

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 2 – Lights On The Water

“Most of the wealthy packed their kids’ bags and sent them to school in Canada. Why Canada and not the USA, which was far closer ? No one really knew, but it had become a bit of a tradition.”

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Getting a car on Jannsen was harder than collecting unicorn teeth. One car per household, no exceptions and even then there were limitations on engine size. There were no hired cars just motorbikes and even they were limited to 125cc. Sam had put in a request to bring in two vehicles in a container for the production crew and onscreen talent, but the paperwork was still going through the local bureaucracy. Luckily Nicki Outerbridge had a Jeep and didn’t seem to mind being their chauffeur for a while.

Not that Ilaria D’Andrea was in the Jeep with them, she was following them on a hired Yamaha YS125. She dreaded to think how many tourists had ill-treated and abused the poor bike, but it was far better than being a passenger in a car. As for the crash helmet that came with the bike; she refused to let her mind dwell on how many greasy heads had been inside it.

“I really could get to like this place.” She muttered.

The roads were infamous for being pretty grim if torrential rain arrived with a tropical storm, hence the popularity of Jeeps on Jannsen. It was a sunny dry morning though, with the palm trees gently swaying in the breeze. Ilaria had expected to hate the small island with its tiny population and no proper airport. Instead she was beginning to fall for its charms. She followed Nicki into the boat repair yard and stopped near her Jeep, before putting the bike on its centre stand. Ilaria found it impossible not to look at the grubby inside of the crash helmet as she took it off.

“Can you buy these things on Jannsen Nicki ?” She asked. “There must be some for sale somewhere.”

“Yes, I know someone. I’ll get you a brand new one later today.”

“Thanks.”

They’d arrived at one of the two boat repair yards on Jannsen, one owned by a man called Michael Chavez. A bit of a rogue according to Nicki, who seemed to know the dirt about everyone on the island. Everyone followed Nicki as she yelled for Michael and walked towards a large boat lying on its side.

“It’s a miracle she stayed afloat.” Said Nicki. “As it was, they only just about managed to get her out of the water.”

At first glance The Dolphin looked fine, just the normal type of boat that took snorkelers out to the reefs, or gave tourists a trip around the island. There was even a poster or two about being the only glass bottomed boat in the Donder Isles. The reason the vessel had been dragged out of the water by winches was only obvious when they were able to see her underside.

“What did that ? Did she hit the rocks ?” Asked Sam.

“No, we were out in the sound. Pointless, all you can see is water as dark as ink. Every now and then though, some damn fool wants to go into the sound and see if they can spot the monster.”

The man talking was black, thin and had to be close to seven feet tall. His age could have been anywhere from early forties to late fifties. Walking beside him was a plump middle aged white guy

wearing a Chavez Boat Repairs T shirt. Nicki did the introduction and the tall man was Charlie Dunkley proud owner of The Dolphin, the only glass bottomed boat on Janssen. It was hardly a surprise to learn that the man in the T shirt was Michael Chavez.

“So, what did tear a hole in your boat ?” Asked Sam.

“Depends who’s asking.” Said Charlie. “I filled in an insurance claim stating that a freak wave caught us in the channel coming out of the sound. The damned thing pushed us against the rocks.”

“You can probably understand Charlie’s reluctance to tell a different story to TV news.” Said Michael.

“We’re not TV news.” Snapped Sam. “And I don’t care about insurance companies being told a convenient lie. I just want to know the truth.”

Ilaria knew what a collision with rocks looked like and it didn’t cause the sort of damage The Dolphin had suffered. The famous glass bottom had been cracked along its length, though luckily the hole at the stern end was quite small. Whatever had cracked the glass had carried on causing damage by ripping a hole about two feet across in the hull. A ragged hole that looked to have been torn out.

“Will you want to use my name ?” Asked Charlie.

“Not if you don’t want us to.” Said Sam. “We can just name you as a source and get an actor to read your words.”

“Do I get paid ?”

Ilaria had been to a large variety of locations in some of the most remote places on the planet. One man in Honduras had witnessed his first cousin eaten by something in the river, yet his main question to her had been about getting paid for his story. It was the same everywhere and she knew that for a lot of people, a few extra dollars really mattered.

“We pay a standard five hundred dollars if we use your piece.” Said Sam. “United States dollars, paid in cash.”

The smile on Charlie’s face told her he was going to tell them the truth about the hole in his boat.

“It was a damn cruise ship group.” Said Charlie. “About fifteen of them, all wanting to go and look at the sound. Normally I’d have refused, The Dolphin is a bit large for the channel, but they kept insisting.”

“Did you hit the rocks Charlie ?” Asked Nicki. “You can tell me, there’ll be no hard feelings. I just don’t want you lying to these people.”

“Lying ! I’m not that desperate for five hundred bucks. Anyway we were in the sound, the far side just to the north of the small island. The water was too dark to see anything, just like I warned them. Of course some moaned about a wasted day out. One of them though, she claimed to have seen something in the water, a long way down. Daft of course, you can’t see anything after about ten feet down.”

“Do you know her name ?” Asked Ilaria.

“No, she was just a tourist from one of the cruise ships.” Said Charlie. “They pay their thirty dollars and have their trip. With luck I never see any of them again....They all moan about everything. Anyway, just as a few more of them are saying there’s something under the boat, the tearing noise started.”

“Did you see anything ?” Asked Dom.

“Of course I did, just let me tell it my own way. Anyway we weren’t moving that fast. As the tearing noise started we came to a sudden halt and some of the tourists were knocked off their feet. There was some screaming and the boy who helps me was shouting about something. It was there, right beneath us. Like the tentacle of an octopus or a squid, but huge and it had claws. It must have been

the claws that were tearing into the hull. I stopped looking when the water began pouring in. All I could think of then was getting out of the sound to somewhere safe.”

“Can we talk to the boy who helps you ?” Asked Dom.

“No use, he had an injury a few years ago, an accident while diving.” Said Charlie. “Bashed his head and now....He’s a good lad, but he probably doesn’t remember that day.”

“I know Vince and he might remember a few things.” Said Nicki. “You’ll just need to be patient with him.”

“We can do caring and patient.” Said Sam. “Not all TV people are bastards.”

“Can I take some pictures ?” Asked Ilaria.

“Do I get my five hundred bucks ?”

Sam paid him, he usually carried a bundle of US Dollar notes for such occasions. Ilaria had a decent Digital SLR in her backpack, which she used to get about a hundred pictures of the damage to The Dolphin. Some close to, some from a distance and they all showed where something had clawed and gouged at the hull. It seemed a miracle that the entire glass bottom hadn’t shattered, sending the boat to the bottom of Outerbridge Sound. By the time she’d finished, the others were ready to leave.

“Sorry I couldn’t help with the names of a few tourists.” Said Charlie. “I run a cash business and one tourist looks much like another.”

It was strange, but everyone seems to think they have a copyright on the story they were involved in, as though no one else was allowed to talk about it. The research people in London could find out which cruise ships had been in Janssen that day. A few phone calls to the passengers and quite quickly, they’d have enough eye witness accounts to fill in the holes in Charlie’s story.

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Sam Hardwick had founded Scott Hardwick Productions with Denise Scott while they were both going through college. They’d been lovers then, both with a love of the cinematic arts. They were no longer lovers, but against all the odds, their company had flourished. Denise now ran the office back in London in the role of Finance Director, which meant she controlled the purse strings.

Sam had a theory that everyone thought differently about the people they’d been intimate with, as opposed to the general population. A tiny little bit of love for Denise still lurked somewhere within him, he was certain of it. He was sure she felt the same way, even though some of their phone conversations could be awkward. Lunchtime in the Donder Isles was late in the office in London, with most of the staff heading for home. The phones would have stopped going crazy too, so it was their favourite time to catch up with one another.

“Did the local government people approve the cars ?” Asked Denise.

“No, they’re still processing the paperwork. I’m not sure if offering a bribe will help or get me arrested.”

“Probably arrested, I’ll try and speed them up from this end.”

Sam was sat by the pool with a glass of cold wine. He imagined Denise in London, with an hour and a half journey home once their call ended. He often thought it was no coincidence that none of their productions had been in wet cold places, or in cities. If you were going monster hunting, it made sense to do it in a subtropical paradise.

“How is the Benevide’s place ? Are you all settling in alright ?” She asked.

“Wonderful, far better than staying in a hotel. The pool is wonderful and there’s complete privacy. Enough bedrooms for everyone and there’s even a guy who looks after the garden.”

The Benevide family were on a tour of Europe and Denise knew someone, who knew one of their close friends. Sam had used the homes of people travelling before and it was always so much nicer than staying in local hotels. Cheaper too, as long as no one broke a prized antique during the wrap party.

"Your press release made enough media websites to get noticed." Said Denise.

"Has it hit social media yet?"

"It's beginning to and our PR Company are going to hire someone to help. I know you're not keen on using trolls for hire, but it does work. Finance relies on the story going viral and doing it quickly."

"Are they trolls if they help us? Either way, I can see it makes sense. Just make sure no one finds out, or what remains of our reputation will vanish."

"Don't worry, I'm using Dimitri as a cut off. I'm sending you a script writer, he should be with you in a couple of days. You need someone to put a bit of meat on the bare bones of the stories you're hearing."

"Who are we getting?" He asked.

"I'm sending you Jeffrey Gravenor."

"Oh Crap."

"I know you don't like him....No one does. But he is good and most importantly, he's available. Keep him focused Sam, I'm relying on you. Keep them all focused."

"I will..... Did I mention how nice it is by the pool?"

"Bastard....I just heard the end of the Piccadilly line has signal problems, again."

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Nicki had lived in Tilburg most of her life, she'd even been to school there, which was rare for an Outerbridge. Most of the wealthy packed their kids' bags and sent them to school in Canada. Why Canada and not the USA, which was far closer? No one really knew, but it had become a bit of a tradition. Nicki had acquired her secondary education in Tilburg, the largest town on Janssen. Before being sent to a college in Montreal to have her education finished off. Why the British hadn't renamed the Dutch named Tilburg after somewhere back home, was again a mystery.

For Nicki and the other local kids, the town of Tilburg with its hotel, bars and even one or two restaurants had been their world when they were growing up. It had been her boom town, until she'd spent time in a huge city with fast food, twenty four opening and streets that didn't becoming mud pools after heavy rains. There was still something about Tilburg, like the scruffy boyfriend she'd thought was so cool in her teens. As she parked outside Rum Runners, she felt a tingle of excitement. She looked at herself in her Jeep's wing mirror.

"You'll do." She muttered.

She entered Rum Runners, the best bar and restaurant in The Donder Isles. The restaurant could seat about twenty five, which seemed a bit optimistic on an island with a population a little over four hundred. There had been a few weddings that had filled it though. The three TV people from Scott Hardwick Productions, known simply as SHP, had already claimed a decent table.

"Nicki, we're over here." Yelled Ilaria.

Nicki waved, she liked them, she genuinely liked them. It was just that a film crew with all that cash to spend and probably a faulty moral compass. They were likely to cause a lot of problems before they packed up and left town.

"Am I late?" Asked Nicki.

"No, we're early." Said Sam. "A bit of a celebration, our press release was mentioned on several major TV news shows. It's even being talked about in South Korea, or so I'm told."

Her dad had always brought her to Rum Runners as a treat and dinner there still felt like something special. She knew the waitress, of course she did, she'd had a fight with her older sister in her final year of school.

"The usual Nicki?"

"Yes please Judy, and a bottle of Amstel."

Dutch beer, the favourite drink on Janssen. Another mystery really as no one on Janssen had spoken Dutch or had any links there for over five hundred years.

"They're sending us a script writer from London." Said Sam. "Jeffery, we've all worked with him before. He will need your help as he'll need private meetings with local people."

"Anything I can do, happy to help. The Island needs the tourism that hopefully, you guys will bring in." She said.

They were paying her a small fee, as was the local tourism authority. She didn't need the money, but was a firm believer that if you want people to respect you, they had to pay for your time and work.

"Will I have heard of this Jeffery?" She asked.

"He did the script for a BBC piece on women's prisons." Said Ilaria.

"I think that was for Chanel 4." Said Dom. "Good work, he won an award."

Nicki's dinner, her usual, was a well-cooked steak with fries and all the trimmings. Expensive, though she assumed Sam and SHP were picking up the bill, he had invited her to dinner. Everything had to be shipped in, the only food grown commercially on the island were Donder Onions.

"So Nicki, how about a short history of the Outerbridge Sound Monster?" Asked Ilaria. "I'm fascinated by the idea of a beast that turns up every hundred years."

They seemed genuine, she'd never picked up anything to suggest they were baiting her, or thought she was just a crazy local. Mind you, she wouldn't have blamed them if they had. Dom was putting his phone in the centre of the table to record what she said.

"I can only tell you what you must have already read somewhere." Said Nicki.

"Let the poor woman eat her dinner." Said Sam.

"We all know a local perspective is invaluable." Said Dom.

Nicki didn't really mind picking at her food while telling them the long and often disputed history of Outerbridge Sound. She'd had her own ideas about some of it, especially the lack of investigation for some of the terrible events.

"Alright....Though first let's explode one myth, the events are never exactly a century apart. The first dreadful happening we know of was the slaughter of the Dutch colonists in fifteen ninety, though something might have been stomping around the island long before that. There are very few indigenous animal species on the island, which is rare."

"That's good, we can use that in an introduction." Said Sam.

"We could get in that Hugh guy who does documentaries for the BBC." Said Ilaria. "Sorry Nicki, we're probably spoiling your flow."

"No problem, as long as you're buying me another Amstel, or two."

"Yes, I can organise that." Said Sam.

"Anyway, the next near extinction of the human population was in about seventeen hundred. The British held the Donder Isles then, though there were still arguments going on with the Dutch about that. After quite a few portents of doom, the local clergyman's words, not mine. Something rose up out of the sound and killed nearly everyone. Three people took to a boat and by a miracle they washed up on the American coast, about five hundred miles away. Luckily the clergyman was one of the survivors, or we'd never have known what happened."

"A missing colony, like the one at Roanoke." Said Dom.

"Yes, we can bring that in too, though we mustn't overdo it." Said Sam. "Carry on Nicki, we should be approaching relatively modern times."

"I have my own theory about why so little was done to investigate the dark goings on at the sound. The next dreadful slaughter was in eighteen fifteen. The British had clung onto the islands and by then there was a population of at least two or three hundred. Sadly most of the colonists died, though a few were rescued by..... Ironically a Dutch warship. The British and Dutch were enemies once again then, both fighting on opposing sides in the Napoleonic wars. The survivors did make it home, though no rescue ship was ever send to the Donder Isles. My guess is that everyone was simply too busy fighting the French."

"You might be right, we'll need to get a few historians in to give us their opinions." Said Sam.

"Which brings us right up to the attack of nineteen seventeen." Said Nicki. "A time when most of Europe was busy fighting a world war. There was some mention of the deaths in the press and even a few pictures, though only pictures taken after the event.

A man had been sent by the Horticultural Society to look at plant species on the islands and take pictures of anything of note. When the supply ship he was on arrived, he was just in time to photograph mutilated bodies and ruined buildings. Again there would definitely have been an investigation by the British authorities, if it hadn't been for the war. There was a large contingent of Irish builders on Janssen then, constructing various coastal defences. In all its estimated that close to two thousand were killed by whatever happened in nineteen seventeen."

"And now the next dark event is a little overdue." Said Ilaria.

"Be honest with me Nicki." Said Sam. "There could be rational explanations for everything. Do you believe in....The monster of the sound ?"

"Yes, of course I do.....Don't you ?" She said.

"I don't have to Nicki, I just have to collect all the information together and turn it into TV entertainment."

"A bit cynical Sam." Said Ilaria.

"Be cynical, but we're seeing the start of the dark portents." Said Nicki. "The damage to the glass bottomed boat, the occasional weird sighting of something moving through the water in the night. Next will come the lights on the water, followed by people going missing. If you all stay on Janssen you may live to be convinced that the monster is all too real."

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Dom Trecca felt something cool and moist on his cheek. He'd had too much to drink at Rum Runners, but he always drank a little too much. It came again, the touch on his cheek by....It felt like a kiss.

"Oh, I can't sleep Dom. Wake up."

As he woke, he realised he'd fallen asleep on a pool side lounge. He did hate sleeping indoors in hot climates, the aircon dried out his sinuses and made his allergies worse. He had no memory of how he'd ended up sleeping beside the pool, though he'd woken up in far weirder places.

"Oh Ilaria....Wicked girl, leave me in peace." He said.

He knew the look on her face all too well; she couldn't sleep and wanted to drag him off on some crazy escapade. It had happened so many times in the past and after waking up in a barn full of goats in Honduras, he'd vowed to resist her in future.

"Come on Dom, it'll be fun. I want to see the famous sound by moonlight."

Like a roguish imp she kissed him on the cheek again and began pulling at his arm. Ilaria was older than him, a good ten years older. After a drink though and when she had insomnia, he thought of her as a kid sister.

"You're no fun anymore Dom. Come on, it's a full moon, I think, and I have the bike."

The moon didn't look quite full yet, but it was very bright. Dom suddenly realised there was a cool breeze, a bit too cool to get back to sleep.

"How would we get there?" He asked. "You're too drunk to get on that bike."

"I'll be fine Dom....Oh come on, it'll be fun and I promise to drive really, really slowly."

His knees ached as he stood up, sleeping outside had definitely been a mistake. Ilaria kissed his cheek again and for some reason he wanted to kiss her properly. Would she get angry? He lunged very slowly, giving her plenty of time to move away, or tell him to piss off. Their lips met and she kissed him back. It was nice, actually it was a lot better than just nice. When Ilaria did move away she moved slowly and there was a grin on her face.

"Wow, that was unexpected." She said. "I thought you were devoted to your little wifey."

"I'm pretty sure wifey has had someone else in her life for quite some time."

"Ahh, I see."

She kissed him again, just a peck on his lips. She was backing away from him, the roguish imp look back on her face.

"I have two crash helmets, Nicki gave me a new one." She said. "They're in my room, if you're brave enough to follow me there?"

Ilaria was gone, hurtling over the grass like a wild thing, a very sexy wild thing. Only then did he realise he had a huge erection making a tent out of his trousers.

"Jeez....I've turned into a horny teenager." He muttered.

He remembered there was a box on the back of her bike, a box big enough to carry a bit of shopping, or a tourist's picnic lunch. He went into the kitchen on the way to her room and grabbed a bottle of wine. Cheap wine with a screw top, he couldn't be bothered searching for a cork screw.

Ilaria's room was on the ground floor and was usually inhabited by the owner's teenage daughter. The posters on the walls grabbed his attention, the weird mix of eighties rock and modern pop.

"Wow, this is a bit.....Different." He said.

"It really is, I found an electric guitar at the back of the wardrobe."

"It's very you."

They kissed again, but only for a moment.

"I see you brought wine." She said. "We should take a blanket, there's just about enough room in the box."

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Ilaria did keep her promise, she was keeping her speed down to about thirty. Still too fast, the official blanket speed limit for Jannsen was twenty. Not that she was worried, they'd yet to see a cop anywhere and anyway, speed limits were for locals to worry about. Dom had been a gentleman, letting her take the new crash helmet, while he used the old grubby one. There was a hill on the way there, one that would give them a perfect moonlit view of Outerbridge Sound. Still some way off the infamous dark water glistened in the moonlight. She stopped the bike in the centre of the road.

"It's beautiful." She said.

"Look at the clouds."

High above the infamous sound, a bank of cloud was doing something strange. It seemed to be rolling over on itself in a way she'd never seen before. At the clouds centre a storm appeared to be

building, a silent electrical storm with no thunder. The lighting was illuminating the interior of the clouds, without making a sound.

“The clergyman in seventeen hundred talked about unnatural storms.” Said Dom. “ One of the dark portents he wrote about.”

“Do you still want to go ?” She asked.

It must have been difficult wearing a crash helmet, but he managed to lean forward and kiss her neck.

“Of course I do.”

Because of the channel into the sound from Jones Bay, the road had to snake around quite a bit, though so far they hadn't seen another set of lights on the road. They went through two small places, one called simply 'Sharp's Point' and another called 'Duncan's Leap.' They ended up on the northern coast road for a few minutes, before turning south after seeing a sign for Outerbridge Sound.

The population was tiny, housing density low. It didn't surprise her that no one had built their home anywhere near the dark waters of the sound. She ignored the bike park for tourists and bounced the Yamaha over rough ground for a while. Eventually she was happy with where they were and she stopped the bike. They were on flat grass above a cliff. Not a huge cliff, no more than thirty feet or so, but high enough to stop anything crawling out of the water. It looked like they were about to do the wild thing together and she needed to feel safe to really enjoy the moment. She put the bike on its stand.

“The clouds are still there.” Said Dom.

High above them the lightning was still illuminating just one particularly large cloud. Tempting to talk to Sam about some sort of UFO connection with the once a century slaughtering of the local population. Not that he'd go for it, Sam wasn't a believer and definitely didn't want to believe.

“I meant to ask Dom.....Do you believe in the monster ?”

“Oh yes, I have since I saw those pictures from nineteen seventeen. The guy who took them was a scientist after all. Two thousand killed in a single night. So yes, I believe. Do you ?”

“I didn't, not until I got off the boat from Miami. Being here though, picking up the general vibe....Yes, I believe something dreadful lurks in the waters of the sound. We've both worked on stories we knew were crap, but this.....This is the genuine article.”

“Oh, do you remember the lady in Brazil who we're sure killed her own cat ?”

“Yes, and claimed the river monster got it.” She said. “What an evil bitch.”

Ilaria put the blanket on a dry area of ground and removed her skirt. Normally jeans were her thing, she'd never have worn a skirt, but Sam had hinted that smart casual was required for dinner at Rum Runners. She folded her skirt carefully and then took off her blouse. Dom wasn't a fool; he knew what was going on.

When she glanced at him, he was just wearing a pair of boxer shorts. She sat on the blanket and he came and sat next to her, their nearly naked bodies touching. For a few minutes they drank the wine, taking it in turns to drink straight from the bottle. Eventually they kissed again, before she gently pushed him onto his back and eased his shorts down over his thighs.

“HmMMM impressive Dom, very nice.”

Not porno film huge, but his Dick was a good size for a guy who'd drunk as much as he had that night. Nice and hard too, as she used her left hand, slowly rubbing up and down. Ilaria actually enjoyed going down on a guy. There had even been one or two women in her life, though she really preferred to drive stick. As her lips went over the top of his dick, she heard Dom moan.

The sex was pretty good. Actually for two people as tired and drunk as they were, it was bloody fantastic. There had even been a repeat performance about an hour later and Dom hadn't even tried the couple of things she wasn't too keen on. Similarly he seemed to enjoy everything she did and she had learned a thing or two over the years. The fact that she was thinking about improving their sexual repertoire, proved she wasn't thinking of it as a one off. It was lust not love, though she did have a huge amount of affection for Dom. She loved her husband, but he was a long way away, right at the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. No worries about arriving home carrying another man's child, a hospital consultant had told her that wasn't going to happen.

She'd had tests in her mid-thirties and he'd been very nice to her, even giving her a tissue when she'd briefly cried. Quite good looking with a look of Idris Elba about him, right down to the flecks of grey in his beard. No hurrying her out, he'd even sent the nurse to fetch her a cup of tea. What it had all boiled down to was that if she wanted a child, it would have to be adoption or long term fostering. Ilaria looked at Dom as he slept, half covered with an edge of the blanket.

"Please don't fall in love or get clingy." She muttered.

A few moments later she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

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Dom woke up with a headache, which was normal. The first thing he saw was a huge toad. Very few indigenous creatures thrived on Janssen, but it seemed nothing ate the toads, not even the legendary monster. Poisonous to eat, the huge things thrived in great numbers and some were as large as a puppy. He turned over and saw Ilaria, who was lying next to him, asleep and gently snoring. He kissed her shoulder and decided it was time to find where he'd left his clothes the night before.

It was after dawn, there was a pleasing golden glow to the eastern part of the sky. Not long after dawn though and some places were still hidden by dark shadows. As he turned to find his boxers, he saw the surface of the sound. He fondled Ilaria's arm a little and when that failed to wake her, he pushed at her shoulder.

"Wake up.....You need to see this." He said.

"What.....What's wrong?"

He could tell by the gasp, that she'd rolled over and seen it too. The entire surface of the sound was covered in what looked like dancing flames. Not a bright light, the fire on the surface of the water had a dull yellow look. The real shock was seeing fire and flames where they had no logical right to be.

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