*Jaws by Peter Benchley.*

In thirty-five feet of water, the great fish swam slowly, its tail waving just enough to maintain motion. It saw nothing, for the water was murky with motes of vegetation. The fish had been moving parallel to the shoreline. Now it turned, banking slightly, and followed the bottom gradually upward. The fish perceived more light in the water, but still it saw nothing.

The boy was resting, his arms dangling down, his feet and ankles dipping in and out of the water with each small swell. His head was turned towards shore, and he noticed that he had been carried out beyond what his mother would consider safe. He could see her lying on her towel, and the man and child playing in the wavewash. He was not afraid, for the water was calm and he wasn’t really very far from shore – only forty yards or so. But he wanted to get closer; otherwise his mother might sit up, spy him, and order him out of the water. He eased himself back a little bit so he could use his feet to help propel himself. He began to kick and paddle towards shore. His arms displaced water almost silently, but his kicking feet made erratic splashes and left swirls of bubbles in his wake.

The fish did not hear the sound, but rather registered the sharp and jerky impulses emitted by the kicks. They were signals, faint but true, and the fish locked on them, homing. It rose, slowly at first, then gaining speed as the signals grew stronger.

The boy stopped for a moment to rest. The signals ceased. The fish slowed, turning its head from side to side, trying to recover. The boy lay perfectly still, and the fish passed beneath him, skimming the sandy bottom. Again it turned.

The boy resumed paddling. He kicked only every third or fourth stroke; kicking was more exertion than steady paddling. But the occasional kicks sent new signals to the fish. The time it needed to lock on them, only an instant, for it was almost directly below the boy. The fish rose. Nearly vertical, it saw the commotion on the surface. There was no conviction that what thrashed above was food, but food was not a concept of significance. The fish was impelled to attack: if what it swallowed was digestible that was food; if not, it would later be regurgitated. The mouth opened, and with a final sweep of the sickle tail, the fish struck.

The boy’s last – only – thought was that he had been punched in the stomach. The breath was driven from him in a sudden rush. He had not time to cry out, nor had he had the time, would he have known what to cry, for he could not see the fish. The fish’s head drove the raft out of the water. The jaws smashed together, engulfing head, arms, shoulder, trunk, pelvis and most of the raft. Nearly half the fish had come clear of the water, and it slid forward and down in a belly flopping motion, grinding the mass of flesh and bone and rubber. The boy’s legs were severed at the hip, and they sank, spinning slowly to the bottom.

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