

FINNING

OVER BLACK:

An idling boat engine HUMS. Waves gently LAP into it.

Then --

SPLASHING. Lots of it. Something big and powerful.

BOOM! A piercing WHISTLE. A projectile SOARS. Rope UNRAVELS.

THUMP! The harpoon finds a home.

Feet SHUFFLE. A man GRUNTS. Rope pulls TAUT.

The SPLASHING calms.

SHLINK! A metal blade drags across wood.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm sorry.

THWACK!

EXT. MARINA - DAY

A low-grade commercial fishing dock.

CARL, late 40s, carries a large red cooler. Behind him, his boat, "Carpe Diem."

His boat is like him -- a little older, wide in the middle, but well-aged with only a few soft scratches to the surface.

Carl extends an unsteady hand to the man coming up the dock.

CARL

Mr. Walton.

JOHN WALTON, late 50s, shakes Carl's hand. John has more hair on his knuckles than he does on his head, but his tailor-made Kiton suit and Bentley sunglasses reveal a man of great wealth and influence.

JOHN

A sunrise can tell you a lot about the day ahead, and that's one of the most beautiful sunrises I've ever seen.

Carl clumsily drops the red cooler between them.

CARL

Sorry. I, uh, have it here for you.

Carl gets on his knees. Puts his hands on the lid.

John COUGHS. Gets Carl's attention. John shrugs his chin over his shoulder: "step aside." Carl does.

John opens the cooler. His lips curl into a sly smile.

JOHN
Where did you find her?

CARL
About twenty miles out.

JOHN
How big?

CARL
Maybe twenty feet.

JOHN
Magnificent.

John closes the lid.

Carl uncomfortably rubs a hand across the back of his neck.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I can't tell you how pleased I am.
You've definitely exceeded the
expectations set by my last
proletariat.

John fishes inside his jacket. Retrieves a pen and checkbook. He begins writing.

Carl's eyes widen. This is what he's been waiting for.

John stops, unfinished. He closes his checkbook.

JOHN (CONT'D)
In fact, I'm so impressed, I'm
going to extend my offer to you.
Now, I was raised not to believe in
handouts because it opposed the
value of a good day's hard work.
But when you told me how sick your
wife was, it struck a chord with
me, and I wanted to help.

Carl's face hardens.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A sign reads "RADIATION ONCOLOGY."

JOHN (V.O.)
I know the cost of the treatment
your wife needs.

Carl parks his lemon of a pick-up.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Carl paces a lonely waiting room.

JOHN (V.O.)
And you and I both know the check
you want me to write today is only
a fraction of that price.

INT. RADIATION ONCOLOGY DEPARTMENT - DAY (FLASHBACK)

CARL'S WIFE, 40s, nervously eyes the linear accelerator.

JOHN (V.O.)
I'm willing to write another check,
the check you need, but only if
you're up to the task of working
for me one last time.

She looks back at Carl. He forces a smile and nods.

CARL (V.O.)
What do I have to do?

EXT. MARINA - DAY

John lowers his sunglasses.

JOHN
I need the fin of a bull shark.

CARL
What?

JOHN
It's the final and most valuable
piece of my collection. And I'd
wager the man who just conquered a
twenty-foot Great White would be up
to the task.

CARL
You don't understand. Bull sharks
are different. They're territorial.
Aggressive. Most shark attacks you
hear about on the news are because
of bull sharks, Mr. Walton.

JOHN

All the more reason to want a creature of such notoriety for my collection. My offer stands.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Carl sits on a hospital bed with his sleeping wife.

JOHN (V.O.)

If you deny my offer, I'll sign the initial check I'm indebted to you. But if you accept, I'll write a new check that will cover the entire cost of your wife's treatment.

She gently puts her hand on his.

JOHN (V.O.)

You must ask yourself -- how much does your wife mean to you?

Carl kisses her forehead.

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

An endless blanket of water. Moonlight catches the waves.

Through the blackness, a tiny speck of yellow light.

The Carpe Diem.

INT. CARPE DIEM - NIGHT

Carl stands on the bridge. A picture of his wife stares back at him from the steering column.

Carl looks at a sonar screen. Blackness all around.

On Carl's utility belt, a hip flask. He reaches for it. Takes a swig. Exhales.

Carl grabs a long rectangular box. Opens it up. Finds a tranquilizer gun.

Suddenly --

BEEP. BEEP.

Something on the sonar.

A familiar HUM resonates as Carl quiets the engine.

Carl grabs the tranquilizer gun. Loads it. He looks back at the picture on the wheel and exits.

EXT. CARPE DIEM - NIGHT

Waves lightly touch starboard.

Carl steps out of the bridge. He places the gun against the wall. Trades it for a large yellow bucket. He carries it to the boat's edge.

Carl reaches into the bucket. Pulls out a chunk of meat.

PLOP!

The meat hits the water. Red tendrils of blood trail from it.

Carl sets the bucket aside. Grabs the gun.

He waits.

From inside the bridge --

BEEP. BEEP. The sound of the sonar picking up.

Carl tightens his grip on the gun. Again, he quietly steps to the edge of the boat.

The BEEPING softens. Perhaps we've grown accustomed to it.

Carl turns on the spotlight. Shines it directly at the water.

The blood from the meat has created a scarlet cloud. Beyond that, total darkness.

SPLASH!

Sweep to the right. Movement in the water, but too far away to see clearly.

Carl turns off the spotlight.

Again, he waits.

CLICK!

The spotlight shines. Carl jumps back --

A massive shape cuts through the cloud of blood.

Carl aims. FIRES.

He drops the gun, grabs the yellow bucket again. Tosses a few more chunks of meat overboard.

Carl eyes the harpoon on the wall. He retrieves it, removes the protective cork covering the head.

Beads of sweat slither down his temples.

He aims at the water.

It's QUIET.

CARL
(whispered)
Come on.

Carl's eyes soften. No sign of the shark. The harpoon lowers.

CHOMP!

A giant mouth of RAZOR-SHARP TEETH rises from the murky waters. A thirteen-foot BULL SHARK devours a chunk of meat.

Carl doesn't waste a moment.

BOOM!

The harpoon fires.

THUMP!

The head of the harpoon sinks into the shark's side.

Carl immediately ties the rope to the cleat.

The shark THRASHES, unable to swim away.

Carl grabs the tranquilizer gun.

BOOM!

Another direct hit.

The splashing intensifies. The wood around the cleat begins to splinter.

Carl pulls at the rope. He SCREAMS. Looks at his hands. The friction has split his palms down the middle.

Carl grabs the gloves from his utility belt. Quickly puts them on. Grabs the rope again.

The splashing CALMS. The shark STILL. Carl notices. He pulls, bringing the shark closer to starboard. He wraps the rope around the cleat with each additional pull.

Then, when the shark is snug against the boat, Carl falls back. He closes his eyes. Catches his breath.

Carl brings himself to his feet. Grabs a machete hanging from the wall. He steps to the edge of the boat.

His eyes meet with the shark. A twinkle of sorrow reflects in each of them.

Carl raises the machete.

CARL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

The machete comes down, hard and fast --

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY

A built-in mahogany bookcase covers the back wall. On each shelf, John's collection of preserved SHARK FINS. Gold name plates reflect under each one.

John sits at his desk.

Carl enters, red cooler in hand.

He drops it on the floor, hard. BANG!

John doesn't react.

JOHN

"It only stands to reason that where there's sacrifice, there's someone collecting the sacrificial offerings. Where there is service, there is someone being served." Do you know who said that?

CARL

It's done. You have your last shark fin. I want my money.

JOHN

That was Ayn Rand, a rather peculiar novelist.

John presses a button underneath his desk.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Did I tell you about how I got into the habit of collecting shark fins?

John stands, adjusts his jacket.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The weekend I celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday, I visited Hyams Beach in Australia with a friend of mine to see what he was calling "the whitest sand in the world." Have you been to Hyams Beach, Carl?

Carl doesn't speak. His stance grows more impatient.

JOHN (CONT'D)

As I was admiring the whiteness of the sand, the two of us stumbled upon something washed up on shore. It was a copper shark.

John approaches the proudly-displayed fin.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Now I had never seen a shark up close and personal before. But you know something? I think it's human instinct to want to feel a shark's fin, even if just for a second. And that's what I did. That was when my friend told me about shark finning: people removing shark fins to sell for profit. Now, being a recent college graduate with a slew of student debt on my shoulders, I couldn't resist the idea of making a buck from a dead shark fin. So I removed it. And that one squalid, lifeless shark fin took care of an entire semester of college.

John moves to another fin on his shelf. The plate reads: "WHALE SHARK."

JOHN (CONT'D)

Did you know the fin of a whale shark sells upwards from twenty thousand dollars?

CARL

Mr. Walton, please. I'd like to have my money and go see my wife.

JOHN

I didn't know that myself until a buyer approached me about the one I had. It was this same buyer who told me the value of an entire collection of shark fins.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's worth ten times the amount of paying you to do the hard work for me. That is, if I were actually paying you.

From behind Carl, a burly SECURITY GUARD enters. Carl catches a glimpse of him, but not before the guard grabs him and holds him in a death grip.

CARL

What the fuck!?

John lights a cigar.

JOHN

A fascinating thing about shark finning, Carl. It's illegal, punishable by up to twenty years in federal prison. Something the courts and neurotic members of PETA wouldn't take lightly. But I can appreciate the sacrifice you made, particularly for your wife. You will walk away thankful that a decent man like myself didn't call the police, allowing you the freedom to spend whatever valuable time your wife has left with her at her bedside. And I will accept the responsibility of making sure this collection goes into the hands of a buyer who doesn't need to know some of these fins came from living, breathing creatures of God.

CARL

I'll kill you, you piece of shit!
I'll fucking kill you!

Carl struggles. The guard pulls him closer to the door.

JOHN

Goodbye, Carl. Give my best to the missus.

The door slams shut.

John takes a drag of his cigar and smiles.

FADE OUT.