

## Outerbridge Sound

### Chapter 6 – Rosie Landry

**“There was plenty of space in the hotel car park, there always was. Even the imminent arrival of half the world’s news media wouldn’t change that.”**

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Paris was doing the job she’d arrived to do, though she knew that wasn’t likely to last. With Rosie Landry coming out of the trees screaming and covered in blood, everything had changed. She’d live, most of the blood had probably been from her brother Luke. Eight year old Rosie had been found by her parents and she’d been shouting about a monster killing her brother. The general population can be strangely relaxed when it comes to missing adults, but if it’s a kid the temperature of the story can quickly hit boiling point. Sam was talking about doing a news piece for SHP, with her as the face and voice. He wasn’t even worried that her bruises hadn’t fully healed.

“It’ll add authenticity.” He’d told her. “We need to get our news piece out there, before the big boys of main stream media arrive. Talk to Jeffrey about the script, we need something to go out tonight.” There were rumours that CNN were on the way, and Fox News. Good luck to them with that, they were probably only just realising there was no proper airport on Janssen. No one got there in less than two days and only then, if they could afford to hire their own aircraft. Paris was sat at a table next to the pool, going through the first, and very rough, draft of the news piece with Jeffrey.

“.....After my own encounter with the monster of Outerbridge Sound, I can appreciate how terrified a young child must have been. Just eight years old and witnessing her twin brother being dragged away by some nameless horror. Poor Rosie Landry.....”

She stopped reading and looked straight at Jeffrey Gravenor.

“I know you’ve written a lot for TV Jeffrey.”

“Alright, what don’t you like about it ?”

“It feels a bit over the top, like one of those sites on the net where everyone thinks aliens are real and Elvis is still alive and runs a supermarket in Burnley.”

“Perfect, just the style I was going for.” Said Jeffrey. “Trust me, the public will lap it all up, especially if Ilaria can get a few pictures of Rosie to go with it.”

“Yes, but it’s a kid Jeffrey.”

“And that will make the TV series a winner my dear Paris. I thought you were tougher than this.”

“Oh, I used to be.”

Sam had warned her that a lot of people in the industry thought Jeffrey was a bit of a jerk. Actually, it was said less as a warning and more of a ‘this the consensus, make your own mind up,’ kind of way. Jeffrey could be very sarcastic in a smart-arse way and he carried on doing it, despite a lot of people probably dreaming of punching him on the nose. Paris didn’t like him, but she could see a potential for him to be likeable. She was a reconstructed person herself, six months free from using cruel sarcasm and bitchy remarks. Paris had often thought there should be tokens given out, as they were for being six months sober. If they weren’t eaten by some denizen of the deep, she’d decided to turn Jeffrey into a witty sarcastic person. Oscar Wilde may have had his detractors, but if he could pull off witty and amusing sarcasm, so could Jeffrey.

“I heard the American cops are coming to talk to Vince.” Said Jeffrey.

"Nicki seems plugged into the local gossip. She told me the FBI are on the way, something to do with a cross border crime committed overseas. I've no idea on how their rules work, but the FBI are on the way."

"Oh dear, poor Vince."

"Yes, they might ask to extradite him if he looks to have committed an offense."

"Which we all know he has." Said Jeffrey. "Do you think Sam will hand over a copy of the filmed interview?"

"Not sure, I've never worked with him before. I hope he doesn't."

"So do I, the poor kid could end up in prison.....Anyway, please read the script again. I can see where I could make it even more over the top and sensational."

He was grinning at her and for a fleeting second, she actually liked him. Yes, she was definitely going to make reconstructing Jeffrey her new project.

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Ilaria D'Andrea had dreamt of getting out of the Humvee and into a new SUV with really good aircon and comfy suspension. Now it had happened, she yearned to be back in the elderly military vehicle. It had handled the bad roads better and her occasional bit of off roading. Plus, people got out of the way of the Humvee when they saw it coming.

"Do you think we'll get a chance to record an interview with Rosie?" Asked Emily Hansen.

"Sam said we need to pester them until they agree." Said Ilaria. "Her parents can name their own price.....We have to get an interview with Rosie."

"You can't offer cash to people who just lost a kid." Said Dom.

"A missing kid to be exact Dom." Said Ilaria.

Dom was in the back, supposedly her moral support. She'd have used her bike to get them to the one and only decent hotel on Jannsen, if Sam hadn't insisted she took Emily with them.

"I need her up to speed quickly." He'd told her. "Emily needs to acclimatise in a way, the way they do with athletes at the Olympics. Take her with you, let her get a feel for the place."

It made no sense at all, but although Sam wasn't always right, he was always the boss. So, Emily was with them on a very morally questionable trip to get an eight year old on camera. Some girls were daddy's girls and some weren't. Besides being there for moral support, Dom was also there in case the Landry's girl responded better to him than to her.

"Do we know anything about the parents?" Asked Emily.

"Their cruise ship has left Jannsen, so they're staying at the hotel while the search for their son continues." Said Ilaria. "The local government are picking up the hotel bill. As for the Landry family.....They're from Louisiana and not exactly poor, but not awash with cash either. I don't like to do it, but good old-fashioned bribery might get us an interview with Rosie."

"I still don't like the idea." Said Dom.

"Neither do I Dom, neither do I." She said. "We'll only get one chance though. The news media heavyweights could be here by tomorrow, bringing their bulging chequebooks with them. Then it will all become a circus and we'll never get anywhere near Rosie."

"If it goes wrong though.....The press will crucify us." Said Emily.

"So.....We mustn't get it wrong."

There was plenty of space in the hotel car park, there always was. Even the imminent arrival of half the world's news media wouldn't change that. Like it or not they'd have to obey the rules and either hire tourist bikes or walk everywhere.

“They’re in room twelve.” Said Ilaria. “No huge smiles, but remember their boy is missing and we’re sure he’ll turn up. Got that Dom ?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry.....Mea culpa.” Said Dom.

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Gary Brown had been given one of the Humvees, rather than a new SUV. It made sense, he had a lot of equipment to cart around and he was likely to go off road more than most of the SHP film crew. He didn’t mind, the aircon in the military vehicle was adequate and it meant not having to worry about getting around bushes. He just kept going straight and flattened them.

“Crap boss ! That one was a small tree.” Said Simon.

“Filming dates have moved; we don’t have time to piss about.”

Simon was still officially a casual, hired through an agency. Gary liked the guy and would make sure he got a credit on the TV series. Everyone referred to him as Gary’s cable runner, though he’d probably be a lighting assistant on the credits.

“We just have to watch for the ditch Ilaria mentioned.” Said Gary. “This old beast is good, but it won’t get over a deep drainage ditch.”

Gary had been told the Janssen Regiment wanted their vehicles bank. Nicki had sweet talked them though, one of their top guys. In the end it had been agreed that SHP would keep the Humvees for the duration of the filming. In return the Regiment were going to be mentioned in the show, quite a few times.

“There.....That must be the track we were told about.” Said Simon.

The tourist bike guy had managed to get his truck into the orchard, so there had to be a track they could use. If a local could get a flat bed truck in there, Gary was confident they could get there. When there were too many trees to get around or knock flat, Gary stopped and couldn’t quite believe his luck.

“There it is, the banana palm the tourist hit on her bike.” He said.

“Do we need anything out of the back ?”

“Not yet, let’s have a look first.”

Gary liked the trees; they took out the glare of the sunshine and left everything in dappled shadows. It was perfect for the lighting he intended to use. Outside shoots were always a problem, they could easily look like holiday films. Screening out the real sunshine and faking it, produced better results. Gary was a master at producing sunny day conditions that looked better than the real thing. Paris would love it; he’d worked with her before. She loved dappled shadows, with just the right lighting for those all-important close ups.

“Just about perfect.” Said Gary. “We’ll run out a few cables and light the palm the bike hit. Run out the portable generator as far as you can.....That way. See if you can tuck it behind something.”

“Ok boss.” Said Simon.

They only had the worst camera SHP possessed, but it was good enough to test lighting layouts. Gary put it on a tripod and aimed at the wrecked banana palm.

“Damn thing.....Bloody camera still judders.” He muttered.

The portable generator had to be some distance away, or the sound could be a nuisance. Gary had expected Simon to take a while, running the cables and finding a spot to put it. He had the scene setup as well as he could and yet, there was still no sign of Simon.

“Hey, are you taking a dump ?” He shouted.

No power, definitely no power, the lights refused to come on. By the time Simon ran towards him out of the trees, Gary was feeling irritated.

"I need power Simon. I have other places to look at today."

Simon was pointing and if Gary had known the area better, he'd have known he'd sent his cable runner in the direction of Outerbridge Sound.

"You need to see this." Said Simon. "We need to call the police."

"There are no phones out here.....Show me what's so important."

Simon was agitated, which was rare. As he got closer, there was the definite smell of vomit and traces of it on Simon's shirt.

"Sorry Simon, are you alright?"

"It's just.....I can't.....Just come with me."

It was rough terrain on the other side of the orchard, as though no one had tended the ground for years, maybe decades. It took them a while to get to the portable generator, which was on its side. Gary instinctively put it the right way up, before looking at where Simon was pointing.

"I can't look again.....It's a kid, he was just a fucking kid."

It wasn't far, Simon must have seen the child's size white T shirt while he'd been carrying the generator. Just a plain white T shirt in amongst the disturbed weeds. Something had happened there and unless Janssen had lots of missing kids, it had happened to young Luke Landry.

"Christ....No wonder he puked." Gary muttered.

At first it had looked like puppy kibble on the T shirt, on it and around it. The raw kind of kibble that some of his friends fed their dogs. Nothing recognisable, though something about the small pieces of skin.....It did matter to him, that he was probably looking at the remains of an eight year old.

"We need to call the local cops." Yelled Simon.

"I told you, the phones only work in town. Let me think Simon, give a minute."

The odour from the remains must have been brought his way by the breeze, it suddenly lodged in his nose and the back of his throat. Gary was close to vomiting, but managed to keep his breakfast on the inside.

"Pictures, we'll take pictures and show them to Sam. Then he can make the decision about telling the Janssen cops. There's all sorts going on today, stuff we don't know about. Ilaria was talking about interviewing the Landry girl. If we go into town yelling about this.....It could screw everything up. There's blood leading away, we'll follow it and see where it goes to."

"I'm not taking any pictures." Shouted Simon.

"Then I will....You can walk around me." Said Gary. "Not too far away though, we need to stick together."

It was a glorious sub-tropical day on Janssen, yet Gary was beginning to get nervous. Two dead tourists and finding what was left of the Landry kid. Try as he might, it was hard to concentrate on using his iPhone to take pictures of the gory scene at his feet.

"Oh, Shit Gary.....There's something else over here."

Gary Brown had served his country, though he hadn't done it out of any sense of duty. He'd been young and unemployed at the time and an army apprenticeship had sounded a good idea. Plus, the lady at the Job Centre had leant on him a little, until he'd sent in an application. Several interviews, an aptitude test and a thorough medical later and he was in, signed up for five years. He'd had dreams about serving his time overseas, somewhere exotic. The British army had sent him to Northern Ireland, twice. Gary had left the army with a few bad memories about the things he'd seen, but he'd also left as a qualified electrician. He prided himself on being tough, but he was trembling as he went to look at what Simon had found.

"Don't do that to me again.....It's just a bit of material."

Just a ragged square of orange material, it could have been carried by the wind from anywhere. One thing was certain, it had nothing to do with Luke Landry.

“Sorry.” Said Simon.

“That’s alright.....Come on.”

There was a lot of blood to follow, huge amounts in some places. Gary didn’t know how much blood there was in an eight year old boy, but most of it was forming an easy trail to follow. The bushes and weeds were disturbed too, by whatever had carried off the kid.

“Are we near where Luke was taken ?” Asked Simon.

“I have no idea, maybe. I don’t think we’re far from Outerbridge Sound.”

He’d left the map in the Humvee, not thinking they’d need it. There was a recollection that the infamous sound wasn’t that far away and Nicki had mentioned the flamingo pond being close to the sound.

“Stay close Simon.....We need to stick together.”

The small size sneaker covered in blood took away any uncertainty. Only one shoe, though it had to have once belonged to the boy. No foot inside it, the sneaker had been ripped apart. Simon was finally calm, even taking a few pictures of the bloody shoe. There were a few pieces of tissue and skin near the sneaker, but compared to what they’d already seen....

“Can we go now ?” Asked Simon.

“No....We’ve come this far. Let’s find out where the trail of blood ends.”

The blood and trodden down weeds took them out of the trees and onto a rocky beach of a sorts. The blood ended almost at the water line.

“We’re there aren’t we ? It’s Outerbridge Sound.”

“Yes, it probably is.”

“I’m not joking, we have to call the police when we get back to the villa.” Said Simon.

Gary had seen a lot of things while working on film sets. The actress having a fling with a cameraman, even a makeup girl on one occasion. He’d seen bullying, various minor assaults and quite a bit of theft. He realised the industry was a little weird and there was only one golden rule. No one likes a snitch.

“When I move onto the next job, it’s likely to be for a large movie, a genuine blockbuster. I’ll need a Senior Lighting Engineer and it would look good on your CV. On the other hand, fuck things up for Sam and you could end up being unemployable. You know what I’m saying, don’t you ?”

“That I keep my mouth shut and do as I’m told.”

“Yes, you got it in one. We pack our things up and go back to the villa. We’ll then show Sam the pictures and tell him what we found. He’ll then decide whether to call the cops.”

“Sam might not be there.”

“If he isn’t we tell the science guy, he’s always there. We don’t call the cops though, it’s not our decision to make. Agreed..... Mr Senior Lighting Engineer ?”

“Alright.”

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To Ilaria they’d just been the parents, Rosie’s mum and dad. Bill and Ava Landry were nice, good people was her first thought after meeting them. Honest and hardworking, the kind of people who turned up to their kid’s school sports day and baked a cake for new neighbours. They’d also been through a rough year and a relative, an aunt of Ava’s, had paid for the cruise. Ilaria had hated doing it, but Sam was relying on her. She’d managed to get a face to face with Rosie for a thousand dollar,

far less than Sam had told her she could go to. Bill Landry had gone out for walk, leaving Ava to keep a watchful eye on them and her daughter.

“Nothing to worry about Rosie, we’re here to help you tell your story.” Said Ilaria.

“Just hold up the picture of Luke when they tell you honey.” Said Ava Landry.

Rosie had responded to Dom from the start, definitely a daddy’s girl, probably a bit of a tomboy too. There were eight year old girls, and there were eight year old girls. Some screamed at the sight of a spider, while others brought home baby alligators as pets. Rosie struck Ilaria as belonging to the second kind. Her mum was an emotional mess, but Rosie looked calm and alert.

“Alright.....Camera running.” Said Emily.

Her normal job, the one she’d been hired for, was location scout and little pre-production work. Ilaria actually enjoyed putting together story boards for the shows. Interviewing kids with missing brothers though.....Young Rosie looked calmer than she felt.

“We all know you brother Luke is still missing, can you describe him to us ?”

Rosie held up a picture showing a boy with messy hair and dirt on his cheeks, the public would love it. Ilaria had no idea who the number on the picture would connect people with, the Landrys had arranged that. Showing it had been a condition of getting an interview with Rosie.

“My brother is a bit taller than me....And he’s a bit clumsy. His knees are always scabby from falling over.”

“You must miss him.”

“I do, I miss Luke so much.....I wish he was here.”

“You have a bandage on your arm Rosie. Is that from when you were attacked ?”

“Kind of.....I ran after the creature and got hold of my brother. I tried to pull Luke away, but the.....Thing hit me. I must have hit my head on something. By the time my dad found me, there was no sign of Luke, or the creature. Luke was dead, I’m sure my brother is dead.....”

There were a lot of tears and she noticed Dom kept the camera running. Some of it could be edited in, a girl crying for her brother was brilliant television, or would have been, if it had been fiction rather than the real thing. Ava Landry came over and hugged her child. Ilaria had made a promise to Sam though.

“Just a little longer Rosie.” She said. “Do you think you can manage that ?”

Rosie nodded and her mum went and sat on the hotel bed, her head in her hands.

“I know this must be dreadful for you Rosie.” Said Ilaria. “Can you describe the creature that carried off your brother ?”

“It moved so quickly....Grey and large, much bigger than me. Like a snake, but not really like a snake. Lots of teeth, I kept seeing those teeth as it hurt Luke.”

More tears, but she kept asking her questions. Sam hadn’t given her a list; she hadn’t even rehearsed them in the bathroom mirror. Ilaria just asked what she thought all the parents watching the news would have wanted to know.

“This Thing, this creature.....Did it have legs ?”

“It must have I suppose, but it moved so fast. All I kept seeing were those teeth, lots of sharp teeth.”

“Please describe what Luke was wearing the last time you saw him.”

“A white T shirt and a pair of blue shorts.....Sneakers I think, his favourite.....”

It took poor Rosie a while to describe the few items of clothing her brother had been wearing. At the end of her description, she held up the picture of Luke again, complete with the Louisiana telephone number. Rosie was quietly crying as she held up the picture. The entire world was going to want to give Rosie Landry a big hug. Sam was going to love it, the bastard.

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Sam Hardwick had been in his room with Nicki, it was just about the only private place he had left in the villa. The dinner with the Inquisition was scheduled for that evening and he needed to get a feel for what they might want to know. The meeting with all the key movers and shakers in The Donder Isles had been arranged before the Landry boy had gone missing.

“They have to realise that changes everything Nicki.”

“My brother J is the person to convince. He’s the power behind the throne here, the genuine Premier of Janssen. A complete bastard, though he is logical when it comes to business.”

The thumping on the door came at a bad time, it broke the flow of their conversation. It could have been worse, an hour before they’d been naked on the bed, fucking each other’s brains out. There had been a certain inevitability about them having sex and Sam had learned to never fight against the inevitable. He opened the door to find Gary and an agitated looking Simon.

“Sorry, science guy said you were busy.” Said Gary. “But trust me, you will want to hear about this.”

“We have to contact the Janssen police.” Added Simon.

Sam invited them in, despite still having wet hair from a post sex shower. Nicki looked freshly showered too, but if Gary had noticed, he was too polite to mention it. The story came first, of their unexpected discovery, which sounded about ninety nine percent certain to be the missing boy. The pictures came next, complete with a small movie Gary had taken of the disturbing entrails, or whatever they were. When he’d finished, Sam passed the phone to Nicki.

“Did you show all this to Bryan ?” He asked.

“Who ?” Asked Gary.

“Science guy.” Said Nicki.

“Oh, right.....Yes, he’s seen everything.” Said Gary.

“Go and get him please.” Said Sam. “This is something that obviously needs reporting to the authorities, though only after we’re all on the same page. I don’t like sudden surprises or being made to look a fool....And we need another couple of chairs.”

Coffee to help everyone feel comfortable, Simon went for coffees and returned with coffee and cookies. Store bought, but everyone nibbled at them.

“Alright Bryan.....I take it you’ve seen the pictures of.....Whatever Gary and Simon found ?”

“I have, yes.....Dreadful business. Worse of course, being a kid.”

“So Bryan, is this.....Let’s be brutally honest. Are we looking at the remains of a human child ?”

“The skin fragments are human, though I can only speak from my expertise as a marine biologist. If I had to give an opinion....Yes, the pictures are of human remains, probably from the abdomen of Luke Landry.”

“The T shirt matches the description given by his mother.” Said Nicki.

“There are a lot of plain white T shirts in the world.” Sam said. “I have about four of them.”

“Same here.” Added Gary.

All of them looking at him for guidance, yet he still hadn’t decided what to do. Ilaria was likely to be just finishing an interview with Rosie, a please find my brother piece to camera. Announcing that fucking Gary and Simon had found bits of the kid would kill that story. They’d still be able to use some of it and Twitter would love Rosie Landry. It would still bring a golden story down to being almost dross though. Could he delay calling the police.....Could he even justify it to himself ? Sam actually banged the table as he made up his mind. Poor Ilaria, he’d told her to do whatever it took to get Rosie on camera and now it would all be useless.

"It would seem fairly certain that Gary and Simon found the spot where this.....Creature, devoured the Landry's boy. We obviously need to inform someone in authority. We've always relied on Nicki as a go between with the local police. In fact, the only police car I can remember seeing, was parked outside Rum Runners one Friday night."

"I've seen that one too, every Friday night." Added Bryan.

"So Nicki, you're our local knowledge Guru." Said Sam. "Who are we likely to meet in the local police force and who do we need to call?"

"There are between four and five members of the Jannsen police force." Said Nicki. "Only four this year after George was sent back to Britain for a bypass operation."

"Four cops.....Just four." Said Simon.

"Per head of the population it's better than London or New York." Said Nicki.

"Its still just.....Four guys." Said Sam.

"I'm not going to turn into a local apologist, it is bad." Said Nicki. "It's all we can afford though. Based loosely on the British police, very loosely. We've a Chief Constable you'll all have seen, though his other job takes up most of his time. It's Max, the guy who owns Rum Runners."

"It's like a banana republic." Said Bryan.

Nicki put her hand up to stop everyone insulting the nation of her birth and Sam helped her.

"Alright everyone, let Nicki finish." He said.

"We have one other full time police officer who was born on Jannsen." She said. "Then we have.....It's become a tradition to bring in two or three British coppers. They're well trained and the tourists love their uniforms and the accent. The problem is that the UK seem to feel a year or so in Jannsen is a kind or reward, a way of saying thank you to officers about to retire."

"Now George and his bypass operation becomes dreadfully clear." Said Bryan.

"It's like dads' bloody army." Muttered Gary.

"So.... Which of these very senior policemen do we call?" Asked Sam.

"There is a local minister for law enforcement and security." Said Nicki. "I can't ask him, it's my brother. Not J, the other one, Thomas. He's actually very good at organising things you see. Call him and he'll get the matter moving right away. If needed he can ask the Regiment for help."

"I don't want to be the go-to guy for the police." Said Sam. "I know it's a bit of a cheek, you are an external consultant, but Bryan....Do you mind contacting Nicki's brother?"

"No, not at all."

"Good, then please do so right away. As for the rest of you.....Please cancel anything else you have planned for the rest of the day. I'm sure the police will want to talk to us."

Nicki went with Bryan, probably to make sure he had a telephone number for her brother Thomas. Sam sat looking at the phone, knowing it would soon ring. It would be Ilaria to inform him of her triumph, only to be told it had all been a waste of time.

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Mark Coulier didn't really need the money; his family were one of the oldest on Jannsen. He often joked that his dad didn't count his money, he weighed it. Still, being paid in dollars, tax free, did help with his tab at Rum Runners. Plus, like his Regiment uniform, doing casual work for the film crew had other benefits.

"This is a beautiful boat; my dad had a Bertram for years." Said Annabel.

Mark liked women and they seemed to like him. Every year groups of women arrived on the cruise ships, many with just one thing on their mind. Getting drunk, having fun and above all, getting laid. Groups of friends, hen parties, you name it. There was no prostitution on Jannsen, simply because



there was more than enough free supply to meet the demand. Of course, like young men the world over, Mark talked himself up a bit.

“Yes, Sam wanted my opinion on it.....As their adviser on such things.”

He had once thought wearing military uniform was a bit too much. Ladies like Annabel though.....They seemed to love it.

“I heard getting into the sound can be dangerous.” Said Annabel. “Didn’t two Israeli students get killed recently ?”

“That was two years ago. I’ve done it lots of times.”

The Bertram, named Serenity by old man Morris, was getting on a bit. She had a good engine though, and it had been well maintained. Mark was happy with the throttle response and had faith in her. He’d been asked to look into something which was probably nonsense, but Sam was paying him well, so.....

“This place is so beautiful.” Said Annabel. “Point a camera anywhere and you’d get a perfect Instagram moment. What is this place called ?”

“This is Jones Bay, one of the nicest stretches of water on Janssen.”

There really was a need for traffic lights, they’d been needed for years. As he throttled up Serenity, a boat coming the other way decided to go against the current.

“Bloody fools.....Tourists I bet.” He said. “They hire a boat and come straight here...No idea how to handle a boat, or about getting into the sound.”

“Are we going to be alright Mark ?”

Damn, he’d scared her, which hadn’t been his intention.

“Yes, we’ll be fine.....I’ll let the idiots get well out of the way.”

They actually waved as they went past, as though it was bloody Henley Regatta. Of course, Mark just glared back and ignored the wave. As they hurtled off leaving a wake high enough to be a hazard, he throttled up again.

“Here we go, easy.....You’ll see.”

Annabel hung onto his back, while peering over his shoulder. Older than him, though not that much older. She lived in Wilmington, Delaware and worked for a credit card company. She’d told him that the cruise with a few friends was the high point of her year.

“Oh dear.” She muttered.

“It’ll be fine.....Over before you know it.”

She was still hanging onto his back as they entered the cool, dark waters of Outerbridge Sound. There were several boats there, no doubt crewed by tourists, once a year sailors. With luck they’d take their bored families safely away after an hour or so, all moaning about what a let-down the sound had been. After seeing what was left of The Jenny, he sincerely hoped they’d all have an uneventful day. There had been talk of banning tourists from the area, but there weren’t the resources to enforce a ban.

“I like this, it feels.....Peaceful.”

“The original Dutch settlers called it the Dark Water.” He said.

“I like that.”

Sam had wanted Serenity to be seen in the sound, there was a large SHP flag hanging limp from the mast and SHP painted on the side of the cabin. A presence to be noticed, that might well end up on a few family pictures and movies. Sam had also wanted him to land on the small island at one end of Outerbridge Sound.

“See..... Perfectly safe.” He said. “We used to come here quite often when I was a kid, my mum thought the place felt.....Tranquil, yes that was her word for it, tranquil.”

“Do you fancy a drink ?” She asked.

“Yes, there’s wine in the fridge.”

No moorings in the sound, there was effectively no bottom to anchor them to. Every generation had built a jetty at some place along the sides of the sound, only to have it mysteriously destroyed one dark and stormy night. There had even been a jetty built on the island, in the hope tourists might like it. All that was left of it were two rotting posts in the ground and one cross beam, which had to hanging on by the skin of its teeth. The island had an uninviting reputation, but he had been well paid in tax free dollars. When Annabel returned, it was time to tell her about his short and hopefully, uneventful excursion.

“Cold enough.....The wine.....Cold enough ?” She asked.

“Perfect.....Look, I’m going to put out a few sea anchors. I promised someone I’d look for something on the small island. I’ll need to use the dinghy to get there.”

“Wow, what are you looking for ?”

“Just a laptop, which probably isn’t there.”

The Jenny had been close to the island, but there was no way a heavy laptop could have been bounced or knocked onto the island. Sam had looked everywhere else though, and he was offering an eyewatering finder’s fee.

“Great, I’ll come too.” Said Annabel.

“No, it might not be safe.”

“You can’t leave me here.....Not on my own.”

“The Serenity is a solid old boat, you’ll be fine. Take a nap or something and I’ll be back before you know it.”

Annabel kissed him hard on the lips, the sort of kiss that promised so much. For a moment Mark nearly gave up the whole idea of searching for the laptop. The finder’s fee though, it would pay off his Rum Runners tab until he retired.

“I won’t be long.” He said.

He hated dinghy’s, there was no dignified way to get in or out of the dinghy tied to the stern. Every time there was the chance of an unexpected drenching. He’d seen it happen to far too many experienced sailors to think it couldn’t happen to him. Annabel waved to him, as he used the oars to pull towards the island.

“I hope you find it.” She yelled.

“So do I, but I bet I don’t.”

The damned thing was eight miles down, of course it was. Mark pulled towards all that remained of the old jetty, the two upright posts. It was the only place to go ashore without scrambling over sharp rocks. After securing the dinghy he noticed a glint of something silver a little way off, in amongst the rocks.

“Please be a laptop.....Annabel and I can drink champagne tonight.”

It was impossible for it to be there, but there it was. There was even the name of the marine institute on it, the one Sam said he’d borrowed the drone from. No broken screen either when he opened it up, just a few cracks.

“The Damn thing might even boot up.” He muttered.

Not that he intended to try, Sam could have that dubious pleasure. When the creature was yanking The Jenny about the way a cat plays with a mouse, the laptop must have been thrown high into the

air, it was the only thing that made sense. Then by some weird law of inanimate objects it had done the impossible and landed on the island.

Mark was almost back in the dinghy when he saw something that looked like giant lugworms. Several of them, clustering around a rock. Long hairy worms that fishermen used as bait. Only these were longer, tougher looking and they seemed very interested in one particular rock. It was so weird, that he used his phone to take a few pictures.

“Crap.....What the hell ?”

He didn't see the ball of writhing, whatever they were, until he'd moved. About half his size, it looked like a ball of writhing worms, but he knew it was more than that. There was a centre, a nucleus to the thing. Every few seconds the writhing parts revealed a solid centre. Mark put his phone onto the movie setting and let it run.

“Oh, science guy will love this.”

The ball of writhing worm like things trundled across the rocks and into the water. Mark had never seen anything like it, he thought no one had probably ever seen anything like it. Sam's science guy would probably have an orgasm when he saw the recording. When the ball and all its long worms, vanished below the water, he stopped the recording.

“Jeezzz, I'm not showing that to Annabel.” He muttered.

Getting out of the dinghy and back onto Serenity was just as undignified, especially as he didn't want to let go of the precious laptop.

“I found it Annabel, I actually found it.” He yelled.

No answer, though he wasn't unduly concerned. Mark put the laptop in the locker near the steering wheel, intending to take it to Sam immediately. He ran down to the galley, certain that Annabel would be there, enjoying a glass of wine.

“Annabel.....Good news.....Bloody good news.”

Still no sign of her, which was beginning to worry him. There had been too many weird events on, or near the infamous Outerbridge Sound. No one was sure what had attacked the glass bottomed boat, and then there had been the near destruction of The Jenny.

“Where the hell are you ?.....Annabel.”

He looked in the toilet and then tried the large bedroom, the one Sam was talking about turning into his nerve centre, a base of operations while filming on the sound. Annabel was there, lying on the bed, covered in just a cream-coloured cotton sheet.

“I don't fancy taking a nap.” She said.

Annabel lifted the edge of the sheet, as if inviting him to join her. Naked, completely and utterly naked. She looked to him at that moment, as the most exquisite woman who had ever walked the Earth. He decided that Sam could wait another couple of hours for his laptop, as he undressed and joined her.

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Sam was fed up. It was late and he'd had the call from Ilaria. She'd been upset, but still determined to use the interview with Rosie. Anything mentioning wanting to find Rosie's brother had been edited out, and some pictures of wrecked tourist bikes, edited in. By the time Mark had handed him the miraculously intact laptop, he was in no mood to edit Ilaria's news piece yet again.

“Get to somewhere with WiFi cover and send it.” He'd told her.

It wasn't a bad piece, considering the heart had been ripped out of it. Not the news item it could have been, but the major networks would find a place to slot it into their news bulletins. It was Rosie of course, the crying eight year old girl whose brother had been killed by the monster of the sound.

She had something about her.....All the grief emoted out of her eyes. It made it impossible not to watch her. Actually, when he thought about it....It was a fucking brilliant news item.

“Who now ?” He muttered, as the phone rang.

The Inquisition had been messing him around. First bringing the meeting forward, only to delay it again and again, as the dreadful news about Luke Landry began to leak out of the Jannsen police department. All Sam wanted was a bed to crash in for a few hours.

“Hi, Sam Hardwick.”

“J here, J Outerbridge....Look I’m sorry we’ve messed you around. Can we meet now ? I know it’s late, but there are only three of us and we can come to you. It is important.”

“It’s been a long day. Can we do this first thing, say over breakfast ?”

“I’m now looking at the news in New York, via the internet. I could mention you only have an internet link to use on Jannsen, because I made sure it happened. If this sensationalist reporting carries on unchecked, there will soon be no cruise ships stopping here. So please.....Stay up a few more minutes and talk to us.”

“Well.....If you think it’s important.” Said Sam.

“I do.....I would add that all three of us are wealthy men. We could dig in the sofa cushions and probably find enough loose change to fund SHP for a decade. I’m sure you understand what I’m saying.”

“I do, of course I do. I’ll wait up and see you. I’m sure you know where we’re living.”

“Yes Sam, I do, It’s a really nice house. Have you dug about in the garden yet, looking for old Jack’s hidden treasure ?”

“What ?.....I’ve never heard of that.” Said Sam.

“Jack Benevide was supposed to have hidden something valuable before he died.” Said J. “I’m surprised you haven’t found some of the holes that have been dug in the garden over the years.”

“I’ll have to look for them, now you’ve told me.”

“We’ll be with you in twenty minutes Sam.....Don’t go to bed.”

“I won’t.”

J hung up the call and Sam wondered what they expected him to do. The news was the news and a story as big as a dead kid.....There was no putting a positive spin on that. Still.....It was worth talking to anyone who could provide that much finance out of their petty cash tin. He put his head round the bedroom door.

“Your brother is coming over with the key members of the Inquisition. Do you need to hide or anything ?”

“From my brother J ? No way.....Can I get dressed and listen at the door ?” Asked Nicki.

“Yes, no problem.”

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