



# **IT COMES WITH THE TIDE**

**A Short By  
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## IT COMES WITH THE TIDE

Henry Talbot stood at the end of the jetty and watched as the sun set into the sea. When he was a child his father had told him that if he listened carefully enough he would be able to hear the sound of the ocean bubbling, boiling from the heat as it swallowed the flaming orb. As an adult Henry knew that the story was bullshit. The ocean held many things at night, but the sun wasn't one of them.

As the sun vanished, leaving only an orange blur on the horizon a single tear pooled in the corner of Henry's eye and then ran down his craggy cheek and became lost in the greying beard that covered his jawline. He raised an arm and wiped it across his face, eradicating the sign of weakness. He had a job to do and there was no room for emotion.

Henry turned away and walked along the jetty, making his way slowly towards his fishing boat – *The Breathless*. As he walked he thrust his rough, weathered hands into his pockets and contemplated the events that had led him to consider such desperate measures.

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*The summers in Healy's Cove were usually a happy time filled with sun and the smiling faces of tourists. This summer had started out no differently and people flooded into the town, quickly filling the guest houses and the holiday homes.*

*Unlike other towns scattered along the coast line they did not resent outsiders. If it wasn't for the tourists then Healy's Cove would wither and die, so they were welcomed with open arms. If the tourists wanted to spend their hard earned money who were the people of The Cove to stop them?*

*It was the circle of life.*

*Things only started to turn sour midway through the fourth week. The carcass was discovered by an early morning dog walker and had quickly become the centre of attention as news had spread through residents and holidaymakers alike.*

*Full colour pictures of the killer whale had made the front page of the local and regional papers. The pictures showed the carcass in all its gory detail, but for Henry the photographs had lacked the impact of the actual scene that morning.*

*The whale had clearly been dead, of that there was no doubt. The question of the day, however, was something that caused the people great concern. What kind of creature could have literally torn off the lower jaw of the killer whale and then ripped the tongue from its mouth?*

*The most popular theory was a shark... the great white terror. Everyone had seen the films and the scare mongering was based around those unbelievable plots instead of factual truth. Over the course of the next week the fear subsided and everything returned to normal. There were no more attacks and it was business as usual in Healy's Cove.*

*The second corpse was found four weeks later, pulled up in a net meant to catch shrimp. She could have been no older than twenty, but she would never see twenty one. Her left leg had been severed above the knee and her right arm was totally gone. The only consolation to her family was that she had probably lost consciousness before her abdomen had been ripped open and her internal organs fed upon.*

*It had been Henry and his crew who had pulled her from the ocean and he was haunted by her eyes, still open in death and staring at him with blind accusation.*

*Once again the fear returned and the gossip mill began to turn feverishly, but none of this mattered to Henry. He'd received news upon his return to shore that over shadowed the death of the girl he'd never known.*

*Marcus Howell, the Sherriff of Healy's Cove had taken Henry to one side and sat him down, carefully giving him the news that Shannon, his wife, had not been seen since taking her evening swim the night before. Henry had sat and shook his head from side to side, denial hiding him from the growing fear in his gut. Howell had rested a hand on Henry's shoulder and then shown him the familiar swimsuit, now a tattered mess that was stained with blood. Henry had broken down, sobbing at the realisation that his wife was gone.*

*Since that morning Henry had been out in the fishing boat every night without fail, scouring the area in search of the beast that had taken the love of his life. The victims kept turning up, washed upon the beach by the high tide, women,*

*children and men... none were safe from the predator lurking in the depths of Healy's Cove.*

*Henry watched and he saw the pattern evolve. Every four weeks without fail the bodies would appear, only for the attacks to wane after a few days. He marked each death on a calendar, stating where and when the body had washed up.*

*The summer was now drawing to a close and Henry had a feeling in his gut that time was running out. He had to act and he had to do so without any further hesitation. He'd studied the dates and he was sure the next attacks would begin tonight. This time he would be ready for the beast.*

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Kyle Jenkins was already on board *The Breathless*, waiting to be joined by his Captain. He had no desire to venture out on the ocean, but work just recently had been scarce. Henry was offering a good rate of pay for a nights work. Kyle had a mortgage to pay and a wife to keep happy. He couldn't turn down any work, regardless of its nature.

"You sure you want to do this, Henry?" Kyle shouted.

"Never been surer about anything in my life," Henry replied, jumping across from the jetty to the boat.

"But we ain't kitted out to go shark fishing."

"You don't want my money then get off my boat," Henry snapped. "I'll do this alone if I have to."

“We made an agreement and I don’t go back on my word,” Kyle defended himself.

“Then shut up and cast off,” Henry ordered. “I want this over before sunrise.” Henry made his way up to the main deck.

Kyle glanced at his Captain and shuddered. He’d known Henry for years and he’d changed so much this last season. Kyle understood that losing your wife could do things to a man, but Henry had taken a path of hatred and vengeance. It scared Kyle to be going out alone with him.

The engine of The Breathless came to life with a roar, the entire boat juddering for the briefest of moments before slowly pulling away from the jetty.

“What the hell have I let myself in for?” Kyle whispered, fishing a packet of smokes from his pocket and quickly regretting that he hadn’t brought more.

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Henry stood and stared at the large crucifix that hung on the rear wall of the main deck. He wasn’t a religious man, never had been, but the large wooden cross with its detailed silver Jesus had been a wedding gift from Shannon’s parents. They said it would look over him every time he went out to sea. That had been over twenty years ago and in all that time Henry had never felt the need to ask the icon for anything. If the truth be told he’d meant to take it down after Shannon’s parents had passed away.

But now he felt relieved that he’d left it where it had always been. For the first time in his life Henry needed something to give him strength, someone to ask

forgiveness for what he was about to do. He said a prayer silently and then climbed down to the foredeck where Kyle was preparing the nets.

“I don’t think we’ll be needing those tonight,” Henry said as he approached.

“I can’t find the chum,” Kyle mumbled without looking up. “Gonna need chum if you’re wanting to attract a shark.”

“This one’s too smart to fall for that old trick,” Henry said in a calm voice, pulling the knife from the scuffed scabbard on his belt. “Its only after one thing.”

Henry didn’t wait for another question from Kyle. He stepped forward, grabbed Kyle by the hair and pulled his head back; dragging the blade across Kyle’s throat with the same expert ease that he would gut a fish.

“I’m sorry Kyle,” Henry whispered, holding Kyle in an embrace until the blood stopping spurting from the wound and his thrashing had faded to nothing more than the twitch of dying nervous system. “It has to be this way.”

Henry looked at his watch, distressed to find that he was only an hour away from midnight. Time was running out and he only had until morning to do what had to be done.

He set to work on Kyle’s body, cutting away his clothes and laying the body out on the deck. It was slow work pushing the hooks through Kyle’s arms and legs but Henry worked as efficiently as he could with shaking hands. It was gone midnight by the time he’d finished, sixteen large barbed hooks in each arm and leg. Another dozen hooks now run along Kyle’s spine.

The final hook Henry had forced through Kyle's neck. It entered just below the skull, ripping its way through the windpipe and the bottom of Kyle's mouth. The tip of the hook now protruded between Kyle's blue lips.

Henry attached this hook to the heavy duty cable that would usually be attached to the shrimp nets. The cable ran to a jib set up that could be easily swung out over the side of the boat and from there it wound around the drum of a hydraulic winch.

The generator that powered the winch started up on the first try just as Henry had known it would. He prided himself on the upkeep of his vessel. After all it was his lifeblood... his money maker. He pulled back on the control lever and hoisted Kyle's corpse into the air, the lifeless torso dangling like an unwanted puppet in a toyshop window.

Henry crossed over to Kyle, suddenly wishing that he'd taken the time to close the dead man's eyes.

*Too late now.*

Henry raised the knife one final time and thrust it in below Kyle's sternum and dragged down viciously, opening Kyle's stomach and revealing the glistening innards. With his free hand Henry tugged on intestines, pulling them free of the wound with a moist sucking sound.

Henry quickly returned to the winch controls and raised Kyle's body a couple of feet higher, enough to swing him over the port side of the boat.

“Come and get it you bastard!” Henry shouted out at the still ocean. “Come and get it!”

Henry lowered Kyle into the water, leaving only his head visible above the surface. It was too dark to see but Henry knew that the clear blue would quickly turn red with Kyle’s blood, a signal that would tease the predator straight into the trap.

All Henry had to do was wait.

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By two o’clock the clouds had cleared and a full moon illuminated the ocean. Henry looked out with a sad smile on his face. He always found the sea at its most beautiful at times like this... peaceful... serene. At night the ocean become a mirror of blacks and silver, a liquid surface of untainted pureness.

Henry sat in a fold out chair in the centre of the deck, a harpoon gun rested upon his knees. Despite having finished off the Thermos of black coffee he was beginning to feel tired. His eyelids were heavy, falling slowly, when he heard the splash off to the port side. Henry became instantly alert, kicking the chair backwards and taking the few short steps to reach the side of the boat. He looked over the edge, watching Kyle’s head as the water lapped gently at his dead chin.

Henry squinted, trying to look beyond the reflective surface. The glow was dim, a white smear that quickly grew bigger as it neared the surface. Henry watched the shark take form as it sped upwards and a hate filled grin broke out on his face.

“That’s it you bastard,” he whispered. “Take a big ol’ bite.”

Henry took a quick step backwards and raised the harpoon, ready to strike as soon as the beast broke the surface. He didn’t flinch as black water mixed with silver foam exploded outwards. Kyle’s lifeless corpse rose from the water as it was attacked from beneath with great force. It all happened in nothing more than seconds, but to Henry it felt like a lifetime. The water arched outwards and then rained back down, finally revealing the creature he sought.

Henry froze at the sight. It was huge. Bigger than anything he’d ever seen and it had swallowed Kyle up to the waist, its powerful jaws grinding ragged teeth into soft flesh.

But it wasn’t the size of the beast that filled Henry with dread.

Oh, no... it was something worse... something unnatural.

The shark had arms, thick, muscular arms that grew out from below the gills on its side. It had reached up and held Kyle’s head in its hands, talons as savage as its teeth tearing at the flesh of Kyle’s face as it forced the body deeper into its throat.

“No!” Henry screamed and he would’ve sworn, in that instant, that the shark glared at him.

Henry raised the harpoon and pulled the release trigger. The barbed projectile penetrated the shark-thing’s hide with a dull slap seconds before the beast dropped from view, taking its prize with it.

The winch immediately began to unreel, the beast dragging Kyle's body down with it. Henry ran over and slammed the control lever into lift and the silence of the night was shattered by the squealing of steel cable grating against itself as the reel was pulled tight.

"Not getting away," Henry muttered under his breath as he worked, reloading the harpoon gun. "You gotta pay for what you've done."

The winch slowly began to reel inwards, fighting against the drag on the far end of the cable. Henry had to stand with his legs apart, keeping his balance as the entire boat tilted to the port side.

"You're mine, you bastard." He pushed the control lever further forward and the hydraulics buzzed loudly, working at full load.

Henry was ready for the beast when it surfaced this time, watching the cable go slack as the shark-thing stopped fighting and sped back towards the boat. It broke the surface and launched itself upwards, soaring over the top of the boat from port to starboard. Henry followed its path, raised the gun and fired. The harpoon sank deep into the soft underbelly of the shark-thing.

Salt water rained down on the deck and Henry, still looking up, slipped and all balance was lost. His arms spun wildly in a vain attempt to remain upright and the harpoon gun fell from his grip. He hit the deck hard, the wind punched from his lungs on impact.

"Shit!" Henry gasped as the realisation of what the beast was doing hit his confused mind.

Henry looked up at the cable that trailed behind the shark-thing, horrified at what he knew was about to happen. The shark-thing hit the surface on the starboard side and the cable snapped taught above Henry and whipped downwards with a savage release of stored tension.

Henry rolled sideways, but the action was too late. The cable came down and severed his left hand at the wrist sending burning tendrils of pain up Henry's arm and into his shoulder. Henry screamed but the sound was drowned out by the deafening crescendo of splintering wood as the cable smashed the deck and downwards through the hull of the boat, cutting it in half with same ease as it had removed Henry's hand.

Henry felt the boat sink down in the centre, the fore and aft decks lifting out of the water in a giant V. He reached out with his remaining hand, grasping blindly for a purchase that would stop him sliding from the ruined deck and into the water. If that happened it was game over and the beast would win.

His fingers found something, a bolt holding the winch in place and he gripped it tightly, the difference between life and death nothing more than three inches of threaded bar that dug sharply into the palm of his hand.

Henry held his breath and waited for the boat to level out, the separate halves hitting the surface simultaneously. He didn't wait and dragged himself to his feet. Time was of the essence and he could already feel the deck shifting again as the boat began to submerge.

He scurried towards the steps leading to the main deck, the pain in his arm clouding his vision with shadows. He forced himself upwards one step at a time. He made it to the top and almost laughed when he reached out to open the door with his missing hand.

Henry swung the door open, entered the main deck and then pulled it shut behind him, leaning against it for support as he removed the aged leather belt from his trousers and tied it off around his upper arm. He knew he had to slow the bleeding if he was to survive.

A new wave of laughter shook Henry's torso, the very idea of survival the biggest of all jokes. He knew he was going to die at sea and he accepted it. But he was taking the bastard shark-thing with him.

Without warning the boat shook and Henry looked down at the shattered foredeck. Kyle looked back at him with dead eyes, his head hanging from the mouth of the beast as it used those taloned hands to pull itself on-board. It moved with a fluid ease, razor like nails dragging itself out of the water to reveal two monstrous legs that sprouted out halfway down its body. The feet were clawed just like the hands and tiny fins ran up the entire length of the creature's thighs.

Henry kept a wary eye on the shark-thing as it stood upright, using the tail as a counter balance to the weight of its upper body. He fumbled around for the box he knew should be on the shelf above his head.

The shark-thing reached up with both hands and grabbed Kyle's head once again, but this time it pulled, gagging as it yanked the mangled body out off its jaws, spewing blood as the hooks tore at the soft tissue of its throat.

Everything below Kyle's neck was a tattered remnant of the man he'd once been, shredded flesh and muscle hanging loosely from shattered bone and mangled hooks. The shark-thing paused once the unfinished meal was clear of its mouth and seemed to study it for a moment before tossing it over the side of the boat.

Water already lapped at the creature's knees as it lurched towards the main deck, not as confident on land as it had been in its natural habitat, its progress hampered by the now steep angle of the capsizing boat.

Henry found the box and lifted it down, working with one hand to open it and pull the flare gun from within. He cracked the gun open and wedged it between the elbow of his ruined arm and his ribs, taking the first of three cartridges with his good hand and sliding it home. He looked up again in time to find the shark-thing halfway up the steps.

The creature looked back at Henry, gave out a roar as it tensed and then threw itself forward with powerful legs.

Henry raised the flare gun and fired at the same moment the shark-thing smashed its way through the window, its vicious mouth open to reveal the multiple rows of serrated teeth.

The burning flare illuminated the inside of the shark-thing's mouth, embedding in the back of its throat as it continued to burn, cauterising the raw

meat. The shark-thing began to thrash, its lower half jammed in the shattered window frame. Its jaw snapped open and closed, still intent on ending the life of Henry Talbot.

Henry was trying his best to return the favour, but the box holding the remaining two flare cartridges was gone and he couldn't find it amongst the carnage that had once been his home at sea.

The shark-thing struggled to gain entry into the main deck and Henry was forced further back to avoid the gaping maw of death dealing teeth.

"I hope you fucking choke," Henry screamed and threw the useless flare gun at the creature.

The shark-thing retaliated, thrashing harder in a bid to reach its prey. Henry slammed into the rear wall of the main deck and turned his head aside in an attempt to escape the fetid breath that threatened to smother him. Henry saw the cross hanging next to him and, for the first time in his life, he hoped there truly was a God.

Henry snatched the cross down from the wall and wielded it like a dagger, his fingers wrapped around the cool silver of Christ's head.

"You wanna eat me, then eat me," Henry yelled. "But you're gonna know about it, you ugly fucker." Henry swung the cross with the remaining strength he had, aiming for the black eye that stared at him.

The cross sunk into the shark-thing's eye with a liquid pop, the wooden shaft sliding easily into the soft tissue. The shark-thing bellowed and tried to pull away but Henry kept pushing, forcing the tarnished legs of Christ into the wound.

The shark-thing's bellow turned into a scream and Henry released the cross as the open wound began to bubble as if superheated from within. Frothy pink blood spewed from around the crucified Christ as the silver figure began to melt from the cross.

The Shark-thing thrashed harder, but no longer in a bid to get to Henry. Now it was trying to retreat.

"This is for Kyle!" Henry braced himself and then kicked out with his right leg, sending the cross even deeper into the creature's eye socket.

"And this is for the others," Henry yelled as he kicked again.

"And this is for Shannon!" Henry kicked a final time.

The arms of the cross snapped off and it sank all the way into the eye, penetrating the creature's brain. The shark-thing thrashed its last, more of the pink froth pouring from its mouth and pumping out through the slits of its gills.

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Sea water had begun to fill the main deck, seeping in over the lower edge of the broken windows. The boat was going down and nothing Henry could do would stop it. It was a price he was willing to pay for victory. He worked quickly despite the lethargy that threatened to take him into unconsciousness, snatching what looked like a back pack from its place on the wall. He had to squeeze past the

shark-thing and he did so with care. He was sure it was dead, but the closeness still filled him with dread.

Once passed the creature he kicked open the door and stepped outside. He took one last look at what was left of his livelihood and then jumped overboard. The sea was cold and on impact with the surface Henry was instantly awake. He held the pack with his good arm and pulled the cord with his teeth.

The lifeboat came alive with a hiss of air and Henry dragged himself out of the water and lay on his back taking deep breaths. He wanted to watch The Breathless capsize but he never did, exhaustion enveloping him before he could even roll over.

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Henry Talbot stood at the end of the jetty and watched as the sun set into the sea. When he was a child his father had told him that if listened carefully enough he would be able to hear the sound of the ocean bubbling, boiling from the heat as it swallowed the flaming orb. As an adult Henry knew that the story was bullshit. The ocean held many things at night, but the sun wasn't one of them. He knew what true terrors the ocean held and he never wanted to face them again. He was happy to live out what was left of his life on dry land.

It had been three weeks since that night but the stump of his wrist still throbbed. The doctors had said he was lucky to be alive.

*They only knew the half of it.*

They'd offered him a prosthetic hand but Henry refused. The stump and the eventual scar were his medal for besting the creature. He would wear it with pride.

Henry heard the footsteps behind him but he didn't turn, his gaze fixed upon the sunset. He still didn't turn when Sherriff Marcus Howell stopped at his side and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"We found her, Henry," Marcus announced softly. "We found Shannon."

Henry remained silent as tears welled in his eyes.

"I know this is hard for you," Marcus continued. "But I need you to take a look at something for me."

"Sure, Sherriff." Henry finally turned to face Marcus.

"She was in a pretty bad way when we found her," Marcus stated. "But we haven't been able to explain this." Marcus held up a clear bag and showed Henry the contents. "They pulled it out of Shannon's left eye."

Henry saw what was left of the wooden cross and the melted remains of the crucified Christ and his legs gave out.

"Henry?" Marcus crouched next to him. "Will you be OK?"

Henry shook his head and sobbed.