

Every truth passes through three stages before it is recognized. In the first, it is ridiculed. In the second, it is opposed. In the third, it is regarded as self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer 1788 - 1860

## Chapter 1

The gray skies blackened the turquoise water, and the air sizzled with pent-up tension as Annie McDoogan floated in the warm South Florida current. The impending storm mirrored her mood, and she felt strangely empowered. It was a perfect beach day.

Annie had been deeply depressed since someone killed her father six months ago. They had been very close, and she cried every night now that he was gone. Her mother, Colleen, had sold their house and moved them 12 miles west to Coral Springs because the Fort Lauderdale memories were too much for her to handle. She agreed to homeschool Annie until she felt strong enough to attend classes. The ocean was Annie's only joy now, and her mother brought her as often as possible.

The beach was almost deserted. It was the last Monday in April, and the other kids were still in school. Annie, her mom and a lifeguard had the sand to themselves. Just the way Annie liked it. She had gained 20

pounds since her father died, and the fewer people who saw her in a bathing suit, the better.

Her mood improved as the wind picked up, and she playfully conquered the crashing waves. Her white swimsuit made her an easy target to spot in the dark water, and she knew her mother would yell at her if she drifted too far in any direction.

She marveled as schools of fish leaped in the distance while the circling gulls feasted. *Wait a minute. That's not right. Something's off.*

“Annie! Annie! Get out!”

She glanced back at the beach and saw her mother frantically waving her arms. *What's wrong?*

Time slowed down as her brain registered everything that was going on. *Mother upset. Fish getting closer.* She suddenly felt like an actor in a movie, paralyzed as she watched the scene unfold. *This can't be real.*

So many birds. So many fish. Surrounding her now, rubbing against her. *This isn't right.* Her heart was pounding harder. She needed to run. *I can't think!*

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the lifeguard running toward a Jet Ski 100 yards down the beach. *Another actor in the story. Not enough time.* She could hear the faint sound of sirens wailing in the distance. *Coming for me?*

*Focus, Annie, focus. Breathe. You know what's happening.*

“Daddy!” The wind whipped her words away.

She felt movement. *There it is!* A black fin, moving faster and faster. Coming straight at her. Emotionless. Relentless. On target.

## Chapter One

*I'm hit! Instant clarity. No damage! Annie searched for her attacker in the black water. Where are you? Her heart was about to explode. Somebody help me!*

The outside world fell silent. No birds or screams. No help. No sirens. Just her and the unseen shark alone in a bubble. *I can't run. My legs won't move!*

Her entire focus centered on the water around her. Crouching now, she waited. Every nerve firing as her muscles tensed for action. *Come on. I'm only 15, and I'm not going to die here.* She breathed deeply and steadied her body. Waiting.

The wind died. *Fin!* Slowly circling her. Annie instinctively matched its movements, turn for turn, finally able to move her legs. *Should I run? If I fall, I'm dead. I don't know what to do!* The words screamed in her head, and she could hear her blood pounding.

*Breathe.*

*Whoosh!* Teeth clamped on her leg as she stared into dark, malevolent eyes.

*Remember what I taught you.*

She twisted and turned but couldn't pull away. The shark was motionless while it tasted the raw flesh, sampling her like an appetizer. The bloody water fueled her rage, boiling inside her and pushing her to act. Giving her strength. Fear disappeared. She was the hunter now. *This isn't over.*

Annie tensed as she pulled back her hand and jabbed her finger in the cold, hard eye. Teeth sank deeper into her leg. *Damn it!*

She channeled her anger and smashed her fist into the killer's gills. *Bam!* The stunned shark released its

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grip and thrashed its tail, forcing her under the crimson water. *I'm down. I can't fight.*

Annie didn't know when the seizures started or when she lost consciousness. But, her mother knew. Colleen could see Annie floating face down in the water with her arms stretched out at her sides like a bloody snow angel. She screamed in anguish as she watched her daughter drift away.