

AQUARIA

GUY LANE



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Guy Lane

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Guy Lane
Focus on Sustainability
Entrepreneur / Commentator / Novelist

Aquaria
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Titles by Guy Lane.
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Sulking Sam

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Distant Lightning

Through wispy, high-altitude clouds, moonlight shines across Aquaria Bay. The sea surface glistens silver-grey and the night air is tinged with humidity, hinting at the possibility of a storm.

In the middle of the bay, the marine research vessel, 'Boaty McBoatface' drifts quietly, its engines turned off.

Sitting on the wooden duckboard that hangs from the back of the boat, Lucy Callahan holds a blue plastic bucket. She's a 38-year-old, athletic, brunette. Her hair has turned surfer-blond from exposure to the sun and salt water. She wears her trademark gold lycra wetsuit, and a fixed look on her face.

Callahan lowers the edge of the bucket to the water surface and microscopic algae swirl around the edge, sparkling with blue light.

“I can smell the damned petroleum oil, already,” she grumbles, as the water slowly fills the bucket.

“Maybe it’s the algae that you can smell,” says the boat skipper, watching from the deck above.

Callahan lifts the bucket from the water and places it between her legs on the duckboard. “Sam. I’ve smelt enough algae in my time to know the difference.”

Sam is stocky, maybe a bit chubby, with a shock of curly hair that can’t be contained by his woollen cap. He wears a leather vest, and has a striking resemblance to an extra from a Game of Thrones episode. “I was just saying,” he mumbles.

Callahan looks up and makes a conciliatory smile. How else can she apologise without committing to words? It seems to work, as Sam returns the gesture.

She cocks her head to view the surface of the water in the bucket against the stern light. “You can see the oil sheen.” Exasperated, she looks towards the horizon, “It’s from that damned oil rig.”

Sam steps onto the duckboard and peers into the bucket. “That oil could have come from anywhere.”

“That’s why we have to go to the rig, you see? Match the chemical signatures.”

“That’s just so risky.”

“Risky? Are you kidding me? I’ve put twenty years into Aquaria. I’m not going to have it shut down for a bloody oil field.”

“You get really animated when you’re angry,” Sam says, chuckling.

“I’m not angry.”

“Cranky, then.”

“That’s not it, either,” Callahan simultaneously blushes and grins.

“What do you call it then?”

“Focused.”

“Funny. I’m going to tweet that on my Facebook page.”

“You don’t have a Facebook page. You even have a smart phone. And we’re in stealth mode, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah. Stealth mode. So, twenty years, *huh?*”

“I invented Aquaria when I was in high school,” Callahan says.

“Really? I’ve never heard this story.” Sam swings his legs over the side of the duckboard, settling in.

Callahan sighs. She rests back against the chain that connects the duckboard to the transom, tucking her legs under her body. Looking across the calm sea under the vast sky, she feels liberated by the lack of pressure to say or do anything. If she was a different person, she could go a whole minute without speaking. But she’s Lucy Callahan,

Aquaria CEO, and she is always on the go.

“When I was at school,” she begins, “we had this guy do a presentation on the planetary boundaries. I’d never heard of sustainability before. I was fifteen, and it was mind-expanding. When I learned what the humans had done to the planet, it made me so angry.”

“That’s not like you,” Sam quips.

“Anyway, the guy set us an assignment to devise a global-scale solution to one of the sustainability issues. I became obsessed with it, working day and night until was just about burned-out. In that time, I created the concept that came to be Aquaria.”

“Did you get a good mark?” Sam asks.

“A high distinction. Then a scholarship. Then another. Then a Ph.D. in oceanography. Then I realised

that I couldn't communicate Aquaria to business people, so I got an MBA."

"What's that?"

"Masters of Business Administration."

"So, you're like a business oceanologist?"

"I am a business-minded oceanographer who raised a hundred million dollars for the largest public aquarium and marine research facility in the world."

Callahan picks up the bucket and swirls the water around. "All that for that." She tips it into the sea, throwing the algae into a frenzied green glow.

"Then that damned oil rig comes along."

On the horizon, an orange flame dances above a cluster of white lights. The Expedient Energy rig is ten miles from the coast. Further out to sea, lightning crackles inside thick clouds. The storm has been brewing for days.

“That rig is going to shut us down.”

“You think so?”

“I thought I had it all planned out, Sam,” Callahan says, anxiously. “But I missed something. Something big.”

“What?”

“Pressurised, light, sweet crude.”

“Oil? Where?”

“Under Aquaria Bay. The oilmen can’t help themselves.”

“Too right. They’d murder their mothers to drill for oil” “And now it’s just us standing in the way. Science and public opinion, like a rabbit caught in the headlights.”

“What about the government?” asks Sam. “They’re part of Aquaria, aren’t they?”

“It’s all corrupt, Sam. We’re on our own.”

“I thought that the government would stand up for us.”

Callahan shakes her head slowly. She threads her hand under Sam's arm and draws his hand onto her lap. She thinks, "Sam is good for me. He helps me understand how other people see the world."

"You know, when I'm not wearing a wetsuit, I wear a suit suit," Callahan says, then chuckles. "A business suit, that is."

"Suit, suit. That's funny."

"And I sit in these meetings in the board-rooms and I listen to machinations of influential people. The wheeling and dealing. The plotting and planning. On the surface, it's all science and sustainability. But scratch an inch below and its posture, looking good, and getting access to resources, undue promotions, and earned media."

Callahan looks at Sam just as he turns his head to meet her eyes. "Do you know what I am talking about?"

“Not really.”

“The government keeps hinting that we need to share the bay with the oil industry.”

“What?”

“So I tell them – as plainly as I can – that a healthy marine ecosystem and the offshore oil production are mutually exclusive. Maybe those words are too confusing, so I say: you can have one or the other, but not both. And they tell me that I’m a Luddite. That I lack vision. That if I really cared about marine science, I would be pragmatic. And if there is a major oil spill, just start again, they say.”

“Start again? What does that mean? Build another Aquaria, somewhere else?”

“We could call it Aquaria II,” says Callahan, feigning excitement. “And it would be bigger, maybe even better than Aquaria I. But they don’t

understand the power of Aquaria is not just the public fish tanks, and the millions of likes and all the positive EWOM and publicity. It's our deep understanding about how this marine ecosystem works." Callahan spreads her arms to encompass the whole of Aquaria Bay. "We've studied this site so intensely that we can scale our learning from micro to macro. This bay helps us to understand the whole ocean ecosystem. It is a unique laboratory, and if we leave here, we start the whole research project from scratch. Like a ten-year marriage, snuffed out by one act of infidelity. Sure, you can get divorced and remarry. But there is so much lost, Sam. It's immeasurable."

Callahan sighs and goes silent. She looks at her hands, lit by the white light on the transom.

"Why have you never been married?" Sam asks.

Callahan inhales audibly, then stands. She steps up onto the main deck of the research boat. “We’d better get going.”

“I didn’t mean that. I...” Sam curses for having walked into a trap of his own making. He turns to see Callahan looking down at him. She’s not angry. She’s just focused.

“When you write the log, don’t forget that Boaty McBoatface never left port tonight, Sam. We’re in stealth mode, remember?”

Callahan's Office

The next morning is the tenth anniversary of Aquaria, and the facility is abuzz with activity. Huge crowds are starting to filter into the public aquarium. It is a day that Callahan both loves and dreads. Loves, because all the all the pomp and ceremony signifies that she has kept the institute afloat another year. And dreads, because expectations fall on her engage with a lot of strangers.

The first strangers of the day come in the form of an early morning press interview. The journalists crowd into Callahan's office. This has a décor consistent with both an executive and a marine scientist.

There are white boards covered in multi-coloured scribble. A flat-screen TV shows a dozen CCTV cameras that are aimed at various parts of the facility.

On the shelves and propped up against the walls are marine science objects, mementos from undersea research. These include specialist pieces of perspex with electronic devices inside, a stainless steel tube designed to extract cores from coral, and numerous pickled animals in jars, some of which are so unique that they do not even have names yet.

On Callahan's desk is a circular jellyfish tank, illuminated from beneath by colour-changing LED lights. The jellies are tiny, translucent creatures in continual motion. They squelch water through their bodies to keep pace with the gentle flow in the tank.

On the wall behind Callahan's desk is the Aquaria motto: *Aquaria, an aquarium, an aquatic vivarium*. There is also a cover page of a Time magazine in a display case. It shows Lucy Callahan, person of the year. She's wearing a

business suit over the top of a gold-coloured lycra wetsuit. The caption reads: Lucy Callahan, Sealioness of Aquaria Bay. Next to this is an iconic image of Callahan dancing with a real sealion.

Standing next to Callahan is her confidant and senior aquarist, Hal Toohey. He's in his late fifties, tall and ex-military. He has a stern look, which is excellent for overwatch duties, but at heart, he's a pacifist. He is Callahan's shadow whenever she is around strangers, and 'go to guy' for anything, at any time.

Callahan tells the journalists, "We've come a long way since the Fish House, the first aquarium that was open to the public in London, in the 1800s. You see, an aquarium is not just a liquid zoo. An aquarium is a conduit for the public to learn to love science. And when they understand science, it is possible to

understand the biophysical systems of the Earth, and then they can see the importance of protecting them.”

“So, Aquariums can save the planet?” quips one of the journalists.

“That’s my hope.”

“And, Lucy, as a female corporate CEO, it must be pretty exhausting running all of this, the public aquarium, the marine science precinct, the fish farm and biofuel facility. How is your work-life balance?”

“Well, I live Aquaria, so work and life is the same thing. And my assistant, Tiffany, takes care of all the CEO business. So I just drift, really.

Plankton-like. I troubleshoot, help out where I can, and look out for the unknown unknowns.”

After the interview, she heaves a sigh to Hal. “*Phew*. Intense. What’s next?”

“Pipeline walk.”

“Yes. The big crowds.”

They exit the office and walk through the Aquaria compound. Callahan is about to enter a door, when Hal puts his hand out, “Whoa. You don’t want to do that.”

Too late, she pulls open the doorsteps through the frame. She enters the foyer where dozens of school children are gathered.

“Oh, dammit!” Callahan halts, just as Hal steps through the frame. The door closes behind them. He pushes his hand against it, but it’s locked from the inside.

“Help me, Hal,” she turns and smiles at her shadow.

There are children of all shapes, sizes, colours and levels of activity. Some sit quietly, reading, others look like they are going to explode with energy, buzzing with excitement and incredibly noisy.

Callahan has no choice but to wade through the crowd of hyperactive kids. It's like trying to walk in belly deep water against the tide, but she grits her teeth and perseveres. Her progress is halted when a little girl, dressed as a fairy with pink wings, a tutu, and a wand, engages in a desperate battle of wills with a boy dressed in a Spiderman costume.

"My wand is most powerful," says the fairy, daubing the Spiderman with invisible fairy dust.

"I just squirted you with web," Spiderman retorts.

Callahan steps aside and moves gingerly through the crowd. It seems like an age before she gets to the other side. "Wow. They're exhausting."

Walking the Pipe

A noticeable feature of the Aquaria facility is the white pipe that begins at the public aquarium and snakes off through the bush and over the low hills. There are two pipes, side by side with a wooden decking straddling them, forming a walkway. The pipes carrying sea water between the bay and the Aquaria Bio-Industrial facility on the other side of the hill.

In the car park, there's a big crowd of people from the adjacent city dressed for a day of exercise. Hats, sunglasses, sunscreen, shorts and training shoes.

A flight of steps connects the walkway to the carpark. There is an arch made of balloons and, in big black letters on a white sign, the word: START. Under the sign is a ribbon, as yet uncut.

Callahan enters the crowd. When people see her trademark gold lycra

wetsuit, some call out her name, enthusiastically. She addresses the crowd briefly over a microphone, thanking them for the attendance and continual support of Aquaria. “I officially open the tenth Aquaria pipeline walk.”

A rousing cheer comes from the crowd as a little girl moves forward, holding a wooden box. From inside the box, Callahan retrieves a ceremonial ribbon cutter, a piece of driftwood into which is embedded three teeth from a tiger shark. She slices the ribbon under the start sign and poses for the Aquaria photographer. Then Callahan climbs the stairs onto the pipe and starts walking. Hundreds of people move in behind her.

The pipeline ceremony has four distinct phases. The first is the long, flat stretch from Aquaria to a refreshment station at the base of the foothills. A lot

of people depart the pipe at this point and take advantage of the buses waiting to take them back to their vehicles in the carpark.

The rest of the pipe walkers press on and tackle the gruelling stretch of pipeline that snakes up the hill. Callahan has the lead and Hal follows immediately behind.

“I think I know where you get your world famous thighs from,” he tells her.

“What?”

Hal moves alongside. “How’s that Sam coming along?”

“Oh, you know.”

“Is he shaping up as a breeding partner?”

“Sam has a few qualities. He’s fit.”

“Fit as in athletic, you mean?”

“Yeah. He doesn’t smoke. He binge-drinks in moderation. He eats healthy food, a lot.” Callahan chuckles at her own joke.

“Let’s not forget that fit in the Darwinian sense means able to adapt to changes in the environment,” Hal reminds her. “Is he fit that way?”

“Good question.” Callahan turns to Hal with a concerned look. “Not sure, actually. He throws a hissy fit if he misses an episode of Game of Thrones. So there’s that.”

“There’s lots of breeding strategies, Lucy. We’ll find you one that fits.”

“Give me some options, Hal.”

“Consider the bacterium, it just splits in two.”

“That won’t work. There’d be a power struggle.”

“Then there’s the oviviparous model, like in the nurse shark. The first egg to be fertilized becomes a baby shark that eats all the subsequent eggs. And of course, the seahorse.”

“Now the seahorse has an interesting strategy.”

“Have you ever seen it?”

“What?”

“Seahorse birth.”

“No. I haven’t actually.”

“We’ve got some in the breeding tank. I’ll give you the heads up when they’re ready to pop.”

Callahan halts and turns to observe one hundred and fifty people in a long queue sweating their way up the hill. She raises her hand and waves to them, and many see her and wave back.

“Nearly there!” she hollers. She chuckles and says to Hal, “World famous thighs? Are you kidding me?”

“Everyone talks about your thighs. Maybe it’s those fins you use when you’re on scuba.”

“Keep your eye on the job, Hal.”

At the top of the hill, there is another refreshment station comprised of knock up tents manned by volunteers distributing water and energy drinks.

This location affords an excellent view of the surrounding landscape and seascape.

To the East, is the crescent-shaped Aquaria Bay. The long sandy beach is bookended by rocky headlands. It is about 10 kilometres from one end to the other. The centre of the bay is very deep, except for a seamount that rises to about thirty metres below the surface. Moored over this shallow patch, is an enormous vertical axis wind turbine, known as the Vawt, that spins in the breeze.

The Aquaria public aquarium and marine science facility – a former Navy training base – is on the Northern side of the bay. It's a sprawling campus with a breakwater and marina and a newly constructed hotel.

“How many humans are there on Earth, Hal?” Callahan asks, off the cuff.

“About 7.4 billion. I think that’s the number.”

“And what’s the carrying capacity of the planet? How many can it sustain?”

“That depends on how they live.”

“If they lived like Western people, for instance.”

“This planet could sustain about a billion Westerners, I guess. If you lived like the average Afghan, on the other hand.”

“I’m not going to breed,” she says.

“The planet is overpopulated with Westerners, already.”

“Well, there’s that.” Hal concurs. “But there’s the other argument.”

“Which is what?”

“Maybe your baby will go on to invent something amazing, make it all worthwhile.”

“Maybe,” she says.

“Hey, check the eagle.” Hal points into the distance, to the West. The bird is

gliding high above, supported by a rising bubble of air.

Visible from the observation point at the top of the hill is the Aquaria Bio-Industrial facility. The AB-I is a sprawling compound comprised of a fish farm and a biofuel production facility.

The fish farm features two hundred round ponds, each a hectare in size, dug into the ground. The landscaping is well established, and the facility has the look of a huge oasis in an otherwise barren landscape. To the right of the aquaculture ponds is the biofuel facility. It looks distinctly space-age with row upon row of clear plastic tubes occupying hundreds of hectares of land. This facility uses excess nitrogen and phosphorus from the fish farm to grow algae that are cultivated in the plastic tubes. The algae can be processed into a variety of different

liquid fuels, including ethanol, a replacement for petrol, and biodiesel.

Along the other edge of the AB-I is a railway line. A train has pulled up for its tanks to be filled with fuel. On another carriage, a forklift delivers pallets of fresh fish.

Callahan scans the facilities, her eyes focusing on specific details. She nods in satisfaction.

“Wow!” Hal says. “It always takes my breath away.”

“It’s starting to look like a real ecosystem now.”

“And to think that this vast biological industrial facility was dreamt-up by a fifteen-year-old girl.”

“Think big, work smart, don’t stop.”

Hal chuckles. “Is that your motto?”

“That’s what the tutor said when he set us an exercise to fix the planet.”

“It’s working so far.”

Beached Whale

The invigorating pipeline walk ends at the aquaculture ponds where there is a meal of fish and fruits all grown on-site. On offer also is a ceremonial tot of home brew grog made from algae ethanol. It is considered impolite to decline. The obligatory algae grog helps to create a joyous atmosphere in the bus ride back to Aquaria.

When the bus pulls up in the carpark, Callahan sees some of her staff waiting, with concerned looks on their faces.

“What’s going on here?”

“Looks like something needs rescuing,” Hal says, peering through the window.

As Callahan steps off the bus, Lori, the head of Marine Rescue, takes her by the arm to move her aside. “There’s a whale stranded at the Southern end of the bay. The team is about to head off.

Do you want to come?” Lori shows Callahan an image on the screen of her smartphone.

“It looks like a juvenile sperm whale. Okay, I’ll come. Hey, Hal, you want to see a beached whale.”

“Sure, why not?”

The ‘baby’ whale is the size of a bus and it is clearly emaciated, looking like it hasn’t had a decent meal in ages.

Callahan sits with Hal in the sand at the base of the dune, watching the rescue team do their work. The first task is to assess the condition of the animal. Lori approaches with a glum look on her face. She shakes her head as she approaches.

“What’s the report?” Callahan asks.

“It’s gone.”

“That’s sad.”

“Yeah. They think it hasn’t eaten in a week or a fortnight. They are just setting up to do a stomach pump.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“Poor baby,” says Callahan, letting sand slip through her fingers.

“Speaking of babies. Is Sam still nagging you to have one.”

Callahan starts to chuckle. “It’s funny. The way he talks, I think that ‘he’ wants to have ‘my’ baby.”

“You should get out more.”

“I get out every day.”

“I mean get out with other people.”

“I know enough people already. Don’t need to complicate things by meeting more. And besides, marine life is so much more predictable, Hal. What do you think that are going to find inside that stomach?”

“Not much by the sounds of it.”

“I bet you it’s something to do with that oil rig.”

“About this oil rig. Where is it?”

Callahan points out to sea. The rig is just visible as a black dot on the horizon.

“It can’t be doing much harm if it’s broken down.”

“Oh, come on. Do you really think that oil rigs just break down?”

“That’s what it said in the paper.”

There is a commotion amongst the people working around the whale as the stomach pump arrives. A vet pushes a tube into the whale’s mouth and the device activates.

“I might check this out,” Callahan says, rising from the sand. She walks to the group of people working with the whale.

“Okay, stand back,” the vet says. The tempo on the stomach pump increases and there is a loud gurgling noise resonating from inside the carcass. Then, a great gush of fluid pours from the animal’s mouth. It has the acrid

smell of sperm whale bile and it is accompanied by a flood of plastic debris.

Callahan approaches and looks at what seems to be the contents of a recycling bin. There are chip packets, soft drink bottles, and plastic bags.

“That’s just ridiculous,” says Hal.

“Parmalat, Pepsi-Co, Coca-Cola, McDonalds,” Callahan checks off the brands spilled out on the sand, shaking her head gravely. “It’s like a fast food expo.”

The vet peers into a tube that’s been pushed into the whale’s gullet. “Okay, that’s the lot.” He withdraws the tube, stripping fluid off its surface with a gloved hand.

“What’s the prognosis,” Callahan asks.

“Hi, Lucy. It’s hard to say before the autopsy, but I don’t think the whale died from the plastic. It would have eventually, of course. Something else

contributed to its demise.” He places his hand solemnly on the whale’s, head.

“Like what?” Callahan asks.

“Well, isn’t it odd that the first ever whale stranding in Aquaria Bay coincides with a seismic survey just offshore.”

“What seismic survey?” asks Callahan, alarmed.

“That one out there.” The vet waves his hand in the direction of the oil rig.

“They’re mapping the oil field.”

“Lori!” Callahan calls out the rescue leader. “Can you make sure that all this plastic gets returned to the Chief Executive of the company that produced it. Compliments of Aquaria.”

“Should I wash it first?”

“I don’t think so. And talk to PR. Get a press release out. And make sure they name the CEOs.” Callahan turns to Hal, an intense and displeased look on her face. “Oil rigs don’t break down,

Hal,” she growls. “It’s there for a reason.”

Seismic Ship

Later that night, Callahan is asleep with Sam in the double bunk in the bow of Boaty McBoatface. She dreams of an earthquake that grows and grows, and she tosses fitfully in her sleep.

Meanwhile, out at sea, a ship turns and heads towards Aquaria Bay. Normally, the vessel would be fully lit, but tonight, the deck lights are switched off. The vessel is no ordinary ship because it tows five thick cables, each over three kilometres in length. The cables are made of a thin plastic sheath that covers a tangle of electrical wires and tiny microphones. The streamer cables slip through the water at a depth of ten metres.

Extending from the after section of the vessel on the port and starboard side, are sturdy steel booms. Hanging from the booms are dozens of shiny,

stainless steel canisters. From the trailing edge of the canisters runs a thick black hose. The hose connects to huge compressors located deep inside the vessel.

This is no ordinary ship, indeed, this is a 3D seismic ship and the compressors are running at full speed. The huge diesel engines that power them scream, pushing vast quantities of hot exhaust gas into the atmosphere.

The main engines, on the other hand, are spinning at a more leisurely pace as the ship makes way at a leisurely five knots. The 3D seismic ship approaches Aquaria Bay Marine Park.

It is two hours before the low tide, and with the half-moon signalling the neap tide, the bay is calm and silent. The water is still, and the noises associated with moving water are absent, as the tide ebbs to its quietest point.

As the vessel approaches, the silence slips away. The sound of the propellers and the main engines spread across the bay. Then comes the higher pitch of the compressors. When the ship is three miles from the bay, another sound penetrates the ocean. It is a distant rumbling noise as the air guns begin to discharge their compressed air. In water, a kilometre deep, the sound of thirty air guns simultaneously going off is a muffled BOOM. However, as the ship enters the bay, the water becomes shallower and the acoustic pulse reflects off the hard sea floor.

The sound of the guns going off is like naval artillery being discharged. The noise is a sharp, all-encompassing BOOM! Ten seconds later, another BOOM! And so it goes. Every 26.66 metres that the vessel travels forward, the airguns discharge.

The ship heads straight for shore and when it seems that it will run aground, it turns hard to starboard. The long streamer cables follow, describing a long curve as the ship heads out of the bay.

Onboard the ship is a room full of computers and the men and women who maintain them. Spread out across a table is a chart showing Aquaria Bay. The bay is crisscrossed with thin black lines, looking like a mesh. One of the navigators is poised with a yellow highlighter pen and a ruler. He watches the computer monitors that are suspended from the ceiling, then he calls it. "Okay. Line 12A is complete." He draws the yellow pen across the respective line. "Set up for 12B."

When the ship is three miles out to sea, she turns 90 degrees to port, travels a short distance, then turns another 90 degrees to port and steams back

towards Aquaria Bay for another run. By the time that the ship has reached the starting position of the survey transect, the streamer cable is straight and the guns are firing again.

“How’s the data,” the navigator asks one of the observers.

“It’s clean as.”

“That’s the neap tide, you see. It’s so quiet.”

On the wall, a plotter adds ink to a moving sheet of paper, etching out a shadowy pattern that represents what lies beneath the seafloor of Aquaria bay. A geophysicist draws a red line around a structure and scribbles words inside the shape: Oil.

Callahan wakes to the sound of her mobile phone ringing. She sits up in bed, feeling troubled from the dream. She checks the number on the phone and sees that it is one of the Aquaria marine scientists, the guy who monitors

the acoustic receivers on the sea floor of the bay. He says that something is blasting away in the bay, and that all the data is corrupted.

She lowers the phone and thinks back to the conversation with the vet. Surely, they can't be doing seismic survey in Aquaria Bay. At first, she feels powerless, not knowing what to do. Then a rage rises in her and she springs into action. "Sam. Sam. Wake up!" She shakes the boat driver awake then steps out of bed to dress.

"What's going on," Sam asks, groggily, watching her slip into her wetsuit.

"They're inside the gate."

"What does that mean?" Sam rubbing his eyes.

"Get the boat going. Quick."

Sam sits up in bed, confused and watches Callahan pull up the zip on her wetsuit. "What?"

“Come on, Sam. Go! Go! Go!” she claps her hands and Sam stumbles out of bed.

Sam fires up the engines, grumbling at having been tossed out of bed. He backs the vessel out of the pen expertly and drives along the marina arm. Then he turns towards the harbor entrance and pushes the throttle forward.

“There’s nothing out there,” he says, peering through the windscreen into the dark night.

“There it is.” Callahan points at the radar screen. There is a big blob in the middle of the bay. “Steer 075 degrees.”

Sam adjusts course then peers through binoculars, “Cheeky bastards, they are in a blackout. What are we going to do?”

“Serve them notice.” Callahan picks up the radio handset and speaks into the microphone. “Calling seismic ship operating in Aquaria Bay. This is Lucy

Callahan, CEO of Aquaria. You are ordered to immediately depart Aquaria Bay.” She glances down at the instruments, then says, “Come on Sam, full steam ahead.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Callahan steps down below. She locates her weight belt and strips the lead weights off it, then clamps it around her waist. Then she fossicks around for a sheet of paper and a pen. When she moves back into the cabin, Sam asks.

“So what’s the plan?”

Callahan raises the handwritten note.

“This is a cease and desist order.”

“What are you going to do with that?”

“I want you to get right up behind the seismic ship.”

“What, are you going to throw it on the deck?”

“Push the bow right up against the transom, Sam. Don’t spare the paintwork.”

“I’ll have to slide in between all those streamer cables.”

“You can do it.”

As the seismic ship comes closer, Callahan activates the heavy duty spotlight and trains it on the transom. There are three streamer cables deployed from the back of the ship and two more on booms.

The after-end of the seismic ship looks like an industrial plant. On either side is a steel chute with winching gear for the guns. In the middle, the cable deck has big, hydraulically powered reels for the cables. Closer to the ship, Boaty McBoatface bounces around erratically as she enters the ship’s foaming wake.

Callahan moves onto the front deck, holding tight as the boat bucks and

heaves. She ushers Sam to advance further, and he edges the accelerator forward. He pushes the vessel to go faster, then the bow bumps up against the transom of the seismic ship. He edges the accelerator further forward, pinning the bow against the bigger ship's transom.

A crew member steps onto the cable deck and raises his arms in front of his face to block out the glare of the spotlight. Callahan scrambles onto the cable deck, then turns and indicates for Sam to back away. She raises her fist to show that she is holding a long blue cyalume stick. Then she tucks the stick into the back of her belt.

“Oh, shit,” Sam mutters, shaking her head. “She’s going swimming.” He pulls back the throttle and manoeuvres out of the tangle of streamer cables. Then he pushes Boaty McBoatface forward

and drives parallel the seismic ship, alongside its wheelhouse.

Callahan storms across the cable deck and enters the door that the crew member opened. The room is largely empty as the crew has retired to the mess hall while the ship steams out to sea, straightening the streamer cables for another run into the bay.

On a table inside the recording room there is a map with the distinctive outline of Aquaria Bay intersected by dozens of black lines in the shape of a grid. Callahan grabs the document, quickly folds it, and tucks it into the sleeve of her wetsuit. She follows her instinctive knowledge of the layout of the ship and marches up a flight of steps onto the bridge, catching the skipper and first mate by surprise.

From inside her other sleeve, Callahan retrieves the note that she had scrawled below decks of Boaty McBoatface on

the bumpy ride over. She raises her voice to boom level, “This vessel has illegally entered the Aquaria Marine Park and you are instructed to depart immediately!”

“Get off my damned ship!” shouts the skipper.

“Get out of my damned marine park!”

The bridge door bursts open and a couple of oilmen enter the room wearing flannelette shirts and oily jeans. One has the toe poking out of his sneakers.

“Hold on. Hold on.” One of the men on the bridge says, slowing down the thugs. He is wearing office gear, looking out of place on the bridge of a working ship. Callahan recognizes him as a former employee of Aquaria. He looks at the floor and mutters under his breath, “We shouldn’t be here. It’s just wrong.”

“Get her out of here!” the skipper demands.

“Come with us, miss,” says an oilman, moving in.

“Go to hell.” She tosses the cease and desist letter at the Captain and he steps back in surprise, catching the document.

“You have been served, asshole!”

The oilmen try to grab Callahan, but she gives them the slip and belts out the door onto the flybridge. She leaps up onto the railing and balances there, looking down at the foaming mash of water pushed off the bow of the ship.

In that instant, a thought comes to her mind, “This battle could kill me.” Then she dives over the side and splashes into bow wake.

The oilmen rush to the side and look into the dark water, but she is nowhere to be seen. The skipper moves them

aside and peers overboard. “That’s just ridiculous.”

Callahan comes to the surface quickly and turns her head to see the silhouette of the streamer cables hanging off the boom. One is moving towards her very quickly. She claws at the sea surface and the streamer cable slices through the water, missing her by just a few inches.

Around her, the sea illuminates as the airguns discharge, forcing pressurised air into the sea. The disturbance activates a million algae who show their displeasure with a pulse of blue light.

Within a moment, the ship has passed and the ocean becomes quiet. Callahan treads water, shaking her head despondently.

“What a bloody racket,” she says. She retrieves the cyalume stick from the back of her belt and cracks it. The plastic rod glows with a bright blue light.

Sam sees the cyalume light waving and edges the boat towards it. Then he puts the vessel in neutral and moves to the back deck. Callahan swims over to Boaty McBoatface and raises a hand. Sam grips her wrist and in a single movement, hauls her out of the water. She lands on the deck and throws the ‘mission accomplished’ pose. Then she runs her palm across her hair, stripping it of water, leans forward and shakes her head like a wet dog.

Sam laughs and talks at the same time, “I can’t believe you, crazy woman.” He tosses her a towel and she wraps it around her neck.

“Here, see if you can open this without breaking it.” She retrieves the piece of piece of paper from her sleeve. It’s damp but otherwise intact.

“What’s that?”

“Evidence. Head back to port, Sam. I’m going down below to call legal.”

Too Much Acid

The next morning, Callahan gathers her legal team and sets them in motion to find legal avenues against the company that runs the seismic ship. Hal drifts in and out of the meeting, keeping abreast of the plan. Later, Callahan meets her acoustic scientist who alerted her to the seismic ship and listens to the audio from the bay.

On his laptop, he activates the audio recording and tells her, “What we want to hear is a cacophony of clicks and whistles as thousands of marine creatures communicate from the seafloor.

But rather than clicks and whistles, the seismic ship sounds like a thunderclap. Every ten seconds, a thunderous boom rings through the depths. After the ship has gone, the bay is quiet, almost as though all the sea creatures are dead or

they have been scared into an eerie silence, like a graveyard after the rain.

By midday, Callahan is free and she wanders through Aquaria, checking that everything is in order. She goes looking for Hal and finds him overseeing some maintenance work on the nutrient scrubbers.

“Hi, Hal. What’s up?”

“Lucy. Here’s your chance to see what a juvenile *Homo sapien* looks like.” He indicates towards a woman holding a baby. “This is my sister. She’s just dropping off my lunch.”

“Hi.” The woman extends her hand. “I’m Jill.”

“You are going to eat the baby?” Callahan jokes then regrets it. “Just kidding.” She eyes the child, suspiciously.

“Hal says that you are thinking about having a baby,” says the woman, chirpily.

“I wouldn’t say that, exactly.” Callahan blushes.

“You never stop talking about having a baby,” Hal says.

“No, Hal. I tell you about Sam talking about having a baby. That doesn’t mean I’m thinking about it.”

“Anyway,” says Jill, “I am an expert now. If you have any questions.”

“Tell her about the nappies,” Hal chuckles, maliciously.

“We’ll there’re two types of nappies. Reusable and disposable.”

“What sort are they?” Callahan asks, looking at the baby.

“These ones are disposable.”

“And what are they made of?”

“Cotton and plastic and stuff. They’re leak-proof. Look.” Jill wiggles the edge of the baby’s diaper.

“And how do you dispose of them?”

“Throw them in the bin.”

“That contravenes the Circular Economy,” Callahan grumbles. “I am definitely not suited to breeding.”

“You’d make a great mother,” says Jill.

“Shark’s mother, maybe,” Hal says.

“Drop the litter and swim away, fast.”

Callahan turns her attention to the nutrient scrubber. It’s a flat panel made of a substrate that encourages the growth of long strands of marine algae. The workers are stripping the algae away with a blade. Callahan reaches out and tears off some of the green fibres in her hand. She takes a bite, then offers some to the baby. Baby extends its chubby hand, grasps the weed, and starts to suck it.

“Is that okay?” asks the mother.

“It’s very nutritious,” Callahan says, “We sell it as a health food.”

Hal says, “So, Lucy, we have an interesting question from one of the aquarists. It’s a bit out of my league so I

am coming to the master. Or the mistress, as it were.”

Hal leads Callahan to a laboratory where there is a young woman peering into a microscope.

“Sally, this is Lucy Callahan.”

“Hi, Mrs. Callahan.”

“Ms. Callahan.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I’m a Ms., not a Mrs.”

“Oh, okay.”

“What are you working on here?”

“I’m just checking on the growth of some diatoms. And it’s raising some interesting questions. You see, I’m involved in water quality and we control pH in the Aquaria exhibits to match the conditions in the ocean.”

“*Uh-uh*,” Callahan nods.

“And we do this so that our exhibits accurately represent the conditions of the real ocean, and because these are

the conditions that they are accustomed to.”

“That’s right.”

“Except that the ocean is becoming increasingly acidified because of all the CO₂ being absorbed from the atmosphere.”

“Right,” says Callahan. She’s familiar with this argument. About half of the CO₂ that the humans add to the atmosphere is absorbed by the ocean. And CO₂ plus water makes carbonic acid. More CO₂ equals more acid in the ocean. “So where do you think that leaves us?”

Sally continues, “Well, if we keep conditions identical to the ocean, we are going to reduce the health of our exhibits. Either that, or we dose the water to maintain the historical pH, but then we are no longer able to say that the conditions are identical to the ocean.”

Callahan sighs. Another nail in the ocean's coffin, pounded in by the fossil fuel industry.

The young aquarist continues, "Also, if we leave the pH at the level of the ocean, we are going to see it interfere with the carbonate system. Particularly in the coral tanks. I think that they might die."

It is a little while since Callahan has wrapped her mind around this particular field of ocean chemistry. So she takes a few seconds to think through what the young aquarist has told her. The young aquarist is right. The ocean is becoming artificial. Should Aquaria follow suit?

Callahan shakes her head, gravely. "The knocks keep on coming," she thinks. The rig. The seismic ship. And now the ocean turning to battery acid. All part of the fossil fuel industry's ecocidal war on the environment.

“I’ll put it to the science committee,” Callahan says. “And thanks for bringing this to my attention.”

Callahan and Hal move through the laboratory. They come to a desk where a man is operating on a sea cucumber. With a pair of forceps and scissors, he delicately snips out a little section of the animal’s intestine. Then he lowers the tiny scrap of flesh into a pre-marked plastic bag. He lifts the lid from a big silver vat from which steam pours out of the top and down the sides. The scientist drops the bag into the vat of liquid nitrogen.

“*Abhh*, that reminds me,” Callahan says, “I have been looking at this fertility service. Just in case I ever decide that maybe breeding isn’t such a bad idea.” She retrieves from her pocket a folded brochure and hands it over.

Hal starts laughing as he scans the brochure advertising an egg freezing service. “So, how does this work?”

“Well, they take some eggs and store them in liquid nitrogen until you are ready to breed.”

“Lucy Callahan’s eggs. That would make some fine caviar.”

“Anyway, you know I don’t like to outsource what we can do internally. Do you think that our vets would be able to do this? We’ve got plenty of liquid nitrogen here.”

Hal laughs aloud as he ponders the idea. “You wouldn’t want to risk mixing your eggs up with sea cucumber guts. What colour would the baby’s eyes be?”

“Be serious.”

“Let me think it through.”

“You do that. I have a board meeting.”

The Proxy

Callahan walks through the offices on her way to the boardroom. She checks her email on her smartphone and sees that there is an alert for news stories about Expedient Energy. “That was quick,” she says, as she had only just set the alert, while she was working with the lawyers. She halts in the hallway to review the information.

There are two Expedient Energy articles. The first is an Oil and Gas Bulletin saying that the oil company had released the results of an exploratory well offshore from Aquaria Bay. The well confirmed suspicions that the structure contained pressurised, light, sweet crude. The preliminary results of the seismic survey have also indicated the vast scale of the reserve. The article refers to the oil field as the Elephant of Aquarius.

The second alert is a story in a finance journal reporting that Expedient Energy's share price has jumped by eight percent. They use the term the Aquarian Bull. It describes how Expedient has just issued a capital raising instrument called Aquarius Bonds to fund the further development of the prospect.

“Elephants, bulls and bonds,” Callahan thinks, feeling her spirits fall. She finds herself standing in the hallway in a very strange headspace, completely bamboozled, not knowing what to do next.

Who does she know who can help her interpret these new risks? Should she be in action? If so, doing what? She feels as though the enemy is breathing heavily on the perimeter fence, and it is only a matter of time before they break through.

As she enters the board room, her phone sounds the text message noise. There are three messages, saying the same thing. Three of the board members have declined to attend the meeting and instead they have sent a proxy to take their place. Proxies are not unusual. But three at once, all notifying her at the same time, that's very unusual. But most surprisingly, all three have allocated the same person to be their proxy.

Callahan halts as it sinks in. One man has replaced three members of her board. When she sees his name, her stomach cramps. It's John Priestly.

She lowers her mobile phone, stunned. Her breathing is heavy, and sweat forms around her neck. Her mind whirrs trying to make sense of this turn of events. The enemy is breaking through. "But why Priestley?" she wonders.

A secretary enters the board room and lays a copy of the meeting agenda in front of each seat. Callahan scans the agenda items. It's all normal fare, budget issues, science issues, maintenance issues, as per the draft that she had reviewed the day before. However, a final item has been added in the last twenty-four hours. It seems innocuous enough, a proposal to rotate a statue in one of the tanks. What? What is such a trivial issue doing on a board meeting? This is a meeting of governors, not gardeners. The Aquarists look after those details. A side-note indicates that the mermaid agenda item has been added at the insistence of the three missing directors and that Priestley will be representing them. What does that mean? Why would they do that?

Callahan tosses the question around in her mind for a while, but it makes no

sense. So it will go to a vote. Then what? If she agrees to the action, she will have gone along with Priestley's plan. If she disagrees, she falls into the trap of arguing over a triviality.

Callahan moves to the door to see if any of the other board members have arrived. The Chairman, Charles, is approaching. He's in his seventies, a retired high school principal. Wearing a red and white striped shirt with a bow-tie and braces, he walks with a cane and always seems jovial.

"Charles," she says, arresting him in the hall.

"What's the matter, Lucy?"

She shows him the three text messages, each voting Priestley as a proxy. "Do you know who John Priestly is?"

"Of course. He's the religious charity man."

“And for today, he’s a proxy board member of Aquaria.”

“I took some phone calls about this, last night.”

Callahan is stunned. “You didn’t think to tell me?”

“It was late and I didn’t think it important. It was just something about a statue.”

Callahan is confused. How come she sees danger and the Chairman doesn’t? Has she read this wrong? “Okay. Charles, don’t worry. Let’s just scratch this last line item from the agenda. We don’t want a stranger calling a vote on it.”

“I can’t do that,” the Chairman says, “It’s been proposed by the three Governors.”

“But it’s too trivial to waste our time on.”

“I am bound by the Aquaria constitution, Lucy.”

“And I wrote the damned constitution, Charles!”

“Lucy, I can see that this has rattled you. But I am duty bound to follow the script – that you wrote. The statue stays on the agenda because it has been requested by three governors.”

“Who aren’t even here.”

“But they are here,” the Chairman says, looking up the hall. “They’d just arrived.”

A secretary escorts John Priestley along the hall. He’s chatting away excitedly, taking in all the coming and goings in the Aquaria offices.

Callahan turns back to the Chairman and whispers, conspiratorially, “I wanted you on this board because you were a stickler for the rules. Now that threatens to undo us. Do you understand?”

“If you want the item scratched, find a way that conforms to the constitution,” Charles whispers back.

John Priestly nears. He’s a private-school Catholic with an absolute surety about his actions. So sure, in fact, that people who meet him are often left with a sense of having been wrong their whole lives. He’s a snake who will do or say anything to advance his cause. Even when he contradicts himself, he is so slippery that people tend to think that they must have misheard.

One time, in a TV interview, the presenter ran a sequence of clips showing Priestley flip-flopping on a topic. He watched the clips with his impassive grin, then made a brief statement that somehow tied all the contradictory statements into a single coherent policy. Priestly is not just smooth, he’s smart. And that’s really dangerous. Now he is inside Aquaria.

“Mr. Chairman,” Priestly says, extending his hand, his voice a seducing whisper. Charles is taken off guard and accepts the handshake. Priestley places a warm palm on the back of the Chairman’s hand. What a nice man. How could anyone dislike him?

“And Ms. Lucinda Callahan.”

As Priestley’s hand extends towards her, Callahan feels a shiver run the length of her body, like the time she trod on a stingray. She moves quickly back into the board room and takes a seat at the end of the table, her mind whirring.

Some of the other board members have arrived. They are marketers, media professionals, lawyers, accountants. Hand-picked by Callahan, a dream-team board with sufficient psychological diversity to ensure that an institution as complex as Aquaria has the leadership it needs. It suddenly occurs to her, that

the paucity of marine biologists on the board is now a liability. How are media professionals or lawyers to know about the intricacies of science that will be destroyed by the oilmen drilling Aquaria Bay?

Priestly enters the room and offers his hand to anyone he meets. He knows them all by name and engages in a warm, soothing small-talk that puts everyone he meets on side.

Callahan's Assistant CEO enters the room and Priestley makes a fuss over her. She moves away with a bemused look, not sure what it all means. Callahan shoots her a glance and she moves over.

“Who's that?”

“I think that he's an oil industry plant.”

“He's slippery enough. What should I do?”

“Maintain course and speed until further notice.”

Callahan retrieves her smart phone and quickly searches for the Aquaria constitution. It's a document of sixty plus pages. She worked on it for years, thinking through every eventuality. But she had never considered John Priestly. A patsy. A plant. A mole. She flicks from one page to the next, searching for a way to have Priestly evicted so that he would never come back. As she searches, she curses the double-edged sword of having selected a chairman with a dogged commitment to process. The whole Aquaria project could sink around his ears before he'd bend the rules.

The Chairman calls the meeting to order and moves through the agenda items. Most of it is procedural, reporting, not requiring a lot of input from Callahan. She grunts “yes” or

“no” as appropriate and continues to plot against the interloper. Finally, she abandons the constitution and starts to search the web for information about Priestley. He’s an extrovert socialite, sits on lots of boards. Nothing bad ever happens around him. He is such an upstanding citizen that he has become sacrosanct.

Callahan googles the search terms “John Priestly” and “Expedient Energy” and there’s a hit. It’s a post from a local blogger called Opinion on Everything.

The post speculates that if Expedient Energy were to drill the Aquaria prospect, it would be much cheaper to do it in Aquaria Bay, where the water is shallow than further out to sea. However, the blogger says, doing that would invite the wrath of the Sealioness, Lucy Callahan. The blogger writes, “Maybe saintly John Priestly

would make a good Chairman for Expedient Energy because the oilmen would need God on their side if they annoy the Sealioness by drilling Aquaria Bay.”

It all suddenly makes sense. Or does it? Is this valuable intelligence, or just scuttlebutt and speculation? Callahan sighs, exhausted and confused.

The Chairman moves onto the final agenda item and hands over to Priestly to speak to the motion. Callahan looks up from her phone, stunned.

Priestly begins with his trademark humility, “From the bottom of my heart, I say, thank you. Thank you for inviting me to your table. And on behalf of my sponsors, I’d like to say a few words about the mermaid statue in the Cod Tank.”

“Who are your sponsors, Mr. Priestley?” Callahan interrupts.

Callahan feels all the board members look her way. This is the first time that she has spoken in the meeting.

“I have been invited to attend this meeting on behalf of Mr. John Holland, Mr. Kevin Albrecht and Mrs. Ambrose Hill.”

“*Uh-huh*. And why are they unable to attend?”

“I was not informed of that.”

“*Uh-huh*. And why you, I wonder?”

“One of God’s little gifts, Ms. Callahan. I’m popular.”

“Nothing to do with your involvement with Expedient Energy, then?”

“I have no involvement with Expedient Energy,” says Priestley, plainly.

“But, they invited you to be their Chair.”

“I am a man of cloth, not oil.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“I’m just here for the mermaid statue, Lucy.”

“Can we proceed?” the Chairman asks, directing the question at Callahan.

She nods her head, gravely. Attacking Priestly without effect only makes her look weak. Her mouth is dry as she looks at each of the board members in turn, desperately hoping that they can see the looming threat. But they don’t. How can they?

Priestly continues, “A number of the visitors have commented that when entering the Cod Tank, the placement of the statue has the mermaid’s back pointing towards them. My sponsors acknowledge that the reason for this is that the main viewing platform of the Cod Tank is on the other side of the room, and the front of the mermaid statue is visible from this position. However, it is proposed that if the mermaid statue were rotated 180

degrees, it would afford a more enlightening first impression of the Cod Tank. And first impressions are so very important, they believe. Mr. Chairman, would it be possible to vote on the matter.”

Callahan is stunned. “What is more galling?” she wonders. “That the devil is in the room, or that the other board members think of him as part of the team.”

Even the Chairman seems to be coming around to the idea of rotating the mermaid statue. He’s not fighting it. He’s an extrovert who hates conflict, he’ll just go right along with it. He’s not thinking ahead. He’s not protecting the interests of the organisation.

“Very well,” the Chairman says. “All in favour of rotating the mermaid statue 180 degrees?”

While Tiffany abstains from voting, the rest of the board goes along with it.

The room resonates with a multiple of voices, singing in unison, almost like they were in one of Priestley's choirs, "Aye. Aye. Aye..."

Callahan can't speak. Her teeth are clamped closed, her lips pursed tight against them, and her nose is twitching. She is trying hard to prevent herself from screaming or launching herself across the table at Priestley's throat.

"Ms. Callahan?" asks Priestly. "Would you care to vote on the matter at hand?"

Callahan says directly. "Can you explain why there is an oil rig stationed on the perimeter of Aquaria Bay?"

"It's broken down," he says, plainly.

"You have inside information about that?"

"I read it in the paper."

"The paper," thinks Callahan. The paper is edited by Ambrose Hill. She's one of the governors who have

nominated Priestley to the table. Who are the other two? One's a lawyer. And the other runs an engineering firm. Callahan hears a rasping noise coming from her own throat. Her inability to compose herself is becoming obvious to the others in the room, so she stops trying to speak.

In a guilty tone, the Chairman announces, "It's okay, Lucy, the vote has already carried."

"Congratulations," says one of the board members to Priestley.

"Oh, it's just a tiny thing," Priestly says, bashfully.

Callahan watches this exchange intently. It all makes sense now. The business about the Mermaid Statute was an introduction, a loss leader, a gateway transaction, a way to break the ice. Rather than the proxy just sitting in the meeting and nodding, he has become a decision maker. A player.

“Well that concludes the meeting,”
says the Chairman.

Callahan slumps forward, exhausted.
She sits like this until she hears the last
person depart the room.

Seahorses

Callahan pulls open the door and steps into the concrete service corridor. She rests her back against the wall, feeling overwhelmed. Then she makes her way to her room in Aquaria Resort staying in the service corridors. She is the only person who has the swipe card access to do this. Eventually, she arrives at the resort a few doors down from her suite.

The main feature of the Aquarius Resort is that every room has a wall made of a fish tank. In Callahan's room is a tank full of seahorses. The main section of glass faces onto the bedroom. However, there is also a glass wall in the bathroom, at the end of the bath. She has a ladder set up and a scuba tank with an extra-long hose connected to a full face mask.

She strips off her suit and tosses it onto the bed. Then, in just her

underwear, she opens the bar fridge and retrieves a little bag of dried fish. She turns on the flow of air, affixes the mask, then steps onto the ladder and swings her legs over the side of the seahorse tank. Normally, at this point, she would check that her hair was in a tight bundle, but today, she slips into the water with her hair free.

She sinks to the bottom and sits cross-legged on the sand, her hair waving around her, like fine seaweed. She retrieves a tiny, fishy carcass from the bag. Holding it in her fingertips, she watches as dozens of seahorses move towards her.

The movement of seahorses always seems surreal. The tiny, bony animals are propelled by the rapid beating of wings where their ears should be.

Callahan squishes the little fish between her finger and thumb, releasing a cloud of particles. The

seahorses move closer and the specks of fish are instantly sucked into their tubular mouths.

Watching the seahorse feeding puts Callahan into the flow, the trance-like state where every other consideration is shifted to the periphery. Time stands still in this vacuum of thoughts. The emptiness scrubs away her stress, and makes the subsequent thoughts become that much crisper.

In this meditative state, in her room, underwater with the seahorses, Callahan's breathing slows. The sound of air bubbles exiting the regulator and clattering past her ears becomes less frequent. Finally, she is calm.

At that point, her mind turns back to the complex mass of thoughts about the new threat to Aquaria. There are so many things to think about. Oil rig. Seismic survey. Dead whale. John Priestley. What legal avenues does she

have? How is the rig going to affect visitor numbers and cash-flow? How big actually is the risk of the oil company trying to put the rig in her bay? What are Aquarius Bonds? Where does Priestley fit in? Why have the three directors abandoned their posts?

The problem is too big and imminent for her to get her head around, alone. She needs to go into the boardroom with an analytical thinker, to whiteboard it out. She needs a fast flowing, high-level conversation where every angle is probed for risk. Where multiple scenarios are created, with drill down and action plans for each.

Callahan sighs, changing the noise of the air bubbles leaving her regulator. She doesn't really want to talk with anyone. It's the other people who cause the problems in her life. She has to deal with far too many people already.

Wouldn't it be good if she could speak octopus? Imagine doing a whiteboard session with an octopus, she thinks. It could have a different coloured pen for each tentacle. And they are smart, too.

Callahan giggles underwater, making the exiting air bubble chatter in a peculiar manner. A curious seahorse drifts around her face mask and she inspects it at close quarters.

Who does she know who can help her, without antagonising her? An analytical thinker, someone committed to the project.

Callahan begins to move. She slowly stands on the sand, then turns and raises a foot onto the ladder, steps out of the seahorse tank into the bathroom. She wraps a towel around her head sends a text message to Sam, asking him to come to her.

When Sam arrives, Callahan is sitting on the end of her bed, wearing a

bathrobe. Her hair is bedraggled, hanging around her neck.

Sam sits next to her and places a kiss on her shoulder. “Bad day?” he asks.

Callahan nods slowly, conscious of how hard it is to break her thoughts away from the imminent destruction of her life’s work. She wants to greet him appropriately, but her mind is caught in a tempest of thoughts. She is distracted by Sam tugging at her hair. “What are you doing?”

Sam ignores her protest and turns his full attention to drawing something from her knot of hair.

“Get off me!”

Sam chuckles as he tugs harder and the prize comes free. He holds it up in front of her to see. It’s a dead seahorse.

“The things you find in a woman’s hair.”

While it is sad to see that one of her fishy friends has perished, the expired

seahorse makes for a good segway to a lighter mood. Callahan smiles and returns Sam's kiss.

"Boy, you are a strange woman. What's going on?"

"Oh, just the pressures of the marketplace." She wants to turn on the tap and pour out the fifty top things that need to be analysed. The first thing is a critical analysis of the Aquaria Bonds. But she realises that Sam is absolutely not the analyst that she needs.

"Is that oil rig getting to you?" he asks.

"I'll be okay."

"Of course you will," Sam says, without hesitation

"Why do you think that?"

"Because you are super-smart, strong, talented, and really foxy."

"Oh, come on."

"You have these amazing thighs."

Callahan chuckles. She puts the tip of her finger against his lips but he moves her hand away.

“No. Hear me out. My high school teacher used to say that I was as dumb as a toolbox.”

“Where would we be without tool boxes?” Callahan laughs.

“See. You have just admitted it.”

“What?”

“I’m all down on myself and you’re sitting there agreeing with everything I say.”

“Oh, come on. You’re overthinking it.”

Sam chortles. “That’s so funny.”

“What?”

“So you’ve got a degree, right?” he asks her.

“Yeah.”

“What sort?”

“A bachelor degree in oceanography with honours.”

“Sure. Whatever that means. And a PDh. And an MBA. Right?”

“And a Master’s degree.”

“I already said that.”

“It doesn’t matter. Your point being?”

“I’ve got a boat driving license. So, when I look at the world, I see simple patterns. I see the hull. The deck. Some ropes, maybe.”

“What’s your point?”

“My point is that I am in absolutely no danger of overthinking anything.” He chuckles at his own joke.

In another universe, in another time, Callahan might have laughed with him. “I guess I am going to have to do that myself,” she thinks.

Jam Jar

Next morning Callahan wakes and lies quietly looking at the floor. She thinks through the flurry of emails that she sent the night before during a period of clarity.

Sam gets back into the bed with two mugs of coffee. He places one on the table next to Callahan. Then he turns on the TV with a remote control and flicks through the channels until he finds what he is looking for: Scooby Doo.

As the cartoon plays, Callahan watches steam rise from the edge of the cup.

“If we were to have a baby together, I could get one of those basket things and strap it to my chest, like in the Hangover movie,” Sam says, chirpily.

“Sam do you have to keep talking about this. I am not having babies. I

would be just my luck to over-ovulate and end up with octuplets.”

“Ocolets? What?”

“Never mind.”

“There’s a storm, outside, hey?” Sam mentions.

“Really?”

“Yeah. They’ve shut the Vawt off to the public.”

“Let’s go to the Jam Jar.”

“Take the boat out in the storm?” Sam asks. “Hell, yes.”

In the middle of Aquaria Bay is the most popular attraction after the sealions, the Vawt. The name is a contraction of the words ‘vertical axis wind turbine’ and it doesn’t look much like a normal wind turbine because it has only two blades that rise in a V-shape from a moored pontoon. The blades are huge, stretching over a hundred meters into the air. In the centre, on the pontoon, there is a

structure with a helipad on the roof. Under the helipad is a café and interpretive centre and a service room containing all the gearing and electronics.

When the wind blows strong, the Vawt can produce 10 megawatts, which is enough energy to power Aquaria many times over. The Vawt is moored to the seabed by four thick chains that terminate at the top of concrete pilings that have been driven meters into the seabed.

The strength of the wind only becomes apparent when Boat McBoatface turns towards the entrance of the harbour. There are white caps and spindrift. A burst of white water explodes from the bow as the boat pushes into the swell.

Callahan braces herself, enjoying the sensory overload that comes from being on a boat in a storm. The wind is

loud, whipping around the hull.

Periodically, the bow forces itself into an oncoming wave. The vessel shudders as a burst of white water erupts into the air and the windscreen turns to white fizzing water. Waves slap against the hull, and things clunk and bang inside. The anchor chain adjusting its position on the floor of the chain well making a dragging noise. The constant motion makes it feel as though gravity were continually shifting around. Staying upright means waving through the air. The totality of the experience calms Callahan and she starts to feel calm with her analysis of the Expedient Energy risk.

The Boaty McBoatface bumps alongside the lee side of the Vawt pontoon. Sam takes a few minutes to tie the vessel with bow, stern and spring lines. As he does, Callahan looks up to see the huge, V-shaped blade slicing the

air. Despite the huge size, the Vawt blade operates silently. It towers over her, monstrous in size, and yet safe.

With Sam at her side, Callahan walks along the pontoon toward the café. The wind tries to blow them off the deck into the swirling sea.

Callahan uses her swipe card to access the café. The room is semi-circular with windows all around the curved wall. Along the flat wall is the service area with fridges, display cabinets and pay station. There are about thirty tables in the café, with chairs neatly set around them.

The light inside the café is silver grey and the noise of the storm is diffuse. The Vawt moves in the swell, but the structure is so large that the movement is slow, not fast and jerky like the boat ride over. In the middle of the room, a hand rail surrounds a descending spiral staircase.

“I’m going to heat up some mussels. You want some?” Sam asks. Callahan shakes her head and descends the stairwell to the Jam Jar, the underwater viewing platform beneath the café.

The Jam Jar is made of the same material as the aquarium tunnel, three-inch thick acrylic. The ceiling is mirrored and the floor is toughened glass. The top of the Jam Jar is three metres below the sea surface. Up there is a swirl of white water as the waves dash against the Vawt pontoon.

Callahan moves to an arrangement of leather ottomans in a circle around the bottom of the staircase.

The heavy cloud cover and the white water makes the light in the Jam Jar dim and consistent. No bright sparkles or spears of intense light, like on the bright days. Today, it’s slate grey and dim.

Callahan looks at the thick chains that hold the Vawt in place, observing how the catenary subtly changes as the structure rises and falls in the swell. Some days, when the water visibility is high, it is possible to see the chains all the way to the seabed, a hundred feet below. The chains are covered in marine life, seaweed, anemones, soft corals. Hundreds of fish surround them, nestling in the foliage or finding a meal.

On one side of the Jam Jar is the 3D nursery. Long chains hang from the surface, providing a resting place for the cultured molluscs for which Aquaria is so famous. It is from here that the juveniles are harvested to be grown out in the aquaculture ponds on the other side of the hill.

Sam arrives, carrying a bowl of steaming mussels. “Oh, boy,” he says,

excitedly. “I could eat mussel soup all day.”

“Sam, we’re in big trouble,” Callahan says, quietly.

“Is it true that you tried selling mussel ice-cream?”

“Sam.”

“I put chilli and pepper--”

“Sam!”

He looks around and sees that Callahan is withdrawn. “Are you worried about that oil rig, still?”

“I’m losing control of my board.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that other people are taking over.”

“Who?”

“I can’t confirm it. But I think it’s a puppet master from Expedient Energy.”

“Let’s hope not. I’ve worked in oil. They’ll ruin the place.”

“What does that mean?”

“They just trash everything. They can’t help themselves.”

“Everything?”

Sam slurps some mussel flesh from a shell. “Oh, boy, that’s good. So, what are you going to do?”

She looks at the glass floor, despondently. A school of forty or more trevally swims in her direction. They come alongside the perspex wall of the Jam Jar and swim into the current, remaining in the same place, their bodies undulating as they push through the moving water. Callahan stands and moves close to the plastic wall, inspecting the silver-grey fish at close quarters.

“I need everybody pulling their weight. Even if it means breaking some rules.”

“I’ll break some rules,” offers Sam.
“I’ll smash them to pieces.”

“Good. And I’m going to put a rocket under the Chairman,” she says. “I need him onboard.”

VAWT Sinks

Later that afternoon, the Chairman visits Callahan in her office. Outside the window, Aquaria Bay is flecked with whitecaps as the storm continues. A rolling surf crashes onto the beach producing an ultrasound that can be felt even inside the Aquaria complex.

In the middle of the bay, the Vawt spins effortlessly transforming the captured energy of the wind into 10 megawatts of electric current. It's a big storm for a boat, but just a breeze for the Vawt which is designed for winds with ten times as much force.

"You know I am not given to conspiracy theories, Lucy," the Chairman tells her.

"This isn't a conspiracy theory. This is a plausible assumption based on evidence," Callahan argues. "Okay, for one, it's long been known that there is

oil under Aquaria Bay. Confirmed by Expedient Energy in the paper yesterday. Second, they have just run a seismic survey through the bay.”

“That was an accident.”

“Charles, do you really believe that there is any such thing as an accidental seismic survey?”

“Well, it does seem strange.”

“Exactly. And then overnight, we lose three of our board to an outsider.”

“Who may or may not have any connection to Expedient Energy.”

“Let’s assume that he does,” Callahan implores.

“Why?”

“You only need two ducks to get them in a row, Charles. Now we have three.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“It means that there is enough evidence to assume that we are under attack from Expedient Energy and the

next time that rig moves it's coming here."

"Where would they put it. The water is too deep."

"They'd put it on the seamount."

"Hardly. The Vawt is in the way," the Chairman says, dismissively.

Suddenly, the lights flicker in the office and the screen on Callahan's computer goes blank and then switches back on again. Curious, she glances up at the monitors and scans the electronic signatures of the operations of the Aquaria facility. One thing stands out. The power output from the Vawt is falling rapidly. "What the...?"

"Are you seeing this?" asks the Chairman, pointing through the window onto the bay.

Callahan shakes her head ruefully, feeling a premonition about what she is about to see. She turns and observes that the Vawt is in trouble. Rather than

spinning freely and wavering gently from side to side with the swell, the whole structure is shuddering, like it had lost its centre of gravity. The Vawt heels over. The blades, still slicing through the air, strike the water, tossing up a huge burst of spray. Instantly, they disintegrate, hurling great chunks of fibreglass into the sky. Then in a second, the entire pontoon on which the Vawt floats, wallows and then slips below the sea surface.

Callahan blinks. She rubs her palms over her face. Did she really see that? Did a 10 megawatt wind turbine just disintegrate and sink before her very eyes. “Oh, boy,” she sighs. “More plastics in the ocean.”

“The storm just killed the Vawt,” says the Chairman, aghast.

“Oh, Charles, wake up, why don’t you!”

“I beg your pardon.”

“The storm didn’t kill it, you silly old goose. It’s rated for force twelve.”

“I don’t like your attitude,” the Chairman grumbles.

“I’m sorry, I...”

The Chairman departs the room mumbling something about young people and respect for authority.

“Damn,” Callahan feels her spirits slump as she looks out at the sea. Chunks of fibreglass blade, float on the surface, now the only evidence of the Vawt’s existence. She feels a compelling need to call someone, raise the alarm. But who would she call? And what would she ask them to do? She stands at the window, shaking her head, stunned, lost for words, lost for ideas. The monumental structure called Aquaria is being dismembered and she is the only one who can see it happening.

In a daze, the Sealioness moves to her desk and slumps in her chair, exhausted from having to figure it all out on her own. She types out an apologetic message to the Chairman on her mobile. As she does this another name comes to mind.

She thinks it through for a while, then searches her contacts for someone that she has not called in a long time.

“Where’s the action man today?” she mumbles as she places a call.

The phone rings three times then goes to a message bank that is introduced by a gruff voice that says, “Just leave a goddam message.” Then the beep.

“Hi, Todd. It’s Suzy Callahan from Aquaria. Something big just fell over without good reason. Can you call me back, please, as soon as possible?”

She hangs up, then calls Sam. She gets the message bank there too, so she asks

him to get Boaty McBoatface ready for a mission.

Callahan sits back in her chair, thinking it through. The phone rattles and she sees a message from Todd, “skype you soon.” Then another text, from Sam, “cu 30 mins.”

What Destroyed the Vawt?

Right on time, Sam backs Boaty McBoatface up to the Aquaria wharf. The wind is strong, swirling around the marina, smelling cold and salty. Callahan is waiting with a big coil of yellow hose slung over her shoulder. Sam laughs as he ties up the boat. “You pick some weird nights for pleasure diving.”

“It’s not pleasure, its business. You up for it?”

“Where are we going?”

“Vawt.”

“What for?”

“It sank.”

“What?”

“Vawt sank half an hour ago.”

“Funny. Where are we really going?”

“Sam, do me a favour and just drive the boat to where we were today.”

“Righty-ho, Cranky Callahan.”

Callahan goes down below to prepare her diving gear as Sam backs the boat out of the pen.

When the boat is in the channel, Sam shows a look of surprise when he finds that the Vawt, a constant companion on the horizon, is no longer there.

“Shit!” he exclaims. “The storm took it.”

Callahan’s reaction is swift, “Okay, Sam, don’t get me started on the storm and the goddam Vawt!”

“Whoa,” Sam raises his hands as if to defend himself.

“The storm didn’t take the Vawt. Something else did. We’re going to find out what.”

“Righty-ho,” Sam grumbles. “You can bite me but you have to kiss me first.”

Callahan sighs, exasperated. She reaches out for Sam’s head and teases her fingers through his hair.

“Baby,” she says in a conciliatory tone. “The Vawt was designed and built by Germans. It can’t just sink. Something else must have happened. I just want to find out what.”

“Okay, I get that. But does it have to involve diving alone? At night. In a storm. At depth. Can’t it wait for the morning, and you go with a buddy.”

“Really?”

“What was I thinking? It’s Lucy ‘do everything the dangerous way’ Callahan. How about I get you there and look out for you while you are in the water?”

“Thank you, baby.” She places a kiss on his cheek.

“Now, you can shout at me.”

As soon as the boat is free of the rocky breakwater, it starts to heave up and down in the swell.

After a few minutes, Callahan’s mobile starts making the Skype noise. She raises the phone and Sam glances over.

On the screen, is a profile picture of a blocky man, who looks like he ought to be in an action movie.

“Who the hell is that?”

“It’s Todd. I asked him to call me.”

She okays the call and the still image is replaced with a grainy video feed. It is dark where he Todd is, and there is a sparkle of light and a chattering noise in his background.

“Hi, Todd.”

“Hey, baby-cakes.”

“Where the hell are you?” she asks.

“I can’t tell you, but it’s hot.” Todd’s background resonates with a distinctive chatter, like something out of a war film. There are uniformed people moving around him.

“Is that gunfire?” Callahan asks, astounded.

“I can’t tell you, but it’s hot.”

Sam starts to laugh, derisively. “He’s like action man toy with a string.”

“Who’s your mate?” Todd asks, coldly over the skype.

“He’s a friend.”

“A friend?” asks Sam, perturbed.

“What, are you screwing that cat?”

“Anyway,” says Callahan, changing the subject. “Do you remember the Vawt?”

“The big wind turbine? What about it?”

“How would you disable it?”

“Pull a fuse.”

“How would you sink it in thirty seconds?”

“That’s much more fun. Let me think.” Todd moves out of sight of the camera for a little while. In his place are men in military fatigues moving around, fussing over a chart on a table. The room is periodically illuminated by a flash of light.

“I’m your friend?” asks Sam, all amiss.

“I meant friend as in Todd is free to speak around you.”

“Well, thanks for that. And who is this guy, anyway?”

“He’s a friend,” says Callahan.

Todd returns to the screen and says, “Okay. I’d compromise the acrylic bubble on the bottom.”

“How would you do that?”

“Det-cord. I’d wrap det-cord around it. Bang. Shear it off. She’d go down in a flash.” Todd clicks his fingers for effect.

“Great. Thanks.”

“Good luck,” he disappears from the screen with the distinctive Skype ‘bloop’ noise.

“You know what det-cord is?”

Callahan asks Sam. She glances up, seeing just the side of his face as he scowls and mutters to himself.

“Sam?”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Callahan finds the icon for the youtube app on her smartphone. She

searches for ‘det-cord’ and activates a 48 second video. The video shows what looks like a length of rope being rolled out from the back of a truck on a beach. A man connects two wires protruding from the rope to a battery, then activates a switch. In an instant, the entire length of rope - the det-cord - detonates, erupting a flurry of sand into the air.

Callahan nods her head, gravely. “Det-cord,” she says. “Detonation cord. Explosive rope.” She turns to Sam and says, “That’s what sank the Vawt.”

Sam doesn’t reply. He’s got a displeased look on his face.

“What’s the matter, Sam?”

“Baby-cakes?” he asks.

“Dude, can you just keep your eye on the job?”

“On the job,” Sam repeats. “On the job with Action Man Todd.”

“Why do I have to explain myself to you?”

“I don’t know Lucy,” Sam’s voice becomes tight. “Maybe it’s because I visit your bed chambers. That builds in me certain affections.”

Lucy wants to chuckle, but she holds it in. Every time Sam refers to her bedchambers, she thinks of his boyish obsession with Game of Thrones. It’s so cute. “And I have a special thing for you, too,” says, non-committedly.

“Really?”

“I do.”

“So who is baby-cakes Todd?”

“Let me tell you what Todd had going in his favour that one night many, many years ago?”

“Illustrate me,” Sam scowls.

Callahan starts to laugh freely, overwhelmed by the ridiculousness of the argument. When she is able to draw a breath, she says, “Gin and tonic and

persistence. More of the latter than the former.”

“Maybe I should try that combination.”

“You don’t have to.”

A muscle works on Sam’s cheek as he thinks it through. “A long time ago, huh?”

“It was like eight years ago.”

Sam goes quiet and Callahan glances at him. He stares into the distance, hands on the wheel, his body moving back and forth as the vessel pushes through the swell. The dim light of the instrument panel illuminates his face, casting shadows. He looks fixed, determined, as though he is trying to solve a complex puzzle.

She thinks that if Sam lived in a real Game of Thrones world, he’d be a wood cutter, maybe a gamekeeper. And the only way he would get into the court would be by delivering the game.

He doesn't understand politics.
Everything is black and white for him.
He doesn't see the subtleties of grey.

Callahan wonders how he came to be with him in the first place. She thinks that through for a while. He's a good boat driver. He keeps the bedchamber warm, every now and then. And he follows instructions. That's enough, isn't it?

"So how does he know about the Vawt?" Sam finally asks.

"What?"

"How does he know about the Vawt? You said you knew him eight years ago. But the Vawt has only been there for two years."

"Fair call, Sam. And you know that I don't give up my secrets easily. But I will share this with you. We keep in touch, professionally."

"Professionally. *Hub?*"

Suddenly, Callahan is overwhelmed by the conversation. She steps out onto the back deck and lets the wind whip through her hair and the salt spray lash her face. When she comes back inside, she pokes her fingers into Sam's ribs.

"Alright. I'm not cranky," he says.

"Oh, yes, you are, baby-cakes."

"F*** off," Sam tries not to grin.

They glance at each other and laugh.

Callahan says, "Todd's a military demolition guy. I run all the Aquaria blueprints past him."

"What? Say that again."

"I run all of the Aquaria infrastructure blueprints past a military demolition expert."

"Why? What for?"

"Think it through for a minute."

"You know that's not my strength."

Sam goes quiet for a while, looking out at the ocean ahead. Eventually, he says,

“So that you can find where the weak spots are.”

“Correct.”

Sam starts nodding. “And that’s why you are going to dive on the Vawt. To find out if it went down in the storm, or someone blew it up.”

“Correct.”

Sam eases a long sigh. “Boy,” he says, at length, “I have got a long way to go to be as smart as you.”

Callahan tickles the hair on the back of his scalp with her finger tip. “You don’t have to be as smart as I am, Sam.”

“Really?”

“Not so long as I am.”

Diving on the Vawt

Sam brings Boaty McBoatface over the wreck of the Vawt, monitoring the location with the sonar. He faces the vessel into the wind and applies just enough forward propulsion to keep her in place. Callahan steps onto the back deck in a thick wetsuit. At her feet is a coil of yellow hose, she picks up an armful and tosses it over the transom. Then she connects one end of the air hose to the full-face visor, pulls the visor over her face and seats it tightly. Then she gives the diver's okay signal and rolls backwards into the water.

In the cabin, Sam switches on the monitors and activates the recording equipment for the video feed from the visor.

Below the surface, Callahan tests the audiovisual gear on the mask as she descends. "You getting this?"

“Loud and clear,” Sam says, in the cabin.

As Callahan exhales, the positive pressure forces air through vents on the size of the helmet. The air forms bubbles in the water, small and tight. As they ascend, they get bigger as the weight of the water working on them reduces. The bubbles flatten out, like shiny, silver jellyfish and erupt on the surface in a hiss of white foam that lasts just a second before disappearing.

From the surface, Sam keeps track of the bubbles and the direction of the hookah hose to get a sense of where Callahan is in relation to the boat. The sea rises and falls and the wind howls around the vessel as he manoeuvres to keep the vessel in place. If everything goes right, having Callahan in the water is not inherently unsafe. It is calm beneath the sea, even in a storm. The

problems could really stack up if anything goes wrong.

“Are you getting this feed?” Callahan asks, when she reaches the seabed thirty metres deep. She stands on the reef, slowly turning in a circle, allowing the cameras in the helmet a panoramic view of the sea floor.

“Port and starboard cameras are go,” Sam tells her as he checks the monitors in the cabin.

“You recording this?”

“Yeah. What’s all that white stuff on the bottom?”

“Fibreglass from the shattered blades.” Callahan shakes her head, ruefully.

“Whoa. Stop that. It’s making me dizzy.”

“Sorry,” Callahan chuckles.

“Can you see the wreck?”

Callahan retrieves the torch and pans the beam around the seafloor. The

visibility is about forty feet, and a large shape looms in the hazy distance. She leans forward and fins towards the wreck of the pontoon.

The pontoon has landed on the seabed vertically. She fins around the wreckage playing the torch beam across the surface. She sees where the transparent tube attaches to the base of the pontoon, but the lower part is buried in the reef.

“Sam, I’m on the wreck now. The tube is missing. Can you see it?”

Sam checks the sonar, twisting the dial to change the frequency so as to pick up an object of lesser density than the steel hull of the pontoon. He says, “There’s a shadow about a hundred feet to the north-west of your position.”

Callahan checks her compass and swims around the sunken pontoon until the compass shows the right heading. Then she fins in that direction,

calculating her progress by watching the seafloor move underneath her. Finally, the shape of the acrylic cone looms into view. She fins around the structure to find the end, where it has been separated from the rest of the pontoon. “Check the monitors now, Sam.”

“I can see it. Can you get a zoom in on the edge?” Callahan holds the structure and pans the cameras over the wreckage. The acrylic is three inches thick, and the outer two inches appear to have been melted, while the remaining inch is fractured, like it had snapped under load.

“You recording this? Is the picture clear?” Callahan asks.

“Yes and yes. Angle the torch a bit. The other way. That’s it. That’s good, that’s really clear.”

“That looks like what Todd described,” Callahan says. She retrieves her knife and scrapes a sliver of plastic

away from the wreck. She grips her fingers on the bit, and a shadow looms in the periphery of her torch light. A shock runs through her body as she flashes the torch towards it. Instantly illuminated, a mouth hangs open, the jaw studded with conical teeth. There is grey skin and a bloodshot eye.

Callahan yelps in surprise, dropping the knife and finning away from the hulk in shock.

“What the hell was that?” asks Sam, staring at the monitor. The image shows the seabed swirling around. “Are you okay? Lucy?”

Over the audio comes the sound of Callahan’s rapid breathing and cursing. “I’m okay. I’m okay. That scared the shit out of me.” She retrieves her knife off the sea floor then fins back towards the tube.

Callahan’s torchlight plays over the carcass of the bottlenose dolphin. It’s

an adult male, one of the regulars in the bay, recognisable from the wounds on its dorsal fin. “It must have been checking out the explosive device when it went off,” Callahan says.

“Oh, man,” sighs Sam. “Another dead whale. Okay, get out of there Lucy. It’s giving me the creeps.”

“Okay, just hold on.” She slices off a piece of acrylic and pushes it into a pocket in her wetsuit. Then she grabs the dead dolphin by the tail and swims with it to the surface.

Shark Birth

Next morning, Callahan stands on tiptoes, looking over rows of glass tanks but she is unable to see Hal. She calls his name and a head rises. He waves her over.

Hal is standing in front of one of the tanks, holding a dictaphone and a clipboard with a watch clipped to it. “Still thinking about having a baby?” he asks.

“Not right at this moment.”

“Take a look at this.” Hal indicates towards the tank.

Inside, there are a dozen oval-shaped leathery brown blobs. The ends have wispy fibrous material that is tangled up in the coral. Visible inside each of the translucent egg sacks is a squirming mass, coloured with light and dark bands. One of the sacks has split, and the former occupant now rests on the

sand on the bottom of the tank, slowly opening and closing its mouth, drawing water over its gills. It is a banded catshark, just hatched.

The baby catshark is about five inches long, a perfectly formed animal looking like a miniature version of the adult.

Another catshark has its head protruding through the slit in its egg, and is frantically writhing its body to get free. Beige coloured fluid billows out of the egg as the baby makes its escape. It swims around the tank, bumping into the glass a few times before finally coming to rest on top of its mate.

“That could be you,” Hal says, chortling.

“Can you scuba dive pregnant?” Callahan asks.

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

“And how old does a child need to be before it can scuba dive.”

“Legally or physically?”

“It doesn’t matter, really.”

“Say, you need to go and see Bob Sellec. He’s just got some anomalous sea surface temperature data for you to look at.”

“An anomaly.”

“Another hot blob.”

“Great. Just what we need. Say, Hal, can you do me a favour.”

“Of course. Hold on, another birth.”
Hal activates the Dictaphone and speaks into it. “1125 hours catshark birth number three, easy passage.”

Callahan hands him a clear plastic bag containing the chip of acrylic from the sunken Vawt. “Can you find a lab that can check this for explosives?”

Hal starts chuckling. “That sounds very James Bond. What sort of explosives.”

“Det-cord. That’s what sank the Vawt.”

“I thought that the Vawt sunk in—”

“Don’t go there, Hal.” Callahan says abruptly.

“Is everything okay, Lucy?”

She turns back to her friend.

Vulnerability washes over her and she feels as if she is melting into the floor.

“We’re under attack, Hal. I’m the only one can see it.”

“I understand.”

“There’s a dead dolphin on the deck of my boat and wrecked turbine on the sea bed. I don’t know what to do.”

“Evidence. Find something definitive.”

“I am going to see that lawyer that deserted my board without calling me.”

“Don’t kill him. And Take this with you.” Hal hands her the dictaphone.

“Get him talking. Get it on record.”

Visiting the Lawyer

Later that day, Callahan waits in the reception area of the lawyer's office. Her stomach feels tight, not because she fears conflict with Kevin Albrecht but because she's anxious that she's going to learn how vulnerable Aquaria has become. What else has she overlooked?

On the secretary's desk Callahan sees a fishbowl with a *Betta splendens*, a Siamese fighting fish. The bowl has blue glass beads on the bottom and a plastic plant. The fish looks healthy, but they often do, just before they die. Callahan peers into the tank, checking the condition of the fish. She leans forward and sniffs the opening of the bowl. She turns to the secretary and asks, "Do you look after the fish?"

"It sort of came with the job."

“You need to exchange 20% of the water every week and don’t feed it too much.”

“Okay.” The secretary makes a note on a piece of paper.

“And get some proper gravel and some plants.” Lucy hands over a business card. “Ask for Hal. Tell him that I sent you. He’ll fix you up for free.”

“That’s really sweet, thank you. You can go in now.”

Callahan looks back to the fish bowl. A Siamese fighting fish or the lawyer who let the oilmen in, who would she rather spend time with? Reluctantly, she moves away from the fish, and follows the secretary. She enters the office of the lawyer, recognising the décor from when she had been there years before. He is one of her picks for the board of Aquaria. “This is all my fault,” she thinks.

Albrecht is standing and he indicates for her to sit. Callahan perches on the edge of the seat, but he doesn't follow suit, he just stands there, looking down at her. "How's Mr. Priestly?" he asks, jumping right in. "Is he behaving himself?"

"You know that he has been head-hunted by Expedient Energy?"

Callahan fires back, hoping to catch the lawyer off guard.

"Of course. It was my idea. I put them together."

"It was your idea?"

"Lucy, before you ask a hundred questions, let me set you straight on a few things. To use an metaphor, Aquaria Bay swims on a sea of oil. Did you know that when you chose the location for your marine science project?"

Callahan glances at the carpet, cursing that she had been asked that question.

She says, “The oil extends miles off the coast. Drill it out there.”

“The water’s too deep,” Albrecht says.

“They do deep water drilling all the time.”

“Technically it’s possible. But commercially it’s not.”

“But if there is so much oil there, why not spend the extra to protect Aquaria Bay?”

Albrecht chuckles knowingly. “Let me give you a lesson in oil industry economics, Lucy. They don’t spend extra to protect the environment.”

“Why not?”

“Because they don’t have to. It’s the oil industry. They make their own rules. The purpose of the oil business is to maximise shareholder value. That’s why we drill where the costs are lower.”

“So you are a shareholder.”

“As you ought to be if you were a prudent investor. I am a bond holder,

shareholder, and a service provider. There is a lot of legal work in oil production, you know.”

“Is it really that simple?” Callahan feels light-headed.

“No, it’s much bigger. It’s about public opinion.”

“You’ll have to explain that to me.”

“Aquaria has been a great opportunity for this town because it created some jobs,” Albrecht says. “But these are tourism jobs. Tank cleaners. Goldfish trainers and the like. Now, there is a new opportunity to share Aquaria Bay and create high paying oil industry jobs. Engineering jobs. Real jobs. It’s a good thing for the town.”

“But you can’t have a healthy marine environment and oil production. It’s one or the other,” Callahan protests.

“That’s old news. With the new technology and advanced management

practices, oil production is ecologically sustainable.”

Lucy slumps, she remembers teaching Albrecht about ecological sustainability when she first enrolled him into joining the Aquaria board. She was sitting in this same chair and he was behind that same table, struggling to get his head around the language of ecology.

“We’re not going to drill your dolphin tanks,” Albrecht says, light-heartedly.

“We’ll drill in the bay.”

“We don’t have goddam dolphin tanks,” Callahan growls. “The mammals are free to come and go. As you’d know if you had been paying attention. And besides, there are a lot of very highly paid marine scientists, not just summer jobs.”

Albrecht waves his hand, dismissively. “Those big science jobs go to university people from out-of-town. Overseas people, even. Foreigners.”

Callahan looks back to the carpet, shaking her head. It is pointless trying to pitch an argument about a globally relevant science program to someone who is so damned parochial. This is another of her strategic blunders. She had always thought that pandering to the local community's parochial interests was a strength. It had been, until another project came along.

"I have asked Mr. Priestley to continue representing me at the Aquaria board," Albrecht continues.

"Three months," Callahan says, standing.

"Three months, what?"

"Three months then he's out, as per the constitution."

"Not unless he's voted in. As per the constitution, that I helped you draft."

"He won't be voted in on my watch," Callahan growls.

“We’ll cross that bridge when the time comes.”

“Not if I have burned it beforehand.”

Callahan moves quickly out of the Lawyers office and onto the street. She has a distinctive feeling that her enemies are multiplying in number but her allies aren’t. She remembers the man on the seismic ship. He worked for Expedient Energy and apologised to her. What was his name? She wracks her brains but the name doesn’t come to her, so she calls Aquaria human resources and asks them to email the details to her.

When she gets back to the office, the email has arrived and she sees that the guy’s name is Teller. She forwards the information to Hal, asking that he set a meeting with Teller, but to do it with an outside line. Hal comes back within the hour to say that Teller is prepared to meet.

Basement Meeting

Aquaria's basement is a huge, dimly lit, cavern. The distinctive smell of concrete and salt water gives the basement the feel of a sea cave. It resonates with the humming noise coming from pumps, filters and air conditioning plant.

Hal arrives with Teller. He's mid-forties, dressed like an accountant. He holds a plastic tube under his arm. Callahan wants to be nice to him for risking his job by meeting with her, but she has trouble reconciling that he works for the people who are trying to shut her down.

She lays the dictaphone on the table and presses the play button. Albrecht's voice crackles out, "Now, there is a new opportunity to share Aquaria Bay and create high paying oil industry jobs.

Engineering jobs. Real jobs. It's a good thing for the town."

"I get it," says Hal, nodding gravely.

"I think that what Expedient is doing is outrageous," Teller says off the bat.

"What do you do with them?"

Callahan asks, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Accounting, still. I'd move on, but they pay really well and I've got a family now."

"A family?" Callahan nods, contemplatively. "And why are you here?"

Teller puts his hand against his chest and says solemnly, "You have to know about this. But you didn't hear it from me, okay?"

Callahan shrugs, unconvinced. "What have you got?"

Teller pulls the cap off the tube and tips the contents onto the table. He unfurls one of the rolled-up sheets and moves items on the table top to pin

down the corners. “You’ll recognise this.”

The plan shows a schematic of the entire Aquaria infrastructure, including the aquarium, the pipes, fish farm and algae facility. It is very detailed, with little numbers and words adjacent to each piece of infrastructure describing the technical specifications, the power rating of pumps, the diameter of pipelines and internal volume of tanks.

“Is that one of ours?” Hal asks, studying the chart.

“The diagram is ours, but all this additional information isn’t. Where did you get this?” Callahan asks the oilman in their midst.

“From the Expedient Energy mainframe computer.”

“Where would they get all that engineering data?” Hal asks.

Callahan steps away from the table, stunned. She puts her hand on her

forehead as it becomes clear. “The other missing director, John Holland. He runs the engineering firm that built Aquaria.”

“Oh, shit,” Hal sighs. “Inside job.”

Teller unfurls the other plan. This one is printed on a transparent plastic sheet. He lays it over the first sheet and adjusts the paperweights so that it perfectly overlays the original plan. It is largely the same as the other diagram, but there are changes to the words in the boxes.

“What the hell?” Callahan peers at the overlay, stunned. “What am I looking at here?”

“This is what Expedient Energy plans to do to the Aquaria infrastructure.”

“Walk me through it.”

“Okay,” Teller says, reluctantly. “The big picture is that all your Aquaria infrastructure is set to become oil production infrastructure. So, over

there, the Vawt is removed and replace with the rig.”

“That’s already started,” Callahan growls.

Teller continues, “The subsea trench that carries the electrical cable from the Vawt to the shore, now carries an oil pipe. The water pipe over the hill to Bio-Industrial becomes an oil pipe. The aquaculture ponds and algae tubes become crude storage. The micro refinery that processes the green crude now processes some of their petroleum crude into liquid fuels to run the operation. The railway line that transports fresh fish and sustainable biofuel, now carts crude oil to market.”

The diagram shows that every part of the Aquaria’s infrastructure is to be repurposed. Callahan steps away from the table, feeling light-headed.

“Take a breath, Lucy,” Hal suggests.

Callahan places her palm over her chest and inhales deeply. She returns to the table, unable to speak. She looks at Teller, nodding slowly. “Okay go on.”

Teller retrieves an A4 sheet from the tube. “This document shows the reallocation of human capital. They keep most of the administration staff and a few technicians with big pay increases. The rest are let go.”

“Why?” Callahan asks, her throat dry. “Why do this?”

“It’s the lowest cost way to get the oil to market.”

Callahan stares at the charts, dumbfounded. She nods her head as the simple message works its way through her neurons. They have the power, they make the rules, and they take the lowest cost route to market irrespective of who or what suffers. “I need to get on that rig.”

“You’ll need a security ID,” Teller says.

“Can you get me one?”

Teller looks at the floor, cursing that he had been asked. Eventually, he nods.

“I’ll need your photo for it.”

“I’m right here.”

Teller raises his smartphone and aligns Callahan in the frame of the camera.

“Smile, Lucy,” Hal says, gravely.

Callahan forces a grin but it only lasts a few seconds.

Teller checks the picture for quality.

“Okay. I’ll get that in the post to you tomorrow,” says Teller. “And some branded work gear. You’ll need them, too.”

“You can go now.”

Teller looks down at the charts on the table. “You didn’t get those from me, okay.

“It’s okay.” Callahan watches Teller depart, then turns her eyes to Hal.

“What’s next?”

Hal draws his hand over his face and shakes his head.

The Touch Tank

That night, Lucy moves through the public aquarium complex. It is dark and quiet. Apart from the night watchman, an old ally, she has the place to herself.

Wearing her gold lycra wetsuit, she walks to the touch pool. The shallow tank contains harmless animals that the public is invited to touch. She slips into the water and moves to a spot where she rests against the rocks with the seaweed waving gently against her.

The occupants of the touch pool visit her and she rewards their inquisitiveness with dried fish from a bag tucked inside her sleeve. One of the rays, with bright blue flashes on its skin, nestles in her lap and she strokes it, like one might caress a sleeping cat.

In the dark, with her fishy friends, Callahan relaxes and lets her mind wander. She tries to conjure up new

ideas about how to protect Aquaria. In the dark, with the water lapping her body, she falls into a meditative state, a mixture of melancholy, anger, frustration. While it seems that the enemy gets stronger every day, her interminable spirit is growing, too. While she may not have birthed a human child, she has birthed a scientific institution, and she will protect it with her life. Except that the threat is not something as simple as a wild dog or an aggressor. It is an industry, with tentacles that seem to be popping up everywhere. She doesn't even know the full extent of the threat. She doesn't even know how many tentacles it has. She doesn't know what comes next, or who to trust. She is losing control of her board. If she no longer controls the board, she will be voted off it. But before that happens she'll step down, and if she does that right, it could be a

rallying point for her supporters. She nestles her head into the kelp and dreams up a ritual that is fitting of the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay.

After soaking in the touch tank for a few hours, Callahan goes back to her room, showers and goes to bed.

The next morning, as she walks to her office, she sees the in-house medics moving quickly through the complex, carrying their medical kits. Curious, she follows them and finds that they are heading to the touch pool, where she was the night before.

A woman has collapsed and lays unconscious in front of the tank. She is one of two teachers for a class of thirty school children. Some of the children are mortified, looking at their fallen teacher. Others are taking full advantage of the distraction, and running riot. The second teacher is frantically trying to round up the truant

children. One of the medics asks her what happened.

“She touched something in the pool,” says the teacher.

Strange. The whole purpose of the touch pool is that it contains harmless animals. Callahan glances at the touch pool and checks the occupants. She sees the normal animals, the rays without stinging barbs, and some benign fish. Sea cucumbers, some big, blue starfish.

Then she sees it. Sitting on a rock, right next to the plexiglass, almost invisible, because it looks so much like a rock itself. It is the scariest and deadliest fish of all, the stonefish. It’s an ugly bug-eyed animal, and once you can see one, all the others become immediately apparent. Callahan gasps, there are at least five of them in there.

A shudder runs through her body as she remembers that she was sleeping in

that pool just last night. The attack on Aquaria just got personal.

“The stonefish are meant for me,” she thinks. It feels as if one of the stonefish has found its way into her stomach. She pulls her arm over her gut, grimacing.

A little boy wearing a bright blue overcoat waggles his fingers in the water trying to attract a ray. Callahan steps forward and swoops him up in her arm and seats him on her thigh.

“Okay, kids, let’s move away from here,” she says, shooing the children away from the glass. Hal steps into the room and moves over to her. “Whoa! Lucy’s had a baby.”

“Stand back,” the medics prime the defibrillator.

“What the heck?” Hal sees the woman on the floor, the medics poised over her.

“Someone put stonefish in the touch pool,” Callahan growls. She lowers the

child to the ground and tells him,
“Now, if you can get all your friends to
line up over there, Uncle Hal will take
you to get free ice cream. Okay?” The
boy nods excitedly. “Off you go.”

“Uncle Hal?”

“And call Tiffany. Get her to shut this
room down to the public immediately.”
Callahan moves over to the medic and
tells her, “She may have been poisoned.
There is a *Synanceia* in the tank.”

“We are going to need anti-neurotoxin
on standby,” the medic says to her
partner. “And how’s that helicopter
coming along?”

The boy in the blue jacket is doing a
sterling job of convincing his school
mates to line up against the wall. Hal
takes command of the class and leads
them towards the cafeteria.

A photographer from the Star enters
the room and starts, snapping pictures
from various angles. Strange, thinks

Callahan, that they should be here so soon. She rests her back against the wall and draws her hand over her face, letting it all sink in. The third missing Director runs the newspaper. It all makes so much sense. The three directors haven't just abdicated their roles; they are actively moving against her. And there is nothing that she can do about that.

The medics activate the defibrillator again. But to no avail, the old woman lies motionless on the floor in front of the touch tank. When the hospital crew arrives from the helicopter, the medics are busy applying CPR to the unconscious woman.

Watching all this, Callahan glances around for Hal, but he has gone to the cafeteria. Thinking it through some more, she realises that the stonefish wasn't meant for her, *per se*, it was meant for anyone. Because by killing a

member of the public, the whole institution would come under attack. She imagines what the headline of the Star newspaper will read the following morning: Aquaria, where children play with stonefish.

Standing against the wall, watching the medics lift the unconscious, or maybe even dead, woman onto a gurney, Callahan feels fear flush through her. For a second, she wants to crawl into a cave to hide away from it all. But there is nowhere to hide in total war. And hiding is not her way. Her way is to face the enemy and bare her teeth.

Callahan watches the medics wheel the old woman away on the gurney. Then she moves quickly away from the touch pool, towards her boat.

Todd's Plan

Aboard Boaty Mc Boat Face, Callahan takes out her smartphone and skypes Todd. The device rings and rings and she frets that he might not pick up. Her body trembles as she has a flashback to seeing the stonefish in the touch pool. Horrid creatures.

Finally, Todd answers. It is night where he is, and he looks like he's just woken. Callahan jumps straight in. "I think that you were right about the det-cord."

"Yeah. So, *ummm*, what?" Todd rubs his eyes to wake.

"It's Lucy Callahan. You were right about the det-cord."

"Sorry to hear that."

"Now I need revenge."

"Good. Against who?"

"An oil rig."

Todd laughs. “I don’t think you want to do that.”

“I didn’t ask for your goddamn permission!” Callahan snaps. “I’m asking for your help.”

“Whoa! Turn it down, baby-cakes.” Todd looks around. He stretches and retrieves a bottle of beer, takes a swig then daubs his mouth with the back of his hand. “So, you want to play with explosives, huh?”

“Where are you?” Callahan asks.

“Oh, some messed up place. What’s the rig called?”

At last, she’s having the conversation she wanted. “I don’t know. It’s working for Expedient Energy in Aquaria Bay.”

“Okay. Let me do some research. Call me back in an hour.” Todd switches off.

Callahan heaves a sigh and stares at her hands. She tries to get back in her meditative state, but she really needs to

be underwater for that. She thinks about the stonefish in the touch pool. Who would have put it there? Who else knew that she bathed there? The only one comes to mind is the night watchman, but has been an ally right from the very beginning. Anyone could have put them in there. All you'd have to do is bring them in a bag and just pour them into the tank when no-one was looking. They could have been in there for days, really. And there's no security cameras in the touch pool, so no evidence. And that will make it easier for the media to paint the stonefish as an inside job.

Callahan rests back and tunes into the storm of thoughts pounding through her head. If she can disable the rig, will Expedient Energy just go away or will it only buy her some time. First things first. Wait for Todd's call, that's all she

needs to do. She can switch off for a while.

She slumps back in her seat, and becomes attuned to the sensation of being in a boat in a harbour. The vessel moves slightly as it responds to the waves, squelching against its fenders. In the distance the main halyard of a sailing boat chinks against the mast. Wavelets lap against the hull.

When Todd's call comes, she wakes. She reaches out and presses the screen of her smartphone to activate the call.

"I'm going to put you in contact with Tom Finn."

"Who is he?"

"He's an old mate. I'm going to send him plans for a small shaped charge. It's made of a flameless explosive."

"A shaped charge?"

"A normal explosive goes boom," Todd gesticulates, indicating an expanding balloon. "A shaped charge

goes bang.” With his index finger, he indicates an explosion that is targeted in one direction. “A tiny amount of explosive. Reduces collateral damage.”

“Collateral damage?”

“Shit that you didn’t want blown up.”

“Is it dangerous?”

“That depends on whether the instructions are followed.”

Callahan nods, sombrelly. She looks up to see Sam standing on the dock. What is he doing out there? Has he been listening in? He steps onto the deck of the boat.

“Thanks Todd. I wait for the call.”

Callahan ends the skype abruptly, suddenly feeling possessive of her privacy. Her smartphone makes the distinctive ‘bloop’ noise.

“Hey, Lucy,” Sam says, standing in the doorway.

“Hi, Sam.” She feels like he is intruding even though all he is doing is

standing there. He really should just give her some space. Why isn't he picking that up?

"How's baby-cakes?"

"Not now, Sam. There's too much going on."

"When, then?"

"When, what?"

"When are we going to get some time together?"

"I don't know. I just can't think about that right now."

Sam kicks his heel against the door frame. "I'm worried that you're going to do something stupid if you keep talking with Action Man."

Callahan raises her hand, that being the only way she can respond. She just wants him to turn off. Talk about something else.

Sam says, "I won't let you do it."

His statement changes her mood. She chuckles at the thought of Sam

stopping her doing something that she's set her mind to. And it's a sweet gesture; he cares about her and wants her to be safe.

She reaches out to him and he takes a step towards her, but it's not enough to close the gap. So she leans forward and closes her arms around his waist. Sam sighs deeply and tries to turn her to kiss her, but she doesn't want that.

He pushes his mouth against her face, and her body goes rigid, wishing him to stop, but not having the heart to push him away. She is feeling rejuvenated by the embrace, but oppressed by his advance.

The moment passes, and she pushes him gently away.

Sam's expression falls, his disappointment palpable.

"What's the matter, Sam?" she asks, impatiently.

“Sometimes I feel like I don’t figure in your plans.”

The effort required to think of a meaningful reply is just too much. Callahan opens her mouth hoping that something appropriate will emerge, but nothing does.

“You don’t love me with everything you have,” Sam says, despondently, looking at the floor.

“I love you with everything I have left,” Callahan says, honestly. She looks at him directly, hoping that the honesty will suffice for him to change the subject.

“You don’t put me as number one.”

“I know.”

“See.”

“See what?”

“You just agreed with me.”

“I’m telling you the truth, Sam.”

Sam moves over to the other side of the cabin, shaking his head. “So how far down the list am I?”

“What? What list?”

“How far down your list of priorities am I?”

She shakes her head, frustrated, not knowing how to end the conversation. It’s too childlike. She proceeds with the truth. “Number three.”

“Three? Is baby-cakes at the top?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Sam.”

“*Uh-huh?* So where is he on the list?”

“He’s not on the damned list!”

“So who is one and two?”

“Aquaria first, me second, then you.”

“You put your job ahead of yourself?”

“Yes.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Not for me, it isn’t.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Sam says.

“I can’t spend my life committed to just a person, not even if that one person is me. I need something greater. And you are a part of my life but I first have to look after Aquaria and my own wellbeing. Like I say, I love with all I have left.”

“Which isn’t that much, right now.”

“You know Sam, I’m a bit preoccupied with an oil company that wants to wipe out my life’s work.”

“So that’s how it is, *buh?*”

“I know it sounds harsh.”

“Sounds?”

“It is harsh. But that’s all I have. And if that’s not enough for you, I understand.”

“So I can just go, if I don’t like it?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“My way or the seaway. That’s what it sounds like.”

“Oh, Sam. There’s nothing good comes from this conversation. Can we do it another time?”

“Would that be enough for you? If the table was turned?”

“I don’t know. I can’t imagine that situation.” Callahan heaves a sigh. When she glances up at Sam, she sees that he is grinning at her.

“Wow. That was heavy,” he says.

“Yeah. Thanks for that.”

“I get emotional sometimes.”

“Really?” she chuckles.

“Hey, Lucy. You want to make out?” Sam moves towards her, reaching for her hair, but she moves aside and takes his hand in hers. “No Sam. I’m a bit preoccupied with getting that rig out of my life right now.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Sam turns his back and adjusts a dial on the radar.

“Oh, Sam.”

“1-2-3, I know. I’ll just go to the back of the queue.”

Know Your Enemy

Callahan is at her desk staring at the computer monitor, trying to get her mind around the dynamics of the hot water that is moving in Aquaria's direction. She has the handset of the phone cradled on her shoulder, in the midst of a phone call with the oceanographer, Sellec.

She is reviewing the Earth Nullschool website, set to sea surface temperature. She clicks the mouse and watches as the pattern changes, showing a time series of the blob's temperature and location over the past few days. The hot blob creeps closer to Aquaria Bay with every frame.

"There's been a mass fish death up the coast," Sellec says.

"I heard."

"So the question is, will the hot, oxygen-depleted water get into Aquaria

Bay. And if it does, how long will it stay. And what species are vulnerable.”

Callahan adds a layer of ocean current data and considers the way that the moving water interfaces with the blob. She reviews the current synoptic data and tries to determine how the local weather will influence the blob’s movement.

“I think that you ought to go and ground truth it. Take some oxygen readings,” she tells Sellec.

“That’s what we are thinking. Which budget?”

Callahan looks up from the monitor to see her secretary approaching. She knocks gently on the door.

“Good point. We need a new line item for existential threats. Just get it underway and I’ll get Tiffany to talk to you.” She ends the call.

Callahan pushes the mouse away, overwhelmed by the number crunching.

The stonefish adjusts itself in her stomach. She looks to her secretary.

“Your 11 o’clock has arrived. Sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“He’s asked if you could come to him.”

Callahan shakes her head, wearily.

“Where is he?”

“On the helicopter deck.”

“What’s he doing up there?”

“He’s sitting in his helicopter.”

“Of course he is,” she thinks.

“Another annoying person to deal with.” She heaves a sigh, then departs her desk.

Callahan takes the stairs to the chopper deck on the roof of the administration building. She pushes open the door and sees a sleek black helicopter parked inside the yellow circle. The male pilot has stylish blonde hair and wears Rayban Aviator

sunglasses and a beige leather jacket with wool lining. He looks like a cross between an airman and a fashion model. He wears earphones, gently nodding his head to music.

Callahan huffs, annoyed to have to pander to this man's peculiarities. She walks up to the door, fixes her face with the 'I'm too busy for this bullshit' look, then raps her knuckles on the plexiglass.

The man turns his head and tilts his glasses forward revealing doleful, brown eyes.

"Yep. He's devilishly handsome as well," thinks Callahan. She notices that his expensive clothing is colour matched with the décor in the helicopter. Who would have thought that you could pimp out a chopper?

The man removes the headphones and indicates for her to come around the other side. Shaking her head, she

walks around and opens the door. The pilot holds up his hand, halting her.

“What’s the password?”

“What?”

“Just kidding. *Ha-ha-ha*. Come on. I want to show you something.”

“What?”

“Jump in.”

“Are you Todd’s friend?”

“I can’t tell you. It’s hot.” He indicates for her to sit in the passenger seat.

“Yeah, you know him. Where are you taking me?”

“You’ll spoil the treat.”

Callahan huffs again then complies with the request. When she is buckled into the seat, the man offers his hand for her to shake, saying, “Lucinda Callahan, the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay. The pleasure is all mine.”

“And what’s your name.”

“Tom Finn. Some people call me Tally Ho.”

“That’s a brand of cigarette papers.”

“And a red light district accounting firm. *Ha-ha-ha.*” Tom Finn’s laugh is as eccentric and noticeable as the man himself.

“Are you always like this or are you just pretending?” Callahan asks, unimpressed.

Tom Finn tips his Ray-bans again, revealing his love-making eyes. “It’s part of my healing process. Forgive me.”

“He’s vulnerable, too. Or just a good actor.” Callahan thinks. She wonders where this charming adventurer fits into her picture. A smile slowly forms.

The helicopter alights, slowly rotating as it ascends. Tom Finn points the helicopter in the direction of the distant oil rig, lowers the nose and powers forward. “Let’s go visit the death star.”

The chopper speeds forward, losing altitude then coming within meters of

the sea surface. Tom Finn has effortless control of the chopper as it powers ahead. The oily dot on the horizon grows quickly as they approach. As they close in on the rig, the chopper banks and circles the rig.

“When it’s time for me to go,” he tells Callahan, “I’m going to fuel up, and hit one of these f**kers at 300 miles an hour.”

“What for?”

“Blaze of glory, baby.”

“You’re not planning on doing that today, are you?”

“Oh no. I’ve got a few late nights in me yet. *Ha-ha-ha.*”

Despite her resistance, Callahan chuckles and joins in. “That’s one way of murdering innocent people.”

“*Pah!* I spent twelve years in the forces guarding petroleum products. Crude oil coming out of oil fields, and fuel going into combat zones. How innocent can

you be working in that industry? Oh, alright. I'll radio ahead. Give them twenty minutes notice to evacuate, then bam! Hey. Looks like they're on the move."

"What do you say that?"

"They raised the stabilisers. See, down there."

Callahan looks into the tangle of infrastructure on the rig. It occurs to her that she has been railing against it for the past week, but until now had no idea what it actually looked like. There it is. A giant structure, rising from the sea like a mountain of steel. Pipes and decking, cranes and cabins. It looks totally artificial. Like it ought not to exist on this planet. "Where are they going?" she asks.

"Next stop Aquaria Bay, from what I hear."

There are people moving on the oil rig decks. A boat steams out from under

the rig, and Callahan sees another tied up alongside a floating pontoon in between the legs.

In an abstract way, the rig looks like a creature from the seabed, a mutant crustacean, maybe. The steel structure teems with activity as the workers move around in their pale blue coveralls and white helmets. Cranes shift material from one place to another. The rig has the look of an invasive species that is set to annihilate the indigenous population.

“How do we kill that thing?” Callahan asks, now on the same frequency as Tom Finn.

“That rig is just a small part of it?”

“What does that mean?”

“The rig is the point of the spear, Lucy. There’s a whole army behind it.”

Callahan looks at him, confused.

“You need to understand this. I’ll show you.” Tom Finn turns the

helicopter towards the shore. The blue sea flashes underneath, then they pass over the aquarium at speed. The chopper ascends and flies around the city. There are one and a half million people below. Tom Finn hovers high about the Central Business District. “You heard about the Aquaria Bonds,” he asks.

“Yeah. What are they?”

“It’s a debt instrument for Expedient Energy. An investment opportunity for others.”

“Like a corporate bond?”

“It’s a corporate bond on steroids. 10% return on your investment and your money back after three years. Everyone is buying them. Mums and Dads. Institutions.”

“Who’s driving this?”

“Tex Drillerson, Expedient Energy, CEO. It doesn’t take a lot of brains. All

he is really doing is channelling the energy.”

“The energy?”

“No. The energy. All of the resonant resources.”

“I don’t understand.” Callahan looks at Tom Finn, frustrated. Even though his eyes are hidden behind his Ray-ban’s, she can tell that he is an ally, and that he is helping her to know her enemy. She nods, feeling for the first time that she has a partner in the fight. She nods her head, indicating that she is an empty cup, ready to drink it all in.

“Emergy. All the bond traders who get paid commissions for selling Aquaria bonds. The public and institutions hungry for yield on their investments. The demand for the oil products. Unemployed people and graduates promised new jobs. All the shallow repetitive conversations that normalise the destruction of something

as unique as Aquaria. He's just channelling all of that, and using it against you."

Callahan gasps, like she had just glimpsed the vast landscape through lifting fog.

"He's set the whole town against you. Clever, *huh?*"

"So how do we kill it?"

"You're not going to kill the oil industry anytime soon. That meat grinder's got some murder left in it yet. The best you can do is kill Expedient Energy."

"You are the first I've met who thinks it's possible."

"Maybe you can kill Expedient Energy. But it won't end there."

"Why not?"

"So long as there is oil under Aquaria Bay, and cars, jets and ships run on petroleum fuel, there will be oilmen prepared to go for it."

“But we can kill Expedient Energy, right?”

“Maybe.”

“So, how do we do it?”

“Spectacularly and with style. Do you have any money?”

“How much money?”

“Millions.”

“Suppose I had. Then what?”

Tom Finn hedges for a while, “I might know someone.”

Callahan is silent as the chopper returns to the helipad. When the engines fall silent, Tom Finn reaches behind the passenger seat to retrieve a small black case. He raises the lid revealing a folded sheet of paper that covers the contents of the box. Under the paper, inside the foam padding, is a metal tube with short legs. There is also a battery and an electronic device. Tom Finn opens the document. It shows the

layout of the oil rig and a schematic of the central computer system.

“This is a shaped charge,” Tom Finn tells Callahan, pointing to the tube.

“You need to get it right here,” he points to a small red ‘X’ marked on the chart. “It’s a non-flaming explosive. It’s only tiny, but it will ruin the boards without causing a fire.”

“Will that kill it?”

“This will blow the rig’s brains out. It’s a complicated part. It could take them months to replace it. But Expedient is a big company, and they are using other people’s money to fund this, so they’ll get it fixed, eventually.”

Tom Finn passes the black box across. Callahan closes the lid, nodding her head, gravely. Killing the rig has suddenly become very real.

“Do you trust your inside man?” Tom Finn asks.

“What?”

“The guy who is going to set the bomb for you. Is he trustworthy?”

Callahan’s mouth is dry and she can only make a rasping noise that more or less sounds like the word, “Oh, yes.”

“Okay. You let me know how you want to proceed.” Tom Finn hands her a business card. It is black, embossed with gold, almost as sleek and sage as the man himself.

Arguing with Sam

Callahan walks through Aquaria service corridors to the wharf and steps aboard Boaty McBoatface. Inside the cabin she lays the black case on the table, not noticing Sam resting on the forward bunk.

“Is that the bomb?” he asks, taking her by surprise.

Callahan gasps, clutching a hand to her chest. “Shit! You scared the hell out of me. What are you doing here?”

“Catching a few zees before my next mission. You got the Job Safety Assessment for that explosive device? You need form six.”

Callahan brings her finger to her lips. “What are you even talking about?” she hisses.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Sam says, with that whiny tone in his voice. “One minute you’re talking about getting a

bomb delivered and next thing some git in a helicopter sweeps you off your feet, leaving you with a bomb-sized gift.”

“What are you following me?”

“The fancy helicopter is a bit hard to miss. What are you doing here?”

“The red torch.”

“It’s a bit extreme, isn’t. A bomb.”

“Extreme. Are you kidding me? Everything will be destroyed if they come in. The laboratories, the technology we’ve built, the key exhibits. All gone. I’m not risking that.”

“What do you know about bombs?”

“I just follow instructions.”

“Which are what?”

“Put a harpoon in its brain.”

“Oh, what the hell,” Sam says, rising from the bunk. “I don’t care about my life, anyway. Let’s go.”

“No. It’s not you.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing to do with you, Sam. It’s a contingency plan.” She starts looking around the cabin.

“What are you looking for?”

“The red torch?”

“In the engine room. Port side.”

Callahan moves onto the back deck and lifts the hatch. She steps down below. A minute later she returns, without the torch. She’s shaking her head, frustrated. She moves back to the cabin with a grumpy look on her face.

“Oh, sorry, its over there,” Sam says pointing to a shelf.

Callahan takes the red torch and the bomb box, then departs the boat. Sam halts her departure with a question.

“What are you doing tonight?”

She looks at the floor, frustrated to have been asked the question. “I’m working.”

The Killing Tank

Later that night, Callahan is wearing her golden wetsuit and the weight belt and stands silently in the hallway of the coral exhibit. She has a coil of rope slung over her shoulder and a torch held in one hand. Her other hand is extended in front of her and she watches as it trembles. Tonight's task has her stressed out to the max. She tries to calm her erratic breathing, but her chest is tight with anxiety.

The hallway is dark except for the faint light radiating from the coral tanks. These are dimly lit with ultraviolet light, casting a kaleidoscope of brilliant colours. The reds, blues and greens waver on the ceiling as the beams of light are confused by the movement of the water surface in the tanks.

She switches on the torch and plays a red beam of light across the floor until she finds the metal loop attached to the trapdoor. She lifts the hatch vertical, ties one end of the rope to the loop, then lays the door flat on the ground. Below the trapdoor, on the lower floor, is the Killing Tank.

Below her, six bull sharks circle the hull of an old rowing boat that rests on a jumble of rocks, representing a ship wrecked on a reef. Callahan drops the unattached end of the rope into the open hull. Peering into the hull of the boat, she shivers as she contemplates what comes next.

The Sealioness walks quickly along the hallway and takes the fire stairs down one level to the Killing Tank. On the edge of the tank, there is a facemask and a regulator connected to an air hose. She slips the mask over her face, grips the regulator between her teeth,

then slips into the tank with the red torch. Standing on the sand, she pans around, observing the behaviour of the bull sharks. They are calm, which is good, but it's not the sharks that worry her.

Scattered around the sand are skulls and bones, representing the remains of the victims of the shipwreck. The human remains are real, provided to Aquaria through bequests of fans who passed away.

She moves across the sand to the hull of the boat and looks inside. The end of the rope is coiled on the sand in the middle. She plays the beam over the wooden hull and the rocks, looking for signs of life. It all seems empty and quiet, but she knows this is deceptive.

Callahan's mouth is dry and she gulps, fear gripping her. She closes her eyes and tries to steady her nerves, then pulls herself through a hole in the boat's hull.

She pans the torch around, then sees one of the things that she is most worried about. A moray eel, thick as an athlete's thigh, pokes its head out of a hole, watching her. Callahan freezes, listening to the bubbles clattering past her ears, conscious of her heart pounding. "Can the eel sense fear?" she wonders.

She wedges the torch into a crack in the rock, observing that the eel is more interested in it, than in her. Then she moves to the sand in the middle of the wreck and starts digging, forming a hollow that immediately starts to backfill. She digs faster to make progress.

Something touches her head and she gasps in panic. The regulator slips from her mouth and she grips it in place, frozen in horror. The moray eel wraps itself around her body and its face moves an inch from hers. It is sniffing

her, testing whether she is edible. Callahan moves her hand to the knife strapped to her leg. She doesn't generally kill the exhibits, but sometimes, it just has to be done.

The eel's blunt head is covered with blotchy, amphibian-like skin. A dark eye flicks around, examining her. It breathes by constantly opening and closing its mouth, drawing water over its gills. Sharp, needle-like teeth, brim inside the moray's mouth. Callahan grips the handle of the knife and slowly brings the blade from the scabbard. The eel turns its head and looks in the direction of a school of lionfish that have exited their hiding place to observe the commotion. The creatures have red and white vertical bands. Their deadly poisonous fin spines have a ribbon like skin that wavers as they move. They are beautiful and deadly,

unlike the eel which just plain ugly and deadly.

Callahan turns an eye to observe a large lionfish approaching. She's either going to get bitten by the eel or stung by the lionfish. Possibly both.

Gently, she raises her arm, holding the knife with the point aiming down.

Then, she releases her grip. The knife falls, glancing against the lionfish. It immediately flaps away from the knife. The movement captures the attention of the moray eel. In a flash, it unravels itself and darts towards the lion-fish, clamping its jaws on its tail. A struggle ensues as the lionfish tries to puncture the eel with its spines and the eel tries to sink its teeth further into the fish's body.

The creatures writhe on the bottom, tossing up a shower of sand. With this commotion taking place, Callahan starts to dig feverishly. Handful after handful

of sand is cast aside and she digs. Something moves in front of her, and a stonefish pokes its head out of the sand, right where her hands are.

“*Ugggh!*” she instinctively moves back in shock. Around her, the moray eel has attracted the attention of its mates and now the whole reef seems to come alive with eels. Callahan is flushed with terror, surrounded by creatures that could eat, bite, sting poison and kill her in seconds.

She holds one hand to the regulator, the other against her mask, closes her eyes and breathes deeply. As she hyperventilates, she fights the instinct that would have her immediately swim out of this terrible place and never return. But she is committed to her mission, and there is no alternative than to complete this task tonight. Now.

She moves her hand away from her mask and takes stock of the deadly

creatures moving around her. She pushes her hands into the sand and starts digging again. Then she finds what she is looking for - a hard surface. She quickly excavates the sand from around a metal box. It has a handle on the lid and a padlock, keeping the lid closed.

Callahan reaches up for the rope, just in time for one of the bull sharks to take it in its mouth. She tugs hard, but the shark is adamant not to lose its meal. It shakes its head and the rope is torn from Callahan's grip.

So she reaches down for the handle of the box and tries to move it toward the hole in the shipwreck. The box is incredibly heavy and she needs to stand over it to lift it from the sand.

With moray eels chasing lionfish, and stonefish moving around her feet, she hauls the metal box through the hole in the side of the boat and follows it. She

crouches on the sand, relieved to be in the realm of the bull sharks.

One of the sharks takes an interest in the box and she pushes it away as it rasps its teeth over the metal surface. Another shark bumps into her from behind, opening its mouth to lazily sample whether she is edible. She feels pressure on her leg and looks down to see blood in the water. *Damn!* She's been bitten. Now there's blood in the water.

The rope drifts into view. She grasps it and slips the end through the box handle, then ties a bowline. She moves quickly to the side of the tank and hauls herself out of the water. She pulls the mask off and sits on the side panting heavily, watching the sharks nose up to the side where she is sitting.

A shudder runs the length of her body and her stomach cramps. She holds a hand out in front of her and

sees that she his shaking violently.

Above the tank, the rope starts to sway and she sees that one of the sharks is mouthing the rope.

“Shit!” Callahan moves towards the fire exit and ascends to the UV Coral tanks. Standing at the trap door, she hauls on the rope. A shark grabs the box in its mouth, forcing Callahan into a desperate tug-of-war. “Get off it, you bastard!” she shouts, waving the rope from side to side.

The box comes free of the shark’s mouth and she quickly pulls the rope, hand over hand, raising the box out of the water. The bull sharks swirl around, their dorsal fins slashing the water.

Callahan pulls the box through the hole in the floor, then plonks it on the floor. She closes the trapdoor, and slumps against the wall, exhausted.

At one end of the hallway, light appears as the door is pulled open. The

silhouette of a man occupies the space for a second before all goes dark again.

Callahan holds her breath, unsure what to do next.

The man switches on a torch and pans it around the hallway. Then the beam sweeps across her as she sits there surrounded by rope, with the metal box at her feet. The loom of the torch illuminates her face and she raises her arm to block the light. “Hi Phil,” she says.

“Oh, it’s Miss Callahan,” says the old security guard. “Is everything okay, Lucy?”

“Oh, I’m fine, you know?”

“You must have cut your leg on the coral,” Phil says, playing the torch over the hole in her wetsuit where the bull shark had sampled her. “And you’ve lost your knife.” He turns his attention to the coral tank, peering inside. “How the devil did you get into the tank?”

“Phil, could you do something for me?”

“Certainly, Miss Callahan.”

“Could you get me a trolley?”

Phil turns his torch onto the metal box. “Yes, Miss.”

“And Phil, one other thing.” She raises a finger to her lips and says, “Our secret.”

“Yes, Miss. Of course. I like our little secrets.”

Callahan watches as Phil moves away to get the trolley. When he has exited the hallway, she retrieves a little key that is tucked into a pocket on her wetsuit. She pushes the key into the padlock and the lock falls open.

She raises the lid and peers inside. Even in the low light, the gold bars glisten brightly. Six blocks of bullion, as perfect as they day they were forged.

Finance Guru Stacey Keiser

Callahan lays the six gold bars out on the floor of her room and takes a photo of them with her smartphone. She texts the photo to Tom Finn with the words, “Is this enough?”

The reply comes back within fifteen minutes. “I’ll pick you up @ 2”.

At the allotted time, Tom Finn pilots the black helicopter onto the Aquaria chopper pad, and Callahan steps in. Once they are underway, Callahan asks where they are going.

“We’re going to see finance guru Stacey Keiser.”

“Finance?”

“You have to hit them where it hurts.”

Keiser’s office occupies the top floor of a commercial tower that overlooks the river. The secretary walks them along a corridor on either side of which there are rows of office cubicles

occupied by busy workers. At the end of the hallway is a wooden double door with wrought iron frame. The secretary shows them inside. It looks like something out of Game of Thrones. “Sam would like this place,” Callahan thinks.

Callahan and Tom Finn enter the corporate suite, the most notable feature of which is a magnificent fish tank embedded into a wall. Intrigued, Callahan approaches the tank, oblivious to anything else.

It’s a freshwater aquarium about twelve feet long and stretching from waist height to the ceiling. It contains a log with and a lush forest of vivid water plants behind. The sole animal occupant is a large adult arowana, a sliver fish with big scales. It hovers motionless in the tank. The tank is of the scale and quality one would expect of an Aquaria exhibit.

Callahan peers into the tank, studying the fish like a doctor conducting triage on a patient, immersed in the fine detail of its scales and gills. It looks healthy and, so far as fish can be, happy.

The reflection of a woman who looks much like herself disturbs Callahan from her fish watching. She has a brisk intensity, and a sense of purpose.

“Do you like our fish?” Stacey Keiser’s hair is short and artificially bleached. She wears a white cotton shirt, a short dress and black high heels. She has a calm demeanour and seems perfectly suited to the environment that she has created.

“Do you mind if I see the filtration?” Callahan asks.

“Please.”

Callahan opens the wooden doors on the cabinet under the tank and peruses the pumps, pipes and containers

through which the tank water circulates. It's very well put together.

Kaiser glances at Tom Finn, who shrugs in reply.

"Do you love your fish?" Callahan asks, after she has completed her assessment.

"I do. It brings me luck."

"Well that's a good." She allows the financier to direct her to a lounge setting made of leather and stainless steel.

"Can I offer you coffee or..."

"No, we are just here on business," Callahan says.

"Lucy wants to sink an oil rig," says Tom Finn.

"Not literally. Economically. I want to bankrupt Expedient Energy."

"I hear that name a lot, these days." Keiser draws a computer keyboard onto her lap and her fingers play swiftly across the keys. She visits the

Expedient Energy website and activates a data projector that shines the financial charts onto the wall. “*Hmmm*. Very bullish. Do you have any resources?”

“Bullion,” Tom Finn says.

“Another good start. How much?”

Tom Finn retrieves his mobile and shows Keiser the photograph of the gold bars side by side.

“So, what am I looking at here?”

“I think that’s six by 400 troy ounce, triple nine bars,” Tom Finn, says.

Keiser opens a spreadsheet and rapidly types some numbers. “So you have about \$2 million in gold bullion. We can work with that. Why don’t we invent a scenario and explore some possibilities?” Keiser rests back in her seat, interlaces her fingers, closes her eyes and goes into her financial Zen space for a little while.

Callahan glances at Tom Finn, unsure what happens next. Then Keiser opens

her eyes and starts typing numbers onto the spreadsheet.

“Okay, so let’s transfer the gold to the holding vault. Then we take the deposit receipt for \$2 million and set up an offshore trust with a trading account. Let’s call it the Locust Fund. For argument’s sake.”

“Why would you call it the Locust Fund?” Callahan asks.

“It’s just a name,” Tom Finn tells her.

“Then let’s name it after a marine organism.”

“The Arowana Fund,” says Keiser.

“That’s a freshwater fish.”

“The Vampire Squid Fund,” Tom Finn chuckles.

“Vampire squid?” asks Callahan.

“It’s a term for predatory banking practices,” Keiser says.

“I happen to be quite partial to the *Vampyro infernalis*,” Callahan tells them, seriously.

Kaiser and Tom Finn shoot each confused glances again.

“That’s the scientific name for the Vampire squid.”

“I don’t think that the regulators in the British Virgin Islands would accept Vampyro—whatever you just said, as a name for a fund,” Keiser says. “The offshore banking system may be systemically corrupt and corrosive to the real economy, but it is quite conservative in many ways.”

“Shorten it,” suggests Tom Finn.

“To?”

“Let’s call it the Pyronalis Fund,” Callahan suggests. “That’s a contraction of the two words.”

“Okay, the Pyronalis Fund, it is. Then the fund ties in with a merchant bank that doesn’t mind to operate in the grey zone.”

“Which bank?” asks Callahan.

“I’d say this one,” Keiser waves her hand to indicate the room that they are sitting in.

“Okay.”

“So we leverage the gold and hedge, so that will give us, say, \$20 million.”

“Leverage and hedge?” Callahan asks.

“Borrow against it and insure the loan.” Tom Finn, tells her.

“So, the Pyronalis Fund buys \$18 million in Expedient Energy stock and puts \$2 million aside for a short position.”

“Okay, back up. I’m lost,” Callahan holds up a hand. “You are going to use my gold to buy shares in Expedient Energy? Why?”

“Then you have some influence over them,” Tom Finn tells her. “And when their share price increases, you make money, and if the share price decreases you make money.”

“That’s right,” Keiser says. “As Expedient Energy gets closer to producing oil and they raise more capital from the Aquaria Bonds, the share price will rise. Then, at the appropriate moment, following some sufficiently bad news, the Pyronalis Fund will liquidate its entire position in an overly dramatic manner.”

“And what does that mean?”

Kaiser says, “Sell everything in a hurry and make a big fuss about it. Then, all going to plan, the loss of the Pyronalis Fund will spook the other investors into selling, and the stock price will fall. And then we’ll be in a good position.”

“How so?”

Tom Finn explains, “The further the Expedient Energy price falls, the more you’ll make on the short.”

“It all sounds very illegal.”

“In finance, everything is legal unless you get caught,” Keiser says. “And if

you get caught, the fines are less than the payout. So there's that. It's better not to get caught."

Callahan stands and walks to the aquarium. She presses her face against the glass. The arowana moves towards her and they observe each other. The fish is motionless, apart from the slight motion of its pectoral fins and its eyes that swivel to and fro, examining her.

The Sealioness inhales deeply, then turns back to the conversation. "Let me be very clear," says exasperated, "I'm not here to make money or to risk getting caught. I'm here to put a f**king harpoon through the brain of a sea monster."

"You won't kill that company with just \$2 million," Keiser says. "But you can wound it."

"That's right," says Tom Finn. "And you'll be in a stronger position to set up another deal and wound it again, later."

“I don’t want to wound it!” Callahan raises her hands, frustrated. “A wounded animal is dangerous. It attacks unpredictably. Don’t you understand? I want to kill it outright.” She slaps the back of her hand into her palm.

Her action elicits no response, just blank looks. She tries another tack.

“Imagine that you are on a commercial tuna boat,” she suggests. “A long-liner. You have to kill a sashimi-grade yellowfin so that the flesh isn’t damaged from its death rattle. How would you do that?”

Keiser raises her hands, indicating that she doesn’t even know what the question means. Tom Finn rests back in his chair, impressed with Callahan’s approach.

“Pithing,” Callahan says. “You cut a hole in its skull, then run a length of stainless steel wire along its vertebrae, all the way to the tail.” She clicks her

fingers for effect. “Dead in an instant. That’s what I want to do to Expedient Energy. I don’t want to wound it and make money so that I can wound it again. I want it pithed!”

“You don’t have enough capital to pith that oil company,” Keiser tells her, flatly.

“Then rethink your scenario, Stacey Keiser. Leverage and short my 400 troy ounce, triple nine bars harder. That’s your job.”

She turns her attention to Tom Finn. He’s grinning stupidly. “Okay, sky pilot. I’m all done here.”

Prepping for a Mission

Back at Aquaria, Callahan stands in the basement holding a waterproof bag, and thinking through the meeting with Keiser. She had been buoyed with hope after first meeting Tom Finn. He had given her so much clarity and convinced her that it was possible to deliver a fatal blow to the oil company. She found the money, as requested, at great risk to her own life. But it seems the best that money could buy was an investment strategy to get rich from tormenting the oil company. What a waste of hope and effort that was. And Todd put her onto Tom Finn, so maybe his judgement wasn't all it is cracked up to be.

The only positive outcome is that she's now armed with an explosive device. The Sealioness is on her own

again, and now she has a bomb. “Damn them all,” she growls.

She moves to a darkened corner where there is a large shape under a tarpaulin. She drops her bag and takes a corner of the tarp in her hand. For a moment she halts, undecided. Then she drags the tarp onto the floor.

In front of her is a one-person mini-submarine cradled on a metal frame. The ‘torpedo’ is three metres long, a fibreglass hull with a raked-back perspex canopy. It features inbuilt compressed air tanks, lights, video and a powerful lithium-ion battery pack and electric motor. The torpedo is custom built by Aquaria engineers to Callahan’s specifications. It’s been field tested, but yet to find a mission worthy of its capabilities. Tonight, that changes.

Callahan turns her attention to her bag. She unzips it and checks the contents. There is a pair of Expedient

Energy coveralls and ID tag delivered by Teller as he had promised. There is the bomb case, a towel, her wetsuit, weight belt and mobile phone. That's all she needs.

Callahan straddles the submarine and runs through a full systems test. She switches the headlamp on, then off, activates the nose camera and watches the monitor show display the vision. She hits the vent button and listens to a quiet rush of air. Then she moves the throttle and the propeller spins swiftly. The battery is fully charged, the air cylinder is full and the mask attached to the hose fits properly. Everything works.

So the equipment is ready. Does that necessarily mean that she will proceed? No, it means that she has an option to proceed. It's time to think like a strategist. Go or no go? How does one make that decision?

Callahan thinks back to her boozy nights with Todd when he would tell her about military strategy. She remembers some salient points. In the book *On War*, von Clausewitz says that one must decide to trade the certainties of not going to war with the uncertainties of going to war. The certainty of not going to war against Expedient Energy is that they will destroy Aquaria. But maybe going to war will lead to a worse outcome. But what could be worse? Callahan wonders. If Aquaria is lost, her life is over anyway. There must be another argument. The Chinese guy, what did he say? In the ancient text *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu says that a battle unfought is a battle won.

“How do I not fight this battle?” Callahan asks aloud. “Tex Drillerson. Go and see Tex Drillerson. Tell him to stop.”

Callahan retrieves her phone from the waterproof bag, then slides the bag under the trolley with her foot. She throws the tarpaulin over the torpedo and departs the basement.

Tillerson's Office

A few days pass before Callahan is able to secure a meeting with Tex Drillerson. She steps out of a taxi across the road from the Expedient Energy corporate headquarters and looks up at the ominous building façade. The structure is black marble with bronze tinted windows. It looks like the visor of a killer robot, impregnable, oppressive. All it lacks is murder holes drizzled with gore.

The sign reads Expedient Energy – black words against a blood-red background. Security lights burn brightly, even though it is the middle of the day.

She approaches the entrance, expecting the glass door to slide open. Instead, a biometric monitor flashes, collecting video, still and thermal images of her. A metallic voice crackles

from a speaker. “State your name and purpose of your visit.”

Callahan moves close to the speaker panel and says, “Death to all robots.”

A few seconds later, a human voice asks, “State your business here?”

“I’m Lucy Callahan, here to see Darth Drillerson.”

The door slides open revealing two big security guards wearing combat gear and carrying AR15 automatic weapons.

“Identification,” grunts a guard, holding out a hand, covered by a fingerless glove.

Callahan retrieves her driver’s license from her shark leather handbag and hands it over. The guard looks at the photo and then studies her face. He returns the card then instructs her, “Arms up.”

Callahan scowls as she is patted down for weapons. “Oh, boy,” she thinks, as

she grits her teeth. “Some people must really want to whack Drillerson.”

Next, the guard escorts her to an elevator. He hits the button and steps back waiting for it to arrive. An agonising period passes while the lift descends. Callahan studies the details of the security guard’s hand resting on the weapon. Eventually, the door slides open and she steps in.

As the doors close she heaves a long sigh. The elevator doesn’t feel like a Supermax prison. Indeed, it is plush, scented, even, and Vivaldi Four Seasons plays quietly. Elevator music with class. It reaches the top floor, and the door slides open revealing an opulent lobby.

There is no receptionist behind the desk, but there is a water fountain, a coffee table and chairs, and a goldfish bowl. Callahan investigates the fish. It is small, orange with a double tail. There is no gravel or weed in the tank, just the

remains of uneaten food on the bottom. The water has a tinge to it, a sign that water quality is poor due to excess nutrient. Callahan sniffs the water, detecting a stale smell. She peers at the fish intently, and sees the first signs of white spot.

Her triage is interrupted by a robotic voice saying, “Mr. Drillerson will see you now.” There is the sound of a door sliding open, around the corner.

Callahan approaches Drillerson’s office cautiously, peering inside. The room is large and rich with the trappings of excess money. There is a suite of thick red-leather armchairs, a lawyer’s bookshelf, and a Georgian era clock. Seated at the large redwood table is the CEO of Expedient Energy, Tex Drillerson. Behind him, on the wall is an old musket and the words: Republican Patriot.

Drillerson stands. He's in his sixties, six foot three, well-fed and immaculately groomed. He looks like a poster boy for wealthy baby-boomers. His hair is so perfectly cut that the barber might have just departed the room. He has the eyes of a confidence trickster.

"Sit. Sit. Sit," he says, waving his hands enthusiastically.

Callahan is reminded of her visit to the lawyer's office, and how by sitting, she had felt the lawyer tower over her. It made her feel uncomfortable. She remains standing.

"Now, let me think," Drillerson says, striking the classic pose, finger on chin, palm holding elbow. "When was the last time I saw you? *Abhh*, yes. You were getting first prize for your silly fish tank project while my little boy, Billie-bob, got a big fail. You looked so pretty, standing there in your little

schoolgirl's uniform and pigtails. Billiebob, now he was real upset. You stole his prize."

"Hardly," Callahan laughs derisively. "Your son submitted a proposal for an oil field on Aquaria Bay, that was hardly going to win a sustainability prize."

"Oh, sustainability," Drillerson waves his hand, dismissively. "It's like roller blades. It comes in for a while, then it goes out. Then it has a little resurgence. Then it's... you know... Yoyos."

"What are you even talking about?"

"My little boy came home crying, Lucy. And I made him a promise. We'll get it back. We'll get your bay back. And we did. Let me show you."

Drillerson retrieves a remote control from his desk, and points it towards a darkened corner of the room. He ushers Callahan towards a large, 3D, scale-model of Aquaria Bay and the

Aquaria complex that flickers into view as the overhead lights come on.

The diorama is like one of the models that property developers use in display homes. It is very detailed. The sea is represented by clear blue Perspex, with tiny ripples representing the waves.

Below the sea there is an accurate representation of the bay's bathymetry, including the seamount. On the water's surface is the oilrig and below it a collection of pipes that run along the seabed and connect to blowout preventers. Lots of them, spread out across the slopes of the seamount, like an invading army annihilating the marine science experiments and wildlife.

Callahan is taken aback at the extent of the undersea disturbance. She had thought that there was only one well, but instead, there are dozens.

There are rig tenders and other working boats on the sea surface. To add either authenticity or salt in her wounds, there is a sheen representing an oil spill on the sea surface and a vessel making a half-hearted attempt to put a containment boom around it.

“This is what Aquaria was made for, don’t you see,” says Drillerson, enthusiastically. “This is Billie-bob’s vision. Energy. Energy for the economy. It’s all under here.” He indicates the seamount with his hand. “We just have to get it over to here.” He moves around the model to point to the railway line adjacent to the former algae biofuel facility. “And look. Right on time.” A model train chugs along the rails and pulls up next to the tank farm. “Fill her up, Gus!” Drillerson says aloud. He pretends to pull a rope attached to a steam whistle. “Toot! Toot!” He turns to Callahan, beaming,

“Isn’t it wonderful what we have done? You laid the ground work. I go and get the oil.”

“We? There is no we, you goddam sociopath! It’s a world leading marine science precinct with a ten-year baseline.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that.”
Drillerson waves a hand dismissively.
“You can build another one. You’re good at it.”

Callahan steps away from the diorama, suddenly feeling overwhelmed. It’s as though she were looking at someone familiar who had been taken over by a skin disease. The intimate detail of the diorama is stunning. The pipeline, that has been repurposed to carry oil, looks just like the real thing, even the walkway has individual slats indicating the wooden decking. The shape and colour of the vegetation on the hill is accurate.

What is most apparent is what is missing. The solar panels have been removed from the aquarium roof, and the outdoor tanks are empty of water. Inside the sealion compound, a garbage truck tips its receptacle, emptying a load of trash into the empty pool.

Callahan had found it hard to believe Teller's story about Expedient Energy's plans to repurpose her infrastructure, even when she was looking at the charts. But, seeing the 3D model, she knows it's true.

Her heart sinks, and her mouth falls open in despair. She feels light-headed and takes a wavering step back. She wants to get out of there. She moves to the sliding door, but it doesn't open.

"You should come to the rig tonight," Drillerson calls out. "John Priestly is going to bless it at 8pm. I could get you and a plus one some tickets if you like. Do you have a plus one?"

Callahan slams her foot against the door. “Open the f***ing door!” she bellows.

The door slides open and she steps through to the lobby and hits the button on the elevator.

On the reception desk without the receptionist, the poor goldfish looks in her direction, opening and closing its mouth, almost as if it were pleading for her to help. The elevator slides open, but she doesn’t step inside. Instead, she places her sharkskin handbag on the reception desk and retrieves a plastic bag from inside. She empties the contents of her handbag into the plastic bag. Then she tilts the goldfish bowl and pours some of the manky water into her handbag. She moves over to the water fountain and adds some fresh water. Then she scoops the goldfish out of the bowl and drops it into her bag. Finally, she takes the plastic bag

containing her personal effects, places it gently on the surface of the water in her bag, and then pulls the zip closed. She hangs the shark-skin handbag over her shoulder as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

She slips through the elevator door just as it is closing. Inside, she exhales deeply, relieved to be moving away from Drillerson's delusional psychosis. The classical music and aroma is soothing, but she wills the elevator to go faster. Finally, it touches down and the door opens, but not the door she entered through, a door behind her. She looks out onto the manicured garden at the back of the Expedient Energy corporate office.

She moves quickly off the grounds, onto the street, and walks at a fast pace. Holding the handbag swollen with goldfish water close to her side, she

puts as much ground between her and Drillerson's death star as she can.

She's thinking back to von Clausewitz. She is now convinced that the uncertainties of going to war are preferable to all other options. What else did von Clausewitz say? The closest analogy to war is gambling in a casino.

"Time to roll the dice," growls the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay as she marches towards the coast.

Visiting the Rig

Callahan gets back to Aquaria before dark and goes straight to the basement. For the first ten minutes, she paces back and forth ranting. Then she settles and performs another check of the torpedo. Everything works. But it is too early to go yet. Darkness has yet to fall.

She strips off her clothes and dons her gold wetsuit, and slumps into a dark corner with her arm turned so that she can see her wrist watch. Her teeth clench and anger irradiates off of her like heat from a lava flow. Her breathing is shallow, her face knotted with intense concentration as she thinks through everything that has happened since she first heard the name Expedient Energy.

Eventually, thinking this way exhausts her, and she rests back and breathes

deeply. Finally, calmness comes over her and she relaxes.

Her phone rings and she sees that Sam is calling. She looks at his name displayed on the screen and hovers a finger over the button to take the call. The ringtone resonates through the cavernous basement. She doesn't know where Sam fits in, anymore. She had no expectation of him to march ahead and take care of things, but he's not even at her side. She's fighting for her life and he's moping around and bitching about not getting enough attention. She doesn't need that. What was she doing with him in the first place? The phone stops ringing, and within a few seconds Sam has departed her thoughts.

She glances at her watch. It's dark outside now, and shortly, the blessing ceremony that Drillerson referred to will be underway. That should be a distraction. Callahan stands and moves

to the torpedo. She zips up the waterproof bag and stows it into the torpedo. Good to go.

Then she says out loud, “Thank you, Mr. Drillerson, I accept your invitation to your drilling rig party. And yes, I will be accompanied by a plus one. His name is Mr. Shape Charge.”

She moves over to the wall and takes hold of the chains hanging off the overhead, electric winch. She drags the winch along the steel girder and lowers the hooks using the hand-held control. She connects these to the torpedo, then hits the up button on the control. The chain clinks through the pulley and the torpedo rises from the floor. Callahan pushes the torpedo and it moves, the electric winch above sliding along the girder. Underneath the end of the girder, there is a hole in the floor, filled with seawater. The moon-pool is the access way to the Aquaria Bay.

Callahan hits the down button and the torpedo lowers into the water. It is positively buoyant although most of the body sits below the surface. Callahan slips into the water and detaches the hooks. Then she straddles the torpedo, affixes the face mask, activates the control panel and rolls her thumb over the button that activates the air vent.

She takes a long, deep breath. For a moment, she is indecisive. Fear creeps into her mind. It's a premonition that she will not see another morning; that her work ends tonight. Is it worth the risk? Is there something that she has overlooked? For a moment she is paralysed by doubt, but these confused thoughts don't last long, because racing towards the shore of her subconscious, is a tsunami. A roaring wave of anger slams down and drags her fear out to sea.

She hits the vent and bubbles pour out of the torpedo. The mini-sub sinks and salt water rises up her visor. Then all she can see is blackness. She hits a button and the torpedo headlamp switches on. The concrete tunnel illuminates. It runs thirty meters, beyond that is the open sea. She powers forwards. By the time the torpedo exits the tunnel, she is travelling at full speed. She lowers herself below the Perspex canopy to reduce drag and the speed increases appreciably. She watches the gauges glowing in the dark water. Compass heading. The numbers show the distance to the rig descending as she gets closer and closer.

The water is warm tonight. The hot blob is getting closer, , Callahan thinks. How long can the ocean stay alive with so many assaults coming from the human race? Acidification. Overheating. Overfishing. Pollution. Is

there anything good that the humans have ever done for the ocean? Other than research it, to understand how it works. Understand how it is dying.

It takes twenty minutes for the mini-sub to cross the bay and arrive over the seamount. It shows up on the sonar and Callahan slows the torpedo to a crawl, ten metres beneath the surface. It's dark, but the water moving around the legs of the rig causes a faint shimmer of algae, making a hazy glow in the periphery of her vision. She brings the torpedo to the surface next to one of the legs, adding tiny bursts of air to the flotation tank so that her head comes to the surface inch by inch.

She is alone down here. The pontoon is unoccupied. She drives the torpedo to the pontoon and lashes it to a cleat. She vents some air so that it is negatively buoyant, and lets it hang beneath. She hauls herself from the

water and drags the waterproof bag onto the deck. After a quick dry off with the towel, she pulls on the coveralls and helmet and affixes her ID badge. She stows the bag under the steps. Then with the little black bomb case, she ascends to deck of the oil rig.

On the third step, she stops. “I’ve forgotten something.”

She wracks her brains. What is it? She looks down to see the toe of her neoprene booties. No safety boots.

“Shit!” she is motionless for too long, unsure what to do. Then she breaks free, pressing on, regardless. She gets to the top of the stairs and keeps moving.

The rig is crowded with dozens of people. There are a lot of workers wearing coveralls, but also oil executives and dignitaries and the media. John Priestly walks around the drill deck flicking water from a bowl and muttering something that sounds

like a mix between Latin and drunken gibberish. Close to him, on a podium, watching proudly, is Tex Drillerson. Drillerson is clapping his hands gently in time with a tune playing inside his own head.

With the crowd distracted by Priestley's voodoo, Callahan slips inside the superstructure. On the wall is a map of the rig and she spends a few moments familiarising herself with the layout and the location of the computer room. Someone enters the hallway and she freezes. The stonefish returns to her stomach and she feels totally unprepared for what comes next. What the f**k is she doing here?

“Hi,” says the stranger, as he passes. Callahan exhales, then catches sight of her reflection in the glass of the display case. She sees the helmet and the coveralls; she looks like one of them. She calms and the stonefish shrinks.

She locates the computer room on the chart then makes her way there. When she arrives, she looks up and down the hallway to confirm that she is alone. She peers through the small window in the door and observes the rack of servers with twinkling lights.

To one side is the big cabinet that contains the mainframe computer. She swipes into the room, moves quickly across the white tile floors, and slips behind the mainframe. She pulls open the metal door on the back of the computer cabinet and slips inside.

The space between the hardware is quite narrow but just big enough to work in. She lays the black case on the floor and lifts the lid. She retrieves the folder paper inside and reviews the diagram for where the explosive device is to be placed. There is a panel that needs to be removed. It is attached with four screws. She turns back to the box

for the screwdriver and then goes completely motionless, staring at the foam.

Her mouth falls open. There is an empty space where the shaped charge is supposed to be.

“What the f**k?” she hisses. The battery is there. The electronic thing is there. The toolkit, but no shaped charge.

“What the f**k?” She draws her hand over her face, trying to control the rage that is growing inside her.

Where the hell is it? Then she remembers her conversation with Sam, how he had sent her to the engine room for the red torch when it was actually on the shelf in the cabin.

She retrieves her mobile phone and rings Sam. He answers immediately, almost like he was waiting on the call.

Callahan whispers curtly, trying not to shout, “Guess where I am, Sam?”

“In a bubble bath, waiting for me.”

“I’m goddam computer room on a goddam oil rig. And guess what I don’t have?”

“Lipstick.”

“Where’s my goddam bomb, Sam?”

“I pinched it.”

Callahan presses the phone against her forehead, her whole body trembling with rage. “I am unable to complete my mission because of you.”

“Listen to you,” Sam chuckles.

“Unable to complete your mission. I told you this would happen if you hang around with Action Man.”

“You’ve f**ked me.”

“You shouldn’t even be there.”

“Who the hell are you to tell me that?”

“The man who loves you. I do what I think’s best for you.”

“What you think, Sam?” Callahan pulls the phone away from her ear, shaking her head vigorously, trying to

dispel the debilitating fury. She brings the phone to her ear again and growls, “Let me relieve you of that thinking duty, right now, by making it really clear how you ought to behave.”

Sam is silent, so she continues. “As soon as the oil starts flowing through this rig, my entire life’s work is wiped out. Finished! You understand?”

Still no word from Sam. He is rendered mute, taken aback by the tone of Callahan’s voice.

“Preventing that outcome is more important to me - to me, Sam - than my own existence. And you are now standing in my way. Keep the f**k away from me!” She ends the call and looks around the computer room, gritting her teeth.

“F**k!”

A rumbling noise starts to reverberate through the computer room as the big diesel engines come into life. Callahan

suddenly feels vulnerable, wanting to be away from the rig. She replaces the paper in the box, and gingerly steps out of the computer cabinet.

It seems as though the whole rig is trembling she moves out of the computer room and hastens along the hallway towards the door onto the deck. Outside, there is an atmosphere of excitement amongst the crowd of people. Some have their heads tilted back, looking at the top of the derrick.

Up above, a metal cable rolls through pulleys and a section of drill stem rises and moves into position.

Callahan halts, stunned. It's finally happening. The drilling has begun. She moves silently to the stairwell, descends quickly. On the pontoon, she strips off her coveralls and helmet, stuffs them into the waterproof bag, then slips into the water next to the torpedo.

She pulls the visor over her face, activates the torpedo's electrics and then unties the rope. The torpedo hovers in mid water. Under the pontoon, Callahan feels as though she is back in familiar territory. The ocean pulsates around her as the huge diesel engines power the rotating gear that turns the drill bit. The vibration from the engines resonates through the steel legs into the sea.

Suddenly, huge mercury vapour lamps switch on, flooding the underside of the rig with light. Callahan sees the drill bit penetrate the water surface and a terrible grinding noise reverberates through her body.

The drill bit is like something out of a terminator movie, with rows of overlapping teeth rolling and grinding against each other. The metallic colour of the drill stem and the teeth resembles the colour scheme of the

marine world, looking almost like the scales of fish. But no fish has such intense strength that it can chew through rock as the drill bit is designed to do.

The drill bit is not from nature, it is spawned from the vast industrial machine called the petroleum industry, and it can only serve to destroy nature.

Callahan rolls her thumb over the button for the air vent and a stream of bubbles pours out of the torpedo. She slowly sinks, in time with the descent of the drill bit. As she descends, the illumination from the rig lights dims and the drill bit is visible just from the subtle flare of phosphorescent algae being sucked into the rolling jaws.

At ten metres, Callahan switches on the headlights and moves the torpedo closer, continually venting to stay next to the drill as it descends. Then the drill halts, and the water resonates with the

clanking noise as the roustabouts connect another drill stem.

There is a whirring noise as the drill bit starts up again. The grinding teeth begin their descent again. After another period of decent, the drill halts again as another drill stem is attached to the top of the string.

She is at a hundred feet depth now, the seabed close. It is illuminated by the headlamps on the torpedo. It is a beautiful myriad of coloured coral, a complex ecosystem made of many hundreds of different species all coexisting in the living space.

Callahan moves a finger over the control panel on the torpedo and switches on the video camera. The monitor shows the metal teeth gnashing together as they pass the last few inches of open water before engaging with the living tissue on the upper surface of the coral reef.

The head of the drill bit strikes the reef grinding through a stand of soft corals and anemones. Instantly, the flesh pulverised into a mist of milky water and white flecks. Water billows from the site of the injury, carrying with it a cloud of ground-up coral. Fish dart out of the way and swim anxiously around the periphery of the cloud, lest the fine particles clog their gills. The drill stem slides into this hole two or three meters, below which point, the drill bit strikes rock and the noise changes. The pounding, rotating action of the drill bit pummels the rock, reverberating like a violent earthquake.

Then, all around, it starts snowing. Tiny particles of ground-up coral are falling from above. The coral has been sucked up through the inner pipe and is now being expelled over the side of the rig. Then the snow changes colour as the crushed coral in the drill stem

empties and in its place is fine ground rock. The rock particles are smaller and denser than the coral, and they fall slowly, settling like ash.

Callahan moves the torpedo around to allow the nose camera to record the whole expanse of reef being rained on by finely ground rock. Reef fish dart to and fro in panic as their habitat is destroyed. An octopus crawls out of a rock and walks nimbly away from the disaster zone.

Callahan watches the destruction, with morbid fascination. All around the world, thousands and thousands of rigs are wrecking the same havoc on the marine environment. The pulsing, grinding sound reverberates in her stomach, jiggling the resident stonefish. She feels an overwhelming sense of loss, failure and despair as the drill spins and the grey rock dust falls from above.

She vents the air tank and the torpedo nestles in amongst the corals and weed. Callahan slumps forward over the controls of the torpedo. Overwhelmed, and feeling as if the game is lost, she cries. All alone, at depth, in just her wetsuit and full facemask, the tears pour out and collect on the inside of her visor.

She watches as the octopus walks towards her. It is a surreal scene it helps break her out of her misery. The octopus wraps a tentacle around her booty. Feeling safe, crawls up her wetsuit onto her lap. It gets itself comfortable there, then its body changes colour to match the wetsuit. The now-golden octopus raises a tentacle and lightly touches the suckers against her cheek. Callahan rests her hands on the octopus and they both sit there watching the drill assault the reef.

With her new companion, Callahan falls into a deep melancholy. The bubbles escape her the rumbling noise of the rig lulls her into a meditative state.

White Shark

With a start, Callahan's eyes flicker open. She is surrounded by a cloud of black ink as the octopus dashes off her lap and out of sight.

Immediately, she's confused. A chill of fear flashes through her body. Where is she? Why is she underwater in the dark? Is this a dream? Why did she wake?

The stonefish adjusts itself in her guts, rubbing the sharp tips of its killing spines against the inside of her stomach.

Callahan is alerted to a white shimmer in the periphery of her vision. She grasps the throttle on the torpedo and spins the machine so that the headlamps point in that direction. Just in time, she catches a glance of the distinctive form of an adult great white shark. Then it's beyond the range of the light. It's a big one, six metres, a female.

Probably drawn by curiosity to the drill bit and now casing out a fresh meal.

Callahan inhales and feels her chest is tight. That's what woke her, it is getting hard to breathe. She snatches up the gauge attached to the scuba tank and sees that she down to less than 50 bars. She's out of air!

"Shit," she lifts the dive computer and checks the details. She is overdue for a decompression stop. Well, that's not going to happen. She has fallen asleep on the seabed and now must pay the price. Her options have narrowed to death by drowning, shark bite, or decompression sickness, the bends.

She throttles the torpedo and turns towards Aquaria Bay. She adjusts the trim fins to ascend to thirty feet and stay there for as long as she has air to do so. Once the air runs out, she'll go for the surface. But that will hurt. She has been at depth for so long that as

she approaches the surface, tiny bubbles of nitrogen gas will form in her blood and congregate around her joints, wracking her with pain. If she is lucky, she'll survive. She switches off the lights to conserve power and pushes the torpedo at full speed.

Water forces past her as she picks up speed. The depth gauge shows a gradual ascent and she's relieved that she is not feeling any pain yet.

Then suddenly, a shape looms nearby, illuminated by a shimmer of phosphorous. The white shark swoops in from the dark sea. Callahan catches a glimpse of its triangular teeth as it passes a few feet from her head. The teeth don't connect with her, but its pectoral fin snags on the hose leading from the tank to her visor. In an instant, the mask is ripped from her face and trails behind her in the flow of water. She reaches over her head to

grasp the hose, but she can't locate it. Then she loses purchase from the torpedo and tumbles upside down in midwater. Out of breath, she hooks her fingers around the clasp of her weight belt.

However, rather than ditch the belt, a thought flashes through her mind.

"Sam gave me this weight belt. It's a feature of our relationship. I can't just ditch it."

She leaves the belt on, and claws for the surface. With all her might, she draws the sea past her body, her feet kicking wildly for speed. She exhales what little air she has in her lungs as the gas expands. The nitrogen bubbles expand too, and the pain comes on. The closer she comes to the surface, the more intense the pain is. And yet she must ascend or drown. The pain stabs hard and her limbs seize up. A massive headache comes on and she grasps her

face, grimacing. Then she blacks out, ten feet below the surface.

The white shark comes back to sample her. It rises up from below and pushes its hard, pointed snout into her belly. Waving its head from side to side, it samples her with the electric and olfactory organs built into its snout. It senses wetsuit and mammal flesh.

The force of the shark brings Callahan to the surface and as soon as the weight of the water is off her, she instinctively inhales, flooding her body with life-giving oxygen.

Grimacing against the pain, she cocks her arm, and when the moment is right, swings her fist against the shark's snout. It is not enough to harm it, but sufficient to surprise. The shark recedes, and Callahan inhales deeply, balancing her body so that she can float without having to move her arms or legs. Wracked in pain, she floats on the

sea surface, exhausted, her head swimming in delirium.

The white shark comes back, brushing her with the tips of its pectoral fin. Then it goes deep for a while. When it returns, it is emboldened and it rises with its mouth open. It brings Callahan's torso into its mouth and clamps lightly on her body, disturbed by the taste of wetsuit, and still uncertain if there is a decent meal to be had.

Callahan feels the pressure of the shark's teeth on her body and the pricks as its teeth puncture her wetsuit and skin. Grimacing in pain, she lifts an arm, brings it across her body and curls her fingers around the buckle of the weight belt. The pain stabs in her elbows, wrist and finger joints. She lifts the buckle and the weight-belt slips off her waist, into the shark's open mouth.

Instantly, the pressure goes away and the shark sinks back into the depth. Then it abandons Callahan and swims away, out to sea.

Decompression Chamber

At five in the morning, Callahan blinks awake, as she washes up on the beach of Aquaria Bay. She rolls around in the surf, gasping. Eventually, she regains her bearings and crawls up the sand to the foot of the dune. There, she collapses and falls asleep, exhausted.

She wakes to the sound of a conversation. A man and a woman, early morning beach walkers, are standing over her.

“Is that Lucy Callahan?”

“Is she alive?”

Callahan’s eyes open and she reaches out a hand, weakly. The pain is absent when she lies still but it returns when she moves. She beckons the woman over and says with a rasping voice, “Tell Hal. Decompression chamber.”

“Did you hear that?” the woman asks her male partner.

“Decompression chamber.”

“Do you have your phone with you?”
the woman asks.

“No. You?”

“You run to the Aquarium. I’ll stay
here with her.”

The man strips off his jacket and
looks up ahead at the distant Aquaria
infrastructure. “Okay. He repeats. I’ll be
back shortly.”

“Quick!” the woman calls out.

Callahan raises from the sand just
enough to watch the man sprint along
the beach. He runs towards the surf
where the sand is firm, then settles into
a pace that is swift and sustainable for
the three-kilometre run.

Callahan grimaces and grips the
woman’s hand tightly. She begins to
shiver, her entire body convulsing. The
woman retrieves her partner’s jacket
from the sand and wraps it around
Callahan’s body.

“You look like you have been bitten by something.”

Callahan nods, then drifts back to sleep.

She wakes to the sound of a helicopter settling on the beach. She sees medics moving towards her with a stretcher. She drifts in and out of consciousness as she is transferred to the hospital, checked over, then placed into the decompression chamber. This is a steel room about the size of a combi van. There is a bed inside and a chair next to a thick glass window. Inside, the chamber, the air pressure is increased to allow the nitrogen bubbles to dissolve into her blood. Then the air pressure is gradually reduced allowing the nitrogen leaves her body through her breath.

Swaddled in blankets, Callahan sleeps through the day inside the chamber. Later that night, she sees Hal sitting on

the other side of the glass, wearing a grave expression.

Callahan moves to the chair with a blanket wrapped around her. “Hey,” she places her hand on the glass.

Hal matches her hand. “We nearly lost you last night.”

She nods somberly. “It was a big night.”

“You should see this,” Hal says, chuckling. He stands and picks up her wetsuit. The gold fabric has been slashed and the black neoprene beneath pokes through. “Looks like you got munched.”

“It was a white shark. If we’re lucky, it might have been tagged with a camera.”

“Lucky, *hub*? You have some suitors waiting for you outside.”

“*Uhuh?*”

“Sam. And the guy in the helicopter.”

“*Uhuh?*”

“You want me to send them in?”

“Not Sam.”

“Okay. And the other guy?”

“No. Send him home, too.”

Chairman Resigns

Callahan spends the next day recuperating in her hotel room. Propped up in bed, she follows the progress of the drilling through the Expedient Energy website. There is a widget that allows the public to track the progress of the drilling, counting down the meters before the drill hits the oil zone.

She receives an email from Keiser saying that work is apace with the Pyronalis Fund. But Callahan has lost interest in that approach, so she doesn't reply.

In the evening, someone knocks on her door and she peers through the eye hole, but the person she sees outside has his back to her. The stonefish squirms in her stomach.

“Who is it?” she calls out.

The man turns, and she sees that it's the Chairman. He looks glum, withdrawn. She opens the door and the Chairman says, sadly, "Hello Lucy, sorry for the hour."

"That's okay. Come in."

"I shan't. I really must be..."

Chairman looks up the hallway, as though he were wishing he were on his way.

"Is everything okay?"

The Chairman is trembling. "They got to me, Lucy."

"What?"

"Last night, I take this call from a man who threatened me harm unless I stood down. And just this morning, this..."

The Chairman opens his hand to show a bullet, the sort that would fit a handgun. "It was in my letter box."

"I'm so sorry," Callahan.

"The other directors have handed in their resignation, as well."

“I expected something like that.”

“I want to be a good governor, Lucy, but I am too old to be a soldier. I have family responsibilities. I have no choice but to resign my position as Aquaria Chairman.”

“I understand. Email me. Make it official. And I’ll put out a press release, just so that they know you are not resisting.”

The Chairman grasps his hand on Lucy’s wrist. “Thank you, Lucy. Good luck.”

Lucy closes the door and sits on the end of her bed. Her thoughts are not hurried and chaotic, she’s not feeling the need to crawl into the seahorse tank to calm her nerves. She is steely calm and the thoughts are systematic and precise.

With the Chairman gone, she has lost control of the board. The Constitution gives her 48 hours to announce the

removal of a board member. She could find a replacement, but they would need to be voted in by the remaining board members, and the numbers are no longer in her favour. She controls one vote, Tiffany, her assistant controls another, and John Priestley, the proxy, controls three. The battle is lost. Her only chance to save Aquaria is to go deep. To go deep, she must first capitulate, and do it in typical Sealioness style; big, bold and in front of the world's media. It is time.

Lucy lifts the receiver of the house phone. First, she calls Tiffany, her assistant, and briefs her on the change of events. Then she calls the head of PR and tells her that she will be announcing something huge tomorrow night.

“Who should I invite from the media?”

“All of them,” Callahan tells her. “Get them all.”

Then she calls the sealion trainer.

Extraordinary Sealion Meeting

The next day, when the media arrive they are not directed to the board room as is the norm for Aquaria media events, but to sealion auditorium. It is a big crowd and the atmosphere becomes animated and excited as speculation swirls about what comes next. The head of PR has done a great job of rounding up media professionals. Some have even flown in from overseas at a moment's notice to see the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay make her announcement. The fact that the media release failed to disclose what Callahan planned to discuss, only helped to whet the appetite of the gathered journalists.

The auditorium is packed with cameras, microphones, journalists, producers, the lot. It is a carnival atmosphere, with the Pennsylvania Polka playing over and over again on

the loudhailers, and a few juvenile sealions leaping in and out of the water, playfully.

In the middle of the pool, there is a floating pontoon connected to the side with a walkway. In the middle of the pontoon is a speaker's rostrum.

The presentation begins with the sound of someone whistling loudly and five large sealions appear at once whisking rapidly down slides into the water. In a flash, they leap out of the water, onto the pontoon. There is a great deal of honking and braying as the boisterous animals play-fight each other.

The trainer brings the animals to order with a whistle and rewards them with a chunk of oily fish. She tosses fish and the sealions deftly snatch it from the air.

She whistles again and the sealions line up in a row that extends from the

walkway to the podium that is located in the centre of the pontoon.

Callahan steps onto the walkway and moves to the rostrum. The sealions come to attention, holding their right fore-flippers to their heads in salute.

In the back row of the auditorium, Sam is instantly alerted. He is stunned by how good she looks. Her hair is freshly cut so that it bounces around her neck. She's wearing the suit that she wore for the photo shoot with Time magazine. This is Lucy Callahan on the top of her game. Sam is struck by remorse at having let her down. He looks down at his hands.

Callahan steps behind the podium as the sealions give her a round of applause. "Thank you. Thank you," she says. The sealions stop clapping.

Callahan waves a hand towards the sealions. "These are fine animals with whom we have a symbiotic relationship.

We give them their favourite food, plus our vets take care of them. In return, they draw a crowd and perform. They don't live in tanks. They live in the ocean, and they have a lucrative part time job performing at Aquaria. Let's hear it for the sealions."

Everyone in the crowd contributes to rowdy round of applause. Everyone except Sam, that is. He's just staring, glumly.

Callahan says "I have spent my adult life seeking ways to create synergistic relationships between animals and humans. In my early years, I believed that all animals were suited to a synergy. However, it seems that I have overlooked one animal that is incompatible as a partner with us humans. That species is called *Homo Petroleien*. Otherwise known as oilmen."

At the sound of these words – oilmen – one of the sealions, a big male, lifts its

hind fins and, with its mouth, makes a noise that sounds like a loud, wet fart, “*Flaaart!*”

The effect on the audience is instantaneous. A mixture of revulsion and laughter sweeps through them.

“That’s disgusting,” says a journalist from the Star.

“That is so funny,” says an ABC cameraman.

Callahan allows a few seconds for the joke to pass. “*Homo Petroleien* share some characteristics of *Homo sapien*. They have one head, two arms, two legs. But in place of a heart they have a mechanical, clockwork device that pushes the blood around. And now that the heartless *Homo Petroleien* control the board of Aquaria, I fear that this fantastic experiment of connecting natural science to the public, people to animals, is drawing to a close. I am sad to say that the oilmen have won.”

“*Flaaaart!*” goes, the sealion, and the audience responds with rapturous laughter. Even those who were initially off-put by the farting sealion, laugh too.

“At Aquaria, we research what the increase in atmospheric CO₂ is doing to the oceans. The oil industry is responsible for about 30% of the CO₂ that has been released since the beginning of the industrial revolution. The oceans have become acidified and hot. Hot means that it carries less oxygen, and oxygen breathing animals perish. Organisms that don’t breathe oxygen prosper. And some of these organisms produce poisonous hydrogen sulphide. The atmospheric heat also melts ice and the ocean is becoming more dilute. Less salty, hotter and more acidic. The oilmen are killing our ocean. The oilmen!”

“*Flaaaart!*” goes the sealion and the laughter from the audience follows.

“I do not want to be here to see what *Homo Petroleien* and specifically the mutated deviants from the sub-species Expedient Energy, will do to Aquaria. For this reason, I am resigning all of my positions in Aquaria, effective immediately.”

The sealions immediately begin to cry. They howl and cover the faces with their flippers. They honk in distress at the top of their voices, making a terrific racket. The cacophony of pining pinnipeds changes the mood of the people in the crowd, instantly.

Callahan completes her presentation with a grand finale.

She steps up onto the podium and calls the sealions to order, “Attention!”

The sealions stop crying. They stand on their tails, their faces pointing right at her, their right flipper across their brows, like a military salute. Then Callahan strips.

She takes off her suit jacket and tosses it aside. Then she undoes her blouse revealing golden fabric underneath. She slips out of her suit pants and tosses them aside.

And she stands there, clad in her figure-hugging, golden wetsuit, the fabric pressed against her athletic body. The contours of her world-class thighs, visible for the whole world to see. The one imperfection is a bump over the bandage that covers the bull shark bite wound.

Callahan strikes a heroic pose, standing like a metallic statue. She looks around at the crowd of hundreds of media people. Her eyes land on the Sam in the back row. He looks at her, seeming lost and alone. She holds his attention for a few seconds and imparts as best she can a simple message: *you are forgiven, but you can't come back*. Sam nods

solemnly. A sad smile rises on his cheek as Callahan's eyes depart him for good.

There is an expression that the Sealioness sometimes uses, the current is more powerful than the fish that swims within it. In that moment, Callahan is content. She is proud of what she has achieved, and not saddened by the turn of events. It is what it is.

Camera flashes dapple her body as the machine called the global media absorbs her information and packages it for the consciousness of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Out in the bay, from the back deck of one of the Aquaria working boats, a single firework is released. It soars into the night air, followed by a thin orange trail. At the top of its arc, it explodes, throwing a star-burst of blue light.

The sound of the firework resonates across the sealion compound. At that

moment, Callahan dives into the water, followed by the five sealions. They hit the water in a flurry of bubbles, then the sealions return, effortlessly sliding out of the water onto the pontoon.

The sealions have returned, but there is no sign of Lucy Callahan. They stand on the side of the pontoon, peering into the water, as though they were seeking their missing companion. Then they move a flipper over their faces, slump on the deck and howl in sadness.

The narrative is complete. The Sealioness of Aquaria Bay has resigned her position on land and returned to the sea. Maybe she is a mermaid, after-all.

The audience responds with a standing ovation. Cheers and whoops. Howls of excitement and then disappointment. Then grumbling and anger as the deeper message of the story seeps into their psyches: beloved Lucy Callahan

has gone, and Expedient Energy is to blame.

How to Quit

The youtube video with the title ‘How to Quit’ goes viral on social media networks. The video’s success gets picked up by mainstream news.

“Here’s a lesson for all of you thinking of changing jobs. If you are going to quit, do it in style,” say the news reader from the BBC. CNN carries the story, as does RT and stations all over the world.

The youtube video is tweeted and retweeted hundreds of thousands of times. Even on the professional social network Linked-in, the video is shared and re-shared under the title Quit Protocol.

Bloggers blog about it and the phenomena spawns a parody showing people videoing themselves as they quit their jobs in dramatic style. One guy walks into his boss’ office dressed as a

sealion and shouts, “I quit.” A woman resigns their job, dressed as a pirate. Another visits the sealions at an aquarium and poses with the animals, as he quits to camera.

Then there is the golden wetsuit theme. Hundreds of young women dress up as Lucy Callahan and take selfies of themselves holding a sign that says “I quit” and “Bring back our quit.”

All the time, the social media team from Aquaira keep the plate spinning by sending tweets and facebook posts of pictures of Callahan in other epic situations. Callahan hand feeding a bull shark, Callahan cuddling an octopus, Callahan cradling a Rock Bass.

While the public fawns and empathises with Lucy Callahan, it also directs scorn at the oil industry and Expedient Energy in particular. One meme that does the rounds on the web shows people posing next to their

electric cars, and say to the camera, “I am doing it for Lucy.” Do it for Lucy quickly becomes synonymous with swap your petrol powered car for an electric car.

All of this electronic word of mouth is monitored by the public relations team at Expedient Energy, conscious of the negative sentiment coming their way. The stream of emails criticising their drilling in Aquaria Bay becomes a flood.

The use of search terms Expedient Energy and Aquaria typed into search engines goes through the roof. In their plush board room with the long walnut table, the executives strategize ways to tarnish the reputation of Lucy Callahan and the Aquaria project.

They seize upon a photo of Lucy wearing a necklace with a gold-plated seahorse. They distribute this through paid content in the mainstream media with the caption, ‘the woman who

wants men to have the babies'. They continue to labour this theme, pouring scorn on her failing to have taken a husband and to have had no children, by age 39. It is a miserly, mean-spirited attack by professionals.

Through long hours, fuelled only by coffee and the threat of lost bonuses, the highly trained communications team of Expedient Energy think up mean and nasty things to say about Lucy Callahan, and then spend millions of dollars to have the compliant media industry churn out print, radio, TV and digital content to that effect.

However, Lucy Callahan, the brand, is powerful, and the insults simply look childish and mean. And for every spiteful news story funded by Expedient Energy the comments are full of ringing endorsements of her, and scorn for the oil industry.

One analyst bluntly comments that Expedient Energy looks like a drunk pissing on a statue, the result of which is public scorn and wet shoes. The hashtag #drillersons_wet_shoes trends on twitter as another way of saying, failed strategy. Another commentator says that Drillerson has caviar on his face.

The oil company's stock price falls as investors, wary of being associated with the company's assault on a popular icon, sell up and take their money elsewhere.

In his office, Tex Drillerson stands next to his diorama, the remote control device in his hand. The train chugs past, but he is not going "Toot! Toot!" now. Instead, he stares at a flat screen watching a finance show describe the bear market running against his stock and the public ridicule of the company's CEO.

“I don’t have wet shoes!” Drillerson yells at the screen.

Gustav's Restaurant

Callahan is oblivious to all of positive social media and negative mainstream media coverage of her quit routine. Instead, she is busy working with the core team of supporters in Aquaria, protecting as much as they can of value before the Expedient Energy wrecking ball crashes through the walls.

With the headquarters set up in the basement, the team gets to work. The IT technicians set up alternative servers to house the huge database of scientific data that has been collected from the research in Aquaria Bay.

The lawyers incorporate new vehicles in the names of key staff into which they transfer ownership of samples and custom designed equipment. By stripping the assets out of Aquaria, the items are protected. Priceless treasures of marine science are carefully boxed

up and sent to storage facilities a long way away from Aquaria.

Arrangements are made with other Aquarium facilities and museums to house some of the more unique and valuable exhibits. A team of professional photographers are employed to take a record of Aquaria as it was.

Late afternoon, Callahan takes a call from Stacey Keiser. The financier proposes a get-together in an up-market restaurant. Callahan walks around the basement looking at all the furtive activity taking place, feeling buoyant that the emergency plan is being executed effectively.

“Have we got this?” she asks Hal.

“It’s all in hand. You go. Take some time out.”

At Hal’s insistence, she agrees to meet Keiser. She drives to Gustav’s restaurant in one of the Aquaria

vehicles, a red Tesla. The Maître D' escorts her to an intimate booth.

Kaiser stands and takes Callahan's hand. She places a kiss on the Sealioness' cheek. "You have been in the wars, I hear."

"I am still in the war, technically."

"Sit down. You're my guest tonight, okay?"

"Are you sure you want to do that. I haven't eaten a proper meal in days."

"Don't worry, it's on a company account. We are going to eat, drink and be merry and talk business along the way. How does that sound?"

"I am okay with that."

Keiser draws a menu and shows Callahan the opening page. "I find it very hard to go past the lobster mornay for an entree. Oh!" She places her fingertips over her mouth.

"What?" asks Callahan.

“I forgot, that you run an aquarium. Is it wrong to eat seafood around you?”

Callahan laughs, “The marine life is perfectly happy to eat us, I can assure you. I nearly got eaten by some bull sharks, not so long ago. Oh, and a white shark.”

“I can only imagine what it’s like to be you.”

“It’s certainly not for the faint-hearted,” Callahan grins.

“So what does one have to do to get bitten by a shark?”

“I jumped into a tank full of them. Plus, the moray eels, stone and lionfish. I am actually lucky to be here.”

Callahan becomes pensive for a while pondering the thought.

“A spa bath is just not exciting enough for you?”

Callahan wonders whether Keiser can be trusted with a secret. “That’s where I keep the bullion. In the Killing Tank.”

“*Abhh*. It all makes sense, in a Lucy Callahan sort of way. And about that bullion. It’s normal practice for us to check the markings on the gold bars and we found them to be... Shall we say, very interesting.”

“*Uh-huh*.”

“You don’t sound too surprised about that.”

“Not really.”

“Could I enquire where you bought the gold?”

“I found them in a shipwreck, on the seafloor.”

“Of course. What was I thinking?”

“I thought that they’d be a good insurance for Aquaria, so I didn’t notify any authorities. Nor did I try to find the name of the ship, so as to not arouse suspicion.”

“Anyway, they are registered as stolen.”

“Stolen?”

“In 1842. The point is that we can’t use them for the Pyronalis Fund without significantly increasing risk.”

Callahan sighs, deflated. Her last, slender chance of running interference with Expedient Energy has just evaporated. She stares numbly at the menu, her spirits falling. She heaves a sigh, feeling weary. “I might drink tonight,” she says weakly.

“That’s a great idea.” Keiser flicks through the menu to the drinks section.

“In fact, I might drink until I black out.”

“Let’s do it with bubbles.”

“Bubbles,” Callahan smiles, feeling like she is back in familiar territory.

“I’ve actually had a lot of bubbles recently.”

“Really.”

“Bubbles of nitrogen. In my blood.”

“That must be a diving thing.”

“I nearly died, actually,” Callahan says, nonchalantly. Then the realisation comes that she did nearly die.

Keiser signals for a passing waitress and places an order for the champagne and two serves of lobster.

As she does this, Callahan finds herself motionless, a sense of dread moving through her body. She looks at her arm, seeing the flesh turn to goose and the hairs coming erect. Near death, a few days ago, suddenly catches up with her. “*Ooohh!*” She shudders, as the feeling passes, leaving her light headed and craving intoxication.

“Are you okay?” asks Keiser.

“Yeah. I just really fancy that drink, actually.”

“It’s coming. You want to tell me about that?”

“No, let’s talk business.”

“Okay. Well, the good news is that we have a new strategy and it is much better than the last.”

“Really?”

Keiser adjusts the cutlery on the table in front of her as she forms her words. “With great interest, my PR team have watched your stunning exposure in the mainstream and social media. And the strategists tell me that with a bit of theatre and intentionality, you could move the market.”

“You see, I don’t know what that means,” Callahan says, feeling her energy return. She cocks her head to view Keiser from a different angle.

“It turns out that amongst my client base, you have something of a cult following. And now that you have thrown a gauntlet to Expedient Energy, there is the smell of blood in the water.”

“I know how that feels,” Callahan chuckles. She runs her fingers over the shark wound on her thigh.

“I think that we can take the short position to a whole new level.”

“We can pith the oil company?” Callahan asks, excitedly.

The waitress arrives with the champagne.

“Yes, please,” Callahan pushes her glass forward and watches as it is filled. She hungrily downs the champagne in one long gulp and holds the glass up for it to be refilled.

With the waitress departed, and the spicy bubbles rising in her throat, Callahan leans conspiratorially towards Keiser. “We can pith Expedient Energy?”

Kaiser sips her champagne. “Oh, that is nice.” She places the glass on the mat and holds her fingers on the stem as she speaks. “Once I let my network

know that the Sealioness was out to get the oil company, they were all clamouring to take a position in the trade.”

“That’s good, isn’t it?” Callahan asks. She sniffs the edge of her glass, enjoying the sensation of tiny bubbles bursting next to her nose.

“It is good news, for two reasons. First, we don’t need your bullion anymore, so you get to keep your gold. Second, as you won’t be a financial beneficiary of the trade, we have more options as to how we can use your skills. Plus, there are a lot of people want to come into the game, so the stakes are much, much bigger now.”

“That’s three reasons,” Callahan says, flatly.

“Okay, so I’m lousy at math.”

“Great, my banker can’t count,” Callahan bursts into laughter and Keiser

follows suit. They raise glasses, clinking the edges together.

“Our cunning plan requires you to do one more show. Are you up for that?”

“Just tell me what and when.”

Keiser winks and nods her head for a little while. “Tell me about you.”

“What do you want to know?”

“You’re not married?”

“Never have.”

“No children?”

“Nope.”

“A partner?”

“Nope.” Callahan is surprised by her disclosure, and she ponders that for a moment. It seems so very natural and liberating to be single again.

“It’s complicated?” Keiser asks, watching Callahan process her thoughts.

“No, not at all. Overly simple, in fact.”

“Male? Female?” Keiser grins hopefully.

“I was recently spending time with a male.”

“Pity.”

“What about you?” Callahan asks.

“Oh, you know. The lipsticks come and go.”

“There is a lot of homosexuality in marine life, actually.”

“Really?” Keiser asks, intrigued.

“Mermaids?”

Callahan laughs. “I’ve never heard of gay mermaids. I was thinking of dolphins.”

“Queer dolphins?”

“It’s well known.”

“I should come to your aquarium. It sounds like a hoot.”

“Anyway,” Callahan says. “Moving on from homosexuality in marine life. Tell me about this new plan.”

Waking at Keiser's Apartment

Callahan wakes to the sound of a small brass bell. *Ting ting ting ting tinnnnngggg*. She opens her eyes to see linen with a very fine weave. The pillow is soft and scented with sandalwood. It is a very pleasant wake-up but overshadowed by a question. Where the hell is she?

What does it really matter? She is too comfortable to care. She has survived stonefish and sharks, decompression sickness, disappointment, and despair. Waking in a stranger's bed is hardly going to phase her. The last thing to flicker through her mind before she nods off again, is a question. What happened last night? Something about a red car and a policemen.

Some time later, the aroma of ground coffee triggers the Sealioness to engage with the day. She rolls over and observes that she is on a fold-out bed in

the lounge room of an up-market apartment.

“Coffee ma’am.” Keiser holds a steaming mug. She is dressed for the day, and has a notebook computer tucked under her arm.

“Thanks,” Callahan takes the coffee, feeling self-conscious.

“How much do you remember about last night?”

Callahan drinks some coffee and its effect is instantaneous. “I remember something about the police?”

“Don’t worry. That’s all sorted. Do you remember anything after that?”

“Not really.”

“Does the name Cali Zalophus mean anything to you?”

Callahan lets the smell of the coffee waft through her. “Sounds familiar.”

“Well, this is your happy morning present.” Keiser opens the laptop

computer and passes it to Callahan. The monitor shows a press release.

“What is this?”

“Breaking news. Overnight, a mysterious financier has taken a very large position in Expedient Energy.”

“Is that good?”

“Well. that depends.”

“On what?”

“On whether Cali Zalophus does what we want.”

“Will he.”

“She.”

“Will she?” asks Callahan.

“We’ll have to see about that.”

Leafy Sea Dragon

When Callahan gets back to Aquaria, she is in a buoyant mood. Tiffany meets her in the hallway. She has a worried look, as though the woes of the world rest on her. “The oilmen have called an Extraordinary General Meeting,” she says glumly.

“That’s you and Priestley. That’s when they’ll shut us down.” Callahan says.

“I bumped it out three days, as per the constitution, then there’s a public holiday, so it’s in five days from now. What are we going to do?”

“Business as usual until we can’t.” Callahan places a hand on her shoulder. “You’ll be okay.”

Tiffany nods gravely. “It’s really sad, is all.”

“Just let the current take you. It’s okay downstream.”

“Thank you,” Tiffany makes a weary smile.

Callahan continues through Aquaria checking her phone. She has a missed call from Sam, and a press release from Expedient Energy announcing that a fund called Pyronalis has taken a large position in the company and is seeking to underwrite the whole Aquaria prospect. The name of the mystery fund manager is Cali Zalophus. When Callahan sees this name, she laughs aloud, getting a flashback from the drinking session with Keiser, the night before.

She goes looking for Hal. “Five days, Hal,” she tells him.

“Hey, you. Wow. That’s a smile. You look like you got laid.”

“It’s possible,” she chuckles. “We have five days.”

“Till what?”

“Till they lock us out and turn this public aquarium into an oil production facility. So, where am I needed.”

“You need some chill-out time. I got you a present.”

“Really?”

“In the tank in your room. Check it out. Get some seahorse time.”

Callahan returns to her room and looks at the seahorses in the tank trying to determine which one might constitute Hal’s present. She strips off and climbs the ladder to the tank with the little bag of dried fish. She places the visor over her face and descends to the sandy floor. The seahorses are at first hesitant to approach, but as the smell of the fish wafts out, they approach her cautiously.

From the thick weed, a new creature pokes out its head. Hal’s present is a leafy sea dragon. It’s like a seahorse on psychedelic drugs and steroids. It is a

foot in length, the body is orange and yellow and festooned with brightly coloured translucent skin that wafts and ripples as the dragon propels itself through the water.

Callahan raises a piece of fish and watches intently as the dragon approaches. It comes slowly towards her, its eyes swivelling around to assess the threat. Eventually, it overcomes its curiosity and moves its flute mouth close to the fish. Then it sucks in water and the fish disappears. Its colours are vivid, pulsing and shimmering in the bright tank lights. Callahan is mesmerized and for a moment, she feels a cycle of emotions. She is in awe of the animals that nature creates. Exquisite beautiful creatures that are so uniquely matched to their environments.

Then her spirits fall when she remembers the reason why she has

been gifted the sea dragon – Hal is getting it out of the tanks at Aquaria before the oilmen arrive.

Then she feels confused. How is it that nature could create something as magnificent as a sea dragon, and then spawn something as atrocious as an oil executive. It didn't make any sense.

On balance, the humans behave like a tool-using zombie that smashes everything in its path. And the most powerful tool of destruction is the corporation, an entity that is designed specifically to exploit everyone and everything in order to benefit a tiny subset of society, those who own the shares. Callahan thinks back to the conversations with Stacey Keiser and the flamboyant fly-boy, Tom Finn. Like the Ying and Yang, everything has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Even Aquaria had a destructive seed, the vast reservoir of

oil under the seabed. And so too does Expedient Energy. The greed that propels people to put money into a toxic enterprise like Expedient has a flipside. Fear. And fear is what the shareholders of Expedient Energy are going to get in great measure.

The sea dragon has satisfied its curiosity and its hunger. It turns and slowly moves back to the little forest of seaweed, its new home.

The Extraordinary Board Meeting

On the morning of the Extraordinary Board Meeting, Callahan sits in bed reading the news. She checks the Expedient Energy website and sees that the drill bit is now just fifty metres from the sweet spot. The page says that breakthrough is expected anytime within the next twelve hours.

Expedient Energy has put out a press release saying that Cali Zalophus, the head of the Pyronalis Fund, will be visiting the Aquaria facility later that evening.

Callahan raises her phone to text Keiser, and at the same moment, a text from Keiser arrives. “It’s tonight. You all good?”

“You bet,” she replies. Then she calls Tiffany, checking in with her about the Board Meeting which has been set for

0900h. Tiffany is anxious, waiting in her office, unsure of what comes next.

Priestley skypes and tells Tiffany that he won't be attending the board meeting in person and that the skype call will suffice. She agrees to this, as per the constitution. Then he instructs her to have all the staff and guests to evacuate the Aquaria facilities by 10 am. Tiffany agrees to follow his instructions, and he signs off.

Tiffany calls Callahan as soon as the call is over.

“You are doing the right thing,” Callahan tells her. Then she goes to the roof of the hotel and watches as the staff departs the facility, get into their cars and go home. It is a solemn sight, but one that she has been expecting for some time now. She's not angry. She's not focussed, even, she's just drifting downstream, like plankton.

Shortly, a security van arrives, the advance guard of the oilmen. A locksmith truck arrives and a man switches the locks on the front door of the Aquarium and allows the security guys inside.

Callahan makes her way to the HQ in the basement. Hal is there. He hands her a clipboard with line items all ticked off. The jewels and scientific gems of Aquaria have been saved. All that remains are the fish in the tanks. “It’s all done,” Hal says,

“How’s the oxygenation holding up?” she asks.

“It’s good. All the big tanks will all be aerated through the passive water exchange. But we’ll see mortalities within a week if the tanks aren’t fed.”

“Hopefully, we won’t need a week. The oilmen are doing a media event here tonight.”

“Are you invited?”

“Not officially,” Callahan chuckles.

“Well let’s hope that this plan of yours works.”

“Walk with me, I’ll tell you about it.”

“You can’t get into the facility.”

Callahan raises her swipe card. She swipes against the reader next to the service corridor. She pushes the door open.

Hal does a double take. “What is that?”

“Secret sub-system. Did you really think that I was going to locked out of my own aquarium?”

“What was I thinking? Where are we going.”

“We’re going to have a chat with some sealions.”

Sulking Sam

As the sun sets, Sam is sitting in his car in the carpark of a tavern. He is half drunk and emotional. On the floor in front of the passenger seat is the shaped charge and a half bottle of bourbon.

Holding a copy of the afternoon newspaper, he stares at the photo that shows a big sign with the word CLOSED on the front gate of the Aquaria carpark.

Sam finds the number for Lucy on his phone. He holds his finger poised over the call button then presses. He listens as the call goes straight to message bank. He tosses the phone onto the floor with the other evidence of his despair, then slumps over the steering wheel despondently. On the dashboard in front of him is the dried seahorse that he had wrested from Lucy's hair.

It's blank dot of an eye looks at him, accusingly.

A vehicle enters the car park and Sam watches as two guys step out of the vehicle. They are wearing the blue coveralls with the Expedient Energy logo on the breast. One of them has an ID tag visible. The two men strip the coveralls and toss them into the back of the ute. Sam watches as they depart, adjusting the mirror to see them enter the tavern. He thinks this through for a while, as an idea slowly forms.

He glances around to see that he is alone, then steps out of his vehicle and retrieves the coveralls with the ID attached. He bundles these onto the onto the floor of the passenger well. Then he returns to his seat and resumes his position slumped over the steering wheel. He looks at seahorse, wondering whether it could possibly be revived.

Eventually, he draws a long sigh, fires the engine and drives off. When he gets to the Aquaria carpark, it is filling with news media and others. A security guard asks for his ID. He shows off Expedient Energy ID and is allowed through.

Sam parks up and finds his way to the marina. Standing on the seawall, he sees the oil rig lights flickering into life as dusk falls.

“Out of time,” Sam draws his palm over his face.

He goes to the storeroom and pulls the tarpaulin off a 200-litre drum of seaweed ethanol. He tips the drum over, then rolls it with his foot along the jetty.

He lifts the drum onto the transom and lets it drop onto the deck of the boat.

He drives Boaty McBoatface into the channel, sets her on autopilot, then

goes to the back deck to lash a rope around the ethanol drum. Then he goes down below and changes into the coveralls that he stole from the roughneck in the carpark.

It is full dark when he arrives at the rig. He pulls the boat against the pontoon, steps off and lashes her alongside.

On the back deck, he coils the free end of the rope, then walks up the metal steps, paying out the rope as he goes.

A worker moves past and Sam waves him over. “Hey, dude. Give us a hand here, will you?”

The worker complies, and the two men heave the line and bring the drum from the deck of the boat.

“Where’s this going?” the guy asks.

“Computer room.”

“I’ll get you a trolley.”

“So, what’s in this drum then?” the guy asks, when the returns with the trolley.

“Computer oil.”

“Computer oil? Really. You know where you’re going with it?” asks the worker.

“No mate. You want to lead the way.”

The worker walks ahead and swipes into the building. He holds the door open for Sam as he manoeuvres the drum on the trolley through the door frame.

“I never knew computers needed oil.”

“You know how cars have got computers in them,” Sam says. “It’s sort of like that.”

“That makes sense, I guess. Here we are, mate.”

The worker swipes his card against the reader, but the lock doesn’t activate. “I don’t have access here, so I going to have to leave you. Good luck.”

“Thanks, bud.” Sam looks through the small double glazed window in the door and sees the banks of computer cabinets. Row upon row of twinkling lights. Some cabinets have spinning reels. Sam raps his knuckles on the door and one of the technicians looks up. He moves over and activates the lock.

Sam lowers the door handle and pushes the trolley through the door. “Hey buddy, special delivery,” he says. “What is it?”

“I’ve got some juice for your Cisco mainframe,” says Sam, thinking on his feet.

“Cisco? We don’t use Cisco.”

“Hey, I’m just the delivery guy.” Sam tips the barrel on its side it crashes to the floor. The algae ethanol spills out of the open neck and spreads across the white tiled floor.

“What are you f**king crazy?” the technician screams.

“Get out! Get out!” Sam yells.

The technician yelps and leaps through the door. Sam quickly scouts around looking for anyone else, as the aroma of ethanol floods the room. His gut feels tight. The longer he is in the room, the more likely it will accidentally catch fire.

There’s one other guy in the computer room. He’s behind a door, working on a computer with headphones on. Sam raps on the glass, but the guy doesn’t look up. So he plants his foot hard against the door and kicks it open. Sam grabs the back of the chair and wheels the guy through the computer room and out into the hall. “The computer oil has spilled!” he shouts.

He sees a fire alarm switch in the wall. Sam hits the plastic glass with his elbow and activates the alarm. The noise is a

deafening WHOOP! WHOOP!
WHOOP! He turns back to the
computer room, but the door is locked.
He kicks it hard, but it's a toughened
security door.

“Shit.” He watches as a trickle of
ethanol makes its way towards the door.
“Come on baby.”

A fire warden comes into the hallway
and calls on him to “Get to the muster
station.”

“Righto!” he waves the man away.

The ethanol leaks under the door
frame and Sam retrieves a zippo lighter
from his pocket and touches the flame
to the liquid. The effect is
instantaneous. Blue flame immediately
spreads across the clear fluid on the
floor. Much of the fluid has dripped
between the tiles and it spreads across
the subfloor. Flame suddenly rises from
all different parts of the room and
smoke pours out of the cabinets. The

quickly turns to flame and Sam steps back, stunned at his success. He turns to his left to make his escape from the rig. At the end of the hallway, he sees flame through the glass panel in the door. That wasn't planned. He looks up the other end of the hallway and sees the same thing.

Mystery Investor

Meanwhile, back on the mainland, the Aquaria board room is crammed with professionals from the media, finance and oil industries. Priestley is there with Tex Drillerson. Journalists practice their pieces to camera. Tom Finn enters the room and takes Drillerson's arm.

“Mr. Drillerson, I'm Tom Finn. Cali Zalophus is in the building and he requests that you get the presentation underway as he is very pressed for time.”

Drillerson moves to the podium and begins his presentation. “Expedient Energy is a faith-based energy company and we are doing our part for the holy trinity of coal, oil and gas. We are vertically integrated all the way up to heaven. Today is a blessed a day for this energy company. God willing, the

Aquaria prospect will be bought in within the next few hours.”

Priestley nods, approvingly. The oil boss is following the script. In the doorway, Tom Finn gives the thumbs up to Drillerson.

Drillerson, points his hand towards the door. “Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honour to introduce you to the most angelic of angel investors, Mr. Cali Zalophus.”

Everyone in the crowd turns to face the door. Tom Finn, steps aside and allows a person wearing a long black trench coat to enter the room. The person shuffles, hunched over, their face hidden from view. Moving slowly, they make their way towards the podium. The mysterious person raises a hand to their mouth, then releases a piercing whistle.

Suddenly, chaos erupts in the board room as four Californian sealions burst

through the door, yelping and honking at the top of their voices. They charge around the boardroom table, bowling over anyone and anything in their path. Tripods topple over, crashing cameras and lights to the floor. The media and oil people scream and leap out the way as the orderly presentation is thrown into marine mammal madness, accompanied by the overwhelming aroma of oily fish. The excited pinnipeds run a circuit around the board room table, barking and hollering.

“*Arrrrgh!!* Devil spawn.” Drillerson freaks out at the sight of the sealions. He leaps onto a chair, waving his hands to shoo them away.

Then the mysterious Cali Zalophus throws off the overcoat revealing not a crusty old aristocrat, but a feisty and determined woman. It’s Lucy Callahan! She wears her shiny golden wetsuit,

with the bull shark bite mark on the thigh.

In her hand, she has a bundle of white cards. She leaps onto the board room table and calls the sealions to order.

They instantly comply by mounting the table and lining up in front of her. She hands each of the sealions a blank white card that they grip with their teeth. With the four cards hanging from the mouths, Callahan addresses the journalists. “I am Lucy Callahan of Aquaria,” she says aloud. “And I’m not dead! I have a message for all the shareholders and bondholders of Expedient Energy.” She gives a signal and the sealions raise the boards above their heads, revealing the reverse side, on which is a large black letter. Lined up side by side, the sealions spell out the word S-E-L-L. Sell.

“Sell!” Callahan yells at the top of her voice.

“Yes, Ma’am!” shouts Tom Finn. He presses his finger on this smart phone, theatrically. Then, using his Sergeant Major’s voice so that everyone within a nautical mile can hear him, he yells, “The Pyronalis Fund has just liquidated its entire position in Expedient Energy! *SELLLLLL!!!*”

A hell breaks loose as stockbrokers, shareholders, bankers and financiers come to the simultaneous conclusion: a severe haircut is heading their way. “What the hell is happening?” someone calls out.

“The Sealioness is shorting Expedient Energy!”

“Look there!” screams a journalist, pointing through the window, into the distance. The tone of her voice makes everyone turn to see what she is referring to. Callahan looks in that direction, too. Stunned, her mouth falls open.

In the middle of Aquaria Bay, the oil rig is lit up with a bright gout of orange fire. Huge flames leap from the superstructure, dancing in the night sky. A helicopter flies around the disaster zone, its spotlight trained on the sea surface, where dozens of workers have jumped to safety. The light from the fire reflects off the low clouds, flickering, giving the bay an eerie orange glow.

“Oh, my starfish,” Callahan says. She brings her fingers to her mouth, horrified, watching as the oil rig goes up in flames. Did the rig break through to the oil? Is that an oil fire? Is this another Deepwater Horizon incident taking place in Aquaria Bay? She turns to see the computer monitor showing the progression of the drill bit towards the breakthrough point. The bit has stopped moving, just three metres short. Callahan heaves a sigh of relief,

then turns her attention back to the rig, willing the workers to escape to safety.

“Sell!” someone shouts to their stockbroker, over his mobile phone.

“Sell it all.”

“Don’t sell!” shouts Tex Drillerson, waving his hands frantically. “Priestley! Do something!”

“What? What do you want me to do?”

“Tell God to put the damned fire out.”

“Are you serious?” Priestley asks, astonished.

“Sell!” shouts another finance professional.

“Talk to him now!”

“He’s busy.”

A journalist turns to face the accompanying camera, raises a microphone and tells the world, “A massive sell-off of Expedient Energy shares started tonight at the press conference that was to announce the

successful drilling of the Aquaria prospect. Then this happened.” She steps aside to allow the cameraman to focus on the burning rig. She steps back into view. “Now that’s what you call a fire sale.”

On the walls, TV monitors show international news bulletins transmitting live feed from the Aquaria board room. The image of the burning rig wavers on the screen, then cuts to the chaos taking place inside the room.

Callahan sees her own face on the TV and it reminds her that her work is done. With the crowd distracted, she makes her exit from the board room table followed by the four sealions.

The Gates of Hell

Outside the board room, Callahan hands the sealions over to Tiffany and makes her way towards the basement. Feeling emboldened, she decides to travel via the public aquarium, rather than the service corridors.

She moves into the tunnel when she feels the stonefish squirm in her stomach. A premonition. She halts, and turns to see that Drillerson and Priestley have followed her.

“Get the bitch,” says Priestley, pointing. Drillerson moves his hand under his suit jacket and withdraws a silver pistol. He aims it at Callahan.

Callahan runs as the gun fires. The bullet whistles past her head, strikes the head of a stainless steel nut, and explodes in a burst of green light and bullet fragments. The fragments catch Callahan in the scalp, and she gasps as

she runs along the tunnel. Blood runs down her forehead into her eyes.

The tunnel is three metres wide, a transparent arc of acrylic overhead. It follows a gentle waving curve like a snake and there is a line of sight in the middle where one can see directly from one end to the other, a hundred meters away.

Drillerson walks along the tunnel, blasting away with the pistol, and tracer rounds whip along the tunnel like laser beams. When they hit the plexiglass at a shallow angle, they deflect, flying off in another direction, or tumble like a strobe light. One bullet strikes the plexiglass, skips to the other side of the tunnel, bounces off, and in this manner travels in a zig zag pattern.

Some of the bullets pepper the acrylic, pushing a hole all the way through, and then spiralling into a path of bubbles as the friction of the water slows them

down. From the hole, a jet of pressurised water shoots out.

Callahan runs, the bullets whizzing around her. She gets to the end where there is a flight of stairs going down. Panicked, she rushes too fast, slips and tumbles down the steps. She limps into the Corals by UV light display. The dark hallway is dappled with faint multicoloured shadows. She moves to the far end as fast as her twisted leg will allow. At the end, she finds the door is locked. There's no way out. She moves back the way she came but gets half way before the far door opens and Priestley and Drillerson enter, in the middle of a loud argument.

Callahan freezes. She looks around for an escape but the only opportunity that presents is the hatch in the floor.

“Oh, not again,” she sighs. The stonefish multiplies in her stomach and starts fighting with its offspring.

She lifts the hatch and looks down at the shark tank bathed in red light, below. The bull sharks flip around, agitated, their dorsal fins slicing the surface.

Callahan lowers herself through the hole. She holds onto the carpeted edge with her fingers tips, hanging directly over the shipwreck. Looking down, she sees the lionfish and stonefish moving around below her. “Oh, shit,” she says, regretting what she has just done, but paralysed, unable to let go, or climb out of the hole.

“What the fuck happened out there?” yells Drillerson to Priestley, as they storm along the dark hallway. “That rig was blessed by God.”

“It’s that bitch, Lucy Callahan.” Priestley snarls.

“I thought that you had God looking out for it.”

“What?”

“You blessed it the rig. You threw holy water on it.”

“Holy water won’t stop it getting sabotaged, you idiot.”

“You mean we’re not covered?”

“Covered? It was a religious ceremony, not an insurance policy.”

“But you’ll get him to set the rig right, won’t you?”

“Who?”

“God.”

Priestly stops and lets out a belly laugh. “You cannot be serious. You actually think that there is an invisible man looking out for your oil rig. Next, you’ll be telling me you still believe in Santa Claus.”

“What do you mean?” Drillerson shows a wounded look. “There’s no Santa?”

“Anyway, you’ve got rig insurance.”

“I don’t have rig insurance.”

“Say what?”

“I didn’t insure the rig.”

“You didn’t ins-- Why the hell not?”

“I thought that you have it covered,” says Drillerson.

“You cannot be serious.”

“Priestley, what are you telling me? It’s all made up.”

They pull up right next to the manhole and Callahan grimaces, her fingers aching as she hangs there, above the stonefish, unable to let go.

“The faith-based energy company is just a hoax?” Drillerson demands.

“Tex, you’re supposed to serve the cool-aid to prospective share-holders, not drink it all yourself.”

“And what about the holy trinity, coal, oil and gas. You just made that up?”

“You have to admit, it’s pretty funny,” Priestley laughs.

Drillerson’s face goes red and he grabs the holy man by the collar, shaking him

violently. “You’re a goddam fraud. I bet you don’t even talk to God!”

“There is no God, you imbecile. It’s a story made up to control people.”

Priestly breaks free. He takes a step back and, at that very moment, he drops through the hatch in the floor. His ass hits Callahan on the way down and she gasps, gripping harder to the ledge.

Drillerson shakes his head, unsure of what he has just seen. The holy man blasphemed and then disappeared. From the hole in the floor, there comes the sound of splashing and screaming.

Drillerson gingerly leans forward to see the water in the Killing Tank seething with red foam. Six bull sharks thrash wildly in a manic feeding frenzy as they clamp their jaws into John Priestley’s flesh.

Then Drillerson sees Callahan, staring up at him. Her teeth are clenched

together, blood smeared over face from the bullet fragment. She grimaces as she raises herself by the fingertips, throws one arm out of the hatch onto the carpet and then hauls herself out of the hole.

Terror grips Drillerson and he collapses, falling to his knees. Clasp ing his palms together, he starts reciting, “Our father, who art in heaven...”

From the hell-hole below, Priestley makes one last agonised scream, then the bull sharks drag him to the bottom of the tank and tear him to pieces.

Callahan stands, her eyes fixed on Drillerson. He is on his knees, begging forgiveness. He is catatonic in fear and his barely able to speak. “You were dead,” he stammers.

Callahan wipes blood from her forehead and runs her hand down Drillerson’s face. She leans close, so that he can smell her breath. “I curse

you,” she growls. Then she limps away from the oilman.

To the Rig

Callahan limps into the basement. She halts in the doorway, propping herself up on the frame. Her face is contorted with pain, streaked with blood.

Hal rushes to her, helps her inside.

“What the hell happened to you?”

“I got shot and fell.”

“Come over here. Sit.” Hal calls for a first aid kit and examines Callahan’s wounds. “Did you see the rig?”

“Yeah.”

“What the hell happened?”

“I don’t know.”

In the basement, there is an atmosphere of excitement amongst the Aquaria workers. The social media team are busy stirring the pot, tweeting and retweeting, creating new content. Return of the Sealioness is the name of the youtube video of the sealions spelling out SELL. It’s going viral.

The TV news channels are still chewing over the collapse of Expedient Energy. The share price has been wiped out. “That faith-based oil company sure is one hell of a mess,” says a commentator. Meanwhile, the rig keeps burning. The footage shows chaos aboard as some of the workers fight the fire, and others find their way to safety. The camera pans to sea level. A dozen people cling the outside of a boat that makes its way out from under the rig. Instantly, Callahan is on her feet.

“Hal, did you see that?”

“What?”

“It’s Boaty McBoatface!”

“One of our boats?”

“Oh, no.” Her face instantly becomes ashen with worry. “It’s Sam.” She retrieves her phone and sees that there are a dozen missed calls from Sam. She scrolls to the last of the call and listens to the message. She can hear in the

background the sound of the boat engine. The throttle pulls back and Sam says. “I’m sorry for what I did, Lucy. I am going to put it right.”

She calls his number. It doesn’t ring. Instead, there is an automated message saying, “Service unavailable. Service unavailable. Please try later.”

Just then Tom Finn swaggers into the basement. He strikes a pose and shouts “Victory!” in his booming voice. “Let’s hear it for the Rebel Alliance!” He raises his hands above his head and walks around the room, clapping. His enthusiasm is so infectious that everyone stands and claps along with him.

Callahan moves over to him and grabs his arm. She limps as she drags him towards the door.

“Shit! What happened to you?”

“Have you got your chopper here?”

“Of course.”

“Take me to the rig.”

“The rig is on fire, Lucy.”

“So am I, flyboy. So let’s Go! Go! Go!”

In the air, Tom Finn turns to Callahan and looks her over. Hal has wiped the blood off her face, but it is still matted in her hair and splattered down her wetsuit. She has a fixed look, her eyes unwavering, watching the rig approach.

“What’s your plan?” he asks, gravely.

“I don’t need a plan.”

The helicopter arrives at the rig and hovers as a rescue chopper departs the helicopter deck. There is a lot of smoke in the air and a dozen people huddle on the perimeter, waiting for a ride to safety.

Callahan jumps out as soon as the chopper touches down. She moves over to the workers and directs them to the helicopter. Then she steps back and watches the helicopter alight.

She moves down the metal stairwell to the lower decks. It is pandemonium down there, a chaotic throng of people yelling, calling orders. Acrid smoke wafts in the air. A team directs a firehose through a hole in a wall. Orange flashing lights pulsate and sirens wail.

A door flies open and a man staggers out, carrying the weight of another. Their faces are blackened with soot.

Then from the same door, two medics wearing face masks carry a stretcher out of a structure with a man's body on the stretcher, covered in a sheet. Callahan watches as they take the body to a quiet corner where there are four other bodies, covered with sheets.

Callahan moves over, her heart falling. One of the man's hands is outside of the sheet. She recognises the shape. The fist is gripped around something small and dark. Callahan moves forward and

rests on her haunches, tears welling in her eyes. She takes the hand onto her lap and gently opens the fingers.

In Sam's palm is a dried seahorse, the one that he untangled from her hair. She takes the little animal, closes Sam's palm, then places his hand under the sheet.

She stands, distraught, and looks around at all the chaos. All the smoke and toxic fumes from melting metal and blistering paint. She looks up at the cranes and equipment, overwhelmed by all the trappings of an industry that knows only how to kill.

She moves away from the stretcher and descends the stairwell to pontoon. There are a dozen people down there, waiting on a boat to come alongside.

Callahan moves behind the stairs where she is out of sight. Here, she stands, feeling wretchedly sad. She wants to be away from the rig and back

in Aquaria. She slips over the side, into the water and begins the long swim to shore.

Melancholy

Callahan wakes in the dunes and lays there curled up in a ball, the rising sun warming her face. The rig fire is extinguished now, the rig looking like a blackened skeleton. A wisp of smoke rises from the scorched wreck.

Along the shorelines, debris from the accident has washed up. There are life vests, plastic sheeting, and pieces of charred material. The air is tinged with the smell of burnt plastic.

Callahan sits up and brushes sand off her face. She looks along the beach and sees a man walking in her direction. She raises a hand to acknowledge him. He's carrying a takeaway coffee cup.

"Coffee, ma'am." Hal says as he hands over the cup. He slumps down in the sand next to her. Looking up at the rig, he takes some sand in his hand and lets

it slip through his fingers. “I heard about Sam.”

“It was my fault, Hal.”

“Nah. I don’t think so.”

“I was my fault. I knew about the oil from the beginning. That’s why I chose this bay for the facility. I thought that I could lock them out.”

“That was a long time ago. And you were fifteen.”

“I have an ego of a Californian sealion,” she says, despondently. “How could I have been so stupid?”

“Fifth of October, 2005,” Hal says, looking at her.

“What’s that?”

“That was the day that I didn’t make any mistakes.”

Callahan nods her head, pensively.

“He was so sweet. He used to sing sea shanties to me. Even though he didn’t know the words. And he bought me a weight belt.” Callahan sighs.

“I had a beer with him once,” Hal says. “Yeah, he’s a funny guy.”

“You didn’t like him, did you?”

“I didn’t dislike him. He just wasn’t right for you.”

Callahan nods somberly, looking at the sand. A shiver runs through her body.

“That wetsuit is still wet. You must be freezing.”

Callahan nods. And tired. And hungry. And sad.

“Come on. Let’s get you into a hot shower.”

They stand and walk silently along the beach. Callahan moves as best she can, the leg wound from slipping on steps last night, still causing discomfort. As she walks, she observes the debris on the water’s edge. There are pieces from the burnt rig, and bits of white fibreglass from the destroyed Vawt. “We need to get this beach cleaned.”

“All in good time, Lucy.”

Inside the basement, Tom Finn is seated, looking despondent. When he sees Callahan, he wraps her in his arms, smothering her. “You are one crazy bitch.” He grips her shoulders and examines her. “Boy, you look good even when you’re all mussed up.”

“Is Expedient Energy pithed yet?”

“Oh, yeah. That’s well and truly pithed. In fact, I am under instruction to get you to Stacey Keiser at the first instance so that she can hand it over.”

“Hand what over?”

“The oil company.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Well, when the Expedient Energy share price got to two cents, she bought it for you. All of it.”

“She bought me an oil company?”

Callahan starts laughing. “I get the strangest gifts.”

“Cool huh? Should I fire Drillerson, or do you want to do it?”

“Let’s talk about that later.”

“Okay, that’s enough business talk,” Hal says. “The woman needs a hot shower.”

“Mother hen has got me,” Callahan waves to Tom Finn as Hal steers her towards the door.

“Quick detour, first,” Hal says, then leads her to a laboratory where there is a big tank full of seahorses. “You need to see this.”

Callahan leans forward to see a big fat seahorse, that has its tail wrapped round a piece of kelp. It is rocking back and forth.

“Now, you see the fat male, here doing the dance,” Hal asks, in a whisper.

“Okay.” Callahan observes the seahorse closely.

“I call this one Kevin.”

“Kevin the seahorse? What were you thinking?”

“Watch closely.”

The Sealioness studies the seahorse intently, noticing that its respiration is much quicker than that of its thinner neighbours.

“I feel like I have a big hole in my stomach,” Callahan says, morosely.

“That will fill in time,” Hal says, sagely. “He was a sweet kid, but he wasn’t your match.”

“You were right about fitness. He couldn’t adapt to the changed circumstances.”

“The blob has gone, by the way.”

“The blob?”

“The sea surface temperature anomaly. It’s moved out to sea and will probably disappear in the next few days.”

Callahan nods, letting it all sink in. Sam is gone. Expedient Energy is gone.

Priestley is gone. The blob is gone.
Does that mean that Aquaria is saved?

“I don’t mean to jump ahead,” Hal says. “But what about Tom Finn? You two look good together.”

Callahan chuckles. “That’s not going to fly, I’m afraid.”

Hal smiles, anticipating the story.
“Okay. And...”

“I asked him if he had any children. He started laughing and said, in his thick English private school accent, you’ve got me a bit wrong there, Lucy. You see, I’m a bit of a Sealioness, myself.”

Hal laughs aloud. “Okay. Now it makes sense.”

“I don’t know why I didn’t see that coming. I mean, what straight man perfumes his helicopter?”

“Kevin would know.” Hal says.
“Look. He’s doing his thing.”

At that moment, Kevin the seahorse makes a distinctive shaking movement. It buckles over, as though it were having a convulsion. Then, from a little slit in the middle of its belly, dozens of tiny seahorses squirt out. Kevin convulses again and more babies are jettisoned. Each squirt propels hundreds of tiny seahorses to their freedom. They are identical replicas of the father except for their diminutive size and the pale colour. As soon as they are free, their little fins get to work and they move through the water.

Callahan gasps, astounded. “Oh, wow! How many are there?”

“Could be thousand or more,” Hal tells her.

Callahan turns to her friend, her face lit up in a smile. “That’s just ridiculous.”

“The males will spend their whole life in an area no more than a few square metres.”

“Housebound,” Callahan says.

Kevin the seahorse makes a few final convulsions, the last of which delivers no more babies. Then it slumps to the sand, seeming exhausted from the effort.

The tank is now full of babies drifting around like snowflakes. Hundreds upon hundreds of them.

The female seahorse, bulging with eggs, swims over to the exhausted Kevin. She pushes her belly against him, trying to nudge him back into action.

“No rest for the wicked.” Hal says.
“She’s got another load of eggs for him to look after.”

“More eggs?”

“Yeah.”

“Poor Kevin,” Callahan says.

She suddenly feels very tired and lightheaded and thinks back to the string of terrifying situations of the past few weeks. She remembers jumping off the seismic ship, finding the dead dolphin on the Vawt, the stonefish in the Killing Tank, the bends, the white shark, Drillerson shooting at her and Priestley getting eaten by bull sharks. And finally, a long swim back to shore from a burning oil rig at night. What an extraordinary month! But no big deal, really. The Sealioness of Aquaria Bay takes those things in her stride.

Then she thinks of Sam again. Poor Sam who wasn't fit enough to adapt to the changed circumstances. Poor Sam who wasn't sharp enough to survive his own bomb. Sam, who had pressured her over and over to start a family with him, never letting up.

Kevin the seahorse makes one more convulsion and a tiny speck shoots out

of the slit on its belly. Another baby seahorse born into the world by its hard working dad.

“I think I dodged a bullet, Hal,” Callahan says.

“One? You’ve dodge a hundred, I’d say.”

Callahan shakes her head, “No. Just one.”

End.





Guy Lane
Focus on Sustainability
Entrepreneur / Commentator / Novelist

A writer without readers is just a dreamer, so thank you, thank you, thank you for reading my book!

If you would like to continue with our new relationship, here are some things you might like to do:

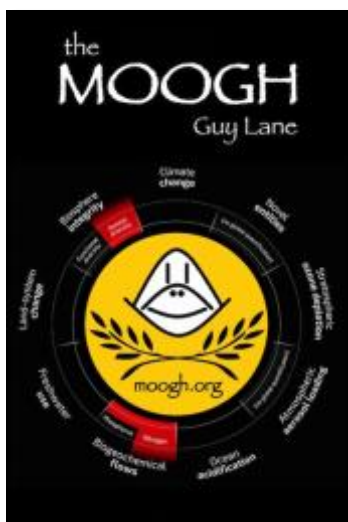
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- On the following pages, you can see all the books by Guy Lane.
- And of course, tell people about the book and the sustainability themes therein.
- There is no [trillionaire spaceman](#) coming to save us, and we are all going to have to intervene, ourselves.

Thank you again, dear reader.

All the best.

Guy Lane



The Moogh

When people see the Moogh, they run towards it screaming with joy, believing it to be a messenger of peace and

sustainability. Maggie

Tarp kept her head, and now she's the Moogh Reporter for the Fractious News Network. She's embedded with moogh.org, the shadowy organisation that won the UN contract to manage Moogh affairs. Unfortunately, for Maggie, her bosses don't like the stories that she writes about spirituality and Moogh philosophy - they just don't sell. So they pair her up with the hot-shot journalist, Perrin Speer. Sparks fly, and Maggie rejects everything that Perrin tries to teach her. Perrin falls foul of

moogh.org when he reveals that they are killing people to hide a deadly secret. As the Moogh Zone descends into chaos, Maggie finds that the Moogh also keeps a secret. But does she have what it takes to get the story?

“There are pop-culture icons for killing zombies & catching criminals, now there is one for saving the planet. The Moogh restores nature and revives the planetary boundaries.”

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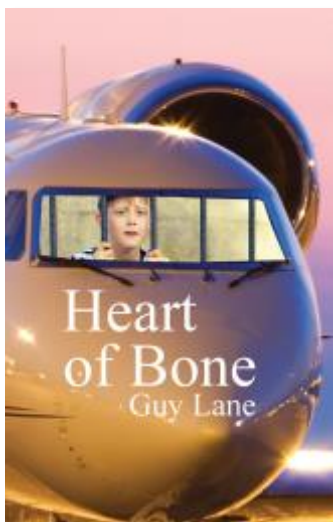
Yongala

Boer War veteran Corben Plath has nothing to lose when his estranged half-brother (the C.E.O. of the Queensland Coal Board) offers him blood money and a ticket on the luxury cruise liner S.S. Yongala. Aboard Yongala, Prof. Frederick Portland is traveling to Townsville with his young niece, Felicity, and his renewable energy invention, the 'Smoke Engine'. Fearing that the Smoke Engine will ruin them, the Coal Board task Plath with murdering Portland and destroying his machine. Onboard the ship, Plath strikes an innocent friendship with Felicity, not realizing that she is the niece of the man he has been sent to

kill. As Yongala steams into heavy weather, Plath learns that there are armed men aboard looking for him. Tired of fighting, he comes to see that his own salvation depends on Felicity surviving the storm.

“I wrote a fictional version of the final voyage of Yongala because I wanted the public to know that scientists have understood the basics of climate change since 1905.”

[Read **YONGALA** today](#)



Heart of Bone

Rebecca is a personal assistant to billionaire poison merchant, Gilly Clay, and she's trapped in a ruinous employment contract.

Her life flashes past through a mane of ginger hair and stress. Rebecca keeps her sanity through a secret love affair with psychologist and author, Tom Snowden. Snowden's new book - *Sustainability and the Superclass* - gets inside the heads of the powerful men who run the world so poorly. One day, Clay adopts an 8-year-old boy, Montgomery Earle, and grooms him as the heir to both the business empire and his defective moral compass. Seeing this, all of Rebecca's certainties

slip away, and she's forced to make a choice. She can either keep silent and watch the young boy being corrupted or risk everything by speaking out.

“We live in the age of a global Superclass, where half of the world’s wealth is controlled by as few people as could fit on a single corporate jet. They are so unplugged from reality, that we can’t rely on them to lead a transition to a sustainable future. Instead, we need to take matters into our own hands.”

[Read **HEART OF BONE** today](#)



The Oil Price

Danny Lexion easily meets his two life goals: he looks good and makes lots of money. One night, out on the town, he falls for the stunning environmental activist, Bren Hannan. Bren's mission is to save a tiny island from a ruthless oil company called Peking Petroleum. To do this, she needs to get to a UN Conference in Dubai. Danny offers to fly her there, thinking that it might lead to some romance in an exotic city. In Dubai, Danny learns that Bren's story doesn't check out. He finds himself in the cross-hairs of the mercenary security firm - Storm Front - who are protecting Peking Petroleum's interests. As the

bullets fly through the streets of Dubai, Danny learns that saving the planet is a deadly business, and the real price of oil is blood.

“The Oil Price is my first novel and something of an ensemble piece of characters and themes around the oil industry and the blocking moves of environmentalists.”

[Read **THE OIL PRICE** today](#)



Intervene

Anton Vorlov runs the world's biggest company, Between Destiny, from an island off the coast of Dubai. Officially, he's a billionaire

from Ukraine, but he is actually a trillionaire spaceman - and his real name is Zem. He never sleeps, and his vast organisation spends \$100 billion a week financing the restructure of the global economy to make it sustainable. Zem is trained to handle complicated international negotiations and the inevitable interference of the oil industry. However, when his personal assistant - a feisty Earthling called Megan - decides that she wants his attention, Zem gets right out his depth.

‘In twenty years of world-watching, I have yet to be convinced that there is an individual or an organisation that has the influence to alter the destiny of human civilization. I created a fictional spaceman to do the job, to foster the idea that collectively, we might all intervene, ourselves.’

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Aquaria

Lucy Callahan (38) is known as the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay due to her reputation for risk-taking, showmanship and thinking big. She's the founder of Aquaria, the world's most popular public aquarium and marine science precinct. One day, an oil rig ominously parks offshore. Callahan learns that Expedient Energy plans to drill for petroleum in the Aquaria marine park. The threat crystallises when the oil firm take over the Aquaria board, and the extent of their plan becomes known. Callahan dives into battle, prepared to risk everything – even her own safety – to protect her life's work. However, when her boyfriend, Sam, starts running

interference, Callahan realises that winning the battle against the oil firm may come at a personal cost, a relationship and possibly a family. How will the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay respond to this dilemma? Will she give in to her partner's wishes, or fight to the bitter end, even at the risk of her own life?

“Climate change, ocean acidification and plastics are killing our oceans. The fossil fuel industry, and particularly the oil industry, is to blame. Plastics are made of oil, afterall. We must all become ambassadors of the ocean if we want it to survive. Fortunately, we needn't juggle white sharks and stonefish, like Lucy Callahan, to play a part.”

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