

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 21 - Abandoned

“Pretty and slightly unusual names were common on Jannsen, Italian was one of the most popular. Ilaria had seen a waitress at Run Runners, with Aaliyyah on her name tag. She’d decided there and then to forgive her parents for lumbering her with Ilaria.”

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Nicki Outerbridge didn’t have a superweapon on a sling, like Bill. She had an assault rifle with special ammunition though, a weapon she was feeling growing respect for. There had been one of them at the top of the stairs, one of the beasts that looked like a mass of teeth and claws. Bill was behind her, so as the monster went for her, she’d fired a short burst into its mouth. Nicki was sprayed by its foul-smelling blood, but it was dead. The sound of gunfire caused more screaming and shouting, from a female voice.

“Hello.....I’m in here. Please help me.”

No lights, just flashlights and those weren’t showing as much as Nicki would have liked. A nice pool of light where she pointed hers, with dark areas either side of her. Her mind refused to stop reminding her anything could be hiding there, in the dark. When she found the woman wearing a hospital smock, the suddenness made Nicki jump. Blood was the first thing she noticed, lots of it. So much that she thought the woman must have been bitten by one of the creatures.

“I’m so pleased to see you.” Said the woman. “They’ve all gone, all the staff. My doctor seemed so nice, but he’s obviously abandoned me.”

“He’s probably having a few troubles of his own.” Said Sam.

Bill was stood behind them, aiming his massive gun, down the hallway. He seemed to have the best flashlight, which was probably a good idea.

“All the shouting must have attracted the beasts.” Said Bill. “Do what you need to do to her quickly, we need to get out of here.”

The blood wasn’t from a bite, the woman had pulled several tubes out of her arm and she hadn’t done it carefully. It needed bandages really, though Nicki knew that any fix, had to be a quick fix.

“I need something to bandage her arm with, Sam.” She said. “A pillow case will do, cut into strips.”
“I’m on it.”

The woman had wedged herself in a corner, her back hard against the wall. It all screamed a problem with walking, but at least she was standing. First floor private rooms were probably wonderful, with great views of Jannsen. Until the power went off and the elevator stopped working.

“I’m Nicki and we’re going to do our best to get you to somewhere safe. Can you tell me your name?”

“I thought the navy had dealt with those things.” Said the woman. “The radio news said the navy had dealt with them.”

“The navy are doing the best they can.” Said Bill.

Sam handed her a small pile of strips from a pillow case and she began to wrap them around the holes that were still bleeding. Nicki noticed that every move, caused the woman to wince and push her hip against the wall.

“What are you in hospital for?” She asked.

“My hip, it’s been bad for years. Silly to hire a tourist bike and even sillier to fall off it. The doctor said I might need a replacement hip on the left side. When I get home though and I’ve had a chance to talk to my own doctor. I’m Pam by the way, Pam Hobson.”

“Can you walk ?” Asked Nicki.

“Barely, it’s taken me hours to get this far.”

“I can see a wheelchair.” Said Sam. “We can strap her into that and carry her down the stairs.”

“No time, I can hear at least two creatures downstairs.” Said Bill. “Pick Pam up and carry her, we’re leaving here, now.”

Carrying someone in the dark, while trying to carry rifles, flashlights and backpacks, was a nightmare. Pam was quite brave about it, but every time her left leg was jostled, she screamed. They were halfway down the stairs, when Bill fired his supergun. The noise was enough to startle anyone, especially if you weren’t used to it. Pam yelled out as the beast fell apart. She was a middle-aged lady with a damaged hip. There was no way Nicki was going to tell her off for screaming, even if it did attract the creatures. The next creature took Bill three shots to kill, while he moaned about trying to aim in the dark. Wading through monster guts became something else to add to the nightmare of carrying Pam.

“Not far now Pam, be brave.” Said Sam.

“Where are you taking me ?”

“There’s an APC outside, an armoured personnel carrier.” Said Sam. “You’ll be safe in there. Then we’ll be leaving Jannsen on a boat waiting for us at the dockyard.”

There was a larger beast just inside the ruined main doors to the hospital. One with greyer skin than most, it had what looked like proper legs and hands with bearlike claws. Luckily Ted Sangster was there, with two of his special ops team. Their assault rifles loaded with ammunition still on the secret list, made short work of the monster.

“This is Pam Hobson.” Said Bill. “We didn’t find anyone else.”

“Welcome Pam, we’ll try to make you comfortable.” Said Ted.

“My doctor abandoned me.” Said Pam.

“There’s a lot of that going on.” Said Ted.

“Did you find anyone in the accommodation block ?” Asked Nicki.

“It was bad in there really bad. We found a maintenance guy still alive. He’s lost a leg and....It doesn’t look too good for him. Get in the APC, we’ll go straight to the docks.”

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Denise Scott had gone past simple panic and into a kind of nihilism. There was nothing she could do to help Sam and the SHP staff on Jannsen, nothing. Her mental state made her impossible to live with, she knew that. It had been a few nights since Flo’s expensive underwear had managed to rouse her. Flo was a caring lover though, she’d understood and supported her, so far.

“Oscar Grimm knows what he’s doing.” Said Flo. “We’ve done all we can Den, it’s up to Sam to get everyone to The Daphne.”

They were in bed, most of their serious conversations were while trying to get to sleep. Was there a female equivalent of erectile dysfunction ? Something in her mind wasn’t allowing them to do anything else in bed, other than talk. There had been no contact with Jannsen, since the videos sent out by someone on The Sheffield. No contact, no news; her mind was filling the information vacuum with dreadful imaginings. The last contact with the navy on Jannsen mentioned The Sheffield being under attack. Denise rocked slowly back and forth, her back hitting the bed’s headboard.

"It's just not knowing Flo." She said. "Everywhere else they've been, at least the fucking phones worked. The insurance company almost said no to filming on Janssen. Too isolated they said, until we offered to pay higher premiums."

"The specialists arrived there safely; we know that Den. Then there's The Sheffield, a navy frigate armed with cruise missiles. The British government has done its best to protect Janssen. We just have to assume they'll do their jobs and do them well."

Den had thought it through during the day, in an office full of frantic staff. There might be no telephone link to Janssen, but they didn't mean no work. Quite the opposite, the entire world seemed to want to talk to SHP about what was going on. The worst was the constant trickle of enquiries from relatives, worried about members of the cast and crew.

"Couldn't reinforcements be sent by air?" She asked.

"The airstrip is now closed and this isn't the sort of situation where the MOD would parachute troops in. We'd have no idea what they'd be facing. Two navy ships are being diverted to The Donder Isles, though that is between you and me. That's important Den, mention it to no one."

"Alright, but it all seems so slow."

"Even in the twenty first century, we have problems delivering help at a distance. It took nearly three weeks for the task force to reach the Falklands. People tend to forget that. Ships are on the way and satellite surveillance continues."

"How about the Americans, they're closer?"

"They're concerned over their citizens on Janssen, of course they are. They're not keen on increasing their involvement though, it is a British protectorate. To the Americans, it may be in their backyard, but it's our responsibility. Plus, the Prime Minister isn't keen on asking them to help. It wouldn't play well with the British public."

"So, everyone is abandoning the people of Janssen." Said Denise.

"No one is abandoning anyone Den; ships are on the way."

"I'm Sorry Flo, but to me; it feels like my people on Janssen are being abandoned."

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Ilaria D'Andrea really didn't know what to say to Daryll. His family home where everyone he cared about had lived, was gone. The same kind of damage that they'd both seen at Rum Runners. It looked as though the walls had been ripped apart by something with incredible strength. Then the propane tanks that fed the cooker in the kitchen had exploded. What was left of the house was still too hot to enter, but they had used flashlights to look around the back garden and the grapefruit orchard across the road. A pointless task she'd thought, just a futile gesture so that Daryll could think he'd done something, anything to look for his family.

"Someone will have run away to hide in the trees, I know it." Daryll had said.

Pretty hard to tell the man who'd saved her life, that he was clutching at straws. The arrival of the noisy truck and a lot of yelling, hadn't brought anyone out of hiding. Ilaria had never felt enough had been done to find Dom, so she criss-crossed the orchard in a thorough manner, a proper search pattern. When she found the body of a young girl, she had no idea where Daryll might be. She fired her shotgun and he arrived in a matter of seconds.

"Oh, not Italian....She was only ten."

Pretty and slightly unusual names were common on Janssen, Italian was one of the most popular. Ilaria had seen a waitress at Run Runners, with Aaliyyah on her name tag. She'd decided there and then to forgive her parents for lumbering her with Ilaria. Daryll was quiet, as he hugged the dead girl. A cousin of his, Ilaria thought, though she wasn't certain. Italian had been partially eaten, her chest

bitten into and hollowed out. Ilaria gave Daryll about five minutes, maybe ten, before disturbing his grief.

“Did you find anyone, Daryll ?”

He just shook his head, without even turning round. In any fairly normal place on the globe. If you’d come home to find your house destroyed, you could call the emergency services, the first responders. Fairly soon a lot of men and women in uniforms would turn up. They’d have bright lights and radios to coordinate what needed to be done, they might even bring dogs to help the search for missing loved ones. There was none of that on Janssen, not now. Ilaria felt a real need to help, to not give up on Daryll’s family. She’d lost track of what had seemed to be an endless night. There was an encouraging glow in the sky though, as the sun rose in the east.

“It’ll be daylight soon.” She said. “We can continue looking then, maybe go over the orchard again.”

Daryll never did get a chance to answer. There was the sound of something large approaching, something knocking down trees as it came. Ilaria was no science guy, but she knew that when you heard trees being pushed over, there had to be something truly enormous on the way. By the weird games human perception plays on us at times of crisis, the huge thing sounded to be coming straight towards them.

“We’re getting out of here.” Said Daryll.

Daryll was a big guy, even bigger and more muscled than Mark Coulier. He picked up Italian in his arms, as though she weighed next to nothing. He was going to get covered in the girl’s blood, but didn’t seem bothered by that, or even to notice. He ran with the dead girl in his arms and Ilaria ran after him. Again, it was probably caused by stress and a little panic, but the noise of something crashing through the orchard, seemed to follow them. When they reached his truck, Daryll put Italian in the back and covered her body with a bike cover.

“I couldn’t just leave her here.....Come on, get in.” Said Daryll.

The sound of something huge chasing them sounded close, very close. Unlike in every cheesy movie Ilaria had ever seen, the elderly truck started first time. Daryll had to use the headlights, though it did feel as though he was shouting ‘here we are,’ at whatever was after them. Far too fast of course for the roads, Daryll put the pedal to the metal.

“Can you see it, is it close ?” Shouted Daryll.

“I can’t see anything, it’s dark behind us.” She replied

Ilaria looked through the truck’s rear window as the sun came up. For a second or so, she saw the monster against the orange glow of the rising sun. Not the huge great grandmother of all the creature’s, science guy had predicted was deep in the waters of Outerbridge Sound. The monster that had destroyed Daryll’s home was huge though, it could have stepped over the villa on its tentacles. She couldn’t see its eyes, just masses of those huge tentacles.

“I saw it Daryll.....The navy can’t deal with these things, no one can.”

“I just hope this freighter you mentioned hasn’t already left Janssen.”

“Not Grimm, he’s a real pro..... He’ll still be there.”

Daryll should have slowed down, though she didn’t blame him for trying to put a lot of distance between them and the monster. A corner taken at sixty, that would have been dangerous at thirty. Then there was the fallen tree just after the curve in the road. The truck hit the tree and rolled. Not the usual side over side roll, it went end over end. Someone had once told her an end over end roll meant goodbye cruel world, and pray there’s an afterlife. Ilaria was conscious as the rear end of the truck slammed into a banana palm. Over it went again and her head hit the roof, as the truck

ploughed bonnet first into a drainage ditch. She was unconscious for a time, though it hadn't been too long. The sun was still fairly low against the horizon.

"Oh, fuck ! Are you alright Daryll ?"

At first the amount of blood, had her convinced she was now on her own, with a truck that was now a useless pile of twisted metal.

"Come on Daryll, you can't die on me." She yelled.

Ilaria remembered the blood had come from Italian, just as Daryll coughed and sat up. He looked dreadful, but she probably looked as bad to him.

"I have to live to see Ray Beaver." She said. "The bastard told me it was impossible to survive an end over end roll."

"Do you always talk so much ?"

"Yeah, pretty much." She replied.

"Sorry, give me a moment." Said Daryll. "I hit my arm during all that, it might be broken."

The waterlogged ditch might have saved their lives, by cushioning the impact. It was slowly filling the truck with water though and debris was jamming the doors. Luckily, the hole where the windscreen had once been, gave her an exit to climb out of. She had the debris quickly out of the way and Daryll's door open. He turned to get out and she knew his arm wasn't broken. There wasn't the tell take shriek of agony, as he used the arm.

"You'll be fine Daryll, it's probably just a pulled muscle."

"Oh, you're right, but it still hurts like hell."

By some miracle Italian's body was still in the back of the truck. Daryll tidied the old bike cover so it covered the body completely. Ilaria hated to state the obvious, but felt she had to. Nicki Outerbridge had given her the introduction to Jannsen talk. One thing that kept coming up was that nowhere is that far from anywhere else, on Jannsen. That was right of course, but didn't allow for walking through monster ridden tropical vegetation.

"Well.....No transport and the docks are right over the other side of the island." She said.

"There's the jetty, that was my original idea. Most of the boats might be gone, though we could get lucky. It's about a two hour walk from here."

Ilaria remembered things she'd been told; she was eccentric about that kind of thing.

"You said no small boat could reach America, Daryll. You said they'd all die."

"I said most of them would probably die, there is a difference."

He was grinning at her, she had to grin back. The jetty was a shitty chance to find a boat, with a good chance of getting killed in a storm if they found one. Still....It was just about their only option.

"Come on then Daryll, lead on. Let's go and steal a boat."

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The Sheffield had moved two miles away from Jannsen to communicate with the outside world. They'd been sent to protect the people of The Donder Isles though, which was pretty hard to do at a distance. Peter Tanner could understand why Captain Harrington had brought the frigate closer to shore, of course he could. Their launches could deliver armed men easier and then recover them faster. There was also the fast-approaching point no one wanted to admit. Fairly soon they'd have to evacuate all the survivors they could find and leave Jannsen to its fate. The Sheffield had to be close to shore once the evacuation began.

"So, the old man hasn't changed his mind." Said Andrew Low.

Old man was a term of affection, they'd both known the captain for years and respected his ability to command. Sometimes though, the only options left when fighting a war, were risky options.

“We can’t leave millions of pounds worth of equipment behind.” Said Peter. “London would never forgive the captain, or us.”

“I get it; if we end up running away, we mustn’t be seen to be running away.” Said Andrew.

“Don’t let the old man hear you talking like that.” Said Peter. “He’s having a bad day and he might make you walk the plank.”

It wasn’t agreed procedure, but they were alone on the landward side of The Sheffield. Peter hugged Andrew and then briskly walked towards the stern. There was a chance that Peter might die trying to retrieve the boat from Outerbridge Sound, a very real possibility. The boat had a small skeleton crew and so far, they hadn’t been attacked. The water of the sound had looked like bubbling, hot pea soup for a while and there were the constant electrical storms. Despite all that, the boat carrying the expensive submersible, had remained unmolested. The boat had been repaired and two divers had braved the infamous dark water of the sound, to inspect the hull. They’d taken picture of some damage below the water line, which had been looked at by experienced engineers. The consensus had been the engineering equivalent of a shrug. The boat might survive another trip through the narrow channel, or it might not. There was no way of telling without getting the boat out of the water to look at the hull properly, which was impossible.

“The best way to find out if it’ll survive is to try it. Then we’ll know for certain.”

Engineer Evans had told him with a grin on her face. They’d secretly shared a bunk a few times, so she was allowed to make tasteless jokes about the possibility of the boat breaking up and his subsequent death.

“Fifty-fifty I reckon.....Come on you’ve beaten worst odds than those.” He muttered to himself.

The Sheffield had been attacked and was likely to be attacked again. London had been informed, it was one of the last communications before their links with the outside world, packed up completely. Large creatures with tentacles had tried, unsuccessfully, to clamber up the side closest to the island. A few larger beasts had nearly succeeded, their claw marks were still visible on the painted steel plating. One had managed to get a tentacle over the side, wrapping it around a gun turret. There was a small contingent of marines onboard and one of them had killed the huge beast with an anti-tank missile. It’s remains were still there; in the shallows close to the beach. Everyone knew that if a few of the really huge monsters decided to attack the frigate, they were in trouble.

“Join the navy, travel to exotic places.” He muttered. “And get killed by exotic creatures.”

His destination on the frigate was a helicopter landing pad at the stern. The small helicopter had already been brought out of storage. The blades had been fitted and everything thoroughly checked over. Officially the helicopter was for anti-submarine duty and it packed a real punch. Two missiles that entered the water and went deep to find their target. Each one was capable of destroying a nuclear sub. Mainly though the helicopter was used for surveillance and as now, getting key people where they needed to be. Today it was going to land him on the boat in the sound.

“She’s warmed up and ready to go.” Said the pilot.

There was something wonderful about going straight up in a helicopter. Like a super elevator, lifting you up and away from the turmoil below. The turmoil and mayhem was quickly back though, as they flew over Janssen. There were a lot of fires, just about every building they flew over was burning or destroyed. It was easy to spot Tilburg from the air, the entire town was an inferno.

“It’s bad down there, I heard five of our guys died in Rum Runners.”

“Don’t spread rumours.” Said Peter.

“Sorry sir.”

Peter had heard it was eight of the crew who'd been killed by what had happened at Rum Runners. The famous bar and restaurant was gone now, nothing left of it except a smoking hole in the ground. The journey to Outerbridge Sound didn't take long, nowhere was that far from anywhere on Janssen. The water below looked like a mass of dirty yellow bubbles. He was expected, the ship-to-ship comms did occasionally work well enough, to give them interference free conversations. Someone on the boat was looking up and waving at them.

"I could land close by and wait." Said the pilot. "Just in case you want to go back to The Sheffield." It was so tempting. Say the boat was beyond repair, or there were a few huge creatures roaming around. No one would ask him for details, even the captain. Someone in London might ask a few questions, but by then....No one would really care.

"I could land on the edge of the sound.....Just wave, or send up a flare."

Oh, so tempting, but the boat had a crew of four, the minimum level considered necessary. Peter had never thought of himself as heroic, but he wasn't going to abandon four of the crew.

"No, though thank you for offering." He said "Once you've put me on the deck, go back to the frigate."

A sack of provision hit the deck before he did, the crew hadn't been resupplied for a few days. They wouldn't have gone hungry, but it would have seemed mean to arrive empty handed. Things were normal was the order of the day, the trip out of the sound and into the Atlantic Ocean was going to be a piece of cake. By the way, here's some bottled water, a few tins and some fresh bread. No one fully bought in to the official gas lighting, but it had to be done. Getting out of the helicopter wasn't as dignified as getting into it. There was a drop of a few feet, though he landed without twisting anything. He was there, with a grinning diver in front of him. He prided on knowing the names of the entire crew. He remembered seeing the man around and that he was one of the divers, but no name was springing up in his mind.

"I brought a few supplies, food mainly.....And you are?"

"Hawkins sir.....Pleased to see you. We did wonder if everyone had forgotten us."

"There's been a lot going on."

"Yes sir, of course sir."

The other three members of the crew came out to greet him, all of them had a slightly stunned expression. No officer with them for a while and then the thunderstorms twenty-four seven. No wonder they didn't seem at their best.

"We're leaving in half an hour." Said Peter. "I want everything checked. If it can move, tie it down and that counts double for the submersible."

"We already checked it." Someone said.

"Then check it again. The last thing we need is the submersible shifting about, when we're halfway through the channel. Start the engines too, give them plenty of time to warm up."

"We ran the engines for a while yesterday." Someone muttered.

"I know you've been left out here for a while, but when I tell you to do something, I expect it to be done. No questions, no comments....Just do it! Do you all understand?"

"Yes sir." Repeated four times.

By the time Peter was on the bridge, only Hawkins was still with him. When he felt the vibration of the engines starting up, he knew the crew were finally getting their act together. He'd come across the problem before. When men used to obeying orders, were left without an officer for a while, they could begin to get awkward about doing anything.

"The comms is iffy, but we were warned you were on the way." Said Hawkins.

Warned rather than informed, probably an unconscious choice of words. They crew had probably gone mildly feral for a while. That was over now though. Peter looked across the sound, knowing something was wrong, though it took him a while to realise what it was.

“Didn’t the film company have a boat on the sound ?” He asked.

“Yes, crewed by those Regiment people. It was there one night, but gone the next morning. They either left at first light, or they’re at the bottom of the sound. My guess, and I might be wrong, is that something attacked their boat in the night. There are claw marks on the side of our boat, but we’re a lot bigger than SHP’s old wooden Bertram, and a lot tougher.”

“Did you report that ?”

“Yes, as soon as it was noticed.”

Good, they hadn’t gone completely wild. One of the crew appeared and actually saluted, before telling him everything was secured and checked. They were ready to leave and as no one else seemed to automatically take the role, he took the wheel. Seaman Ambler had expertly brought the boat into the sound. He was dead though, killed while escorting a Swedish tourist back to her cruise ship.

“Here we go.....I have the helm.” Said Peter, to no one in particular.

There was a smell to the water in the sound, more noticeable now their propellers were disturbing it. Sulphur with a hint of rotting vegetation. Not a good or wholesome smell, it got into his nose and made him cough.

“Hold onto something Hawkins, this could get a bit bumpy.”

“Yes sir.”

The boat had never been originally designed to carry something like the submersible. It fought being steered in a straight line and felt like it wanted to veer off to the left all the time. Peter fought the boat, almost willing it to come round, to hit the channel head on. By the time he moved the throttle to full, the boat was straight. They were going to make it; he was sure of it. There was that lull in the centre of the channel, waiting for the current to push them forward again.

“Fuck.” Said Hawkins.

Peter had seen it too, the monster entering the other side of the channel. It was as large as the creature which had destroyed the cruise ship. Its body and tentacles completely blocked the channel. Peter knew his life was probably about to end, there was no way past the brute. The boat was big and heavy, there was a chance to take the monster with them. As the boat moved forward, Peter shoved the throttle up to full. The boat hit the monster at speed, the pointed prow going into its single yellow eye, an eye full of hate.

“Fuck you.” Yelled Peter.

The boat began to break apart, there was no way to escape the chaos. Peter saw the submersible crash through the cabin wall, before hurtling into the beast. He felt a pain and realised it had taken most of his right arm, as it had destroyed the cabin. Hawkins was gone, there was no sign of him. The creature though, the monster with hate in its eyes.....Peter knew it was dead. Nothing could survive that kind of damage.

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Daryll had begun to tuck his arm up against his body, when he didn’t need to use it. The pain seemed to be getting worse, a lot worse. Not a full break, it didn’t hurt that bad. Ilaria had mentioned having really bad pain after a skiing accident, that had turned out to be a hairline fracture. Not that he was cursing his luck, he was alive after all. Alive and feeling thirsty enough to consider drinking from a drainage ditch. The sun was fully up and it looked set to be another glorious sunny day on Janssen.

“Not far now, I can smell the ocean.” He said. “I could do with a mouthful of water.”

“Yeah, of course.” Said Ilaria.

She’d offered him the bottle before, but with only one reliable arm, it seemed sensible if it remained in her backpack. Plus, there’d be the constant temptation to drink the lot and their one and only litre bottle of water, might need to last for a while. He took one small mouthful, which he savoured for a while before swallowing. There was a noise and Ilaria instantly had her assault rifle off her shoulder and aimed at, a huge toad. It was about the third that had spooked them, maybe the fourth. To Daryll, it was reassuring to see how fast Ilaria reacted.

“Damn girl, you should be a special ops soldier....Maybe an assassin or something.”

“I’d start by assassinating all these damned toads.”

“They keep the bugs down.”

They grinned at each other; she had a good grin. Daryll realised it at that moment; if you had to be stuck in a near death situation in a sub-tropical paradise, always pick a companion with a good grin.

“Leave the toads alone.....Come on.” He said.

He’d brought them by a straight route, or as straight as drainage ditches and the occasional close encounter with a creature, would allow. They found the jetty and the ocean quite suddenly, when they left a path through some banana palms. Three boats were left tied up at the jetty and Daryll knew two of them were wrecks. Insurance cases that barely floated, waiting for the assessment guy from the American mainland. Not that he or she was ever likely to arrive, not now.

“You won’t like it, but there isn’t a lot of choice.” He said.

Charlie Dunkley had mentioned to Daryll about the new glass bottomed boat being at the fitting out stage. No frills like ship to shore radios or a navigation system, or furniture for that matter. There probably wasn’t even a toilet yet, but the bottom-line essentials were there. People tended to gossip to Daryll as he delivered or collected tourist bikes. The Dolphin II had a good engine, a wheel, a throttle and a full tank of fuel. Oh, and the resins sealing the glass bottom in place, were almost fully set and hardened, almost. All that was expected. Seeing Charlie’s dead body lying in the bottom of the boat, wasn’t expected. Ilaria looked Charlie over, she even propped him up against the only furniture, the benches where paying customers would sit to wonder at the amazing underwater sights of Janssen.

“No wounds or anything.” Said Ilaria. “Weird, he’s just.....Dead.”

“Poor old Charlie had a dodgy heart. I guess it finally gave out on him. We’ll need to get him over the side, Charlie already smells a bit ripe.”

“We’re going to take this.....Thing out on the open ocean ?” Asked Ilaria.

“I’m sorry, the Royal Yacht was spoken for.” Said Daryll. “Help me, Charlie did like his fried chicken a little too much.”

If anyone had told him, he’d be dumping an old friend in the ocean.....But it had to be done. Charlie was heavy, he twisted the bit of his arm that didn’t like being twisted. The splash as Charlie hit the water had barely stopped making ripples, before Ilaria was moaning at him.

“This thing isn’t seaworthy, Daryll. No wonder it was left here, it’s a death trap. We should go back to getting to the docks. We find a working vehicle and join everyone on the freighter.”

“It’s a long way to the docks, assuming we can find some water and nothing eats us. Plus, the freighter isn’t likely to make sure all the kids are on the bus, before leaving. Oh, I need to sit down, before I fall down.”

There was a little shade over one area of the bench. Daryll sat and looked at the tiny fish on the other side of the glass bottom. For a few moments, it felt almost idyllic. Just for a few moments.

“We need a pan B, Daryll. These things are intended for shallow calm waters. Take her out into the ocean currents and the bottom will fall out.”

“Look Ilaria, just humour me and look her over. Look at the engine, the fuel gauge and....Well, just check her out. If you still hate Dolphin II, we’ll think of something else.”

Daryll was tired, neither of them had slept the previous night. His arm was hurting too, causing the sort of pain that was probably the only thing keeping him awake. There wasn’t enough fuel to reach anywhere of course, even with full tanks. None of the small boats had enough fuel to reach anywhere, apart from maybe one or two of the fishing boats. If Ilaria liked what she found, they’d head west towards the American coast until the fuel run out. Then they’d drift with the ocean currents. It was a crap plan, which was why he wasn’t going to worry Ilaria with it. He knew she liked the boat, when he heard the engine start. There was that grin again, as she came up from below.

“Alright, we’ll give it a try.” She said. “The engine is covered in inspection sticker, saying everything is fine.”

“Great, I’ll untie us from the jetty.”

“No, I’ll do it. You stay there and rest.”

No good, he had to tell her.....It was that grin of hers, he couldn’t betray that grin.

“There isn’t enough fuel, Ilaria.” He said. “We can get into the current that goes all the way up to Nova Scotia and hope to drift towards the coast. That’s the best we can hope for.”

“I know, I’ve used small boats. The bottom will probably fall out and drown us, long before the fuel runs out.”

He watched, as she untied the glass bottomed boat and took them away from the jetty and out towards the open ocean.

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Things took longer than Paris had hoped, new and unusual activities normally did. No one gets to practise bringing gold coins out of a worm-infested cave, while avoiding flesh eating monsters. It was a new thing for all of them, probably a once in a lifetime experience. Kate had freaked out when she’d found a few of the worms in her knickers and then the quadbike hadn’t wanted to start. Nothing insoluble, just the makings of an average day in The Donder Isles. In a way Vince had been their rock, the person who grounded the three of them. He’d kept calm and hadn’t sworn or screamed while stomping worms. The delays meant it was a few hours after dawn, when they reached Vince’s home. The trip to the caves had been a success though, they had enough gold to ensure a comfortable life for all three of them, and June.

“At least the house looks undamaged.” Said Kate.

Paris was in the Nissan with Kate, while Vince followed on the quadbike. Paris had decided that either she or Vince should always be in the car with Kate. Sam’s new PA was a bit of an unknown, with something of a reputation. True, her reputation involved getting through men at a rate of knots, but Paris didn’t want her alone in a car, with most of the gold coins.

“I just hope she doesn’t decide to stay on Janssen.....June can be a bit awkward at times.” Said Paris. Vince showed no inclination to use the front door. He went straight round the side of the house, towards the back garden. Paris followed him, with Kate close behind her. June was on the ground by the garden table and there was no mistaking she was dead. Not killed by one of the creatures, her body wasn’t even nibbled. By the look of things, June had put a gun to her head and pulled the trigger. Fires everywhere, the radio station off air and stories about people being attacked and eaten by strange creatures. It was no wonder that some might decide to take the quick way out.

“Oh Vince, I’m so sorry.” Said Paris.

Would he blame her ? They could have collected June on the way to the caves. Vince's mum didn't seem the sort to explore caves though. Paris knelt next to the body and June was cold, dead for many hours cold. Vince just looked at his mum, a really intense look. Without a word he ran out of the garden, heading into the wild area behind the house. It was the area of thick vegetation, where Paris had once seen one of them, one of the creatures.

"No Vince.....Come back." She yelled.

He'd gone, she could hear him crashing through the undergrowth. Paris put her assault rifle and backpack on the table, before walking over to June's body. It was dreadful, the amount of blood. No wonder poor Vince had run off.

"Give me a hand Kate." She said. "Vince will be back once he calms down. We can have June buried by then. Just a shallow grave, it'll stop her being nibbled at."

"I don't think so."

Kate had her assault rifle and it was aimed at her. Kate probably wasn't a good shot, but the rifle was loaded with the special ammunition. It would only take one round to hit something vital....

"All this messing about with Vince and his fucking mother." Said Kate. "Enough, we're leaving now....Or I'm going on my own."

"He won't be long; I know Vince quite well." Said Paris. "We'll have time to get to the ship, Grimm will wait."

Kate had her finger on the trigger. Paris could see how Kate might be tempted to keep all the gold for herself. No one would know what had happened. It would be pretty near the perfect crime, with the creatures eating Kate's victim, her. As for Vince ? Running about like a crazy man was only going to get him killed. Paris had a small handgun, tucked down the back of her jeans, the way they do in movies. Nicki had given her the gun just after Dom had been attacked. Paris had no idea where Nicki had acquired a few guns, but Nicki knew people. The problem, as Paris saw it, was getting the gun out of her belt, before Kate shot her.

"Sorry." Said Kate.

Paris was certain that moment had arrived, she was about to find out if there was an afterlife. Vince couldn't have picked a better moment to come back. He'd had the shotgun over his shoulder for so long, she'd ceased to notice it. He had it up and ready, aimed at Kate.

"Don't shoot Miss Ferland." He shouted. "I'll kill you.....I will."

Kate turned towards Vince and she might have been thinking of using the assault rifle. Vince had probably never fired a gun before in his life and even Paris didn't think much for his chances against an angry woman with an assault rifle. He'd created a few moments of confusion though, long enough for her to aim the handgun at Kate's head.

"Put the rifle down Kate." She said. "We can all go to the ship, no one needs to get hurt. Just put my rifle on the ground."

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