

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 9 – Geological Events

“As the local police seemed about as much use as a one-legged man in an arse kicking contest, Bill had decided to carry out his own investigation.”

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Dr Bryan Hayman had ceased telling the SHP people he wasn't an expert in every field of science. He knew they referred to him as 'Science Guy,' the villa was too small for any conversation to be that private. He was a senior biologist with the Bahamian Marine Institute, he had nothing to prove. His boss had called a few times, emphasising the favourable correlation of him being mentioned on news broadcasts and donations from the great and good. Michaela had been very polite, very professional, she always was. She did let him know though, that funding for his research project on Dolphins, was linked to keeping SHP happy.

“I know I can rely on you Bryan.” She'd told him.

It had been a threat, a very polite and professional threat. Bryan knew institute directors, they were like mafia bosses, their arm was long and their vengeance was total. If he screwed things up, dear sweet Michaela would end his tenure. Bryan knew a fair amount about geological processes and he had access to some of the best online reference materials. To fill in the gaps in his knowledge, he did what everyone does.....He relied on Wikipedia and winged it.

“There are far more reports lately about gas bubbling up out of the ocean.” Said Sam. “Mainly in the waters to the south of Jannsen, though not just there. Any thoughts on that ?”

A new idea, a weekly questions and answers session first thing on Tuesday morning. Just the senior people had been at the first one in the large lounge at the villa. Now just about everyone turned up, probably just for the coffee and nibbles.

“As with so many events we're hearing about, I think they're geological in nature.” Said Bryan. “The strange lightning inside clouds and magnetic anomalies, are all the same kind of thing seen before volcanic eruptions. The gas bubbling up in Outerbridge Sound and now in the ocean, are another sign of geological events. These things may build up slowly, even over decades, until eventually...”

“Boom !” Yelled Gary Brown from the back of the room.

There was laughter, which they all probably needed. It was a week until the Sheffield arrived and with the disappearance of a local girl, the rumours had started up again. The UK press were hinting that investigating the recent dreadful events in The Donder Isles, might be put under military control. That could prove to be disastrous for SHP.

“Seriously Bryan, could we see a volcanic eruption ?” Asked Sam.

“That..... Would be the perfect television moment.” Yelled Ilaria.

“I know you all think I'm nuts, but I still think we're dealing with aliens.” Shouted Dom.

“Alright.....Give Bryan a chance to speak.” Said Sam.

Here it came, the winging it section of the Q&A. Bryan had a certain amount of knowledge on human physiology, about the same as a clever kid in the final year of high school. He imagined the scene where Michaela asked him to clear out his office, and winging it became far easier.

“No.....I don't think we're going to see such a violent event.” Said Bryan. “I do think there will be more electrical storms and outpourings of gas. Some will smell like rotten eggs and be toxic, so keep the gasmasks close by.”

“Yes, they cost a fucking fortune.” Shouted Sam. “So, use them.”

Some laughter, but also a lot of miserable looking people. The practise sessions and the one full on drill with the masks, hadn't gone too well.

“Yes....I know they're hot to wear, but they could save your life.” Said Bryan. “Some of the gasses coming up out of the ground could well be lethal and odourless. Some will be inert, but will replace the normal air, with the twenty one percent oxygen you need. The masks won't help with those, so watch one another. Lack of oxygen, hypoxia, can cause faintness and confusion. In some cases, you might even have hallucinations. This could be the reason why a few of you report seeing thing in certain parts of town. There is an emergency oxygen supply in all four of the vehicles you use, make sure you know how to use them.”

“I saw something, it was real.” Yelled Paris. “I didn't imagine it, it was real. I told Sam it was real, a large grey thing that snapped its jaws at me.”

“Hypoxia induced hallucinations aren't the same as imagining some.....” Said Bryan.

“Don't patronise me.....It was real.” Shouted Paris.

Bryan saw the look in her eyes and knew that saying anything would be wrong at that moment. Getting to where she was in that industry, it was probably an experience that most wouldn't survive, not emotional intact anyway. She was his morning coffee buddy, so he smiled and after a second or two, she smiled back.

“Anyway.....The oxygen is there, so learn how to use it.” Said Sam.

It seemed the session was over, Sam and Nicki wandered off and most of the crew left for a shoot where the cruise ships docked. It was the day when The Major and his wife were due to record the introduction, the first two or three minutes of what would become episode one of 'Outerbridge Sound, The Dark Water,' another temporary name everyone hated. He wasn't sure what to expect when Paris Ferland walked up to him, though she was smiling.

“Do you fancy coffee ?” She asked. “I'm even offering to fight the toaster oven until it produces edible cheese on toast.”

“That would be brilliant.”

And he meant it, her smile still took his breath away. Bryan wasn't still in awe of her, not totally anyway. He liked her though, really liked her. Coffee and cheese on toast with her, was infinitely preferable to being shouted at.

“I have a few new dolphin pictures.” He said.

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The lawyer hired by the good people of Tilburg had accepted a ludicrous deal, Bill Carr had guessed she would. In return for a few promises, including no threat of the death penalty, any objection to the boy being taken to the USA had been dropped. His mother had even signed a document giving the FBI permission to take her son any place they damn well chose to, though the document said it with more words and rather more politely. Vince was now a guest in the FBI's Louisiana field office in New Orleans. Bill had thought that would be it, Stacey and he would be picked up by plane and taken back to the USA. About the same time that he was telling his wife, the business on Janssen had been taken care of, the local girl had gone missing. That changed everything. As Nicki Outerbridge had told him when he interviewed her;

“We expect tourists to fuck up. They wander about their home town like an accident waiting to happen, then they arrive here on a cruise ship. Judy Gosse is a local though, she’s lived on Jannsen all her life. She doesn’t fuck up like a tourist, she knows what side of the road to drive on.”

Nicki had gone on to make some rude remarks about American tourists, which he didn’t take personally. She’d convinced him though, that Judy wasn’t missing, she was almost certain to be dead, the latest victim of whoever was killing people on Jannsen.

“We all know each other here.” Nicki had told him. “No girl here gets a moody and goes to live with an aunt in another town. No one spends a week in a motel with their latest guy. At the very least Judy would need to eat and drink. If she’d bought food anywhere, the people she’d bought it off would know her.”

So, he’d been told to stay put and help with the investigation, which meant Stacey stayed too. As the local police seemed about as much use as a one-legged man in an arse kicking contest, Bill had decided to carry out his own investigation. All the regulars at Rum Runners had been interviewed and all had agreed on two things. Judy was a really nice girl everyone liked, and she’d left to go home on her bike late that night, probably around two in the morning.

“Are you alright ?” He asked Stacey.

The idea was to follow the route all the way from Rum Runners to where Judy and her parents lived, right at the northernmost tip of Jannsen. The police had claimed to have searched the road, but there was that whole arse kicking thing to be taken against such a claim.

“I’m fine, I used to ride my brother’s bike when I was about twelve.” Said Stacey.

He did quite enjoy seeing her wobble about on the tourist bike they’d hired from Darryl. At last, there was something she didn’t excel at. On the other hand, he was in charge of their investigation, which meant he was responsible for getting her home in one piece.

“We could do another few circuits of Tilburg.” He said. “So, you can get used to it.”

“I’ll be fine.....Go on, I’ll follow. Don’t worry about me.”

Bill had once owned a few big bikes, including a classic British bike, a Triumph Bonneville in mint condition. It had been a few years since he’d ridden a bike, but it all came back to him. The tourist bike hired from Darryl’s felt like riding a toy. There were only two road to get to where Judy lived, the longest followed the coast. The other went close to the infamous Outerbridge Sound, so he’d decided to try that way first.

“Jannsen isn’t big enough to get lost.” Darryl had told them.

Bill had been told that about Bogotá once, in Colombia. He had got lost, he’d managed to get well and truly lost. After spending a night sleeping in a roadside hedge, he now took no chances. He had a backpack carrying all the essentials. He waved at Tracey and rode his bike east out of Tilburg.

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Emily Hansen always tried to keep a bit of a distance from the people she worked with. Filming away from home, often for months, brought out the best in some, but the worst in others. Young and maybe a little naïve, she’d had a few bad experiences. There had been one film in particular, a horror film that meant being in Ireland for months, only mixing with other members of the cast and crew. With hindsight he hadn’t been as into her, as she’d been into him. Hindsight is always twenty-twenty vision though. At the time she’d thought it was the real thing. She still hated him for breaking her heart, even though she knew he’d done nothing wrong. To be working with him again though.....It felt as though life was playing a particularly nasty trick on her. The world of TV and movies was actually quite small, so it was almost certain she’d work with Cormac Doyle again one day. If only it hadn’t been so soon.

“Need a hand ?” Asked Dom.

“Thanks Dom. I usually borrow Simon, but Gary has him running about.”

She didn’t have that much to lug about, though the boom mic was awkward rather than heavy. Despite the entire cast and crew now being on Janssen, it felt they were short on runners and the usual people who helped cart stuff about. Emily liked Dom and he was safe, little chance of him wanting to get too friendly. Everyone knew he shared a bed with Ilaria.

“The cruise ship will be here all day.” Said Cormac. “We can use it as a background, but we have been asked not to bother the passengers. We’ll set up well away from the jetty.”

There was that voice again, with his Donegal accent. Emily would need to tune him out, or being that close to him would drive her crazy.

“Wow, that thing is huge.” Someone muttered.

The cruise ships used a natural bay up near the docks. Emily had heard the island was still paying off the expense of dredging a channel deep enough for the huge ships to get close to shore. It was impressive to see the ship right there, right in front of her. It was as if someone had taken a small town and dropped it in the ocean.

“Can someone get a rake ? We don’t want the sand covered in footprints.” Yelled Cormac.

It was the usual standard chaos, with everyone forgetting that The Major and his wife Kitty, weren’t old hands at the game. They didn’t look terrified, just confused.

“Don’t worry it’ll all quieten down when you do your piece to camera.” Said Emily.

“It’s all so.....” Said Kitty.

“Loud, chaotic and confusing.” Said Emily. “And no one has even told you where to go. It will make sense and I guarantee that when you’re saying your lines, all eyes and ears will be on you. There’s even software to bring down the background sound of seabirds and waves. Trust me, once Cormac begins filming, it will all make sense.”

Kitty actually held her hand, while The Major smiled at her.

“Thank you.” Said Kitty.

Emily still had that boom mic to get in the right spot, while Gary began screening out the wonderful morning sunlight. It seemed crazy to screen out the sun and replace it with lighting powered by a portable generator, but there was no denying, Gary always lit scenes perfectly. It was no more crazy than using software to bring down the calls of seabirds.

“Can someone get rid of those footprints ?” Shouted Cormac. “Our wonderful secluded beach in paradise...Looks like the army have used it for manoeuvres.”

It mattered; it really did. Emily had seen a TV show, one of those period romances, a real bodice ripper. There seemed to be a lot of scenes where the hero had to rip his shirt off and dive into the waves. There they were on film, all those footprints where the crew had lugged everything up and down the beach. Dom did it, he grabbed a rake out of one of the Humvees. She was going to mention it to Sam, they needed a few people to lug stuff about and do things like making a beach look pristine again. Local teens would do, about half a dozen keen ones.

“Thanks Dom.” Said Cormac. “We’ll try the intro without the cameras running.”

No chalk marks, Emily steered The Major and his wife to the right spot. Gary seemed happy with where they were, so the long process began. There would be lots of takes and the inevitable hold ups, but that day’s filming was underway.

“In your own time and read the script if you have to Arthur.” Said Cormac. “Just the first page for now.”

Trust Cormac to burst the bubble, the crew always called him The Major. Everyone knew Arthur Mullen was a bit of a fraud, but they were making a TV show about a mythical beast. Gary moved Kitty slightly to get her lighting just right, and The Major said his first few lines of the day.

“My wife and I would like to tell you about the strange events we witnessed here, in this subtropical paradise. An Island Group called The Donder Isles. Dutch for thunder, because of continuous storms when the islands were discovered. Mainly one large Island, named after the captain of a Dutch ship who discovered the Islands in fifteen sixty.....Jannsen Island, or simply Jannsen.....”

The sound would be perfect after a little work and Gary’s constant grin told her he was happy with the lighting. The Major seemed transformed when he started to speak, he even looked taller. A voice like a cross between John Wayne and Morgan freeman. And when he looked at his wife and called her pumpkin....The show was going to be a huge hit, Emily knew it. She’d been involved in enough truly awful shows to know a great one when she saw it.

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Stacey Tuttle, FBI agent, who didn’t mind admitting she’d be thirty one on her next birthday, had actually begun to enjoy the bike ride. The air was just hot enough against her face, though not too hot. The trees on both sides of the road were lush and green. Best of all, Bill was keeping to the local twenty speed limit, or even slower. They’d stopped twice to look at bits of junk in the undergrowth, though neither had been Judy Gosse’s elderly Yamaha 125. Jannsen really was a subtropical paradise and like so many others before her, Stacey was beginning to fall in love with the place. Bill waved his arm up and down, as he slowed down and pulled off the road.

“I saw something in the bushes, might be nothing.” He said.

“Nice to walk about again, my legs were getting a bit stiff.” She said.

The last glint of reflected light in the undergrowth had been an empty five-gallon tin, that had once held motor oil. Everything had to be checked though, being thorough was the bedrock of any investigation. Or at least that was what they’d told her at the FBI training academy.

“Another oil can I bet, or half a bath tub.” She said. “I’m still wondering why any sane person would cut up a bath tub and dump half of it in the bushes.”

“Yep, it’s going to be long day.” Said Bill. “Dinner at Rum Runners is on me tonight, or at least on my expenses.”

“Bill Carr, last of the big-time spenders.”

“A garden planter.....Half a bath tub I mean.” Said Bill. “Fill it with a few colourful blooms and stick it up against the wall.”

“So why throw away the other half ?”

“Hmm....I might need to think about that.”

It wasn’t an old can, or half a galvanised metal bath tub, it was Judy’s Yamaha. A second-hand import, there were quite a few on Jannsen, Judy’s still had the original Pennsylvania licence plate. Most second-hand cheap imports still had their original plates. Strictly speaking it was illegal, though the law was rarely enforced.

“The steering lock is on.” Said Bill. “I think it broke down, so she hid it in the bushes to stop anyone messing with it.”

Stacey almost called it in, but remembered there was no such thing as calling it in anywhere except Tilburg. They had asked for a satellite phone, but their boss was still considering it. The Yamaha was stuck in the bushes, she had to help him drag it out.

“Hate to suggest it.” She said. “I think we have to leave it here for now.”

“Yes, though a few pictures might be a good idea, just in case someone does run off with it.”

At last, a use for her expensive iPhone, that she could only use as a phone, within a half mile radius of Rum Runners. Stacey took lots of pictures from various angles, some quite imaginative. "We'll go really slow now and investigate anything, even a crushed bush." Said Bill. "She obviously set out to walk home from here, almost certainly using the short route past Outerbridge Sound."

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Kate Russo was quite looking forward to her friend's birthday celebrations, despite the young waitress from Run Runners going missing. The party was going to be on a well-maintained boat at least a mile offshore. No wandering through the woods, or hiking cross country for her. She liked to think of herself as part of Janssen now, she had lived there for some time. She listened to the local gossip and if the Janssen zeitgeist said stay out of the woods, she'd stay out of the woods.

"Now, where did I put my boating shoes?" She muttered.

"Sorry?.....Didn't quite hear that." Debbie yelled from the lounge.

"Just talking to myself."

They were going out for a birthday lunch, before meeting the boys at a quiet jetty near the dockyard. Kate was going to get everything she might need packed in an overnight bag, which meant they could be out on the ocean by late afternoon. She was missing Gary South; he had a certain way of touching her. She lifted her skirt and gently felt the outside of her panties, before pushing a little harder. After she made the first tiny whimper of pleasure, she stopped. Debbie was famously nosey and had been known to walk into her bedroom without knocking.

"So.....I suppose it'll be Rum Runners for lunch?" Yelled Debbie.

"Where else is there?"

"There's Luigi's in Manhattan."

"Yes, I meant places we can actually get to."

"I guess it'll have to be Rum Runners." Shouted Debbie.

"Their steaks are good and.....It is my treat."

Kate rechecked everything in her bag and did up the zipper when she was happy that anything she could possibly need, was in the bag. A last look at herself in the mirror before she went though, a mixture of self-validation and therapy. Weren't all women her age supposed to have something about their body they didn't like? She'd read that somewhere.

A young guy in Tilburg, a tourist from a cruise ship, had told his friend she looked hot. She did look hot; she liked the woman looking back at her out of the mirror. Not bad for her age, not bad at all, if it wasn't for her tummy.

"Damn, I'm sure they're worse." She mumbled.

Better than on her face or neck of course, though she'd prefer not to have deep wrinkles anywhere. Still, on the whole, she was a pretty hot forty two year old. Kate pulled her blouse down over her tummy.

"Still got it girl, he's lucky to have you." She muttered.

"Will you stop looking at yourself in the mirror, I'm hungry."

That could sometimes be the problem with really good friends, they knew you too well.

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Bill Carr didn't really know when they were hunting it, had turned into it hunting them. Dusk probably, when there wasn't enough light to aim his gun with any certainty. Officially he'd needed something signed by the people in London to carry his gun, maybe even the Queen, he wasn't sure. Unofficially the local cops turned a blind eye, as long as he only shot bad guys. Everyone told him it was impossible to get lost on Janssen, but he didn't have a clue where he was.

“Stacey.” He yelled. “Where the fuck are you ?”

Too clever for her own good was his usual thought about Stacey, Agent Tuttle. Yet it had been him, he’d realised the gouge marks in the road were important. He’d followed them off the road and into the bushes, with no backup. There was no backup on Janssen, apart from the local cops and the famous Janssen Regiment. He tried his phone for about the tenth time, knowing there would be no signal.

“Please don’t be dead Stacey.” He muttered.

Bill had only ever lost one partner and he’d died peacefully in bed from a stroke. They’d seen someone or something in among the trees. After the required number of warnings that they were armed FBI agents, they’d chased after it, or him, or maybe even her. The world seemed a little more fucked up every day, though Bill didn’t like to think a woman had killed the Landry’s kid. As the sun had begun to go down, the grey thing had turned and they’d become the hunted.

Bill Carr, veteran of many battles, some real, some with a federal system that often felt like wading through treacle; ripped off his other shirt sleeve and wrapped it around the worst of the bites. A typical blocking wound, the sort people get in knife fights. A large gash down the outside of his left arm. If the thing had managed to open an artery in his arm, he’d have bled out by now. The small bites on his chest and thighs were painful, but they weren’t likely to kill him, at least not for a while. He had fired a few rounds at the grey head with yellow eyes, though there was no indication he’d hit it. No blood, his shots definitely never slowed the damned thing down. Which was weird, just plain crazy. He usually hit what he aimed at, with rounds that could penetrate a car’s engine block.

“Stacey !” He yelled again.

When full darkness came, they’d used flashlights, they had been prepared for searching in the dark. Stacey had still been with him then, they’d both still been confident it was just a wild creature of some kind.

“You hear about it all the time, wealthy crazies keeping weird animals as pets.” Stacey had said.

They’d stopped using the flashlights when it was obvious the thing with all those dreadful teeth, was using the light to find them. Walking through thick vegetation by starlight wasn’t impossible, it was just awkward and made a lot of noise. The thing also found them by the noise, every snapped twig seemed to trigger an attack.

Gunfire drove it away, though not for long. Stacey had vanished during the attack which had left him with the deep wound to his left arm, he had no idea what had happened to her. Bill was beginning to think there might be a pack of the creatures, rather than just one moving with preternatural speed. He was old school; he counted his rounds and knew he still had four in his gun and a spare clip in a back pocket. Enough to get the job done, unless the fucking thing really was something that had risen up from hell, by way of Outerbridge Sound. Bill moved slowly now and very, very carefully, though he hadn’t been attacked for a while. He hated the idea that it might have already eaten its fill.

“Stacey !” he shouted.

Bill spotted the starlight glinting on water first, still water. He had known the road they’d been on went quite close to the infamous sound. Luck was on his side; the movement was visible against the slight brightness of the water. It might have been something blowing about in the wind, but it wasn’t. All his instincts were telling him it wasn’t.

“Agent Tuttle.” He yelled.

Movement, definite movement in the darkness and not that far away. Darkness takes away colour, everything ends up like an old black and white movie. He found Stacey leaning against a tree and the

dark wet looking patches on her blouse were probably blood. It was if the darkness had decided to censor the worst parts of what he was seeing, his partner seemed to have a lot of dark wet patches right across her body. He knelt down next to her, not really wanting to see if she was alive. He put his cheek up against hers and she was warm. Not only warm, he could feel her breath against his cheek. Bill gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze, but still didn't speak. Stacey's arm was pointing at something on the other side of a small clearing. The Outerbridge Sound was right behind the weird tableau of the monster feeding.

Any words might mean a nasty death, so he pressed his cheek hard against hers, before giving the clearing his full attention. It was probably where the beast ate, there seemed to be a lot of body parts, far too many to all be from Judy Gosse. The leaf mould all around him was covered in dark patches, probably all of it the blood of its victims. Just one beast as far as he could tell, which made it even more terrifying. To move that fast, to bite so many times, yet avoid all his bullets.....

"Kill it Bill.....Kill it." Muttered Stacey.

It heard her, of course it did. It had been chewing at something, probably the body of Judy Gosse, there was still something dark and unpleasant in its jaws. It looked straight at him, with its unblinking yellow eyes. They were almost luminous, those dreadful, soulless eyes. As it moved, he fired all of his gun's last four bullets into those eyes, as fast as he could fire them.

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Denise Scott was happy; the sound of a busy office always made her happy. The general hubbub of an office drove some crazy, but to Denise it meant they were busy and the business was booming. Having a lot of staff working weird hours to call people in the USA, meant it was often hard to find privacy to call Sam. Just shutting her office door didn't work, neither did locking it. If they had a real issue to sort out, her staff had been known to bang on her locked door. There was no escaping the drama of a show once filming began, it covered everything like a flood and easily oozed under locked doors.

Denise loved it all, or nearly all. Even her sex life with Flo had improved, in a subtle way. Being busy she had stopped trying too hard to please, which had caused Flo to be more attentive. Again, there was someone banging on her door, just as she was about to call Sam. Outside it stood a very tired looking Izzy, manager of the back office and general fighter of fires.

"I just need five minutes to call Sam, Izzy. I'm thinking of getting a sign made, 'go away, the crazy lady is well beyond being busy.'"

"Sorry Den, it's just that Maureen says she needs to go home. It seems her husband is moaning about never seeing her."

"I saw the overtime sheets; she can afford to buy a new husband. Tell her I expect her to be here until I go home."

"Alright."

"And please tell them I need fifteen minutes of peace."

"Alright."

No overtime and they moaned, lots of overtime and they moaned. Maureen wouldn't quit though, she just seemed to thrive on drama. Den sent a quick text to Florence.

'Is 3am too late to come over xx'

'No xx'

'See U then xx'

Florence Karádi was definitely getting more than smitten, the L word was used quite often now. As for her.....Denise liked the sex and she had feelings for Flo. Love though....She said it back out of

politeness, but knew she didn't mean it the way Flo did. Flo said 'I love you' as though it was a line from a romance novel. Den said it as though it was on a greetings card. The difference wasn't subtle, it could end up being a major problem. She dialled the other major problem in her life.

"Hi, how's life in rainy London?"

"No rain today Sam, though we did have waist high fog for a while."

"You must see Jannsen when things quieten down. Bring Flo....Everyone falls in love with this place. Even the FBI people get all poetic about the island."

"When it quietens down, and assuming the legendary beast hasn't eaten you all."

"So.... Any news on the Sheffield?" Asked Sam.

"Are we still assuming this line is clean?"

"Yes."

"Alright....The government has said there is no real need for a Royal Navy investigation into events on Jannsen, that the local police, combined with the FBI are capable of sorting it out. Going back on that would let the opposition score a few points, so....Unless there are more gory finds, you shouldn't be hindered from filming or travelling wherever you want."

"That is straight from your source?"

"It is Sam, it is."

"So, we're really hoping no one finds the Gosse girl until the Royal Navy have been and gone. Unless she is alive and shackled up with a new guy."

"I hate to agree, though you are right Sam. Pray that the monster has a break for a while and no bloody remains are found in the near future."

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The evening hadn't really gone as planned. For a start the spot they usually liked to spend the night had been taken. A large three masted sailing ship had grabbed their spot, by far the best place, at least as far as Kate was concerned. It looked the sort of ship that belonged in history books, the kind that used to race around the world, carrying cargoes of tea. Giles knew who it belonged to, he even claimed to have been on it a few times.

"Not bad for a family yacht huh? A bit more style than the usual rich guy's superyacht, though there's no room for a helicopter. It's owned by one of the wealthiest men in The Donder Isles. You must have met Mark Coulier at some point, the guy who wears a regiment uniform all the time."

Oh yes, Kate remembered a night with Mark. Only a one off, Mark had a reputation as a bit of a kiss and tell. She hadn't been able to resist though, all those rippling muscles and youthful charm.

"Yes, I remember seeing him around."

"Well, his father owns the Diogenes. A weird name, a family in joke I've been told, though I don't get it. I've been to a couple of parties there, but my lips are sealed. Talk about what happens on Diogenes and you never get invited back."

Not just the huge three masted in their spot, there were at least another half dozen boats in the area of ocean they'd started to think of as theirs. Privacy was the main concern on one of their fishing trips where no one ever caught any fish. They could hardly drop anchor next to another boat, they might well be people who knew her, and her husband.

The second problem was Gary wanting to have some fish, to add a little authenticity to the standard lie about where he'd been all night. Someone had sold him a pile of not very fresh fish, and a large plastic tub to carry them in. The disgusting smell that covered the entire boat in a cloud, had been too much to bear. It was truly amazing how just a few bad fish could create so much stench.

“The fish go or I do.” Kate had told him. “I mean it, it all goes over the side, or you can take me back to the jetty.”

The fish had gone over the side before they were that far from land, and the plastic tub had gone with them. The dreadful smell lingered for a while, but was gone by the time they were ready to drop anchor and have a little fun. A lot closer to shore than usual, but a decent spot with enough distance from any other boats to ensure privacy.

It was an event to mark Debbie Hindle’s birthday of course, her BFF. Kate always worried about using new terms correctly, but she was sure BFF suited her feelings toward her best friend. After a sharing a bottle of champagne and the obligatory birthday cake, there had been sex. Private sex in Gary’s room, with Deb and Giles in the other room. That was when the night began to really work for her, after the endorphins from sex had begun to get into her bloodstream. Everything always felt ten time better, brighter and more fun after sex.

“That wonderful freshly fucked glow.” Deb called it.

After sex there was a meal, Gary could create some incredible meals on a simple gas-powered barbecue. More champagne, of course, though she refused to sniff what Giles called the Colombian marching powder. Her friends were adults, they could do what they liked. Kate preferred to stick to alcohol. By about one in the morning, they’d split up, with Deb and Giles on the deck to one side of the main cabin, while she and Gary claimed the other. Heavy petting on a sun lounger was getting close to an activity she liked to do in private, but after so much booze.....

“Can I get you another drink ?” Asked Gary.

“Is there any champagne left ?”

“I think so, Giles bought about six bottles.”

More bubbly and lots of kissing, Kate felt like she was a teenager again. Even her dodgy hip was behaving. Her first reaction was to chuckle, when she heard the sounds of sex coming from the other side of the deck. It was strange how someone else’s sex sounds can be so comical, yet so evocative at the same time.

“Sounds like they’re having fun.” Muttered Gary.

It was the ultimate aphrodisiac; Kate could feel herself getting wet. When Gary began to pull her knickers down over her thighs, she knew he was feeling it too. She liked the idea, but not the location.

“You know me, I like my privacy.” She said.

“Come on then.”

They avoided looking in the direction of their friends, though Kate was sure she’s seen it for a moment, the pale white skin of the bottom that belonged to Giles, thrusting up and down. She was giggling by the time they reached the stairs to go below deck.

“Oh, not this again.” She said. “Not tonight of all nights.”

There was the sound of the ocean bubbling, just as it had before. The awful smell too, of bad eggs and something a little like the gas Gary’s barbecue used. As the deck wobbled under her feet, she grabbed hold of Gary. She dug her fingers into his arm, she had to be hurting him.

“It’s alright Kate, it will pass.....Just like last time.” He said.

By the time their friends were stood next to them in just their underwear, the worst of it had stopped. Only for them though, they could still hear the ocean seething further to the south. There was the weird underwater green glow again, though now it was a hundred yards or so away from them.

“One of the film crew was in Rum Runners.” Said Deb. “He was talking about the gas coming from a geological event.”

“We can’t let it ruin your birthday Deb.” Said Gary. “How about more bubbly all round ?”

“That sounds fun.” Said Deb.

It looked like the night was going to carry on as usual, until Diogenes burst into flames. Not just a section of the wooden sailing ship, it seemed to instantly be burning from stem to stern. Bright yellow flames, that reached the top of its masts.

“They.....They were where we wanted to be.” Said Kate.

“We should do something to help them.” Said Deb

No one moved, Kate could already feel the heat of the blaze on her face. Once the screaming started there was no more talk of going to help. More gas had to be rising up from the ocean, the fire kept increasing as the flames became brighter. They watched Diogenes die, right there in front of them. By the time the flames diminished, there was little left of the huge three master. Just a few burning pieces of debris in the darkness.

“I’m taking us over there.....We might find some survivors.” Said Gary.

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