

Outerbridge Sound

Chapter 4 – Paris Ferland

“There was no husband and kids waiting for her in a semi-detached somewhere in the suburbs, Denise had never been that in love with any man. Not that she’d been that in love with any woman either.”

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Sam had received an email from their insurers, the staggeringly expensive underwater drone was covered by their policy. Next year’s premiums were likely to cripple SHP if the drone was lost or damaged beyond repair, but that was a worry for another day. He hadn’t realised the insurance value of the borrowed military hydrophones either, until he’d seen them listed on the email. That too was a worry for another day.

“Today we’ll use everything apart from the kitchen sink.” Said Sam. “Dom has business elsewhere, so I’m relying on Ilaria to record anything important.”

“Hey, I already unpacked the drone....Not fair.” Said Ilaria.

“I can use a camera.” Said Paris.

“Nothing like a willing volunteer.” Said Sam. “The one with red stickers is the best camera, the other one can sometimes give jerky images.”

Paris Ferland had arrived on a small plane with just a couple of bags. She wasn’t at all what he’d expected, not a single sign of her legendary diva attitude. Very attractive, one TV critic had a habit of saying she smouldered into the camera. A weird metaphor, but now he’d met her, Sam understood the whole smouldering thing. Long blonde hair that seemed intent on getting into her eyes, she definitely had bags of telegenic charisma.

“All the sea anchors are in place, but we will drift a little.” Said Nicki.

“Well start with the hydrophones.” Said Sam. “Normally pulled behind nuclear submarines to look for other nuclear subs. We’ll let them drop straight down, so someone needs to make sure they leave their container nice and cleanly.....”

“Alright, no need to look in my direction, I’m on it.” Said Ilaria.

There were a few noises from the rear of The Jenny and Ilaria returned muttering under her breath. It appeared the ‘damned things’ had tried to tie themselves in knots.

“Hydrophones are designed to hear someone break wind in a submarine five miles away, so we all need to be very quiet.” Said Sam.

The string of hydrophones was about a hundred and fifty metres long, with a hydrophone every metre. The container was supposed to run them out smoothly, though winding them back was likely to be a nightmare. He’d been amazed to learn that despite costing a small fortune, nuclear subs usually jettisoned them after use. Sam took off the headphones and put the sound through to the laptop’s speakers, to allow the camera to get the sounds.

“What’s that frying sound ?” Asked Nicki.

“Crustaceans feeding..... Shush now.” Said Ilaria.

Sam had heard the hidden sounds of the oceans before, the noises you normally had to be a creature of the seas to hear. Molluscs mainly, all busy feeding on whatever they could find. For a deep body of water full of tasty debris to feed on, Outerbridge Sound wasn’t that noisy.

When the sounds like whale song began, Sam assumed the incredibly sensitive hydrophones were picking up sounds from the Atlantic Ocean. There were reefs around the Donder Isles though and then vast areas of shallows. The closest whale had to be about ten miles away and the sound was from somewhere much closer. The original song was answered by another creature with a slightly different voice.

“Crap..... There are lots of them down there.” Said Paris.

Her voice created feedback and for a while cabin was full of the dreadful screeching noise, with Paris mouthing ‘sorry’ at everyone. Eventually they could hear the wonderful song of the deep again. It went on for about twenty minutes and seemed to involve at least a dozen different creatures. At the end there was just a single voice left, which gradually faded away. Sam turned the laptop’s speaker right down.

“I think they’ve gone deeper.” He said. “Far deeper than the hydrophones can pick up.”

“Their song.....It was so beautiful.” Said Nicki.

“Next we use the underwater drone.” Said Sam. “Do I have any volunteers to help get it in the water?”

It didn’t surprise him that everyone was eager to help. It was Paris who voiced something he’d been thinking, and probably the others too.

“I don’t believe anything that sings like that, could rip people apart.” She said.

“I’ve seen killer whales playing with a baby penguin.” Said Ilaria. “They batted it about with their jaws and flippers, until it was just a bloody stain in the water. Don’t be fooled by a pretty song.”

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Dom had remained in the villa to make a few calls and he was expecting a few calls to come in. Missing seeing anything the drone might find didn’t really worry him, he’d see the recordings when everyone returned. Doing his ‘oh wows’ a few hours later than anyone else honestly didn’t worry him that much.

“We’re really lucky Ilaria is a bit obsessed with high definition.” Said Bryan Hayman.

The science guy was busy looking at Ilaria’s pictures on the wall, blown up to about six feet square by a projector. Science guy seemed really excited that Ilaria used a camera that gave incredible detail. Dom was trying hard not to think of science guy as science guy, in case he called him that in public.

“A bone is a bone to me...What are all those lines?” Asked Dom.

“Toothmarks, where something chewed at the poor girl.”

Dom peered at the picture Ilaria had taken that night. Vince had been so certain a man had yelled at him, yet the foot in the trainer had turned out to be female, no doubt about it. They still didn’t have an identity for the dead tourist, though a call he was expecting might change that.

“Could the local wildlife have gnawed at it?” He asked.

“There isn’t much local wildlife.” Said Bryan. “Toads are high up on the food chain on Jannsen, but no toad has long sharp teeth. I did think about a dog, but there are very few pet dogs. It’s the toads you see.”

“They eat the dogs?” Asked Dom.

“No, the dogs eat them and then die of the toxin in the toad’s skin. Anyway, nothing native to Jannsen that we know about chewed at that leg bone.”

“More great lines for the show.” Said Dom. “I just hope the family are cooperative once we get an identity for our dead female tourist.”

“A tiny foot and mauve nail polish aren’t definitive proof of gender Dom.”

“Oh, it is, trust me....It is. Anyway, the DNA testing should be back in the morning. I’d happily bet my completion bonus on the owner of that foot being a woman.”

The phone rang, the landline they were relying on for just about all communications with the outside world. Most of the time stepping back into what felt like the technological past was fun, though for Dom at least, it was becoming tiresome. He was even beginning to miss the spam text messages.

“Sorry, I need to get that.” He said.

There were three landline connections coming into the villa and so far, at least, the connections had been both clear and reliable. One line was in the lounge they all used, with another in the master bedroom which Sam had claimed. A third line sometimes used for outgoing calls was connected to an old-fashioned fax machine. Jannsen seemed to be a place where Nokia phones were at the bleeding edge of technology. Dom got to the phone in Sam’s room after running fast enough to leave him breathless.

“Hello.”

“Dom, it’s Pru from Madrigal Research. Denise asked us to investigate your missing tourist.”

It was strange how just about everyone, including the local cops, insisted on saying the tourist was missing. As if a one-legged woman was limping around town, maybe even getting a beer in Rum Runners. Madrigal were an expensive private investigators, who didn’t mind bending rules and cutting corners.

“Hi Pru, any luck ?”

“Yes, and things are a lot more complex than we thought. Nicki Outerbridge has an email link, if I have your permission to send everything to her ?”

“Yes, no problem, Sam has already agreed to that. What did you find out ?”

“There are two missing tourists from a cruise ship which visited Jannsen at about the right time. A man and woman travelling together. Both of them are American citizens Dom, so there could be blowback if you don’t give the info to the authorities.”

“Fine Pru, I’m sure Sam will do that. Please though, cut to the chase. Whose foot did we find ?”

“We’re fairly certain the foot belonged to Miss Susan Fox; her info will be in the email. Travelling with her and also missing is a Mr John Hamilton. Again, a basic bio on John will be sent to Nicki by email.”

“So, why are we being told there are no missing tourists on Jannsen ?” He asked.

“Hmmm, let me suggest something Dom. There’s a little internet and WiFi coverage that just about covers the part of Tilburg around Rum Runners. Mainly you guys are relying on three land lines that I believe you’ve never had checked for.....Unwanted friends on the line.”

“I see what you’re saying. Do you have my cell phone number ?”

“Yes, Sam gave me everyone’s numbers.”

“I’ll be in Rum Runners in about.....Give me an hour.”

Dom found the science guy, who he was trying hard to not think of as the science guy, still looking at Ilaria’s pictures on the projector.

“As a biologist some of the pictures of the leaf litter are amazing.” Said Bryan. “How was the call, did you get a name to go with the foot ?”

“Sue Fox was the lady on the bike, though her boyfriend is missing too.”

“Really ?”

“They suggested we get our phone lines checked for bugs. Actually, I’ll suggest to Sam that the whole villa is swept for electronic surveillance.”

“Wow, my life is rarely this exciting.”

Dom wasn't sure if he liked the science guy, but he would make them just two guys having lunch in Rum Runners. It wasn't going to be all about taking a call from Pru, the fun would be watching to see who was interested in him receiving that call.

"I'm going to Rum Runners Bryan, fancy joining me for lunch ? After that we can go to see Vince. I think he knows something, even if he's confused about it. I think he saw two people on bikes, a guy and a woman."

"That could be fun, I hired a tourist bike yesterday." Said Bryan.

"I need to take a camera and we have a Humvee with a full fuel tank outside."

"Really ? It looks a bit wide for the roads on Janssen."

"It's just a truck with attitude Bryan, it'll be fun."

Science guy gave him a look that suggested he didn't think fun was the right word. He did get his jacket though and follow him outside.

"Does anyone ever refer to you as science guy ?" Asked Dom.

"Not that I can remember, why ?"

"No reason, just curious."

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For Denise and Florence, coffee had moved on to wine and a decent meal in an Italian restaurant in Beauchamp Place, just a street or two away from Harrods. There was no husband and kids waiting for her in a semi-detached somewhere in the suburbs, Denise had never been that in love with any man. Not that she'd been that in love with any woman either. Sex was a need, anyone denying that was a fool. If friendship went with the sex, all the better.

There was currently a man in her life, a really good friend. Callum definitely considered her to be his girlfriend. She'd sometimes found that annoying, but sometimes it had felt good. They'd both used the L word, though for her at least, it was just a word to indicate they were good friends who had sex two or three times a week. Everyone needed to be possessed by someone at times in their life, even if it was in very small doses. As for Flo ? Denise had needs in that direction too, the need for the kiss and touch of a woman. Why she had such needs was something she rarely thought about. After all, introspection had no limits to how far it dug into your soul. Denise had needs and Flo was very good at satisfying them, end of story.

"You must try the Tiramisù for dessert." Said Denise. "It's the best I've had, anywhere, ever, even in Rome."

"I keep forgetting you travel the world making films."

"Not as much as I used to, I run the London office now."

"Good, it might mean I'll get to see more of you." Said Flo.

Wine and a meal inevitably meant sharing a taxi to somewhere. They agreed on one of the hotels in Chelsea, the one where Flo had once seen a famous rock star checking out. Hotels meant their sexual liaison was being hidden from others, a pleasure doubled because it was illicit. Flo was digging through her bag in the taxi.

"Darn, I know one of my cards is still in my maiden name."

"No problem, the hotel room can go on mine." Said Denise.

It had never been that complicated at college. They'd gone back to one of their rooms in the dormitory, or someone else's room. They had a tiny blonde friend who for some reason insisted on being called Stan. By the third term of the second year, Stan was living with her boyfriend in his student digs. Stan's room had been their sin bin for most of that year. A cosy room close to the stairs and the communal showers. Flo leant across the taxi seat and kissed her.

“Will I see a lot more of you Den ?”

“I think so, yes.”

“Your problem in Janssen should sort itself out by the way. I don’t claim any credit, the Frigate will be going there after all.”

“That is good news, Sam will be pleased.”

For Denise at least, part of the pleasure of the taxi ride was the occasional kiss and touch, while mentally thinking about the pleasures to come. She pictured herself removing Flo’s business suit, while wondering what colour her knickers would be. If she’d been a man her dick would be hard and erect, an embarrassing problem when it was time to pay the taxi. Luckily her genital equipment was discreet and tucked away nicely inside. She felt wet though, as they walked towards the hotel’s entrance.

“Are we getting too old for all this ?” Asked Denise.

“Never.”

Checking in was easy, her credit card accepted as proof of ID. They chose an ordinary room, even though getting back together after a bit of a hiatus felt special. Flo ordered champagne and nibbles from room service, while Denise used the bathroom. She looked in the mirror and saw a guilty person looking back at her.

“We’re not married or anything.” She muttered. “Callum is just a really good friend.”

Was it two timing if it was with another woman ? Much as she’s have liked to ease her conscience by thinking it wasn’t, she accepted it was. She returned from the bathroom, to be just in time to deal with the man delivering their champagne and nibbles. Of course, she tipped him far too much, it was one of her failings.

“My turn for the.....”

“We’ll go together.....We can shower together.” Said Denise.

Her desire was at about level twenty, while her patience was almost depleted. She almost dragged her old friend into the bathroom, pulling at the button on her blouse as they went. They were in the shower, with Denise on her knees, using her tongue with great skill; when Flo said she loved her. Out of habit Denise said it back. Another of her failings was trying to please people.

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Getting the drone into the water had been a nightmare. The damned thing was heavy and there were awkward bits jutting out of it, and it seemed to have far too many propellers. Paris had a bruise on her arm that looked quite nasty, before the drone was bobbing about next to The Jenny. Sam had learned a lot about the TV production game and rule one had to be; don’t disfigure the onscreen talent.

“Of crap Paris, I’m so sorry.” He said. “Please don’t set your lawyers on me.”

“Ahh, a bit of makeup will cover it. They always cover my tattoo for TV work.”

She pulled the shoulder down of her T shirt, to reveal a tattoo on her shoulder. A large red heart with ‘Craig’ written under it.

“High school sweetheart.” Said Paris. “He’s now about twenty stone and delivers parcels for UPS.”

Sam was beginning to realise there was a lot about Paris that didn’t fit neatly into her public persona. At least she didn’t seem likely to litigate over the bruise.

“I got a bruise too.” Said Ilaria.

He ignored her, which sometimes worked and sometimes didn’t. The drone came with its own control laptop, only reasonable considering its insurance value. Another expensive gadget he had no experience of using, though he had been given an online course back in London. That had been a

while back though, and a lot of things competing for memory space had occurred since the underwater drone flying webinar.

“Everyone comfortable at the back ?” He asked. “I’ll begin by letting water into its buoyancy tanks. It dives exactly the same way as a full-size sub.”

“Impressive, how much do those things cost ?” Asked Nicki.

Ilaria let out a sarcastic laugh, it had been a mistake to ignore her. Sam hit the record button to keep everything the drone saw, all in wonderful high definition. He just hoped it wouldn’t be needed in an inquiry as to why the drone had been destroyed.

“It’s on loan, we didn’t buy it.” He said.

“How deep can it go ?” Asked Paris.

“As deep as it needs to. The oceanographic institute we borrowed it from use them to map deep ocean trenches.”

The drone had lights, the ability to see right across the visual spectrum and beyond, and its own onboard sonar. By the time it was down to fifty feet, all any of that was showing, was water that looked like pea soup. As the hydrophones picked up more of the sounds like whale song, the drone became interested too. Why it was interested probably came in training webinar two, or maybe three. Sam decided to ignore the expensive robotic device wanting to find the source of the sounds. The song was coming from several miles down, where there was a lot of debris for the drone to run into.

“It wants to investigate the songs.” He said. “Whatever is singing is coming up from the depths of the sound, so I’ll let them get a little closer.”

“They’ll be friendly, I know it.” Said Paris.

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Dom had underestimated the noise and crowd pulling ability of the Humvee. The local population of Tilburg had probably seen the vehicles before, but there were quite a few tourists in Janssen’s only large town. An American veteran grabbed them and, after politely hearing a few tales about Afghanistan, they barely made it into Rum Runners before his phone rang. Gone was any opportunity to look the place over for anyone a little too interested in his business.

“Hi Pru, thanks for calling.”

“It’ll be much safer to talk like this Dom.”

Rum Runners was fairly busy, but it was a large place with a lot of tables in the main bar. Dom steered them towards a quiet corner with the science guy following close behind. A few people did look up, they were part of a TV crew after all. Just about the most exciting thing in town.

“So, how can two tourists vanish and no one goes crazy ?” He asked.

“The official line is that their passports were checked when they left the island, so they must have vanished somewhere else. People do go overboard after parties and the cruise ship did visit other locations. The official response from The Donder Isles was, not our problem.”

“I’m assuming you’re not buying that ? We do have the foot to prove the girl died here.”

“Once the DNA report comes back, the government people in Janssen will definitely be in the spotlight. Our contacts in the US Immigration Service, consider it unlikely passports were checked on exit. One retired officer told us passports were rarely looked at on entry. They rely on the cruise ships doing all the checking.” Said Pru.

“So, someone covered things up to avoid the dead tourists headlines. Don’t the cruise ships know if someone doesn’t come back from a trip ?”

“You’d think so Dom, but it isn’t a day trip by a local high school. The average cruise ship carries around three thousand passengers, all probably keen on a little privacy. I hate to say it, but I’m not surprised how easily these young people’s deaths were hidden.”

“Thanks for the info Pru.”

“Anytime.”

A waitress took their order, the same girl Nicki knew, or had known her sister. Dom decided he needed to begin remembering those sorts of connections, they might be useful. After two mouthfuls of food, he told the science guy the gist of the story.

“Doesn’t surprise me.” Said Bryan. “A man went overboard from a cruise ship and no one realised until it docked in Nassau, the local papers ran a piece on it.”

“We need to get everything out of Vince, and, I hate to say it.....We really do need to find another foot. A guy’s foot this time.”

“Any body part will do, as long as the DNA is still viable.” Said Bryan.

Dom was beginning to warm to the science guy, they seemed to share the same view of the situation. Dom even paid for lunch and he remembered to look at the name badge the waitress had pinned to her blouse.

“Thank you Judy, didn’t you go to school with Nicki Outerbridge ?”

“No, that was my much, much, much older sister.”

“Sorry....Look you might be able to help with something. I’m Dom by the way, the location guy with the film crew.”

“Oh I know, everyone knows why you’re all staying at the villa.”

A twenty dollar note seemed to be a fairly standard sweetener anywhere on the globe and it seemed to work on Judy, after he’d put it in her hand.

“I’ll try and help, what do you need to know ?” Asked Judy.

“Just the name of whoever checks people arriving from cruise ships Judy. We want to get the details right for the show. Do you know their name ?”

It crossed his mind that Judy might get into trouble, but as Sam had told him more times than he liked to remember, the show had to come first, second, third and sometimes even fourth.

“Well.....To be honest Dom, no one does that. The cruise ships check people as they get on board, so they must be alright.”

Dom left it until they were in the car park, before joining science guy in disbelief that it had been so easy to prove the local government had lied. There was no checking of passports, in or out. The Humvee had gained a small cloud of tourists and the veteran had brought a few friends. Politeness mattered though, no one wanted people talking about the rude bastards from SHP. He’d listen to all the stories about Iraq and Afghanistan with a smile on his face, though it was going to be a long afternoon.

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Paris Ferland had arrived on Janssen with a determination that the Donder Isles monster TV show was going to be the thing the public talked about, not her sudden resignation from CNN. It hadn’t been her finest hour and as for the dreadful game show ! SHP had already been given funding for a six-part mini-series; she’d checked that with her agent.

“Behave yourself, no dramas Paris.” Abigail had told her.

She’d had the same agent for years and Abigail sometimes talked to her like a big sister, or worse, a second mother. Her real mother was a bitch who she hadn’t seen in years, but she knew Abigail’s heart was in the right place. There had been other unkind comments about keeping her claws well

covered and thinking before she yelled at anyone. Unkind comments, mainly because it was true, she could be a genuine twenty-two carat bitch. This time though, she was going to be different. "Keep the camera going Paris." Said Sam. "No matter what happens, make sure it's all on the memory card."

"I will, I promise."

They'd all been watching the screen, eager to see whatever was making the sounds like whale song. "That song implies they're mammals, just like whales." Said Ilaria. "Probably trapped in the sound hundreds of years ago and bred down there, deep down in the dark."

"They might have been trapped down there for thousands of years." Said Sam.

"Whales don't tear ankles off and drag tourists off bikes." Said Nicki.

The old Paris would have argued, there might even have been a serious row. The new Paris was finally beginning to listen to her analyst though, and realised those who disagreed with her weren't always her enemies.

"There might be these whale creatures and something else in the sound." She said. "Something really dangerous."

"You might be right....Keep that camera rolling."

"I will."

The pings and blips seemed to take ages to become blurred outlines on the screen, though it was probably only a few minutes. The drone was trying its best to view the creatures singing the strange sounds, but to no avail. Then its onboard systems tried infrared.

"Crap !.....Jeez Sam, it had something then." Said Nicki. "Set it back to look in infrared."

Sam had to play with the laptop for a bit, and judging by his language the drone had a mind of its own. Finally, they all saw the image on the screen that had excited Nicki.

"Fuck.....That's is definitely not a whale." Said Paris.

Another dozen or so blobs on the screen were just that, blobs. One of the creatures though, seemed to be finding the drone as interesting as the drone found it. To Paris that implied the creature on the screen had curiosity, which implied intelligence. It was just a pity that it looked like nothing she'd ever seen before.

"That can't be it, the drone's feed must be getting interference." Said Nicki.

"It's not, that's it.....I'll see if I can clean up the image." Said Sam.

Paris still had the camera running, swinging it around the room occasionally, though like the others, her real interest was the creature on the screen. A large central body that was still too vague to make out. Coming out of it were dozens of long thin tentacles, like those of an octopus. Long tentacles, so long they were reaching up to almost touch the underwater drone.

"That thing has to still be a mile down.....Nothing has tentacles that long." She said.

"We need to see it better; I'm sending the drone deeper." Said Sam.

Paris doubted if the drone had much of a top speed, or that it could dive that rapidly. It was powered by batteries and pushed through the water by several quite small propellers. For a while it was like watching paint dry, as the drone moved deeper and closer to the nearest creature. Eventually the tentacles looked clearer and closer, though the main body of the beast was still tantalisingly difficult to see.

"Wow, that was a bit too close." Said Sam.

One huge tentacle has gone above the drone, passing so close that it looked certain to hit it. Paris had held her breath, only breathing again when the drone carried on, unmolested.

"How much is that drone worth Sam ?" Asked Ilaria.

"I know.....But what's the point of having the thing if we're too cautious to use it."

More tentacles went past, some looking as though they were deliberately being careful not to hit the drone. Maybe the creature was curious about the strange device with its whirring propellers and bright little lights. It crossed her mind that to the creatures who sang like whales, the drone might look like a living creature.

"Can you increase the camera's sensitivity to infrared?" Asked Ilaria.

"If you can, it was in a training webinar I missed." Said Sam. "What you see is as good as I can get it."

As the drone moved ever closer to the underwater beast, it showed weird undulations in its body. Strange large pits and undulation, even vast areas of ripples on what was probably its skin. True the drone was viewing everything in infrared, which was bound to look weird. It was so strange though, so alien. Paris was actually beginning to wish she wasn't in a boat on the water above such a beast.

"Did you see?.....No....Swing it to the left Sam." Yelled Nicki.

When Paris saw the single huge, yellow, reptilian eye on the screen, she swung her camera around to get Sam's reaction. As she caught his look of amazement, the screen went blank.

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Bryan Hayman knew they shouldn't really be trying to get more details from Vince, certainly not without someone with them he knew and trusted. He'd decided to leave all the talking to Dom, who seemed to have a fairly fluid moral compass. As far as Bryan was concerned, he wasn't an employee of SHP, he was just an outside consultant. If he kept fairly quiet, he couldn't be implicated in anything Dom might be up to, or so he hoped.

Despite his mother's objections, they had managed to get into the house. They were in the kitchen during the hottest part of the day, with Vince sat in a chair next to an open window. If it hadn't been for a ceiling fan, the room would have been uninhabitable. As it was Bryan could feel sweat making his shirt stick to his back.

"You didn't bring Nicki.....He likes Nicki." Said June, Vince's mother.

"As I said, we're just here to clarify a few things." Said Dom. "You can stay in the room and make sure we don't upset your boy."

"Five hundred dollars doesn't seem much for what you expect from him."

Bryan was a little shocked by how soon June had mentioned money. The kitchen was in need of a repaint, but they didn't strike him as people desperate for a few dollars. You can never tell though and Bryan really wanted to stay in the background.

"How about a job for Vince, the glass bottomed boat will be out of action for most of the tourist season. I can get him on the payroll as a runner. The pay will be at least a hundred dollars a day, just to carry things around and deliver messages. Vince will see a lot of Paris Ferland, which I'm sure he'll enjoy."

"The lady from TV news?" Asked Vince.

"That's the one, she works for us now."

Vince was hooked, Bryan could tell by the sappy grin on his face. The problem was going to be June, who seemed to be juggling a need to protect her son, with a need for cash.

"How long will the job last?" Asked June.

"We're shooting a mini-series, so we'll be here in Janssen for at least six months, maybe a year."

June hesitated and Dom kept pushing at her, like a real pro.

"No tax of course and paid in cash."

June nodded and sat herself at the end of the kitchen table.

"Alright, but don't upset him." She said.

"We won't."

"Do I really get to see Paris?" Asked Vince.

"I'll make sure you get a message to give her every day." Said Dom.

Bryan hadn't realised he was there as a cameraman, until Dom turned it on and handed it to him.

"Not our best camera, but it will have to do. Just keep it pointed at Vince."

"I think I can manage that." Said Bryan.

Sweating from every pore, while holding the TV company's second-best hand-held camera. It wasn't how Bryan had thought his day would have gone, but despite it all, he was enjoying himself.

"So, Vince.....You told us the tourist you saw was a man." Said Dom. "As I'm sure you heard the foot we found belonged to a woman, probably an American called Sue Fox."

"I heard you found her." Said Vince. "The man turned off the road a little later."

Bryan had seen the previous recording of Vince, and joined Dom in a real jaw dropping moment.

"You never mentioned a woman, Vince." Said Dom.

"You never asked me. Everyone kept on about the eyes I'd seen and I saw the eyes when that.....Thing carried off the man. I didn't think anyone was interested in the woman."

Actually, it was difficult to fault Vince's logic, though even his mum was glaring at him. Dom drummed his fingers on the table and closed his eyes for a minute or so, before continuing.

"We think the man was called John Hamilton and we are interested in both him and the woman Vince. How long after the woman went off the road, until you followed the man into the orchard?"

"The woman was wobbling about; I think I might have worried her. They were both on the wrong side of the road, so I flashed my lights and yelled at them. I was only trying to help."

Bryan thought it was time he said something, even if only to show a bit of support for Vince. The poor kid was implicated in the death of two American tourists, even if his intentions had been good.

Soon the authorities were likely to descend on June and her boy. God help them both then, Bryan didn't think Vince would be taking up the job offer.

"I'm sure you meant well Vince." Said Bryan. "How far until the man went off the road."

"About half a mile. I never saw what happened to the woman. I just....."

"We know, you didn't want to get into trouble." Said Dom.

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Sam just looked at the blank screen for a while, knowing what had happened.

"It might be a fault in the link." Said Nicki.

"No, the creature finally got annoyed at it, the drone has gone." Said Ilaria.

There would be so many claim forms to fill in, but at least he knew the drone was covered by their insurance policy.

"She's right, the drone will be scrap metal by now." He said. "We have the recordings though.....At least we have the recordings."

"Do you want me to stop filming?" Asked Paris.

"No, we'll need to do it by the book and try to renew contact with the drone. Keep filming everything, no telling what might be useful."

Sam had only touched two keys on the laptop, when for some reason he leapt across the main cabin of The Jenny. His shoulder had hit the wall and the little finger of his left hand was now bent the wrong way. Through the pain he looked over the ruins of where he'd been working. The laptop was on the floor, but it did have two solid state drives, so he hoped the precious recordings still existed. For some reason Nicki had leapt across the room too, though she was still conscious and seemed alright.

“What happened ?” She asked.

“No idea, how about the others ?”

“Bruised but otherwise I’m fine.” Shouted Ilaria.

Her voice seemed to be coming from underneath an upturned table, but at least she was alright. He looked around and saw Paris, crumpled up next to the stairs that lead to the deck.

“Crap, Paris doesn’t look too good.” He said.

“I see her.....On my way to check on her.” Said Nicki.

Sam should have either gone to dig Ilaria out of the rubble, or least tried to straighten his own finger. Instead to grabbed the precious laptop, intending to put it somewhere safe, if there was anywhere safe. Laptop under his arm, for some reason he leapt across the cabin again. He hit a doorframe and it was worse that time, much worse. His foot hurt like hell and he was certain he’d heard a bone snap.

“What the fuck is going on ?” He yelled.

“That thing, it must have got hold of the anchor chain.” Yelled Nicki. “It’s pulling The Jenny about.” Now he was pretty sure he wasn’t going insane; his mind began to work again.

“We didn’t lower the anchor. It’s got hold of the string of hydrophones. Look after Paris if you can, I’ll go and jettison the damned hydrophones.”

It was agony to walk, every step sent a wave of pain up his leg. Sam remembered reading that the human foot had more bones than the rest of the body. It might not have been true; he had seen it on social media. If it was true, it felt as though he’d crushed or broken quite a few of them. What worried him most was having no idea where the laptop had ended up. By the time he got to the stairs, Nicki already had Paris leant against the wall.

“Look after Ilaria too, I shouldn’t be long.” He said.

Stairs were impossible to do hopping, or on one foot, he discovered the hard way. Halfway up the stairs, The Jenny did another instant movement backwards. He was pushed down hard into the stairs, really hard. Judging by the blood and the new agonising pain, his nose was broken, maybe a cheekbone too. He’d broken his nose once before at college. Not doing sports or during a fight, he’d fallen off a pedal bike after a few too many beers.

“Fuck !” He yelled.

“Are you alright ?” Shouted Nicki.

“Not really, but I’m still moving.”

Once at the top of the stairs he could see the full extent of the damage to The Jenny. There had been two small masts with the usual ship to shore comms and short-range radar. All gone, everything above the height of the cabin had gone, as if swept away.

“There goes our deposit.” He muttered.

He was at the wrong end of the boat, which meant the agony of walking to the stern end, all the time hoping The Jenny wasn’t dragged away from beneath his feet. There was sea water everywhere, as though the creature had tried to drag them down into the depths of the sound, down into hell.

He was lucky, he reached the stern without the boat being dragged around, or lurching about. He could see the large metal cabinet where the hydrophones had been stored. He could also see the coils of a huge tentacle, as it grabbed the string of hydrophones.

“Oh, shit.”

Nothing to hold onto, and as the boat hurtled one way, he remained still and met it, mainly the hard parts of it. For a second he was unconscious, before waking up where he needed to be. His face was

jammed up against the hydrophone cabinet. His ribs hurt like hell with every breath, he assumed a few of them were cracked or broken. As he tried to move, he noticed his damaged foot was now at a weird angle to his leg. Things didn't look too good; things weren't too good at all.

"Get it done Sam you idiot, get it done." He mumbled.

Opening the cabinet made just about everything hurt or ache. There was a split pin to stop the release handle from moving down by accident. Getting the pin out turned into a painful exercise with lots on bad language. As he grabbed the handle, he saw the tentacle grab the string of hydrophones and begin to pull.

"Not this time."

He pulled the handle and the tentacle vanished below the surface, dragging the expensive hydrophones with it. Hydrophones by their very nature were passive, designed to listen without being noticed. If theirs had angered the denizen of the deep, he couldn't imagine how. He remained looking at the dark water of the sound for a good ten minutes, waiting to see if the beast came back to finish them off. Eventually he turned around, to find Paris sitting on the damaged roof of the cabin and aiming a camera at him. She looked terrible and there was quite a bit of blood on her blouse.

"Did you get it all?" He asked. "Is it all recorded?"

She simply smiled at him and nodded.

"Brilliant." He said.

Talking made him cough and bring up a few tiny amounts of blood. That wasn't good, he was sure that most definitely wasn't good.

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