

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 20 – Government House

“Jannsen’s Hospital was ablaze. Really it was named the ‘Glenister Hospital – Jannsen,’ after the medical insurance company who’d financed building it. Not that the local population cared. To them, it was the Jannsen Hospital, the place to go if anything was bleeding or really painful.”

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Stacey Tuttle was quite happy to settle back into a seat and let the special operations team run the show. Being in the back of the APC, she’d begun to notice communications with the navy people were becoming less reliable. It made sense from what she’d been told. Geological events caused the comms difficulties and they agitated the creatures. So, the earthquakes and eruptions made the monsters go crazy, at the same time as they made it hard to coordinate defences.....Perfect, fucking perfect. The big worry was that talking to The Sheffield, was now fairly difficult. That would make it impossible to arrange a pick up when they wanted to leave, an extraction as Corporal Reiser referred to it.

“Fire again, always fire with these things.” Knowles said. “How do monsters manage to set stuff alight ?”

“They knock things over and break stuff Knowles.” Said Reiser. “Sometimes hot stuff and power cables.”

Stacey had asked for first names, but Reiser and Knowles were old school, surnames only. Government House was a typical colonial, stone-built building. The governor sent by Britain had probably lived there, until The Donder Isles had changed from a colony of the empire, into a protectorate. A large building, she’d been told it was now offices for the local government workers. Flames were visible in a few broken windows and there were the almost inevitable bodies, on the steps leading up to the open doors.

“Alright, we’re not here to go monster hunting.” Said Reiser. “We rescue who we can, this is now a search and recovery mission. Only the living, we’re not bagging up the dead.”

No one looked shocked. Like her, they’d heard one side of the distorted and garbled conversation between Reiser and Ted Sangster in the other APC. They’d seen something at Rum Runners, something that seemed to scare even the battle-hardened special ops team. No more monster hunting, they were now picking up survivors, before getting the hell out of Jannsen. Easy said, considering they hadn’t heard from Sangster again, or the navy. Stacey knew they were in for a fight, when the turret gun began firing, before the rear doors of the APC, were fully open.

“Cover each other, no heroics.” Yelled Reiser. “Watch for survivors....Check your targets.”

The APC had floodlights, which the man in the turret was aiming at Government House. The creatures running from the building seemed drawn by the lights. They weren’t coming to fight the soldiers, the small ones seemed to be mindless beasts. They were probably hungry and saw the soldiers as nothing more than food.

“You should stay in the APC, miss.” Said Knowles.

“I’ll be fine. I can’t move that fast, but my gun will be needed.”

The soldiers had special ammunition of some kind; they were killing the creatures. It seemed to take a lot of bullets though. A war of attrition to see whether the soldiers could destroy the beasts,

before running out of ammunition. Stacey felt a need to show them that the half-crippled FBI lady wasn't just a passenger in the APC. The gun seemed heavier every time she lifted it, though she managed to keep a steady aim. The noise it made grabbed a lot of attention, before the creature she'd fired at, seemed to blow apart. There was a brief thump noise, as its bodily fluids, combined with quite a bit of yellow goo, covered a few yards of ground. What was left of it, fell over and appeared to crumble to dust.

"Jeeezzzz." Said Knowles.

"Wow, it seems better every time I fire it." She said.

She might have been getting better with it of course. Though she thought it more likely that the smart bullets it fired were learning. Could they really do that ? She had no idea.

There were newer buildings near Government House, offices for various public bodies. One was the main, and only, post office on Janssen, with the sorting office in the same building. Stacey was sure she'd seen a face in a ground floor window. She hadn't imagined it; they were waving at her. Difficult to see any details, but it looked like a man. The soldiers were doing quite well, the turret gun on the APC was creating a lot of dead beasts. Stacey grabbed Knowles by the arm.

"Please, come with me." She said. "I saw a man waving at me from the post office building."

She thought he was going to say no, he'd begun to pull away from her. Maybe her gun had impressed him, or he'd decided she'd know a waving man in a window when she saw one. Whatever the reason, he followed her across the road and through the splintered remains of a set of double doors. 'Janssen Post Office,' it said on a sign above the wreckage of the doors. Definitely a building from the colonial years, there was a framed picture of Queen Elizabeth II, hanging in the entrance lobby. A picture from when she'd been quite young, maybe just after her coronation.

"Alright, we're here.....Where now ?" Asked Knowles.

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Mark didn't realise he'd never given Aly breakfast, or even coffee, until he saw her attack a bacon sandwich in the dining room onboard Grimm's freighter, The Daphne. He'd been running on a dazed kind of autopilot since electrocuting his father. There had been some covering up of what had occurred. He remembered setting the switches back to the main JELCO supply. No one had come running after he'd killed his dad, even the cook seemed unaware anything was wrong. His father wasn't popular, his own house staff rarely sought his company. It might be hours until anyone found the dead body of Neus Coulier. By then it would just look like a terrible accident, if anyone ever did find him. They'd seen some terrible things on the way to The Daphne, on Aly's motorbike. For the first time, he began to consider that Janssen might be finished.

"Sorry, you must be starving." He said.

Aly smiled at him, with a mouthful of food. She simply put her hand up and gave him the thumbs up sign. The food was good, mainly because they both hadn't eaten that morning. Even a plain bread roll with bacon in it, tasted like the best breakfast he'd ever eaten. Ilaria had told him about the waiting freighter and the password megafauna. She seemed to tell him out of gratitude, after he'd helped her out with a few things.

"Can I get you anything else ?" Asked Dylan.

"More coffee, leave the jug." Said Aly.

"What she just said." Added Mark.

Dylan seemed to be the onboard cook, though he carried a gun in a holster. They'd seen about a dozen members of the ship's crew and all had been armed. Serious weapons, assault rifles on straps over their shoulders. They appeared to be expecting serious trouble. For a freighter the ship had

some impressive weapons too, there were the kind of heavy turret guns he'd only seen on visiting British navy ships.

"So, you guys were hired by SHP?" He asked.

Dylan just smiled at him, his usual response to any non-food related questions. Actually, the weather seemed to be on his list of subjects he could discuss. He'd already mentioned it was going to be a hot dry day on Jannsen, with a chance of rain in the evening.

"Forty degrees and ninety percent humidity. Not a good day for fighting monsters."

The fact that he'd seen a forecast somewhere, meant The Daphne had better contact with the outside world, than just about anyone else. Oscar Grimm entered the ship's dining room and sat across the table from them.

"I hope neither of you is thinking of leaving the ship?" He asked. "Things are bad out there, far worse than you might think. We heard the navy frigate has been attacked, The Sheffield."

"I'm not budging an inch.....The things we saw." Said Aly. "When do we leave Jannsen?"

"Not until the last possible moment." Said Grimm. "A few of the SHP film crew are here, but many are still somewhere out there....With the creatures."

Even Grimm sounded a little scared and Ilaria had said he was ex-CIA, a real hard case. Mark didn't know the total population of Jannsen, no one really did. Figures were given out by the local government, but no one really knew, there hadn't been a full census since the nineteen seventies. There were the locals and summer residents. The navy were there of course and quite a few civilian construction workers. Add on the die-hard tourists renting villas no matter what the news might say, and there were likely to be two, maybe three thousand people on Jannsen, say three and a bit thousand, tops. Aly and he must have seen at least two hundred half eaten bodies on the streets of Tilburg, on the way from his house. Then there were the deaths at the Chavez chapel. How long until the population was effectively, nil?

"I have to go back." Said Mark. "I promised the navy and the FBI, that I'd be there if they needed me and.....I think they need me."

"Don't talk shit, you've only got one hand." Said Dylan.

"A little respect for our guest, Dylan." Said Grimm.

"I'll manage.....Some way, I'll manage." Said Mark.

"You won't Mark, you'll end up in a drainage ditch, half eaten." Said Grimm. "To be honest, I'm concerned about Sam and his people. The villa was overrun and most will have gone to Bredon House. They aren't going to survive long there. I have a Jeep, two actually, but one needs to be left here, just in case it's needed. We could take the spare Jeep and run by the villa first, then Bredon House. I'd appreciate someone with me who's good in a fight....Are you with me Mark?"

"Oh yes, I'm with you."

"Good, finish your breakfast and we'll leave. The Jeep won't hold many, but I think we could cram half a dozen into the back, at a pinch."

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Bill Carr smelt the sulphur in the air as the APC headed towards Jannsen's only hospital. Brimstone the ancients called it, the odour of hell. Everyone in the APC had to be able to smell it. They were all intelligent people who knew the smell was from volcanic activity, but despite that.....Some of the soldiers were looking nervous. They'd passed one fissure in the ground, that has been spewing out flames and acrid smelling smoke.

"It's all happening so fast." Said Ted Sangster. "We'll look for survivors at the hospital, then head back to Tilburg."

“Tilburg was a ruin when we left Rum Runners.” Said Travis.

“I know, but we have to try.” Said Ted. “We’ll look for survivors and then head to the dockyard. According to London, there’s a civilian freighter waiting there to evacuate the film people.”

That started a flurry of questions, which Ted ignored. It was left to Sam and Nicki to fill in the gaps about The Daphne and the part it might play in getting everyone the hell off of Janssen. The soldiers looked a lot less nervous now they knew there was an exit route, a way out of the hell around them. Ted had been right, things were changing, very quickly. Every building they saw seemed to be on fire, even the creatures running through the fields looked scared. Still hungry and dangerous, but even they seemed to sense that something truly apocalyptic was going to happen.

“Crap.....No one can be alive in there.” Said Nicki.

“We need to try.” Said Ted. “There’s a residential building at the back, for their staff. We’ll start there.”

Janssen’s Hospital was ablaze. Really it was named the ‘Glenister Hospital – Janssen,’ after the medical insurance company who’d financed building it. Not that the local population cared. To them, it was the Janssen Hospital, the place to go if anything was bleeding or really painful. The clever front doors that opened when you walked up to them, were just bent pieces of plastic, busted glass and chrome.

“I’m coming, I’ve got a decent assault rifle.” Said Sam.

“Me too.....I’m coming.” Said Nicki.

“Fine, just don’t get killed.....London will have my teeth for cufflinks.” Said Ted.

“I’ll go with them, through the front.” Said Bill. “While your army guys go to the residence.”

“Fine, come on.....Let’s get it done.” Said Ted.

Bill grabbed his guaranteed monster killing weapon and noticed the counter was on twenty five rounds. He had another bag of rounds in the APC, maybe another twenty or so. It sounded a lot, but he had used thirty rounds fighting the creatures at the chapel. It was a heavy weapon and hard to aim. Sadly, not every round hit a target.

“I was just thinking.....Does anyone know if Michael Chavez made it ?” Bill asked.

“No, he died of his injuries on the British Frigate.” Said Travis.

Bill hadn’t been that keen on Chavez, that kind of religious fervour could end up being a problem. Still, he had hoped the boat repairer turned holy man, would survive. They all piled out of the back of the APC, leaving just one man to use the turret gun. Bill led Sam and Nicki towards what remained of the hospital’s front door.

“I can feel the heat from here.” Said Nicki.

The area to the right of the doors was where Bill had spoken to Stacey. It was all well ablaze, but from what he could remember there were just storerooms in that part of the building. He knew there were specific and very nasty hazards in hospitals, like oxygen cylinders.

“We’ll go to the left.” He said. “No being quiet, yell like fuck.”

They did and he did too. They shouted that the army had arrived to take survivors to a place of safety. They shouted and yelled enough to waken the dead, yet no one responded. Only the sound of Sam firing, told him something else had answered all the yelling. It was a tough looking creature, its skin more grey than the usual yellowish green. It seemed to have claws on hands too, though there wasn’t time to look at it for long.

“Move over.....Get out of the way.” Bill yelled.

He pushed past Nicki and fired the heavy weapon, that fired heavy metal bullets at unimaginable speed. When the creature didn’t instantly die, he fired again. Bill knew the second shot had done the

trick, when the beast's body appeared to erupt towards its rear. A lot of nasty looking fluid poured out, before the monster hit the ground. It was still moving its front legs, though that might have been just reflexes. He'd hit a cockroach with a heavy book once, and its legs had kept wiggling about for nearly an hour.

"Wow, that gets the job done." Said Sam.

"It really does, but I've got to conserve ammunition.....Or get better at aiming it."

Bill had a nagging suspicion that in all the general panic and excitement, he'd missed with the first shot. When the answering voice came to all their shouting, he almost disbelieved his ears and ignored it. Even Nicki seemed unsure.

"That.....It's a woman shouting.....Isn't it ?" She asked.

"It definitely is.....This way." Said Sam.

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The post office building was newer than government house, but it still looked like something from Janssen's colonial past. Lots of stone walls that looked different outside, than they did inside. Stacey had seen a man waving in a window on the ground floor, but which window ? With modern partition walls and heavy hardwood furniture, it all looked so different as she opened an office door and went inside.

"Here, I'm sure the window must be in this room." She said.

Not just Knowles with her, another soldier had joined them. Maybe they'd been told to make sure she didn't get herself killed. The man wearing a smart shirt and tie, was crouched under a desk.

Tailored shorts too and he was wearing a pair of expensive looking black brogues.

"It's alright, we're here to get you to safety." Said Knowles.

The man didn't seem that keen to leave his hiding place, despite him being the one to wave at her.

"We have an APC, a modern one." She said. "Nothing can get at you in there. I'm Stacey by the way, special agent Stacey Tuttle with the FBI. And you are ?"

He came out from under the desk and his Bermuda shorts looked a bit strange in what was effectively a war zone. Her mind wandered for a moment and she wondered if they were only Bermuda shorts in Bermuda. Maybe smart tailored shorts on Janssen, were Janssen shorts. He offered his hand and she shook it.

"I'm councillor Hardy, Stuart Hardy. I took refuge here when those things broke into Government House. They started killing everyone.....I saw them eating people I've worked with for years. It was.....I just keep seeing it in my mind....."

"You're alright now, Stuart." She said. "Have you seen anyone else in here ? Anyone alive ?"

"No.....Everyone is dead....They killed everyone."

"We should get him to safety." Said Knowles.

She liked Knowles, he was obviously good at his job and brave as a lion. When he talked though, he often seemed to be repeating everything he'd been told at a mission briefing. Stacey knew the type; she'd seen dozens of them in the FBI.

"You two can stay with the councillor if you like." She said. "I'm going to have a quick look in the other offices. Just the ground floor.....Then we can leave."

Knowles had a way of hesitating when she asked him to do something, which she chose not to take personally. He was just weighing up if she might get him killed, which was fine. As long as he ended up doing as she'd asked.

"We'll all come with you." Said Knowles. "If the APC sounds the warning siren though.....We're leaving."

“Fair enough.” She said.

Councillor Hardy had obviously decided to stay with the people who had guns and an APC outside. He followed them without saying a word. The lighting was just the emergency lighting, which barely gave enough light to avoid bumping into furniture. All the office doors were open and even with the crap lighting, it was easy to see they were empty.

“The door at the end leads to the sorting office.” Said the councillor.

It was a different world beyond the door, they were back in the fifties, maybe the eighteen fifties. No modern sorting machinery, everything was obviously being done by hand. Five or six desks in front of rows of pigeon holes, some still containing letters and packets. There seemed to be quite a lot of mail that was never going to reach who it had been intended for.

“Wow, this place is out of the ark.” Said Knowles.

The councillor started going on about costs and how the post office made a loss every year, as though he was running a campaign. Stacey might not have seen the wounded woman, if she hadn't been looking at the pigeon holes for anything addressed to her. The bureau claimed to have sent her several pieces of mail, that had never arrived.

“Over here, behind the desk.” She said.

“She's not moving.” Said the councillor.

A few lumps had been bitten out of her arms, but the woman was still breathing. She even moaned as Stacey examined her wounds. There was a lot of blood on the tiled floor, it was a miracle the woman was alive.

“She's alive, though only just.” Said Stacey. “Do you have any medical supplies ?”

“Back in the APC.....I'll go back for a medical kit.” Said Knowles.

The APC chose that moment to sound the siren. It was leaving and if they didn't run, it might not wait for them. Just standing up after examining the woman was painful.

“You two have to carry her.” She told the two soldiers. “She's still alive, so we're not going without her.”

They carried the woman, while Stacey tried to cover everyone with her efficient monster killing gun. Outside it was pandemonium, she could see why the siren had been sounded. At least two dead soldiers not far from the APC and both looked to have been torn apart. Stacey fired her gun three times, killing one of the creatures with each shot. There were so many of them though, far too many to kill them all. She followed Knowles into the APC and it drove off. No one had given any orders, the driver was just driving, anywhere to get away from the carnage.

“Who did we lose ?” Asked Knowles.

“Lee and Richards.” Someone answered. “We've another four with bad bites, but they'll live. We found two office workers alive, but they might not make it.”

No spare seats, so Stacey sat on the floor and pressed her back up against the wall. She was still in pain, though not as bad as when she'd been standing up. Others would look after the woman she'd found, soldiers experienced at treating wounds. There was a new smell in the APC, to compete with the ever-present smell of sulphur. It was the coppery smell that got into the back of her throat, the smell of fresh blood.

“Where are we going ?” Someone asked.

“The dockyard, the navy said get to the dockyard for a pickup.” Said Knowles.

“That was a few hours ago.” Someone muttered.

“Anyone got anywhere better to go ?” Asked Knowles.

No one had, so it seemed they were heading towards Janssen's dockyard. Stacey was beginning to accept that they were in trouble, but not as much as some. They had an APC in good working order and some pretty decent weapons. If the pickup was a no show, they could try somewhere else. As far as she knew there were still two aircraft at the landing strip, if anyone was brave enough, or stupid enough, to try and get them off the ground.

"I know her." Said the councillor. "Now she's cleaned up a bit and under a decent light."

He was looking at the woman they'd carried out of the post office. Against all the odds, she was opening her eyes and looking around. It really did look like she might live to see the next piece of mayhem on Janssen.

"Who is she?" Stacey asked.

"Debbie, Debbie Hindle."

The name meant nothing to Stacey, yet there was a slight inkling somewhere in her brain. The name had cropped up before in connection with SHP's new local PA, Kate Russo. Not that Stacey had seen Kate in a while. She was the sort who survived anything though, even an apocalypse.

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"I'm sorry, nothing looks familiar." Said Vince. "I think we're in the wrong place."

"We're not where we got in before, Vince." Said Paris. "This is the way we came out."

Kate Russo had become used to their strange double act. Even if it sounded like they were constantly lost, they always seemed to get where they wanted to go. Vince was clever in his own way, everyone at the villa realised that, after a while. As for Paris.....Paris was someone to have on your side if the world was about to end, which might be any time soon.

"Here....I told you." Said Paris.

As if to prove the point, she and her flashlight vanished behind a bush. Vince followed her and Kate followed Vince. All three of them were in a narrow, damp and bad smelling passageway in the rocks. Paris looked pleased, but to Kate at least, it didn't seem to be anywhere to get excited about. Long worms were everywhere she aimed her flashlight. Long wriggling worms, that covered the walls.

"Oh.....If you hadn't mentioned gold." She muttered. "I'd be tempted to head for the docks."

"Come on Kate, think of what your share can buy." Said Paris.

"Are these worms everywhere." She asked.

"There are no worms where the gold is kept." Said Vince.

"Lead on then Vince, lead on." Said Kate.

He did and he took them through a passage where the water came up above her ankles. There were things in the water, Paris had warned her about that. As they entered a drier part of the cave system, there was a few minutes of removing bugs and worms from their ankles and lower legs.

"How many millions in gold are we talking about?" Asked Kate.

"Enough to make all.....This, seem worth it." Said Paris.

"My mum will need some to put food on the table." Muttered Vince.

"She'll get more than that Vince, much more." Said Paris. "We'll pick up June on the way to the docks."

Kate didn't remember being told about a diversion to pick anyone up, but after the water, the worms and the awful smells.....Picking up Vince's mum didn't seem to be anything to complain about. When Vince stopped in the middle of a passage, she wondered why, until she saw the glint of gold.

"That is....." She began.

"Awesome, amazing.....Wonderful." Said Vince. "Paris has been working on my vocabulary."

Paris had been right, there was no way the three of them could have carried all of Jack's treasure out of the cave. It would have taken a proper crew, with the right equipment and trucks. Even then, and provided the creatures didn't eat anyone, several weeks to remove it all from where it was. Jack must have spent years gradually shifting it from the wrecked Spanish galleon. There it all was, most of it consisted of gold coins in bags. Paris had obviously been pondering on getting her share of Jack's hoard for a while.

"Alright, I think we can do two trips back to the vehicles, before getting fed up with the caves and the worms." Said Paris. "Plus, we need to minimise the risk of running into one of the creatures. A ring on each finger is fine and a necklace of course. That alone will pay the daily cost of living for a few decades."

"Wow, I just realised it's going to happen." Said Kate. "I'm going to be fucking rich."

"Fucking rich." Echoed Vince.

"Jack obviously re-bagged the coins, some of the bags are still quite solid. Grab the best-looking bag you can find and pour out coins until you feel comfortable carrying the weight. Just remember that a pound of gold is worth about twenty five thousand dollars or thereabout. As the average human carry weight is about thirty, to thirty five pounds.....I'll let you do the maths."

"You've obviously been thinking about this.....A lot." Said Kate.

"Oh, I have.....Every waking moment some days. Two trips to the vehicles could see us with two million dollars each. No tax, no bother....I even have a contact I'd trust to buy it from us."

"We could make three trips." Said Kate.

"And we'd get tired and careless." Said Paris. "We might even decide to forget about June and do a fourth trip. The car might not be up to all that weight and we'd end up fighting our way to the boat, with fuck-all in our pockets. No, we do two trips and get the hell off this island.....Agreed?"

"Yeah, it makes sense....I agree." Said Kate.

"We have to go for my mum." Said Vince.

"Don't worry, we will." Said Paris.

Kate found a bag of gold with a solid looking bag and poured coins out onto the floor, until she could just about pick it up. She didn't need the look from Paris, to tell her she'd never be able to carry the bag all the way to her car. It hurt, it really hurt, but she poured at least twenty more pounds of gold coins onto the grubby cave floor. There was now enough spare cloth for her to gather the top of the bag together and tie a knot in it.

"Well done Kate." Said Paris.

When all three of them had a gold ring on every finger, two on some and necklaces, they picked up their bags of gold coins and began the long walk back to the vehicles. The water full of worms tested her resolve not to put her bag down. She even ignored the feeling of worms crawling over her shins. Kate hoped the wriggling feeling on her thighs, was just her imagination. No sign of any creatures and her Nissan looked undisturbed. Kate did find herself trembling though, as she thought of doing the walk all over again.

"You were right, Paris." She said. "Two trips will be enough."

It helped to think that she now had a tax free million dollars in her humble hatchback. They were quickly in the wet, worm-infested tunnels again. Kate began to think the wriggling feeling on her thighs, might not be her imagination after all. She was so close to shrieking, demanding a few minutes to get the damn worms out of her clothes. Then she heard the sound of heavy footsteps in the passageway they were about to enter.

"Turn your flashlights off." Hissed Paris.

Fuck, in the water and in the dark. Kate held her hand over her mouth to stop any chance she might scream. She heard the creature run past, less than six feet away. She smelled the dreadful smell the beasts had. A mixture of mould and rotting meat. It had to have been a good ten minutes after it had gone, before Paris turned on her flashlight.

“Good, that’s how we do it.” Said Paris. “Sneak in and sneak out again. Make sure none of those things ever sees us.”

“We’re still going in there ?” Asked Kate.

“We’ll be alright.” Said Vince.

“Think of it as.....Therapy.” Added Paris. “I guarantee that when you’re a rich retired lady, living in Miami. You’ll never be afraid of the dark again.”

“Chicago....I want to retire to Chicago.” Said Kate. “Come on then, lets grab another million each.”

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Daryll too, had been caught out by how fast things on Janssen were changing. He had a family, two aunts and at least three cousins on Janssen. All of them should have come before strangers. He’d thought there’d be time to look for anyone in Rum Runners who might need help, before going to help his kin. Even being in that part of Tilburg meant heading away from his own home, but he’d just had a bad feeling about Rum Runners. His long-departed mother had talked about him being a little psychic, though others simply said he had a nose for trouble. It was that nose for trouble, that had him looking around the inside of the still burning ruins, that had once been the best bar and restaurant in The Donder Isles.

“What the hell happened to this place ?” He muttered.

It looked like there had been an explosion, or maybe a local earthquake, if there were such things. Not one single wall of Rum Runners was intact. Most of the rubble he was having to trample over, was what was left of the upper floor, combined with roof beams. Daryll used a large axe he always had in his truck, to hack his way into what had been a storeroom. He also had a shotgun on a strap over his should, though so far, he hadn’t had cause to use it.

“Hello !” He yelled. “Shout out if you need help.”

“Here.....Here.....Don’t let the fire get to me.”

A woman’s voice and she sounded scared. Not that he blamed her, fire scared the crap out of him too. It was also a female voice he was sure he knew.

“Ilaria.....Is that you ?” He shouted.

“Of course it is Daryll.....Stop fucking about and dig me out of here.”

Daryll was big, really big. Strong too and he’d seemed to have been born a natural at football. His high school team had won a lot of championships. So of course, by the usual weird way fate behaved, he’d ended up running a business that hired out tourist bikes. Using the axe and brute force, he cleared the rubble enough, to drag a dusty Ilaria out of the debris. She hugged him, which was nice. His bike hire clients were sometimes nice people, but none of them had ever hugged him. “Thank you Daryll.” Said Ilaria. “I heard the army guys, but they didn’t hang about for long. I don’t think they heard me yelling.”

“Glad you’re alright. This place looks like something stamped on it a few times.” He said.

“I have no idea what happened....I just heard a lot of noise. Luckily the fire never headed my way, but I felt the heat.....Oh yes, I felt the heat.”

She looked awful, there was a gash in her cheek that might need stitches. She was alert and standing though, which meant she could get in his truck. Checking her over for injuries could wait until later.

“Was anyone trapped with you ?” He asked.

“No, I was in there alone.”

“Come on, we should get out of here.” He said. “Are you armed ?”

“I was, but I lost the assault rifle somewhere.”

His pump action shotgun didn’t have special ammunition, but it was all he had. Daryll handed it to her.

“Take this, you might need it.” He said. “I’m going to get my family. Then....Well, then I have no idea where to go. I was thinking of seeing if there are any boats moored at the eastern jetty.”

“There’s a boat waiting at the docks, an armed freighter.” Said Ilaria. “I know the password, so they’ll take us.”

“Well..... That sounds better than winging it. We’re going to my house first.”

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