

The Girl At Little Harbour

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Will's dead. I know he is. Although I'm doing my best not to look, I know if turn my head I'll be able to see his body lying where it fell after I'd finished smashing the oar against his skull. I'd killed him but he'd killed me too; or at least as good as. Maybe even worse. Of all of them that had to be out there, why did it have to be him? I know it wasn't his fault, that it wasn't really him, just his body, driven by the virus that's changed the world so dramatically in the last few months. I don't know how many months exactly; it seems like forever yet the summer's still not over so it can't be more than four or five. I can't clearly remember the world as it was before. The memories are still there but it's as if I see them through a haze or smoke or something. It's only the ones from after *it* happened that are clear now. At first we called *it* the disease; the outbreak; the end of the world and many other things but at some point we started calling it '*it*' and that's the name which stuck.

I think of Carol-Lynn; my little girl, my beautiful baby. We called her Carol after Will's mother and Lynn after mine. It seemed logical at the time but we might have come up with something different if we'd realised how much confusion it would cause. No one ever seemed to get it right, not at first any way, and Carol-Lynn was very sensitive to the many mistakes. Every time someone got it wrong, she'd pout and give them a look that could curdle milk. Staring straight at them she'd say in a stern voice, 'My name's Carol-Lynn, not Carolyn or Carol-Anne or Caroline but Carol,' she'd leave the slightest pause for emphasis, 'Lynn!' She'd been doing it pretty much since her first day at elementary school. I don't know where she got that look from but Will always said it was the same look I gave him when he did something stupid. I smile when I remember this; And then cry again. How could it all end this way? Our perfect little family ripped apart, destroyed: Will dead, because I'd had to kill him, me infected, and Carol-Lynn, what would happen to her?

There are other survivors around here. I know there are; that's why we'd come this far north, trying desperately to find others like ourselves, but will they find her before it's too late? How can they? They're not looking for her; Why would they? They don't even know she exists. As long as she does as I've told her, she'll be safe and she has plenty of food so maybe there's a chance. The other survivors aren't too far away, just a few more miles and maybe one day they will come this way and find her.

I'll be long gone by then. Not dead but turned into one of them; an infected, just like Will had been, but I have no one to put me out of my misery. I'm destined to roam, no longer really human, for god knows how long, attacking any survivors who come near. I don't know when but sooner or later I'll turn and I can't be anywhere near Carol-Lynn, safely tucked away as she is, when that happens. I can't go to her and hug her one last time; I can't tell her I love her; that I'm sorry to be leaving her like this. I can't even say goodbye. When I don't come back as promised, she'll know something has happened to me. She won't know what but she'll know that I've left her all alone in this terrifying and dangerous world that none of us could have ever have foreseen.

We were in Trinidad when *it* happened. It started slowly, with rumours of strange things happening in Haiti; then some of the other islands to the north. A while after that someone with the infection turned up in Miami. That was when I started taking it seriously but I figured the government, the CDC or someone, would work out a way to deal with it. I still didn't realise how bad it was, what this new virus did to people and what it made them do to others. Then, out of nowhere, Miami was over-run. All I could do was stare at the television in the marina office along with everyone else as we watched it happen. We had family and friends there and I tried calling but the phone lines were jammed; all I could do was hope they'd made it out. At first the authorities spoke with confidence about dealing with it but within a day the confidence disappeared and was replaced by confusion and fear. They didn't say it but it was written across their faces. Then the virus jumped: To Britain, to Canada, to Rio. Within a few days it seemed like *it* was everywhere.

The moment we heard the rumours of an outbreak on the island, we left. Along with five other yachts, all with families like ours on them, we set out not really knowing where we were going; just that we needed to get away. Gradually we meandered north, moving from island to island, looking for somewhere that was still safe. As we did, we watched the news reports with disbelief as the world fell apart. Then, right in the middle of a broadcast, the news channel stopped. We tried to find another one but all we got was automated messages telling of technical problems and falsely promising the shows would be right back. We tried the FM radio but there was nothing on that either. Suddenly it seemed like we were all alone in the world. Our little flotilla had reached the Turks and Caicos islands by then and there seemed little point in carrying on. Instead we found an uninhabited island and set ourselves up there. To call it an island was perhaps a bit of wishful thinking as it was really just a very large sandbank that rose about ten

feet above the water covered with scrubby bushes but there was no risk of running into anyone with the infection so we were safe. Or at least we thought we were.

I'm not too sure how long we'd been there, just our five families, surviving, living off what we could catch from the sea but it seemed like forever, when they made contact over the VHF radio. We used the radios to talk to each other, to chat back and forth, and it was during one conversation that they broke in. They told us they were from the US Navy and that they'd been ordered to find as many survivors as they could and take them to a safe zone that had been set up in Puerto Rico. When they asked where we were, we gave them our position and they told us they'd be there the following morning. That night we celebrated. I felt as if a great weight had been lifted off my shoulders and I slept soundly for the first time since *it* happened. Will didn't. He alone didn't trust the men who'd made contact with us. I never found out what it was but there was something in the way they spoke that just didn't sit right with him.

I woke at daybreak to the sound of Will shouting angrily in the cockpit followed by a blast of his shotgun. I leapt out of the bunk we shared and sprinted to the companion way; Will was standing on deck, gun pointed at someone I couldn't see.

'Get the fuck away from us!' Will yelled.

There was a shouted reply in what sounded like Spanish or Patois.

'Mom, what's going on?' Carol-Lynn had come up behind me and was now clinging to my side.

I smoothed her hair with my hand as I kept my eyes locked on Will. 'I don't know, honey.'

'Who's Dad shouting at?'

Before I could reply Will fired his shotgun again. I'd always been against him having it on the boat; I thought it was too dangerous, especially with a child on board, but now I was glad we had it.

'Next time I'll aim at your engine. You understand?'

Will's voice had a hard edge to it and they must have believed him because I heard an outboard clunk into gear and race off.

He glanced down at me. 'Liz, we need to get out of here now. Get the engine started and as soon as I get the anchor out the sand, get us going.'

I looked at him questioningly, 'What's happening?'

'I'll fill you in later. There's not time now. They might decide to come back. They've gone over to the other boats but they might still come

back.' The hardness had gone from Will's voice and now he just sounded scared.

'Dad?'

'You stay down there Carrie. It's not safe up here.' That's always what he called her, Carrie rather than Carol-Lynn. He was the only one who was allowed to call her anything other than her full name.

'But Dad, what's going on?'

Will didn't answer. Instead he disappeared towards the front of the boat. I leapt into the cockpit and started the engine. We hadn't used it in weeks and it took several attempts before it spluttered into life. The shotgun lay on one side of the cockpit along with a pair of binoculars. While Will wrestled with the anchor line, I pick these up and scanned around the anchorage that had been our home for what seemed like a life time. There were three open boats, each about 20 feet long fitted with large outboard engines, and twelve or thirteen men in all: some armed with machetes, others with clubs. One had what looked like an assault rifle and two brandished pistols of some description. They'd boarded three of the other yachts already and were circling the last one. Jools was standing on deck with his flare gun, doing his best to keep it pointed at which ever boat was nearest. Jenny was beside him and I figured their kids were probably somewhere down below. They'd over-wintered at same marina as us in Trinidad and we'd got to know them well. I saw smoke rise from the barrel of the assault rifle just as the sound of the shot reached me and Jools crumpled to the deck clutching his arm.

'Liz, we need to get going now!' Will was striding towards the cockpit. I'd been so transfixed by what was going on with the other boats that I'd forgotten what I was meant to be doing.

'Oh ... yeah.' I lowered the binoculars and pushed the throttle forward, turning the wheel until we were heading out of the bay. We could only do about four knots at the most and they'd easily be able to catch us if they wanted to but it was our only hope of getting away. In the mean time, Will readied the sails.

The last I saw of the others was about fifteen minutes later. We were just about to round the top of the island where we'd pass from the attackers' sight. By then they'd moved everyone onto the largest yacht and lined them up along one side; hands tied behind their backs, facing out to sea. While most of the strangers ransacked the other yachts, a group of three kept an eye on their prisoners. The one with the assault rifle leaned against the mast as he smoked a cigarette and chatted with the man sitting on the top of the cabin. The third was walking back and forth behind our friends and their families shouting and gesticulating with his pistol; I could see terrified looks on their faces.

'Mom, what's going to happen to them?' I hadn't heard Carol-Lynn come into the cockpit and she was now standing beside me, her hand shading her eyes as she stared back towards the other boats. Her voice was quiet and flat.

I pulled her close. 'I don't know.'

'Can't we help them?' She was staring straight up at me.

I turned away, avoiding the blue eyes that were searching my face for answers. 'No.'

'Why not?'

Will looked across at her from where he was standing at the wheel, 'Because there's too many of them. They'd catch us too.'

'But what do they want?'

'Food; Supplies; Boats ...' Will caught himself just in time and glanced at me uneasily. He didn't finish his sentence but I knew what he'd almost said: Women.

Back on the largest yacht, I could make out Jools standing at one end of the line of people, Jenny beside him. They're kids, Michael and Jane, were there too. Jane was the same age as Carol-Lynn and they'd spent a lot of time together since *it* happened. Michael was a couple of years younger. The man with the pistol was now behind Jools, still shouting and gesticulating. I saw Jools try to twist round to face him. He wasn't the type of person to just stand there and take it. The man pushed him back and then raised the pistol. I didn't hear anything but as if in slow motion I saw Jools' head explode and he toppled forward into the sea. Jenny tried to stop him but with her hands tied there was nothing she could do. The man pressed his pistol against her head and, even though she was hunched over, she froze. The man shouted at her and she slowly straightened up. All the time the man kept his gun pressed against her. I could see him yelling at her; first in one ear then the other. The one with the assault rifle was laughing.

After what seemed like an age the man lowered the pistol and I could see Jenny relax a little. He took a step to his left and in a flash shot her two kids; not in the head but in the back. Michael fell into the water where I could see him struggling to stay afloat but Jane collapsed onto the deck. Jenny tried to get to her but the man sitting on the cabin jump to his feet and held her back. The one with the pistol stood over Jane and fired again and again; not into her head but into her belly. I could see her writhing in agony while the man turned to Jenny and laughed. It was then that we passed round the headland and out of sight. That will always be my strongest, most lingering memory of the other families, the people we'd spent so much time with since *it* happened.

From then on, while we kept the VHF radio on, we swore we'd never use it. We kept mostly out at sea, well away from any land. It wasn't as easy but Will figured it was safer: there was less chance of us running into anyone else. We knew we needed others if we were going to survive but we no longer knew if we could trust them. It was late one night when I was on watch that I heard something coming over the airwaves. It wasn't clear but it was definitely a voice.

'Help ... Please help ... Someone please help ... Help me.' It was a little girl, the fear clear in her voice. For a moment there was silence.

'I could go back in the head. I was in the toilet reading ...' The signal faded out for a moment before coming back. '... blood everywhere.' Again the voice was followed by silence; She was be talking to someone I couldn't hear.

Suddenly a new voice broke in. This time a boy, a teenager by the sound of it. 'Katie, it's okay. Just do what Jack says. Get back in the head now.'

'Jeff, you're alive? Is everyone ...' The signal disappeared and they were gone. I listened on for the rest of my watch but that was all I heard.

Over breakfast Will and I discussed it, trying to work out what it meant but before we could come to any conclusion the radio burst into life again.

'... Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee, for those in peril on the sea.' The voice was soft with a slight southern American accent.

It was an odd thing to suddenly hear. We both waited but there was nothing more.

I glanced at Will, 'What d'you think that's all about?'

Will shrugged, 'Maybe it's Sunday and they're doing a service.'

I'd lost track of the days a long time before and for all I knew it could be a Sunday. 'Where d'you think they are?'

Will scratched his head. 'Don't know, maybe somewhere north of here. If they was further south we'd probably have heard them before now.'

'D'you think we should try to find them?'

'Don't know.' Will seemed to be saying that a lot these days. Over the years I'd become used to him always having an answer, even if it was guess and this change this was beginning to disturb me: it was almost as if he'd given up trying to make sense the world.

'What about if we head north, see if we can pick up anything more?'

Will shrugged. 'I suppose.'

As we made our way north, the fragments of conversation coming over the radio gradually increased in frequency. We started to recognise voices and hear names: Jack, Rob, CJ, Jon, David. We got a sense of who they were and what they were doing: Fishing, scavenging and, most importantly, surviving. It became addictive and for a while none of us spent more than a few minutes of our waking hours out of earshot of the radio in case we missed something. Carol-Lynn was fascinated and would make up stories based around what we heard, filling out the characters, giving them actions. CJ became a beautiful princess, trapped in a tower by Jack, her father. Rob, Jon and David were suitors she'd call down to from a window high above the ground, sending them out on quests as trials to see who would win her hand in marriage. Both Will and I laughed but for all we knew she could have been right.

After a week we heard a place name for the first time: Hope Town. Will scuttled below and returned with a chart. We spread it out and pored over it. Carol-Lynn was the one who found it, perched on a small island around a 100 miles to our northwest.

'What d'you think?' Will glanced at me nervously.

'It sounds like they're doing quite well; better than us at any rate. I mean you heard them talking about gardens and growing things the other day, didn't you?'

'Can we trust them though?'

'I don't know.' I was starting to use that phrase a lot too. 'It sounds like there's quite a lot of them though, like a proper community not just a few people on boats. We could see if we could raise them on the radio. Find out more.'

'Yeah.' Will paused for a moment. 'But look what happened last time we made contact with anyone on the VHF.'

'This is different. We won't tell them where we are. There's no way they can work it out.'

'Still ...' Will's eyes flicked to Carol-Lynn. Like me, he was remembering the last we'd seen of her friend Jane: writhing in agony as a man tortured her in front of her mother; her father and her brother dead in the water.

'Yeah, maybe that's not a good idea.' I thought for a few seconds. 'How about if we head up there and see what we find? We can keep a low profile and if it looks dangerous, we can just creep away again.'

'Hummm ...'

I was starting to get exasperated. 'Will, we need to do something. We can't just float around out here for ever. Can we?'

'I suppose not.'

'So we head up there?'

'Yeah, I guess.'

The first land we spotted was the southern tip of a large island called Great Abaco. We'd decided to work our way up along the coast towards Hope Town to see what we could see. So far it was nothing but then again the charts didn't show many settlements along the islands eastern coast at this end. As we moved north, I noticed the sea was beginning to change. The swell was gradually building into large, well-spaced rollers that would slowly lift the yacht up ten, fifteen feet and then drop it gently down again: somewhere over the horizon a storm was brewing.

Later that afternoon, the VHF crackled into life yet again. It was doing this so often now we were starting to lose interest. Carol-Lynn had got bored with her stories and just made smart remarks about what the people were saying. She reckoned Jon fancied CJ but didn't want anyone else to know: who knew if she was right? Yet, there was one word in the latest fragment that instantly grabbed our attention. We recognised the voice from the accent even before he mentioned his name.

'Hey, this is Jack. We think there's a hurricane coming in. If you're not already in Hope Town, you need to come back here now ...'

Hurricane. That was the word which stood out; which frightened us. I didn't know how they knew one was coming but it fitted with the building swell.

'Will, if there's a hurricane coming, we need to find some shelter.'

Will emerged from the companion way, waving a rolled up chart. 'Way ahead of you.'

He laid it out in the cockpit and started glancing around. He pointed to an almost completely enclosed bay that housed a small settlement called Little Harbour. 'This looks good and I think we can make it there before the storm gets here.' He glanced up at the sun. 'But I don't think we'll be there before it gets dark.' He inspected the chart more closely. 'We'll get as close as we can and then we'll just have to hope the storm doesn't get here before daybreak.'

By two in the morning it was clear we wouldn't make it in before the storm got to us and we had to decide what we'd do instead. The yacht was already starting to buck and sway in the ever-increasing seas. Working hard in the darkness, we stripped off the sails and the boom so we'd have as little windage as possible. Will took an old storm jib and fashioned it into a sea anchor. As the winds built, he dropped it over the side and tied it off to the cleat on the foredeck. Almost immediately the boat turned into the waves and started to settle. As I went down to get some rest, Will remained in the cockpit bundled up in his oil skins and sou'wester against the rain that was starting to move horizontally. At my insistence, he'd put on his life jacket and his safety harness. He sat there, staring out into the approaching storm, wondering, like I was, what was coming our way.

'Liz, we're in big trouble!'

Carol-Lynn and I had been jolted from the bunk where we were sleeping off the sea sickness which had troubled us throughout the worst of the storm. Only in the evening when it started to ease did the queasiness begin to ebb away. We were both drained, physically and mentally, and had fallen asleep almost instantly. I glanced around trying to get my bearings and to work out how I'd ended up on the floor.

'Mom, I'm all wet.' Carol-Lynn had got up and was standing beside me, soaked to the skin.

Looking down at the floor I saw it was awash with in water. I jumped to my feet. 'Will, what's going on?'

'We've hit something. Or rather something's hit us.'

'What?' I was still trying to get my bearings.

'I don't know. Something big in the water. It's put a hole in the side. We're going down.'

'Shit! What're we going to do?'

'I don't know, get the dingy over the side I guess. We'll have a better chance in it than in the life raft.'

'How long have we got?'

'Ten, maybe fifteen minutes at the most.'

We got the dingy inflated and over the side in record time. I scrambled in but just as Will was passing Carol-Lynn to me, the boat lurched onto its side and started to sink in earnest. A second later it was gone and Will was in the water. He grabbed onto the dingy and pulled himself

over the side. He sat there, wringing wet and breathing heavily. After a second he spoke. 'Fuck, that was close!'

'Dad, you're not meant to use words like that!'

I smiled. 'Darling, I think on occasions like this it's allowed.'

She looked confused as Will started the engine and turned us northwards. While the storm had eased, the waves were still high and towered above us whenever we sank into the troughs between them. It was slow going but at least we were heading in the right direction. Then the engine spluttered and died, leaving us at the mercy of the sea.

'Will?'

He'd knelt down and unscrewed the cap of the fuel tank before peering in. He replaced the lid and stood up. 'Out of fuel.' He glanced around. 'We can't stay out here, not with the sea like this.'

'What can we do instead?'

'Paddle ashore?'

'But what about *them*?' We'd been at sea for so long Will seemed to have forgotten about the danger which now lurked on land. 'What if there's infected there?'

'There's not many settlements around here so maybe there won't be a lot around. If we find any when we get there, we can always head back out to sea.'

I pushed the wet hair out of my eyes, 'I suppose so.'

We untied the oars from where they were stored on the left side of the dingy, and taking one each, we started to make our way towards the nearby shore.

It took longer than I expected and it was daylight before we finally climbed out onto the sand. It was the first time I'd set foot on land in months and it felt strange, almost alien. I glanced around nervously but there were no signs of life. To the south, sand stretched as far as I could see while a rocky outcrop blocked our view to the north.

'Liz, help me get the dingy up the beach. I want to make sure it stays here in case we need it.'

'You have a plan then?'

'Yeah. See how far north we can get along the beach and then see if we can reach any of the people in Hope Town on this.' He pulled a small hand-held radio sealed inside a clear plastic bag out from his pocket and waved it from side to side.

'What will we do if we run into any of *them*?' Carol-Lynn always called the infected *them*, saying it in a slightly disgusted way. She couldn't bring herself to call them anything else. We'd see what they could do when they attacked, not first hand but on the television when the news was still broadcasting. It had been horrifying to watch and Carol-Lynn still had nightmares about it.

Will reached into the dingy and pulled out a long thin package covered in plastic. 'Use this.'

He unwrapped it, revealing the shotgun. I was amazed he'd had the presence of mind to pack it as the boat was sinking. This was the Will I knew: the decisive decision-maker, the one I'd fallen in love with all those years ago. It was good to see him back. He'd been gone so long I'd wondered if I'd lost him forever. I hugged him; I couldn't help myself.

He looked at me, startled. 'What's this in aid of?'

'Just because.' I smiled, slightly embarrassed, and stepped away. 'Right, let's get going.'

He turned to Carol-Lynn. 'I almost forgot I've got something for you.' She looked at him quizzically as he unzipped the front of his oil skin jacket and pulled something out. 'I figured he got left behind in the rush. He's a bit wet but I'm sure he'll recover.'

'Teddy!' She threw her arms around him. 'Thanks Dad.'

We walked round it, examining it from all sides.

'Look. Up there. Blue and white paint. I think this is what we hit.'

The shipping container was nestled into the sand, twenty feet long, eight feet wide and a similar height.

Carol-Lynn was inspecting it curiously, 'What d'you think's inside?'

'I don't know but it'd make a nice safe place to hole up.' Will banged the side and it echoed loudly. 'I don't think any infected could get into that!'

We set to work clearing the sand away from the door. Once this was done, Will pulled up the lever and swung the door open. Inside was a jumble of cardboard boxes.

Carol-Lynn craned her neck. 'I wonder what's in them?'

'Only one way to find out.' Will reached for the nearest one and tore it open. Cans spilled out and rolled across the floor.

Carol-Lynn's eyes lit up with delight. 'Food!'

I picked up a can that had ended up against my foot and held it out to her. 'I've never ever seen you get so excited over peas before.'

'Peas?' Carol-Lynn looked deflated. 'I thought it going to be something nice.'

It took us an hour to move enough boxes to allow us to enter the container. We stacked them along the back and sides until about half the floor area was cleared and we could move in.

I looked at Will. 'What now?'

'You guys stay here. I'm going to talk a look around and see if I can get an idea of what we're up against. Once I get back we can work out what our options are.'

'Okay, but be careful.'

'When have I ever not been careful?' Will had a twinkle in his eyes as he flicked them towards Carol-Lynn. It was a bit of an in-joke. We'd always talked about having kids at some point but none-the-less getting pregnant with Carol-Lynn hadn't been planned. It wasn't that either of us regretted it just that it had been a bit of a surprise when it happened.

Will hugged me and then Carol-Lynn. He took a few steps, then turned, 'Here, I should leave this with you.' He tossed me the plastic bag with the radio in it. 'Just in case.'

I stared at him, 'Just in case of what?'

He said nothing. Instead he tucked the shotgun into the crook of his arm and strode off up the beach. I watched, not realising it was the last time I'd ever see him. Well, the real him anyway ...

'When's Dad coming back?'

It had been dark for an hour and there was still no sign of Will. Just before sunset, I'd heard the sound of two shotgun blasts somewhere beyond the sand dunes at the back of the beach and I'd expected him to come running over the top at any moment but he hadn't.

'He's probably been caught out by night fall. He'll be holed up somewhere safe and sound. I'm sure he'll be back in the morning.'

'You promise?' Carol-Lynn glanced at me but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. Of the two possible answers, one would be a lie while the other would upset her greatly. Instead I pulled her close and hugged her tightly.

By lunchtime it was clear that Will was gone and I had to try and work out what to do next. I turned on the radio and I could hear the people in Hope Town as they talked back and forth. I tried breaking in but it

they were unable to hear me. If only I could reach them and let them know where we were, they might be able to come and get us. I tried to think of the reasons why I couldn't. I came to the conclusion it was one of two things: either the radio wasn't powerful enough or there was something between us and them that was blocking the signal. There wasn't anything I could do to boost the power but I could try and find a place where the signal would get through. I thought about how best to do this. The logical choice would be to go north but that was where Will had gone and he'd obviously run into trouble. Then something occurred to me: what about the dingy? With just me and Carol-Lynn it would be difficult to paddle it any sort of distance but we could tow it along behind us as we walked along the shore. This would give us a means of escape if we ran into trouble. I didn't know why this hadn't occurred to me before. If it had, Will might still have been with us.

I sat down beside Carol-Lynn on the boxes I'd arranged into a bed for her the night before. I held her hand. 'I think I've worked out a way for us to get out of here ...'

'But we can't leave.' She had a shocked expression on her face. 'We need to be here when Dad gets back.'

I turned away so she wouldn't see the tears welling up in my eyes. 'Dad's gone. He's not coming back.'

'He can't be.' Carol-Lynn was starting to cry now. 'He just can't be.'

'He is. And that means it's not safe to stay here. We need to get out, to get away before anything happens to us.'

'But ...'

'I know.' I held her tear-stained face in my hands. 'I know but it's what we have to do. It's what Dad would have wanted us to do.' I kissed her on the forehead. 'The only thing is I'm going to have to leave you here for a little while. I need to go back to the dingy and bring it up here. Then we have to leave.'

'Can't I come with you?' She clung to me. 'I don't want to be alone.'

'No. You need to stay here in the container where it's safe. If you come with me, I mightn't be able to protect you. I'd need to be able to run fast to get away, or jump in the water and swim. I can't do that if I'm worrying about you.'

'Don't leave me here on my own.' Her voice was quite but plaintive. 'Please.'

'I have to,' I kissed her on the forehead again, 'It won't be for long, an hour at the most, but I have to. It's our best chance. I'll come back; I promise I will.'

I looked at the dingy. The tide was further out than when I was last here and I knew it'd be a struggle to get it back into the water. As I stood there, trying to work out how I could do it, something hit me hard from behind throwing me forward onto the dingy. I twisted round to see Will standing over me, his eyes burning with anger. I'd never seen someone who was infected so close before and the look of pure rage on his face chilled me to the bone. I could see a fresh wound on his forearm that still oozed blood; this must have been how he'd got the virus. For a moment he just stood there, staring: it was almost as if there was a hint of recognition. Then I realised he wasn't recognising me as me, instead he was seeing me as prey. I glanced down and saw one of the paddles to my right. As he lunged at me, I grabbed it and swung it at his head. Yet this was Will, the love of my life, and I only did it half-heartedly. He barely noticed and was on me in an instant. I felt an intense pain surge through my body as he sank his teeth deep into my left shoulder.

I still had the paddle in my hand and I raised it above my head. With all the force I could muster, I brought the blunt end down on the back of Will's head. I did it again and again until I felt it shatter. Even then I carried on until I couldn't tell if he was moving because he was still alive or because I was still hitting him. Finally, exhausted, I dropped the paddle and rolled him onto the sand. I sat there, staring at him disbelievingly. We had survived unscathed for so long and now we were both finished. I could already feel the infection burning through my veins and I knew it was just a matter of time before it would overpower me. I wondered what I should do. I couldn't go back to the container, it would be too dangerous, but I didn't want to stay here with Will's body. Then it came to me. It was the last thing I could do for him, the man who'd been my best friend for most of my adult life, and it would take my mind off what was happening to me.

It took me an hour using the paddle to dig a hole in the sand that was big enough to bury Will in and it was another 30 minutes before he was covered up. By then I was sweating heavily, partly from the strenuous work but mostly because of the infection working its way through my body. I stood there, looking down. Unless someone told you, you'd never have guessed there was someone buried there beside the dingy. I said a small prayer for him before walking up to the top of the beach and sitting down. I surveyed my surroundings. It was the first time I'd really seen the place where we'd come ashore. With white sands, palm trees and blue seas, it was truly stunning. I couldn't

imagine anywhere more beautiful to have buried the only man I'd ever really loved.

I can feel the end coming and my mind turns back to Carol-Lynn. I can't believe I'm leaving her alone on the beach. Her only hope now is that someone will find her. I know she's got plenty of food and I know there are other survivors around here so I figure she's got a good chance just as long as she stays in the container. I turn on the radio just for some company before I go. There's a familiar voice, I think he's called Rob. 'Yeah Jack, I checked it out in the cruising guide. It looks small but there might be something there. Andrew says it's a pretty easy trip.'

'I know the place.' It was the soft southern accent again. 'Just stick to checking out Little Harbour. Don't go any further south.'

My heart leaps into my mouth. It sounds like they're planning to come here; and soon. I grab the radio, press the transmit button and shout as loud as I can but I get no response. They just carry on with their conversation. I try again and again until I'm hoarse, doing my best to let them know about Carol-Lynn but still nothing. I look north towards the rocky outcrop that separates this part of the beach from the part with the container on it. I think about climbing to the top of it to see if it would make any difference but if I do that, there's a risk I'll end up on the other side. I don't want that to happen. As long as I'm on this side and Carol-Lynn's on the other, I figure she's safer.

Rob's voice crackles out of the radio again, 'We'll leave in the morning at first light and should be there by noon. That way, we can be back well before night fall.'

The words fill me with hope. They'll find Carol-Lynn tomorrow, I know they will. She won't be alone for long. Just one night. If only I could tell her, but I can feel the virus taking over my body. I feel myself starting to fade; to disappear. Surely they'll see the container and investigate. How could they miss it? When they investigate, they'll find her. All she has to do is stay in the container and wait for them to get there. I've listened to them speaking to each other for days now. They sound like good people; I know they'll look after her. As the disease finally overcomes me, I smile to myself: I know that within a few hours my precious baby will be safe.

A Note From The Author: One of the most memorable scenes from [*For Those In Peril On The Sea*](#) is the one set in a container on the beach at Little Harbour. It's the one everyone talks about. My editor told me it haunted her for days after she read it for the first time. In the book, it's a bit of a mystery as to where the girl they find living in the container came from. I'd thought about writing her back story into the book itself but it didn't really fit in, so I've written it here as a stand-alone piece. If you're familiar with the book you'll see where this dove-tails into the main story. If not, you can read [*For Those In Peril On The Sea*](#) to find out what happened to Carol-Lynn.