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On his first day back in Ocean Isle Beach, Casson bought a surfboard and sat astride it beyond the breakers. One or two kids with boogie boards gave him a few strange looks, but that didn't concern him. The ocean was very warm, a lot warmer than ten years earlier, when Casson had last been here. He wondered if it was warm enough to tempt any great whites this far north to join the blacktips and sandtigers, which were generally thought to be harmless. He imagined himself rigid with fear as he sat and watched the huge jaws of a great white snap shut on his leg and pull him under, but the fact was he didn't care. That was his great strength, his advantage over McGuire.

He looked towards the shore, which was dominated by a futuristic water tower like a gigantic golf tee, not that he'd ever had the opportunity to play golf. To the right of the water tower was the bar where he'd met Janey, and somewhere to the left was the motel where they'd spent a couple of nights. He looked along the shoreline to the pier where he'd first encountered McGuire, the man who claimed never to have met a fisherman who didn't need a loan of at least a few extra bucks. Casson had been fishing that day, catching nothing, but that night he'd snagged Janey in the bar above the Giggling Mackerel, and a couple of days later he went looking for McGuire and told him he could use a few bucks after all.

Casson felt his back beginning to burn and so paddled into shore. He stowed the surfboard in the car and drove down towards the pier. The miserable old fucker in the bait shop at the pier entrance looked like he'd been standing there ten years. 'Seven dollars a pole,' he growled. Casson raised his empty hands and the guy looked away and spat on the floor. His pier was for fishermen. A handwritten sign advertised prices for bloodworm and lugworm. Casson passed through the shop nevertheless and emerged on to the boardwalk structure of the pier. He walked to the end, pausing at the spot on the leeward side where he'd been standing ten years earlier when McGuire had approached him.

He wondered, for the hundredth time, what he would say if he met him again. 'Hey, remember me. I took a little loan off you because I met a pretty girl and wanted to make it last. Well, we moved into a two-room house in Durham, me and Janey and her fifteen-year-old son Vince, and I worked hard but never earned enough to keep up with the payments, and you just kept asking for more and more until you were bleeding me dry.'

Leaning on the wooden rail at the end of the pier, Casson watched three charter fishing boats heading out to sea, one after the other. He wondered if one of them was McGuire's.

He drove away from the beach and pulled off to the right

just before the bridge that connected the island to the mainland. He sat on the open-air deck of the Giggling Mackerel and cooled down with a bottle of beer. He took out his wallet and slid out a couple of snaps. There was one of him and Janey, squinting into the sun at some forgotten outlook point in the Blue Ridge Mountains, shortly after they had moved to Asheville to try to save their marriage. The other photo was of Vince in his uniform the day he'd left for Iraq. He was proud to be serving his country, he'd written back to them, but Casson knew why he'd left. The kid had reckoned that with one less mouth to feed, his folks would find it easier to manage.

That it hadn't worked out was not the kid's fault. That Vince had come home in a box was Casson's fault, according to Janey, and he couldn't argue with that. But he reckoned a couple of people had to take their share of the blame. Only one of those people enjoyed the protection of a secret service detail.

Casson headed down from the bar, stopping to talk to the guy who ran the boat hire franchise.

He didn't want to spend the night on the island and so drove up the coast to Southport where he ate blackened catfish on the deck of a seafood restaurant by the marina. The sinking sun was a gold coin floating on the surface of the river.

Up at dawn, he drove back down south, careful not to go above the speed limit but keeping an eye on the time. In back, along with the surfboard, was a rod bag. He parked by the bait shop and shouldered the door open. The old guy behind the counter took in the rod bag and said, 'Seven dollars a pole,' adding, 'You want bait?' Casson said he'd be using a lure. The old guy said, 'Blood is best,' but Casson dropped a five and two ones on the counter and pushed his way through the next door, checking his watch as he went.

At the end of the pier, some thirty yards from the nearest fisherman, he unzipped the rod bag and withdrew the rifle. He ran an oilcloth over it then put it down on the boardwalk while he watched the boats heading out.

Twenty minutes passed before he saw McGuire's boat. He picked up the rifle and rested it on the wooden rail, peering into the telescopic sight. McGuire was standing up at the controls. In Baghdad, Vince had taken a headshot from a sniper, which had broken his neck. The same would happen to McGuire. Casson squeezed the trigger. *Snap.*

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nicholas Royle.