

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 23 – A local Apocalypse

“Never kill the toads, they keep the bugs down.”

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Emily had decided that loving someone, definitely made you trust them more. Cormac by his own admission, had never obtained his pilots license for a small plane. Just a few lessons many years before, but for some reason, she trusted him completely. Like the trust in the captain of a transatlantic jet, when he said things might get bumpy, in a soothing voice. She hadn't panicked. All small planes bounced about a bit, even the few private jets she'd been on.

“I'll get as close as I can to the ship, before ditching.” Said Cormac.

The word ditching hit her consciousness like a hammer. She'd assumed they'd be landing near the docks. Using a road, or a farmer's onion field to land on. At no time had Cormac mentioned crashing into the ocean, before swimming for their lives. If he had, she'd have noticed.

“We're going to land on the water ?” She asked.

“Yes....We can't take anything, even the guns. No packs either, they'd just drag us under.”

Emily was a decent swimmer; she'd won a few medals at school sports days. The ocean looked rough though and there was a lot of gunfire going on below them. Cormac headed them out to sea a little, before turning to head straight at the docks.

“I assumed we'd land in a field, or a road.” She said.

“No roads I'm afraid, and no fields. She should float for long enough for us to get in the water. We'll need to be quick though.”

To Emily they were heading towards the guns, the ones firing fairly constantly. As Cormac brought the plane lower, the noise became worse and the water below looked even rougher. There was a moment when she briefly looked up, rather than at the water rushing towards them. It was impossible, even though science guy had told them it was going to happen. It was if about a square mile of Janssen had risen up out of the ground. It was heading away from the docks and Emily pitied anyone in its way.

“Science guy told us....We never really believed him, or at least I didn't.” She said. “Nothing can hurt anything that big, nothing.”

“Hold on.....Get out on the wing after we land.” Said Cormac. “Dive in the water, well clear of the plane if you can.”

Considering it was something that couldn't be practised, Cormac did well. The plane bounced off the water, but he kept it heading straight and true. Emily thought they were both going to drown, as the Robin went deep into the water. It bobbed back up like a cork.

“Out.....Out !” Yelled Cormac. “Swim towards the ship.”

Another hot day on Janssen, the temperature had to close to forty degrees again. The current at the docks came from the south and it was a good fifteen degrees cooler. Nice to swim in, but after the hot interior of the Robin, it felt like hitting iced water. Emily felt panic begin, as the tightness in her chest refused to let her breathe. Then she saw the dinghy heading towards them. A man she didn't know was waving and yelling words she couldn't hear.

“We're alright.....They sent a dinghy.” She yelled.

"It's Thierry." Said Cormac.

They helped each other, until strong arms pulled them both out of the water.

"Wow, that was some landing." Said Thierry. "You guys are seriously crazy."

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There was no list of those who'd arrived at The Daphne and Grimm said he had no intention of starting one.

"That comes later, we've all got enough to do right now." He'd told her.

Paris had wanted to find Ilaria, though knowing who was safe sounded a good idea. Grimm was right though, in a way. People were arriving all the time; any list would be a constantly moving feast. It was just that Ilaria D'Andrea was one of those larger-than-life characters, that seemed indestructible. Just knowing she was alive, would put a better spin on a terrible day. Paris had left Vince asleep on a deck chair, on the front deck. It was the furthest point of the ship from the action, though the gunfire was still deafening. Only Vince could have curled up in the chair and slept like a baby. By the time she came across Gary, she was beginning to feel a little guilty. She'd hadn't exactly come out of it without a scratch, but her cuts and grazes were minor. Plus, she did have a nice nest egg hidden inside Kate's Nissan. Everyone else seemed to have nasty bites, sometimes missing limbs. She liked Gary and not just because his lighting could make her look gorgeous, or a horror. She knelt next to him.

"Crap Gary, I thought you'd be the first here. Fit as a fiddle, with a bottle of Jack. What the hell happened?" She asked.

"Stupid really....I was ready to leave the villa, when Cormac mentioned needing a generator. The rest as they say.....Is a painful memory."

"Is the leg going to be alright?"

"Probably not."

"Jeezzz Gary."

Paris hugged him and made sure he hadn't been forgotten by the overstretch medical staff, which seemed to be one guy with a stethoscope and two of the crew. She went everywhere, asking if anyone had seen Ilaria. The general consensus was that the last time anyone had seen her, was in Rum Runners, the night it was destroyed. By the time Mark found her, she'd gotten over the whole guilt for being well thing. Until of course, she saw the stump where his left hand had once been. Someone had told her about him losing a hand, but with all the confusion....Plus, hearing about it was nothing like seeing the bandaged lower arm.

"Oh Mark, I feel so bad for being in one piece." She said. "Actually, sorry....That must have sounded really shitty."

"Everyone says something weird, there's probably a term for it." Said Mark.

"They can do wonders these days, Mark."

"Everyone says that too."

"Sorry.....Have you seen Ilaria anywhere on the ship?"

"No, though she must be alright.....She seems...Indestructible."

"I hope you're right. I wanted to tell her some of the documents we recovered are safe. Not all of them, quite a small number actually. Enough though, to prove they knew about the creatures over a century ago."

"Can I see them?"

"Yes, of course you can. I left the bag with Vince."

"Then maybe we can find a bottle of something." Said Mark.

She had a well-developed horny guy detector, honed to perfection after years working in TV. Injured man or not, she prodded Mark hard in the chest, twice.

"Hey." He said.

"I want someone else to see the documents, it all feels like something that needs sharing. But that's it Mark, no getting ideas."

"As if.....What sort of a guy do you think I am?"

"Yeah.....Right."

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Nicki Outerbridge Still felt groggy from the bang on the head. She'd seen so many people die on Janssen and then there was Sam. Bill said she'd seen it happen, the moment one of the creatures had killed Sam. Not remembering it felt worse than seeing it happen. Not that their relationship was likely to end up with a marriage and two-point four rug rats. They'd probably break up and then find excuses to get together. There'd have been make up sex, then sex as ex-partners, followed by sex when they simply had no one else in their lives. It was how the real world worked, or at least it was how it had worked for her. Not the stuff of romance novels, but she had loved him. A tiny bit of love for Sam, would always be there, somewhere.

"Stop Nicki.....Stand still." Yelled Bill.

Daydreaming again, or day-nightmaring really. She hadn't seen the creature coming out of the undergrowth. Something was happening, they'd seen very few of the creatures and most of those had ignored them. That was no excuse for drifting though, losing focus. If Bill hadn't killed the beast with his wonderful supergun, she'd have died. Monster food, just like poor Sam.

"Sorry Bill.....I'll watch for them." She said. "It's just with everything.....And things look so different."

"Are you sure you know the way?" Asked Darwin.

"Yes, of course I do. The landscape has changed, that low ridge was never there before. It must be the volcanic activity. Weird.....The track to the docks will be the other side of it. Janssen is changing, but I still know the way."

"It'll be dusk soon; we need to hurry." Said Bill.

They'd had the chat while walking, the one where they put themselves in the shoes of Oscar Grimm. None of them would have risked being moored in the docks after nightfall, so it was safe to assume Grimm wouldn't either. Nicki knew they had to hurry; she took them up the side of the new ridge. It was steep and the rocky surface was hot to the touch. She lost her footing once, but didn't slide far.

"Crap Nicki, I trust you but....." Said Bill.

"Yes, I am going the right fucking way." She yelled.

The ground became hot enough to scald her fingers, but she kept climbing, scrambling up the ridge that had never been there before. Tiny fingers of smoke were coming out of the rocks, smoke that smelt of sulphur. If Sam had been there, he'd have been taking pictures and wondering what science guy might have to say about it. Now they'd both gone.

"Keep up with me.....You'll see." She yelled.

A quick look behind her and they were there, even if they didn't look happy about it. They both had wounds, she had wounds. It was unlikely anyone on Grimm's freighter would leave Janssen without wounds. Those without physical wounds would carry the trauma with them forever. Nicki stood up straight when she reached the top of the ridge.

"Yes, they're still there." She said.

"I always did trust you." Said Bill.

The ridge gave a good view of the dockyard. The Daphne was in the berth nearest the road, though there was another ship, one that would never leave. Effectively a derelict, it had arrived with a construction crew and materials for the dock improvements. There had been problems getting it running to leave and the company owning it had gone bust. That had been a decade before. The derelict wasn't going anywhere, but Grimm's ship might sail at any moment.

"We need to run." Said Bill.

The ridge seemed hotter on the other side, but at least they were running down it. What was left of the track merged with the road, which looked like a vehicle graveyard. At least one smouldering Humvee and an APC, crushed into a mass of the usual hatchbacks seen on Janssen. Much of the population might have died, though the survivors had obviously been told about the ship and the megafauna password.

"Stop !.....Wait, we're coming." Yelled Nicki.

Bill seemed to forget about the whole low on ammunition problem. He fired his very noisy weapon three times, aiming high into the sky. Someone had torched the remains, there were piles of partially cremated creatures. After that, it seemed there were simply too many dead beasts to deal with. The ground was littered with the remains of the brutes. As Nicki ran around a dead creature the size of a truck, she saw someone untying the ship.

"No.....Wait.....We're here." She yelled.

Not so much untying, as using a winch to lift huge ropes from bollards on the dock. The man using the winch was being guarded by people carrying assault rifles.

"We saw you.....And heard you." Someone shouted. "The ramp is still there, though not for long."

They had been raising the access ramp, it was a good three feet above the jetty. It came down quickly, thumping the jetty. Up they went, onto the aft deck of The Daphne. Nicki saw lots of survivors, most of them bandaged and bloody. One of them moved towards her and hugged her.

"Oh, Nicki....I always knew you'd make it." Said Paris.

"Did all our people make it ?" Asked Nicki.

Paris shook her head at her.

"No, not all.....Grimm still refuses to start a list, but I can tell you who's here."

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Officially they needed a pilot, though he couldn't see the Janssen port authority trying to prosecute him. Oscar Grimm knew where the deep-water channel was and he had no intention of running aground. He steered out of the docks very slowly, before speeding up The Daphne, as they reached open sea.

"They'll nuke this place; you wait and see." Said Rana. "It should be nuked, the whole of the fucking Donder Isles."

Grimm had a good view from the bridge and he'd had cameras installed, to give a perfect view of the what was behind them. When you transport the sort of goods, some might get angry about. It paid to be able to watch your back. The docks looked the same, but the number of fires on Janssen seemed to be growing. Something huge was occurring on the island, something science guy had called a local apocalypse.

"They won't nuke it." He said. "They would if they were sensible, but they won't."

"Why not ?" Asked Rana.

"It will come down to two groups wanting to leave Janssen alone and they will be very vocal about it. The green eco gang will be saying we have no right to wipe out a unique species. They'll probably

get a minor royal to appear on TV and I guarantee genocide will get a mention. They might even throw misogyny into the mix, as the huge queen creature is likely to be female.”

“You’re such a cynic Oscar.”

“No, I’m a realist. The other group demanding Janssen is left alone, will be the big pharma and medical people. Unique life forms that can survive for a couple of ice ages....There will be money to be made there, I’m certain of it. So no, there will be no nukes falling on The Donder Isles. My guess is that in a few years, when everything settles down; some medical group will build a research base on what’s left of Tilburg.”

“The sad thing is Oscar, that you’re probably right.” Said Rana.

“People forget Rana, they forget these kinds of things very quickly. Do you fancy driving for a while ? I think a tour of the premises is overdue. Just to make sure our guests are settling in.”

“Yeah, no problem. When are you telling the guests we’re heading for The Dominican Republic ?”

“Give it two or three days. By then, they’ll be happy to arrive anyway. I love my ship, but she wasn’t designed to hold this many people.... Soon, they’ll begin to feel uncomfortable.”

Oscar was trying to avoid the two FBI agents. They had no jurisdiction on his ship, but they’d soon be asking about using his comms to talk to their people in the USA. Details about The Daphne would be asked for and their destination. They might get a bit peeved at not being taken to a port in the USA. He had no intention of telling them the comms blackout had cleared, for at least three days.

“Confusion to our enemies.” He muttered to himself.

Seeing Bill Carr in the hold being used as a makeshift hospital, sent Oscar hurrying up to the aft deck. Matt was there, talking to Paris Ferland. Matt would do, he was a big guy. Oscar got behind him, effectively blocking any view of him from the main part of the ship.

“We were just saying how terrible it is.” Said Paris. “There must be a way we can help ?”

“It looks like The Sheffield is finished.” Added Mark.

Oscar hadn’t noticed and he should have. It was night, but the British Frigate was on fire. At least half a mile away, the ship was locked in an embrace with a creature three times its size. The battle was only going to end one way. Mark was right, The Sheffield was finished. Huge tentacles were wrapped round the ship and it was already leaning over by at least forty degrees.

“The size of that thing.” Said Grimm. “We’ve no weapons that could kill it, and with so many injured people already onboard. Sadly, there’s nothing we can do for them.”

He had two missiles, his insurance for a very rainy day. If someone’s navy was every seriously after him, then he’d use the missiles. A thing that size though, the missiles would probably just annoy it. Then there was the damage they might accidentally do to the frigate. Deep down Oscar admitted to himself that he’d already put his ship and crew in more danger than he’d been prepared for. More danger than he’d been paid for.

“Yes, I can see that.” Said Paris. “Those poor sailors.”

“Where are we headed for ?” Asked Mark.

“I’m not sure yet, my crew are still working out the safest option.”

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~ Three Years Later ~

If you happened to be in Bermuda and in need of a tourist bike, you had a fair choice of places to hire one. Just one in Pitts Bay Road though, on the side of the road closest to the ocean. The new owner had thought about keeping the old business name, it was well known in the area. Ego won over economics though and a large sign over the door says;

“Daryll’s Bike Hire.’

There are signs in the window promising special rates for long term hires. Inside you'd find a large black man, with quite a few visible scars. Accept his first ludicrously high quote on a two week hire and he might tell you how he was a football player once;

"A damn good one....I never could work out how I ended up in the bike hire business."

Show a genuine interest in his football stories and on the right day, when his left arm isn't giving him trouble; and he might tell you about being a survivor of the terrible events on Janssen Island. He'll go on about fights with his insurers;

"Act of God my arse."

He'll take a while, giving you a blow by blow on getting compensation for losing his business in Tilburg, the main and just about only town on Janssen. Or more accurately, it had been the main town. They never had nuked Janssen, but little had been left after the dreadful events there.

"All that's left now are the toads, or so I've been told."

Be patient, smile a lot and on a really good day. Daryll will tell you about leaving Janssen on a glass bottomed boat. Not a sailor's yarn, he'll point at a newspaper article, framed and on the wall. You'll get the story about Ilaria being with him, one of the TV crew filming for a series on the creatures.

"We were adrift for months. No water for weeks, no food either. If that fishing boat hadn't been in just the right spot...."

The article, if you want to read it ? Will tell you they were adrift for about three or four days, but don't tell Daryll he's exaggerating again. If you do, he won't tell you what happened to the woman with him, Ilaria D'Andrea.

"Nice lady, she went back to London. Last I heard, she was back with her husband."

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~ Ten Years After The Local Apocalypse ~

Nick was eight years old and he tended go beachcombing on his own. He had a younger sister, but she wasn't big enough to join him. It was Saturday, so no school. He tended to get up early and wander along the beach a mile or so from where he lived. There was always something new on the beach, pulled ashore by the ocean currents. He lived with his parents and sister, in a village called Donkin, which wasn't far from Glace Bay in Nova Scotia. There weren't many other kids in Donkin and there wasn't much to do. Nick had taken to beachcombing after finding the large shell, which was still the best thing in his collection. A huge spiral shell, which looked as though it had a rainbow on the inside. There was something a little magical about that shell. His dad had told him it had probably come from the far south. A shell from the tropics, washed along with the ocean currents. A piece of wood covered in barnacles had been on the beach the week before, but his mum had said it was too filthy to come in the house.

"Oh, wow." He said.

It looked like a huge ball of worms, as it rolled along the beach. Big, really big, taller than him by about a foot. Nothing had ever bitten him on the beach, or stung him. Nick wasn't scared, just really curious. He walked towards the rotating ball and noticed the worms seemed to be coming out of an egg in the centre of the ball.

"Hatching." He muttered.

One long thin worm dropped from the ball. Nick watched for a while, as it wriggled about, before digging itself into the pebbles.

"Cool."

When he looked up the worm ball was gone, vanished.

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~ The End ~

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That's it, the final chapter of Outerbridge Sound. There will be no Outerbridge II, but I will definitely write another creature feature.