

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 12 – The Submersible

“Paris had been honest with him, telling him she only wanted him for his brain. As he sat there though, naked on the side of the bed. She realised the rest of him was pretty good too.”

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Strangely it had been her idea, even if it was crazy. There seemed to be a lull in creature activity and there was no real privacy in the villa anymore.

“Face it Sam, if they’re hearing our private conversations, they can hear us screwing.”

He’d agreed and they’d used her bike to get most of the way up to the top of Castle Point. Not all the way, there were two really tough places to clamber up, that her bike would never have managed. Puffing a bit from the climb, they’d arrived at the highest point on The Donder Isles. Sam had carried the picnic basket; just in case they were hungry afterwards. Nicki had carried two blankets and an assault rifle over her shoulder. Not the most romantic thing to take, but they were strange times on Janssen, very strange. That had been just after midnight and it was now a little after one thirty in the morning.

“I’m glad I carried that damn basket now.” Said Sam. “Warm prosecco sounds awful, but when you’re thirsty enough....”

“I thought you’d draw the line at lugging ice up here.” She said.

The sex had been very good, there was something about doing the wild thing outdoors. The warm breeze off the ocean, the sound of frogs chirruping in the undergrowth. It all seemed to boost her libido, which never needed much of a boost anyway. Sweaty and thirsty, they’d decided to attack the contents of the hamper, before doing it all again.

“There was an old wooden fort up here for years, supposedly a relic from the Dutch colonial days. I was never convinced; it all looked a bit modern.” She said. “After one hurricane hit the island in eighty-seven, it vanished. Probably turned to a pile of matchwood, which washed out to sea. Its demise left us this perfect spot to have a picnic.”

“It is a great place for privacy.....We must do this again.” Said Sam.

“Probably a little dangerous.”

“Admit it; That’s part of the fun.”

Nicki was developing a bit of a thing about Sam’s dick. Seeing it small and shrunken felt like a personal insult, besides being such a waste. She was polite though, she did wait until he’d finished his warm prosecco, before reaching for it. It was soon swelling in her hand, as Sam nuzzled her neck. The moment for action was close, she straddled him and felt him go in deep. At that moment the earth really did move for her, it moved for everyone on Janssen.

“What the hell was that ?” Asked Sam.

Nicki was well travelled; she’d been in LA when an earthquake had struck. Only a mild one, but it had felt far worse than the tremor that had caused Sam to cry out. She ended up on her knees, looking at the ocean far out to sea.

“An earthquake, a mild one.” She said. “Weird, because we get hurricanes and the occasional tornado, but no earthquakes.”

The ground shook again and they ended up hugging one another, while the ground moved sideways, as well as up and down. Something had caught her eye though, something out in the ocean that might be another result of science guy's geological events.

"Look." She said, pointing. "That's miles away, well past the reefs."

It was if the deep ocean was on fire, burning with huge impossible flames. The glow was lighting up the surface of the ocean for miles. She'd heard about molten lava boiling the ocean in places like Iceland, but Janssen wasn't like that.

"I have a bad feeling we're looking at what stirs up the creatures in Outerbridge Sound, every hundred years or so." Said Sam. "The lull might be about to end."

"I've never heard of earthquakes here, or the ocean.....Burning." She said.

Castle point wasn't that high, probably barely able to be called a hill. It gave the perfect place to watch from though, as they watched real fire appear above the water. A long way off, but the flames covered a huge area. Gas again probably, the same being blamed in the destruction of Diogenes. Any boats in the area were at risk, but they hadn't even bothered bringing their phones.

"We've no way of warning anyone." She said.

"I'll tell Deb we need two satellite phones, as soon as possible."

"I just feel so helpless Sam. This island is my home."

Another tremor and, still naked, they hugged again.

"There are two hundred Royal Navy guys on Janssen." Said Sam. "They have working comms and they're trained to deal with just about anything. We should stay here until morning, it's probably safer than riding your bike during an earthquake."

She felt something stirring, as it rubbed against her leg. By the time he'd rolled her, gently, back onto the blanket, his intentions were clear.

"Really ? During an earthquake ?" She asked.

"Why not ? I seem to remember we were interrupted."

"I never knew you were such a wild man, Sam Hardwick."

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Paris Ferland knew she had it, and that there was even a word for it. Sapiosexuality, she nearly always fell for the smart guys, the geeks most of her friends avoided like the plague. There had been a few hunks in her life, she'd nearly married one. But, when she flicked through her mental Rotadex, it was usually the really smart guys she fell for. Not that Bryan, AKA science guy wasn't handsome in his own way.

She'd noticed the new admin person giving him the glad eye. Her names was.....Kate, that was it.

Paris liked to think of herself as a reformed character, a former bitch. Not that she'd let that stop her giving Kate a poke in the eye, if she felt it was needed.

"There's a hell of a commotion going on out there." She said. "I think we must have slept through the worst of it."

"Probably the earthquake." Said Bryan. "It was only a few small tremors, but if people have never felt one before.....Nothing to worry about."

She was dressed and he wasn't. Paris had been honest with him, telling him she only wanted him for his brain. As he sat there though, naked on the side of the bed. She realised the rest of him was pretty good too. She'd been listening at his room door for a while, it seemed there were a lot of upset people in the lounge. Cormac, the usually quietly brooding Irish guy, seemed particularly angry, but she couldn't hear most of what he was saying.

"I'm going out there." She said. "Don't be long, I might need backup."

“Alright.”

Watching him walk to the shower wasn't a chore. The sex had been good from the beginning, though they'd only been sleeping together for a couple of weeks. From her experience it should get better over time, as you discovered each other's tastes in sexual repertoire. If it didn't get better, it meant it was time to let the relationship drift. Paris liked the word drift, it sounded more polite than dumped. Not that she was contemplating dumping Bryan, he was definitely a keeper.

“I'll get us both a coffee.”

“I'd kill for cheese on toast.” Bryan shouted from the shower.

She didn't creep out into the corridor, she didn't do the walk of shame, ever. She was an adult and Bryan was an adult. If they wanted to have sex, it was no one's business but theirs. Bryan probably had someone back home, just about all the cast and crew had someone, somewhere. It didn't seem to stop them finding a little pleasure and comfort where they could get it. She'd seen Simon one night, snogging the guy who cleaned out the pool. After a few years in the entertainment industry, she considered herself to be unshockable.

“Shockproof Paris.” She mumbled to herself.

The general noise in the lounge was mainly about Sam and Nicki going missing, though a few people were saying Sam had told them he would be staying at Nicki's. Cormac was the director and strictly by TV production tradition, that made him the next in command. Of course, that didn't stop Gary the lighting guy from voicing his favourite gripe.

“A delay is fine if you're living in the villa.” He said. “Simon and I have been relegated to Bredon House, which a long walk from here.”

“And we had to clamber over a fallen tree.” Added Simon.

“Yes Gary, we have been over this before.” Said Cormac. “If I had my way, we'd have all drawn lots for who had to move out of the villa, but it wasn't my decision.....Now, getting back to today, we have a full day of filming at Outerbridge Sound.”

“Nicki normally goes through things with us.” Said The Major.

“I can do that.” Said Paris.

“I usually like Sam to sign off on the final script adjustments.” Said Jeffrey.

“I can do that.....Look people.” Yelled Cormac. “We have a tight schedule for today and we're aiming to time our filming to coincide with the British navy using the submersible. We need to get moving, the vehicles are outside.”

“What if there are fallen trees on the road ?” Asked Simon.

“Then we shove them out of the way.” Said Dom.

“Sam wasn't even at the last shoot.” Said Emily.

“Everyone outside.....Now.” Shouted Cormac. “You all know which vehicle you've been allocated.”

Paris had seen and heard it all before, even on a good day there was a certain herding cats feel to TV production. By the time Bryan joined her, she had the lounge to herself. Actually, not quite to herself, Kate fiddled with a pile of papers, before she too headed outside. Paris began her all too familiar tussle with the toaster oven, to get edible cheese on toast out of the damned thing.

“Wow, where is everyone ?” Asked Bryan.

“Cormac rounded them all up and herded them all out. I'll have cheese on toast ready in two minutes, if I'm lucky.”

“Aren't you supposed to be with them ?” He asked.

“The makeup lady has my onscreen ensemble.....We'll be using my hired bike to get there.”

“We ? Sam gave me tasks to do here.”

The timing was perfect, her best and most edible looking attempt at cheese on toast. She placed the plate in front of him, together with a cup of fresh coffee. Paris could cry on cue, by remembering a puppy dying when she was about seven. Looking sad and generally upset, she could pull on as easy as a pair of gloves.

"I thought you'd want to see me do my bit. It's my longest into camera section of, what will be, episode one."

"Sorry, I had no idea.....It's not that...."

No good, it was too easy and winding up Bryan didn't feel right. She genuinely had a few feelings for the geeky guy.

"I'm just winding you up Bryan.....If you have things to do, that's fine. It would have been nice to have you there though. We're using the Royal Navy as background action, while I do my stuff."

"Well.....I'm just indexing a few pics from nineteen seventeen. I could easily do it tomorrow."

"So, you're coming?" She asked.

"Yes, I'll come and watch you do your thing."

Life on HMS Sheffield should have been going by the book, just another morning routine. It wasn't shaping up to be a routine morning though, which annoyed Captain Trevor Harrington. He had the distinct impression that people were making excuses, which annoyed him even more.

"So, now you're telling me Seaman Ambler wasn't killed while on a routine patrol?" He asked.

Deaths were never easy to deal with, there would be relatives who'd need to be informed. Then there'd be a never-ending series of requests for information from London. It didn't help if the officers he trusted, lied or told him half-truths. Low and Tanner, his two best officers, he'd had them with him for some time. It was human nature though, not to tell the boss the entire ghastly truth.

"It seems the patrol had ended and they were heading back to the launch." Said Low.

"By way of Rum Runners, I expect." Said Harrington.

"Yes, that does seem to have been the case." Said Tanner. "The earthquakes were continuing as minor tremors and some cruise ship passengers were a little concerned."

"Female tourists I expect." Said Harrington. "If I had my way, we'd put bromide in their food....and the women crewmembers are no better.....Carry on....Tell me what I can already guess?"

"The cruise ship passengers were escorted back to their vessel, but it appears Ambler and one of the women....Went off together." Said Low. "A routine search began when he was two hours late getting back to the Sheffield. His body was found near where the cruise ship passengers come ashore."

"And the woman....The tourist....What of her?" Asked Harrington.

"Still missing, we've patrols out." Said Tanner. "They're sweeping from where we found Seaman Ambler, right through Tilburg. We could deploy more men, but with the submersible being launched today..."

"We might need extra hands at Outerbridge Sound." Said Low.

Captain Harrington liked the way they finished each other's sentences. They worked together well and it wasn't their fault if Ambler found a friendly tourist for a little fun. He couldn't declare Rum Runners as being out of bounds, any more than he could stop fraternisation with the tourists. It was a case of shit happens, though he couldn't use that as an excuse in his report to London.

"How was Ambler killed.....Exactly?" He asked.

"Torn apart, he looked like someone had used a chainsaw on him." Said Peter Tanner.

"Medical are still examining the body." Said Andrew Low. "From what I've hear though, some of his internal organs have been.....They look to have been partially eaten."

“So, we’re talking about one of these creatures being responsible ?”

“It certainly looks that way.” Said Low.

London wouldn’t want him asking for extra help too soon. He had over two hundred crew, all of them trained to use weapons, even the kitchen staff. He’d be expected to deal with the situation, though he was already thinking of requesting special operations help, the guys with serious weapons. He’d send the report and hope London suggested sending him a few specialists. London preferred to work that way.

“Do we know the name of the missing woman tourist ?” He asked.

“I’m sure we have a note, though I don’t recall what her name is.” Said Low.

“Then find out and let me know, or I’ll look like an idiot if I’m asked. Another thing that makes me look an idiot, is finding out the truth several hours after a member of my crew is killed. Do I make myself clear ?”

“Yes sir.” Said Tanner.

“Yes, understood.” Said Low

He glared at them for a few seconds, they both deserved far worse. The Sheffield had been sent out to look after the people of Janssen, and to assure the safety of visiting tourists. Now one had gone missing, fairly safely assumed to be dead. London definitely weren’t going to be happy.

“We’ll let the submersible dive into Outerbridge Sound today.” He said. “As far as the population of Janssen are concerned, it must be business as usual.”

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Lola Chavez had always known her husband was more religious than her, but he’d never been someone to try and force his ideas on others. Everyone was fairly religious on Janssen, there were a staggering number of small churches. No one was a dick about it though, she never remembered anyone getting religion the way some of the TV evangelists had it. Until now.....

“I told you what I saw.” Said Michael Chavez. “The creature from hell was huge, it looked certain to tear me apart. Then it vanished.....Vanished. It was a miracle, a genuine miracle. People need to know Lola; they need to be told.”

Despite always saying money was tight, they had a pretty good lifestyle. A lot of wealthy people kept boats moored on the island, there seemed to be more every year. Add several tropical storms into the mix and there were a lot of minor repairs every year. If her husband started to be the local crazy religious guy, their comfortable lifestyle could suffer. Michael, her husband of more years than she liked to admit, was talking about building a chapel.

“I’m not saying you didn’t see something, we’ve all seen a few things it would be hard to explain. I’m just asking you to accept that these creatures might be animals of some kind, rather than demons sent by Satan.”

“You of all people. I never thought my own wife would doubt me.”

She’d found him kneeling on the floor of the boatyard office, praying as though his life depended on it. He’d been there so long that his legs had stiffened up. Even with her help, it had taken him a while before he could stand up and walk. All the time he’d been going on about a miracle.

Lola hugged her husband and was relieved when he hugged her back. She didn’t want him to view her an enemy, he was likely to create more than enough of those.

“No my dear, I don’t doubt you.” She said.

Lola loved her husband, despite knowing he’d strayed a little, usually while on business trips to the USA. When a man returns home knowing a few new tricks in bed, it’s not hard to work out how he

learned them. Despite that she still thought Michael was a good man at heart. Men were beasts, slaves to their urges and desires, her mother had taught her that.

"I'm going to call my new chapel, the Church of Miracles." Said Michael.

She moved away from him a little, so that she could see his face and look into his eyes.

"Where do you intend to build your chapel ? I wouldn't be happy with it being here, next to our house. Not where we live Michael, not where we live."

"No, of course not.... It'll be at the boatyard; everyone knows where that is. We've all the materials to build a chapel...Nothing flashy. We just need a building to keep the rain out. I'll get the lads started on it today."

"Good and I'll bring you a meal at lunchtime. I haven't done that for a long time."

Lola thought her husband was going through a period of mild insanity, but it would pass. She'd give him lots of love and affection and whatever was making him anxious would pass. Soon he'd be pestering their neighbours to attend his Church of Miracles. Loving him then would need a lot of effort, but she'd manage it. She had coped with his straying.

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Bill Carr had decided Mark would never make a good poker player, his voice went up a little when he was happy, or excited. It was hard to work out what Mark was saying on the phone, but the way his voice went up....The call had made him both happy and excited. After the call ended, the huge member of the Janssen Regiment came bounding into the kitchen of the Coulier's palatial mansion. As always, he was dressed in the full uniform of the Regiment. Bill was beginning to suspect he might actually sleep in it.

"You'll never guess who that was." Said Mark.

"Someone who has cheered you up."

"We're official, sort of. That was J Outerbridge, we've been officially asked for our help. He ran it by the navy and they're fine with it too."

Bill was too old for instant euphoria. In his experience if people who didn't want to know you one moment, wanted a favour the next. They were desperate and the favour was likely to be either illegal or dangerous, or both.

"Oh dear, what miracle do they expect from us ?" Asked Bill.

Mark had the makings of a good cop, maybe even an FBI agent. He was clutching a page from the jotter next to the phone and it was covered in scribbled notes.

"A navy guy was killed near the jetty where the cruise ships put people ashore." Said Mark. "He was really ripped apart, barely recognisable according to J. He was with a woman tourist and she's still missing. As we know the usual places these things seem to feed, we've been asked to help with the search."

"On our own ? Doing our own thing ?"

"Oh yes, full autonomy." Said Mark.

"Do we have a name and description for the missing woman ? If we find an ID, we need to know if it's hers."

"Sonja Lund, a Swedish Tourist who is twenty-four years old and travelling with a group of friends. Blonde hair, about five foot nine.....And slim build. Last seen wearing denim shorts and a yellow blouse, the sort that ties up to show her midriff."

"First I intend to finish my breakfast." Said Bill. "Then we'll get our gear together and.....Where do you think we should begin looking ?"

"The orchard where they found the previous woman tourist."

“Great, sounds a plan....Any more coffee ?”

Nicki’s bike had been knocked over during the ground tremors, which seemed to stop it starting. By the time she’d got it going and had dropped Sam off at Outerbridge Sound, she was very late getting to the house where Vince lived with June, his mum. Tired, grubby and still in the clothes she’d been wearing the night before. Yet despite being apologetic and giving June her most smacked puppy look, June didn’t want to let her in.

“I’m sorry I’m late June, there was an earthquake. I’m here now though and I’d still like to see Vince.”

“They’re still after him Nicki. The stupid murder charges have been dropped.....Ridiculous nonsense. The local police still want to prosecute him for hurting the tourists, even though they know it was unintentional.”

June was a tiny lady, but fierce as a mother bear when her son was threatened, her boy. Nicki knew she’d get in the house, mainly because she was an Outerbridge. Her family had power on Janssen, and they had money. One day June and her boy would need a favour from the Outerbridge family, everyone did, eventually. No one wanted to upset an Outerbridge, not even an angry mother bear. “I’m sorry the way things happened June, Sam and I never intended it to go that far. He might face charges, though I doubt it. Imagine how the woman tourist felt when a guy on a bike began yelling at her. My own view is that Vince has learning difficulties and couldn’t predict what might happen.”

“He’s a good boy with a huge heart.” Said June.

“I know he is June, the sort who’d never intentionally harm anyone. J knows people if it might help, far better lawyers than the woman from the Florida.”

“Oh her....It appears the collection didn’t cover all her fee. She was expecting me to pay the difference. Cheek of it, I told her to clear off.”

“Good for you June, good for you. As I said, J knows London based solicitors who understand the way things work on Janssen. You wouldn’t have to pay them; I can take care of that. I’m sure they’ll be able to keep your boy out of the courts.”

“You really think so ?”

“Yes June, I do.”

“You’d best come in.....Though I’m not letting you talk to him on your own.”

“Fine.”

Vince was in the garden, sat at the table where a large grapefruit tree gave shelter from the sun. He was reading magazines and Nicki would have bet a month’s salary on one of them having pictures of Paris Ferland. He was smitten with Sam’s leading lady, which just might tempt him to accept her offer.

“Hi Vince, do you mind if I join you ?” She asked.

“No.”

He was smiling at her. It had to take one hell of a big heart to smile at someone who’d caused you so much trouble, even if it wasn’t intended. Nicki sat at the table, while June potted about in the garden.

“Do you remember the job I offered you Vince, the one working with Paris ?”

“Yes.”

“We’re all very sad you were arrested Vince, we never intended that to happen. The job is still there, working for all the cast, but mainly for Paris. Are you still interested ?”

“Really ? You’re not just saying that ?” Asked Vince.

"I mean it, we really need good people to look after our cast and crew. I'll swear to it on a whole pile of bibles if you like. I promise you'll be doing things for Paris, every day."

"I'd like that."

"Can you start tomorrow?"

"Yes."

A very different June saw her out of the house, a mum who'd seen her boy's prospects suddenly improve. There were a lot of smiles, which would please Sam when she told him. The poor guy swore he'd developed an ulcer after seeing Vince carted off by the Janssen police.

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Paris knew they'd still be getting organised, so she wasn't worried about being a little late. She parked her hired bike behind one of the Humvees and hoped that by the time Cormac noticed her, he'd think she'd been there all the time. Science guy was excited, it seemed the navy were going to arrive a little late too.

"Good, the boat carrying the submersible still hasn't arrived." Said Bryan. "It's far too large for the channel into the sound, it might hit the bottom. Sam seems to think there's a chance it might even suffer serious damage."

No one was worried about her being late, they were all too busy looking across Outerbridge Sound, waiting for the Royal Navy to arrive. The Sheffield's divers had swum around a bit, though they hadn't done any serious diving. This was it, the serious stuff....If they could get the submersible into the sound. They found Sam near the water, discussing matters with Dom and Ilaria.

"....Well yes Dom, they did consider bringing it overland." Said Sam. "There are no decent roads near the sound though and even if there were, no one on Janssen has a truck big enough to carry it."

"Yeah, a truck that size is a bit big to chain to the deck of a container ship." Said Ilaria.

"The navy are confident their boat will get into the sound, though they admit getting through the channel will be a tight fit." Said Sam.

"Is there a chance their boat will get jammed in there?" Asked Paris.

"No, the water pressure in the channel is immense." Said Sam. "No matter how tough their boat is, if it gets stuck in the channel, it'll be broken apart fairly quickly."

"Is that what happened to the two Israeli students?" Asked Bryan.

"No, they caught a freak current and hit the sides of the channel." Said Sam. "Look.....I can see them coming through. Crap! That thing is huge."

Paris didn't know Janssen well, though she was already familiar with the average size of boats that usually entered the famous sound. The boat coming through the channel was twice the size of the largest she'd seen, and it had the submersible strapped to its deck.

"Wow, no.....That'll never make it through the channel."

Said one of the local kids hired as a runner. Paris thought the navy would know their stuff, but it was hard to argue with local knowledge.

"Do we have anyone onboard that boat?" Asked Paris.

"No, Jeffrey wanted to go, but the navy wouldn't let him."

Good old Jeffrey Gravenor, he'd have wanted to listen to the crew of the boat to pick up script ideas. She wasn't a fan of Jeffrey, few were, but she had to hand it to him; the guy was a pro.

"They must be hitting the bottom, have to be." Said Emily.

"A hundred quid they don't make it." Yelled Gary.

"Not funny Gary." Said Ilaria.

The navy's boat was huge, too damn huge. It looked far too large to get through the channel. Then it stopped moving. They were quite a way from it, but it wasn't an illusion or because they were seeing it from a weird angle. The damn thing had stopped moving and was probably jammed.

"I knew it, stuck there.....Probably for ever." Said Gary.

"It won't be stuck for long." Said Sam.

Paris had heard about the tidal flow in the channel on her first day on Janssen. Not really a tidal flow, or at least not just a tidal flow. The tides had an effect, but so did the rolling waves arriving across the Atlantic Ocean. The waves became funnelled in by Jones Bay, until they became mixed in with tidal currents. The rush of water through the channel hit the still cold water of the sound and sort of bounced back. It was a weird set of circumstances, but far from unique. Flatt's Inlet in Bermuda had a similar channel, though theirs was smaller, gentler and far less likely to punish minor mistakes by killing inexperienced sailors.

"It's moving again, I saw it move." Yelled Paris.

Her heart was pounding. For one dreadful moment, she was expecting to witness the navy vessel being broken up by the pressure of the flow in the channel. It was free....Though everyone must have heard the grinding sound as the boat finally entered Outerbridge Sound.

"Did you hear that ? She definitely scrapped the bottom." Someone yelled.

"It's still afloat and I'm sure the Royal Navy are capable of repairing minor damage. "Said Sam." We need to get the team out to our boat. Paris, I know you're doing your piece from out on the sound. Just wave like hell and they'll send someone to fetch you."

"Can I go too ?" Asked Bryan.

"Yes, just come back in one piece." Said Sam. "Otherwise the Bahamian Marine Institute will have me filling forms in for months."

It wasn't exactly high tech, but it worked. Paris waved like crazy and fairly quickly, a man in a small boat was heading towards her. Not rowing, that was something, the boat had an outboard engine and was going to arrive quite quickly. The small Bertram hired by Sam wasn't exactly state of art boat design, but Nicki had declared it to be solid, safe and reliable. Paris was happy to believe Nicki on such matters.

"Can I go with them ?" Asked Kate.

Of course, she wanted to go too, it was obvious that their new admin person had designs on science guy. Paris was pleased when Sam told her she was needed by the crew filming from the shore. Emily went with them in her secondary role as steady-cam operator, everyone had at least two jobs.

"Normally you'd get Nicki, but she has other things to take care of." Emily told her.

One of the makeup ladies was last into the boat, Paris noticed she was carrying her onscreen clothes and a makeup bag. Paris liked that about small production companies. Everyone had several jobs, it looked like constant chaos, but the right person invariably ended up where they were needed.

"Good morning, Miss Ferland."

So that was how Sam had gained a young workforce with local knowledge. Nicki had mentioned Sam asking about the Janssen Regiment doing a few odd jobs and it was amazing what a few donations to the right people could accomplish. The young man sat by the outboard was dressed in the very smart uniform of the Regiment. There were probably more acting as crew for SHP's boat.

"Good morning." She replied.

He was a fan, there was the first giveaway sign. The young man was blushing, being very silent would follow. Once he realised she didn't bite, he'd begin to talk far too much. Eventually, if she saw enough of him, he might eventually behave relatively normally.

“Looks like they suffered some damage.” Said Bryan.

The navy people were looking over the side of their boat, at least one diver was already in the water. Paris couldn't see them cancelling the launch of the submersible, too many people back home in Britain, were expecting to see pictures of the event.

“A small delay is useful.” Said Emily. “It gives us time to get set up.”

The elderly boat Sam had hired was a bit cramped inside, especially as another three Regiment guys were already onboard. No more than twenty with a certain look on their faces. It reminded her of the rare times she'd turned up to functions organised by her fan club.

“You need to go Paris, it's expected.” Abigail, her agent, told her, often.

The sudden rush to look through windows told her something was going on outside. A relief really, a whole contingent of adoring fans could be a little creepy.

“They're launching the sub.” Someone yelled.

There was no extra time to get ready, everything became a rush on deck. Paris stripped to her underwear to put on the fancy onscreen ensemble the public expected. The Regiment boys looked surprised, though she'd probably given them a killer story to dine out on for life. The makeup girl did what she could in the few seconds before Emily called out;

“They're in the water and.....We're rolling.”

The submersible was a genuine miniature submarine. No tethering, no umbilical linking it to the boat. Once launched, the two-man crew had complete control to where the vessel went. Paris had a script she'd been through so many times with Jeffrey, he'd even added a few topical quips that morning. She began her piece to camera totally from memory. It sounded good and she trusted Emily to use the camera properly.

“Something is happening.” Said Bryan.

The idiot had talked over her big moment, though she could understand why. Their boat was shaking about, as was the navy's huge boat. As for the submersible ? There was no sign of it.

“What's going on ?” She asked.

“The water.....It looks like it's boiling.” Someone yelled.

Emily looked terrified, but for some reason Paris felt calm. She'd been through an incident in the sound before, she knew keeping the camera running was important. She took the camera out of Emily's shaking hands and aimed it at the water near the navy's boat.

“As you can see, the water is frothing, almost as though its boiling.” She said. “This happened quite suddenly, just as the navy launched their submersible. Currently, I can't see any signs of that vessel. I've just noticed the water in the sound is moving, taking us with it. I don't.....Crap, it's like a tsunami....The water can't be that high.....it's impossible.....”

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Searching in the daylight was easier of course, though it meant they were unlikely to find one of the creatures to fire at, they appeared to be mainly nocturnal. Still only mid-afternoon and they'd visited just about everywhere they could think of.

“Janssen may be small, but there's still a few hundred square miles for one of the beasts to hide its kills.” Said Mark. “Drainage ditches, overgrown orchards, not to mention miles of caverns if it decides to go underground. We could never search everywhere.”

“I know, I was just hoping we'd get lucky.” Said Bill.

They were close to where Rosie Landry had seen one of the beasts drag away her brother. So far, they'd seen nothing, not even a flattened bush or trampled crab grass. Without really thinking about

it, Bill was leading them to where Rosie had used a fallen tree to get past an area of thick undergrowth.

“Have you heard any news about your partner ?” Asked Mark.

“The last time I spoke to my boss, things looked hopeful. Stacey will definitely be able to walk, though she might not be physically capable of being a field agent. They could find her a desk job, but knowing agent Tuttle....My guess is that she’ll leave and try something else.”

“That’s sad.”

“Yes Mark, it is.”

When they found the body, it was half jammed under a bush, quite close to where Rosie had said one of the creatures had nibbled at her brother.

“Can’t see her face, but denim shorts with a yellow top.....” Said Bill.

“Yeah, I think we can safely say we’ve found Sonja Lund.” Said Mark. “Her clothes are quite easy to spot, the search here couldn’t have been that thorough.”

Definitely shoved under a bush, something probably intended to come back later to finish its meal. Sonja was covered in blood, which had finished congealing. Her denim shorts were now mostly a dull red colour, as were her legs. Bill had seen quite a few scenes of violence, probably too many. He wasn’t about to puke, but he wasn’t totally devoid of feelings.

“I know they’ll be a pain to deal with Mark.” Said Bill. “I don’t want to leave her body here though; it might well come back for her. Can you call your Regiment buddies on that comms thing of yours ?”

“I can, but the fuss will begin Bill. We might lose access to their equipment.”

“Do it, we can’t leave her here.”

Mark pressed buttons and yelled into the mic on his lapel a few times, before actually bashing the comms unit with his hand. Bill didn’t need to be told they wouldn’t be getting help from the Janssen Regiment.

“It’s those damned Geological events.” Said Mark. “Volcanic goings on and such. All I can hear is static and I doubt if they can hear me at all.”

“I’m not leaving her body to be eaten.” Said Bill. “I’ll stay here and you can go and get help.

Someone must have a jeep that can get close enough. Oh, bring a body bag too, it’ll make everything far less messy.”

“My dad has a small off-road buggy thing, but are you sure Bill ? I don’t like leaving you on your own, it might be dusk by the time I get back.”

“I’ll be fine, do you want to leave her here ?”

“No, of course not.” Said Mark.

“Give me a hand pulling her out, before you go. With luck she might still have ID in a pocket.”

Bill shoved bits of the bush out of the way, but it wasn’t easy or pleasant to drag the Swedish tourist out of the bush. Her face was bloody, though mercifully her long blonde hair had fallen over most of it.

“I don’t know how you do this for a living.” Said Mark.

“The FBI isn’t all about dead bodies Mark, though yes, it never gets easier.”

Bill found a Swedish Driver’s license in a pocket of her shorts, at least he assumed that was what it was. He didn’t speak Swedish, but the name on it was Sonja Lund. As a final check he gently brushed the hair away from her bruised and bloody face.

“No one looks that much like their license picture. It’s her though.” He said.

They should have checked, there really was no good excuse. The tourist had been taken by the same creature that had killed the Sheffield’s crew member, quite a few hours before. They’d both made

the wrong assumption. Sonja coughed and a tiny ribbon of spittle came out of her mouth. Dead bodies do weird things, but they don't open their eyes and look right at you.

"Fuck." Said Mark. "She's still alive."

"Go.....Get out of here and fetch help." Said Bill.

Grey skin was an odd choice for camouflage, or so Bill had thought. The only thing he remembered with grey skin was a cat they'd had when he was a kid. He'd seen the area of grey skin after Cleo had been to the vets to be neutered. Grey was good though, it merged in with the soil and vanished among the lush undergrowth. It must have been waiting for darkness to carry Sonja to where it fed, or they'd finally made enough noise to wake it up.

"Eyes.....Fire at the eyes." Yelled Bill.

He was between it and the woman and he intended to stay there. Bill was going to die before he let the creature finish its meal. Bigger than the one that had attacked Stacey, though it wasn't moving as fast. Maybe they took a while a while to wake up ? That was information worth passing on, if he survived. Bill Carr used short bursts with his assault rifle, aiming at the beast's eyes and mouth. They could be killed, he knew that.

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