“Yo! Haashi!”

The boy turned in the street, looking so startled at hearing his name that Nartha nearly laughed. Would have, if she hadn't been so breathless with this stupidity heavy pile of baskets. “Lend a *chochanna* your hands, would you?”

Haashi hesitated for the barest second before setting the parcel he was carrying carefully on the stone wall, stepping over it, and hurrying to relieve her of the baskets.

“Thanks,” Nartha puffed once the top two were balanced in his arms, leaving only one for her to carry. Haashi smiled over the woven edge, though his nose wrinkled at the powerful waft of fishiness now situated directly beneath his chin. He said nothing. Usually, his cousin was doing the talking when Nartha saw them around. The two were pretty inseparable. Nartha actually couldn't remember the last time she'd seen Haashi alone in the village, but from what she'd gathered of his father, going out at all was not encouraged. It was…an odd family. *Worth watching, as all people were, but likely of no use for business.*

Nartha nodded in the direction of the barn and Haashi followed her along the stone wall in that direction. It was late afternoon. The sea was warm and sleepy, and in the field to their left the blast shrimp were beginning the cacophony of their hunt.

Nartha shifted the basket to one hip. “Thanks for the help. There were only three left, and I usually carry two so I thought I could save a trip. Seeing as my lazy *nedigo* was pretending to be deaf and get out of as much work as possible. I mean, he is deaf, but he clearly saw me ask for help and pretend not to. That *bedas.*”

Haashi huffed a little, though whether in mutual annoyance or from the weight of his load it was hard to tell. His eyes were fixed on the wall and he didn't look up.

It wasn't much farther to the barn. Nartha rounded the corner and had just enough time to think *oh no* before Haashi came up behind her and gasped sharply, nearly dropping his fish. Geto, the brand new 9 foot shark swam forward as far as his chain would allow, allured by the smell of food. Haashi had taken several steps back, clearly shaken and eyes wide. Nartha hurried to reassure him.

“The shark is tied up! He won't bite you, he's just new and a little feisty so we're keeping him over here away from the others ‘till he's more broken in. But the door is past him, so we'll have to walk by.”

Haashi nodded, comically white like the sheltered nibbler he was. Honestly, the amount of people who didn't know how to behave around sharks always surprised her.

Nartha smirked a little as she walked toward the door again. Geto nosed up but she firmly pushed his head away and continued past. Haashi inched after her nervously, coiled like a spring. Geto stared him down, trying to menace himself a treat, and Haashi stared back, utterly absorbed in the shark’s eyes. Because of this, he wasn't watching his feet. Geto made his move, jerking forward suddenly and Haashi stumbled back with a yell. His foot caught on the screw that anchored Geto’s chain and the baskets overbalanced him, sending him down in a shower of sand and dead fish. Geto reared in excitement, and the already jostled screw pulled free completely.

Nartha saw the moment the animal realized it was loose. A knowing glint came into his eye. Looked a whole lot like Nartha's dad closing a good deal, if she were honest. Without further hesitation the shark swooped forward. Haashi screamed but Geto only snatched a few of the fish on his way past and then he was gone, swimming toward the town.

Nartha cursed quite colorfully, but only inside her head. In seconds she had dashed into the barn, set down her fish and snatched the net hanging from the back wall. When she

reemerged Haashi was still sitting on the ground looking absolutely stricken. “I'm sorry! Nartha, I'm so sorry! That was an accident. I’m-”

“Chase him!” Nartha interrupted, snatching Haashi’s hand and pulling him up as she began the pursuit. Haashi scrambled to his feet and followed.

The weight of the chain and screw dragging from Geto’s nose ring was slowing him down, but he was still a strong shark, bread for pulling. Nartha could see him slip over the knee high wall and disappear around a street beyond. Just before they made it to the wall themselves two more people jogged up from the direction of the house: Papai and her twin, Rebolo. “Was that one of ours?” Papai asked.

“Geto got loose,” Nartha confirmed, pushing hair out of her face.

“Eh, was the Wahalii boy trying to steal him?”

“What?”

“I wasn’t-!” Haashi squeaked. He tried to step away from her and that’s when she realized that his wrist was still trapped in her restraining grip. Nartha dropped it.

“He was helping actually, but Geto gave him a scare and now they’re both half wild.”

Papai threw back his head and guffawed, echoed by Bolo’s deep belly laugh. Haashi flushed deep red. “Ah well, young man, it seems you owe it to us to bring him back!”

“I will, Nitor! It was an accident. I will get him back.”

Haashi was halfway into an apology bow when Nartha rolled her eyes and grabbed his arm again. “Come on. Geto isn’t getting any closer!”

“We’ll get another net, then come help!” Papai shouted after them.

Nartha signed thank you over her shoulder, and then she and Haashi were over the wall and away, leaving a trail of rising silt in their wake.

Once they were between the houses Nartha passed Haashi the net and slowed down enough to braid her hair and tie her sarong up into a belt position. Haashi looked pointedly away through the whole process and Nartha laughed at his flaming ears. “You know I’m wearing pants underneath, right?”

Haashi looked back very slowly, as though expecting to be struck dead by heaven itself at any second. And halfway wishing he would be. “Uh…Yes. Of course th-that makes sense. Uh-”

The poor man’s misery was graciously put to an end by a frustrated shout from a few streets down. Nartha picked up her pace and sprinted in that direction, the sound of Haashi’s shoes scraping the cobbles followed. Once she rounded the corner she was greeted with the sight of an extremely angry old woman smacking at Geto’s nose, which the shark was attempting to bury in her hand cart. Both shark and woman snapped eyes on Nartha as soon she came into view. Geto took immediate action, whipping his hail and speeding out of the alley. The old woman’s hand cart went flying, spilling vegetables and dinnerware all over the street. Nartha dodged the debris and gave chase, hurrying past the woman’s shrill screech of “Get your beast under control!” as fast as possible.

“I’m so sorry, Nitas! May I help pick this up?” She heard Haashi say behind her, only to invite a fresh tirade from the raging Nitas. Nartha grinned. *Grit chewer.* He should have kept running.

Geto wasn’t swimming high enough to pass the roofs of the village, but he was weaving through them quite quickly and Nartha was losing breath as she pounded after him. She had to corner him somewhere. If he got to open water he’d be infinitely more difficult to catch.

A man had the ill fortune to step out directly in front of Geto’s charge and gave a startled yell.

“Grab the chain!” Nartha shouted, and to his credit he did try. But the chain whipped out of reach and he lost balance, staggering into Nartha’s path as Geto once again whooshed out of sight. Nartha and the man took a moment to catch their breath together in the middle of the street. Nartha leaned over her knees, puffing and overheated. The man ran a hand through his graying hair. “You need help, Nitas?”

“I *hah* had help. Don’t know where they all went though. Maybe *hah* to have a snack break without me.” Nartha stood upright and pushed back her stray hair. “My brothers will be here soon, if we can just keep it from tearing up too much property until they get here.”

The helpful fellow nodded, and was about to speak when Geto blasted past them again. With *Haashi* clinging to his dorsal fin! Geto was clearly unhappy about this and was pitching erratically up and down trying to shake him off. Nartha ducked just in time to avoid being hit by Haashi’s flailing legs as Geto surged overhead. Nartha found her voice. “Throw the net, you idiot!”

Haashi scrabbled at the shark’s back until he managed to throw one ankle over, then tried to untangle the snarl of netting and weights from his right arm. He was colossally unsuccessful. Instead of throwing it over Geto the freed scrap of net blew back onto Haashi, effectively tying his arm to his face and leaving him with only one hand to hold on. Geto rolled violently, bringing Haashi up and over his body, then smashed him into a stuccoed wall. Haashi lost his grip and fell destructively onto someone’s potted herb garden, yelping in pain.

“Haashi!” Nartha shouted, watching him roll out of the broken shards of pottery.

He blinked through the tangle of net and sand. “Look out!”

Nartha turned just in time to see the swinging chain come straight for her face. She brought up her arms and it cracked the back of her right painfully, but her left caught hold of the screw on the end. Geto’s jaws snapped angrily as his momentum yanked his nose ring against Nartha’s weight. Haashi yelled something but Nartha didn’t hear it, too busy flapping her wings and trying to stay upright as she was dragged toward the end of the street.

The street that ended in open kelp fields as far as the eye could see.

Geto, sensing his freedom so close to his grasp, thrashed his tail and powered on, nearly lifting Nartha off her feet. She spun on the end of the chain, wings spread wide for as much drag as possible, but it was no use. Geto swerved, and if the motion hadn’t twisted her backward she might have avoided being knocked off, but as it was her spine collided with a set of stone steps and her fingers let go.

Her name filtered hazily into her ears but she didn’t look up. She did, however, take notice when Haashi sprinted up the stairs past her. Squinting through warbled, upsidedown vision she saw him follow the staircase all the way up to roof level, kick off the short railing, and throw himself into the sky, wings and net spread wide.

Time seemed to move very slowly as Nartha forced her body up and around. She was just in time to see Haashi and the shark crash to the ground, throwing up a cloud of sand. He had landed on Geto’s back, and even managed to get the net over his head, but was in the process of being shaken off because he had no way to keep the net from sliding. Nartha ran with all her might and threw herself at the opposite side of Geto’s body. She skinned her elbows a bit but managed to pin the edge of the net before it slid off completely. Geto writhed, trying to escape backward, but with his belly pressed to the ground he was at a disadvantage. Nartha stood both feet firmly on the net and threw her body over the shark’s back just behind the fin. Haashi clambered up from being half buried beneath Geto’s

head and did the same further up. And when Nartha's breathing quieted down a little bit she realized that the other man was holding the tail. Geto's struggling gradually stilled

All three sat and breathed for a little bit more before the man asked, "What should we do now?"

"Thank you for your help," Haashi said, like the goody goody he was.

Nartha glanced around, looking for her family. "Let's pull the net a little more over him. Then I think Haashi and I can hold him down, if you don't mind looking for my Papai. He and my brothers should be looking for us with another net. They can help us muscle him home."

"Well enough," he said with some measure of relief, and they all shuffled about trying to pull the net into a better position. Geto seemed resigned to his fate, so once they were all sure the man took his leave. Nartha sat straddling Geto's back and pulled at the front of her shirt to cool herself down. Twilight was creeping over the fields but it was still far too hot. She was sure she looked an absolute mess. "Well that's one way to make sure you'll be hungry for supper."

Suddenly an odd cackle joined the crackling of the blast shrimp. Nartha glanced to where Haashi sat with his arms draped over Geto's back. He was looking at her. And he was laughing.

Nartha found herself laughing too. "What?"

"Now we just sit on him? After all that?"

"Do you want to jump off another roof?"

"No!"

"I bet you haven't had that much fun in years, shark rider."

He looked thoughtful at that. "No, I haven't... But I really don't like heights so maybe I can have fun in a less terrifying way next time."

Nartha grinned. "Sayso sayso, but your favorite pastime is clearly falling on things."

"That's not-"

"Falling on chain screws, falling on potted plants,"

"Those were acci-"

"Attack jumping on sharks!"

Haashi inhaled to continue protesting but they both dissolved into laughter instead. Nartha reached out and smacked gently at his head. "You still have someone's poor garden in your hair."

Haashi pulled back and shook his head vigorously under the pretense of clearing his hair. It didn't hide his red ears. "What about you? You hit some things pretty hard. How do you feel?"

"Like I was viciously attacked by a set of stairs, how else?"

Haashi became very intense all of a sudden. "Are you alright?"

Nartha stared at him for a moment. A distant memory of a much younger Haashi pushed itself to the surface. Back before he'd disappeared and gone quiet. Asking another careless child if he was alright with the same sincere intensity. Because it mattered to him.

"I'll be sore in the morning, not worse. Maybe I can get my brothers to do my chores. They owe me for not helping me catch this bruit anyway."

Haashi visibly relaxed and rested his obviously aching head on his arms.

"And I owe you."

At this he looked up again. "Owe me? But I let it loose in the first place."

"Sure, and then caught it again like a champion! Want to come back home for supper? Don't know what we're having but it's probably good."

“I- I shouldn't. I need to get back home and tell Father that…” He went shell white. “Oh no! I left that packet of documents on the wall by your farm! I was supposed to bring that to a client!”

Nartha snickered. “Looks like you'll have to come back after all.”

Haashi rubbed his neck. “I guess so. But I can't stay, I need to deliver that package.”

Nartha punched his arm. “Then I'll get you a nice meal some other time. I still owe you. And a Quijo knows to always pay their debts.”

Haashi seemed to struggle with something, but then he smiled. “With less terror?”

“With zero terror.”

A bruised and blushing face turned toward the fields where the first phosphorescent specks were beginning to glow. The evening was warm. Familiar voices were approaching from behind them.

“If you don’t mind, I think I'd like that, Nartha.”