

Saturday, June 11, 2016

Position: 43.0542° N 86.2998° W

At anchor, two nautical miles due west of Grand Haven

Salty Swallow

“You shot the man?”

“Yes, Marcus, I did – you wanna hear the rest of the story?”

“Sorry, Mindy! The floor is yours . . .”

Mindy took a deep breath and she continued with the tale.

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With one man dead – shot in cold blood before them – the remaining seven crew members appeared to find their tongues.

Yes, it was Marijuana.

Yes, they had offloaded it from a tug that had brought in the cargo from Canada.

Yes, the drugs were destined for the United States of America.

Yes, the drugs were to be split with a portion going to Detroit, another portion to Chicago, and the rest to Philadelphia.

Apparently, the drugs were all paid for, too. Hit Girl wanted more, but the men began to clam up.

“Let me,” Nightmare hissed at Hit Girl.

Hit Girl pondered that for a moment before she waved Nightmare before the crew.

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Nightmare may have appeared slight in her appearance, but her electronically enhanced voice struck fear into the crew.

“I am Nightmare. I am *your* nightmare. I want to know the name of that tug,” Nightmare said before she paused for effect. “I want to know *NOW!*”

The raised voice shook the men but they just glared at the young vigilante. Nightmare stepped towards a large man, two down from the corpse with the destroyed head. She pulled a very sharp, seven-inch blade from the back of her pants. Hit Girl grinned behind her mask as Nightmare brought it before the man’s eyes.

“I like knives; they speak to me. This one wants to cut you. Only, I like to cut things *off* . . . a few weeks back I cut the penis off a rapist; I enjoyed it. I think I want to cut your dick off – assuming it isn’t fucking tiny!”

Nightmare backed up her comment by holding the thumb and forefinger of her left hand about an inch apart. The man’s rage was building and Hit Girl could tell that he was about to explode.

“Talk to me, cunt – or my blade talks to that pathetically tiny piece of flesh between your legs that you call a dick.”

The man never moved but he scowled even deeper and I was about to intervene when Nightmare defused him – in quite a spectacular way! The man never expected it but he grunted as the blade plunged into his stomach and Nightmare heaved the blade to her right allowing copious amounts of intestine to spill out onto the deck.

“Well, he sure spilled his guts!” Nightmare laughed and Hit Girl winced.

The man did not die quickly but he was allowed to suffer as he thrashed around on the deck covering his mates in his still hot blood.

“*Voyager* . . . she’s called the *Voyager* . . . for the love of God!” a man yelled out

Another man lunged towards Nightmare but he fell to the deck where he scrambled in the darkness before he turned and aimed a pistol at Nightmare. He fired off a round, just before Hit Girl shot him in the head with her suppressed Glock.

Hit Girl triggered her radio: “Calm down, Dave – they missed!”

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“We secured the remainder and left them for the Coastguard,” Mindy finished.

“It was my best night ever!” Lauren added with a huge grin.

Mindy noticed Stephanie’s smile change to a scowl – the same with Saoirse. Nobody else appeared to have noticed anything wrong so Mindy kept quiet and she gently shook her head at the two girls.

“I have to admit that it’s not exactly fair that you two get to have all the fun while we’re sleeping,” Saoirse commented with a grin.

“You snooze you lose!” Mindy replied snarkily and Saoirse scowled.

Saoirse and Stephanie descended on Mindy after breakfast that morning.

“We got the impression that you wanted to talk,” Stephanie announced.

“Thanks, girls – yes, I do.”

The three girls descended to Mindy’s comfortable stateroom and once Mindy had closed the door, Saoirse spoke.

“You’re worried about Lauren.”

It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes, last night was exceptional and I saw a few things that concerned me. If it had been Megan, or either of you two, then it would have not been fairly normal . . .”

Stephanie grinned before she turned serious.

“Why us?” Stephanie asked. “Wouldn’t you be better talking to Dave, Chloe, or Josh?”

Mindy looked directly at each girl in turn as she replied.

“I value your experience, girls. You both have unique knowledge and experiences that are unique within *Fusion*. I don’t envy you those experiences, but I do value them.”

“Talk about surreal!” Saoirse commented.

“Surreal?” Mindy queried.

“I’m still getting used to being close to the ‘Main Enemy’,” the fifteen-year-old replied. Having the famous Hit Girl value me, is still something very novel.”

“I must admit, I agree with you,” Stephanie commented. “I’m okay with it, but it has taken a while. Oh, SD? Please be careful – my Mum has an ego problem!”

“I do *not*!” Mindy growled without malice.

Stephanie just rolled her eyes in response.

“Saoirse, I know we began on rocky ground with you trying to kill a little girl that I cared about . . .”

“Less of the little!” Stephanie cut in.

“Young girl!” Mindy retorted. “You are a valued member of my team. Every person in *Fusion* plays to their strengths. You are one of my strengths and I will use your uniquely special skills when I believe they are needed – just like now.”

“Thanks, Mindy. It’s been a rough few months but I’m glad I made the change. Without you, Steph, and Morgan . . . you’ve all helped me cope with changing my life and as far as I am concerned, being shot in the chest by Steph was the best thing ever!”

“Does that mean I can do it again?” Stephanie enquired with an evil smirk.

“Just you fucking try it, bitch!” Saoirse replied with a friendly scowl.

“Back to Lauren,” Mindy announced bringing the conversation back on track.

“She seems to enjoy being partnered with you, Hit Girl,” Saoirse commented.

“Who wouldn’t!”

Saoirse laughed and put her hand to her mouth to prevent any further amusement which might annoy Mindy.

“What’s *that* about?”

“Stephanie said you had an ego, but wow!” Saoirse replied as she struggled not to laugh.

Stephanie laughed at Mindy’s sour expression.

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“So,” Mindy said, pulling them all back to the original conversation. “You both saw it and understood it – spill!”

Stephanie turned serious and she looked over at her older counterpart before she spoke.

“She sees this as a big game. That girl’s been through a lot and I think she’s struggling to cope with it all. Her behaviour is extreme and she has a hatred for men. That in itself is not unexpected when you consider her past experiences,” Stephanie replied. “Her father’s a dick. She was kidnapped and humiliated by men. Then she was raped by a pair of arseholes. There is a pattern.”

"I see myself, when I was younger," Mindy said. "That scares me. Daddy used to make a game of being Hit Girl; it was his way of training me . . . well, brainwashing me. I loved putting on the costume – what five-year-old girl wouldn't – it transformed me into somebody else and you could do anything in a game without worrying about the consequences. I never thought twice about what I did and looking back . . ."

"I know," Stephanie said as she looked up at her adoptive mother. "By the time you realise what they've done to you . . ."

"It's too late," Saoirse finished darkly.

"Nightmare has a problem. I won't keep her off the next mission – she'll want to see this through – but when we return to Chicago, I want to keep a close eye on her."

"We can do that," Saoirse commented with a glance at Stephanie who nodded her acceptance.

Later that morning

Salty Swallow

They were underway again, and heading north.

Dave and Mindy were sitting in the Main Salon. They were both in conversation with a grinning man on the large screen TV.

"Okay – looks like we have AIS for a tug around that position, but no other boat. The AIS is for the *Voyager* – she's Canadian registered; 293 gross tonnes, built in 1962, eight crew."

"Thanks, Marty."

"It is impossible for you to go anywhere, Mrs Lizewski!" Marty commented dryly. "The list of places you've visited and which are now off limits is growing by the day . . ."

"Funny!" Mindy growled as Dave laughed raucously.

"See you soon, guys – try not to cause an international incident with Canada!"

One deck above . . .

"*What* are you wearing?"

"Shorts . . ."

"Definitely the right word for them," Anne-Marie replied pointedly.

"So, they show my legs; big deal."

"Since when did you flaunt everything?" Dave chipped in as he came up the gangway from the deck below – the shorts *were* very short and they showed off every inch of Stephanie's long legs and muscular thighs.

"Since she streaked around the pool in London," Danny laughed.

Stephanie scowled and her face turned pink at the memory.

"I thought she was wearing a new swimsuit – she was almost completely scarlet," Anne-Marie laughed.

"I was embarrassed . . ." Stephanie growled as she advanced on the younger girl. "I am so going to hurt you."

Dave expected his daughter to run for safety, only she stayed absolutely still and she just smiled up at her big sister. Then the eight-year-old fluttered her eyebrows. Stephanie stopped her advance and her expression of anger changed to one of confusion.

"What's with the stupid look?" Stephanie enquired of her sister.

"You'd never hurt me; you love me too much."

"Where'd you get that idea from?"

"You risked your life to save my ass a few months back."

Stephanie deflated and she grinned.

"She annoys the hell out of me but I love her to bits," Stephanie complained bitterly and the cheeky eight-year-old grinned enormously as she hugged her big sister.

By four that afternoon, Mindy's plans were complete.

The three yachts had headed northwards at over twenty knots. They were closing steadily on the tug which was still moving on a northerly heading at a much more sedate six knots. There were several hours to kill before any action got underway, so everybody relaxed for a while. An hour later, the tug dropped anchor a half-mile off Ludington.

Each yacht dropped anchor off Pentwater, about ten nautical miles to the south. We rafted up for dinner and the relaxation seemed to turn X-rated.

Joshua looked around the Main Salon and he focussed on a boy and girl kissing like there was to be no tomorrow.

To be honest, with all the dubious activity aboard over the past day or so, Joshua decided that Mindy had picked the perfect name for her first yacht!

"Hey, Megan! You enjoy your 'salty swallow', yesterday?"

Megan glared daggers at Joshua but she smirked without a word and then went back to kissing a pink-faced Curtis. Even Anne-Marie, who detested the vessel's name, laughed. As was usual, Joshua had control of the music on board. He fiddled with the remote and selected a track. A decent beat came through the high-end speakers.

*Looking in your eyes I see a paradise
This world that I've found
Is too good to be true
Standing here beside you
Want so much to give you
This love in my heart that I'm feeling for you*

*Let 'em say we're crazy, I don't care about that
Put your hand in my hand baby
Don't ever look back
Let the world around us just fall apart
Baby we can make it if we're heart to heart*

*And we can build this dream together
Standing strong forever
Nothing's gonna stop us now
And if this world runs out of lovers
We'll still have each other
Nothing's gonna stop us
Nothing's gonna stop us now*

Megan looked up and grinned and began to mouth the words to Curtis who made a good attempt at responding. Even the adults were getting in on it and smooching together: Ryan and Cathy, Marcus and Paige, Dave and Mindy. Mind you, Mindy kept glaring at Marcus as he kissed Paige, Megan didn't care what her mother was up to, she was way too busy. Joshua selected another track and the smooching just got worse as Chloe sunk her lips onto his.

*There's a calm surrender to the rush of day
When the heat of the rolling world can be turned away
An enchanted moment and it sees me through
It's enough for this restless warrior just to be with you*

*And can you feel the love tonight? It is where we are
It's enough for this wide-eyed wanderer that we got this far
And can you feel the love tonight? How it's laid to rest
It's enough to make kings and vagabonds believe the very best*

Sunday, June 12, 2016

02:00

Position: 43.9423° N 86.5116° W

Two nautical miles due west of Ludington

Always Stealthy

The tender had assumed a new name to go along with its new colour scheme.

A custom-made, radar absorbent, camouflage cover had been fitted which turned the tender black with duck egg blue splodges. A Minimi machine-gun was even mounted on the bow. Five were aboard for the assault. Jackal was the coxswain at the helm with Psyche beside him. Forward of the helm was Wildcat with Nightmare. In the bow was Foxtail. The commander for the night was Wildcat.

Four nautical miles astern, *Salty Swallow* cruised at eighteen knots, keeping easy pace with her tender.

Voyager

The 120-foot, blue and white tug was rocking at a single anchor.

A single all-round white light was visible atop the main mast above the raised bridge. A dull red light was visible through the windows of the 01-deck bridge. Nobody was visible anywhere on deck as the tender drew close and approached the stern. Several portholes were illuminated on the main deck and music could be heard coming from an open watertight hatch on the same deck.

The stern had the lowest freeboard for boarding.

“Standby!” Wildcat growled and four affirmative responses were heard just as the bow of the tender kissed the *Voyager’s* stern. “Away boarders!”

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Foxtail, the tender’s painter in her left hand, jumped onto the rubbing strake which ran around the tug’s hull and she swung over the bulwark onto the after deck. Quickly, she secured the tender to a stanchion and took up a position where she could cover the port side of the tug as the other three members of the boarding team followed her example and landed on the deck before spreading out.

Wildcat and Psyche headed to the starboard side of the vessel while Foxtail and Nightmare made their way forward up the port side. Jackal remained in the tender on watch and less than a foot from the Minimi.

“Foxtrot, this is Alpha, boarding team is aboard.”

“Foxtrot copies,” came the voice of Hal from Safehouse F in Chicago.

Battle Guy and Hal were providing overwatch for the operation. Aboard *Salty Swallow*, many ears listened to the audio and many eyes watched the video from a camera aboard the tender, *Always Stealthy*.

Wildcat and Psyche

“When was the last time we paired off?”

“Now is not the time, Psyche!”

“Humour me?”

“To be honest, I have no idea – but I like to fight alongside you.”

“Cool!”

Psyche indicated the ladder up to the bridge deck and she covered Wildcat as the older girl climbed up to the next deck before she followed. They both approached the starboard bridge door which was closed. Wildcat peered through the glass in the door and saw nobody. She pulled open the door and Psyche dived in.

“Bridge clear!” Psyche announced.

The two vigilantes left via the port bridge door and while Wildcat covered her, Psyche scampered up a vertical ladder to the upper conning position. The position was clear so Psyche continued upwards to the raised bridge which was also clear.

“Upper decks are clear!” Psyche reported as she descended back to the bridge deck to re-join Wildcat.

Foxtail and Nightmare

With the upper decks of the tug clear, they knew that they faced eight people below decks.

That was a strategic nightmare. Assaulting an enormous luxury yacht with large open areas and wide passageways was a relative breeze. The *Voyager* was over fifty years old and the corridors would be tight to manoeuvre through with weapons drawn. That meant some different tactics would be required.

Foxtail entered the superstructure first via the open hatchway and she was followed by Nightmare. Both had suppressed pistols raised before them.

Wildcat and Psyche

Psyche carefully moved down a ladder from inside the bridge into the deck below.

Voices could be heard coming from a compartment to the left. They both paused and Psyche took up a position to assault the compartment. Wildcat dived forwards and with Psyche covering her, she burst through the hatch.

The two men in the compartment were talking together as they watched a movie on a bulkhead mounted television set that looked almost as old as the tug. Both men jumped up and reached for concealed weapons. The first yelled out in agony as he was pistol-whipped by Wildcat and he fell backwards against a steel bulkhead. The next man, towering over six-feet tall, grinned as he found himself facing off against a slightly-built, four-foot-six midget in a semi-armoured suit and mask.

“Is this what pirates look like now?” he chuckled as he feinted left and then struck Psyche in the chest with his right fist.

Psyche yelled out in pain as she went down. She scrambled back to her feet and rammed a Sai into the man’s right thigh. The man bellowed in pain but then went silent as Wildcat shot him in the heart.

“Fucking douche!” Psyche growled as she retrieved her Sai.

Foxtail and Nightmare

“You two having fun?”

“Always!” Psyche reported as she and Wildcat joined up with their colleagues. “Oh, shit!”

An alarm began to sound and they all heard pounding feet. Wildcat pulled Psyche to the deck as a man appeared at the far end of the corridor with a submachine gun in his hand and he sent a dozen rounds in their direction. Nightmare shoved Foxtail into an adjacent compartment and landed on top of the older girl.

“You heavy, bitch!” Foxtail complained as she shoved Nightmare off her.

“Contact!” Foxtail radioed.

Salty Swallow

“Contact!”

“I think things have gone to crap,” Mindy commented unnecessarily.

“*We have everything under control . . .*” Wildcat radioed.

“*Yeah, right!*” Psyche cut in.

Mindy raised her night glasses and she focussed on the tug about two miles distant. She could make out Jackal in the tender and the flashes of gunfire on the tugs after deck, then the Minimi on the tender burst into life.

“Fast boat, inbound from the east – thirty-one knots – heading directly for the *Voyager!*” Ryan advised as he studied the state of the art radar aboard Mindy’s yacht.

Wildcat with Psyche

Fucking shit intelligence!

There were way more than eight crew on board the damn tug. How did we know? Well, I had killed two, Psyche another two and we were fighting at least four while the other two were fighting about six. My Math came to at least fourteen men and we had not seen the captain yet; she was understood to be a woman.

It was every vigilante for themselves as we fought hand to hand in the contorted passageways. One thing in our favour was our physical size. The goons we faced were all men six-foot tall and about the same across. We had space to manoeuvre while they had very little available to them. Nonetheless, the team was fighting well, including our junior member, Nightmare.

I believed everything to be under control – my niece, it seemed, thought otherwise!

Foxtail with Nightmare

The fighting spilled out on deck just as I heard the tugs engines rumble to life.

I burst out of the starboard side main deck hatch and immediately, I came under fire from aft which I dutifully returned. Nightmare ran ahead, her pistol spitting fire and I followed, sending bullets back into the tug’s superstructure. Something was badly wrong; there should only have been eight crew aboard and now there seemed to be well over a dozen, heading on for twenty. At least things couldn’t get any worse . . .

“Alpha, this is Foxtrot. You have a fast-moving watercraft closing at thirty knots with unknown intentions; however, I don’t think they’re delivering pizza!”

It had just got worse and Hit Girl trying to be funny was not exactly helping.

Jackal

What a surprise; one of our operations had just gone to fuck!

I had to be careful where I aimed the Minimi so as not to cut down any of the girls – I decided that they might be a little put out by that act and they would probably come back to haunt me. The tug's diesel engine was thundering to life and I knew that I would have to cast off within minutes or face getting swamped.

I watched Wildcat burst out of the port hatch and after killing a man, she headed forward and then upwards to the bridge. She was followed by the ever-present Psyche. Both girls were dashing about with the energy of the ubiquitous Duracell Bunny but with the vicious streak of Rambo. It was hard to imagine the two female vigilantes as two normal-looking pre-teen girls who had been sunbathing and giggling earlier that afternoon.

I was quickly snapped back to reality as I heard the roaring of high-performance marine engines coming from the east.

The Voyager Bridge

Wildcat dove onto the bridge with Psyche close behind.

Psyche sent one of her Sais the length of the bridge and a submachine gun toting asshole died. The coxswain quickly followed as Wildcat put a bullet into his skull.

“Stop the fucking boat!” Wildcat ordered the Captain.

“Fuck you . . .”

Wildcat punched the woman hard in the face smashing her nose. The Captain screamed out in pain but she quickly regained her composure and she pulled back on the throttle till ‘STOP’ was selected.

“Now – who are your friends out there?” Wildcat demanded.

“Fuck you!”

“I really hate hurting people, you know,” Wildcat went on. “But for druggies like you? Well, you ain't people!”

With that proclamation, the Captain screamed as a bullet blew her right knee-cap apart and she sank to the deck in agony.

“I hope you fucking . . .”

“Wrong answer!”

Another bullet later and another destroyed knee-cap sent waves of agony coursing through the Captain who writhed on the deck.

“I have six more rounds remaining – where'd you like 'em? I like to give people some choice in how I mutilate them. I see myself as an equal opportunity vigilante!”

Jackal

That girl was fucking nuts!

With the tug rapidly losing way, the immediate problem was resolved. However, the next problem was rapidly coming into sight. For a moment, I considered that the incoming craft might be a friendly but that thought rapidly vanished as a stream of gunfire was emitted from a machine gun aboard the vessel. I returned fire with short bursts while the team took cover behind the bulwarks and out of my line of fire.

The fast boat decided the fire was too heavy and they attempted a high-speed turn but the fuckers misjudged it and two men went over the side as they turned. I laughed – who wouldn't. The fast boat began to accelerate away but had only made it about a hundred yards when I caught a flash of orange out the corner of my left eye.

A second or two later the fast boat blossomed into a fiery cloud as it exploded.

Salty Swallow

"That was way cool!" Anne-Marie exploded.

"Thought you'd enjoy that," Mindy laughed as she lowered the Javelin control console to the foredeck.

"I love the smell of explosives in the night!" Anne-Marie quipped.

"We need to have words about what movies your mother lets you watch," Marcus commented dryly.

"All we need now are some marshmallows on very long sticks," Anne-Marie added.

"This is all *your* fault!" Marcus growled as he looked over at a grinning Mindy. "Like mother like daughter!"

We took the tender aboard and left the scene at speed before following a large looping course that brought us back to the other yachts from a very different heading.

There were the usual bruises, but nothing major and everybody was very tired. While we slept, the US Coastguard were up all night as they tried to figure out what had happened a few miles off the coast. Needless to say, if the USCG came to visit, the following morning, all evidence would be long gone.