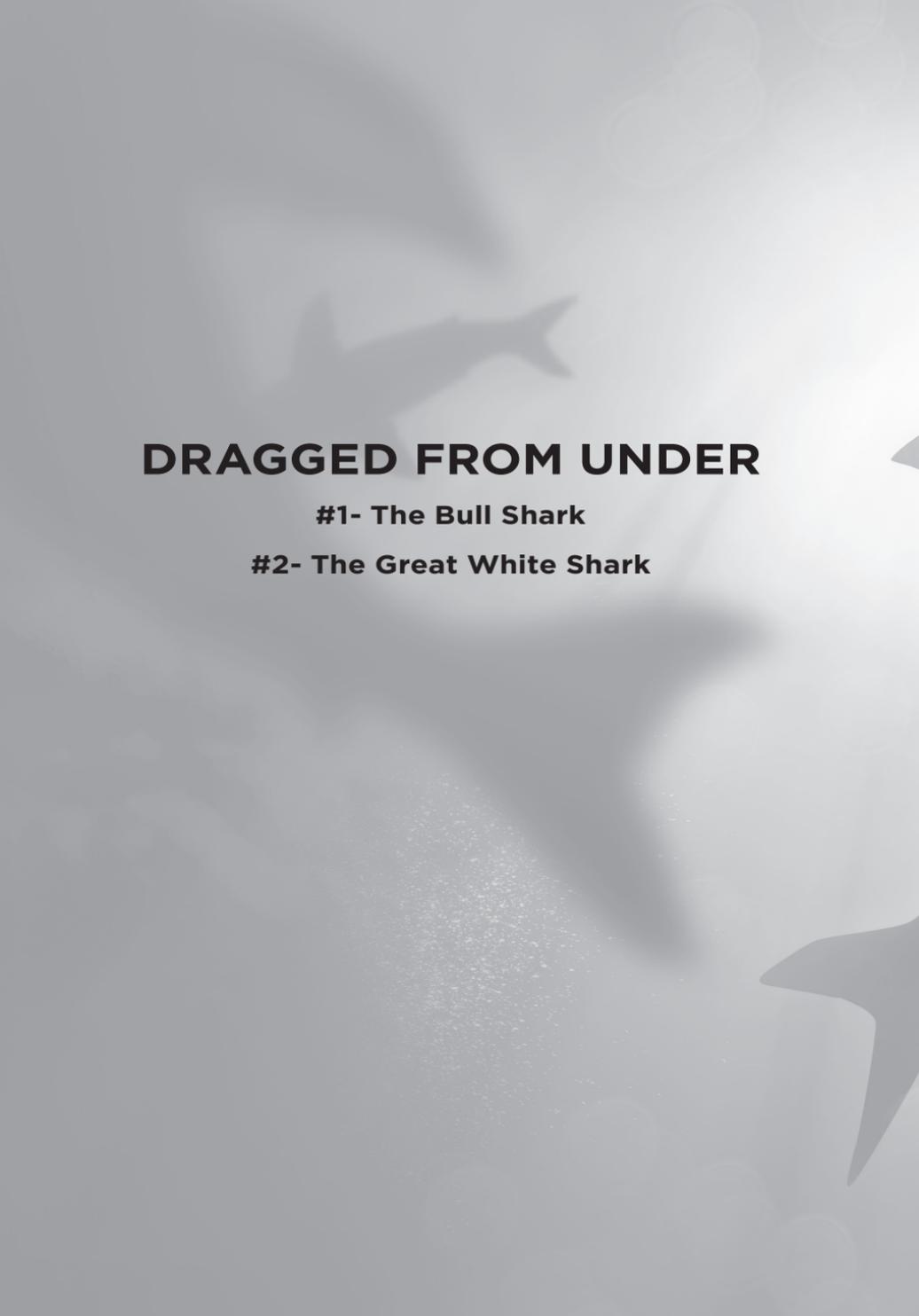




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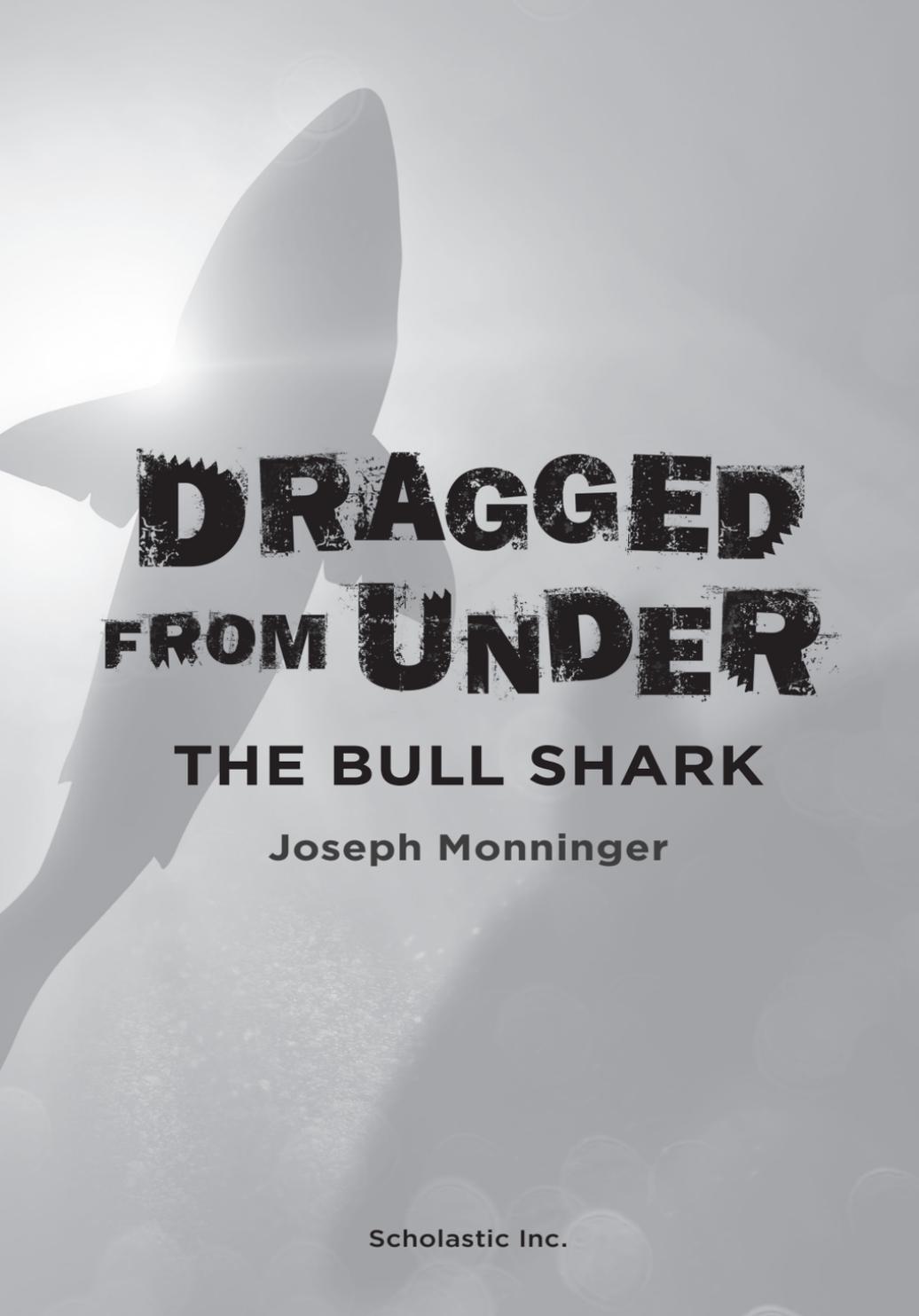
THE BULL SHARK



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#1- The Bull Shark

#2- The Great White Shark



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FROM UNDER**

THE BULL SHARK

Joseph Monninger

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1

Barn Whimbril watched his mother set her right foot against her left calf and hold her hands in a prayer fashion against her chest. She stood on her yoga mat on the back porch of their cottage in Sarasota, Florida, greeting the sun. That's what she called it, anyway. Sun salutations.

Sometimes Barn did yoga with his mom, but not today.

Today was the opening of spring training in Fort Myers for the Boston Red Sox. And to Barn Whimbril, it was the best day of the year.

"Barn?" his mother called. "Check the oatmeal, would you? I think it's ready."

"Are you almost finished?"

“We have plenty of time. The game isn’t until one.”

Barn’s rule number one with his mother: *You couldn’t rush her*. He was aware that she had a different attitude about time than he did. A very different attitude. She was a hippie type, honestly, who had recently let her hair go gray, and now she wore it in a dense, tight braid in back. She liked to say she took the long view. Almost everything humans deemed important, or worth hurrying about, his mother saw as laughable.

“It’s ready,” Barn called, lifting the top off the pot of oatmeal and stirring it to check its viscosity. That meant how thick it was. Barn learned that last year in his fifth-grade science class.

“Serve it up, then. Come on out and we’ll eat on the porch.”

Barn nodded and opened the cupboard next to the sink to get bowls. For a second he caught his reflection in the small mirror his mother had attached to the back of the cupboard door. She used it to check her look some mornings when they had to hustle or when someone unexpectedly knocked at the door. Now, bending so he could see himself squarely in the mirror, he realized, for the millionth time,

that he still resembled an angry rooster. Not just any rooster, either. He looked like a Rhode Island Red, the kind of chickens they had once raised in Pennsylvania before they moved down to Florida. His face was narrow and long, like a bird's face before it pecked, and his hair stuck up on top of his head like a rooster crow. He had white skin, pale, and rusty-colored hair. Hair the color of a steel wool pad after it had been used to clean four or five skillets. Skin the color of milk.

He thought about how Margaret Valley, the smartest and most beautiful girl in Sarasota's sixth-grade class, had once told her friend Becky Haller that she found his looks *interesting*. *What in the world*, he wondered as he pulled out two white bowls and put them on the tray they used to carry things outside, *did it mean to look interesting?*

He placed the oatmeal on the tray, placed a small pitcher of cream beside it along with a bowl of brown sugar, and then pushed backward through the screen door and stepped out onto the deck.

“What a day,” his mom said.

She stood in the sun, her hands still in front of her chest, her right foot still locked against her left calf. She smiled.

She always smiled, Barn knew. She always seemed to be in a good mood. Today she was in an especially good mood because it was winter break for both of them. No school for a week.

“I have everything,” Barn said, putting the food on the circular glass table they kept on the porch. “If we’re going to make the game, we need to keep moving.”

“We’re not leaving for another hour, Barn.”

True, Barn conceded. He knew he was a little keyed up. He sat in one of the porch chairs and scooped out two bowls of oatmeal. He remembered, too late, that his mother had told him to bring out raisins to add. He popped up and went inside and came back with the raisins from Holly’s Universal Galactic Health Food. Everything they ate, just about, came from Holly’s Universal Galactic Health Food Store. Holly was a friend of his mom’s. The monogram for the store, used on bags and cartons, was HUG. Holly’s Universal Galactic.

“I’m almost done. I’m just doing a little ujjayi breathing.”

Nostril breathing, Barn knew. She performed ujjayi breathing at the end of her practice with her eyes closed.

“The oatmeal will get cold.”

“I like it a little cold. It’s like eating paste.”

“You’re weird, Mom.”

Barn ate a few spoons of his oatmeal before his mom finally rolled up her mat and came to sit beside him. Before she did, she put her arms around Barn and kissed his cheek. Barn flinched a little, but he knew that would encourage his mother to kiss him more. She always kissed and hugged him and told him she loved him. If he recoiled at all, or became impatient, she lathered it on even more. She was a tidal wave of mom-ness.

“You excited?” she asked when she settled beside him.

“Opening day.”

“Yep.”

He kept his eyes on his bowl of oatmeal. She was just warming up.

“You still a Red Sox fan?” she asked. “You haven’t changed loyalties, have you?”

He nodded. Then shook his head. He wasn’t sure which question he needed to answer first. His mom kept going, anyway.

“How do you root for the Boston Red Sox when you live down here in Florida?”

“Because they have spring training here, Mom. And because Dad loved the Sox.”

“I know,” she said, and reached over to squeeze his hand. “Just checking on you.”

She didn't follow baseball at all except for the spring training games that took place near Sarasota. She went to those games for him, Barn understood, because she knew he loved them. This was the fifth year they'd been going—ever since his dad had been killed in Afghanistan. Mostly she read novels at the spring games. She was an English teacher at Sarasota High School. She read as routinely as other people breathed.

“You're in charge of loading the car, Barn,” she said as she finished eating. “Sunblock, chairs, maybe a picnic blanket. You know, the usual stuff. Try not to forget anything. Go, Sox.”

“Go, Sox.”

“Eat your breakfast,” his mom said, pushing back his hair and kissing his forehead as she rose.

He did. He watched a phoebe—a small gray songbird easily recognizable for its habit of bobbing its tail up and down—building a nest on the doorjamb above their

toolshed. Phoebes were a sure sign of spring. A week before, he had set up a tiny camera on the nesting platform and put the feed on YouTube. So far he'd had 7,432 visitors. He figured once the eggs started hatching, he would get more views. He had sent a link to the Florida Audubon Society. His whole class knew about the site, and his teacher, Ms. Ellsbury, had given him extra credit in honors science for setting it up.

Barn finished eating and stacked the dishes on the tray. He backed through the door and rinsed everything in the sink. He put his Red Sox hat on and bent to look at himself again in the mirror.

The sight was remarkable.

A Rhode Island rooster wearing a hat, he thought. A bird rooting for a baseball team.

In that moment his phone played the *Jaws* theme.

Duh duh. Dun duh dun duh dun duh, faster and faster.

Only one message triggered that music. Shark attack.

He ran to get his phone.