform.”

Mac hesitated, throat tight.

His gaze flicked briefly inside, toward the tank shimmering behind him in the filtered light.

Then he shook her hand, clumsily.

“I... I’m sorry, really...”

Anya crossed her arms, straight as a blade.

“You claimed to have discovered an exceptional specimen, Mr. Down.”

Her gaze measured him with cold lucidity.

“I came to examine it.”

Mac looked away, his voice dropping a tone.  
“It’s... dead. Last night.”

A thick silence fell.

Anya stared at him, eyelids half-closed.  
“Excuse me?”

She took a step toward him, her expression softening despite herself.  
“That’s... that’s sad,” she said quietly.

Then, lower:

“If you want, I can at least perform an autopsy. You’d have an official record of your discovery.”

Mac nodded slowly, but his eyes drifted past her, as though drawn to an invisible threat.

“Yes... of course.”

But in the shadowed lab behind him, something still moved.  
Beneath the filtered light, the water in the tank rippled imperceptibly.

Mac shifted nervously on his feet.  
His smile faltered.

“You don’t need to bother with that!” he blurted, voice too bright.  
He gestured awkwardly.  
“Anyway, I... threw the carcass to the dogs.”

Anya lifted her head, taken aback.  
“I beg your pardon?”

Caught in his own lie, Mac improvised with a strained smile.  
“Obviously, I cooked it first!”

Silence.

Then, to her own surprise, Anya allowed a small smile.  
Her eyes glinted with irony.

“Indeed,” she said. “One must always cook the sea mammoth.”

Mac blinked.  
“The sea mammoth?”

“A figure of speech,” she replied, chin raised.  
“When someone claims they’ve found a miraculous specimen, we call it the sea mammoth.”

She closed her notebook sharp, decisive.

“And shall we formalize the check?” she asked, tone neutral, almost casual.

Mac blinked again, bewildered.

“The... the check?”

Anya held out her hand, palm up, professional down to her fingernails.

“Don’t forget I’m mandated by the Institute. I have to justify my trip.”

Mac froze for a second, then managed a forced smile.

“Forgive me, I’m still a bit... shaken.”

He stepped aside, gesturing toward the open door.

“Please, come in.”

She entered, her heels clicking on the damp floor.

Almost immediately, she sensed that something in here breathed differently.

Behind her, Mac closed the door.

And beneath the green glow of the tank, the Kraken unseen slowly opened one of its eyes.

## CHAPTER 18 : THE LABORATORY

Anya stepped into the center, her eyes roaming curiously across the place.

The air smelled of rust, mud, and old wood.

Fragments of shipwrecks, marine objects, and sample crates littered the room like remnants of another century.

The floor rang under her footsteps.

Flashes of blue light slid along the walls, cast by the central aquarium.

It was a world halfway between museum and graveyard, a place suspended between ancestral memory and the sea.

Anya approached a large wooden helm, its surface worn smooth, propped against a metal wall.

She brushed her fingertips over the wood, blackened by salt and time.

“What era is this from?” she asked, intrigued.

Mac, bent over a pile of folders, startled.

He turned, surprised by the almost admiring tone in the biologist’s voice.

“The *Swallows II*,” he answered with a spark of pride.

He stepped forward, wiping his hands on his pants.

“English transporter launched in 1782 for the East Indies trade. It sank off the coast of Peru.”

Anya raised an eyebrow, genuinely impressed.

“So you’re not just a scavenger of the seabed.”

Mac stiffened at once, brows knitting.

“I’m not a scavenger,” he replied sharply. “I’m a passionate man.”

He paused, his gaze softening.

“Yes, I work here. But every night, I study marine archaeology. I want to understand what the sea has forgotten not tell it.”

A silence fell between them.

Anya nodded slowly, saying nothing, her eyes drifting between the relics and the man.

Concerned, Mac returned to his desk and picked up his pen.

His hand trembled slightly as he signed the check.

The ink spread a dark reflection over the paper, like diluted blood.

Meanwhile, Anya moved toward the large aquarium, curiosity guiding her steps.

Blue light rippled across her face, cutting her features into a liquid halo.

She narrowed her eyes.

“There aren’t many fish in here,” she noted.  
Her voice carried the distant gentleness of a scientist used to diagnostics.  
“Be careful with the biological balance. A poor tank is a sick tank.”

Mac froze, the pen suspended midair.  
A shiver ran across his shoulders.

“How much was it again?” he said quickly, voice strained, still not turning around.

“Excuse me?”

“The... the amount,” he clarified, too hastily.

“Three hundred dollars,” she replied absentmindedly, eyes still on the glass.

Mac’s eyes widened.  
“Three... what?!”

Anya turned back toward him, a professional smile curling at the corner of her lips.  
“Travel, expertise, scientific assessment. Standard rate.”

Mac let out a nervous laugh.  
“Good thing you didn’t do the autopsy!”

Anya gave him a sly smirk.  
Then, in one swift movement, she stepped forward and plucked the check from his hand.

“An autopsy of who? Of what?” she asked, eyes gleaming with irony.

Mac leapt to his feet, panicked, voice shaky.  
“Miss Brothers! It’s been a pleasure!”

And with awkward politeness, he gently but firmly steered her toward the exit.  
Anya, startled but amused, allowed herself to be guided without resisting.

As she crossed the doorway, check firmly clenched in her hand, she tossed over her shoulder:

“You know, you’re quite the curious specimen yourself, Mr. Down.”

Mac shut the door sharply.  
Silence fell instantly, broken only by the faint lapping of water.

Breathless, he exhaled a long sigh.

“What a pain in the ass! And she ruined me!”

He rushed to the aquarium and tapped nervously on the glass.

“Come.”

Under the water, the lid of the large chest eased open with a muffled creak.  
An outline slithered out.  
The Kraken rose slowly, its tentacles unfolding like living branches.  
Its pustules glowed with a gentle, almost soothing red light.

Mac dipped his hand into the water.  
The touch was cold, dense, almost human.  
He felt a pulse climb along his arm a shiver that wasn't just physical.

"I might've just lost the gold watch... but I don't care at all," he murmured.

A gentle, almost fatherly smile softened his face.

"No way I'm abandoning you."

The Kraken tightened its suction cups around his arm, slowly, like a child refusing to let go.  
Mac closed his eyes for a moment, letting the tension drain.

"But she's right," he breathed. "We're missing fish."

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Elsewhere, at a sunlit café terrace, Jessica stared at her phone.  
The light wrapped her hair in a golden halo.  
She typed a few words, stopped, sighed.  
Her fingers trembled.

"Mac, my love... why?" she whispered.

Her reflection dissolved into the café window, drowned in the summer sky.

## CHAPTER 19 : GARALD’S RETURN

Late morning.

Sunlight filtered through the dirty windows of the center, painting patches of gold across the damp floor.

Mac laughed softly, his face almost pressed to the glass of the tank.

The Kraken, playful, suctioned his cheek in a clumsy gesture.

A simple, pure laugh a moment suspended, shared between a man and the inconceivable.

Then suddenly, the door SLAMMED.

A sharp, brutal sound that made the whole laboratory tremble.

Mac jolted, heart leaping.

“Garald!”

The captain’s voice echoed through the hall deep, hoarse, authoritative.

“Mac Down!”

Garald’s silhouette filled the doorway: red beanie, grizzled beard, leather jacket salted by wind, and a massive crate he dragged with one hand as though it weighed nothing.

His shadow swallowed the room.

“Well, Mac Down! I hope you’ve made progress.”

Panic. Immediate.

Mac tapped frantically on the glass: *home!*

“Quick, quick!”

Under the water, the Kraken obeyed without a sound.

He slipped into the chest at once, closing the lid with a fluid, almost human motion.

A tiny bubble rose and burst at the surface.

Garald advanced massive, threatening. His sheer presence filled the space.

“I had to cut my vacation short,” he growled. “The investors are restless, deadlines collapsing, and you’re dragging your feet?”

Mac forced a thin, guilty smile.

“There’s... a small problem.”

Garald shoved him aside and approached the tank.

His face hardened instantly.

“What the hell is this mess?! Where are my fish?!”

The air vibrated with suffocating tension.  
Mac bit his lip, nervous, hands trembling.  
His eyes darted toward the chest, then slowly back to his boss.

Every gesture betrayed the fear of saying too much.

“Exactly!” Mac blurted. “And I’ll pay the amount, don’t worry.”

Garald froze, then straightened slowly.  
The morning light reflected sharply in his steel-grey eyes.

“So that’s why I passed a Long Beach Institute biology car on my way here?”

Mac felt his blood turn to ice.  
His heartbeat thundered in his ears.

He nodded mechanically.  
“They... they found a virus. Something I couldn’t even pronounce.”

Garald scowled and leaned over the tank.  
The few remaining fish dull, weak survivors circled lazily around the old chest.

The captain slammed his fist on the railing.

“Damned parasite!”

Inside the chest, the Kraken opened his eyes.  
Black pupils tracked the slightest movement of the man with the red beanie.  
His breath imperceptible stirred the water.

Garald pressed his palm to the glass.  
For an instant, his reflection overlapped perfectly with the silhouette of the creature.  
Man and beast, face to face, separated only by a thin layer of glass.

Something flickered in Garald’s features an instinctive shiver, ancient, primal, made of dominance and hate.

He stepped back abruptly, irritated.

“I’ll empty and disinfect the tank tonight.”

Mac turned pale.  
“No... not tonight...”

But Garald wasn’t listening.  
He sat at his desk and switched on the computer with a sharp gesture.  
The screen cast a blue glow over his face.

“I’ll notify the insurer,” he muttered. “Might as well get reimbursed quickly so we can repopulate the tank.”

Then he turned to Mac, voice suddenly precise and cutting again.

“And you will give me the lab report. The one proving the virus is present.”

Mac froze.

“The... the report?”

Garald clenched his jaw.

“I bet you didn’t even ask for it! That’s why you stagnate, Mac. Always scatterbrained!”

Mac lifted his hands, conciliatory, voice low.

“I’ll take care of it. Right now.”

Garald stood and slowly walked around the lab.

His eyes scanned the shelves filled with wreck fragments, ancient artifacts, instruments.

His tone shifted almost admiring.

“At least you’re making progress.”

He brushed a hand across an old amphora.

“What the sea swallows, it sometimes returns... to those who dare to defy it.”

Mac said nothing.

He listened to every vibration of the chest behind him, every ripple of water.

Every second counted.

Garald grabbed his beanie, jammed it onto his head, and headed for the door.

“I’ll be gone for two hours. But I’ll come back to study all this in detail.”

Mac blanched.

“You... you’re coming back?”

Garald growled.

“My vacation is screwed!”

The door slammed shut behind him, in a gust of hot air.

Silence.

Long, dense, vibrating.

Mac stood frozen, breath shallow.

His hands trembled.

He slowly turned toward the tank.

“Two hours...” he whispered. “I have two hours to find a solution.”

He paced, nervous, thoughts burning.

Then suddenly his eyes lit up.  
A smile broke across his face.

“Bruce.”

## CHAPTER 20 : THE KRAKEN'S SHELTER

Early afternoon at Bruce's fish farm under the Californian sun, the rows of tanks shimmered like scales of steel.

Warm wind rolled over the sheet-metal rooftops, carrying smells of stagnant water, fish, salt, and damp metal.

Gulls circled above the buildings, screaming in spirals.

Inside, Mac was striding forward at a frantic pace, breath tight in his chest, a portable cooler in one hand and the old wooden chest in the other.

Sweat gleamed along his temples; his eyes were dark-rimmed, feverish.

Every footstep echoed with urgency.

"Bruce!" he called.

His friend, leaning casually against a tank, was quietly chewing a sandwich dripping with mayonnaise.

He looked up, surprised, his mouth still full.

"Mac! What a nice surprise!" he shouted, delighted.

Mac rushed to him, out of breath, lungs straining.

"I need you. Urgently."

Bruce took another bite, chewing slowly with exaggerated nonchalance.

"Hold on... let me guess."

He swallowed loudly, then pointed a dramatic finger at him.

"‘They recognized Kraken as a new species,’ and now you want my bank account?"

Mac glanced around them, nervous, eyes burning.

"Sadly... no."

Bruce rolled his eyes theatrically.

"Fantastic. A visit with no money at the end!"

Then his expression tightened.

"What's going on?"

Mac stepped closer, lowered his voice.

"You need to house Kraken... for a few days."

The word hung in the air, a silent detonation.

Bruce choked, half swallowing wrong.  
His sandwich slipped from his hand and splatted on the floor.

“Excuse me?!”

“Garald came back,” Mac murmured.

Bruce shrugged, tone falsely light.  
“So what? That old tyrant yelled at you again?”

Mac didn’t reply.  
A heavy, invisible tension thickened the air.

Then—movement.  
A thin tentacle slid out of the cooler, furtive as a snake.  
It wrapped around the fallen sandwich and slowly pulled it back inside the icebox.

Bruce froze, jaw dropped.  
“What... what the”

Mac, pale, slammed the lid shut.

“It’s urgent,” he whispered. “I’ll explain everything later.”

Bruce raised a hand, halfway between resignation and exasperation.

“You wanted to be rich and famous... look at you now, you’re just insane.”

“Please,” Mac insisted. “He can’t stay trapped in there. He needs water, space... life.”

Silence.  
Warm wind ruffled Bruce’s hair.  
Then he sighed, long and defeated.

“Alright... luck’s on your side. I still have one tank free.”

They walked side by side between the basins, their boots clacking on damp concrete.  
Their reflections fractured in the rippling surfaces of water.

At the end of the row, the final tank waited wide, deep, at least two meters down.  
The water there shone like new glass: clear, still, untouched.

Bruce jerked his chin at it.  
“It’s ready. He’ll have room to breathe.”

Mac set the cooler at the edge and opened it gently.  
A smell of raw ocean spilled out alive.

He tapped the metal softly, speaking in a low voice:

“Home.”

Slowly, Kraken emerged, now larger than before.  
Its tentacles slipped over the cooler’s rim, sunlight breaking across its marbled skin.  
Its whole body seemed to breathe.

With a smooth, fluid motion, the creature slid into the basin.  
The water opened around him wavering, musical.  
Perfect circles expanded outward from its plunge.

Mac took the old chest and tossed it into the basin at a distance.

“So he’ll have his refuge.”

Kraken moved toward it at once, half disappearing inside before closing the lid halfway with a slow, deliberate gesture.

Bruce watched, fascinated despite himself.

“What’s he eating, steroids?” he muttered, nervous laughter in his voice.

Mac didn’t answer.  
He stared at the rippling surface, his fingers trembling.

Then he exhaled:

“I don’t know what he is, Bruce... and I don’t care. But one thing’s certain: I won’t abandon him.”

Bruce looked at him for a long time serious, for once.  
Then he placed both hands on Mac’s shoulders, weighted with consequence.

“You just dove in deep, Mac. And you have no idea how far down it goes.”

His tone grew darker, almost worried.

“Why do you burden yourself like this? He’s not a dog. He might be a monster. And believe me, I’ve already seen how hungry he gets.”

Mac turned his eyes toward the basin, where the water trembled in slow, lingering ripples.  
A faint blue shimmer reflected across his cheek.

“For our friendship,” he murmured calmly, “I’m asking you for just a few days.”

He clasped Bruce’s hand.

“After that, I’ll release him back into the ocean. I promise.”

Bruce sighed, rolled his eyes then a half-smile curved his mouth.

“You’re definitely missing a few fries from your basket, brother.”

He jerked his chin toward the tank.

“And be careful your Kraken already looks hungry. I’ll toss in a few live fish.”

A ripple broke the surface.

In the chest, a bubble rose... and burst.

## CHAPTER 21 : THE TRACES

The day was slowly dying.

Within the silence of the center, the only sound was the rhythmic rubbing of a damp cloth against glass.

Garald Collinsons was scrubbing the windows of the now-empty aquarium with furious determination, whistling through his teeth a weathered old sailor's tune.

His reflection warped with each movement, mingling the glare of the neon lights with the ghostly blue of the water residue.

Then suddenly, he froze.

His arm suspended mid-air.

Something had disturbed the surface of the glass.

He tilted his head.

Across the pane, wide circular marks thick, uneven, foreign sprawled like the prints of an impossible creature.

Suction cups.

Garald moved closer, narrowed his eyes, brushed the viscous substance with the tips of his fingers.

The texture was rough, slightly sticky.

A salty, almost oily odor seeped from it.

He grimaced, muttering under his breath, incredulous:

“What... the hell is this?”

His reflection, distorted by the curved glass, returned an unsettling contortion of his own features.

Slowly, the captain straightened.

His breath grew heavier, shorter.

He tossed the cloth aside and stood motionless for a long moment before the deserted tank, fists clenched.

The artificial light glistened on the sweat beading across his forehead.

The silence thickened, dense, almost oceanic as though the sea itself were holding its breath on the other side of the walls.

Then he reacted shaking his head violently and turned sharply toward his cluttered desk.

Fragments of shipwrecks, logbooks, pages scrawled with maritime symbols, sketches of

broken hulls and gutted vessels:  
the whole room murmured with the chaos of frozen research.

He seized a folder, opened it with a brutal gesture, and began flipping through the time-worn pages.

“Months reading these damned Frassinetti reports!” he roared.  
His voice slammed against the bare walls.  
“Nights decoding the journals of the *Miséricordia*! And still nothing!”

He swept the folder aside with the back of his arm.  
Sheets flew through the air like startled gulls before collapsing onto the desk.

He stood there, panting, a massive hand gripping the desk’s edge as he thought.  
His gaze drifted back toward the tank.

Empty.  
But still alive somehow.

“And this virus report... that never comes,” he muttered, jaw clenched.

He dropped heavily into his chair and spun it toward his computer.  
His thick fingers began striking the keyboard, each key clacking like a drop of water echoing in a well.

The bluish screen lit his tense face.

“If the mountain won’t come to me... then I’ll go to the mountain.”

A thin, almost predatory smile crept onto his lips.

He grabbed his phone. His fingers trembled just slightly.  
He dialed a number with chilling precision.

“Hello?” he said, voice controlled, falsely gentle.

A brief silence, then

“I’d like to speak to the biologist who recently visited my center...”

A pause.  
A beat of waiting, as though the sea itself delayed its reply.

“Who? Anya Brothers, you said.”

His tone sharpened, turning cold as anchor steel.  
Staring at the empty glass, he added with a firm, resonant voice:

“Tell her I’m expecting her return. It’s urgent.  
Very urgent.”

In the artificial light, his reflection seemed to move again in the glass as though behind him, something was still breathing.

## CHAPTER 22 : Forbidden Swimming

The afternoon sun filtered through the opaque windows of the fish farm.  
A milky halo settled on the rows of basins, and the water shimmered in silver shards.  
In the distance, the muffled cries of seagulls fell like the laughter of lost children.

In one of the large reservoirs, Mac swam bare-chested, moving with slow strokes and steady breath.

His swim trunks, patterned with the American flag, clung to his skin.  
His unshaven jaw and fever-bright gaze made him look like a man stranded somewhere between science and dream.

Before him, in the dim liquid light: the Kraken.  
Now far larger six meters long, perhaps more.  
Its powerful tentacles unfurled around Mac with hypnotic grace, surrounding him in a conscious, gentle embrace without tearing even the fabric of his trunks.

The basin's light traced shifting reflections on their bodies, like veins of mercury in motion.

Nearly holding his breath, Mac brushed one of the creature's arms with his fingertips.  
The texture was strange both firm and silky, like the skin of a living fruit.

They swam together in improbable symbiosis, an underwater ballet performed in cathedral silence.

A small battered radio perched on the basin's edge crackled out a pop song through its undersized speaker.  
The notes bounced, fell, and merged with the soft lapping of the water.

"Three weeks already..." Mac whispered.

He ran a slow hand across his dripping face.

"I really need to put you back in the ocean."

Underwater, the Kraken moved.  
It approached him, its tentacles curling delicately around his body.  
Then, in one fluid motion, it lifted him halfway out of the water effortlessly as if refusing to let him go.

Their gazes met again.  
And in the creature's black eye, Mac saw something flicker:  
Intelligence.  
Awareness.  
And maybe... attachment.

He remained suspended in that silent exchange.  
For one brief, impossible moment, he felt as if they were breathing together.

But an innocent voice shattered the spell.

“Mac! Are you here?!”

He froze.  
That voice clear, young pierced the still air.

Salie.

Mac spun around sharply.  
The little girl sat in her wheelchair at the basin’s entrance, frozen.  
Her wide dark eyes bulged with terror.

Before her stretched an impossible sight: her friend swimming with a monster.

“Salie! Wait, I can explain!” Mac shouted, surging through the water toward the edge.

But the girl recoiled instantly, her hands trembling on the wheels.  
The chair pivoted, groaned, then shot down the corridor.  
She fled, breathless, tears already burning in her eyes.

Mac leapt out of the basin, dripping, his feet slapping against the concrete.

“Salie!” he cried. “Stop! I’ll explain everything!”

He dashed toward the entrance door, leaving wet footprints behind him.  
His heart hammered wildly.

The door swung open from the outside.

Bruce stood there sunglasses on, oil-stained T-shirt, face exhausted.

“Perfect timing,” he said flatly.

They stared at each other for a long breath.  
Mac panting, bare-chested, soaked.  
Bruce still, half-surprised, half-wearied, sliding his sunglasses up onto his head.

“Did you see Salie?” Mac asked, voice raw.

Bruce closed the door behind him, calmly removed his glasses, and tucked them into his back pocket.

“Yeah,” he said. “She’s been looking for you all morning.”

He rested a friendly hand on Mac’s shoulder.  
His tone softened, almost fatherly.

“You’ve been spending your nights here for weeks now... circling around your octopus.”

Mac stepped back, tense.

“So what?”

Bruce sighed, looking toward the ceiling.

“She worries about you, Mac. She misses you.”

Mac threw up his hands, exasperated.

“And you told her I was with Kraken, obviously?”

“So what?” Bruce shot back, stung.

Mac clenched his jaw.

“She’s fragile, Bruce. Sick. Degenerative illness. Do you understand?”

A heavy silence fell.

Then, lower, trembling:

“But you’re right... I didn’t even realize how much time had passed.  
Blinded by this... connection.”

His gaze shifted toward the basin.  
The Kraken glided in the shimmering water, calm.

Mac managed a faint, tender smile.

“He’s growing so fast. And the way he communicates... it’s fascinating.”

Bruce nodded slowly, grave.

“Fascinating, yeah. And terrifying.”

He paused.

“You need to have him examined, Mac. I’ve never seen an octopus develop like this. Or look this threatening. You’ve seen how fast he grows.”

Mac took a step toward him, tone sharp.

“No. No one must find out he exists.”

Bruce laughed bitterly.

“Still the same damn projection...”

“That has nothing to do with it!” Mac shouted, voice cracking.

A splash sounded behind them.

Both men turned at once.

The Kraken had slid out of its basin.

Its glistening body crawled slowly across the floor, its wet tentacles tracing dark streaks along the concrete.

It was heading toward another reservoir the one filled with fish.

The water trembled.

A primal tension flooded the air.

Then a voice erupted rough, thunderous yanking them violently back to reality:

“WHERE IS THE DECAPODIFORM?!”

The two friends exchanged a look of pure dread before turning.

Bruce went pale.

Mac stood frozen, breath locked in his chest.

Behind the doorway, a massive shadow advanced with determined steps.

“Garald...” Mac whispered.

And the light over the basins shimmered  
like the moment just before a storm breaks.

## Chapter 23 : The Hunt

The door burst open with a sharp crack.

Garald strode in, face tight, boots crusted with mud and dried salt.  
His presence filled the entire room like a storm front rolling over the sea.  
A wave of diesel and stagnant water floated in behind him.  
His heavy steps struck the concrete floor one by one, each step a verdict.

“Three weeks three damned weeks I’ve waited for that virus report!” he roared.

He shoved past Mac and Bruce without even looking at them and marched toward the tanks.  
Mac felt sweat prick along his spine.  
Bruce crossed his arms, trying to look unshaken, but worry flickered in his eyes.  
The two men exchanged a brief look two shipwrecked sailors before the next wave crashed.

Garald inspected each tank in turn.  
His breath was short, his jaw locked tight.  
His fingers slid along the metal rim, searching for the slightest clue.  
The trembling light from the pools carved shifting lines across his weather-beaten face.

Then he stopped.  
He turned sharply toward Mac.

“This morning,” he growled, “I hear you claimed to have a cephalopod from the super-order.”

Mac went pale.  
His heartbeat hammered so loudly he wondered if the others could hear it.

“W-what are you talking about?”

Garald’s smile was nothing like a smile just a thin, cruel fold at the corner of his mouth.

“What you told that biologist.”  
He stretched the moment, enjoying the tension.  
“Anya Brothers.”

The name sliced through the room like a blade.

Mac stepped back, unable to swallow.

“It was... a mistake.”

Garald hissed between his teeth, then plunged his hand suddenly into one of the tanks.  
The water exploded in a frenzy.

Thousands of terrified fish scattered in flashing silver arcs.  
A powerful current surged beneath the surface deep, alive, aware.

Garald jerked his hand back.  
Blood trickled down his fingers.

He froze.  
His eyes widened.  
In the tank beside it, the aerators erupted in a froth of bubbles, as if the entire pool exhaled.

At the bottom of the neighboring basin, hidden in shadow, the Kraken lay coiled.  
Its tentacles moved in a slow, subtle ripple.  
One limb pale and supple remained lifted, its translucent barb still aimed toward the captain's hand.

Garald staggered back, shaking his injured hand.  
He inhaled sharply.

Then he stormed toward the main tank the Kraken's tank.

Mac leaped in front of him, soaked in sweat and fear.

"I—I don't have a cephalopod from the super-order!" he stammered.

Bruce adjusted his sunglasses and stepped forward, firmer this time.

"You're on my property, Garald. So you stay polite... and you back off."

Garald glared at him, shoved him aside, and leaned over the large basin.  
It held nothing but still, clear water.

"Why is it empty?!" he barked.

Bruce swallowed.

"It... needs to remain clean. I'm transferring juveniles tomorrow. Fresh tanks help them grow."

Garald slowly turned his head toward him, then toward Mac.  
His cold gray eyes gleamed with something feral.

"The biologist wasn't lying."

He took a step.  
Then another.  
Mac felt his breath lock in his chest.

"On the glass of my aquarium," Garald said, his voice low, "I saw suction marks. Large ones. Imprinted into the pane."

Mac felt panic swell inside him, his thoughts scattering.  
He seized the only lie he could forge.

“It was a mistake,” he said in a rough whisper.  
He forced himself to look ashamed.  
“I thought I had found something exceptional yes. But it was just a small octopus. Harmless.  
It died quickly. The others got contaminated. The virus... you know.”

Silence pressed down on them.

Garald narrowed his eyes, studying him.

Then he pointed a thick finger at Mac sharp as a harpoon.

“You’ll repay me every last dollar.”

His voice trembled with controlled rage.

“And don’t you dare lie to me, boy. Don’t even try.”

He lunged forward, grabbed Mac by the collar, and yanked him close.  
His breath smelled of alcohol and anger.  
Mac felt his fingers dig into his skin.

“Tomorrow, you finish the job.  
Or your career ends.”

He shoved him away.  
Mac stumbled, gasping, the skin of his neck reddening.

Garald pivoted and stomped toward the exit.  
The door slammed behind him with the force of a wave breaking on stone.

Silence pooled instantly, thick and heavy.

Bruce wiped his forehead.

“We dodged a big one...”

He turned to Mac, more serious than before.

“And now?”

Mac didn’t answer.  
His gaze drifted to the empty main tank silent, accusing.

Then he slowly walked toward the dark corner where his clothes lay.  
In the shadows, the Kraken crawled along the wall of a smaller basin, its suction cups clinging to the metal with a wet, hushed sound.  
It slipped back into the water and vanished into the murk like a shadow swallowed by the sea.

Bruce's jaw dropped.

"Would you... explain *that*?"

"Later!" Mac snapped, grabbing his jacket.

With sudden urgency, he rushed toward the exit, voice raw and breathless.

"There's something more important!"

The door slammed again, and the echo rolled through the hangar like distant underwater thunder.

## Chapter 24 : The Proof of the Heart

Evening was falling over the neighborhood, stretching shadows along gray walls. The streetlamps began to hum with electricity, and that familiar smell of damp asphalt lingered in the air.

Mac climbed the porch steps, knocked, and waited.  
A second... two... then the door opened.

Salie sat there in her wheelchair.  
Pale. Still. Eyes red-rimmed, breath short.

“What... what was that thing?” she whispered.

Mac immediately knelt and drew her gently into his arms.  
He felt her tiny heart hammering against his chest—fast, frightened.

“Is your mom working?” he murmured.

“No. She’s in the kitchen.”

“And your father? Still away on deployment?”

She nodded, with the tiredness of someone far older than her years.

“Sadly, yes. But it’s the last year. After that, he’ll be closer.”

A soft, warm smile passed over Mac’s face.

“That’s wonderful. Did you take your medication?”

“As usual,” she said bitterly.  
A shadow crossed her eyes.  
“Until my last day.”

Mac took her small, cold hands between his.

“Trust... is the faith of the living, you know.”

She looked away, her voice cracking.

“Sorry, Mac. I don’t believe in miracles.”

He leaned his forehead to hers, their breaths mingling.

“Then let me show you one.”

Night had settled, warm and still.  
Overhead, the suspended floodlights cast a stark white glow over the tanks.  
A breeze slipped through the open windows, rippling the surface of the water.  
The silence was broken only by the steady hum of pumps and the faint hiss of oxygen diffusers.

Mac pushed Salie's wheelchair slowly along the aisles toward the largest tank.  
Rubber wheels squeaked softly against the damp concrete.

"It all started after a drunken night with Bruce," he explained in a low voice.  
"I found him inside a jar, tiny... a creature washed ashore by chance, maybe."

He leaned on the tank's rim and tapped gently with his fingers.

"Come."

Salie lifted her hands, terrified.

"What are you doing?!"

"Don't worry. We've developed a way to communicate. And Bruce named him Kraken after the Scandinavian legend."

The water folded into a ripple.

A first suction cup emerged.  
Then another.  
Then dozens.

Long, glistening limbs flexible, strong, alive rose slowly into the light.  
The tentacles stretched toward Mac, brushing him softly, almost like a human gesture.

Salie jerked back; her wheelchair squealed.

"No—no... stop!"

Mac gently held the handles.

"Hey... he won't hurt you. He... he understands."

A tentacle slid toward her slowly, cautiously, an animal's careful approach.  
Its tip stopped right in front of her hand.

"Trust Kraken," Mac whispered.

The cold skin of the cephalopod brushed the child's fingers...  
Then curled softly up her wrist...  
Then around the metal of the wheelchair...

Finally, a suction cup touched her cheek delicate almost a strange kiss of acknowledgment.

Salie shivered.

“Mac... please...”

Then Kraken’s head surfaced.

Black, sleek, marbled with deep shifting hues.

Its enormous dark eyes two moons beneath the sea fixed on her.

The water around them vibrated like breath.

Mac, moved, placed a hand on the creature’s smooth crown.

“Frightening and fascinating that’s what an ethologist would say. But above all... extraordinary.”

“Yeah, sure...” muttered Salie, torn between revulsion and wonder.

A sharp noise cracked the air.

The door had opened.

Bruce rushed in, face tense, eyes wide.

“Mac! We need to talk. Now.”

Instantly, Kraken plunged.

A column of water burst upward, then everything fell still again.

The surface closed, smooth as glass.

Bruce shut the door behind him, chest heaving.

“Garald called me,” he said bluntly.

“He contacted the biologist again.”

His eyes burned with urgency.

“He knows about the ‘super-order.’”

Mac clenched his jaw.

“He suspects. He doesn’t know.”

“And Salie saw you swimming with that thing,” Bruce continued.

“People will talk. And the longer we wait, the bigger it gets.”

The girl sat silent between them, pale, trembling, eyes wide.

Mac knelt in front of her, hands on the armrests of her chair, lowering himself to her height. His voice trembled only slightly.

“I have to save him... and protect you.”

Bruce nodded slowly, more serious than ever.

“Then we need a plan. Right now.  
Before Garald comes back with nets... and with men.”

He hesitated, then added in a lower voice:

“And Mac...  
I have a question for you.  
About Kraken.”

At the bottom of the tank, Kraken reacted to their voices  
as if the conversation itself rippled through the water and reached him.  
Mac and Bruce exchanged a tense look.  
Salie shivered.

Outside, the night was heavy and warm, carrying the distant smell of the Pacific.

And somewhere in the dark ocean,  
the sea opened an eye.

## Chapter 25 : The Human Fault

The wind rushed through the fish farm, carrying the raw scent of the sea.  
The hanging lamps swayed slightly, casting trembling shadows across the walls.  
In the basins, the water shivered like an anxious heart.

Bruce stood near the control panel, staring at the surveillance monitor with a dark, hardened eye.

His features were tight, his face carved by fatigue.

The bluish glow of the cameras painted on his skin a harsh, almost animal mask.

“I just reviewed the footage from the cameras,” he said, voice steeped in irritation.

He turned slowly toward Mac.

“And guess what, Mac?”

Mac, startled, straightened up from the edge of the basin.

His expression flickered between confusion and concern.

“Why are you getting worked up like that?”

Bruce threw his arms up in a sharp, theatrical gesture, then jabbed a finger toward the surface of the tank.

“Because aside from the fish I give him generously, may I add your protégé is eating *my* stock! My work, Mac! My life!”

Mac blinked, mouth partly open.

“What?!”

“Yes!” Bruce shouted, furious.

He grabbed a remote and flicked through footage on a small screen nailed to the wall.

Infrared images scrolled:

a dark creature emerging from the tank, crawling across the damp concrete, leaving behind circular suction marks...

then slipping into nearby basins a silent nightly feast.

“He crawls out at night,” Bruce continued, voice shaking.

“Calm as a saint! Walking from bowl to bowl. That bastard shops like he owns the place!”

Mac felt his knees weaken.

He clutched his head, swaying under the weight of the revelation.

“I... I’ll pay you back for the damages, Bruce. All of them.”

Bruce let out a bitter laugh.  
A joyless sound, like something tearing through the heavy air.

“With what? Your miserable paycheck? Or maybe your future hero’s medal for adopting an underwater calamity?”

He stepped toward Mac menacing his face only inches away.  
The smell of salt and sweat hung thick between them.

“He’s out,” Bruce snarled.  
“That’s it. End of discussion.  
And if he’s still here tomorrow morning, I’ll take him out myself. Barehanded.”

Mac raised his hands in a calming gesture, though fury burned behind his eyes.

“You’re bluffing!”

Bruce clenched his jaw, voice dropping into something sharp and dangerous.

“Trust me on this one, old friend.”

Mac stepped closer, forehead nearly touching his, fists tight at his sides.

“What, did you have a shitty childhood or something?!” he spat.

Bruce’s eyes ignited.  
He stumbled back a step, then erupted.

“Say that again!”

The word cracked like a thunderclap.  
The basins vibrated under the shock of their voices.

They were about to lunge at each other when a trembling voice cut through the storm:

“Stop!”

Salie had appeared.  
She had rolled her wheelchair between them, her small hands clenched on the wheels.  
Her bright, emotional eyes darted between the two men pleading, fragile.

“There’s... something worse,” she whispered.

Silence collapsed over the room.

Mac dropped to his knees beside her, breath short.

“What do you mean, Salie?”

She swallowed, her voice white with fear.

“I saw Garald. He talked to me.”

The words sank into the air cold as ice.

Bruce froze.

Mac felt the blood drain from his face.

“He knows,” she added, barely audible.

A long shiver passed through the room.

At the bottom of the basin, the water rippled too  
as if Kraken, hidden in the shadows,  
had understood everything.

## Chapter 26 : The Weapon and the Pride

Night had fallen over the research center.  
The corridors, empty and hollow, hummed with a low vibration: the neon lights overhead, and the pumps still running in the study room.

Garald prowled through the laboratory like a caged predator.  
His boots struck the concrete floor in steady, hammering beats each step a drum of war.

On the desk, a half-empty glass of whisky quivered with every blow of his stride.  
His eyes two shards of fever scanned the room, searching, hunting, waiting.

“Where are you, Mac...?” he breathed, voice rough, almost caressing.

Then, with a sudden movement, he yanked open a metal cabinet.  
The hinges screamed, the metallic echo slicing the silence.

Inside: diving tools, wetsuits, crates of equipment.  
He swept everything aside with one brutal motion.  
A loud crash followed.

And there, at the back of the cabinet, lay what he was looking for:  
a diving harpoon an old Italian model, the metal worn smooth by time.

Garald seized it.  
His fingers trembled slightly not from fear, but anticipation.

He cocked the mechanism with a sharp gesture.  
The spring groaned, the taut metal hummed in the stillness.  
A brief sound, almost sensual.

“Thank you, Salie,” he murmured, a twisted grin creeping across his lips.  
“Thank you for the information.”

He slowly ran his thumb along the trigger, savoring the coldness of the steel.

“Mac... you disappoint me. Deeply.”

His reflection in the laboratory window stared back at him:  
the face of a man teetering on the brink.  
A deep crease carved his brow, and his eyes glowed with a quiet, concentrated fury.

“If this mollusk is truly unique... then it will be mine.”

A sour smile almost painful warped his mouth.

“Or it will die.”

He lifted the harpoon toward his own reflection, as if swearing an oath to the mirror.

His voice sank deeper, trembling with pride and madness intertwined.

“Everything I desire... belongs to me.”

A long silence followed.

Then the snap of the harpoon’s mechanism he let it click one last time cut through the neon hum.

The sound rang like a death toll.

Garald switched off the light.

And in the darkness, only his shadow remained the shadow of a man ready to defy the sea itself.

## Chapter 27 : The Last Voyage

Anaheim Bay, in this late evening hour, looked like a drowned sanctuary. Under the trembling glow of the dock lights, the pier stretched out like a tongue of steel into nothingness.

The waves slow and heavy licked the pilings with a sound like breathing. Farther out, cargo ships formed black silhouettes, motionless as sleeping whales.

Mac and Bruce struggled forward, pushing a large metal dumpster on wheels. It rattled with every bump, filled with dark water, lined with plastic, hastily sealed. Behind them, the red pickup idled, engine running, headlights blazing like the eyes of a loyal dog.

Bruce's breath came short and rough. Sweat gleamed on his brow.

"I'll calculate the losses... and send you the bill," he muttered without looking at him. He straightened, wiped his damp palms on his pants, put his glasses back into place.

"And until then, I don't want to see you again, Mac."

Mac froze. The wind lifted a flap of his shirt and slapped salt air across his face. His shoulders dropped.

"I'm sorry, Bruce. Really."

Bruce let out a laugh with no sound in it. Not joy, not forgiveness just exhaustion.

"Not as sorry as I am."

He climbed into the pickup and slammed the doors shut with the brutality of a verdict. The engine growled, spat a puff of exhaust. Then the truck vanished into the night, leaving behind the smell of gasoline and regret.

Mac was alone.

Alone on the empty pier, facing the sealed dumpster. The wind hissed through the masts; the cables vibrated like cello strings. He set both hands on the lid, pushed slowly.

A vapor rose from inside, a faint marine breath. At the bottom, the water stirred, and in its shadow something moved the Kraken, curled in its steel prison.

Mac knelt.  
His voice fell to a whisper.

“So here we are, my friend. And Garald knows you exist now.”

A tentacle emerged, trembling, searching for his hand.  
It wrapped gently around his fingers, brushing them with a tenderness almost human.

“Everything is getting harder,” Mac murmured.

He stroked the creature’s cool, damp skin.  
The suction cups pulsed against his palm like an exiled heartbeat.

“At least here you’ll be safe... but for how long?”

He shook his head.

“I need to find something permanent. Something real.”

The wind rose, lifting sprays of foam.  
Mac stood, grabbed the old chest the very one that had sheltered the Kraken’s first sleep.  
He hurled it far, far out.

Splash.

The water swallowed it with a halo of foam, like a mouth closing on a secret.

Mac leaned over the dumpster, tapping the edge softly.

“Home.”

The water quivered.

The powerful tentacles surfaced one by one slick, moonlit, sinuous.

The Kraken rose slowly, unfurling into the night, then slid toward the water.  
It swam free and silent, heading straight for the chest in the depths.

Mac whispered, tears blurring his vision:

“I won’t abandon you, Kraken. Trust me...”

The creature wrapped itself around the chest, settling over it, guarding.  
Then its shadow slipped beneath the surface and vanished.

Mac remained on his knees, hands on the wooden planks, staring at the fading rings on the water.

The wind had died.

Only the quiet lap of the tide answered his breath.

Then a vibration broke the silence.

His phone.

Mac smiled, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Maybe Jessica... though things are so complicated...”

He slid his thumb across the screen.

“Oh come on, Bruce... Sulking isn’t your style.”

He opened the message.

And everything stopped.

GARALD HERE – ARMED – COME BACK.

Mac’s face froze.

The wind seemed to vanish, sucked away.

The streetlights flickered.

He stepped back, the screen trembling in his hand.

His lips formed a name barely audible.

“Garald...”

His gaze drifted toward the bay a line of ink where sea and sky dissolved into each other.

The Kraken, resting somewhere below, was safe...  
but for how long?

## Chapter 28 : The Final Act

Night had fallen over the fish farm heavy, swollen with humidity and electricity.  
The overhead lamps flickered under each gust of wind.  
A harsh smell of diesel and fear clung to the air.

Mac burst into the hangar.  
His footsteps slapped the wet floor, sending splashes through the yellow neon light.

“Bruce!” he shouted.

A noise a muffled groan.

He turned his head and froze, his blood turning to ice.

Bruce was there, tied to a chair in the center of the room.  
Wrists strapped, face swollen, a strip of cloth pressed across his mouth.  
His glasses hung crooked, one lens cracked, reflecting a shard of trembling light.

“Bruce!”

But a voice answered deep, slow, dripping with cold delight:

“Hello, Mac.”

Garald stepped out of the shadows.  
Red beanie on his head, his massive silhouette carved itself into the glow of the tanks.  
In his hand: a diving harpoon, armed, taut, glistening with damp metal.

Mac froze where he stood.  
His heart hammered.

“Garald... put the harpoon down.”

A low, rusted chuckle.

“You know what I want, don’t you?” he said, almost tender.  
“That mollusk. That miracle. It belongs to me.”

Bruce groaned under his gag, shaking his head violently.  
His terrified eyes pointed desperately toward the back of the hangar.

Mac followed his gaze.  
Garald did too.

Both men advanced slowly toward the far basin their pulse pounding in their temples.

The water was clear, perfectly still, as if waiting.  
Only the oxygen pump hummed, and the lamps buzzed overhead.

“Where is it?” Garald growled, breath rough.  
His eyes burned with the fever of madness.

He walked in slow, deliberate steps, the harpoon raised, the tip trembling ever so slightly.

Mac stepped between him and the basin, throat tight.

“You have no idea what you’re doing, Garald.”

The captain smiled a smile without joy.

“On the contrary. I know exactly what I’m doing.”

He slapped the harpoon’s shaft into his left hand.  
The sharp clack rang across the fish farm like thunder.  
Its metallic echo crawled along the walls, vibrating down into the water.

“He’s harmless!” Mac stammered.

“Harmless?!” barked Garald.

He turned slowly, his tall frame dominating the whole room.  
His stare speared into Mac’s eyes like a blade.

“That’s not what Salie told me. The girl was trembling when she spoke of your ‘friend.’”

A thin, self-satisfied smile cut across his face.

“And you know the influence I have on that child.”

A burst of rage ignited in Mac’s chest.  
His jaw clenched.

“Like on everyone around you,” he muttered through his teeth.

Garald stiffened.  
Slowly, he lifted the harpoon, pointing the tip directly at Mac’s forehead.

“Enough,” he whispered cold as death.

“Where is the super-order squid?”

Mac raised his hands, palms open.

“I... I threw him into the bay.”

A long silence.  
Time froze.

Wind whistled through a crack in the roof.

Garald cocked the harpoon with a sharp metallic snap.

“What?!” he roared.

The tip vibrated an inch from Mac’s face.  
A drop of sweat slid down his temple.

Bruce thrashed behind him, screaming into his gag.

“If you keep taking me for a fool, I’ll drive this through your skull,” Garald snarled.

Mac closed his eyes briefly, inhaled, then reopened them steady.

“I’m telling the truth.  
He’s swimming right now in Anaheim Bay.”

Garald stared into him, searching for the tiniest tremor.

Silence fell like a curtain.

Then, slowly, the captain relaxed the weapon.  
A thin, predatory smile returned to his lips.

“If by tomorrow morning I’m not in possession of that cephalopod,  
you’ll regret it.”

He placed a heavy hand on Mac’s shoulder.  
His voice turned syrupy almost tender.

“You dream of recognition, Mac.  
Of fortune. Of glory.”

He leaned close, his breath reeking of alcohol.

“And I can give you all of it.”

Then he pulled back, released the harpoon’s tension with a precise, almost ceremonial gesture.

“Think about it,” he said.  
“Knowledge doesn’t feed you.”

A bitter smile.

“Ambition does.”

He turned heel and vanished through the doorway, swallowed by the night.  
The sound of his boots faded into the corridors like a funeral drum.

Silence fell again.  
A thick silence, full of doubt and threat.

Mac remained motionless, eyes fixed on the empty basin.  
His fingers trembled.

Behind him, the water stirred barely as if, in the depths, the Kraken had heard every word.

## Chapter 29 : The Choice

The sun, warm and sharp, rose above Anaheim Bay.  
The water shimmered under a cold, broken light carried by the ocean wind.  
Seagulls circled in silence, as if sensing an ending drawing near.

Garald was waiting on the dock, triumphant, standing beside a large seawater tank strapped onto a pallet jack.  
His harpoon leaned against the metal, throwing flashes of silver like a weapon longing for blood.

“You don’t do things halfway,” Mac said as he approached, breath unsteady.

“He’s worth his weight in gold,” Garald replied with the smile of a man who believes he owns the world.  
He tapped impatiently on the tank’s lid.

“From what you described, this creature is priceless.”

Mac stared at him, heart tight.  
“Always about money, right?”

Garald stopped tapping, crouched, then rose slowly harpoon in hand.  
“We’re hunters, Mac. We smell a vein of gold, we claim it.”

His smile stretched, syrupy, almost fatherly.  
“It’s the law of the sea.”

His eyes gleamed with a feverish light.  
“And anyway, look on the bright side you’ll get back to your studies, work at my center. And don’t forget... we still have an Incan treasure to find.”

Mac looked at him a long moment, then nodded toward the weapon.  
“All right. But no harpoon.”

Garald hesitated, weighing the young man’s tone.  
Then, reluctantly, he set the weapon on the ground slowly, distrustfully.

“Don’t double-cross me, kid. I’m warning you.”

Mac knelt at the edge of the dock.  
He plunged his hand into the water, tapping a sequence against the wooden pillar:

“Come.”

Garald frowned, intrigued.  
“You taught it Morse code?”

He stepped closer, fascinated despite himself.  
“So it wasn’t just a mollusk...”

Suddenly, a tentacle surfaced. Then another.  
The water split open.

The Kraken emerged, majestic and powerful all at once.

Mac placed a calming hand on its head.  
“Come on. It’s okay.”

The creature slowly hauled itself onto the dock, its ventouses leaving wet circular imprints on the concrete.  
Then it slid, obedient, toward the tank and settled inside like a trained animal.

Garald immediately slammed the lid shut, breath short, overwhelmed.  
“Magnificent!”

He pulled the pallet jack’s handle with renewed vigor, glowing with triumph.  
“This jewel is going to make me rich.”

A voice cut through the air like a blade:

“Mac! I’m so sorry!”

Salie burst onto the dock, pushing her wheelchair with frantic strength.  
Her cheeks were wet, her eyes wide with fear.

“Salie?!” Mac gasped.

Garald kept pulling the tank toward the parking lot, still grinning.  
“I’ll let you two chat. I have scientists waiting.”

Mac watched him go, frozen, mind spinning.  
A memory tore through him

## Flashback

A tiny boy, barely five, on the steps of an orphanage.  
Winter wind howling.  
He clings to his mother’s hand.  
“Mom! No!”  
She opens the door, voice soft but firm:  
“Let go, now... and go.”  
The hand slips away.  
Tears.

The door closes.  
Silence.

## End of flashback

Back on the dock, Mac collapsed to his knees, trembling.  
Salie rolled closer, hands clasped, voice cracked:

“Please, Mr. Garald... let him go.”

Garald stopped dead, glaring like a cornered wolf.  
“Let me pass, Salie. Before I get angry.”

“Garald!” Mac shouted.

The captain turned.

Mac lunged, shoulder-checking him  
The harpoon clattered to the ground in a burst of metal.

They crashed onto the concrete, fists flying, breath burning.  
Chains shook on the pallet jack as it lurched.

“Salie!” Mac yelled.  
“Push the tank! Throw it into the bay!”

“No!” Garald roared, half rising.

The little girl, shaking, grabbed the handles of the pallet jack.  
Her thin arms strained, the metal shrieked under the force.

The tank rolled forward Then tipped And crashed into the water.

SPLASH

A towering plume of spray shot up toward the darkening sky.

But as she pushed, her wheelchair wheel snagged  
She slipped  
And pitched forward into the void.

“Careful!” Mac cried.

He tried to jump up, but Garald hooked his ankle.  
Mac slammed to the ground helpless as...

...the sea swallowed both the tank  
and the child.

\*

Under the surface

Silence became liquid.  
Salie sank, pulled downward by her trapped foot.  
Bubbles burst from her mouth  
Her arms flailed uselessly.

The tank struck the bottom in a muffled boom.  
Her scream dissolved into the water.

Then  
An explosion of movement.

Two cartilaginous lances tore open the lid like paper.  
The Kraken burst free in a storm of light and motion.

Its pustules glowed deep red, like underwater embers.  
It wrapped Salie in a firm, protective grip.  
A cloud of red ink burst from its body a warm, pulsing veil like glowing blood.

The sea turned crimson.  
Salie, engulfed in color, closed her eyes.

The creature held her tight  
and surged toward the surface.

\*

Back on the dock

Garald stood frozen, harpoon raised again.  
“Not so fast, you little bastard!” he roared.

“Bring me the beast, or you’ll regret it!”

Mac, face dripping, rose with trembling fists.  
“Let me go get her, Garald!”

“No!” Garald barked, spitting rage.  
“This tragedy is on YOU!”

The bay rippled  
A massive shadow rose.

Two tentacles eased Salie onto the concrete, covered in a red gel, barely breathing.

“Salie!” Mac screamed.

Garald's jaw dropped.  
"What in God's name... how is that possible?"

A single second of distraction.  
Only one.

Mac struck him, hard.  
Garald toppled backward  
Slipped  
And fell into the sea.

The water erupted.

The Kraken shot upward, a living spear.  
Mac dove without thinking.

"KRAKEN! NO!"

He reached Garald, keeping the captain's head above water.

The monster sped toward them defenses aimed like lightning.

Mac slammed both palms on the surface, rhythm sharp and precise:

"STOP!"

The Kraken halted  
Defenses trembling inches away.

"Even if he's the worst bastard alive," Mac gasped,  
"you don't kill him."

He tapped again:

"Home."

A long moment suspended.  
Then the creature turned slow, majestic  
Its red glow fading.

It disappeared toward the ancient chest below.

Mac dragged Garald back to the dock, arms shaking, lungs burning.

On the concrete, Salie lay covered in the red gel like a second skin.  
Mac freed her from the wheelchair, wiped her face gently.

Her eyelashes fluttered.  
A breath

A gasp.  
Her eyes opened.

Mac lifted his gaze toward the black water, dripping.

“Bruce was right... This isn’t your world, my friend.”

He looked down at the unconscious captain.  
“Garald is too dangerous. And others will come.”

Salie whispered weakly:  
“What... what happened?”

\*

Later, at the research center

Garald, bound and gagged, slumped in a chair.  
Pale, soaked, shivering.

Mac checked the knots, then turned to Salie with a reassuring nod.

“Water only. And the gag stays, tight.”

“I’ll tell Mom I’m playing at a friend’s,” she answered with a mischievous little smile.

“There’s food in the fridge. The phone is there.”

Mac gestured toward the old desk, hesitated at the door hand trembling.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Who are you going to look for?” Salie asked.

Mac went pale.  
His eyes drifted toward the window opening onto the sea.

“My God...” he whispered.

## Chapter 30 : The Ally

Marine Biological Institute of Long Beach, late afternoon.  
The hallway smelled of old coffee and the dampness of aquariums.  
The display panels clicked softly under the harsh neon lights.

Mac knocked at the door that bore a simple inscription:

Anya Brothers

His knocking was tense, rapid a drumbeat of desperation and hope.

The door opened onto Anya's focused face, glasses low on her nose, the corners of her mouth tight.

"So, the 'rampant virus' that's what your boss claims. Despicable man, by the way."

She slammed the door shut. Precise. Sharp.

Mac knocked again, harder this time, his voice cracking:

"Anya, please! This is important. I need your help."

The door opened just a fraction.

"Excuse me?"

He clasped his hands together, almost pleading.

"Help me."

A thin smile a mix of irony and challenge slipped onto her lips.

"You've found the 'sea mammoth' again?"

"What is that mammoth, anyway?" Mac shot back, his voice quick, feverish.

Anya stepped fully into the hallway.  
She removed her glasses slowly and locked her gaze into his.

"I've already explained this to you at the center. I'm an only child, meaning you get exactly two seconds."

Mac didn't waste one.  
He began pacing the hallway in wide, frantic strides, hands animated, thoughts burning through him.

Face to face with her, he cracked wide open:

“Yes. I have a unique decapodiform. His name is... Kraken.”

Anya’s eyebrow lifted.

“Kraken? As in the Scandinavian legend?”

“Bruce’s idea,” Mac said.

She pressed her lips together.

“And... do you have proof this time?”

Mac pulled out his phone with trembling fingers and scrolled through the videos:

- the tiny stowaway slipping out of a jar
- the Morse-code responses
- the chest becoming a ‘home’
- the pustules glowing red right before an attack

Images that breathed, images that *spoke*.

“He—he was tiny, here,” Mac murmured, nervous.

“He’s grown a lot. He understands. He responds. He protects.”

Anya breathed in slowly, like a scientist catching the scent of truth.

“‘Tiny’ means what, exactly?”

Mac placed his phone on the counter between them, like a fragile reliquary.

He raised one finger toward the ceiling.

“Today marks six weeks since we met. He measures over six meters head included at the very least.”

Anya’s eyes widened.

She snapped her glasses back into place.

“Twelve meters total span?” she exclaimed, almost incredulous.

“In six weeks? That’s... impossible!”

Then, her expression shifted—from skepticism to scientific fever.

“He would therefore belong to the Decabrachia clade, subclass Coleoidea...” she whispered, captivated.

Her finger trembled as she traced the video on the screen.

“Look at that two anterior tentacles extended with bony protuberances... I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Mac smiled, proud and exhausted all at once.

“He—he learns fast. He reasons. He remembers. Sometimes... he understands better than we do.”

“Excuse me?!” Anya gasped, stunned, the sentence trapped between astonishment and hunger for knowledge.

“I want to see him. Absolutely.”

Relief washed across Mac’s face for the first time in days something genuine, something alive.

“You can call me ‘you’,” he said softly. “I won’t hold it against you.”

Anya slid her glasses back on with a sharp gesture, but the hardness in her gaze had softened just enough.

“You’re not what I feared, Mac Down,” she said, and her voice, cold at first, now carried a sincere note of curiosity.

Mac stepped closer, throat tight.

He lifted his phone, bringing the screen close to his face, and whispered, solemn:

“And he just saved a child from certain death.”

The air around them seemed to thicken, as if the laboratory itself were holding its breath.

Anya inhaled, deep and clear.

“All right. I’m coming with you.”

She grabbed her bag with a precise motion and slammed her office door behind her.

“But if you’ve lied to me again, Mac Down, I will destroy you publicly.”

Mac nodded relief, fear, and urgency tangled inside him.

“Come. And... hurry.”

They rushed down the corridor, two silhouettes slicing through the neon glare, the Institute ready to tilt from skepticism into science and, perhaps, into an alliance that could change everything.

## Chapter 31 : The Flamenco Friend

Bar *El Toro Rojo*, late afternoon.  
Andalusian guitars echoed beneath red-and-gold lanterns.  
The warm air carried scents of sweet wine, polished wood, and blond tobacco.  
Laughter, finger-snapping, shouts in Spanish:

“¡Vamos, hombre! ¡Otra, otra!”

Mac stepped into the tumult, jostled by the tide of people.  
He forced his way between crowded tables, clutching a large guitar-shaped gift wrapped in golden paper.  
Behind him, Anya followed hesitantly, her heels clicking against the glossy tiles.

“Where is your friend?” she asked, raising her voice above the music.

At that very moment, a roar erupted.

On the small stage lit in crimson, Bruce appeared.

Black shades, half-open shirt, tight black pants a flamboyant caricature of a Sunday-afternoon torero.

He launched into a blazing flamenco, voice rough and powerful, stomping, spinning, snapping his fingers like a rhythm-drunk god.  
The room clapped in unison, spellbound.  
The floor trembled beneath the Andalusian *compás*.

“¡Oleééé!” Bruce bellowed, arms raised toward the ceiling.

Anya froze, stunned.  
Red reflections danced on her glasses and across her amber skin.

“Well... all he’s missing is the guitar,” she breathed, amazed.

Mac dropped the package onto a chair with the resignation of a man familiar with disaster and sighed deeply.

“No point trying to reason with him now!”

“He’s... unbelievable,” murmured Anya, fascinated despite herself.

On stage, Bruce climbed onto a table.  
He twirled, his voice rolling through the bar like a southern storm:

“Ay mi corazón, mi *ombré del amorrrr*...!”

Customers pounded the tables in a trance while the bartender shook his head, amused.

Mac gently took Anya by the arm and steered her toward the exit, a mischievous smile on his lips.

“If he slips into ‘mystic flamenco mode’, we won’t get out until tomorrow.”

“I wish I’d been there when you two met,” Anya said, laughing.

They stepped through the glass doors in a swirl of guitar and incense.  
Behind them, Bruce let out a final cry:

“¡Olé, mis amigos del océano!”

Outside, night was falling over Long Beach warm and golden.

“He’ll never change,” Mac said. “But he’s a pure heart.”

Anya nodded, softened.

“Then let’s keep him close. We’re going to need him.”

Far off, the sea beat its own rhythm another *compás*, the one from the abyss.

## Chapter 32 : The Sea Mammoth

On the docks of Anaheim Bay, the sun was descending slowly a copper-red sphere melting into the waves.

Light gnawed at hulls and rocks with steady, merciless patience.

The air smelled of salt and marine fuel.

Mac knelt by the edge of the pier.

His shadow stretched long across the damp concrete.

With his fingertips, he tapped the wooden pillar short pulses, long pulses:

*Come.*

A murmured Morse code, almost a prayer.

Anya crouched beside him, her hair brushed by the wind.

“That’s Morse, isn’t it?”

Mac nodded silently, eyes fixed on the surface expectant, taut.

Suddenly, the water opened like a breath.

A quiet exhale.

A ripple.

A massive tentacle rose from the depths, glossy and slow, and wrapped gently around the researcher’s arm.

Then the Kraken surfaced entirely:

immense, sovereign, its marbled skin shimmering with dark iridescence beneath the dying light, its intelligent eyes shining like living abysses.

Anya, breath caught, approached.

She extended her hand hesitant at first then touched the warm, viscous, almost human texture of its skin.

Her fingers traced the supple surface until they met a cartilaginous tusk.

“Incredible...” she murmured. “So this is the sea mammoth. Neither squid nor octopus.”

Her voice trembled with awe.

“Another lineage altogether. You clearly weren’t lying, Mac.”

The Kraken, docile, brushed her shoulder with a soft, deliberate motion.

The water rippled around them like the breath of some ancient life.

“It resembles a combination of Myopsida and Oegopsida orders,” she whispered, entranced.

“I need to study it.”

“No,” Mac said immediately.

The Kraken tightened its arm around his, almost protectively.

“He has to go home,” Mac murmured.

“The Pacific Ocean. The Nazca Ridge. Where he was born.”

His voice shook.

“If we don’t send him back, they’ll dissect him. Put him on display in an aquarium. Cage him for the rest of his life.”

Anya lowered her eyes, throat tightening.

“The Nazca Ridge... That’s where you found him?”

“No,” Mac said, voice hoarse.

“He was forced upward.

Not discovered excavated.”

She rose slowly, thoughtful, the sunset drawing amber-and-shadow patterns across her skin.

“And how do you plan to take him back? I don’t have a boat, and the journey is enormous. He won’t survive long away from his natural environment.”

A voice soared behind them, bright and triumphant:

“But *I* do have a boat!”

They turned.

Bruce marched toward them along the pontoon, guitar in hand, shirt half-open, smile wide. The wind swept through his hair.

“You really got to me, Mac!” he shouted.

“Thanks to you, I finally have my true Andalusian guitar!”

Mac burst out laughing, shoulders shaking.

“Resentful has never been part of your vocabulary, my friend!”

Bruce placed a hand on his shoulder brotherly, warm.

“It’s the best birthday present I’ve ever had.”

“With my miserable salary, that’s the best I can wish you happy birthday, Bruce!” Mac said, glowing.

Bruce cast a mock-stern look toward the Kraken.

“But don’t think I’ve forgotten you, you fish-devouring menace!”

Anya approached, hand extended with confident precision.

“Anya Brothers, marine biologist at Long Beach Institute. You said you have a boat?”

Bruce blinked, caught off guard, then shook her hand with respect.

“An eighteen-meter trawler, ma’am! Sturdy, reliable. My parents’ money still sleeps in that rusted beauty.”

Then, half-serious, half-mocking:

“I said I had a boat for your trip. Not that I was coming with you.”

Mac took a step forward.

“Bruce...”

“Don’t think you’ll get everything you want for free,” the sailor cut sharply.

Mac moved closer, eyes burning, voice trembling with emotion.

“You’re my only friend. And as such, I’m asking you humbly to come with me.

Help me take him home.

I’ll pay for the fuel, the repairs, the trip... for the rest of my life, if I must.”

Bruce stared at him for a long moment serious, silent.

Then his gaze drifted toward the sea.

Below, the Kraken lifted a tentacle almost a salute.

Stillness stretched between them.

Anya watched, mesmerized, this improbable trio man, woman, monster bound by a fragile new pact.

Finally, Bruce placed his hand on Mac’s shoulder.

His voice grew deep, brotherly:

“We’ll figure out later how you’re going to repay me.

But if you want me aboard... promise me one thing:

make peace with yourself.

Stop with that damned transference. It’s going to eat you alive. And I can’t watch that happen.”

Mac lifted his head, eyes wet but steady.

“I promise, Bruce.”

The sailor nodded, half-smile half sincere, half worried.

“That’s a start.”

Then, turning toward Anya:

“We have the transport. And you, biologist? Why don’t you come along?”

Anya crossed her arms, gaze drifting over the bay.  
The sun was dying slowly over the water.

“And what would motivate me to risk my career?  
To lose everything for a sea monster... and two dreamers?”

Mac stepped closer, eyes incandescent.

“Because only you can understand him.  
Only you might discover... who he is.”

Bruce blinked.

“You... what? Come again?”

Anya moved closer so close her breath brushed Mac’s cheek.

“So... you allow me to study him? During the journey?”

Mac turned his eyes toward the bay.

The Kraken surfaced slowly, tentacles stirring the water in widening circles of foam.

“Just promise me one thing,” he whispered.  
“Don’t hurt him.  
And keep him safe from all those scientific vultures.”

Anya nodded, solemn.

“Deal.”

She adjusted her glasses.

“I’ll head back to the institute and grab some equipment. I’ll be back before high tide.”

Bruce threw his arms up.

“And your job?”

She raised an eyebrow, mischievous.

“I know a doctor who owes me a little favor...”

“You’re going to get a fake sick note?!” Bruce exclaimed.

She simply smiled conspiratorial and vanished into the golden evening.

Mac and Bruce stayed alone, facing the sea, their shadows mingling with the Kraken's on the rippling water.

The air vibrated with a strange foreboding.

Something had just begun.

A mission.

An alliance.

And maybe... one last chance.

## Chapter 33 : The Hostage

At the research center, night was falling.  
The air smelled of iodine and the cold dust of idle machines.  
A flickering lamp cast golden glints across the walls, like a night-light in a ship's hold.

Salie, focused and silent, held a small bottle of water in her thin hands.  
She tilted it carefully, letting Garald drink tied tightly to a metal chair then replaced his gag with meticulous care.  
The ropes squeaked with each of the captain's breaths, an animal, rasping sound.

The little girl straightened up, eyes wide, as if waiting for a signal.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway.

"Everything's fine, Salie," said Mac's voice as he entered.

She turned instantly, relief breaking across her face like light.

"Finally!"

Bruce stepped in behind him. His shadow filled the room before he did.  
His expression was rigid, his jaw clenched.

"You kidnapped Garald?!" he barked, stunned.

"He was planning to kill you," Mac answered, calm but burning behind the eyes.

Bruce's fists tightened his whole body vibrating with the reflex to fight.

"Then let's tie him *tighter* and throw him in the sea!"

Mac shook his head slowly.

"No revenge," he murmured.  
"Not in front of her."

Salie gave a small smile. Her child's presence softened everything.

Mac crouched, laid a reassuring hand on her shoulder, and pulled her gently into his arms.

"You can go home now. Thank you, Salie. I'll take care of the rest."

She nodded, then pointed her chin toward the prisoner.

"And him?"

Mac sighed.

“He won’t be harmed. I give you my word. But you go quickly.”

She turned her wheelchair toward the door, hesitated, then spoke in a trembling whisper:

“Mac... do you remember when I fell into the bay?”

A shiver crossed him.

“I thought I’d lost you, Salie.”

“Since then, my legs feel weird... like pinching inside. Like little needles moving.”

Silence flooded the room.  
Even Bruce looked away.

Mac forced a smile he didn’t feel.

“When you get home, ask your mom to take you to the doctor. And keep taking your treatment, okay?”

The girl nodded obediently, then wheeled herself out.  
Her wheels creaked, then faded away leaving behind a heavy, marine-like stillness.

Mac remained still a moment, staring into the void.  
Then he turned toward Garald.

The captain, gagged, stared back with a cold, majestic hatred.

Mac tightened the ropes precise, careful, almost respectful.

“Don’t worry,” he whispered.  
“Tomorrow, Joe and Ailfred will come free you. I left a letter for you.”

Garald growled behind the gag, but it dissolved into a muffled rasp.

Mac stood, rifled desperately through the desk, pushing aside piles of old documents until he unearthed a folded nautical chart.  
The paper cracked under his fingers.

He spread it open on the table: coordinates danced across it, traced by a trembling yet confident hand from another era.

“This is what I was looking for...”

He slipped the chart into his bag, along with an old, yellowed logbook signed *Filippo Frassinetti*.

He exhaled with a faint, victorious breath.

“And now we can go.”

Bruce, silent until now, let out a long sigh and headed toward the door.

A sudden vibration rattled the tabletop: Mac’s phone had lit up with a notification.

Mac froze.

The screen glowed in the dimness.

Bruce stepped closer.

“Is it her?”

Mac nodded.

“Jessica.”

Bruce crossed his arms.

“You promised you would make an effort.”

Mac inhaled slowly, throat tight.

“I’ll just tell her everything’s fine.  
That... I’ll make a decision when I get back.”

His fingers trembled as he typed.  
A short message.  
Bare.  
Then he switched off the phone.

“Let’s go,” he said in a low, steady voice.

They walked out, not looking back.

Behind them, Garald sat alone in the dying light.  
His rough breath made the ropes twitch around his wrists.  
His eyes two grey embers stared into the void with the cold rage of the defeated.

The lamp flickered one last time, then died.

And in the darkness, the captain’s lips curved into the faintest smile.

## Chapter 34 : Heading Out to Sea

Night had fallen over the trawler's foredeck.  
The engine throbbed deep in the hull like a living heart.  
The smell of diesel mingled with salt and sun-warmed metal.  
Beneath the keel, the sea struck, breathed, hammered a hidden drum that seemed to pulse with them.

Foam leapt at every wave, splashing up to Mac's, Bruce's and Anya's boots.  
The three silhouettes stood at the bow, facing the wind that lashed their faces.  
Above them, the sky filled with stars, low clouds dragging like shrouds across the horizon.

Bruce glanced under the deck lights at the stacked crates and the strange tubes and devices strapped down with rope.

"Well, well. Look at that, miss Biologist," he said, feigning lightness. "You'll explain all that junk one day?"

Anya, bent over her notebook, didn't bother looking up.  
"Scientific equipment," she replied flatly.  
Borrowed illegally. So if you touch anything, I'll deny everything."

Bruce rolled his eyes dramatically.  
"Perfect. In addition to a fugitive, we've got a thief on board. Comforting."

He shot Mac a pointed look, half exasperated, half ironic.  
"You do realize your treasure-hunter dreams are done, right? Garald will torch your reputation in the whole field. You'll never get another job."

Mac stayed silent for a moment, staring at the sea.  
The wind made his hair wave like dark seaweed.

"I won't abandon him," he murmured at last.

Bruce threw his hands in the air.  
"Fine. I'm going to check the heading and the weather. If we're gonna die, might as well die neatly."

He walked off toward the wheelhouse, muttering under his breath.

•

At the stern, the sea vibrated gently against the hull.  
Moonlight slid across the water in strokes of silver and deep blue.  
The boat cut straight through the swells, leaving behind a glowing phosphorescent trail a luminous scar on the ocean.

Mac walked beside Anya toward the rear deck.  
He stopped next to a large metal dumpster suspended by two thick cables.  
The steel groaned softly under the salt wind.

“Bruce and I drilled big openings in the sides,” Mac explained.  
“He’ll be in symbiosis with the sea. His chest is inside... it reassures him.”

Anya approached and brushed her fingers over the holes, glistening with foam, fascinated.

“Not very academic,” she murmured. “But devilishly efficient.”

She folded her arms.  
“And the food?”

“A few frozen rations in the hold at first he doesn’t like them much,” Mac said.  
“After that, we’ll make stops and he’ll hunt on his own.”

Anya raised a doubtful eyebrow.  
“And if he doesn’t return? If he escapes?”

Mac met her eyes without flinching.  
“That’s the risk. And I take full responsibility.”

They held each other’s gaze for a moment, suspended.  
The wind carried between them a scent of brine, almost gentle.

Anya gently placed a hand on his shoulder.  
“He loves you, your friend,” she said quietly. “Helping you this much... that’s no small thing.”

Mac lifted his head. His eyes shone with a childlike sincerity.

“We grew up in the same orphanage.  
Same nightmares, same scars.  
Except him... he lost everything. His parents died in a fishing accident when he was four.  
This boat is all he has left of them.”

A gust of wind rattled the rigging.  
Under their feet, the sea groaned.

Suddenly, a burst of static exploded through the deck speakers, followed by a deafening yell:

“And to inaugurate this great crossing,” Bruce’s voice boomed,  
“I declare the sea open to the greatest Spanish flamenco of all time!”

A storm of guitar and ¡olé! burst from the speakers.  
The trawler shook with laughter.

Mac and Anya stared at each other, stunned then doubled over laughing, clutching their sides.

•

In the wheelhouse, Bruce danced wildly.

One hand on the helm, the other strumming his guitar, he made the whole vessel sway to a furious flamenco rhythm.

The compass rattled, the radio blinked, and beside an old metal bilboquet, his phone vibrated unnoticed.

•

On deck, Mac and Anya were still laughing, breathless.

The wind whipped their faces.

The ocean stretched endlessly before them, vast and somber and magnificent.

The trawler sliced through the sea, leaving a trail of silver.

The waves beat the hull like an ancient drum, matching the heartbeat of the engine.

And in the breath of the wind, their shared laughter drifted into the night.

## Chapter 35 : The Captain

At the research center, in the harsh morning light.  
The first rays of sun cut through the grimy windows, laying pale stripes across the floor.  
The room smelled of stale alcohol mixed with brine and old wood.  
A fan creaked in the silence.

Garald stood there.  
His features were drawn, beard unkempt, shirt clinging to his skin.  
His wrists still bore the marks of the ropes two raw, angry lines, almost bleeding.  
But his eyes...  
His eyes had lost nothing.  
A hard flame still burned there, merciless and cold.

Joe and Ailfred, his most loyal men, rushed in with relief stamped across their faces.  
Without a word, they stepped forward and sliced through the remaining cords with their sailor's knives.

Garald rose slowly, stiff and sore.  
His joints cracked like dry timber.  
He drew in a deep, ragged breath before lifting his head.  
Rage and a chilling clarity glowed inside him.

"They won't get away from me," he growled.  
Every syllable vibrated through the room like the beginning of a storm.

He strode to the desk, scattered papers with a sweep of his arm, powered up the computer and hammered the keys with feverish urgency.  
Maritime coordinates flashed on-screen a mesh of numbers and shifting blue curves.

"There," he muttered, lips twisting into a knife-like smile.  
"I have all the backup data.  
I know exactly where they're going."

He clenched his fist and slammed it onto the table.  
The lamp flickered wildly.

"That damn decapodiform is mine!"

Tension fell like a net.  
Joe exchanged a worried glance with Ailfred.  
But Garald heard none of it.

He stepped to the window and stared out at the bright, blinding morning.  
His reflection merged with the seascape a steel specter leaning over the horizon.

“Everything I desire... belongs to me,” he whispered, voice pale and deadly.

Then, without turning, he barked:

“Prep the *Self-Made Man*.  
Fill her tanks. Arm the harpoon guns.  
We set sail before noon.”

Joe opened his mouth, but one look from the captain froze the words in his throat.

Garald grabbed his jacket and slammed the door behind him.  
The sound thundered down the corridor like cannon fire.

Behind him, the morning light suddenly felt colder.  
And the research center emptier.  
As if a storm had risen inside it without wind, without waves but with the same devouring  
fury.

## Chapter 36 : The Sea Opens Its Arms

Two days later.

The ocean stretched endlessly, calm and blue like polished metal.

The trawler drifted with its engine shut down, gliding in a silence almost religious.

Only the steady lap of waves against the hull and the distant cry of a lost seabird broke the stillness.

Mac, dressed in his wetsuit, floated at the surface, his snorkel piercing the water like a fragile antenna.

Sunlight fractured on the waves, scattering silver shards across his mask.

Beside him, the large metal container rocked gently, half-open, still connected to the boat by steel cables.

Below, the Kraken traced the metal with its tentacles cautious, almost tender.

Mac murmured through his mask:

“This is the perfect moment...”

At the back of the boat, Anya and Bruce leaned on the rail, watching.

The engine was silent, leaving only the breath of the wide, salt-blue world.

The wind barely stirred Anya’s hair, and the light glinted on her glasses.

“Are you married?” she asked suddenly, blunt as ever, arms crossed.

Bruce jolted so hard he nearly spilled his coffee.

“No. Work keeps me company,” he grumbled.

“Well... there’s Dolofesse. My favorite crustacean.”

Anya burst out laughing a bright, almost childlike sound.

“You’re hopeless!”

Bruce shrugged, wearing his trademark half-smile.

“In lonely times, even a crab’s got heart.”

Below the surface, Mac struck the metal with his fist: short taps, long ones code.

*Come.*

A tremor rippled through the water.

Sunlight broke inside it like a living crystal.

The Kraken answered.

The sea vibrated, then slowly parted.  
The creature rose from the shadows immense, sovereign, its scarlet silhouette undulating like liquid fire.  
Its black eyes, rimmed with silver, seemed to recognize Mac instantly.

A tentacle touched his shoulder gently, like a promise.

Mac tapped again:

*Feed.*

He exhaled, his voice lost in the bubbling mask.

“Go. Hunt... eat... and come back to me.”

The Kraken hesitated, then drifted away slow at first, then with a powerful sweep, disappearing into the infinite blue.

On the deck, time seemed to freeze.  
The trawler floated peacefully.  
Anya watched the sea, wide-eyed.

“Incredible... He understood the command,” she whispered.

Bruce, arms folded, shook his head darkly.

“He’s not coming back. The sea is his home.”

The wind shifted, bringing a sharper, brinier scent.  
Anya turned toward the horizon.

“What was it like... at the orphanage?” she asked quietly.

Bruce blinked, surprised, then sighed.

“Mac’s the big brother I never got. We survived the same shadows, the same revolting food, the same moral-preaching guards with hate in their mouths.”

His voice softened.

“He taught me not to hate. That’s why I’m still with him.”

Anya nodded, thoughtful.

“A brotherhood forged in pain... tempered by the sea.”

Bruce’s gaze drifted to Mac’s silhouette bobbing on the waves.

“Nothing ever scared me,” he said quietly.

“Except losing him.”

Below them, the sea shivered.  
A shadow passed.

Mac, still floating, suddenly felt something tug at his ankle.  
He smiled.

“Back already, old friend?”

Then the tug tightened.  
Harder.

A sharp pain shot up his leg.  
He twisted, trying to free himself.

“Kraken, stop! You’re hurting me!”

Then the jerk  
Brutal.  
Violent.

The water clamped over him like a mouth.  
Mac was yanked downward, swallowed by the blue.

“MAC! LOOK OUT!” Anya screamed.  
She leaned over the rail, waving her arms, panic clawing her voice.

“Grab the ladder! MAC!”

Bruce rushed out, pale as bone.

“What’s going on?!”

Anya pointed at the sea, her voice breaking.

“*Dosidicus gigas*! Humboldts! Pacific giant squids! Aggressive predators!”

Bruce stared down.  
Red shadows churned beneath the surface—fast, vicious.  
Strands of pink foam were already rising.

“Holy hell, Mac! Those are giant damn squids!”

The deck trembled under his steps.  
Bruce tore off his jacket, ready to leap.

“My friend’s down there!”

Anya caught his arm.

“They’re spreading everywhere!” she shouted.

“Warming waters disrupted their ecosystem they’re adapting, expanding”

“This ain’t the time for a biology class, encyclopedia!” Bruce roared, panicked.

He broke free and sprinted toward the cabin.

“I’m getting the harpoons!”

Underwater, Mac kicked wildly, trapped by an unseen force.

Another shadow streaked beneath him.

Then a shockwave

A burst of crimson ink filled the water.

And then nothing.

Mac vanished, swallowed whole by the sea.

## Chapter 37 : The Blood-Red Abyss

Darkness thickened around him.  
A liquid, frozen gulf wrapped him whole.  
The ocean had become a black womb where every sound every heartbeat seemed to scream beneath the skin.

Mac sank in freefall, breath locked inside him, trapped in the cold.  
His lungs were nothing but a fragile bubble suspended between two worlds.  
The last glimmers of daylight had long vanished, swallowed by the liquid night.

Below him, the abyss opened like a torn wound.

Two giant squid had seized his legs.  
Their tentacles lined with bone-hard hooks latched onto his wetsuit and pulled with mechanical speed.  
Pain throbbed, dull and burning.  
Mac thrashed, but the pressure crushed his chest like an iron vice.  
His blood hammered in his temples.  
His breath shattered into thin silver bubbles.

Other squids circled him whorls of hungry shadows.  
Their eyes, huge and gleaming, watched him with cold intelligence.

Then a third one lunged at him from the front, bold, jaws wide open.  
Its black beak snapped sharp, ready to tear a piece of him away.

Mac raised his arms in a helpless cross, lost in the dark.  
A strange peace washed over his face.  
He stopped struggling.

Silence became absolute.  
Nothing remained but the heavy thud of his heart, and the sea immense, indifferent.

Then... everything froze.

A tremor pulsed through the water a low, electric rumble.  
The predators halted instantly.  
Their tentacles quivered, seized by a primal fear.

A streak of scarlet split the darkness.

A tentacle bristling with barbed defenses shot from the void and impaled the squid facing Mac straight through its body.  
The creature's muffled scream dissolved in a cloud of black bubbles.

The Kraken erupted.

A titan of flesh and fire.

Its pustules ignited deep red, glowing until they burned with incandescent crimson.

Its eyes two obsidian orbs shone with a rage almost human.

It hurled itself at the other assailants.

Its arms unfurled like a cyclone.

Tentacles struck, wrapped, crushed.

Gelatinous bodies tore against its hooks, bursting into drifting black clouds.

Entrails scattered pieces floating like banners in the red water, devoured instantly by the remaining pack.

The battle lasted seconds perhaps centuries.

Then all fell still.

Silence.

The water, heavy and red, swirled around them like dark wine.

Mac floated among the carnage, limp.

His body drifted slowly, eyes wide open, strangely calm.

And on his lips a smile.

Faint. Unexpected.

The smile of a man who finally understands his destiny.

The Kraken extended a tentacle thick as a tree trunk, sliding beneath him with infinite tenderness.

The creature wrapped him close, pulling him against its warm, pulsing mass.

A heart beat massive, steady pressed against his own.

Then, with one prodigious thrust, the Kraken shot upward.

It cut through the depths, tearing the layers of water with furious speed.

Its arms lashed the waves, its glowing pustules flashing like underwater flames.

Around them, other shapes tried to approach more Humboldt squid, frenzied, ravenous.

But the Kraken's fury swept them aside, one by one.

Predators shattered under its blows, scattered in bubbles and blood.

Man and monster rose together,

lifted by the trembling light filtering from the world above two souls reaching for the same breath.

And within the rising roar of the sea,

one could swear a cry echoed not of rage, not of fear but a cry of calling.

A cry of ancient love, rising from the deep.

## Chapter 38 : The Awakening

Mac's ragged breathing filled the cabin harsh, broken, then slowly settling into a steady rhythm, like that of a diver torn from the abyss.  
The boat rolled gently, making the walls hum. The bulbs flickered with each blast of wind.

On the narrow bunk, he opened his eyes.  
His face, still wet with saltwater, gleamed under the wavering light.

Bruce leaned over him, a gentle, brotherly hand resting on his shoulder.  
"Easy, Mac. Breathe. Take your time."

Mac inhaled deeply, filling his lungs as if returning from a great distance, then let out a trembling exhale.  
A faint, boyish smile crossed his lips.

"It was... extraordinary."

Bruce, jittery, slapped his knees.  
"Tell us what happened, for God's sake!"

Anya stepped closer, glasses perched low on her nose, her gaze caught between worry and fascination.  
"What exactly happened down there?"

Mac grimaced, lifting his head slowly.  
His voice was calm, low, filled with an emotion he no longer tried to hide.

"They dragged me down with unbelievable force straight into the cold, the dark. The giant squids. I was their prey, their dinner. Two of them latched onto my legs, and another bolder charged right at me. I was out of air... and then everything just stopped."

His gaze drifted, his face tightening at the memory.  
"The squids... froze for a moment. Like they were paralyzed. And Kraken using those terrible defenses of his burst out of nowhere. He impaled them, clean and furious. He slaughtered them all... to save me."

Bruce slapped his knees again, unable to stay still.  
"He saved your life, my friend. And from the start, you've done the same for him."

Mac nodded slowly, eyes lost in the echo of what he'd witnessed.  
"His head... it changed. Longer, more tapered almost like that of a deep-sea squid."

He paused, his eyes glistening.  
"And just before I blacked out, I felt something strange. A peace. It washed over me warm, protective. As if he was saying: Don't be afraid. I'm here."

Only the creak of wood broke the silence.

Bruce handed him a glass of water.

Mac held it with trembling fingers, took a sip, then stared at his reflection in the shifting liquid.

Anya suddenly began pacing, brow furrowed, her mind racing.

“Well... yes, he protected you like you were family, Mac. But what interests me most is this: he may have developed some form of high-frequency echolocation, capable of immobilizing prey at a distance.”

She stopped, thoughtful.

“It’s... fascinating.”

Her eyes hardened.

“He’s far more evolved than anything I imagined.”

Mac lifted his head, anxious.

“Where is he?”

Bruce, sitting on a wooden chair, gestured vaguely toward the stern.

“He came back after diving again. Then he climbed into his ‘trash can’ with a squid still alive.”

He grimaced, disgusted.

“Ugh... wouldn’t wanna be in its place.”

Mac stood, set the glass down, and approached the porthole.

Outside, the sea had darkened.

The waves were rising, their silver crests slamming against the hull.

“The weather’s changing,” he murmured.

“Just a storm,” Bruce shrugged. “We’ve seen worse.”

Mac closed his eyes for a moment and breathed slowly.

“Then we keep going.”

Anya leaned over the table, placing her hand flat against the wood.

“The coordinates. The place where you found the egg.”

Mac pointed to his bag in the corner.

Bruce retrieved it and laid it on the table.

Anya pulled out an old rolled nautical chart, tied with hemp rope, and a worn leather logbook. She unrolled the map, her glasses catching the flickering light.

“What is this?” she asked, intrigued.

Mac looked up, voice grave.  
“The logbook of Captain Filippo Frassinetti.”

He swallowed.  
“Garald talked about him often. But he never let anyone touch it. Not even Joe or Ailfred.”

Anya turned the pages carefully, the paper crackling under her fingers.  
“It’s written in Italian!”

Mac smiled, nodding.  
“Garald must’ve translated the important parts. The mysterious ones.”

She kept reading, lips tight, until she stumbled upon a page annotated in English, written in brown ink.

“You were right... here’s the translation.”

Bruce leaned over her shoulder, curious.  
“So? What does it say?”

Anya scanned the lines, her face tightening.  
“Strange... it’s describing a major event.”

She read softly at first, then straightened with a changed voice louder, as if possessed:

*“On the 20th day of July, in the year of our Lord 1860, Captain Filippo Frassinetti, aboard the Cosmos II, takes command of the convoy. Behind him, under his orders, the Miséricordia a forty-five-meter three-masted ship carries a portion of the riches of the Inca Empire...”*

She lifted her eyes now crimson with shock.  
A shiver swept through the room.

The wind slammed against the windows.  
The light flickered.  
The hull groaned like a wounded beast.

Anya half-closed the logbook between her fingers.  
Her fearful gaze found Mac’s.

“It didn’t sink by accident... did it?”

Mac said nothing.  
His head slowly swayed side to side, eyes vacant he didn’t know the tragedy.

Bruce stood, nervous, checking the instruments out of habit before sitting again.

Then for a brief moment, everything dissolved.  
Thunder blended with the wind’s raw breath.  
Outside, the sea turned black.

A curtain of foam swept past the portholes.  
The wind battered the wheelhouse.  
The lights dimmed.

And in their minds,  
the sea became black velvet.

## Chapter 39 : Frassinetti's Log

### Flashback:

Pacific Ocean, Tropic of Capricorn, along the Nazca Ridge, 1860.

The sea breathed like a sleeping beast.

Under a full moon, round as a silver coin, two Neapolitan sailing ships glided with every sail unfurled.

Their wake shimmered with a milky glow, weaving between waves draped in black.

The trade wind swelled the canvas with a warm breeze, the creak of timber keeping time with the night.

On the bridge of the *Cosmos II*, Captain Filippo Frassinetti tricorne hat pulled low adjusted his spyglass, his moustache whipped by briny wind.

"Wind at our back, steady pace..." he murmured, satisfied. "Now that is what I call sailing home in peace."

He lowered the glass.

To port, the silhouette of the *Miséricordia*, her twin ship, rocked gently in the moonlight.

Frassinetti frowned: the three-masted vessel seemed to drift, slowing.

"Lieutenant Lombardo must have taken leave of his senses..." he grumbled, tucking the instrument away.

He stepped into his cabin, unaware that the sea, that night, had come to collect its due.

\*

On the deck of the *Miséricordia*, three gaunt young sailors leaned over the rail, their filthy hair fluttering in the wind.

Below them, the phosphorescent water brightened around a gigantic shape.

A creature surfaced, rippling at the skin of the sea, seizing fish in spirals of light.

"Did you see that?!" the first whispered. "It's massive! Didn't know things like that existed in this damned world!"

"Savage waters..." grumbled another, spitting into the sea. "Figures."

"We're eating well tonight," the first snickered, gripping a boarding hook.

"An octopus... it's enormous!" stammered the third, pale.

"We haul it up, chop it up, and eat fat till we get home!" the first cheered, eyes shining with madness.

The hook sliced through the air and embedded itself in a tentacle.

The sea changed color: a burning red spread beneath the creature's skin.

A scream rose not human, but a vibration that made the hull tremble.

The three men staggered back, at once fascinated and terrified.

The rope snapped taut.

A massive tentacle burst upward, pulsing.  
An axe came down crack. Flesh severed. Black blood.  
The suction cups still clutched, stiff as dying fingers.

The deck grew slick with viscous slime; the men laughed nervously, drunk on horror and greed.

“Straight from the gates of hell... move!” shouted the third, raising his hook again.

Beneath the deck, something moaned.  
Then the sea rose.

A breath.  
A rumble.  
The entire ocean seemed to rear back.

A colossal tentacle, sheathed in a cartilaginous spike, erupted from the depths and pierced the chest of the sailor with the axe.  
Blood splashed across the rail.

A second limb, studded with bone-like spines, ripped open the ship’s flank and swept the second sailor away in a howl.  
Their bodies vanished into the black churn, sucked under by the pull.

Dozens of shadows rose from below.  
A swarm of decapodiformes, drawn by the blood, tore into the sailors’ remains rending, devouring, ripping them apart with shrill frenzy.

The last sailor rang the bell desperately.  
“Oh God, mercy!” he screamed.

Too late.  
A third arm skewered him clean through and flung him to the sea.

\*

On the bridge of the *Cosmos II*, Frassinetti burst from his cabin, spyglass pressed to his eye.  
The wind lashed his face but he froze, petrified.

In the moon’s raw glow, the *Miséricordia* burned bright.  
A colossal monster, armed with two ivory-colored tusks, was skewering crewmen one by one including their commander.  
It lifted them like scraps of paper, then plunged them into the gaping maws of the smaller creatures swarming below.

Then, in a frenzy, its massive tentacles tore into the ship: masts snapped, yards ripped off, sails shredded like battle flags.  
The hull burst open; cannons rolled into the sea.

“Two hundred and forty feet...” Frassinetti whispered, bloodless.

The spyglass slipped from his hands and struck the deck with a dull thud.

A second monster rose from the deep just as gigantic, just as horrifying.

Side by side, the two giants struck together, impaling the three-masted ship's flank with a sound that tore the night apart.

The *Misericordia*, broken, rolled, groaned, and sank swallowed whole by the darkness.

"Deck officer!" Frassinetti roared. "Change course! Full speed ahead!"

"And the treasure, sir?" stammered a young sailor.

Frassinetti gripped the rail until his knuckles turned white.

"The *Misericordia* is lost. Anyone who stays dies. Southward now!"

The *Cosmos II* fled under the moon's cold gaze, trailing a wake of guilt and shame.

End of flashback.

The trawler groaned beneath a gust.

The echo of the past seemed to pulse within its walls.

Anya turned a fragile page, her fingers trembling.

A marginal note written in a more recent hand appeared beside the passage: a thin, tense English translation.

She read aloud, almost like a prayer:

*"On this day, July 20th, 1860, I became certain, after the tragedy of the Misericordia, that the Leviathan of the seas lived among us. And that it must never be awakened, lest we face its wrath, its onslaught, its terror."*

She lifted her gaze to Mac.

"The female was wounded. The males came. They judged."

Thunder rumbled.

Silence settled in the cabin, heavy as a verdict.

Mac, Bruce, and Anya remained motionless.

Bruce finally exhaled, his voice rough:

"And to think I named him Kraken just to sound cool..."

Anya closed the old logbook with reverence, her gaze fixed on the cover.

"It was a male. A dominant."

Mac's features tightened as he slowly raised his head.

"Now I understand why so many wrecks I studied looked crushed... as if by a giant hand."

He pointed to the map laid out.

"And I think I know where the Inca treasure lies."

Anya frowned.

“Two hundred and forty feet... Frassinetti said... how much is that?”

“About eighty meters,” Mac whispered.

She paled.

“That’s... impossible.”

Bruce stood abruptly, grimacing.

“The myth exists, for God’s sake! And apparently, something even bigger than our ‘friend’ exists too!”

Anya paced the cabin, arms crossed, mind racing.

“Females probably lay eggs in warmer waters to speed up hatching. That would explain their presence at the surface during that season.”

Bruce gripped the back of a chair, eyes wild.

“It’s a flesh-eater. A scourge to humanity!”

Mac, calm yet firm, replied:

“No, Bruce. Human stupidity and pride our obsession with ruling the sea that’s the scourge.”

Anya nodded slowly.

“Females defend their eggs to the death... just like octopuses. If Lombardo and his men mortally wounded a female, then the males retaliated.”

Bruce collapsed onto the bench, pale.

“Damn. It’ll crush us the moment it gets the chance.”

Anya stopped abruptly, eyes burning.

“Males leave the females to dive into the abyss. Juveniles stay near the surface vulnerable. The King of the Seas is real. And with him, his people.”

Bruce buried his face in his hands.

“Hordes of Krakens... dear God.”

Mac approached the porthole.

Rain hammered the glass heavy, slanting, almost alive.

“So,” he murmured, “the sea is giving back what we once stole.”

## Chapter 40 : Dive

On the forward deck, late morning.  
The sky hung low, the color of pewter.  
The sea heavy, dense rolled in slow, pulsing breaths.  
Every wave seemed to guard a secret.

Anya knelt on the planks, checking her gear: waterproof probes, micro-cameras, sterile syringes.  
Straps, clips and valves clicked together in a metallic cadence, almost surgical.

Bruce arrived, face carved by the wind, jacket zipped to his chin.  
His grey, weary eyes scanned the horizon.

“I’ve cut the engines. Time’s running out,” he rasped.

Anya nodded, focused.  
“One hour. No more. It’s now or never.”

The fisherman swept the horizon again.  
The sky was closing in, swallowing the day’s light.

“Where’s Mac?”

Anya adjusted the small camera on her mask, answering without looking up:

“He should already be here. With him.”

At those words *with him*, Bruce felt a cold knot twist in his stomach.  
He stared at the large syringe slipping into her waterproof pouch.

“Do you have to?” he asked, his voice low, almost pleading.

Anya shrugged lightly.  
“It’s just a sample. To understand his metabolism. I don’t intend to hurt him.”

Her tone was casual, almost teasing but in her eyes burned that feverish spark scientists get when they step too close to the forbidden.

Bruce stepped back, uneasy.

“I’ll be at the helm,” he muttered. “And I’ll pray you come back in one piece.”

\*

Out at sea, the surface quivered softly, smooth as hammered silver.  
Mac floated calmly, a wide smile on his face.  
The veiled sun drew halos around his shoulders.

Around his neck hung something unusual: an old metal bilboquet, polished by time Bruce's keepsake.  
He unfastened it, dipped the ball beneath the water, and tapped it rhythmically:

*Come.*

Far off, the sea answered.  
A dome slowly rose beneath the surface, as if something were holding its breath.  
The tremor became a swell.  
The swell took shape.

A colossal mass erupted from the water with sovereign majesty.  
Giant tentacles, slick and gleaming, slid around Mac, lifting him with infinite care.

"Easy, Kraken..." he laughed softly.

He laid a hand on the creature's head.  
The contact was cold, silky, almost velvety a caress on living silk.  
Beneath his palm, something pulsed, a deep, slow rhythm closer to a drum than a heartbeat.

Behind them, a shape emerged through the foam.  
Anya, fins slicing the water, approached cautiously, breathing hard through her snorkel.  
Her eyes behind the visor shone with awe.

"My God..."

She reached out, hesitating, then brushed the surface of a tentacle.  
Under her fingers, the skin shivered, shifting in color, shimmering like liquid stained glass.

Anya stifled a small cry.

"To think we believed the eight-meter giant octopus was the peak of evolution..."

A massive arm coiled around her waist firm, but gentle.  
The touch sent a shiver through her.

"So young... already stronger, faster... and of a deadly beauty," she whispered, entranced.

Mac drifted closer, floating at the surface.  
"And he likes you, apparently. And... yes, I'm certain he's grown again. A lot."

Anya laughed nervously, breathlessly.  
"This is the most improbable contact of my life... a meeting with a legend."

Mac put his mask back on and nodded.

“Come. Underwater... this is his kingdom.”

\*

Beneath the surface, blue light stretched in shifting halos, crossed by silver threads.  
Their breathing rose in slow bubbles drifting upward like strings of pearls dissolving into the deep.

Mac and Anya swam side by side, calm, steady.  
The Kraken glided first below them, then between them immense, serene its reflections sliding across its skin, tentacles floating weightlessly around it.

Anya's cameras rolled silently, capturing the impossible ballet.

Suddenly, the creature froze.  
A tremor rippled along its entire body.  
Its pustules flared to an almost incandescent red.  
Its black eyes opened wide, sliced with a metallic glint.

Anya felt the pressure shift.  
The water vibrated.

A low sound rose from the deep  
not mechanical,  
not human,  
but a rumble, ancient and resonant.

A wave of anger.

The Kraken unfolded in a single, colossal movement.  
Its tentacles and tusks shot outward, raised, ready.  
Every muscle quivered beneath the cold light.

Mac lifted a hand bubbles escaping his regulator.

“Kraken?” he breathed.

The monster did not move.  
Its eyes were fixed on something in the western darkness.

A heartbeat.  
A presence.

The whole ocean seemed to hold its breath.

Anya placed a trembling hand on Mac's arm.  
They exchanged a glance through their masks short, silent, loaded with fear.

Together, they kicked upward, fast fins slicing the water, lungs burning.

Behind them, in the liquid gloom,  
an echo pulsed long, deep, almost musical.

A call...

or a warning.

## Chapter 41 : The Black-and-White Killers

Mac and Anya burst through the surface in a spray of foam, tearing off their masks, gasping for air.

The sky, low and leaden, pressed down on the water like a lid.

“I... I don’t understand what’s happening to him!” Mac panted, his throat raw.

“Forward-guard posture,” Anya replied bluntly, already staring out toward the horizon. “Exactly like an octopus when danger approaches.”

She froze, arm outstretched.

“There. Orcas.”

In the distance, tall, solid black dorsal fins were slicing the sea in a fan formation, converging with the precision of a patrol.

The swell, heavy until then, fell into a rhythm: two beats of silence, one beat of breath primitive percussion.

“What do they want?” Mac whispered, pale.

Anya pulled out a mini-sonar and plunged it into the water with a practiced movement. The screen, beaded with spray, began to vibrate with points and arcs.

“Incredible...” she breathed. “I’m picking up their echolocation... and Kraken’s as well.”

She raised her head, stunned.

“Incredible. He’s blocking their echoes. He’s scrambling them.”

“What?”

“When the squids attacked you, he *paralyzed* them at a distance. Now he’s diverting the orcas’ sonar. But it won’t be enough. They never give up.”

The surface split: Kraken, the color of dark blood, slid out of his boundary of shadow and charged straight toward the pod, massive, lances flared.

“What is he doing?” Mac cried.

“He’s choosing confrontation,” Anya said in a faint voice. “An octopus would hide. Even young, he’ll challenge them head-on and in my opinion...”

Mac ripped the metal bilboquet from his chest and hammered the water in sequences: *home. home. HOME.*

The sound, low and heavy, boomed off the hull, came back like the echo of a cave.

Offshore, Kraken kept going, relentless, a silhouette of war.

“Why won’t he listen to me?” Mac shouted, his throat tearing.

“Because he’s protecting you,” Anya said softly. “He’s programmed for that.”

“He’s going to his death!”

“Mac... you have to accept it.”

“Never.”

“Against six orcas? Females at two tons, males at five. He doesn’t stand a chance, and neither do we.”

“BRUUUUUCE!” Mac roared toward the trawler.

\*

In the wheelhouse, the flamenco cut off mid-strum. Bruce saw Mac’s arms whipping the air with unusual urgency.

“Holy what the hell is going on?!”

He fired up the engines without a second thought, shoved the throttle forward and swung hard to starboard.

The trawler groaned and heeled over.

\*

Mac and Anya hauled themselves aboard, soaked and breathless. Bruce ran toward them on deck.

“I *knew* it he attacked you, didn’t he?!”

“I’m not abandoning Kraken,” Mac spat, eyes blazing as he swept the deck.

“What?!” Bruce gaped.

Anya grabbed his chin and turned his face toward the west.

“Look.”

“Oh my God...”

“Where are your harpoons?” barked Mac.

“We’re not harpooning anyone,” Anya cut in. “I’m a scientist, and Kraken’s fate... may already be written.”

“She’s right,” Bruce said through clenched teeth. “This is nature. We can’t interfere. Besides, we don’t stand a chance.”

Mac planted himself in front of him, breathing hard.

“I’m not leaving him. Where are your harpoons? Give them to me, Bruce!”

Bruce bit his lip, eyes dropping.

“This isn’t your fight, my friend.”

“You’re wrong. I swore. I’m taking him home. I’ll keep that promise.”

\*

Out at sea, the orcas moved ahead, drawing a wide circle and tightening the noose. Kraken pulled himself in, became globe and lances: body coiled, tusks extended, arms flared into a bristling corolla.

Their black-and-white ballet spun around him, synchronized like a carnivorous clock waiting for the opening.

\*

On deck, Mac, frantic, rummaged with trembling hands. Suddenly, Anya’s equipment crates caught his eye.

He lunged toward them, but Anya blocked him with her whole body.

“That belongs to the Institute. It cost a small fortune.”

“Please. Anything that might help him.”

She closed her eyes for a second, then opened them again, stiff as a blade.

“Sorry.”

Mac stumbled back, fingers digging into his hair, on the edge of breaking.

“How can you stay so cold?”

He pointed at Kraken, encircled by the black-and-white killers. The sea around them thudded like a giant heart.

Anya looked, breathed in, and let her expression soften. She gave ground, half a step.

“Cold, no. Clearheaded. But... there may be a loophole.”

She opened a crate, pulled out an acoustic beacon, a wideband emitter, a probe tube.

“We don’t touch the orcas or him. We just move their attention. That’s it.”

“How?”

“Counter-sonar. We scatter false echoes, inflate a phantom prey a hundred meters away, scramble their choreography.

You strike the bilboquet with the right pattern, I’ll match the frequency.

Bruce downwind, slow ahead, to create a decoy wake.”

Bruce swallowed hard.

“This is insane...”

“It’s all we’ve got.”

Bruce sniffed, resigned, and headed for the wheelhouse.

There, he took the helm and lined the trawler up with the wind.

Anya armed the emitter and slid it into the water along a rope over the side.

“Twenty-three to twenty-seven kilohertz, sinus sweep. Mac, – • – • – •. Now!”

Mac hammered the metal, steady and precise, eyes glued to the spinning black-and-white circle.

Anya, anxious, worked the controls, stretching the spectrum.

Out at sea, three orcas suddenly peeled away, their trajectory drifting, uncertain.

“It’s working!” Bruce shouted.

But the matriarch cut through the waves, slapped the water with her tail: a rallying call.

The circle closed in around Kraken once more.

Mac’s head dropped, and he fell to his knees, shaking.

“No... this can’t be happening...”

“At least we tried,” Anya said quietly. “Now we let things unfold as nature decrees.”

The wind rose in a single gust. Spray lashed the hull.

Mac, dripping, snapped out of his despair and whirled toward her:

“There’s a legend, Anya. A creature no man or woman has ever approached until now. And you, the scientist, want to let it die?”

Anya gave a weary shrug, almost extinguished.

“Sorry... it’s the order of things, Mac.”

“He saved my life. He deserves better than indifference. You *can* still do something, I know it. Just imagine it: saving the myth.”

The biologist sighed, pinched her chin between thumb and forefinger, gaze distant and furrowed, then slowly turned toward the crates.

“We can try one more thing... but no weapons. And absolutely no harpoons.”

She lifted a lid and pulled out a heavy device: an electrical impulse grenade, silver, studded with cables.

“We just need a way to launch it far enough.”

“I think I’ve got what we need!” Mac cried.

He reappeared seconds later, brandishing an enormous fishing rod.

Anya gave a nervous smile.

“Perfect, Mac.”

“Bruce, your turn head straight for the orcas!”

“Then let’s move,” Anya said. “We need to prep it now.”

She disassembled and reassembled parts at dizzying speed, connecting wires with the precision of a watchmaker.

“We fix it to the hook. One shot only and once it’s in the water, drop the rod immediately or you’ll be fried.”

“And if it kills Kraken?” Mac asked, ashen.

“Normally, it won’t. It’ll just jolt him, stun him for a moment. The orcas will be shocked too... but they’re tougher. They’ll recover fast.”

She laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

“You’ll have to hold him on the cable. If he sinks... we lose him forever.”

Mac drew a deep breath and clipped the gun to the steel line.

“Then let’s pray Poseidon, God of the sea, is with us.”

\*

Offshore, a determined male broke formation, dove, and torpedoed toward Kraken. The monster from the abyss countered: one slash of his tusk tore across the cetacean's head. The orca veered sideways and fell back to the pod, vomiting blood.

The matriarch and two others male and female burst from the water and struck in unison. Kraken writhed, screaming without sound; one tentacle was ripped away in a brutal tear. The sea turned garnet.

\*

On the foredeck, Mac held the rod in a death grip, line taut as piano wire.

"A little closer, Bruce! Easy!"

Three more orcas were rushing in now, giving their prey no quarter.

"They're going to kill him!" Mac shouted.

"BRUCE! Cut the engines!" Anya yelled.

Then, to Mac:

"Now or never!"

Mac cast the line with a wide, powerful sweep. The grenade whistled through the air and plunged with a heavy splash.

A blue flash detonated the instant it hit the water. The sea lit up in a web of lightning.

The three attacking orcas and Kraken froze mid-strike, convulsed, flipped, suspended between two worlds. The circle shattered; the other cetaceans, stunned, drifted in confusion before slowly veering away.

Bruce burst out of the wheelhouse.

"Well?!"

Anya scanned the surface, lips trembling then a sudden, fleeting smile.

"It worked."

"The cable!" Mac shouted.

Bruce grabbed a mooring hook rigged to a pulley and handed it over.

"Here you can haul him in without getting dragged under."

Anya suddenly blanched.

“No, wait dammit... he’s sinking!”

Mac, transcended by fear, spun around.  
Kraken was slipping away, limp, sliding under the dark mirror.

“KRAKEN!”

He fastened the hook around his own waist in one frantic motion and dove without thinking.

\*

Below the surface, the water was green, heavy, silent.  
The white streaks of the electric shock were already fading.

Mac plunged in apnea like a torpedo, chest on fire, desperately searching the gloom for  
Kraken’s shape.  
Around him, black-and-white masses floated, dazed.

His air began to fail.  
Then there a giant arm, still as a tree trunk.

A tentacle.

Mac grabbed hold, fixed the hook in place, and clamped the steel cable with fingers that felt  
like they were tearing apart.

Above him, the pulley shrieked, the line went taut...

Kraken was caught, his fall checked, halted in his infernal descent.

For a moment, the sea itself seemed to hold its breath.  
And far above, beyond the clouds, the sky trembled drawing, perhaps, the faint outline of  
Poseidon and his trident.

## Chapter 42 : Calm After the Storm

In the cabin, the yellow light trembled like a flame caught in the roll. Soaked to the bone, Mac, Anya and Bruce were slumped on the bench, a glass of whisky in hand, the sea thudding gently against the hull like a tired beast.

“I’ll never be able to thank you enough, Anya,” Mac breathed, his voice rough. “You saved his life.”

“And I finally got my hemocyanin sample,” she replied with a half-smile. “Science thanks you too, in return.”

Bruce raised his glass, eyes reddened by salt and tension.

“Tomorrow, he goes home. Missing a tentacle, but alive.”

They clinked their glasses. The whisky burned their throats, a mercy of fire.

“It’ll grow back quickly,” Anya added. “Their nervous system is more resilient than you’d think.”

Mac drained his glass in one go, felt the warmth drop into his chest, then stood.

“After all he’s survived, he’s going to need rest... I’ll take the chance to send Jessica a message, tell her how much I love her.”

He walked toward the door, phone in hand, lifted his eyes toward the porthole... and his blood ran cold.

Behind the rain-streaked glass, a familiar silhouette: red beanie, face twisted with resentment.

Garald.

\*

Outside on deck, the rain was hammering the metal with rage. Garald, Joe and Ailfred, in slickers, harpoons in hand, stood facing the cabin like a sentence.

Garald laid a hand on the handle, a carnivorous grin on his face.

“Let’s go say good evening to our heroes.”

\*

The door burst open. The three men came in like a storm. Mac, Anya and Bruce snapped upright, tension strung tight as a bow.

Garald advanced at a slow pace, smile stretched thin.

“Evening, folks. Hope you kept the octopus nice and healthy for me.”

His gaze caught on Anya.

“And you, sweetheart, who are you?”

“Anya Brothers, biologist, Long Beach Marine Institute,” she answered, intimidated but standing straight.

Garald snorted, a mean crease at the corner of his mouth.

“The scientist from Long Beach, huh? Perfect. You’re going to help make me famous.”

The door slammed behind them, swallowing a bit of light. Outside, the sea rumbled, rain slashing sideways.

He snapped the harpoon into his palm, smile sharpening.

“All right: you hand over the decapodiform, and I forget about the dock.”

Mac locked eyes with him.

“Why are you so obsessed? Don’t you have an Inca treasure to find?”

Garald tapped the shaft, tone almost professorial.

“Everything I set my sights on belongs to me. And ‘presenting’ that cuttlefish to the scientists will make me more money than any gold bar.”

“I’ll report your looting to UNESCO,” Anya shot back, brows drawn tight.

Garald cocked the weapon, eyes gone dark.

“Enough. You’re each going to search this boat with my men. And if it doesn’t pay off, we’ll use stronger methods and believe me, that’s going to hurt.”

They split up: Garald kept Mac at the bow; Ailfred drove Bruce toward the hold; Joe shoved Anya aft.

\*

On the foredeck, the bow rocked with a slow, limping motion. Garald and Mac walked side by side, harpoon low, chins high.

“You know why my boat’s called *Self-Made Man*, Mac?” Garald asked, almost tender.

“Your cult of glory and money, I’m guessing.”

“Benjamin Franklin,” he corrected. “Ideal, active, deserving, mobile, ambitious. Starting from nothing: the American dream.”

Mac gave a crooked smile.

“Ideal... without crushing everyone else on your way up.”

Garald stopped, weighing his former protégé.

“We’re not that different, you and me.”

“You’re wrong. I got lost, sure, and Jessica paid the price for it. But I’ll never be like you.”

“Women, women... Me, I’m the architect of my life and my destiny. No one to answer to.”

Mac held his gaze.

“Losing your brother broke you. Why not hunt the treasure with your two sidekicks?”

“Leave Jimmy out of this, got it? Or you’ll regret it.”

The sea hit the bow like a warning.

\*

In the hold, Ailfred shoved Bruce toward the cold room.

“No octopus,” Bruce said flatly.

“You’re worse than my kids. Keep looking, or we move on to the serious stuff,” the older man growled, lifting the harpoon.

The door slid open with a bang. A heap of frozen fish collapsed in an avalanche.

“You think he eats fish sticks?” Bruce sneered, pointing at the fridge. “See for yourself.”

Ailfred stuck his head in, sighed

CLACK. A frozen steak cracked him across the face. He dropped like a stone, out cold.

“Idiot. You had that coming,” Bruce hissed, stripping the harpoon from his hands and bolting for the exit.

\*

On the aft deck, Anya was rummaging without much conviction, Joe looming over her.

“He’s dead, I’m telling you,” Anya said without looking back.

“So where’s the body, then?” Joe barked.

“In the depths.”

“Cut the crap.”

She deliberately yanked on a crate that was too high. The stack toppled. Anya went down with it, buried under plastic and tools.

“Oh no...”

“Women!” Joe laughed. “Now you know why I never got married.”

He bent down to help her.

Lightning strike: Anya whipped a pulse gun from her pocket.

A dry crack. Joe collapsed, arms spread.

“Always keep a secret weapon,” she muttered, catching her breath.

\*

Up on the bow, Mac raised his hands, pleading.

“Leave him alone. I’ll work for you. For free. As long as you want.”

Garald’s gaze turned to ice... then slid past him.

From the shadows, tentacles crept onto the deck, slick with rain.  
The head emerged: huge, scarred, two tusks raised.

“I think glory is within reach, Jimmy,” Garald breathed, readying his shot.

“What are you doing?!” Mac choked, half turning.

“Everything I set my sights on belongs to me!” Garald roared, taking aim.

“NO! KRAKEN!”

Mac lunged, slammed into his arm; the harpoon flew, clanged off the grating. The two men crashed together, sliding, locked in a grapple.

Short blows, ragged breathing, boots skidding.

“I’ll stop you, even if it kills me!”

Garald landed a clean right: crack, taste of iron. Mac stumbled, came back, hooked his hip and threw him down onto the wet grates of the bow.

Behind them, Kraken rose, a church-shaped silhouette in the storm, suction cups spread wide.

The bow lifted on a wave; the night itself seemed to hold its breath.

Rain hammered the metal.

Garald, face contorted, snatched up the weapon and leveled it at Mac.

“You’re a real piece of shit. You’re fired. No one will ever hire you again. You’re a loser. You’re finished!”

Mac wavered, swallowed salt, then let loose a single punch short, brutal, freeing.

His fist cracked against Garald’s jaw like a gunshot.

Garald collapsed, limp, on the streaming deck.

Panting, hands bleeding, Mac slowly straightened.

“Go back to your rotten company... and stay there, asshole.”

Behind him, Bruce and Anya didn’t dare move.

Bruce finally exhaled, a sad little smile at the corner of his mouth.

“Mac... I think you just grew up.”

Anya had lifted her eyes. Kraken, balanced on his massive tentacles, was looking down at the scene like a judge from the depths.

She murmured, almost to herself:

“The species that survive are not the strongest, nor the most intelligent, but the ones that adapt best to change.”

“Charles Darwin, if I’m not mistaken,” Bruce grunted, salt-dry irony in his voice.

\*

In the cabin, at last, stillness.

Faces carved by exhaustion, they sagged back onto the bench.  
The sea tapped the hull with a small, regular hammer.

“You tied them up tight?” Anya asked.

“Enough that we can vanish off the *Self-Made Man*’s radar,” Mac replied.

“Why didn’t you let them sink? With the two idiots, it would’ve made a nice little family accident,” Bruce grumbled.

“We’re better than that,” Mac said softly. “We’re not murderers. And besides... I feel sorry for him. He carries such a heavy burden he’ll sink on his own someday.”

A silence. The wind shifted angle.

“My burden,” Anya said, almost laughing without joy, “is that I’ve never known love. Real love. The authentic kind.”

Bruce raised a finger toward the console.

“Name of God... autopilot engaged. One more day... and we hit Peru.”

Anya stood, poured three more glasses, the amber liquid sloshing.

“My parents wanted me to come home with a boyfriend. Instead, I’m coming back with two shipwrecks.”

She raised her glass.

“You know Anya means ‘snake venom’?”

Bruce managed a crooked smile.

“That explains why nobody wants you.”

“And I see why your crab Dolofesse left you,” she shot back, laughing.

They drank. The whisky tasted of foam and distant sun.

Outside, the sea seemed to be listening.

On the bow, the marks of the suckers were already fading, as if the rain wanted to wash the night clean of its sins.

## CHAPTER 43 : THE GREAT DAY

The sky had cleared, rinsed of all anger.

Dawn was unrolling a pale ribbon over the sea, and the gulls, clustered in noisy groups, cried their joy above the trawler.

On the forward deck, Mac, focused, tightened his harness.

The cold metal of the bilboquet clinked against his chest as he looped the chain around his neck.

At his belt, the old copper chest thumped against his thigh with every movement heavy with memories and promises.

He inhaled deeply; the iodine-rich air filled his lungs.

“We made it... the great day.”

He lifted his eyes toward the horizon.

“We’re home, my friend. On the Nazca Ridge.”

\*

In the wheelhouse, the blue glow of the screens brushed their tired faces.

Anya, concentrated, checked the sonar readings and frowned.

“Bruce, what’s the power on your sounder?”

“Never tested it for that kind of depth,” he replied without taking his eyes off the sea.

“It depends on salinity, temperature, pressure...”

He gave a fatigued smile.

“But I think the monster will disappear forever.”

Anya lifted her head, surprised.

“Why that tone?”

Bruce shrugged slowly.

“Because Mac is my friend. And this obsession with Kraken... is starting to scare me.”

\*

Mac slipped into the water, alone, heading for open sea.  
The rising sun cast trembling gold along his skin.  
He raised the bilboquet and struck the metal ball three times: *come*.

The sound resonated beneath the surface like a distant drum.

A rumble deep, alive answered.

The sea rose, broke in a bursting spray.  
Kraken erupted, majestic, scarred, his marbled skin shimmering with dark reflections in the newborn light.

The giant approached slowly, coiled Mac in his water-arms, lifting him in an embrace almost brotherly.

“You still have time before going home,” Mac murmured, his hand pressed to the creature’s skin.

“Just let me... see you one last time.”

\*

In the wheelhouse, Bruce watched through binoculars, a peaceful smile on his lips.

“Finally... he’s saying goodbye,” he whispered.

“Bruce!” Anya shouted behind him. “Look at the telemetry!”

He didn’t move.

“It’s heartbreaking,” he breathed.

Anya yanked sharply on his sleeve.

“Massive echoes coming from the east!”

Bruce squinted at the screen.

“Sperm whales...?”

Anya bit her lip.

“If they change heading, we’re fine.”

Bruce slowly shook his head, his expression already dark.

“I doubt it.”

\*

Mac felt Kraken tense suddenly.  
Their eyes met heavy with the same intuition.

On the trawler, the alarm siren wailed, a shrill, almost animal sound.

Mac turned.

“What’s happening?”

Kraken vibrated, his tusks raised toward the horizon.

Mac tried to soothe him, palm out.

“No... there’s nothing, everything’s fine.”

But water columns were already breaking in the east.  
Dark silhouettes cut through the swell massive, steady.

“Sperm whales...” Mac murmured.

His breath turned rough. His decision instinctive.

He grabbed a tentacle, his gaze burning.

“Not this time.”

He placed his hand on the creature’s skin like one touches a brother.

Kraken shuddered under the contact.

The sea around them was heavy, almost motionless, suspended on the edge of a cataclysm.

“I’m not leaving you,” Mac whispered.

“There are harpoons on the trawler, maybe a gun”

“Absolutely not!”

The voice snapped behind him.

Mac spun around.

Bruce was swimming toward him, panting, strapped in a life jacket, hair plastered by the sea spray.

“You can’t swim!” Mac choked.

“That’s not the question,” Bruce replied, breath shaking.

“I’ve known you forever, and I never noticed you couldn’t”

“Well *I*’ve always known you better than you think,” Bruce cut in.  
“I knew you’d change your mind.”

He cast a look at the Decapod, looming dark beneath the swell.

“He’s going to die, Mac. Either by us, or by them. You survived the orcas, but the sperm whales... that’s not a fight for the two of you.”

He drew closer, voice softening.

“Mac, he’s still young. Give him a chance to live.”

Mac clenched his jaw.

“I’m going to give him that chance, Bruce.”

“No you’re doing it again. A transfer.”

Bruce raised his voice, eyes full of tired brotherhood.

“Your mother abandoned you to save you, Mac. That’s the truth.  
She gave you a new chance. And you have to do the same.  
Let him go. Let him live.”

Mac seized him by the vest, furious.

“What the hell are you talking about?!”

Bruce calmly set a hand on his shoulder.

“Just because our parents failed at everything... doesn’t mean we’re doomed to become like them.”

He tightened his grip almost tender.

“Abandonment isn’t an end. It’s a passage.  
Make peace with yourself.  
And think about Jessica... she’s still waiting for your answer.”

\*

Mac’s gaze blurred.  
The water vibrated around them.  
And in his mind, the past opened like an old wound.

FLASHBACK.

A hallway in an orphanage long, pale, shadowless.  
A small boy crying.

Mac walks alone between the colorless walls.  
He pushes a door too heavy for him, steps into an empty room.

Another child sits on a chair: Bruce Fushun, four years old.  
He looks up.

Their eyes meet companions in pain.

They reach out, join their hands, hold each other, understand each other without a word.

And in that fragile gesture, two orphans adopt each other.

END OF FLASHBACK.

\*

Back in the present, at the surface, Mac released his friend.  
His breathing steadied.

“You’re right, Bruce...” he said in a raspy voice.  
“And as Garald would say: I am the architect of my own life of my own destiny.”

Bruce gave him a wet, wobbly smile.

“Then save him. And give him his chance.”

And he swam back toward the trawler clumsily, but straight, like a man returning home.

Mac remained alone, suspended between sky and sea, facing the giant of the deep.

Beneath him, the ocean widened like a living lung.  
The Nazca Ridge opened before him immense, silent, and beautiful as a grave.

## CHAPTER 44 : THE LAST FAREWELL

The sea growled low, like a distant organ.  
The Decapod was already stirring, a trembling mass drawn to the vibrations of the sperm whales.  
Mac, suspended between fear and love, shouted:

“Stop!”

He dove, raised the bilboquet, and struck under the water a recall signal, an order from the heart.

“Home.”

The echo resonated through the depths like a lost prayer.

“You have to go home, Kraken!”

The chest hung from his belt, heavy with promises and memories.  
He grabbed it, lifted it with shaking arms, his hand trembling on the ancient metal.

“I hate to say it, but... we must part. You have to save yourself.”

Kraken froze.  
His great eyes deep as planets fixed on him with a mute, almost human attention.  
The water vibrated with a pure silence.

With the tip of a tentacle, the creature brushed the chest a gesture of farewell, infinitely slow.

“Home!” Mac repeated, voice breaking. “HOME!”

And in a desperate effort, he hurled the chest with all his strength.  
The metal sliced the water, spun downward, vanished into the darkness.

Mac whispered, eyes blurred:

“If there’s one thing you taught me, it’s that riches aren’t always what we think they are.”

He paused, breath suspended.

“And glory can be intimate. Silent. Deep inside.”

One last time, he struck the signal: *home*.

The Decapod slowly turned upon himself, then began his descent majestic, solemn toward eternal darkness.  
His pustules glowed like a procession of red lanterns.

“Swim, Kraken... swim back to your motherland,” Mac wept.

\*

In the wheelhouse, tension vibrated through the walls.  
Anya scanned the sonar, her features tightened.  
Bruce, bent over the controls, was holding his breath.

Mac stumbled in, soaked and pale.

“Well? Is he following the chest?” he cried.

Anya shook her head without looking away from the numbers.

“The sperm whales are diving too. They’re closing in too fast.”

Mac leaned closer, lips tight, hands gripping the console.

“Come on, Kraken... descend faster.”

Bruce placed a grave hand on his shoulder.

“He’s not fast enough, Mac.”

“How deep can they go?”

Anya lifted her eyes, voice low, strained:

“Up to three thousand meters.”

Mac froze, his face drained of color.

“Three... thousand?!”

Bruce murmured, as though reciting a funeral rite:

“Twenty-meter giants. Fifty tons each.”

Mac turned to him, panic rising.

“Bruce, if you’re implying”

Anya slammed her fist on the console.

“Calm down!” she shouted.

The sonar's beeping quickened faster, sharper, frantic.

She glued her eyes to the screen.

"He has a thousand meters left before the abyssal zone!"

The sounder pulsed like a frantic heartbeat.  
The boat seemed to breathe with it.

\*

Under the surface, the Decapod fled at incredible speed, gripping the chest between his massive arms.  
His pustules pulsed with blood-red light, tearing through the marine night.  
Behind him, the sperm whales unleashed a rain of sonar bursts a tide of lethal waves.

Their song shook the sea like war drums.

Kraken accelerated again, slicing through water layers, breaking thermal barriers.  
Around him, the blackness became total.

Then, in a flash of scarlet bioluminescence, his silhouette dissolved.  
He vanished, swallowed by the abyss.

\*

In the wheelhouse, three faces hovered over the sonar.  
Seconds stretched, endless.

Then, suddenly, the red curve climbed alive, bright, racing upward.

"He made it!" Mac cried. "He's free!"

Tension burst.  
Laughter, tears, shouts they all blended together.

Bruce and Anya wrapped their arms around him.  
Their voices trembled beneath the rumble of the wind.

The sperm whales, on the screen, turned back.

"The giants give up," Bruce whispered, a wet smile on his face.

They toasted, glasses trembling.  
The whisky bitter and warm tasted like deliverance.

Mac set his glass down, eyes drifting somewhere far away.

"Jessica..." he murmured, like a prayer.  
A soft exhale.

“I’m finally free.”

Anya stepped toward the window.  
The sky had turned to slow-burning fire.  
In the distance, several sperm whales resurfaced, releasing geysers of mist and light.

She smiled, her hand touching the glass.

“The world still breathes,” she said simply.

And outside, in the immensity, the sea grew calm.  
The swell softened, the wind fell.  
As if, deep below, a gigantic heart had finally beaten for the last time.

## CHAPTER 45 — TWO YEARS LATER

The sea breathed gently, vast and peaceful.

The trawler advanced slowly across a surface of pale gold, in the newborn light of morning. In the wheelhouse, Mac thin beard, braided hair watched the sunrise with the gaze of a man who had seen the abyss and returned from it.

The silence, between two breaths of wind, tasted like peace.

“Soon,” he said calmly, “we’ll reach the exact spot where Kraken plunged for the last time. Two years already.”

Behind him, Bruce plucked absently at his guitar. The notes floated in the air, heavy with nostalgia.

Mac smiled, turning toward him.

“Thanks for hiring me, old wolf. Without you, I’d never have finished my underwater archaeology degree.”

“You still owe me half of Kraken’s damages,” Bruce grumbled. “But I’ve got my full-time farm now.”

Mac burst into a clear laugh.

“Everyone needs a friend like you.”

Bruce rolled his eyes.

“Christ, you’re gonna make me cry. Go join the guests on the deck. I’ll shut down the engines.”

\*

On the foredeck, the light brushed across their faces.

Jessica, her round belly glowing in the sun, stood with both hands resting on the life growing inside her.

Mac wrapped his arms around her from behind, kissed the nape of her neck.

The air smelled of warm wood, soft sea breeze, fruit, and promise.

“Easy there, we’ve got a child onboard!” a cheerful voice called.

Salie appeared, standing tall and radiant in a light dress, her eyes bright like summer.

Mac froze a moment.

“Incredible... Two years ago you were still in a wheelchair. I’m certain it’s Kraken who saved you when you fell into the bay.”

She laughed.

“The doctors don’t understand anything. Mom calls it a miracle.”

Anya approached, a quiet smile tugging at her lips, and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

“You never told me about that, little secret-keeper.”

“I’ll tell you everything later,” the girl promised.

Anya turned to Mac.

“By the way, the hemocyanin analysis... the results are staggering. He doesn’t even possess homochromy! And what’s even more promising is”

“Don’t start your science mumbo-jumbo again, Anya Brothers!” Bruce shouted as he appeared, laughing.

He pulled from his pocket a small tarnished silver necklace: an old witch-shaped pendant, worn smooth by time.

“I always knew it would come back to you someday. Let it bring you luck again.”

Mac took the pendant, slipped it around Jessica’s neck, and kissed her long and tenderly, as the gulls screeched overhead.

For an instant, the world felt perfectly in place.

Anya, already at work, called out without turning:

“The aquatic mic is ready!”

“Always bargaining with science,” Mac teased.

“Listen, if it works, you let me tag him with a shallow-water emitter,” she replied with a grin.

She tossed the microphone overboard. The water closed over it in a crystalline gulp.

“Morse message, continuous loop: ‘come.’ Broadcast at very high output.”

\*

Later, the sun was sinking slowly, laying a path of liquid copper across the sea. Anya fiddled with the controls, nervous.

“Nothing,” she whispered.

Mac walked to the rail, his hair lifted by the breeze. Jessica and Salie joined him, quiet, serene.

“We’re heading back,” Bruce called from the wheelhouse.

Mac nodded faintly.

Anya turned off the sound, lowering her head.

“The signal travels at over three thousand miles per hour. He should have heard it... unless”

“I don’t want to know,” Mac interrupted gently.

He placed a hand over his heart.

“Thank you... all of you.”

Anya packed up the microphone and sighed.

“You know... I admire you,” she said softly. “You became an underwater archaeologist. That’s your true world, Mac. And if you’re interested... my department is looking for a new colleague.”

She walked toward the wheelhouse to join Jessica and Salie.

Mac stayed alone, facing the sea.

The wind dropped.

The sky darkened, shifting to ink and silver.

A silence of the deep settled.

Mac lifted his head. His eyes shimmered with a quiet, almost tender light.

Slowly, he closed his fist and tapped the steel railing with his fingertips:

“Home.”

A tear rolled down his cheek warm and salty.

And in a breath barely audible, he murmured:

“Under the sea, there are no gods and no monsters... only creatures who remember they once loved.”

He closed his eyes, at peace.

The swell rocked the boat.

And somewhere, far beneath the surface, an echo answered a steady, deep pulse, like the beating heart of a friend.

## CHAPTER 46 : THE RETURN FROM THE DEEP

The wind had fallen silent.

The sea, vast and immense, slept beneath a glasslike stillness.

Every wave seemed to hold its breath.

Mac opened his eyes and stared at the horizon, his features drawn, his heart suspended.

“I can’t believe it...” he murmured.

And yet, nature’s law had to be accepted.

His eyelids lowered slowly.

“And God... how cruel, harsh, and unjust that law can be.”

He remained there, motionless, then turned away, exhausted, shoulders heavy, walking toward the wheelhouse.

Under his steps, the deck groaned softly, saturated with salt and memories.

Then a dull sound tore the air an ancient groan, the cry of wet wood, a breath from another age.

Mac froze.

Behind him, something had appeared.

On the deck placed as if offered by the sea the great ancient chest lay dripping with water, still oozing the foam of the abyss.

Mac stood petrified, breath stolen.

Then, seized by an irresistible impulse, he rushed toward it.

But before he could touch it, a shadow unfolded across the boat a vast, shifting, breathing shadow.

The sky itself seemed to darken.

A gigantic tentacle erupted from the sea in a spray of glittering droplets, coiled around him, and lifted him high into the air.

“KRAKEN!” Mac screamed, his voice tearing through the wind.

And then the ocean opened.

The monster burst forth entirely monstrous, magnificent one hundred meters across, its tentacles marked by scars, its pustules glowing with incandescent red.

Its flesh vibrated like a living organ.

Bruce, Anya, Jessica, and Salie were seized in turn not with violence, but with power, lifted gently, carried upward.

Each was set upon an immense, soft tentacle warm, pulsing, alive with ancient energy.

The sea shimmered around them like a liquid mirror streaked with golden light.

Anya, transfixed, whispered through trembling breath:

“What lies in the bowels of the world to make him return... changed like this?”

Kraken opened his great eyes of black amber two suns of intelligence and memory.

From his beak came deep, powerful bursts rhythmic pulses,  
an ancient language,  
a speech from before humankind.

Mac raised his eyes to him.

Their gazes met.

A shiver of eternity passed between them a recognition beyond time.

Then, around the giant, shadows began to move.

Dozens of other shapes rose from the depths  
Decapodiformes, massive, luminous, undulating like banners of fire in the dark water.

Mac burst into a laugh a sound made of awe and joy, mingled.

“He did it!” he cried. “He did it!”

The sea vibrated vast, full of a new heartbeat.

The sky opened above them wide, pure, like a prayer.

And as the tentacles curled through the light of the setting sun,  
the world for the first time in centuries seemed to breathe again in unison with the depths.

THE END

## EPILOGUE : THE HEART OF THE SEA

There are silences humankind will never understand.  
The sea's silence is one of them.  
I know that now.

For years, I searched the abyss for answers believing I would find proof, treasures, relics.  
But what I found... was myself.

The Kraken was no monster.  
He was a reminder of our limits, our forgetfulness, our arrogance in wanting to measure everything, name everything, possess everything.

He taught me that some truths have no shape only a pulse, like the heartbeat of a friend you thought lost.

The sea has closed its veil over him again, but sometimes, at night,  
I still think I can hear his breath far beneath the surface, in the low rumble of the waves.

And then I answer, as I once did, with the tip of my fingers: home.

Jessica sleeps beside me.  
Our unborn child already carries within him the memory of the wind.  
And I... I have stopped trying to unravel the world's mysteries;  
I simply love them now,  
and try to understand them.

For beneath the sea, there are neither gods nor monsters only creatures that, once,  
have loved and remember.