

## Undocumented Island, Between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland

“All right, we’re going to go over this one more time,” Howard said as he approached the image currently being projected onto the shack’s plain, white wall. He paused before continuing to look over the combined twenty-five men. He’d gotten lucky in that his nephew had been able to bring a few of his friends on board with the operation the day before, which only bolstered their numbers and made the chances for success that much higher. “Uh, Johnny, you wanna click the clicky thing there.”

With a put upon sigh, Jonathan Swift moved his chair over to where the computer and projector were set up. Knowing Howard, he would likely be asking him to run the visual display system momentarily anyway since he didn’t have a clue how to really work a computer. As the only college graduate in attendance, it would, of course, fall to him to do it. Clicking the mouse, he changed the display on the projector so it showed a zoomed-in Google Maps image of the part of the Atlantic Ocean that spanned the distance between North Sydney, Nova Scotia and Channel Port Aux Basque, Newfoundland. A singular blue line stretched between the two port cities.

“Good,” Howard said, taking the fillet knife he held in his hand and resting the point on the dot representing North Sydney. “Now, the ship will leave North Sydney at about eleven forty-five. By four in the morning they’ll be passing by our little island here.” Nodding at Jonathan, the young man clicked a few times and started an animation of a large blue dot following the path of the blue line through the ocean, stopping once it came to rest halfway down it. “At three, Rod, you take the *Gill* and go lay out your seine. You got the corks painted up proper, right?”

Rod Whitborne, Captain of the *Blue Gill* nodded. “Solid black, no shine to ‘emt’all.”

“Good, that’s good,” Howard said with a nod of approval. “You get that seine set and git the hell outta there b’y. After that, we gonna set here, here, and here,” he said, nodding at Jonathan, who clicked the mouse and three smaller red dots appeared with corresponding vessel names beside them. The *Blue Gill* was due to be positioned just north and east of the blue dot, the red dot designated *Lovely Belle* positioned just north and to the west, and the red dot with the label *Turbulent Waters* south just along the blue travel line. “Once that boat done runs over the seine and gets its props all tangled, we move in. Rod, Jake, you boys hook on with your grapples while I set up the ladder and get my people on board. Once they’re on, they’ll drop down some ropes down so your people can get aboard too.”

“What about the crew?” a deckhand asked, “I doubt they’re gonna just sit around and let us do all this.”

Howard grinned wickedly. “That’s why the rest of my crew will be busy rounding everyone up and keeping them folks in line with their rifles and pistols. This ain’t no military boat, so they aren’t gonna do something stupid like try and fight back, especially when they get a gun stuck in their face. Once everyone else is aboard,” he said, nodding for Jonathan to proceed and turning to the wall when the image changed to show a not very detailed view of the transport vessel’s layout, “Me and a couple o’ ma crew will get to the bridge and get control. The rest of you will take care of rounding up the passengers and crew. Rod, you get the starboard side, Jake, you and your boys get the port. We’ll put everyone in here,” He placed the tip of the knife on the open section aft on deck seven, “The lounge. There should be more than enough room for everyone there though it might get crowded.”

Slipping the knife back into its sheath on his hip, he turned and folded his arms over his barrel chest. “Now, let me be real damn clear about this. There gonna be families on dis boat, and that means kids. You gotta be real careful about that. Those kids are gonna be real scared when this happens, so you make damn sure not one of ‘em gets hurt, ya hear me? I don’t care if yagotta poke one of the crew in the head to get ‘em cooperative, but no hurting kids, clear?”

“Boss,” Robert Harris, one of Howards deck hands, said hesitantly, “If there’s gonna be kids involved then maybe we ought to look at a different kind of boat.”

“Naw,” Howard replied confidently, “Kids is the reason why this is gonna work b’y. The news’ll eat it up and the gover’ment’ll listen to us that much more. They don’t want to see no kids hurt even if they don’t give a fuck about us adults.”

He wasn’t thrilled about it, none of them were, but Robert and the rest trusted the experienced captain and naval man. Besides, things were becoming so desperate for them this really did seem like the only way to get anyone to listen to them. Robert himself was worried about how much longer he would be able to afford to pay his mortgage, to say nothing about making sure his wife and son were able to put food on the table. If Howard thought this was the best way to get the government to listen, it really did seem like the best option at this point.

“All right,” the captain said, “Anything else? We all set for the rest of our gear?”

“All set Howard,” Jake Callahan announced, “Me and Rod already got our people set up for jobs.”

“Well all right then,” the burly captain said with a smile, “Let’s get on home then. Be back here right after dinner and we’ll do any last minute stuff.”

With a general murmuring of agreement, the collection of fishermen rose and started making their way out of the ramshackle meeting shed. As he watched them go, Howard knew that it was still very much up in the air whether or not this plan of his would work. The logistics of it were sound enough, but the deciding factor was how the men handled their jobs. He’d chosen his, Rod’s, and Jake’s crew because they were proven sailors and had always been good at following orders. Unfortunately, the human factor was always a problem in any plan. Once they were in the thick of it, he wasn’t sure how many would stay true and how many would falter.

It was a risk, but in his eyes it was a risk worth taking to get back what had been taken from them.

## **Delta Hotel, Moncton, New Brunswick**

For the first time in days, I woke up without it being from escaping from some nightmare and feeling completely refreshed and energetic. I suppose that could be attributed to the fact that we had made the universal decision yesterday to park the R/V overnight and stay in a hotel for our last real night on the road. True, the trip on the ferry would be overnight, but that really didn't count and we didn't have the option of sleeping in the R/V then anyway. Another thing that might have been cause for such a good night's rest could have been because we had separate rooms, Ashley and Aiden in one and Angela and I in another. The privacy, after a very nice meal in the hotel's restaurant and some movie time in Aiden and Ashley's room, also allowed Angela and I to get in some very much needed alone time. Yes, I loved my friends dearly, but I definitely wanted Angela all to myself for the brief time we had left before she had to fly back to Wolf Springs.

I just hope we didn't keep the neighbors up too late. Angela can be quite...vocal. Oh who am I kidding? I easily out-screamed her last night and, honestly, I didn't feel one iota of embarrassment at the idea that the people on either side of our room knew that my sexy lover had pleased me six ways to Sunday. I didn't know if that was because I simply didn't care or if it was due to Libidine's lustful taint that had become such a core part of me.

At the moment, it didn't matter. All that did was curled up on the bed beside me watching me with lazy, sexually sated eyes as I sat up and stretch luxuriously.

“You know,” she purred, “You keep that up and I might not let you out of this bed.”

Grinning like the cat that got the cream, I leaned down and slowly traced the tip of my tongue over the contours of her lips. I allowed her a second to moan with desire before my mouth sealed over hers in a deep, wet kiss that had me dampening in other places as well. “Who says we have to get out of bed?” I whispered against her mouth.

And, of course, my goddamn phone rang, its sudden, shrill tone stabbing through the mood like an icicle. While Angela laughed, I groaned and rolled over to first slap the damn thing before flicking my finger over the digital slider to answer it and activating the speakerphone. “What?” I growled.

“Come on lazy bones,” Ashley’s cheerful voice sang out of the phone’s speaker, “It’s nine o’clock already. We want to see the sights before the last leg of the trip.”

“Ashley,” I groaned, falling back on my pillow and throwing an arm over my eyes while Angela lazily stroked my thighs with her fingertips, sending little flares of heat through me, “It’s fucking Moncton. There’s probably not much to see here.”

“Sure there is,” she said excitedly, “There’s Magnetic Hill, and the Apple Art Gallery that has local artists, and the Acadian Museum-”

“Give us about a half an hour Ashley,” Angela called from the other side of the bed even as I threw her a pouting look, “We’ll meet you in the lobby.”

“Okay, see you then,” she sang out and disconnected.

“She’s probably driven Aiden crazy by now,” Angela said with a laugh as she swung out of bed and headed for the bathroom. I watched her with a smile since, like me, she’d slept completely naked last night and there wasn’t a stitch to obstruct my view of her shapely and succulent body. The teasing little smile she tossed me before disappearing inside was enough to have things clench low in my body.

Alone now, I sat on the bed and did a little self-examination. I did this most mornings these days, though usually during a jog, as a means of seeing just how much influence Libidine still had over me. There was no question that I was experiencing a low-grade sense of general arousal, but that could easily be attributed to the marathon bout of sex I'd had last night combined with having just seen Angela's naked body. Beyond that, I didn't feel any overwhelming urges to just go and fuck the first thing that looked like a human and had a heartbeat. That was good, very good in fact. Just a few days ago, I probably would have either instantly followed Angela into the bathroom or not even let her get out of bed so I could have my way with her and try to experience as many orgasms as possible. Now, the bother I felt at her temporary departure stemmed more from the fact that she would have to fly back to the U.S. soon and how much I would miss her on the whole rather than the immediate absence of a sexual partner. I hoped that meant that the lust taint was beginning to fade, but I wasn't doing jumps for joy just yet. Still, it gave me a little hope that I might possibly be able to go back to living a somewhat normal life that didn't revolve around sex.

The fact that I was joining Angela in the shower less than a minute later was nothing more than being environmentally responsible and wanting to conserve water. The quick bout of wet, orgasmic sexy time that came from it was merely incidental, I assure you.

When we arrived in the lobby some forty-five minutes later, with Angela blushing with embarrassment and me just basking in the afterglow of orgasmic bliss, Aiden and Ashley took one look at us, smiled knowingly, and linked arms with both of us before we all trooped out of the lobby in search of entertainment for the day.

Maybe it was because Angela had treated me to some morning nookie, but my mind was hardly occupied with sex at all that morning. Oh sure, when I saw a cute guy or girl I couldn't stop the quick flash of desire or a brief snapshot-style image of the two of us locked in throes of hot, wet, messy sex, but that was all they were, quick flashes that came and went in less than five seconds. They didn't dominate my thoughts or take away from the fun I was having with my friends going to museums and art galleries and even the famous Magnetic Hill, where it looked like cars that were stopped and shifted into neutral looked like they were

rolling uphill, backwards, supposedly due to some unseen magnetic properties within the area. Aiden and Ashley were absolutely astounded by it, the latter even squealing in child-like delight. They were having so much fun I didn't have the heart to splash cold reality all over them and explain the scientific principles behind the optical illusion regarding the perceived slope of the hill versus what it actually was. We just let them have their fun and went on our way when it was over.

I felt quite a sense of accomplishment with myself for that. Even before my encounter with the lust demon, I'd had very serious impulse control issues, particularly when it came to speaking my mind. It wasn't until after my friendship with Ashley and Aiden had fully blossomed that I had found myself tempering my habit of speaking without thinking and actually considering the thoughts and feelings of others instead of only worrying about my own. True, I'd gotten a bit of a setback due to Libidine's lust taint, but I was pleased to see that it wasn't so overpowering that I'd lost control of myself just as bad as or worse than before.

Probably the greatest part of the day was when we stopped by a small gathering featuring local artists. It wasn't anything major, just a bunch of sun tents set up in Centennial Park with the artists displaying their individual wares on tables, but the uniqueness and diversity of what was being offered was quite interesting. Everything from paintings, to sculptures, to jewelry, and more were available to look at or buy at a person's whim. Interestingly, the majority of the artwork was either Native American, or First Nation as it was called by Canadians, or Celtic in nature. It made sense since, based upon the bit of research I had done prior to the start of our trip, the majority of the population within the Atlantic Provinces of Canada were comprised of those two particular cultures and ethnicities. Regardless, the talent displayed by this local talent was truly quite remarkable. Were it not so elitist, I had no doubt that many of the artists I saw here would have no trouble selling their pieces for great profit in any number of high-end art galleries in New York.

While I myself didn't have much of a cultural background to draw from, given that I had no memory of one, Ashley and Aiden both had Celtic roots in their family line, and thus were fascinated by the artwork based on that particular culture, though it was for different reasons. For Ashley, she simply loved the

beauty of the intricacy when it came to the traditionally knot-based artwork that was universally recognizable as being from that culture, while Aiden seemed to take a more peer-related appreciation for the dedication and talent required to construct such pieces. For Angela and I, we were simply enjoying our time with one another and appreciating the fact that we were able to have a nice, relaxing day when so many as of late had been rather, shall we say, turbulent.

Ashley's delighted squeal drew our attention over to where she was leaning over one particular jeweler's table. "These are beautiful," she gushed, lightly fingering a necklace or bracelet.

"Thank you," the older woman replied, clearly pleased to see someone show such appreciation for her work.

"How much are these?" she asked, pointing to something on the table that I couldn't see from where Angela and I were standing back and out of the way.

"What's up?" Aiden asked as she stepped up beside me.

I simply shrugged. "Ashley's got her eye on something over there."

Aiden canted her head ever so slightly, a sign that I'd learned over the last few months that she was actively focusing on her enhanced sense of hearing. "They're talking about some of the jewelry," she said before wincing and looking embarrassed at the exact moment when Ashley turned her head to cast her a mildly chiding look, "And apparently she doesn't want me listening in. Why don't we go check out those hides over there."

"Why?" Angela asked in confusion as the three of us started to walk over to the station in question where a woman and her daughter clearly of First Nations decent displayed a wide variety of different colored animal hides.

"Well for one it gets us out of earshot of Ashley," Aiden explained as she started looking over the display and lightly fingering the material, "And two, I could use some of this for knife handles and sheathes if I want to try forging some more traditional blades in native style."

"If you plan on using them for functioning knives," the woman said as she came around the table, "I would suggest the deer or buck skins, but I wouldn't



recommend using them for the handles. The texture of the material doesn't really conform well to the rigors that come with using a blade for actual work."

"I was thinking more as the outer lining for the sheath," Aiden explained, "And maybe for the handle on a ceremonial knife I was thinking about trying. I typically use hard woods or synthetics for the handle."

"Why would you want to create a ceremonial knife then?" the woman inquired bluntly.

"Just to see if I can do it," Aiden replied with a shrug. "I've made so many functional blades I'd like to try my hand at some of the more intricate work like blade accents and designs."

"In that case," the woman said, picking up a large swatch of tan-colored deer hide, "I would recommend this one. It is sturdy, yet very soft and would easily conform to a knife handle or sheath shaping."

Looking over the hide, Aiden examined the item carefully. I even saw her nostrils flare, indicating she was smelling it as well, though for the life of me I had no idea why.

"It's perfect," she said with a smile, digging her wallet out of her back pocket, "How much."

With the hide paid for, we were about to return to find Ashley when the girl in question came running up to us with a smile that nearly split her face. "Come on, I want to give you guys something."

Sharing looks of curious confusion, the three of us followed our friend over to a park bench where she indicated we should all sit down. Still confused, all of us sat as she practically bounced on her feet with excitement. "I wanted to give you all something to show you just how much you all mean to me," she began.

"Ashley, you don't have to-" I started to say before I was waved into silence.

"I want to," she said firmly, digging into the small paper bag in her hand before coming up with a necklace bearing two three-quarter circles terminating in extended lines woven together. "Angela, this is for you," she announced, handing

her the necklace. “It’s a wisdom knot symbolizing wisdom, intelligence, and ingenuity.”

Taking the necklace, Angela looked at her with surprise. “Ashley, I don’t know what to say. Thank you.”

“Here,” I told her, “Let me.” While Angela held up her hair, I carefully fastened the necklace around her neck. Once secured, the intertwined knots nestled lightly at her cleavage, looking both lovely and drawing the eye to those delicious swells of her breasts.

“Aiden, I know you’re not a big fan of jewelry but…” With a small flourish, she drew from the bag a bracelet that was half silver liberally sprinkled with tiny Triquetra knots with one large one set at the end of the band before transitioning into twin, tightly braided half-loops of stout-looking leather.

With trembling fingers, Aiden reached out and took the bracelet from Ashley’s offering hand before her eyes lifted to meet her friend’s. Without her saying a word, I could tell that the gift truly touched the wild girl and it seemed like she was almost on the verge of tears. “Thanks Ashley,” she whispered in a choked voice, confirming my suspicions as she carefully slipped the bracelet onto her wrist while Ashley looked on with a happy smile.

“Kitty,” she said, turning towards me and drawing another piece from the bag, “This is for you.”

My eyes went to and remained on the delicate looking chain resting in her palm. It was clearly made of silver, with multiple little Triquetra charms affixed to it that spanned the entire circumference. “It’s lovely,” I breathed, holding out my wrist so she could put it on.

Shaking her head with a knowing smile, Ashley knelt down and took one of my feet in her hands, sending a sudden flash of heat racing up my leg and into the core of me before I had the chance to battle it down. This was one of my best friends, I shouldn’t be entertaining sexy thoughts about her no matter how gorgeous she was. With deft fingers that would undoubtedly make her a very skilled physician someday, and no I did not allow my train of thought on that to derail into the perverted, she slipped the chain around my ankle before fastening

the clasp. When I lifted my foot, I smiled at the way the sun glinted off the silver charms while the movement caused a whisper of tinkling of the silver. Setting my foot down, I slipped off the bench to kneel before my friend and embraced her tightly. “Thank you,” I whispered meaningfully in her ear before kissing her cheek and returning to the bench shortly before Ashley joined us between Aiden and I.

“So,” Aiden said as she considered the bracelet, “The Triquetra...”

“For the three of us,” she explained.

“But you don’t have one,” I pointed out with a knowing smile. The bag hadn’t been discarded yet so it was quite obvious something still remained inside.

Ashley returned my grin with an embarrassed one of her own as she drew out the last item. It was also an anklet, as thin as mine, but containing only one charm instead of multiple. Hers was a small, half-inch circle of silver with a black Triquetra etched into it. Glancing over to Aiden, the wolf girl nodded and slid off the bench onto her knees in front of Ashley, taking the chain and securing it around her ankle before resuming her seat.

For some time, the four of us sat there in silence, content to simply be in the presence of one another with Angela’s arm around my waist and Aiden and I holding Ashley’s hands. “I’m still scared,” Ashley admitted, finally breaking the silence, “But I know I’ll be okay with you guys there with me.”

“Bet your ass we’re with you,” Aiden asserted with a wolfish grin.

I smiled and nodded, giving the lovely redhead’s hand a squeeze, “Now and forever.”

**Trans Canada Highway 1 East, Stephenville Exit**

“Jumpin’ dine lard Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,” Tony Bedford muttered worriedly as he jerked the wheel of his truck, sending him careening across the highway and onto the off-ramp leading to Stephenville. He was late, and that wasn’t a good thing. He was supposed to be at Rod’s boat in Cape St. George in the next fifteen minutes, and that was in Port Aux Port, a good hour away from where he was now. He’d get in serious trouble for this, especially since what they were doing was so important not only for them, but for all fishermen. Tony seriously doubted his girlfriend being horny was going to be an acceptable excuse for this, if they were even still there by the time he arrived. For all he knew, they’d just weigh anchor and steam away long before he ever arrived, leaving him holding his dick in his hand on the dock. There was no way he was going to let that happen, not with something this important at stake.

He’d just hammered down on the gas pedal when his heart stopped for a moment before making the journey up into his throat in the blink of an eye and choking off his air. Speeding down the road in the other direction was the unmistakable silhouette of an RCMP patrol vehicle. Getting pulled over by the cops was definitely *not* going to help him get to Cap St. George any faster.

Thankfully, he had the presence of mind to simply lift his foot off the accelerator instead of stomping on the brake like every instinct was yelling for him to do. He kept his eyes straight ahead as the squad car passed him and raced around the corner. It wasn’t until it was out of sight that he let out a slow, shuddering breath at just how close he’d been to getting pulled over. It looked like the cop had something else to do and wasn’t worried about speeders. Thankfully, since it was highly unlikely there would be another one around since the RCMP were pretty spread out on this side of the island, he stomped back down on the gas and let the speedometer climb back up.

His mind didn’t even register the flashing blue and red lights in his rear view mirror until the piercing wail of a siren filled the air directly behind him. “Fuck!” he shouted as he caught sight of what should have been the long gone RCMP patrol car clearly seeking to pull him over. He briefly entertained the idea of trying

to outrun the cop, but there was nowhere for him to go. This stretch of road continued on for a good thirty kilometers with nothing on either side except trees and craggy landscapes.

With a heavy sigh, Tony pulled his truck to the side of the road and threw it into park even as the RCMP patrol car pulled in behind him. With any luck, he would get a scolding from the cop, probably a ticket, and be on his way in ten minutes. Drumming his fingers anxiously on the steering wheel, he jumped when there was a sudden tapping on the window. Looking over with wide, surprised eyes, he saw the officer signaling for him to roll down his window. “Good afternoon sir,” the officer said, “Constable McHugh with the RCMP, can I see your license, insurance, and vehicle registration please.”

“Yeah, sure,” Tony mumbled, digging out his wallet to shove his license at the officer before hurriedly rummaging through his glove box for the damn insurance and registration. Once he’d located it and handed it over as well, the constable glanced over the paperwork briefly before flicking his suspicious gaze up to Tony’s.

“Where are you headed to in such a hurry?” he inquired disarmingly.

“I’m late to get to my boat b’y,” Tony explained, using a fallback excuse he’d pedaled hundreds of times in the past, “If I don’t get there soon my captain’s gonna jest take off and leave me sittin’ on the dock.”

“And where is your captain’s boat?” Constable McHugh asked.

“Over in Port Aux Port,” Tony told him quickly, hoping the man would just get on with the ticket-writing already.

“I see,” the constable said, tucking Tony’s paperwork and ID into the breast pocket of his bulletproof vest cover, “Would you mind stepping out of the vehicle for me Mr. Bedford.”

“What the hell for?” Tony cried, feeling his heart begin hammering in his chest. What the hell was this pig doing? Did he know something about what Captain Rod had going on with Captain Shepherd?

“Just step out of the vehicle sir,” the constable repeated, shifting back and to the side slightly.

“Look,” Tony said, turning to reach for his phone on the passenger seat. If he could show the man the fake text message he’d set up on his phone in case anyone asked where he was going, maybe this annoying-assed cop would leave him the hell alone.

“Get your hands up!”

The sudden, shouted order was enough to have Tony’s head whipping around to find himself staring down the barrel of the constable’s drawn side arm. While Tony liked to boast how he wasn’t afraid of the police, sort of like how most individuals within his social circle did, staring straight at a weapon that could easily end his life in a heartbeat did tend to put things quite firmly in perspective. Trying and failing to keep from shaking too badly, Tony slowly lifted his hands to show he didn’t have a weapon on him.

“Get out of the vehicle facing away from me,” the constable ordered, his weapon not wavering in the slightest, indicating he was completely in control of the situation.

As Tony complied with the constable’s commands, the one thought that was going through his mind when he felt the steel of the handcuffs lock around his wrists was: *Captain’s gonna kill me for this.*

**Department of Environment and Conservation, Corner Brook**

Eric was thankful that he lived in the same city the office for the West Coast branch of the Department of Environment and Conservation was located. Given the layout of Newfoundland and how greatly spread out its populated areas were, he was glad he hadn't had to make the four hour drive to Gander's office instead of the ten minutes he needed to navigate Corner Brook's admittedly careless and insane drivers. It also made timing the drive much easier so the moment his foot crossed the threshold of the government building's front door the clock ticked over to one P.M. Less than a minute later he was standing at the desk of Janice Perry, secretary of Colin Mercer, the manager of the West Coast office. Though he anticipated at least a ten minute wait once he let the woman know the reason for his visit, he was surprised when she told him to go right on in to the manager's office.

Pushing open the office door, he saw Colin Mercer himself, a slightly overweight man of middle age, with rather nondescript brown hair, in a decent suit sitting behind a modest desk and conversing with a taller, much more physically fit man of around the same age garbed in what was unmistakably a Canadian Armed Forces uniform. Based on the unit insignia on the man's shoulder, Eric knew immediately that he was part of the DRDC, or Defense Research and Development Canada, the agency responsible for the science and technology utilized to better arm the country's military forces.

"Ah, Mr. Howlett, I'm so glad you were able to make it today. How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Eric said shortly, devoting his full attention to the man in uniform who, even now, was looking him over in what was clearly an appraising manner.

"Good, good," Mercer said, his gaze briefly flicking over to the military man and back to Eric. It seemed he had already picked up on the fact that in less than five seconds he had essentially become a non-entity in the room. "Well, I just want to thank you for your help with that rogue and I guess I'll leave you to it then."

While neither man said a word and only continued to visually size one another up, the portly manager quickly hurried from his office, essentially relinquishing it to the military officer. It was several seconds after the door had closed that one of them finally spoke.

“Colonel Randal Flagg,” the officer said by way of introduction.

Eric’s lips quirked briefly in a sardonic smile. “Please tell me you’re joking.”

“Considering I’ve been the butt of every Stephen King joke since I was in middle school, no,” the man said, the corner of his mouth lifting just enough that Eric knew the man understood exactly what he’d meant. “I won’t bore you with pleasantries Sergeant,” he continued, using Eric’s former military rank, “I wanted to offer you the opportunity to be a part of a new program we’ve been developing and are ready to put into implementation.”

“I’m retired,” Eric said, silently cursing himself when his weary body forced him to be the first to break eye contact and sit on the somewhat comfortable couch along the wall of the office.

“True,” the Colonel said, pulling over a chair so he would be able to sit across from Eric with only a coffee table separating them, “But your service record speaks for itself. You are our ideal candidate for this program.”

“Better than anyone else currently serving?” The question was coupled with a skeptical lift of an eyebrow.

“When it comes to snipers, yes.”

Eric looked at the man silently for several minutes, who in turn returned his stare unblinkingly. He might not have been the most intelligent person around, but he knew without even needing to ask that this was undoubtedly a very hush-hush kind of program. That was why the Department manager had departed so quickly and readily and why the Colonel wasn’t saying anything else about the program yet.

“Obviously,” Eric said, measuring his words carefully, “You’re not going to give me many details about it. I’m guessing Top Secret classification? Alright,” he continued after receiving a nod of confirmation, “Go ahead and make your sales pitch.”

Reaching back, the military man retrieved his briefcase from where it rested on the floor at the foot of the manager’s desk and popped it open. He withdrew



several sheaves of paper and set them neatly in a pile on the coffee table before lifting his gaze to the aging sniper's. "The current progression of your disease is such that you will likely be dead inside of two years," he said bluntly, causing Eric to wince involuntarily. Even though he knew Huntington's would kill him, it still stung more than a little to have the entirety of his lifespan spelled out so clinically. "You are still capable of generalized movement, but it has become severely limited. I would guess that you probably had to soak in a hot bath for at least an hour after returning from eliminating that rogue bear just so you wouldn't be crying in pain."

"You're not very good at this," Eric ground out between his teeth.

"What we are proposing," the Colonel went on as though Eric hadn't even spoken, "Is a possibility of completely eliminating Huntington's from your body and returning you to perfect health."

While fifty years ago such a notion would have probably seemed so farfetched as to be insane, the advances in science and technology, particularly when it came to scientists possessed of gadgeteer or divisor mutations, made what was once considered science fiction very much a reality. Still, Eric had never heard of any kind of procedure, theorized or otherwise, that promised to actually eliminate a disease like Huntington's. With something like that, it would certainly have made the news. "I'm guessing I won't understand a word of the science behind it," he surmised, "But why look at me for this and what else is involved in the process?" It didn't take someone of great intellect to figure out that there was far more going on here than a simple cure for a debilitating disease. You didn't make clandestine proposals to someone with his kind of military service record without having something else in mind.

"I'm afraid that's all I can tell you about it unless you agree to take part in the program."

He'd pretty much expected that but it was still frustrating to be kept in the dark about it. "Okay, can you tell me why you picked me instead of one of your active servicemen and women?"

"No."

It was beyond frustrating to have this man dangling some kind of miracle cure right in front of his eyes, yet remain absolutely silent on why it was being offered and what strings were attached to it. Given the level of secrecy, Eric had no doubt that if he signed on with whatever this program was, they wouldn't let him out of it for a very long time. Without a doubt it had to do with his skill as a sniper, and the fact that someone from the military was making this presentation made it clear that the reason was military or combat based. Likely, they wanted him to return as a sniper, but for what reason he couldn't be sure.

“Obviously you want a sniper,” Eric told him, “and based on the fact that it's you talking to me you want to bring me back into the military.” The man's completely blank face gave nothing away to indicate if he was correct or not. Sighing, Eric stretched out legs that were starting to cramp. “So which dictator are you looking to have me kill?”

While the Colonel didn't offer any facial reaction, he did respond to the question, which was the payoff Eric was looking for when he'd made the crass comment. “We don't want to turn you into an assassin Sergeant. This is Canada, not the United States. Our only goal is to ensure the safety and security of this country and we don't make a habit of doing that by striking out at foreign dictators. I understand your hesitation,” he said, his voice shifting to allow a touch of sympathy through the official, neutral tone, “You served your country with distinction and honor and you don't want to tarnish that by changing from a defender into a murderer. I can't tell you much unless you agree to the program, but I will say this: This program is strictly for the purpose of defending lives, not taking them.”

It was all the right words, but could Eric take them at face value? He'd served under many different commands during his time in the military, and each of them had their own agenda in one form or another. Could he trust that what this man was proposing would be for the good of the country, or would it be so a certain few would be able to protect their singular interests.

“Who would I be reporting to?” he asked.

“Me.”

That made Eric frown. “Since when does DRDC command combat units?”

“I’m not with DRDC, I’m with JTF2.”

Joint Task Force 2, the Canadian equivalent of America’s Navy SEALs and arguably some of the deadliest warriors in the world. Eric had never had the distinction of working with them before, being a sniper he operated on his own or with a spotter, but he’d heard plenty during his long career. It was almost a contradiction to how the world perceived the country, and perhaps that was what made them so effective. No one would expect a friendly country like Canada to have such a superior fighting force.

“Attaché?” Eric guessed, nodding at the patch on the Colonel’s shoulder.

“Of sorts,” he acknowledged, “More like a partnership. I handle the soldiers, they handle the science. So, what do you say?”

The more he thought about it, the more it sounded like a dream come true. All Eric had ever known was being a sniper. Whether it was in the military or in hunting in civilian life, he’d never felt more at home than behind the scope of a rifle. Now, he had been served up the opportunity to do it once more on a silver platter full of promises. Hell, he’d be an idiot to say no, especially when refusing it would result in his certain death in a couple of years.

“I’m assuming you’ll want me to do a qualification’s course so you know I’ve still got it,” he said.

Before he could answer, the Colonel’s phone rang shrilly in his jacket pocket. With a frown, one of worry instead of annoyance, he quickly retrieved it and answered the call without even offering an apology to Eric. “Flagg,” he barked authoritatively. After listening to the other end of the line for a few moments Eric saw his face darken before his gaze swept over to him and a slow smile began to form. “Understood. I’m on my way.”

Disconnecting from the call, he replaced the phone in his jacket pocket. “How would you feel about a field test instead?”

## **North Sydney, Nova Scotia**

We arrived at Marine Atlantic in North Sydney well before it was time for us to catch the ferry to Newfoundland, so all of us took the opportunity to have a nice dinner in the coastal town as well as pick up any last-minute things we might need...like anti-nausea medicine. Angela claimed she didn't get seasick, but Ashley, Aiden, and I had never been out on a boat like this before so none of us had any idea if we would get seasick or not. So, like the boyscouts, or girl scouts in our case, we decided it would best to be prepared and picked up the Canadian equivalent to Dramamine, Gravol. Interestingly enough, it couldn't be purchased over the counter like normal, but actually had to be given to us by a pharmacist. Apparently Canadians were far more concerned about medicinal abuse than Americans.

With our bellies full, and hopefully staying that way, and our sea voyage preparations complete, we headed for the Marine Atlantic ferry port. Once we'd gone through the toll booth-style check in station and taken our place in one of the several lines of vehicles waiting for the ferry to arrive, we decided to step out and stretch our legs a little. We weren't alone in this thinking as there were quite a few passengers doing the same thing as we, just milling about, talking, having a cigarette, and just generally killing time until it was time to board.

It was during that time, while Angela and Aiden took the opportunity to use the restroom inside of the terminal, that a little boy of perhaps three or four-years-old came running up to Ashley and I as we were leaning against the side of the R/V chatting and stared at us in awe. While I stood there blinking and not quite sure what to make of this, Ashley, the consummate kind soul, beamed brightly at him and knelt down so, because of her diminutive size, she was actually at eye level with him. "Well hello."

“Pretty,” he said reaching out without hesitation to give one of her long, crimson locks a tug.

Though I could see a flinch in her eyes from the quick pain in her scalp, her smile never wavered as she gently untangled his chubby little fingers from her hair. “Thank you,” she said graciously, “But you know, girls don’t really like their hair being pulled like that.”

“Speak for yourself,” I muttered, remembering a time when Angela had ridden me like a mare and the delicious surge of wet heat I’d experienced from her tugging fiercely on my mane.

Ashely’s pointed glare was more than enough of a silent reproof to have me flushing in embarrassment. What the hell was wrong with me? I thought I was getting better with controlling my impulses and here I was blurting out sexual innuendos in front of a small child. *Sorry*, I mouthed and redoubled my efforts to maintain a good girl state of mind.

“It’s okay if you want to touch it,” she went on, and I practically drew blood biting on my lower lip to keep from doing something stupid like crowing out ‘That’s what he said’, “But you need to be gentle. Girls like it when you you’re gentle with them.”

“I’ll be right back,” I said quickly, and practically sprinted away from the R/V towards the terminal before I lost all impulse control. During the several minute walk across the lot, I silently berated myself for going against my own vow to get a better handle on this lust taint that had been imprinted upon me. If I was going to function within society, I couldn’t take every single incident or spoken word as an allegory for sex. Unless I wanted to work in a strip club or as a prostitute, and I didn’t...although there was something kind of sexy about the idea of being up on stage with scores of men lusting after me. *Goddamn it, get a hold of yourself Kitty!* I practically screamed inside my own head. I hadn’t been this bad before, so what the hell was sparking such a surge a lust in me?

I’d just passed through the door of the restroom when it suddenly hit me. Emotionally, I had no idea what was going on. All I knew is that I was hot and ready and rapidly losing control of myself. However, when the intellectual part of

my brain finally found its voice, the answer was obvious: I hadn't had sex in over eight hours.

Making my way to the sink to splash some water on my face, I examined the evidence to see if my theory was correct. Every day since Angela had joined us on our trip, she and I had had sex, typically before going to sleep that night but sometimes in the morning as well. On the days where we'd only slept together at night, by the afternoon I was definitely...well, there's no other word for it really other than 'in heat'. I couldn't wait for our day to end so I could drag Angela back into the bedroom so we could fuck each other silly. On the days where we had sex in the morning and at night, I was usually quite calm and centered and the whole idea of it was little more than what I presumed an average person's thoughts and impulses of it were: present but far from overpowering.

To that end, I compared it to my knowledge of behavioral patterns when it came to drug abuse, particularly the more addictive variety. While I didn't have a tremendous working knowledge on the subject, I was familiar with how drug addiction caused systemic and increasing changes in mental and social behavior, particularly when the addict was feeling a strong urge to partake of the substance. There was no denying that I was experiencing very similar changes in my thought processes and impulse behaviors. While it wasn't anger or aggression because I didn't have my 'fix', the almost overwhelming lustful desires and needs were certainly a parallel to it.

Did this mean I was no better than a drug addict now? Was I doomed to live the rest of my life looking forward to my next sexual 'fix' and would adjust the very foundations of my daily life to accommodate it? The very idea of being handicapped in such a way had a wave of depression washing over me and filling my eyes with hot tears. I wanted to just live a normal fucking life, or at least as normal as a mutant with the ability to create intensely hot energy knives could. I didn't want to become some sex addict whose every waking thought was when I would get my next dose of orgasms.

Why did this have to happen to me? What the fuck had I done to deserve this? First it was Sinclair and his psycho scientist friend, then it was Libidine. Was

I just a goddamn magnet for people wanting to turn me into a sex slave? Was that really what my life was going to be like from now on?

Maybe I should just stop fighting it. It was so hard to keep those impulses at bay and it felt *so* good when I finally just gave into them. I don't know what it had been like when I had been a man, but sex as I was now was a mind-blowing experience. I was very sensitive when it came to physical stimulation and it didn't take much to send me flying over that edge of carnal bliss while still wanting more. Maybe that was what I needed to do, just give in to those needs that had become the core of my being and let whoever do whatever they wanted to me. As long as I got my beloved orgasms what did it matter?

The feeling of someone's hand on my shoulder didn't really pull me out of my rampant self-deprecation, but it did get my attention. When I looked over I saw Angela and Aiden standing there with very concerned looks on their faces. "Kitty, what is it? Why are you crying?"

Lifting shaking fingers, I felt a dampness on my cheeks that indicated I indeed had been crying without even realizing it. With a choked sob, I threw my arms around my lover and began bawling like a baby while she held me close and stroked my hair making soothing noises in my ear. It felt so good to be held like that, but the physical contact, especially feeling Angela's breasts crushed against mine, caused delicious little sparks of desire to shoot through me. I sobbed that much harder because it was clear I was losing more and more control of myself to my addiction.

I didn't realize Angela and Aiden had led me out of the bathroom, through the terminal, and across the lot until I suddenly became aware that I was in the living area of the R/V surrounded by my friends. I should have been embarrassed to have created such a public spectacle but I was really beyond caring. I wanted to either die or get fucked into a coma, and I wasn't sure which would have been the preferred choice.

"Kitty, talk to me," Angela said with an undisguised note of desperation in her voice.

"I'm...an...addict," I gasped out between sobs.

“What do you mean?” Ashley asked me, taking my hand.

“A...sex addict,” I stammered, “I’ve become a sex addict. I just figured it out. Unless I have sex, and cum, I can’t think about anything else. They did it, they really turned me into a sex slave!”

While I wailed out my despair, I felt the crush of three warm bodies all surround me in a tight embrace, lending me their strength when I didn’t think I had any left in me.

It took a while, but I finally managed to get my tears and breathing back under control. When I’d finally gotten passed the sniffing stage, they all loosened their grip and drew back enough that I was able to see their faces. Each one of them was looking at me, not with pity like I expected, but with love, caring, and a fierce determination.

“We’re going to figure this out,” Aiden promised.

“Tearmann probably has experts that you can talk to about it,” Ashley reasoned, “Maybe they can help you figure out what is going on and help.”

“Oh really?” I bit out, “You think they have a resident sex addict expert on staff?”

Angela surprised me by suddenly gripping my chin tightly in her hand and jerking my head up so I was forced to meet her intense stare. “No, but I do know they have a world renown psychologist on staff as well as several experts on magic, including demon magic. Whether what you’re going through is because of what Sinclair and his buddy did or because of Libidine, they’ll figure it out and help you. What *won’t* help,” she growled, “Is you throwing yourself a pity party and playing the ‘woe is me’ card. In all the time I’ve known you, you’ve never done that once, even when you were at your lowest. You took that brilliant, analytical mind of yours, worked out the problem, and came up a number of theories and solutions. Now stop crying like a little bitch and *think!*”

Maybe it was the love I knew my friends had for me, maybe it was how passionate Angela was about getting me through this, or maybe being called a little bitch just flat out irked me, but all of their words broke through the haze of



depression I'd wrapped myself up in. As the fog began to clear, I reached within myself and purposefully brought the intelligent, scientific part of my mind to the forefront where it began examining the facts at hand.

"Okay," I said, taking a breath and wiping the last of my tears away, "Based upon my own self-evaluation, it seems pretty clear that at present my body is craving sexual gratification at the bare minimum of once per day. Based on the fact that when Angela and I have had sex more than once a day I'm in a much better frame of mind and emotional state, it stands to reason that, yes, I do in fact possess a sex addiction. However, it can be controlled and regulated," I said before anyone could protest my choice of terminology, "Also, addictions of nearly every variety have a very strong physiological component to them that can be directly correlated to the mental and emotional changes that come with it."

"Like how crack or cocaine addicts don't actually become addicted to the drug until they've actually used it," Ashley said, her medical knowledge allowing her to easily pick up on my line of thinking, "With the notable exception of infants who are born from drug addicted mothers due to the drug itself infiltrating the womb and causing an addiction without the child ever having actually used it him or herself."

"Exactly," I said, standing and moving to the refrigerator to get a jug of lemonade that I'd made earlier that day when we had been on the road. "Sex addiction, while I haven't studied the phenomenon but in light of recent events I probably should, would work on the same basic principle. Sure, teenagers, particularly boys, might have a very strong draw to sex and sexual acts, but that's simple biology. They've achieved sexual maturity and biology is demanding they procreate to propagate the species. Once they've experienced the physical act, theoretically, the structure of their neural pathways has a predisposition to seek out and repeat those sensations. With those possessed with an addiction, logic dictates that their neurons connected to those specific sensations are likely firing at a much higher rate and thus creating the desperate need to physically experience the sensations again and again."

"So," Aiden said slowly as she accepted a glass of lemonade from me and crossed her legs, "You're saying that people who are addicted to something,

whether it be drugs, alcohol, sex...whatever, have been physically altered by the addiction?"

"On a neurological scale, possibly," I confirmed with a nod. "I would need to do more research on the subject, put together a test group containing those suffering from addictions, separate them by their specific addiction, establish control groups, and so on, but it is a sound theory. There has been proven to be a direct correlation to neurological impairment causing physiological changes. Just look at those affected by mental disorders such as retardation or autism. While it certainly doesn't happen every time, there is a reason why the media often portrays those affected by those disorders as slack-faced, lazy-eyed, shuffling individuals who stand out from everyone else. Again, it isn't the standard and it's a cruel stereotype, but there is some scientific basis behind those that do appear that way."

"So with your particular...affliction," Angela reasoned diplomatically, "Your body primes itself for sex when your neurons start firing at full strength."

"Exactly," I said, smiling proudly at my lover's understanding of the concepts behind what I was talking about. She might have been a genius with computers, but that didn't always translate into other aspects of science.

"Well," Ashley said as she took a sip from her own glass of lemonade, "I imagine you won't have any shortage of peers you can present this theory to, and maybe they might even have facilities for you to do your tests."

"It's a high school Ashely," Aiden pointed out, "I seriously doubt they're going to have full on labs to do what sounds like Nobel Peace Prize-level research."

"It's a high school for mutants," Angela corrected, "One that is designed to accommodate, amongst other things, gadgeteers and divisors. It's probably best to just wait and see what they've got before you start making any big research plans Kitty."

"Yes," I admitted, "I would probably need a great deal of resources to properly set up a lab equipped to examine someone or myself in the detail I need. But, I can always start my research on it," I said brightly, "I'm sure they have a fantastic library."

“And there’s always the Internet,” Aiden chimed in, “It’s got everything these days I hear.”

“Like she wants to read about the latest Bigfoot sighting,” Ashely joked, lightly slapping Aiden’s shoulder.

Smiling, I sat down next to Angela and cuddled up against her. “Actually, I have a theory about that. You see-”

### **The Blue Gill, Just Outside the Port Aux Port Peninsula**

Rod skillfully piloted his boat through the darkened seas, making sure he tracked their position via GPS on the laptop at his elbow. He’d given himself at least an hour longer than he needed to get into position just in case the wind decided to create some unexpected chop that would slow them down. Fortunately, he didn’t need that extra time since the wind and the sea were both quiet that night, something that wasn’t a very common occurrence on the coast of Newfoundland.

While his men worked on the deck below the wheelhouse to get the huge seine fishing net prepped and ready to be fed over the boat’s stern, he thought about the fact that they were noticeably one crewman short that night. He had played it off with the rest of the crew as no big deal, but the truth was Rod was worried. Being late to casting off wasn’t exactly out of the norm for Tony, but usually it was only by five minutes, maybe ten on the outside. For him to not have shown up after having waiting for a full half hour should have been an indication to Rod that something was wrong, and that something should have probably been reported to Captain Shepherd. However, receiving a phone call from the captain himself who had angrily demanding that they cast off immediately and get to their

deployment site after being delayed by thirty minutes had choked off anything Rod might have said about Tony's conspicuous absence. Perhaps it was fear of discovery, or the fear of Captain Shepherd's wrath, that had Rod thinking Tony had probably just gone on a drunk and was passed out in bed that was the reason for his lack of presence at the dock. That was probably it, nothing he needed to worry about.

"Where we at with that seine b'ys?" Rod asked his men through their intercom system.

"Just about ready Rod," Jacob, Rod's first mate, called back.

Nodding, the captain of the *Blue Gill* steered his boat away from the Port Aux Port peninsula.

### **Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Corner Brook Detachment**

Detective-Sergeant Mark Benoit sighed as he took a sip of bad coffee from his mug and watched the man nervously shifting in his chair in the interview room on the closed-circuit monitor. It had been several hours since Constable McHugh had brought this man, Tony Bedford, to the detachment. What had started off as a traffic violation for speeding had skyrocketed into...well, he wasn't quite sure what he had yet. Picking up the Constable's report, he read through it again to re-acquaint himself with the case.

*During a traffic stop for a speeding violation, I observed the butt of a handgun beneath several pieces of paper on the front passenger seat of the vehicle. When Bedford began reaching towards that area, I drew my weapon and ordered him from the vehicle where he was placed in handcuffs and secured in the rear passenger section of my patrol vehicle. Upon returning to the vehicle, I secured the handgun and rendering it safe. At that time, I observed the papers on the front passenger seat, in plain view, contained documentation outlining what appeared to be a plan to overtake a large vessel at sea. These documents were secured as evidence and a tow truck was requested. Both Bedford and the vehicle were then transported to the RCMP Corner Brook Detachment for further investigation.*

Benoit had looked over the papers in question and one of his fellow investigators was already working on getting a warrant pushed through to search the rest of the vehicle. While there might be something else in the man's truck that could lend itself to a better explanation, the papers the Constable had secured at the scene were already painting a rather frightening picture.

The pages in question each contained different things. One showed what appeared to be a structural schematic of one of the ferries that made the crossing between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. It wasn't at all technical, so he assumed the man had found the image online and simply printed it out. What was worrisome were the notions made on the page. It indicated certain areas of the ship and the manpower that would be required to overtake those sections. It also specified whether the use of a rifle, a pistol, or a hand weapon such as a knife would be required to facilitate this goal.

The remainder of the pages didn't contain graphics like the first, but they did disclose a proposed timeline of events, the number of vessels that would be used to carry out this mission, and the number of personnel that were available. Unfortunately there were no names, for the vessels or the people involved, but Benoit had a feeling Bedford was close to giving up that information.

For the first two hours, the man had fervently denied any wrong doing other than speeding and improper transportation of a firearm. He insisted that he had just been heading for Port Aux Port to work on one of the fishing vessels docked there, yet he couldn't explain the reason for the paperwork to be on his front seat. He had

tried the tired line of someone else must have put them there, but when that clearly didn't fly with the investigator he rationalized it as being a 'thought experiment'. Given that the language of the man up to that point had been pure baymen jargon, his abrupt change in language usage had raised a flag in Benoit's mind that he was almost certainly lying. The problem was, how could he get him to talk? He'd been lucky up to this point that the man hadn't asked for an attorney, but if he pressed him for much longer he didn't doubt that request would be made soon and he wouldn't be able to get anything else out of him.

The Detective-Sergeant was just starting to try and come up with a new strategy when he saw two men enter the squad room that, while similar ages, couldn't have looked more dissimilar from one another. The first man to enter was blatantly military, from his neatly pressed uniform adorned with a multitude of service ribbons, to the straight and confident manner in which he carried himself that bespoke of a man who belonged in a command position.

The other, however, was dynamically different. He was dressed casually in jeans and a flannel with the sleeves rolled up. His gray hair was shaggy and unkempt and the slightly shuffling manner in which he walked indicated some kind of physical ailment or impairment. There was no denying, however, the keen intellect and sharp awareness contained within his green eyes. He might be aging, and poorly at that, but something told Benoit that this man would miss nothing.

"Detective-Sergeant Benoit?" the military man asked as they approached.

"Yes?" he replied slowly and cautiously.

"Colonel Flagg," he said as an introduction as he shook the investigator's hand, "This is Eric Howlett. We understand you have a suspect in custody in possession of some suspicious documents."

"Is there some kind of military connection to them I'm unaware of?" Benoit asked suspiciously. "Because nothing in any of the papers indicated that."

"We don't know," Flagg admitted, "But based upon what we were told they contained, we thought it prudent to look into the possibility of a terrorist attack."

Shaking his head, Benoit turned and placed his copy of the Constable's report on his desk, face down. "How exactly did you find out about this?"

"Because the details of the paperwork indicated a possible sea-based attack, your superior contact the Coast Guard to see if anything of a similar nature had already occurred or was in danger of occurring."

"Except you're not with the Coast Guard," the Detective-Sergeant pointed out, not liking where this was going one bit.

"Quite correct," Flagg said with a smile, "But our intelligence community was notified by the Coast Guard of the possibility of the attack. They contacted me."

"So you're taking over my investigation," Benoit said with a trace of anger, not sure whether he should be offended or glad. Given that it was shaping up to be a cluster fuck of monumental proportions, it was tempting to simply turn over the case to someone else. Except that's not how he operated. He'd had more than his share of strange and convoluted cases in the past and he'd always been able to work out the details of it so he had a clear picture of what had happened and who had done it. He wanted the same for this case as well.

"Not at all," the Colonel assured him, "We only want to be in the room with you when you next question the suspect. It's possible he may say something that might resonate with us where it might not with you."

Well, at least they weren't taking the case from him. Still... "I need to verify this," he said.

"Of course," Flagg said with an understanding nod and waited patiently as the Detective-Sergeant dialed the extension of his supervisor.

Ten seconds later, Benoit hung up the phone and cast the two men a suspicious look. "All right, you can sit in, but I do the questioning. You're just there to observe."

"Of course," Flagg readily agreed.

With the conditions agreed upon, the three men made their way back to the interrogation room. The way Bedford's head shot up from where it had been lying on the table, Benoit was certain he'd maybe get to ask only a few questions before the man asked for an attorney.

"Okay Tony," the investigator said, deliberately making his voice sound tired, "Got a couple more questions for you."

"Look b'y," the man said wearily, eyeing the two newcomers, "I already done tolds you everythin. I ain'tdoin' nuthin' wrong. I was jest heading to ma boat and forgot to lock up my pistol."

"Yeah, I get that," Benoit said, sitting in the single chair while the two other men positioned themselves to one side of the door. "But that still doesn't explain the paperwork you had on top of it."

"Like I saids, it was a thought experiment, just something I done on my own time."

The Detective-Sergeant was about to press him harder on that issue when he saw his phone, which he'd set on the table along with the case file and his folio, lit up. Thankfully, he was able to read the message on the home screen without needing to pick it up and disrupt the interview.

Ask him where his usual fishing grounds are.

Frowning, he flicked his gaze over to where the Colonel and his...associate stood. He could see that he held his own cell phone cleverly concealed by the position of his hands clasped before him. "Tell me something Tony," he asked after the Colonel gave a bare perceptible nod, "Where abouts do you usually fish?"

The question seemed to throw the man and for several seconds he sat blinking dumbly at the investigator. "Usually Gulf of St. Lawrence off Port Aux Port. Depends on what we're fishing for."

Benoit's phone flashed again, bearing the message: **Blue Gill currently steaming for Cabot Strait.**



“Any reason why your captain would be fishing along the Cabot Strait?” Benoit asked and saw the man visibly blanch. In fact, he began trembling so badly that the investigator was actually worried he might start crying at any moment.

“He’s doing it for the right reasons!” Bedford blurted out suddenly, “We just want the gov’ment to see how bad they’re hurtin’ us!”

*Holy shit!* Benoit thought. Here he’d been grilling this man for hours with no success, and just mentioning the stretch of ocean between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland had this guy ready to spill everything. It really galled him that inside of five minutes, these military-types had not only found the key to making his suspect talk, but that they’d essentially used him as a puppet to do it. Still, Benoit was nothing if not a professional, and if it meant stopping a potential terror attack he ready didn’t give a shit who the public credited for the collar.

“I hear you,” the investigator told him, making certain he sounded sympathetic to the man’s worries, “The government’s asked a lot of people, but you’re a good guy Tony, I can see that. You don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

“No one’s gonna be hurt,” Bedford asserted as tears started rolling down his cheeks, “We just want the gov’n’ment to listen to us fishermen for once instead of the bean counters and eggheads.”

Fishermen, plural. He’d suspected that there were more involved when Tony had used the pronoun ‘we’ instead of ‘I’, but this could mean whatever was happening might be bigger than he anticipated. “And I bet they will,” Benoit assured him, “But you know this isn’t the way to do it. No matter how careful you and your people try to be, there’s still the chance of a slip up and someone getting hurt or killed. You don’t want that, right?”

Shaking his head, thoroughly broken now by his own conscience more than anything, Tony Bedford began the ancient art of squealing.

\* \* \* \*

“We anticipate the ships will likely intercept the *Highlanders* between two A.M and four A.M. We’ll need gunships on station and destroyers deployed to that area immediately.”

“Bad idea.”

Flagg looked over at Eric, who was currently examining the digital map layout of the Cabot Strait on Flagg’s laptop currently set up on the hood of the Colonel’s Charger, and blinked in surprise. “Excuse me?” he said testily. No one *ever* questioned his orders.

“Your nearest gunship is coming from Ontario and the destroyers are docked in Halifax. By the time the boat is prepped and launched and the bird’s in the air, whatever these guys are planning will already be under way.”

“So they’ll order the vessel to heave to and board it.” Flagg argued.

“This is a hostage situation,” Eric explained, “One we know is going to happen and one we can plan our counter-offense in advance.” Tapping on the touchscreen of the laptop, the map image zoomed in on two dots directly in the center of the Cabot Strait. “Those are islands. They’re probably the staging at the larger one to the south. We won’t get there in time to stop them from starting the operation, but that smaller one is somewhere I can set up.” Closing the laptop, he made his way around the hood of the car to slid into the passenger seat while Flagg still stood gaping at the gall of the man. “The fuck you waiting for?” Eric called out the window, “Christmas?”

Grumbling angrily, Flagg slid behind the wheel and fired up the engine. “It’s usually unwise to question the decisions of your commanding officer,” he pointed out testily.

“And if the orders made sense I wouldn’t,” Eric snapped. “This isn’t an insurgency in the Middle East we’re dealing with. These are fishermen, probably with zero combat training, armed, taking over a civilian transport vessel for what amounts to political purposes, and chances are nearly every single one of them will be nervous as hell. You stick a destroyer off their bow and a gunship over their heads and it won’t take much more than someone yelling ‘boo’ to get one of them to jerk the trigger just out of reflex and kill someone.” Settling back down after his tirade, Eric relaxed in his seat and took a few moments to simply breathe and regain control of his temper. “Maybe you’ve been out of the field too long or maybe you’re just used to a war zone, but you can’t mount a full-fledged assault on a ship where the hostages outnumber the takers by at least twenty to one.” Flipping open the laptop, he brought up a list of military bases on the computer screen. “Contact Fourteen, Nine, and Five Wing, get their birds prepped, and have them airborne and en route the second we’re in position.”

“You want Search and Rescue helo’s for a hostage situation?” Flagg asked in disbelief.

“Also contact CGS Lark Harbour and Burgeo and have them start heading towards the area. They’re Cape-class lifeboats so it’ll take them a while to reach it.”

“Sergeant, would you care to explain to me why you, an NCO, feels it appropriate to demand a command-grade officer order a bevy of SAR vehicles into a hostile area?”

“Because by the time they get there it won’t be hostile anymore,” Eric said grimly.

“And just how do you know that?” Flagg scoffed, having long since started questioning whether he’d made the right choice for a program candidate.

“Just start heading for Pasadena,” Eric ordered, “I’ll explain on the way.”

True to his word, the moment the Colonel took the on ramp out of Corner Brook and onto the highway, Eric explained his admittedly odd directives. “These aren’t military personnel. Because of that, every one of them will be looking to whoever is leading the operation. It stands to reason that this leader will be one

making the radio call to issue demands once they have control of the ship. The best place for that is going to be on the bridge, both for communication and control. If the leader is taken out of commission, the rest of his men will probably just give up. The Coast Guard needs to be close by on station in case anyone goes overboard or to take on any wounded. They're takeover of the ship is going to be a clusterfuck, guaranteed, so we can expect plenty of minor cuts and bruises as well as more than a few concussions from people getting their heads slammed by a wall or the butt of a rifle when they don't react to demands fast enough."

"You said 'probably' give up," Flagg pointed out.

"Yeah," Eric said with a sigh, "You know how it is, the best laid plans usually go to shit. That's why we should also contact CFB Halifax and have them prep the HMCS *Halifax* with a boarding and assault team just in case. I want to end this with as little bloodshed as possible, but it's probably safest to prepare for the worst."

"And the reason we're going to Pasadena?" Flagg asked, already working on dialing his phone to issue the orders.

"The fastest way to get out to that island is by air. The guy who owns Universal Helicopters works with BOISAR when they need aerial support for a search so he's usually got a bird prepped and ready to fly at a moment's notice. He can get us out there faster than anyone else."

Nodding, Flagg connected his call and began issuing orders to his subordinates at the JTF2, who would in turn make the appropriate calls the bases in question to mobilize their assets. "There's nothing in your file to indicate you possessed this level of tactical awareness and preparation," Flagg noted when he completed his call.

"When you spend twenty years doing troop over watch and watching tactical operations through a scope, you tend to learn a few things about tactical deployment and human nature when it comes to their reactions to an attack. Don't look too much into it," He told the Colonel, "This is just a type of situation that I've dealt with before, so I've got a pretty good insight into it. I wouldn't even try to put together a full on assault or a large scale battle plan.

Nodding, the Colonel skilfully maneuvered his vehicle around slower-moving cars in an effort to get to their destination that much faster. It appeared that he had been more than correct in selecting this man to be a part of his newly created team. “Is there anything you need?” Flagg asked, “At least that we can get on the way to Pasadena?”

“Tim’s,” the sniper said meaningfully, referencing the most popular and recognized coffee restaurant and brand in the country.

“I meant equipment.”

Turning his head slightly, Eric offered the man a wicked smile, “Why do you think I had you stop at my place on the way over to the RCMP?”

### **The Highlanders, Approx. 20 Nautical Miles North of Nova Scotia**

“Can we go somewhere else?”

Looking over at Ashley, who was at my side and clinging to my arm as though her life depended upon it, I could see the wide-eyed look of panic that was starting to creep into those stunning green eyes of hers as they flicked back and forth at the multitude of people around us. While she’d done all right when we’d first boarded, she had absolutely insisted that we wait a while before making the ascent from the loading deck up to the passenger decks when it became clear there would be a huge crush of people doing the same thing at the same time.

It had taken some doing explaining to the crew the reason why we had been milling about when we should have been going along with everyone else. Fortunately, it had only taken one look at the terrified expression on our friend’s face and the quick explanation that she was deeply frightened of large amounts of

people in very confined spaces to have them nodding in understanding and leaving us alone. In fact, one of the crew even came to find us at the R/V to let us know when the herd had cleared and we would be able to head on up without any worries about a ton of people squeezing in around us. Based on the flush that suddenly appeared on his face, I'd wager that Ashley's heartfelt thanks for his kindness was all the reward he needed.

That made the trip up to the passenger decks easy, and even the brief time it took to locate their cabin wasn't too bad. However, When Aiden and Angela wanted to go up on the observation deck to watch the boat leave port, that left just Ashley and I in the cabin and we started getting stir crazy pretty quickly. It was pretty understandable considering the cabins were quite tiny and only had two bunks (we'd planned on Ashley and Aiden sharing one and Angela and I the other) and a small TV. Given Ashley's poor reaction back on the loading deck, the only thing we worried about bringing with us were some toiletries in case any of us wanted to make use of the tiny in-cabin shower and a change of clothes. All of our laptops were still down in the R/V and now that we were out at sea no one would be let back down to the vehicles. Since neither of us liked the idea of entertaining ourselves watching videos on our cell phones, I managed to convince Ashley to go for a little walk.

That, unfortunately, turned out to be not a great idea since the bulk of the passengers hadn't gotten a cabin and were all milling about either in the large lounge area or the only other open facility on the ship, the bar. It didn't take long for Ashley's anxiety to rocket up to the point that I could see she was on the verge of a panic attack. Since taking her back to that claustrophobic room seemed like a bad idea, I instead guided her towards the stairwell that led up onto the observation deck.

The moment the fresh, salty air hit our faces I could immediately see her shoulders relax and a gentle smile return to her face. Perhaps it was being outside on this pleasant warm night, or perhaps it was because she was away from people, but the timid little mouse disappeared and the dazzling princess was once again back in her rightful place. Indeed, there was no denying as she moved to one of the railings to look out over the dark expanse of the ocean all around us, that the combination of the bright moon casting its light across the deck, the wind causing

her hair to stream back in ribbons of bright crimson, and her wardrobe choice of a soft, off-the-shoulder top and nearly ankle length skirt made her appear to be the personification of magical royalty. Not for the first time I had to fight back the urge to gather this lovely, fragile creature into my arms and kiss her senseless. True, Ashley herself had said she was bi, but I seriously doubted Angela would have been very happy to find me kissing another girl, regardless of my current libido issues.

As a means of counteracting my increased sexual impulses, I busied myself with locating Aiden and Angela. Fortunately, they weren't very hard to find since the deck was largely empty save for a few others who were similarly looking to enjoy some fresh air. The pair of them were at a far rail quietly chatting with one another while looking out at the gentle swell and fall of the water below.

Once I was close enough, I slipped my arms around Angela's waist, hugging her from behind and kissing her behind her ear. "Hi," I whispered sultrily.

"Hi back," she said, her voice growing equally husky as her head turned slightly to look at me with half-closed eyes brimming with passion.

"Where's Ashley?" Aiden asked, looking around even as her nostrils flared in an attempt to catch our friend's scent against the admittedly gusty wind.

"Over there," I said, indicating with a nod of my head where Ashley leisurely strolled along the rail. "The cabin was pretty cramped and things were a little too...busy for her."

"I was worried about that," Aiden admitted, "I was hoping she'd stay in the cabin."

"You can't protect her forever," Angela pointed out gently, "We aren't going to always be around and our little Ashley needs to learn how to take care of herself when it comes to being afraid. She knows that better than any of us I'd say."

"It's why she planned this trip," I reminded them, "So she could face her fears and try to overcome them."

"Still doesn't mean I have to like it," Aiden growled.

“None of us do,” I assured her, “But it’s what she needs.”

“I know, I know.”

“You don’t mind if I steal Angela away from you for a while do you?” I asked, lightly grinding my pelvis against my lover’s pert little ass.

Aiden’s eyes flicked lower for a moment before returning to mine and Angela’s gazes. Even as her nostrils flared, a smirk curled up one corner of her mouth, indicating she’d clearly caught the scent of arousal coming from me. “Just try not to have the neighbors making a complaint to the crew will ya?”

“No promises,” I sang and practically dragged Angela across the deck towards the stairwell leading back down to the passenger deck, and our cabin.

Just before the door closed behind us I knew Ashley had joined Aiden because I could hear her excitedly ask, “Are those lights way out there? Is that another boat?”

Whatever Aiden had said in reply I don’t know, nor did I care at the moment. It was all I could do not to just shove Angie against the nearest wall and devour her right in front of everyone. The lust within me was high and the need was a raw, hungry thing that simply couldn’t be denied any longer. I’m sure we got some unusual looks, but I didn’t see any of them. I’d developed a kind of tunnel vision, focusing only on the hallway in front of me that led to our cabin, and the bed it contained within.

I’m not even sure how I managed to get the damn card key to work because suddenly we were inside with the door clicking shut behind us and my mouth hungrily feasting on my lover’s succulent lips. Our movements were nothing more than a blur as we practically tore our clothes from each other’s bodies, licking, kissing, and caressing every inch of bare skin that was revealed with each removed article. By the time we’d gotten down to just our panties, I’d tackled Angela to the bed and was suckling at her breasts like a starving newborn babe, eliciting wanton mewls that I could tell she was desperately trying to keep at a low volume by the way her teeth sank into her delightfully soft and supple lower lip.



Unfortunately for her, I fully intended to have her screaming loud enough to give our cabin neighbors plenty of story fodder to tell their friends and families. From moment my mouth latched onto the soft silk that covered her decadent sex, those intentions became a very vocal reality.

### **Turbulent Waters, Appox. 5 Nautical Miles South of *The Highlanders***

Captain Shepherd checked his sonar for what must have been the tenth time in the last five minutes to confirm that *The Highlanders* didn't appear on its scope. Since he knew the larger government vessel would undoubtedly had much more advanced aquatic detection equipment, he made certain to double the distance between it and his own vessel during his slow pursuit of it than what would normally keep another fishing vessel undetected. Now, all he had to do was wait for Rod to do his part and get that ship dead in the water. After that, he would need to rely on all of his people to do their part and get the ship secured. It was a gamble, especially considering every one of them was a fisherman, not a soldier. Still, Shepherd felt he'd done a pretty good job of getting them worked up about the fact that they were doing the right thing and with something like this emotion played a pretty big role. Most people wouldn't try and fight back against someone displaying high levels of passion about what they were doing, and he was counting on that tonight.

Still, despite his confidence, Howard was nervous. There were a lot of variables involved with what they were doing that, unfortunately, he couldn't directly control. That was the reason why he'd been so careful in choosing the ships and crews for this operation, ensuring they all had good track records when it came to following orders and getting the job done. Well, that and each of them suffering financially certainly didn't hurt. Nothing motivated people more than money these days, and his promise that the government would be paying every one of them thousands of dollars that they were owed really was all he'd needed to use as his pitch.

Bringing up the video conferencing program on his laptop, he initiated a request for communication with the *Blue Gill*. Less than ten seconds after it started ringing the call was answered and Rod Whitborne's face filled the window. "Yeah Howard," the captain said, clearly in the middle of maneuvers, "We're getting ready to go now."

"Any problems?" Howard asked.

As the captain of the *Turbulent Waters* lifted his gaze to peer at his sonar screen in order to make a slight course correction, he missed the brief wince the *Blue Gill*'s captain made before resuming his look of confidence. "Nope, we're all good here by'."

"Then it's all on you b'y," Shepherd said.

Nodding, Rod picked up the hand mic for his boat's intercom system and called out, "Let 'er go!"

While he wasn't able to see anything other than the captain himself, Howard knew exactly what was happening. The *Blue Gill*'s seine, the huge fishing net adorned with floatation devices along the length of its top, was flying off the rear of the ship and into the water. While normally one end of the seine would be secured to a dory, or a dingy as the Yanks called them, and the captain would steer his boat in a circle around a school of fish he intended to catch, this time was much different. Going against decades of instinct, not only was there no dory out on the water, but Rod was piloting his boat in an exaggerated zigzag patten that would

have several layers of net stretched out several hundred meters across the sea directly in *The Highlanders*' path.

Howard listened as he heard Rod's men call through the intercom, "First quarter! Half! Three quarters! All gone!" marking how much of the seine was left on the ship until it was completely in the water. Once the 'all gone' was yelled, Howard saw Rod turn hard on the boat's wheel before throwing the throttle wide open so he could speed away from the floating seine. "That's it," the captain reported, "We're all set. We'll stand by until you give us the go ahead."

"Good job Rod," Howard said approvingly before throttling up himself. He wanted to be right on *The Highlanders* the moment its prop tangled up in the seine and became disabled. Timing was going to be very important to get this right. Disconnecting from Rod, he initiated a video conference with his other ship captain, Jake Callahan. "Jake," he said when the man's face popped up on the screen, "Rod's all done. You start steaming for the ship now. Should be shut down by the time you reach it."

"You got it Howard," the eager captain said, opening up his throttle just as he killed the connection.

"Let's get 'er done," Howard said with a grim smile as he raced towards the soon-to-be disabled passenger ship.

### ***The Highlanders, Observation Deck***

"Is it just me, or are those lights getting closer?" Ashley asked, pointing to a couple, barely noticeable pinpricks of light in the distance.

Stepping up to the railing beside her, Aiden squinted her eyes and tried to peer out across the dark seas. She saw the lights Ashley had indicated, but unfortunately improved vision hadn't been a part of her package of enhanced senses due to her mutation so she only saw them as well as her friend did. "Not sure," she mused. Tilting her head, she tried to see if maybe she could hear something. Unfortunately, between the sound of the sea rushing by and the heavy, steady thrum of the huge boat's engines, there was no way for her to discern any other sounds in the distance. "It could be another ship," she reasoned. "You said Newfoundland had a pretty big fishing community and this would be part of the fishing season I imagine."

"But wouldn't they restrict them from fishing along the ferry routes?" Ashley wondered, squinting her eyes to try and see better.

"Yeah," Aiden said, "That would make sense. Maybe it's just a pleasure craft, like a yacht or something."

"Maybe," Ashley allowed, though Aiden could tell she wasn't quite convinced.

"Well whatever it is, it's no-"

Before she could finish her sentence, the ship suddenly lurched sharply, threatening to send both girls over the rail as the pitch of the engine noise rose to a dramatic whine. With one hand holding onto the slick rail in a white-knuckled grip, Aiden's hand shot out and wrapped around Ashley's waist, pulling her into a tight, one-armed hug even as the red-haired girl also grabbed at the railing with both hands. "What the fuck!" Aiden cried as the sound of the engines screaming felt like red-hot spikes being driven deeply into her ear canals.

Just as quickly as it began, the sounds of protest ceased, quickly winding down to nothing and leaving an eerie silence permeating the air only punctuated by the sounds of the ship's own wake crashing against its keel. As the deck beneath their feet lazily rolled forward and back, the girls carefully stood back up and looked around. "What happened?" Ashley asked worriedly, her eyes darting about the darkened sea for some kind of answer.

“I don’t know,” Aiden replied grimly as what were supposed to be soothing warning alarms began chiming throughout the ship along with an automated female voice urging people to remain calm, “But whatever it was, it’s killed the engines. We’re dead in the water.”