Lizie and Jessica

Emma McMullen
Malmat threw his final blow, but I was gone. I was darkness. I had morphed into shadow, into the thing that concealed me while my last remaining family member had been killed. Dumbfounded Malmat searched around frantically. Unable to believe he had been out played by a boy. I was gone. Walking in shadow back to Crystal Hill.

Amidst burning buildings, people dying and a society crumbling I found the one thing to keep me safe. I had no one left, my family was gone, and I fell into a deep self-inflicted confinement. My newly found magic was my home now. Nobody would take that away from me. I had to learn how to control it, or find somebody to teach me how, only I did not want to be around anybody. I began to use my abilities to steal. At first just to get by, but then I started hitting bigger targets. I made a name for myself and had a comfortable living. Years would pass before I realized I could use my magic for good. But that is a story for another time.

“Ay Frank, come take a looksie at this.”
Frank, a man of little interest in taking a “looksie” at anything, took a deep breath and turned around. Gerry stood a few feet away on the other side of the small boat.

“Frank, over here!” Gerry was waving him over so vigorously that the boat rocked.

“I can see it from here, Gerry.” Gerry was a short, round man who wanted nothing more than Frank’s approval.

“No, really, you have to see this.” Gerry held a bulky beige machine over the water. Its needles traced patterns on a paper which Gerry was reeling out.

“No, I really don’t think I —” The machine drew a massive spike. “Cut the engines.”
Gerry stumbled over and turned the key to the boat. It sputtered to a stop.

“What was that?” Frank was alarmed by the sputtering sound.

Gerry shrugged, then pointed to the gas gauge that was pointing dangerously close to the empty end of the meter.

“Gerry.” Frank’s face turned beet red. “Why the fuck didn’t you fill up the gas tank before we took this damn thing all the way out here?”

Gerry stumbled back over to cower by the edge of the boat. “But, come look at—“

“Yes, thank you Gerry, I know what the spike on the paper means.” Frank straightened his mustache hairs. “It’s deep enough, let’s drop the cargo here.”

“Boss, I don’t think that’s a good idea. We’re right above deep water, but all around, the water is relatively shallow. Looks like maybe reefs and cliffs and things.”

“Gerry, you should have thought of that an hour ago when we left the shore. We don’t have the time or the gas to go further, and your stupid machine says it’s deep here. Drop the cargo.”

Gerry nodded. “Hey Frank, do you really think the concrete and metal will keep the stuff in?”

“Yes, Gerry. For a while anyway.”
They struggled to lift the metal canisters painted in yellow, but managed to
throw them overboard. Once all twelve were sinking into the water, Gerry pointed to his watch urgently.

“You’re right for once. Let’s hustle back. I have paperwork to do.”

A shadow hung in the water, watching them leave. Silent, it pushed forward and down into the depths of the ocean.

Once the men made it back to the shore, they placed a sign.

“Put your back into it.” Frank was always yelling. They hammered a metal rod into the marsh, then screwed in a triangular radioactive sign.

Gerry wrung his hands.

July 22, 1971 15:51

Jessica squinted through the viewfinder of her polaroid. A variety of fishes swam in their separate chambers in the aquarium. She snapped pictures of the fish, and as they printed out, she labeled them by time, location, and species. A massive shark lumbered around its glass enclosure, moving from corner to corner.

“Do you think he’s lonely?” Jessica asked.

“She, dear.”

Jessica scrunched up her eyebrows at her mother, who peered over her glasses to read the piece of paper posted next to the tank.

Jessica’s mother read it aloud. “We are proud to announce that our very own Lizzie is pregnant. All of our efforts to mate her have finally succeeded. We expect her to give birth on Thursday or Friday. Until that time, we’ll continue to allow her to move throughout the entirety of her tank.”

“She’s going to have a baby?”

“Well, yes, it appears that way.” Her mother paused, and shook her head. “Carcharodon carcharias are not supposed to be held in captivity, you know.” She turned and walked away.

Jessica stayed parked in her position, waiting for the perfect angle for a picture of Lizzie.

“A cloud of blood spread around the great white shark. Gasps erupted around Jessica as the aquarium-goers stopped to witness the sight. Lizzie writhed and twisted in impossible ways. Her teeth gnashed wildly at the water. Small bits of flesh floated from her, exuding their own cloud of blood. Lizzie floundered, her fins whipping the pink water into a foam of bubbles. Confusion set in amongst the crowd. People pushed and yelled. The shark twitched a final time, and fell limp.

Jessica turned to search for her mother. Instead, a crowd of people rushed past her. A large woman knocked her out of the way, and she fell back against the glass of the exhibit. Her vision wobbled. Melted dip n dots stained her jeans. Reeling, she stood up, and turned to face the glass. A great white pup stared at her, face to face, from the other side of the glass. Inches away. Beady, dark eyes locked with hers. Its face was marked up with bloody teeth marks from where its mother had bitten it in desperation to live.

An alarm went off, and a voice came on over the intercom. “Please proceed to the nearest exit. This area is now closed.”

“Jessica?” Her mother called for her through the panicked crowd that had formed. “Jessica, where are you?”

Jessica followed the masses out of the exhibit, but the shark glided silently beside her. Each time she looked back, those eyes were still digging into hers.

The crowd emptied out into the lobby, where Jessica lost sight of the pup.

“Jessica, how dare you run away like that? What happened? Look at me!”

August 13, 2000 00:31

When the lights turn off, he’s there, stalking the halls with only his flashlight to lead the way. Aquariums aren’t as popular now, and some of the emergency lights had fizzled out yesterday. The floor-to-ceiling windows enclosed massive creatures. They had just received a new exhibit the other day.

“Stupid, good for nothing…” He could never get the door to the featured exhibit unlocked. He fiddled with the key, shaking it, twisting it, cranking it. With annoyance, he slammed his hip into the door, sending it flying open. He stumbled forward. “Fine, good then.” He turned and locked the door behind him. That’s when he heard the thud on the six-inch-thick plexiglass. He whipped around, but saw nothing there. The domed sixty-foot tall tank was quiet.

He whistled shakily as he went around checking that all the fire extinguishers were where they ought to be and marking which of the lights were still out. They needed this new exhibit to bring people in, otherwise who knows if they’d ever be able to get them fixed.

There it was again — the thud. A creaking sound ached through the room. Another thud. Followed by another and another. Each made the walls shudder. Each exacerbated the crack in the glass that separated the shark from him. The creature was hurdling itself at full speed against the tank wall. The cracked glass weakened with every blow. The man was frozen in place, petrified. His flashlight fell to the ground. Walls of water gushed out, carrying the dark creature with them. Plexiglass crashed down all around him. He snapped to attention, running for the door. Within seconds however, the running turned to awkward lunging as the water enveloped him. His uniform weighed him down as it soaked up the water. He fought the urge to gasp for breath as the dark aquarium around him flood-
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ed. Large shadows floated past him. They say to swim whichever way the bubbles go, but he was out of bubbles. Against the burning in his throat, he kicked until his body went limp. The massive creature brushed up against him, knocking him in spirals, down to the bottom, thirty feet below. His flashlight’s blue LED light penetrated the water, as it spun in spirals parallel to his. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe.

August 16, 2000 6:04

A woman in a lab coat snapped the newspaper that she read as she turned to the next page. Her name tag read Jessica Bauer. She spun her desk chair from side to side.

One of her lab assistants walked up to her. Only their black hair could be seen around the massive pages. “Did you see the story about that shark they’re putting down? Tragic stuff.”

“Hm. No.” She rifled through the pages. “Oh, I see it here.”

Record breaking shark to be put down

A local aquarium decided to take in this specimen in 1960 for holding while scientists and other interested parties considered the possible causes of its affliction and the possible consequences. Scientists had come to believe that this particular shark had encountered radioactive material somewhere along its path through the ocean. “We love the idea of taking in the little guy,” the manager of the aquarium explained at the time. “Of course, we’ll have to display it to the public. We do not expect this to lead to any commercial gain. Of course.”

CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 1...

Despite allegations of misconduct, the local government has declined to comment on opening a possible investigation into how this radioactive material may have ended up in the Louisiana Bay area.

Since being first taken in 1960, the shark which had been affectionately named “Lizzie,” had held the record of longest time in captivity ever. While most great white sharks only make it in captivity for a few days, Lizzie had successfully lived in the New Orleans aquarium for a whopping 11 years.

However, since Lizzie’s death during birth, Little Lizzie succeeded that title. This year, Little Lizzie will have stayed in the New Orleans aquarium for 29 years. Scientists attribute this to the fact that she was born in captivity back in 1971, and possibly to mutations from Lizzie’s exposure to radioactive material.

Back in 1960, a local fisherwoman came across a mutated shark in Louisiana Bay. Her description of the shark at the time was as having “a [messed] up spine, like globs of Jello hanging off of its back and tail. But did have some happy eyes.”
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While we are happy to celebrate this groundbreaking record, we have also uncovered some disturbing news. It appears that Little Lizzie has been exhibiting violent, aggressive behavior recently, resulting in the fatal attack of an aquarium employee.

Unfortunately, Little Lizzie will be put down sometime this upcoming week due to her recent violent outburst and demeanor.

Although the initial care for Lizzie was out of compassion, it appears that for the long term, this shark was, like many other wild animals, meant to stay in the wild.

Jessica’s eyes widened. “We need to leave. Now.”

The lab assistants shared glances of confusion and exasperation.

“I said now!” Jessica shuffled papers and grabbed her laptop, jogging to the door.

“Come on,” one of the lab assistants whined. “Do we really have to?”

“We’ve got a mutated 30 foot Carcharodon carcharias.”

One of the others rolled their eyes. “You can just say great white, you know. We’re not studying for a vocab quiz.”

Jessica put her hands on her hips. “Do you want in or not?”

She stayed quiet.

“Good. I need everyone to be ready with their laptops and any research on cartilage, effects of nuclear waste on sea creatures, the Louisiana coast. Everything. We’re headed to New Orleans.”

August 16, 2000 19:46

The water shimmered with the rainbow of an oil spill, but appeared to go on forever for lack of seeing the bottom of the water. All but one of several people standing around the edge of the water wore blue jumpsuits which read:

NEW ORLEANS
ANIMAL CONTROL

A man threw up his hands, setting off a cascade of commentary.

“Where do you think it is?”

“I don’t care to find out.”

“How are we going to get his corpse out?”


“It’s not like he can reach out and grab a buoy.”

“Enough.” A man wearing a suit stepped back. “These vicious creatures are known for their tendency to bounce from the top to the bottom of any body of water they’re in. It’ll come up soon enough.” He pulled a contraption out of his breast pocket, along with a small box.

The group grumbled, adjusting their clipboards.

“Once it does, we’ll be ready.” He set about sticking six small stickers around the edges of the water. Each sticker was attached to a thin, curly wire which led back up to the small black box.

A grey shadow hovered beneath the surface of the water.

A smile grew on the man’s face.

Behind him, the doors at the top of the stairs burst open. Jessica stepped into the dark room. The shark made a ripple in the water as it surfaced.

“Little Lizzie?” Jessica ran down the stairs. She knelt down near the edge, crawling closer to the shark. She leaned closer to the edge. Lizzie’s eyes stared up at her from just under the water. Jessica held her gaze for a second, but broke away when she saw six small stickers with thin, almost clear wires.

The man motioned to the other animal control workers. They moved in toward Jessica.

She saw the remote in the man’s hand. His thumb hovered over the red button. “Wait!”

The animal control workers grabbed her, pulling her back from the side.

“You don’t need to do this.”

The man walked up to the edge of the water. He stared down at the shark. His thumb came down onto the button. A blue shock current spread from the box across the water.

“No!” As he pressed it, Jessica broke free. Her jaw clenched, she lunged forward, and knocked him into the water. He and the shark spasmed with the electricity, and fell side by side in the water, limp.
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