

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 8 – Bredon House

“The lunch was really good for somewhere off the beaten track. Mind you, it’s hard to go wrong with a fish main course, when it was probably swimming in the ocean the previous day. There were perks to Island life.”

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Paris Ferland had heard Sam give the official explanation a few times and she still didn’t believe it. Two weeks since SHP had rented a fully furnished Bredon House and all the crew were now living there, including those who’d been settled in the villa. The villa was now home for the cast and management, yet Sam was still saying that was just how things worked out, that it hadn’t been intentional. Paris genuinely wasn’t concerned where she lived, or who lived there with her. It had caused a lot of friction though, a bad feeling which refused to go away.

“It’s not that I hate Bredon House.” Said Gary. “It’s comfortable, there’s even a pool. As accommodation goes, it has to be in the top five of places I’ve been allocated. It’s the principle of the thing Paris, you must understand that.”

“I do understand Gary, the Royal Navy will be here in two weeks. We need to be working as a team by then.”

“Don’t worry Princess, I’ll make sure you’re lit perfectly.”

He’d called her Princess a few times before, though she had no idea why. He’d also patted her thigh. Knees were one thing, but her thigh....Anyone else and they’d have got her full ‘don’t do that again’ speech, she knew it by heart. Gary was different though; she was already thinking of him as if he was a favourite uncle. She’d deliberately travelled in the Humvee with him, rather than in one of the new SUVs. He was allowed to push her personal boundaries a little, but only a little. She leant across and patted his thigh.

“I’m sure you will Gary. Tell me though, I don’t mind, but why Princess ?”

“I saw it in the trade press.” Said Gary. “About you being in the running for one of those Disney Princess things.”

“Ahh, the part I never got.”

“Sorry Princess.”

“That’s alright, even I knew I was wrong for the role.”

They were travelling in convoy now, two Humvees and two shiny black SUVs. They even had a director with them, an Irish guy called Cormac who’d done a few independent films that had been well received on the film festival circuit. Cormac was disliked, though not because of all the Indie films. He’d been given the second-best room in the villa.

“Poor June, she must be so upset.” Said Paris.

“Yeah, we’ve orders to stay in the garden.” Said Simon.

Vince was being interviewed by the FBI and things didn’t look good. The media were giving out some very heavy hints that Vince might have killed the tourist couple, rounding things off with attacking the Landry’s kids. The TV news even had some pictures of Vince, which made him look like a psycho killer. Filming in the house would have been good, but ultimately, any house would do. The garden

was crucial though, with the table Vince usually sat at, while sheltered from the sun by a huge grapefruit tree.

"I'll have to park on the road." Gary told Simon. "Put one of those reflecting triangles behind us. Be just our luck if the one lunatic driver on the island picks today to hurtle round the corner."

Everyone left their vehicles, a sizeable group with the actors to play Vince and his mum, Emily the sound manager, the makeup team, Jeffrey the script guy and the director, who of course had an assistant. Luckily Gary had setup the heavy lighting rigs the night before.

"I didn't realise it would be this hot." Said Lionel.

Lionel was the actor who was going to play Vince. Originally a small part, the arrival of the FBI and the allegations of murder, had turned it into what had to be a dream part for an up-and-coming young actor. Paris had never heard of Lionel, though Sam had told her he'd once had a small part in East Enders, but who hadn't.

"No one is to wander off." Yelled Cormac. "We're filming as soon as sound say they're ready."

Paris carried one of Gary's tool boxes, all part of her rehabilitation from her days of being the most awkward diva in the room. The garden was already looking more like a film set than a real garden and Gary would soon screen out a lot of the natural sunlight.

"Have I got time to pee?" Asked Lionel.

"Yes, if it's a fast one." Said Cormac.

Lionel was already dressed in the manner of a young person on Janssen, or at least how wardrobe thought the average young adult on the island would look. Paris had seen Vince a few times and he'd never worn anything like the primary colours Lionel had on.

"Lighting ready." Yelled Gary.

No sign of Lionel when Emily finally said the sound systems were ready. Young Lionel had headed off into the bushes for his pee, they weren't officially allowed into June's house. The actress who was going to play June was a bit part pro, and seemed mildly amused by it all.

"Can someone go and find Lionel?.....Please." Yelled Cormac.

There was no need to go searching, he arrived backing his way out of the bushes, still trying to fasten his trousers. He was yelling as he arrived, something about a hideous creature that was hiding in the bushes. Poor Lionel, they'd have to find him some clean trousers, he'd emptied his bladder down the front of the ones he was wearing.

"I saw it.....Huge thing, head full of teeth." Yelled Lionel.

Paris had always been like it, right from being old enough to walk. While other kids ran away from anything strange or scary, she had to go and take a look. She walked just a foot or two into the thick vegetation and saw what had scared the young actor. By the time she was back with the others, everyone was in a panic, even Cormac.

"Did you see it, Paris?" He asked. "What the hell was it?"

Its timing was perfect, the huge toad came through a gap in the bushes, shoving them aside as it came. A real monster of a toad, easily the size of a rottweiler puppy. It looked them over as they looked at it, while it chewed at a bug of some kind. Everyone was relieved.

"Harmless." Said Gary. "Unless you're daft enough to bite one."

"Can someone get Lionel into some dry trousers?" Yelled Cormac.

"I said we should have brought a changing tent." Someone muttered.

There were times when the old Paris bubbled up to the surface, though on this occasion she had something to moan about.

“Can we please get something done today.” Shouted Paris. “We’ve only got about eight hours of daylight left.”

She shouted it with a smile on her face and grinned after saying it, whereas the old Paris would have screeched like a banshee. Her words worked though.

“Yes, yes.....Come on people.” Yelled Cormac. “Lionel....You can change in one of the SUVs. Everyone else, get to your positions.”

Paris was doing the voice overs and the narration, all on her own and most of it straight into camera. She had the most lines to learn and, in many ways, hers was the hardest part to get right. Not that she was unhappy about that, she lived for those minutes in front of the camera. Part of her mind was troubled though, she’d talk it over with Sam.....Only Sam. Paris wasn’t sure what had snapped its jaws at her in the bushes, before running away. One thing was sure, it hadn’t been one of the famous Janssen toads.

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Kate Russo might have let the experience on Gary South’s boat keep her off the water for a while if she’d been a bit younger, and braver. Parking a car up in one of several well-known spots was more risky than keeping an affair offshore, but many did it. It was her hips of course, the right one in particular. She liked a bit of comfort with her love life, preferably a double bed with Egyptian cotton sheets. She’d met Debbie Hindle for lunch in a little place near the dockyard and before long the conversation had drifted towards their chosen method to stop life on a small island from driving them crazy.

“I might not dump Giles after all.” Said Debbie.

“Isn’t there the whole way he looks at you during sex, thing ?” Asked Kate.

“Yes, but I can live with that, I think. And yes, I will admit he probably lies about his age. He’s attentive though, when it matters and let’s be honest. There aren’t that many discreet men on Janssen.”

Kate remembered Graham, a middle-aged man who seemed perfect for a little extramarital fun. His own very luxurious boat and a flat stomach. The fool had told his wife everything in a fit of remorse. It was only luck that his wife had kept quiet about it.

“Oh, I know what you mean.” Said Kate. “I quite like Gary though and not just for his boat.”

The lunch was really good for somewhere off the beaten track. Mind you, it’s hard to go wrong with a fish main course, when it was probably swimming in the ocean the previous day. There were perks to Island life.

“So, the big question.” Said Debbie. “It’s my birthday next week. The boys want to go out on the ocean to the south of the island to celebrate. Giles told me they have plans, whatever that means. Will you come ? Please tell me you will, or it won’t happen.”

It always amused her that Debbie referred to them as the boys. Did Gary and Giles think of them as the girls ? She hoped they did.

“I was going to say no, until I spoke to Shelley.” Said Kate. “I didn’t mention who I’d been with of course, just that I’d had a weird experience a few miles off south shore. She’d been out there with her husband five years ago and had the same thing happen. It seems that quite a few people have seen the bubbling water, it’s been going on for years and no one has been hurt.”

“So, you’ll come ?”

“Yes, I’ll call Gary tonight and let him know.” Said Kate.

“Oh, brilliant. You must let me pay for lunch.”

The way Debbie was enthusing about it made Kate wonder if her friend had really been thinking about dumping Giles. He was fairly bald, almost certainly older than the forty-five years he admitted to, and a bit of a groper. Kate had never seen him naked, but there had to be something to get Debbie so excited.

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Sam Hardwick quite liked The Major, AKA Arthur Mullen, he could definitely work with him, even though he could see why Denise couldn't stand the guy. An almost pathological liar, he'd convinced two of the crew he'd served in Vietnam, within an hour of arriving in the villa. The dates of the Vietnam war made it impossible of course, Arthur simply wasn't old enough. Facts rarely bother a real teller of tall tales though and Arthur was a genius at it. He also had the look of sincerity that made him perfect for television. Denise had been right about the voice too; Arthur would have the public eating out of his hand.

"Are you settling in alright?" Asked Sam.

"Brilliant, I imagined we'd all be in trailers." Said Arthur.

"Actually, trailers are far harder to find than a villa on Jannsen." Said Sam.

"It's beautiful.....A pool as well." Said Kitty Mullen.

Kitty had been introduced to everyone as his wife, no first name given. After listening to him call his wife darling, dearest, or pumpkin all the first evening they'd been there, Ilaria had taken it upon herself to get a first name for The Major's wife. A direct question did the trick, for a TV cast and crew, they seemed remarkably bad at asking direct questions.

"Hi, I'm Ilaria.....And you are?"

"Kitty dear, Kitty Mullen."

Easy as that, mystery over. Sam had thought of only using Arthur onscreen, but he and his wife had all that down home Texas charm, even if they'd never even visited the 28th state. Jeffrey had quickly added a few lines for her into the script, plus a few opportunities for Arthur to call her pumpkin. The Mullens were perfect for TV.

"I can't see them being ready to use you today." Said Sam. "Enjoy the pool, or spend time looking around Tilburg. Are you bike riders? There are always bikes outside for everyone to use, just grab a couple of them."

"Yes, we actually hired our own bikes." Said Arthur.

"Good, you can't see Jannsen at it's best from inside a car." Said Sam.

"Just stay out of the woods, especially at night." Muttered Kitty. "Or so a lady in Rum Runners told me."

A difficult one for Sam, he was in the business of encouraging wild rumours, they helped the ratings. He'd never been one to calm down public hysteria and he wasn't about to start now. Besides, Kitty Mullen had been in the glass bottomed boat when it had been attacked, she'd seen the monster of Outerbridge Sound, or at least one of its tentacles.

"Tourists get hurt all the time Kitty." He said. "I'm sure you'll be fine on the roads; just remember they drive on the left in The Donder Isles. There is something in the sound, you've seen it, but I can't see it coming out in the middle of the night to kill tourists or go after children. A thing that size.....It would have been seen."

"So, you think this Vince person killed the little boy?" Asked Arthur.

"Not for me to say, though I've heard the FBI seem to be thinking that way." Said Sam. "I am sure though that once the Royal Navy are here, we'll all find out there are no bogey men hiding in the woods."

"I'm sure you're right." Said Kitty.

"Makes sense, as you say, something that big. As you mentioned the Royal Navy, any chance of a look around the Sheffield when it arrives?" Asked Arthur.

Sam inwardly cringed, Arthur probably had a story about being in the American Navy waiting for the right opportunity, a navy seal most likely. Still, Arthur could hardly be kept under house arrest when not being filmed. Besides, the crew of The Sheffield were probably used to hearing a few wild stories.

"Of course, easy to arrange. Nicki has contacts in the government here in Janssen, I'll ask her to arrange something."

"That'll be wonderful." Said Kitty.

They were such a great couple, as long as they kept to the script. Sam thought they would, Arthur had returned the contract immediately. No haggling, no bluster about putting in a few adverts for Major's Quality Automobiles. In Britain you could do a company search to see how someone was doing, though in the USA, it wasn't that simple. Pru at Madrigal Research had done some delving, she knew someone, who knew someone at a bank Arthur had approached for a loan. She'd seen a copy of the accounts for Major's Quality Automobiles and they didn't look good.

"Too many creditors and too few assets." She'd told him over the phone. "Arthur is probably a year away from going bust, at the best."

Bad news for the Mullens, but good news for Sam. Arthur needed the fees SHP were paying, he needed them to keep the lights on. Sam could use that to keep him in line.

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Bill Carr had been with the FBI for as long as he could remember. Straight from college, he'd worked his way up the greasy poll by a mixture of promotions for time served and getting results by hard work. He had a wife in Bethesda, who looked after their two kids, two girls. Not that they needed much looking after, the youngest was about to start college and the older one had a job. Over fifty now, a few years over, he knew he had a reputation for getting results by following procedure, rather than being clever. Bill had never claimed to be that smart, but he was certain of one thing, Vince hadn't killed anyone.

"I've already told you about it so many times." Said Vince.

"My client is tired; he's been here all day."

"I appreciate that, but please Vince. Begin from where you saw the two tourists that night."

"Well, they were both on the wrong side of the road....."

Someone had hired a lawyer from Miami, a woman who looked barely older than his youngest daughter. Bill had no idea who was paying her, but they weren't doing Vince a favour. Vince was obviously vulnerable, a clear case of someone easily confused. Yet his lawyer had never briefed the kid on keeping away from mentioning any personal guilt in the death of the young tourist couple. There was Vince, saying it yet again, that he'd driven them off the road, all being recorded, again. There were enough procedural errors by the local cops to fill a book, yet she'd never brought that up once. Didn't she understand the problems about giving a Miranda warning to someone with learning difficulties. Bill was good at reading people and in his opinion, Vince's only crime was riding a motorbike while intoxicated. Not that he'd tell anyone that, he wasn't employed as the kid's defence attorney.

"Why didn't you get help Vince?" Asked Bill. "You saw the woman being attacked. Why not go for help?"

"I.....Didn't want to get into trouble."

“Why would you get into trouble ?”

“I didn’t mean to make them crash.....I never meant to hurt them.”

It was all far too easy, Vince kept convicting himself. Caught in the limbo between a police force that didn’t follow British procedures correctly and the FBI, who wanted a quick result. The poor bastard was likely to get life, just for being a bit slow witted and too fond of beer.

“But you did hurt them, Vince.” Said Stacey Tuttle.

Bill had a job to do and he’d received his orders before leaving. A lot of people wanted Vince convicted for at least one of the deaths on Jannsen, with lots of hints that he was guilty of all the recent attacks. No tampering with evidence or leaning on witnesses, the bureau did have its reputation to think about.

It wasn’t his job to point out procedural irregularities though, or anything that might help the kid. Bill was looking at retirement and anyway, he’d never been one to rock the boat. Stacey on the other hand was half his age and had come up through the fast-track scheme. The bureau needed more smart young women and Stacey was definitely smart. The strange thing was that after giving him grief over following orders on so many occasions, she was now quite happy to throw Vince to the angry crowd. Bill suspected she’d been promised something.

“Yes.....I hurt them.” Said Vince.

Everyone thought of Vince as a kid, because he behaved like one. As he sobbed, he no longer looked like a kid though, he looked like a young man on his way to spend the rest of his life in jail. Longer than life in the old days, the bodies of felons had been buried in the prison grounds, their sentence extended to eternity. Bill wanted to yell at Vince’s lawyer, when she made about her tenth mistake of the day.

“Can we make a deal ?” She asked.

Bill nodded in the direction of the sobbing young man.

“We should talk outside.” He said.

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Judy Gosse wasn’t stupid, she’d been born in the hospital on Jannsen, she knew that when all the customers at Rum Runners were avoiding the woods at night, it made sense to do the same. Not any particular woods, though it had to count double for the woods near Outerbridge Sound. Judy was avoiding any and every area of woods and even some places with thick scrub. Not that she really believed in the monster of Outerbridge Sound, a contradiction she rarely thought about.

“Goodnight, Judy.” Someone yelled.

Rum Runners officially closed at about one in the morning, though sometimes, as then, Judy ended up leaving at about two. She didn’t mind, it meant extra pay and there was her dream to make a reality. A hair salon in somewhere swanky, she was hoping it would be in a nice part of New York, though any major American city would do. All she had to do was save all her tips, survive on eating crap for a few years and..... She’d just about be able to afford a hair stylist’s course at a school in Canada. Judy knew she wasn’t likely to achieve her dream until she was in her thirties, probably late thirties, but she was young and full of enthusiasm. If anyone asked her age, she said about twenty and she was going to keep saying about twenty, forever.

“Goodnight, Bob.” She yelled.

“Need a lift home ?”

“No, I got my bike fixed.”

They were a good crowd at Rum Runners, another half dozen regulars shouted goodnight at her, as she put on a crash helmet and tried to start her fairly elderly and newly fixed Yamaha. Having it fixed

was a bit of an overstatement, her brother had tinkered with it until, miracle of miracles, it had started again.

"Oh, come on.....Please start." She muttered.

Kick starting a crappy old Yamaha 125 never felt dignified, especially in a short skirt. Judy tended to wear short skirts to work, her tips were always better. Wearing tight tops and short skirts were an integral part of her plan, steps on the path to getting that hair salon in the Big Apple.

"Oh, shit.....Bob, wait." She yelled. "This damn thing."

The damn thing started on about her sixth attempt, so she told Bob she'd be alright. She lived with her parents right up near the top northernmost tip of Janssen, just about as far from Tilburg as you could get. Not that it was really all that far, nowhere was that far from anywhere on Janssen.

"Just get me home."

She muttered at her bike, as it sounded as though it was breaking every speed limit, while struggling to get up to forty miles an hour. Judy obeyed the speed limits during the day, but when she was in a hurry to get home on dark night, the twenty limit was for wimps and tourists.

There was a longer way home that avoided going near Outerbridge Sound, though it meant following the coast home and it being even later when she climbed into her bed. Later or earlier to bed when it was getting close to three in the morning? It was something she'd often wondered, while admitting to herself that it didn't really matter.

Another thing she barely admitted, even to herself, was a belief that Vince had killed the boy Luke and the tourists. She'd made all the right noises at the bar, even putting ten dollars in the jar to help pay for Vince's swanky American lawyer. Deep down though, she didn't believe in monsters, not really. Hiding her eyes behind her fingers while watching horror films was one thing, but believing there was a beast in the woods?

"No way." She muttered.

Judy took the old road, the one that went quite close to the western edge of the dark water, the sound. Not that she'd stop avoiding the woods, there could be anything in the darkness, the idiots might have even let Vince out of jail. Her mum had little faith in the local police and Judy tended to agree with her.

The gradually dimming headlight told her the Yamaha was having problems. It was the battery; her brother had told her it was crap and needed replacing. When the engine began to cough, Judy took her old bike onto the grass beside the road. It turned out to be a good idea, born out of far too much experience of it letting her down. The bike's engine coughed a few times and died.

"Fuck.....Fuck." She yelled.

No phone, the things were useless up at the north end of the island, they were useless just about everywhere except Tilburg. No tools, not even a penlight in her pocket. Judy tried to kickstart her bike at least a dozen times, before accepting defeat. She'd give Darryl a call in the morning, he'd come and put her old Yamaha on his truck. Her bike was off the road, though visible enough for him to find. She put on the steering lock, even though it would take the A Team to get the fucking thing started. She looked at her bike and began to worry that someone might do something to it, though she had no idea what. She moved it just into the undergrowth, using the final glimmer of its headlight. Darryl would find it, he was good at that sort of thing.

"Fuck.....I won't get to bed until dawn." She muttered.

There was a tiny, bright crescent moon in a wonderfully clear sky, full of stars. More than enough light to follow the road home, without breaking her neck on the way. Everywhere was walkable on Janssen, though far from being enjoyable if you were tired and hoping to get a few hours sleep. Judy

kept up a steady pace and her clothing was ideal for a long walk, as there was very little of it. No one went on a bike without a jacket, far too easy to get nasty scars from road rash, when you fell off. Not if, but when, all her friends had taken a few tumbles, including her. She put the leather jacket Rocky had given her over her shoulder and carried her crash helmet.

"I must call Rocky....Been ages." She mumbled.

Not his real name of course, that was Keith. He'd started insisting people called him Rocky when he'd been about twelve and as he was tall, muscular and had a bit of reputation....People called him Rocky. Judy was only half there when the first shape crossed the road, the rest of her was reminiscing, replaying memories of hot summer nights with Rocky. She didn't make a sound as she left the road and crouched behind a bush.

A long grey shape, it was difficult to see it properly in the dark. Still quite a way from her, but it was large. Not as big as Daryll's truck, though it was bigger than her brother's Datsun. Grey, with legs that made a strange scratching sound as it moved across the tarmacked road. It probably had a head and arms, though in the light from just a crescent moon.....It was just a grey shape, a large grey shape. Judy remained where she was, as another creature followed the first across the road. They were heading away from Outerbridge Sound and towards the ocean to the west. Judy kept quiet until they'd had several minutes to get well away from where she was. As quiet as a mouse and as still as a statue. Her knees had begun to stiffen up by the time she moved.

"Fuck." She muttered, for the umpteenth time.

Her first reaction was now curiosity, she examined the road where they'd crossed from one side to the other. There were cuts in the tarmac, shallow cuts that looked almost wet in the moonlight. Her fingers traced one or two, certain that she'd seen the marks recently on other roads. Just a harmless bit of minor damage, probably put down to a piece of farm machinery, or one of the huge Humvees SHP were using. Only they weren't caused by that, Judy knew what was causing them. Claws of some kind, probably, though she hadn't seen enough to be certain.

"I'll call Nicki in the morning; she'll know what to do." She mumbled.

Her older sister had been at school with Nicki Outerbridge and Judy was still a little in awe of her. There had been rumours about Nicki being involved with married men and others about her liking the intimate company of other women. All of it just made Judy hold her in even greater awe. Nicki knew everyone and her family ran Janssen, she'd know what to do.

Judy had travelled about half a mile or so, when she saw the large grey shape on the road in front of her. In a dip in the road, there hadn't been a silhouette against the sky to warn her. By the time she saw it, it was close to her, far too close. A head with jaws, definitely a head, though there was something strange where she'd expected to see arms of some kind. There was the sound again, though louder now, where its claws cut into the road's surface. The slight smell of sulphur almost caused her to scream. Judy had heard a lot of tall tales while working at Rum Runners. Brimstone was the smell of the devil and there were some who said Outerbridge Sound went all the way down to hell.

Judy Gosse, who was always about twenty, backed away from the creature blocking the road. Apart from the scratching sound, the beast was silent, and as for her....It showed no sign of having seen her. Slow step by slow step, she just kept moving backwards. Until her back made contact with something on the road behind her. She knew what it was, as soon as she heard the scratching sound. No good, she couldn't stop herself, she screamed loud enough to waken the dead.

"No..... You aren't real." She screamed. "You can't be real."

The pain began in her shoulder and quickly moved right down her back. It was unbearable pain, excruciating, worse than anything Judy had felt before, worse than she thought was even possible. Mercifully she only felt it for a matter of seconds.

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Ilaria D'Andrea liked her room in the villa, the one used by the teenage Benevide girl when they weren't touring Europe, or wherever they were. Teenage girls could sometimes be a little creepy, Ilaria knew that for a fact, she'd once been one. The wall art ranged from Klimt posters to Marilyn Manson, with movie posters for slasher films. Huge pictures of Taylor Swift fought for wall space with Joan Jett. It was a wonderful mish mash that Ilaria loved and so did Dom. Dom had become a fixture in her room, to the point where Sam had semi-jokingly asked if Dom needed his own room at all. It was the early hours of the morning, yet neither of them were fully asleep. She lovingly fondled Dom's back, before moving towards him and kissing him between the shoulder blades. He wasn't going to be more relaxed and feeling more loved and secure, so she chose that moment to bite his arm. A hard bite, enough of a nip to make him yell.

"Hey, what was that for?"

"Oh, come on Dom, you know you're as curious as I am."

"Go to sleep, please."

"You know me.....You know I won't."

He managed to make sitting on the edge of the bed look like an act of defiance, but at least he was getting up. Dom had told her about having a significant conversation with his wife, though he'd refused to give any details. When he'd mentioned them coming to an understanding, she expected him to say it was over between them. Instead, he'd almost moved out of his own room and into hers. The sex was better too, and it had been pretty good before. Ilaria was going to find it hard to say goodbye after the wrap party, but that was how affairs worked. Besides, the filming might well last a year, maybe longer if there was a second season for the Monster of Outerbridge Sound. Sam's to be confirmed name for the show, which just about everyone hated. Dom was putting the clothes on he'd been wearing the night before, shorts and a white T shirt.

"We need to be careful; Sam already looks at us a bit funny." Said Dom.

"Nonsense, you're imagining it."

"He knows you eavesdrop on his conversations." Said Dom. "The whole place knows, since you told them about Sam renting Bredon House, before it was official. He might chuck us out of the villa and I like this room."

"Hey, it's my room.....No, Sam knows I'm a nosey busybody. If it worried him that much I'd have been sacked by now."

All the time she'd been pulling on clothes, which was quick and easy in a hot climate. Like Dom she'd gone for shorts and a T shirt, though unlike him, hers were clean. Unlike Dom, she remembered to pick up a flashlight before leaving.

"Alright, but we need to do this quietly." Said Dom. "No shouting and waking everyone up."

"Oh, you're no fun Dom Trecca. Alright, I'll be good....Full covert operations mode."

"No taking shovels then, no digging holes in the grounds." Said Dom.

"There must be lots of places we can explore without digging, at least for now."

Ilaria climbed out of the large window, one of the advantages of having the only bedroom on the ground floor. It had been Dom's main exit every morning, until they both realised it was pointless, everyone knew they were screwing.

"We'll start near the pool." She whispered.

Her listening to conversations had paid off, though she hadn't been the first to break the news about the crew moving to Bredon House. That had been Paris, who seemed to always be in the right place, at the right time, to hear the best gossip. She'd told Nicki, who'd told everyone else. Now she felt duty bound not to out Paris as the original source. Hearing Sam talk about the Benevide treasure though, that had been her. Dom stopped when they got to the pool, waiting for instructions.

"If it had been hidden here, it would have been found years ago." He said.

"Not necessarily.....And we need to tick the filter room off our list."

"The filter room?"

"See, I knew you didn't know it was there." She said.

Ilaria had never actually been down there, though she was willing to look stupid if it was just a hole in the ground with a valve wheel in it. She'd noticed it one night, on one her nocturnal wanders through the villa's grounds. Two paving slabs at the back of the pool, which looked to be more than just slabs. Heavy though, it took both of them to lift one, before realising it was on hinges.

"All the way back Dom, then the other one."

An entrance for major work only, by the look of it, though the slabs did go all the way back. Once open you'd never see the steps leading down, unless you were right on top of them. Dom was squinting into the dark.

"Looks a bit grubby and dark." He said.

Ilaria turned on her flashlight and the steps looked just as grubby, though they were far easier to see. She led the way, towards what was probably a pump and filter room for the pool. Common sense, logic and the usual way luck was falling lately, and the door at the bottom of the steps had to be locked. It wasn't, which neither of them took as a good sign.

"That wouldn't have been left like that." Said Dom.

"Just a careless pool guy." She said.

The door was open, the dust scuffed around as though someone had been there recently. No sounds, the pumps were probably on a timer, set to turn off at night. As luck would have it, Dom reached the door before she did. He looked inside and jumped back.

"Hey, watch out." She said.

The steps were narrow, he'd bumped into her and pushed her against the wall.

"Sorry....I heard something in there Ilaria, something moving about."

"Move over a bit, I'll take a look."

Her flashlight showed a small room with several cabinets on the left-hand wall. There were a couple of empty boxes and if it hadn't knocked over a box, she might never have seen it. It was her turn to bump into Dom.

"Crap, it's big Dom."

"What did you see?"

"Not sure, I think we need to get out of here."

There was nothing dignified or orderly about their retreat from the filter room, especially after they heard something knock into the door. When they heard the clang of the metal door hitting the wall, it became a bit of a rout. They'd have run for her room, if she hadn't tripped over a discarded frisbee by the pool. A frisbee, a fucking frisbee, what a silly way to get killed. She imagined her mother at her funeral, trying to make it all sound far less silly.

"Come on.....We need to go." Said Dom.

He hadn't run off and left her at the mercy of whatever was thumping its way up the steps. She could hear the thump, thump, thump as it headed up the steps. Dom was trying to help her up, as it

rose out of the ground. It was the biggest damned toad Ilaria had ever seen. Dom collapsed beside her.

“A fucking toad.” He muttered.

“At least my mum won’t have to mention a frisbee at my funeral.”

“What ?”

“It’s a long and involved story.....Come on, we can search the filter room now. Once that is ticked off our list, we can try somewhere else tomorrow.”

“Really ?” Asked Dom.

“Yes, come on.”

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