

Gone Fishing

By: IndigoRho

Mayor Damian Sharpe found few things to be quite as relaxing as a good swim. The wide lemon shark had lived his entire life in the small coastal community of Pleasant Harbor, a town known for its beaches, fishing, and quaint festivals. He knew every inch of the shore, every inlet, every swimming hole. He'd been to every shipwreck off the coast and every submerged cave. The people trusted him—they'd elected him in a landslide after all—and he prided himself in being known as a jolly fellow with a heart as big as his belly.

Of course, Mayor Sharpe also had an appetite to match that gut. A *fierce* appetite. An extra serving or two at the buffet wasn't enough to sate the voracious shark, though. He preferred his meals to be filling...and lively. As Sharpe glided through the water that morning he wasn't searching for fish, but people. Tourists, ideally.

Pleasant Harbor was a short ferry ride from the bustling Columbia City, and people visited in droves during the summer. The local populace never noticed when a tourist or two mysteriously disappeared, never wondered why their beloved mayor always looked a little rounder on the weekend, never questioned the occasional scuba tank or pair of swim trunks washing up on shore.

Sharpe merely needed to show restraint and avoid letting his gluttony get too out of hand—otherwise he'd have a repeat of the party boat feast from a few years back. Resting on the harbor bottom digesting five wiggling prey had been fun, but spending a month hitting the gym to shed the suspicious gains sure hadn't been. Today, though, Sharpe was just interested in a quick snack before work.

Soon enough Sharpe set his sights on a little rental row boat isolated from others. A lean otter was sitting inside, a fishing pole in paw and a half dozen beer cans beside him. Sharpe couldn't have hoped for a better meal.

The shark dipped beneath the water and silently swam towards the boat. Upon arriving he carefully grabbed the fishing line and gave it a little tug. Sure enough, the drunk fisherman above was convinced he'd caught something, and hastily tried to reel it in. Sharpe retained his grip, pulling just enough to force the fisherman to stand in order to fight his “catch”. At that point all it took was a hard tug to unbalance him.

With a shout the otter fell overboard, not releasing his hold on the fishing pole until it was far too late. His boat rocked wildly but remained afloat, and no one else was close enough to notice the fisherman had gone under.

Usually Sharpe wouldn't have had much of an advantage in the water against an otter, but his chosen prey was too drunk to put up a challenge. As the otter struggled to paddle to the surface Sharpe dove down before darting upwards, maw opening wide. He managed enough speed to swallow the otter all the way up to his waist in a single gulp, his belly rapidly ballooning outward in the process.

The otter had just reached the surface when he felt his legs enveloped and folded inside something soft and warm. He didn't have a chance to shout in surprise before getting pulled under again.

Sharpe grabbed a hold of the otter's sides and began to reel in his prey, practically scarfing him down with a series of steady swallows. With water rushing into his stomach as well the shark didn't have the luxury of taking his time with the meal. His feedings tended to benefit from haste, though. The doomed fisherman managed to flail a lone paw above the water one more time but nothing more, sinking deeper and deeper into the shark.

Air bubbles disturbed the water's surface for another minute, then ceased. The now empty rowboat drifted at the mercy of the tides, fated to be found and brought in eventually. The pile of discarded beer cans would paint a tale of an unfortunate drunken accident. Just another reckless tourist, no big deal.

At a dock nearby Mayor Sharpe slowly climbed out of the water, his white gut bouncing about. The combination of his natural pudge and the water he'd swallowed made his belly appear smooth, not a single lump visible of his struggling meal. Sharpe lifted his belly up and let it drop, chuckling as he felt the otter spun around within.

"Thank you for choosing Pleasant Harbor for your vacation—and for accepting my offer for permanent residence. I'm sure you'll grow to love it." Sharpe grinned.

As Sharpe dried off he noticed his phone showed a couple missed calls from his secretary, and he redialed the number while rubbing his rubbery gut. "Sorry about that, was taking a quick dip after breakfast. Yes I know I shouldn't be swimming after a meal, but it was just a light snack. No I'm not forgetting any—oh God the press conference is this morning, right!? No, no, no, I won't be late, just give me a minute to get dressed."

The Mayor cursed under his breath as he waddled with haste towards his car. The press conference wasn't much—just a quick statement on safety and some questions—but he was *never* late to them. Sharpe's car groaned as he sat on the passenger's side seat and squeezed into his suit. It had a bit more stretch to it than most suits, but the buttons of the dress shirt and jacket still only just barely closed, leaving visible gaps in between. As soon as he was presentable he slammed the door and drove off towards the harbor, thankfully on a couple minutes away. He'd be cutting it close...

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Sharpe wiped a line of sweat away as he stood behind a podium before a crowd of a couple dozen at best. For the most part his round belly was hidden, the still-fidgeting otter having not made much of a bulge to begin with. The Mayor's weight shifted about so often that he doubted anyone would notice a difference, and if they did they might assume he'd had a particularly large breakfast. Of course they'd be right.

The Mayor cleared his throat. "I'd like to thank you all again for coming to our annual start of summer safety talk. Now let's open things up for questions, safety or otherwise."

"Mr. Mayor, how well do you think the new Seafood Festival will do?"

"I expect it to be a great success! Pleasant Harbor provides an incredible bounty of food—I'm proof of that!" He laughed and gave his gut a teasing pat, the small crowd joining in. "Honestly I'm certain it'll do so well that the surge of tourists who visit it will all be waddling by the time they leave."

Except for the ones who waddle right into my mouth. Sharpe's grin grew wider. The otter wasn't moving around much—likely exhausted from his struggles—but the Mayor was enjoying his presence nonetheless.

Another paw rose. "Mayor Sharpe, what are your thoughts on the rumors going around about missing swimmers and fishermen?"

Sharpe's smile didn't falter for a second. "Over exaggerations, I assure you. It *is* true that accidents occur, but it's definitely not an epidemic. In fact, the safety awareness program I talked about today is meant to help prevent such things."

There were nods of approval amongst the audience, followed by a brief applause.

"Mayor, will you finally be participating in the fishing competition this year?"

"Oh goodness no, I've never had much luck with fishing," Sharpe replied. "I'll leave that to the professio—*urrrrrrp!*"

A soaked watch launched out of Mayor Sharpe's mouth as he belched, fortunately landing right beside him. He quickly slid it under the podium with his shoe. "Sorry about that, guess breakfast is disagreeing with me!"

The Mayor held his belly in both hands as he laughed, again getting the crowd to join him. If anyone had seen the watch they made no comment on it.

"Alright, I'm afraid I've got a bit of a busy day ahead of me so we'll have to call things here,"

Sharpe said. "Thanks for coming and have a wonderful day!"

As the crowd dispersed Mayor Sharpe had a brief chat with his secretary before waddling back to his car. He squeezed back in and shut the door, his bulging belly practically filling the driver's side. The otter had finally stopped moving, messy *glrrrgles* and *glorrrps* echoing out from the shark's gut. Sharpe gleefully rubbed and massaged his middle, letting out a series of massive belches that rattled the whole car. He had a feeling that summer was going to be *particularly* fattening...