

## Outerbridge Sound

### Chapter 11 – Jack’s Treasure

**“All that equipment and they’d managed to slaughter another Janssen toad. Not only harmless, they were supposed to eat their body weight in bugs every night.”**

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Despite every member of the political press knowing they were an item, Denise and Florence still booked into hotels using credit cards not in their names. Denise had an SHP company Amex card and Flo had a prepaid debit card that probably broke all sorts of rules. It wasn’t just about trying to be covert, there was a definite buzz out of clandestine assignments. They were at the hotel in Chelsea again, the one where Flo had seen David Beckham in the lobby, she was certain of it.

“But I thought you’d be happy Den.” Said Flo. “Navy divers have been swimming about in the sound and none of them have been attacked. They’re getting ready to bring the submersible into action. The admiralty are happy and the government have said they’re happy the arrival of the Sheffield has restored the region to normality. Everyone is happy, so why aren’t you.”

Denise wanted to say some spontaneity would make her happy, though she didn’t want to spoil the night. In many ways they were behaving like a long-term couple, which was fine, to a point. She missed stripping Flo out of her business suit, maybe leaving it crumpled beside the bed. There was Flo lying on the bed in just her expensive matching bra and panties, her suit carefully hung in the wardrobe. The sex was still good, it just wasn’t what Denise wanted. Of course, nine tenths of the problem was that she didn’t know what she wanted. She stripped off down to just her knickers and lay next to her lover.

“It’s not that we wanted too much trouble, but none at all is a problem.” Said Den. “The story goes off the boil and it begins to look like fake news. Two hundred hunky sailors arrive and there’s no sign of the monster of Outerbridge Sound.”

“So, you’d prefer it if a couple of the Sheffield’s crew were eaten ?”

“Not eaten.....Nibbled at a bit would do.”

“I never knew you were so heartless.”

Flo giggled, until Den removed her Bra. She liked that about her, she responded to having her goodies unwrapped. Not all women she’d been with did, or some of the men, when she thought about it.

“You really do have amazing tits.” She said.

Flo really did have the best pair Den had ever seen; she was actually a little jealous. She kissed them for a while, giving Flo’s nipples a lot of attention. Her lover reacted as she used one of her hands to pull down those very expensive looking panties.

“Oh, that is so nice....Take them all the way off.” Said Flo.

A lot of it with Flo was in her head, reacting to what she knew was going to happen. Denise liked that, lovers with good imaginations were always the best. Den moved down after removing the panties, gently brushing her tongue over the tiny little bit of bush Flo hadn’t had waxed off.

“Stop being a tease.”

“Did you have anything to do with the Americans releasing Vince ?” Asked Den.

“What ?”

A bit mean really, but Den knew she had Flo in the perfect situation to get an honest reply. Sex or the promise of sex got Flo talking, especially if they were both naked. Den lifted her head and looked at Flo.

"You heard me." She said.

"You credit me with too much power. I may have suggested the FBI were making themselves look a little stupid. Vince couldn't have killed that poor waitress, or attacked the FBI agents. The boy is a citizen of one of the few remaining remnants of the empire. There was a little muttering at their people in London."

"So it was you?"

"Just one cog in the machine Den, that's all I am."

Flo was obviously getting a little impatient. She pushed her head forward, which Den didn't mind. Her lover had earned her pleasure. That poor boy Vince....He should never have been put through all that. Denise had the same advantage all women had when it came to oral sex with another woman; she knew what she liked being done to her. In her teens the boys had always been too wary of putting their tongue in really deep. She had no idea why, it wasn't as if anything in there was going to bite them. Den pushed her face deep into Flo's micro bush and got her tongue in deep, really deep. There was that wonderful salty tang to go with the delicious aroma of roused woman. Den would carry on until Flo was like a limp rag, lying sweating on the bed sheets. Her lover had earned her pleasure.

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It was the early hours of the morning in Janssen and after a weekend and a few nights, Ilaria was getting fed up with exploring the cave system. There was also the safety angle, even if it wasn't cool to mention it.

"Let's face it, these caves go on for miles." She said. "We need to find a few more volunteers to help us. I'm sure Gary and Simon would love a treasure hunt. Plus.....If one of us had an accident down here, we'd be in serious trouble."

She'd mentioned it before and Dom never looked keen. He was worried about someone else getting to the treasure first, to the point of paranoia. The caves they'd found behind the grotto were part of a huge network of caves, including a few pools of brackish water. There were no rivers on Janssen, none at all. A couple of feet of rainwater in a drainage ditch maybe and a few tiny streams that only lasted for the duration of a bad storm. But no rivers, it was why the locals collected every drop of rainwater that fell on their roofs, storing it in underground tanks. As for where most of the rainwater ended up.....It corroded the volcanic rocks of the island and formed caves.

"Gary might tell someone Ilaria. The more people involved, the more certain it is that our secret will get out."

"I have watched Pretty Little Liars, Dom, I get the idea." She replied.

"I trust Nicki, but not her brothers. If one word of this gets out, the Outerbridge brothers will be here, the Regiment right behind them. They'll pull this place apart to find Jack's treasure."

"If there is a treasure Dom. We found one piece of ripped up paper at the bottom of the ladder, that first night. It was signed Jack and said go to a certain point in a certain cave. We did and found nothing."

"We probably went to the wrong place."

"Or the piece of paper was left as a wind up. I imagined digging holes near the pool, maybe taking up a few paving slabs, not this. I never imagined we'd end up in somewhere like this. It's not fun anymore and it's dangerous." She said.

The caves were damp, gritty and unpleasant, so they and their clothes ended up damp, dirty and gritty. Comments had already been made about the amount of laundry they were putting in the washing machines in the utility room. As Ilaria moved her foot, it made a squelching sound.

"Just carry on for another hour." Said Dom. "Tomorrow we can think it through."

"No more thinking it through. I'll give you another hour tonight. Then I'm through unless we find a few others to help. I'll go back to digging holes in the lawn, on my own if I have to."

She hadn't meant she'd be through with him too, though the look on his face showed that he thought she might have. Another problem was their lack of decent lighting. Trying to explore a cave system with flashlights bought in a local store had become a nightmare.

"Are we still alright? You and me I mean?"

She gave him a playful thump on the arm and kissed his gritty cheek.

"Yeah, we're ok. Come on, last damp grubby cave for tonight."

Science guy would have loved the caves. Almost every cave had lots of weird insects, which skuttled up the walls as they approached. There were tiny creatures in the brackish ponds too, that might never have been seen before. Ilaria took the lead, taking them into a large narrow cave they'd never entered before. As always, things skuttled away from them, lots of tiny insects.

"Science guy would have an orgasm over this place." She said.

"I guarantee science guy would tell Sam all about our treasure hunt."

It was wonderful and alarming to explore new caves, where they might well be the first to see them for years, maybe decades, maybe for the first time. Bits of rock had the alarming habit of cracking as she stood on them, making her have to grab the wall. Touching the damp walls was never dull.

"Crap Dom, what the hell....."

It looked like a long worm, that was busy winding itself around her hand.

"Looks like one of the worms Mark filmed in Outerbridge Sound."

Ilaria had a simple philosophy about the weird wildlife in the caves. On the walls and in ponds, they were precious and wonderful creatures, true wonders of mother nature. If they were on her body and crawling over her, they were pests that needed to be squashed. Dom had pointed out the contradictions to her, but she didn't care.

"Damn thing." She muttered.

Squashing it against the wall wasn't easy, but finally the worm dropped off her hand and she finished off the destruction with her boot. Gloves would have been nice, but gloves made it difficult to use the flashlights.

They entered a cavern so large, that she thought they'd gone outside into the night. When she looked closely her flashlight was dimly lighting up a cavern ceiling, high above them. Aiming the light down, showed her nothing but water with a few tiny ripples in its surface.

"This is huge, my light barely reaches the other side." Said Dom.

"There are flooded caves under Janssen, though it's contaminated with sea water. They pump it up to use for things like flushing toilets."

"How do you know all this?"

"It's in the bumf we got on the first day here, which I'm assuming you never read....Look Dom, something over there is catching the light."

How far did a standard convenience store flashlight reach? It had to be a hell of a distance, right on the other side of the lake. Dom joined her in moving his flashlight about. Ilaria finally got her aim just right, there was something metallic reflecting the light back.

"Might be stainless steel.....A shovel maybe." Said Dom.

“Definitely not natural Dom. We need help with proper lights and boats we can carry down the tunnels. Canoes maybe, or kayaks...Do you know anyone who has a kayak ?”

At first Ilaria heard the noise, as if the water in front of them was being agitated by something. Like surf hitting a beach, but much louder. The slight whiff of sulphur made her eyes water and their flashlights weren't really intended as caving lamps. Something huge rose up out of the water, something that reached up to almost touch the ceiling. It might have been their lights, though it seemed hardly credible that a couple of flashlights would scare such a beast. It crashed back into the water, causing a wave that drenched them both.

“Fuck..... What was that ?” Asked Dom.

“Oh, come on, we both know what it was. We have to tell everyone now. We can get lights down here and the cameras. Sam will love this place, it's perfect for the show.”

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Bill Carr had never intended to team up with Mark Coulier, but his company had been part of the deal. The Janssen regiment had decent weapons, body armour and all sorts of other useful equipment. Useful to a monster hunter in particular. Mark had given a huge grin and told him when he'd gone to collect an assault rifle and ammunition.

“I know you're not part of the investigation Bill. Take me with you, or there's no access to the Regiment's goodies. Personally, I think we'll make a good team.”

Bill had expected to hate Mark and for a while, he had. He'd refused the invitation to move into the Coulier mansion, until he'd realised it meant getting away from everyone in Janssen knowing his movements. Once they were going out at night creature hunting, he'd begun to realise Mark was good at what he did. Not as smart as Stacey, but a useful partner. They used bikes, carrying as much in the way of weapons and equipment as they could. Using Jeeps would have enabled them to carry more, but the bikes could get them to just about everywhere on Janssen, no matter how remote.

“Maybe we're scaring them off.” Said Mark. “It certainly isn't the British navy.”

“Much as I'd love to claim the credit.” Said Bill. “I think they might be getting ready for something. This just might be the lull before the storm.”

They were revisiting the scenes of crimes, mainly where people had been attacked. The orchard where the woman tourist's foot had been found was becoming very familiar to them, they'd been back there so often. So far, there had been no sign of anything worth shooting at.

“We need to change tactics.” Said Mark.

“I agree....But we can't patrol Outerbridge Sound, the navy guys are there.”

They were self-appointed vigilantes, both of them accepted that. The local police knew Mark and the general impression was that as long as they went after the creatures who'd killed the Landry's kid and weren't a liability, they'd be tolerated. Getting into a firefight with the British navy would definitely tick the liability box. J Outerbridge had even turned up at the Coulier mansion to give them a personal version of how things were.

“I don't care what you do, just don't start a war with the British navy. We all know they're taking credit for stopping any more attacks. I doubt if them splashing about in the sound deterred anything. Still, let them take the credit. London are happy I've been told, which is great. So, no fighting with the Brits.”

It wasn't that hard to avoid the navy, their foot patrols tended to keep to the streets of Janssen and the perimeter of Outerbridge Sound. They'd borrowed two police vehicles, which meant patrolling the rest of the island by road. It was a dreadful way to patrol anywhere, but it seemed London were happy, which meant the tourist ships would keep stopping in The Donder Isles.

"I saw something.....Your two o'clock." Said Mark.

Bill saw something out of the corner of his eye. He hoped it was one of the monsters, they hadn't seen anything since beginning their nightly sweeps of the likely spots. They had fired once, a few nights back. Though they'd only succeeded in killing a harmless Janssen toad.

"I see it." He said.

They had all the best equipment money could buy. Lights on their helmets, night vision equipment. They could even communicate using an encrypted comms setup. Bill ran across the orchard, his assault rifle up and ready. His heart beat faster as whatever they were chasing, turned towards him. It was exactly what had happened before something had torn Stacey's back apart.

"It's turned towards us."

Bill fired twice, as did Mark. Whatever it had been stopped. Bill walked over to what looked like a blob among the leaf litter. He had an idea what it was, enough certainty to shine a little light on it.

"Damn, it's bad luck to kill them, or so my grandmother always said." Said Mark.

All that equipment and they'd managed to slaughter another Janssen toad. Not only harmless, they were supposed to eat their body weight in bugs every night.

"We definitely need to change our tactics." Said Bill.

"Any suggestions?"

"I was certain the creature that attacked Stacey had crossed the road, heading west from the sound. We could spend some time near the west coast."

"Sounds good, I don't think the navy know there is a west side of Janssen."

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Nicki Outerbridge thought issuing a bulletin about the weekly meeting with Dr Bryan Hayman, AKA science guy, was a good idea. The problem, as she'd told Sam while showering one morning, was;

"Great idea, but why me? I already have enough work to fill twenty-four hours of the day."

He'd given her the solution he kept giving her, every time he'd added to her workload. Hire someone as her PA, the company could now afford it. Easy said, but they'd had trouble finding a few young people to be runners and general luggers about of film equipment.

Janssen wasn't exactly awash with unemployed talented people. Nicki had spoken to a friend who knew people, mainly bored housewives and summer residents. It seemed there was a reservoir of talent, if you knew where to look for it. Several phone calls and few meetings later and she'd found the right lady to fill the job of PA and general doer of stuff she didn't have time for. Someone she knew, though she did know just about everyone in The Donder Isles.

Nicki had helped Kate Russo and her husband find their ideal summer residence, not far north of Tilburg. Not that Kate needed to work, as she'd told her at least a dozen times.

"I just get bored out of my skull Nicki. Even a subtropical paradise can get a bit samey after a few years."

It was Kate's first day in the job and Nicki was hoping she didn't seduce Sam. Kate had a reputation on Janssen, which only her husband didn't seem to know about. Mrs Russo was quite a sexual predator and it was said that she always got her man.

"Bryan talks quite slowly, so you can take notes." Said Nicki. "Or record it on your phone and write it up later. There is a lot of scientific information and no one remembers most of it. We need a bulletin with the key points sent out the next day."

"I use shorthand, a boss I had many years ago insisted on it. I can always ask Bryan to go over the fiddly technical bits with me."

So, tempting to tell her that Paris Ferland seemed to have put her mark on science guy, but Kate would need to work out who fancied who for herself. Just so long as she left Sam alone.

"I think we're all here." Said Bryan. "We've had a few interesting new pieces of information this week. Dom and Ilaria found something amazing last night, which some of you may know about. I'll ask them to tell you about that themselves."

"Did they find Jack's gold?" Asked Gary.

"Something even better than that." Said Dom.

Science guy had always looked awkward, though a lot of that had gone. It seemed the best way to get over being nervous about public speaking, was to do a lot of public speaking. Bryan reached for his laptop, which was connected to a projector.

"Anisoptera, the larvae of the common dragonfly." He said.

The audience of the entire cast and crew were very interactive, there were a lot of noises to indicate they were impressed with the creature. It was all part of the weekly team brief now and Bryan gave them a few seconds to calm down.

"The dragonfly larvae lives in ponds for years, eating anything it can catch. A fierce and brutal predator that looks nothing like the flying thing of beauty it will become. I can remember catching a dragonfly larvae in a net when I was a tiny boy. I dropped the net and ran away."

The laughter was good, Bryan was learning about the social benefits of a little self-deprecation. Nicki was glad that Sam had decided to use science guy in several episodes of 'Donder Isles Monster,' yet another temporary name for the show. Bryan put up a picture of the worm ball Mark had filmed in Outerbridge Sound.

"The creatures here are more complex than a dragon fly, but I think it all starts with an egg sack and these large worms." Said Bryan. "The worms feed on the general effluvia deep in the sound."

"And in caves." Said Ilaria.

"Yes Ilaria, and in caves, we will get to that later. The key to the stages of a multi-level metamorphosis, seems to be food supply."

"Less long words this early Doc." Said Paris.

"There isn't much to eat on Janssen." Said science guy. "There might have been once, but unless you like poisonous toads.....So the second stage of development went into the surrounding oceans to eat and grow. It's all theory, but I think all the attacks we've seen are by the creatures a few of you have seen in the undergrowth. They'll be heading for the ocean, but happy to eat the occasional tourist."

"Why haven't they spread out Doc?" Asked Sam. "Why aren't there colonies of them on the USA mainland?"

"My guess is distance, it's simply too far for them to swim. I do think that their dead bodies get washed up on beaches. There are always stories about sea monsters in the press. Usually, the remains get put down to unknown creatures from the ocean depths. But to continue...."

A picture taken by Paris came up, a still image of the huge tentacle that had turned their hired boat into a wreck in a matter of minutes.

"Once they reach a certain size, there has to be some sort of predation among themselves. There can only be room for a small number of adult final stage creature in Outerbridge Sound. I believe, and again only a theory, that deep down at around eight miles deep, there is an entire ecosystem we can't even imagine. The adults give birth to the egg sacks, which turn into worms.....And the whole process begins again."

"I can see a flaw in the theory." Said Cormac. "If these huge adults come back out of the ocean and into the sound, someone would see them."

Bryan put up a diagram that looked hand drawn. It showed a cross section of an island, with caves and pools going down deep below it.

“Geology comes into play Cormac, the geology of volcanic islands in particular. Some volcanic rocks are harder than granite, some are so light they float. Janssen was formed of the porous kind, full of open lava tunnels and vents. Over the millennia water corroded the rocks, adding channels and creating vast underground lakes. Deeper and deeper penetrated the water, becoming more and more brackish.”

“You what Doc ?” Asked Gary.

“Salty.” Yelled Ilaria.

Finally impatient, Bryan held up his hands to stop the ensuing laughter and jokes aimed at Gary.

“Eventually the water will be so contaminated, it will form lakes that are almost completely sea water. I believe the adults have ways to get in through those caves when they’re large, yet still not fully grown. I will ask Ilaria and Dom to tell you about what they found, right under the villa, right under our feet.”

“Alright, supposing we accept this cycle is going on.” Said Sam. “Why do these creatures suddenly turn homicidal and try to wipe everyone out.”

“Geology again. I’m certain of it, though we may never understand the process. Once every century, or so, things heat up deep under Janssen. The heat disturbs the creatures, which upsets their entire lifecycle. As I said, there is little for them to eat on Janssen, apart from people.”

“Could the really huge ones get out of the sound ?” Asked Emily.

“Usually, deep water creatures remain in deep water.” Said Bryan. “They do seem to only come up to shallow water for short periods of time. If the water became too hot though, or if they were hungry enough....They just might.”

“Not a reassuring thought.” Said Nicki.

“Or they might not people, we’re here to make a TV show.” Said Sam. “And remember, the show has to come first, second and third, sometimes even...”

“Fourth.” Everyone yelled together.

“Now, I’d like Ilaria and Dom to tell you about what they found in the early hours of this morning.” Said science guy.

Ilaria actually held Dom’s hand as they took over the hot spot Bryan had just vacated. No pictures on the projector, she simply began to speak.

“As I’m sure you all know, Dom and I have been treasure hunting.”

“Did you find the gold ?” Asked Emily.

“No, but we found something just as exciting. There’s a lake right under the villa, where.....”

Nicki knew it would be a key moment for Kate, she’d either be scared or enjoying every moment.

Kate looked happy, her note book full of the dashes and squiggles of shorthand. She’d already signed the privacy agreement, but Nicki would give her a stronger verbal version later.

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Michael Chavez, owner of Chavez Boat Repairs, believed the waters in Outerbridge Sound went down to hell. He believed it with the same fervour that he believed the sacrament in church became the blood and body of Christ. To him it was all twisted together, the sound, hell, lucifer and the eternal battle between good and evil. It was why he didn’t like his employees discussing the old ways with outsiders, especially tourists. Outsiders rarely believed and even worse, they often ridiculed what they didn’t understand.

"It's heresy Dylan, you must understand that." He said. "You're young, I do remember what that was like. Though while you work for me there must be no talking about the creatures to the outsiders. The film crew will find out soon enough, if they don't follow the rules."

"Sorry Mr Chavez, it won't happen again."

"Good, see that it doesn't."

Money mattered of course, Michael was quite happy to put his hand out to SHP, the way everyone on Jannsen seemed to be doing. As for telling them about the dangers.....If they refused to listen to advice about keeping well clear of certain places, they'd soon learn the hard way. The eternal battle had been going on since the beginning of creation, he was sure of it. Hadn't Josiah Outerbridge once told a congregation in his church that the creatures were the serpents who'd tempted Adam and Eve ? No TV crew could stop the confrontation between Lord Jesus and the creatures of Satan, the unclean one. The crew of the Sheffield would suffer too, if they didn't listen to the rules.

"No one listens." He muttered.

"Sorry Mr Chavez ?" Said Dylan.

"Nothing.....Have a half day Dylan. Go home and give my respects to your mother."

"Thank you."

Michael needed to clear his thoughts and it was easier to do without the usual constant noise of boats being repaired. The damaged glass bottom was still there, leaning up against two palm trees. He found it strange that most people on Jannsen still believed the creatures were a myth, when the truth was there to be seen.

"Toothmarks." He muttered. "Clear evidence that the unclean one has sent his demons to test us."

All of life was a test, nothing made sense if it wasn't. He'd failed in his faith once, while on a business trip to Florida. So many girls that just a phone call and a few dollars could bring to his hotel room. So easy to get drugs from a member of the hotel staff, who was eager to sell. Only the soft stuff of course, just a little weed.

Michael had ended up on harder things and had missed the last meeting before going home. He never did that, missing meetings was.....His father would have been so ashamed. After that he doubled down on his efforts to stand up to any temptations Satan might send his way.

"I will be tested, I know that.....I will not fail next time, I will not give in to temptation."

He walked right down the beach to where the surf was just beginning to drench his shoes. Michael loved the sounds and smells of the ocean. No matter how often he came to that spot and looked at the waves rolling in, he never lost the feeling of awe. Two birds flew past him and if his gaze hadn't followed them, he might not have seen the dark object beneath the waves. Sharks never got past the shallow waters and reefs, though one or two tourists claimed to have seen them. No shark attack had been recorded since.....It had to have been in the nineteen twenties.

"What the hell is it ?"

It wasn't that far out, seeming to be able to ignore the waves and the current he knew ran north to south. It had to be large to resist the pull, or heavy. Michael's mind went from something living to the flotsam and jetsam that were constantly arriving with the ocean currents. In the end his curiosity made him undress down to his boxer short, before wading out into the surf. Probably a baseless rumour, but it was said old man Morris had made his fortune by finding a wreck. Some said he'd found gold, others said drugs in boat that had fallen victim to the eastern reefs. All of it more than likely rubbish...But stories like that have a lasting effect on a small island.

"Looks big....Must be something worth having." He muttered.

His toes had just left the sand, his head bobbing about just above the surface. It was that moment to either start swimming, or call the whole idea a waste of time. He'd already decided to swim out to whatever it was, just to satisfy his curiosity, when it moved. Not just part of it, the entire dark mass moved a few feet to the left. It had to be a good fifty feet across, yet it had moved quickly, without disturbing the surface of the ocean. When Michael saw the grey skin break the surface, he knew he wasn't investigating a wreck. He took off the crucifix that hung around his neck twenty-four hours a day. He held it in his right hand.

"Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

They never appeared in the ocean during the day, never, everyone knew that. He hadn't disobeyed the rules, so it had to be a test of his faith. Even if he was about to die, he wasn't going to fail again. Michael began to swim towards the huge dark shape under the water, the crucifix held out in front of him.

"Creature of darkness, you shall not prevail against the light."

He doubted his sanity when the beast raised its head out of the sea. A huge head, it appeared to be almost all head. A head with so many tentacles coming out of it, that it was impossible to even guess at how many. It was the eye that terrified Michael. Right in the centre of the head, surrounded by grey tentacles, was a solitary yellow eye. In that unblinking eye, he saw hatred. A burning hatred for God and everything good that he'd created.

"Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

He trod water and closed his eyes, hoping for a miracle. He didn't deserve God's mercy; he'd been tested before and had failed that test. Some nights he could still smell the perfume of the whores on his skin. He still hoped God would smite the foul beast.

"Begone.....Begone.....Thing of evil." He yelled.

Nothing was going to make him open his eyes, nothing. He felt the water swirling around him. Something dry and hard touched his shoulder. It all seemed to go on forever, until his legs began to get tired, so tired. It was open his eyes and swim to shore, or drown.

"I don't fear you servant of the unclean one." He yelled.

There was nothing to be seen when he opened his eyes. Just a few sea birds and the surf hitting the beach. No dark shape beneath the ocean, no single huge yellow eye. Even when he'd swum back to where his feet touched the sand again, he still expected to see those masses of tentacles. It was a miracle, that was the only explanation.

"I was tested and found worthy." He muttered.

Michael left the ocean and put his clothes back on. He entered the small wooden hut he used as an office and knelt on the floor. He began to pray and was still praying several hours later, when his wife came looking for him.

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Sam had been her lover at college, perhaps that made him more sensitive to her signals? He knew Denise was in love with Flo, really, genuinely in love. She no longer yearned for escape from London during every phone call, no longing to escape the cold nights and rainy days. Denise had turned every phone call into something like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn contemplating another fifty years in the Gulag. He was sure she hadn't realised how unhappy she'd sounded, how lonely. Now Denise was happy and obviously deeply in love. Of course, he might know she was in love, but she might not have realised it yet. Happiness wasn't a natural state for Denise Scott, at least not for quite some time. She'd probably need a little time to get used to it.

"So, how's Flo?" He asked.

"I can almost see you smirking Sam Hardwick....She's fine, how's Nicki ?"

"Fine."

Once filming was over, he and Nicki would probably go their separate ways, which wasn't something he was looking forward to. He might mention that to Den one day, but not yet.

"Did science guy touch on why there is a lull in the attacks ?" Asked Denise.

"Not really, not in the weekly team meeting. He's told me it could be anything from the seasonal return of the cold-water currents from the north, to the mating habits of these things. At one point he was looking at magnetic data for the region. To be honest, I don't think we'll ever know. Nicki muttered something about the old ways and rules.....All very weird and totally unlike her."

"Mating habits, bound to be." Said Denise. "Freud said everything boiled down to sex. It's probably the same for the monsters of Outerbridge Sound. Any more ideas on a name for the show ? We need to agree on something Sam. Variety ran a piece under creature feature with name to be confirmed. That's not good, not good at all."

"Yeah, let's do it now." He said. "I hate just about all the names people have suggested."

"Dom's 'people eaters of Jannsen' was memorable."

"Indeed, it was, but I've noticed the story is now about the people, it is only a small island after all. And us of course, more so since Gary and Simon found the poor Landry kid."

"You want a title that says character driven ?" Asked Den.

"Oh, how I hate that phrase." He said. "The TV show will be about all of us though and the good folk of Jannsen. The creatures are there too, but mainly.....It will be about the people. I was thinking of calling the show 'The Mystery of The Donder Isles.' What do you think ?"

"So people eaters is out then ?"

"Very funny. I was never sure if Dom was serious."

"He was, trust me." Said Den. "I like it and hate it in about equal parts. The TV networks will like it though and that is what matters. We'll go with that; I'll do an official press release from London. With luck Deadline will have it on their website in a couple of hours."

"Great, once Kate has written the bulletin about science guy's ideas, I'll email you a copy."

"There is one other thing Sam, supposing this is the lull before the storm ? We can afford it, so how about a plane sat on the tarmac, ready to leave if the worst happens ?"

"Oh Den, bad feng shui, or whatever...Think of the vibe it'll give the entire team. Then there'd be a bored pilot sat in Rum Runners all day. I will consider it, but at the moment, not a good idea."

"Answer me truthfully, do you feel safe there ?" Asked Den.

"What a question, you've never asked before. Not entirely, though I do respect these creatures, which I know sounds dreadful. Don't worry, I won't even be that honest with Nicki."

"These things have killed locals now Sam, and Luke Landry. Be careful what you say to anyone."

"I know, oh I know honesty is something I can't afford. Most people think mother nature is like a Disney film, full of kindness and compassion. We know the truth; we've filmed enough of the brutality to realise mother nature is a total bitch. Life is about not being on the menu for any other living creature, it's eat or be eaten. It's all about passing on our DNA. These creatures are enormously successful at surviving, mother nature would take them to her blood-soaked heart. So yes, I respect them."

"Please Sam, for me.....Consider that plane waiting on the tarmac." Said Den.

"It's more grit than tarmac, but I will. I promise I will consider it."

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