

[needs demonstration that Cruncher doesn't actually bite]

[scene at restaurant. Man in suit trying to get them to change the menu and print in English (not just on blackboard) – cruise line wants 10%]

[adventure - in boat?? – to do what???)

[gave up on StVincent (kids) and Grenada (revolution)]

Mention Marseilles – health problems – sulphur in fuel

Try to complain. Police intimidated. Also chief magistrate. Virtual UDI.

Leave island with nothing. Night raid to get it. Sunrise illusion.

1 Passport

Charles had been waiting for some time. He hadn't noticed how long because he had started looking at his phone and ended up sending three emails and a couple of texts and checking the news and weather. Now his attention turned to the chair opposite where the sergeant had been sitting. It looked as if its very ordinariness told a story with its plain metal frame with chipped black paint and minimally padded seat covered in dirty red vinyl. He took five photos of it and sat back to admire the results.

The day had started well. Retirement was good. He had written three long paragraphs of his book when the post came. He had felt a bit embarrassed turning up at the police station with the letter in the brown envelope and rather relieved when the lady at the desk checked on her screen and confirmed that he should be there.

The sergeant came back in with another man.

"Mr Clemence, this is David Jones from the Home Office who will consider your case".

"I told you before, it is Clémencé with an unusually positioned circumflex on the first e and an acute on the last. Good God, its Jones isn't it? Didn't make sixth form, but landed on your feet have you? Decent job? Well I never."

The man hesitated and stepped back. "Yes headmaster. I am now a senior assistant." Picking it up carefully so it didn't drag on the floor, he drew up another similar chair, sat down and opened a file on the table.

"Your father came to the UK." The sergeant said, reading from it. "You are a second generation migrant. Mr Jones says that there are special regulations for the second generation so you may be granted leave to stay, at least temporarily."

"My father, did you say?"

"Yes. Is that incorrect?" Jones asked.

"I told the sergeant that my ancestor, general sir Phillipe Clémencé was awarded a manor house in Oxfordshire, now unfortunately the property of distant cousin, for bravery at the battle of Waterloo, and moved here from France and my family have lived here ever since."

“Yes maybe, but did they give him a UK passport and right of abode?”

“It seems that something is missing here. Can you remember who taught you history?”

“No Sir. I remember he had a grey beard.”

“Right. That would be Mr Dawson. An inspiring man. Since retirement he has written a history of the Napoleonic wars which was well reviewed in the specialist press and even got four stars in the Saturday Guardian. Surely you must have learnt something from him. Can you still not see what I am saying?”

“No, not exactly.”

“How is your mathematics? The battle of Waterloo was in 1815. It is now 2020. Do you think it likely that my father attended?” Jones fell silent, mouth open, no evidence of cerebral activity.

“You clearly have a foreign name and it is not on the national database.” The sergeant said.

“They probably missed off the accents. Many of these second-rate systems don’t have good enough software to record them properly. I always insist that my name is recorded properly. You should submit a request for a system upgrade.”

“All EU migrants must return to their country of origin. You recently entered this country from France. I assume that is your country of origin.”

“Of course it isn’t. I am completely British and, as I just said, my family have lived here since 1815. I just came back from a cruise on the river Seine. This whole investigation is a joke.” He smiled and coughed slightly in pretence of a laugh. They did not smile or laugh back.

Jones was taking notes, writing slowly on in a small notebook with lined pages. “The river Seine you say. Is that in France?”

“Yes. It flows through Paris.” He looked at Jones. “That’s in France as well”.

The Sergeant passed over a copy of the letter. “This says that you should bring your passport.”

Charles reached into his coat pocket and handed it to him. He opened it briefly and placed it in the file, sliding it across the table, out of reach.

Jones turned over several pages of the papers in front of him until he found a small booklet to read from. “Any passport that is not matched by a record on the national database is an illegal document and may be a forgery. Any such documents should be retained by the appropriate authority.” He looked up with a grin, turning to the sergeant who smiled back.

Charles held out his copy of the letter. “If I’m not on the database, how did anybody know where to send this letter?”

The sergeant stood up and held the door open. Jones gathered up the papers and closed the file. “Your case will be considered and you will be advised regarding any further interviews that may be necessary. Under the new procedures these will be in the overseas embassy in the migrant’s country of origin.”

Walking back to his car, Charles collided with a Big Issue seller in the High Street and felt obliged to buy a copy. Reversing onto his driveway he almost hit the wall, but had time to go forward and move across to his normal space before Jenny saw him.

She listened patiently to his account. “You weren’t very diplomatic with that stupid boy were you. Does this mean you will agree to go to live in Spain with Henry and Margaret?”

“I’m damned sure it was him who threw that flower pot through the Post Office window. You know I don’t want to go to Spain. It may be warmer, but even you find Margaret hard going after a while. Anyway, they’ve taken my passport so I can’t go anywhere.” He suddenly looked up in alarm. “What about Dubai in September?”

She rose from her chair and went over to the sideboard, taking a small envelope from beneath the cutlery tray in the top drawer. “I was going to give you this for your birthday but you should have it now.”

She handed him a red passport. On the cover it just said European Union. He looked inside, page by page, stopping at the photo page to read his name. He held it up, smelt it, and it looked as if he might kiss it.

She waited until he put it down. “My favourite column in the Mail online gave a link for the office in Brussels. It was £150 but I knew you would want to remain an EU citizen”.

“Junker said he would do it when they had their shouting match. Said they were civilised nations even if we weren’t. Brilliantly impressive that he really did.”

“Shouldn’t have called her a bigoted witch though. Not very nice. Anyway, have you heard, she’s going to make an announcement.”

Standing at a lectern outside number ten, the prime minister outlined the dire problems facing the economy.

“Whose fault do you think that is, you stupid old bat? Your brexit was hard enough to knock a hole in a concrete khazi.” Charles was leaning forward in his chair. Jenny looked up, a tiny partially created jacket for an expected grandchild hanging from the needles.

“So I have decided that it will be necessary to bring in restrictions on foreign exchange transactions with immediate effect. This will prevent irresponsible speculators from taking away the capital we need here to create employment.” The camera held steady, framing her face and shoulders.

“Bloody hell. Last person to do that was Harold Wilson wasn’t it. Bigoted witch is too good for her. So we can go to Spain but can’t buy a decent villa. No, don’t say it. Even if Henry did invite us for as long as we wanted. He only wants cannon fodder for Margaret.”

2 Golf Club

[describe room] Charles was in no danger of having to buy the first round. He had sliced into the rough by the tenth fairway and again at the twelfth and missed a six inch putt on the fifteenth. However, thoughts of the welcome pint were abruptly interrupted as he entered the clubhouse. An imposing figure in blazer and tie was leaning on the bar from the far side.

“Harry, this is very good of you. Where’s Pedro?”

“it’s all hands to the pumps as they say. As captain, I see it as my duty to respond to a crisis.”

“I see. And Pedro?”

“It was never meant to be people like him and Maria. They were good, hard working. It was supposed to be the others. You know, the ones you see on the news. I did try to help them with the

forms but there are these targets for the numbers that have to go and they didn't have any qualifications apart from what they got from school in Portugal. Your usual?"

Charles downed the first half of his pint and choked, spilling a good part of the rest on the carpet. It was sweet and sickly and truly awful. He saw that the tap for the new alko-pop they had bought to encourage young members was next to the bitter.

Harry had picked up a glass and was reaching for the optic on the Johnnie Walker. Paul looked hopeful but his hopes were dashed when Harry downed the neat double himself.

"I'm happy to look after the bar and the memsahib is doing the kitchen. It won't be for long. The minister was on the news last night and said they would help us find good local people if we need them." He reached for the optic again, missing the whisky and ending up with Smirnoff. Looking puzzled at the lack of colour, he was pleased to see it improve when his second shot was more accurate.

"Look Harry." Paul said quickly. "Would you like us to take over for a bit? It really is good of you to do this, but all workers need a break from time to time."

Harry emerged from behind the bar and produced his keys from his pocket.

"No Harry. Not the Jag. I mean, could you have a look at the second green. Moles I think."

Charles managed to relieve him of the keys as he staggered out.

No sooner had they cleared the queue at the bar which formed immediately on Harry's departure than a woman appeared through the door from the kitchen holding a glass in one hand and an almost empty bottle of Courvoisier in the other. Her striped cotton apron had failed to protect her smart blouse from the effects of her cooking.

"Charlotte. The heroine of the kitchen." Charles stood and pulled up a chair. "Do join us. Harry has just popped out for a few minutes. We're minding his duties."

She slumped into the chair. "Three of them came for interview. We do pay the living wage. We give a contract for 20 hours a week. That's fair, isn't it? We can't afford to pay them every day if it's raining and nobody comes. Then they get the extra hours if needed. We only deduct a bit of rent for the flat up in the roof. It was all done properly you know, a shower with nice white tiles. Such a shame the planners wouldn't let us put any windows. We shall find someone, won't we? A nice couple like Pedro and Maria. In a few days."

Paul jumped up because she seemed at risk of sliding right out of the chair. Her eyes half closed, she was gently declining. With as much decorum as he could manage he reached under her arms and lifted her. She never awoke.

"We'll have to carry her to the sofa." He looked hopefully at Charles but just at that moment there was a loud bang followed by the sound of falling shards of glass.

Charles rushed to the window. Harry had already set up another ball at the first tee.

3 Gold Coins

Jenny beamed, her smile lighting up her whole face. "I'm sure you won't ever regret it. We can get a lovely villa with a local golf club with staff just like Pedro and Maria."

Charles was sitting with his back to her, facing the desk in the corner with his lap-top on it. "If you say we can do it then I am sure we can." The screen in front of him showed a picture of a gold

krugerand on the Amazon site. Paul had been right, they had brought in currency restrictions but apparently forgotten to ban the sale of gold. It might only last for a few weeks but that would do. At just over a thousand pounds for a one ounce coin he wondered if Amazon would do free delivery.

Jenny looked up at the glittering image. "We could put them in biscuit tins. It looks a bit like a biscuit, doesn't it? They'd never look in a biscuit tin would they? Don't worry. It'll be fine."

"You know that jeweller on the high street, where we bought that ridiculously expensive chain for that locket. Do you think they have a way to check things to see if they are really gold?"

Jenny gently touched the shining gold chain she wore every day and smiled. "Yes, I'm sure they can, but didn't you find lots of tests on Google?"

Charles typed in "testing gold coins" and looked down the page he had looked at a dozen times before. "I just want to be absolutely sure they are solid gold and not half tungsten. See this one, you spin the coin on the table and the app listens to it. Very clever, but the people who make the forgeries must know about it."

Minutes later an expensive looking black 4 by 4 pulled up on the driveway and two men wearing appropriately expensive looking suits emerged from behind the tinted windows. The older looking one was somewhat over weight and looked bored. His younger companion was so busy taking photos of the house that he almost fell over a strategically placed stone gnome. Photography finished, and brandishing glossy brochures entitled "loans in 7 days" they marched up to the door just as Charles opened it.

Bored looked up at the smiling face in front of him and did not smile, his face dropping even further at the sight of a black standard poodle in the corridor beyond. The big black eyes emerging from the curling hair seemed to eye up his rather limited stature to check if it could reach his shoulders if it jumped up at him. Jenny's offer of a seat on the sofa and a cup of tea raised a marginally more positive reaction. In the meanwhile, busy was off round the house with Charles showing him every room so he could take more photos and make notes. Returning to the lounge a brief conference of the sales team followed before bored started his pitch.

Starting with comments about what a lovely and valuable house it was he looked up to see Charles looking at his watch. He produced a wad of paper.

"I just need to fill in a few details on this suitability report before I can recommend a financial product."

Charles spent the next half hour working through his files to try to dig out figures for the pages of obscure details of his finances required by the report. Some of the figures were true, some were lies, but most were just guesswork.

"Before we move on, I would like you to have a chance to look at these brochures about our company. If you take a minute to look through them we can study all this useful information you have given us."

The front page of each glossy carried a picture of a satisfied customer. Mrs Jones from Swansea wore a summer dress and stood with a view of the hills behind her while Mrs McDonald from Aberdeen wore a winter coat and her hair was tucked under a woollen hat as she stood by the harbour. Each one carried effusive quotes about the service and value but to Charles's practiced eye they looked remarkably like the same person.

The poodle ambled up and onto the sofa and sat next to bored who cringed away from the big wet nose. Seeing that neither Jenny nor Charles planned to do anything about it, the dog went to sleep and bored hurried on.

"I am suggesting two alternative plans to you. They would both give you great financial security which I am sure is important to you. We have studied your circumstances and they would both be entirely suitable." He went on to describe an annuity based on the value of the house and a quick cash purchase of the house.

Jenny looked alarmed but Charles just said nothing. The silence lasted almost half a minute. "I see" bored said and abandoned his attempt to get hold of the property freehold at a fraction of its true value. Finally, he moved on to discussing the loan and, after one brief attempt to extract interest at almost double the rates quoted in his literature, it was agreed. 7 days later, having signed away his right to a cooling off period, Charles had three hundred thousand pounds and ordered gold coins of many descriptions in batches of less than ten thousand pounds worth, in the hope of not attracting too much attention.

The queue for the Portsmouth St Malo ferry was marked out with thick yellow lines in three lanes running across the car park. Two of them had big notices announcing the new one thousand pound limit for currency and valuables. By the third lane the sign was hanging off and blowing around in the wind and threatening to hit the cars. The notice advertising the previous ten thousand euro limit was visible beneath. It carried a recommendation to move larger sums with bank transfers. This was conspicuously absent from the new notices.

Each lane had a kiosk next to it with a sign above announcing: "United Kingdom Border Control".

Charles handed over the passports together with a form declaring compliance with the limit and promising to bring the car back and not sell it. Behind him on the back seat were two biscuit tins. They were so heavy he had had to put them on a wooden plank to stop them sinking into the upholstery. The poodle sat next to them.

Charles's European Union passport was examined in great detail before being placed under the scanner. Passport control finished, the customs agent signalled to them to pull over out of the queue into a parking bay just behind the kiosk. Charles looked around. The bays at the other two kiosks were empty. He was gasping for a whisky.

They watched from a marked out viewing area as two men approached their car. One did while the other watched. First the boot was fully unloaded and each item checked. The spare wheel was lifted out and shaken.

"OK, you check the inside while I put all this back." The doer looked up hopefully at the watcher, who walked round in a way that reminded Charles of the small group of children who never dared to venture more than two feet beyond the school gates until their mothers arrived to collect them.

The man who liked to watch looked in at the back seats. The poodle slowly raised its shaggy head and looked back.

"Do you want me to get him out?" Jenny asked the doer, walking forward. "He's very gentle, he won't hurt you."

"No need. Go on mate. It's only a poodle."

"I'll get him out. Come along Cruncher."

"Really no need madam. Please remain in the viewing area. Why Cruncher?"

"He crunches his biscuits. The ones in the tins."

The watcher looked up. "Is that all?"

“Yes of course... He’d never hurt a fly.” The words were affirmative, but the pause before their delivery spoke of other possibilities.

Re-fitting the spare wheel was proving difficult. Seizing the opportunity, the watcher swung the back-passenger door open, leaned in, grabbed the plank and slid it a few inches sideways. This, however, revealed a dog biscuit which was immediately captured by Cruncher, brushing his face with a long flopping ear. He jumped back, slamming the door. Standing up and patting down his uniform he called out: “All clear in there.”

The car jack clanged into place beside the spare wheel. “You pathetic wuss. It’s only a poodle. Check the front while I finish off here.”

4 Buy Villa

Charles was exhausted after viewing six villas. Henry and Margaret had gone with them and enthused about the size of the sun terraces, the fittings in the kitchen and the views across the parched golf courses. To Charles they all looked tediously similar. Now Henry had sent them to see the solicitor who spoke good English and was known to be passably honest. The office had comfortable leather armchairs and, best of all, an air conditioning unit grinding away under the window. Cruncher had been shorn of most of his curls to keep him cool, but had seemed to suffer from the heat even more than Charles. He lay down contentedly in front of the blast of cold air.

“I see that you have found some suitable properties within your budget.” The man leafed through the sheets of agents’ details. “In this country, it is customary for buyers to transfer money to their solicitors so that we can reassure the vendors that you have the necessary funds”.

“It’s not quite like that. We have the funds as what you might call tangible assets and we hoped that you might advise us on how to sell them.”

“What do you mean by tangible assets? Things can be difficult and slow to sell. I though you said you were cash buyers.”

“We have gold coins.” Jenny cut in. “Charles is a bit nervous about telling people.”

The man paused for a few seconds and then smiled. “You are very fortunate. Very fortunate indeed. There are a number of people here with wonderful properties, but they are part of what I might call the informal economy. They like to keep their affairs separate. They like gold a lot. It is difficult to buy here. The authorities are always so interested. I have a colleague who can contact them.”

This villa commanded the hill-top with stunning views across a tree-lined bay with glistening yachts bobbing at anchor. The kitchen fittings left Margaret speechless. Soon after they arrived, a Lamborghini swept up the driveway. The driver was introduced as the smiling owner, Mr Benfield-Carter.

Charles looked at him, something seemed familiar. He prided himself on remembering every student he had ever taught. This man looked as if he was in his fifties so he would have been in one of his first classes.

They walked through to the terrace. Margaret swooned. Then Cruncher saw it. Having suffered the indignity of being made to look like a cross between a plucked chicken and a tennis ball, he saw good cause to act like one. By the time Jenny realised he had pulled the lead from her hand he was

half way across the terrace. Seconds later he was in the infinity pool, tail running like a propeller, ears floating to either side.

Charles rushed to drag him out. Then, just as he turned, he had it. He had only just started as a teacher. He had smelt something in the corridor which reminded him of his university halls of residence. It didn't take long to find out what had happened. It was just plain Carter in those days. He had kept the boy back after class to explain that, while the school wished to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit in its pupils, growing marijuana in his mother's greenhouse and selling it to his classmates, was not to be encouraged as part of that policy. The liberal leanings of Charles's youth had led him to decide not to report on the matter to the headmaster. The boy had thanked him profusely and offered him some.

5 Try out Boat

Charles leaned back in the sun lounger. In just a few weeks since they had bought the villa; he had grown to love the view of the bay. He could sit under his sunshade and watch the people on the beach and the boats, and be glad he was on his peaceful terrace and wasn't down there with them. There was just one fly in the ointment. A very large fly, 30 feet long, out there in the bay. The ever-attentive Mr Benfield Carter had given Jenny a glowing description of sailing it down to the local harbour and mooring it where people would see it and know who had arrived in it while the proud owners took lunch in a waterfront café. It was, he said, an essential accompaniment to the villa. She just couldn't resist it.

That was the official version. The reality was that Henry and Margaret had been impeccable hosts when they had arrived from England with only what they could fit in their car. But there had been a slight edge to the way in which Margaret had expressed her sympathy every morning at breakfast. Gloating might have been too strong a word but she was exceedingly proud of her villa by the golf course. Now everything was different and Jenny escorted Margaret through to the terrace to show her the yacht at every available opportunity.

Having bought it, however, they were going to have to use it. All too quickly, the day came. Henry had told them that had won races at his local sailing club and would be glad to show them how it was done. "It's easy when you know how." He assured them. "You just need to keep a good eye on the wind direction."

Charles had seen people being taken out to the yachts in a local fishing boat which waited at a small landing stage. The man was very polite and helpful, but the level of his fee made it easy to see why he had given up fishing.

From the distance, the boat had looked gleaming. However, the cross-trees near the top of the mast had clearly been a favourite perch for local bird life. A bucket and sponge were located and Charles set about washing off the arisings while, having completed her obligatory tour of the plush interior, Margaret looked on sympathetically. In the meanwhile, Henry had found the sail locker and was soon busily engaged slotting the runners into the mast and connecting the shackles to the tops of the sails. By the time Charles had finished clearing away the copious quantities of guano, and washed his hands in some rather green looking water from the tap in the galley, Henry announced that they were ready to go. Charles was sent forward to release the mooring line from the buoy and Margaret pulled on the halyards and the sails were raised.

The boat moved towards the shore and a mass of other boats. Henry swung the tiller across and shouted "Ready about. The breeze is inshore. We need to tack out to sea."

The boat turned slightly and stopped, head to wind. Henry was moving the tiller back and forth but they were steadily being blown backwards. A large yacht, almost twice their size, loomed up behind them.

Charles remembered that he had not taken out any marine insurance. They were being blown closer to the big yacht. He pictured a large hole where they hit, possibly at the water line making it sink, the owners suing him for enormous sums. They were only ten twenty feet away when he felt vibration and heard the engine. He looked round. Jenny was sitting on the helmsman's seat in front of the controls. Moments later they were turning and heading out to sea.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Henry asked her.

"We took a holiday on the canals"

"What those little ditches? They're only four feet deep and the bottom two are full of crushed supermarket trolleys. They aren't real boats."

Jenny handed him a glass of wine and increased the throttle.

"Any idea which way to go?" Charles asked.

Henry peered back at the receding shore line. "Keep the land on the starboard bow and watch out for the harbour. It should be visible when we round the headland."

Jenny pointed to the screen on the bulkhead in front of her. "I suggest we follow the sat-nav. It shows the moorings and the café."

From out at sea the small town, nestled around its harbour, looked idyllic in the sunshine. They passed the end of the long breakwater. Some years before, Charles had been persuaded to spend an afternoon at a major boat show. Looking at the huge hulls of the gin palaces he had wondered where they all ended up. Now he saw it. Acres of brilliant white glass fibre were punctuated with oddly shaped tinted windows. Jenny was faithfully following the sat-nav and took them so close under the mega-yachts that the massive curved bows seemed to loom right over their little boat. The top of their mast was scarcely at deck level of the larger ones. Charles wondered if, having supplied half of Europe with the wherewithal to get comprehensively stoned, Mr Benfield Carter might appear at the rail of one of them.

The only person to notice them arrive at the pontoons was an elderly man who helped them moor up and, for a very modest gratuity, offered to keep an eye on the boat. They took a table at the café. The menu looked good, the wine was excellent, and the view fascinating. In the foreground the small boats on the pontoons bobbed slightly in the wash of a passing ferry, the floating palaces in the background remained silent and immobile.

Charles raised his glass. "We really must do this more often."

Charles found that the boat was actually rather useful. Margaret liked to make surprise visits to call in for a coffee. However, these were so predictable that Charles found it easy to arrange to be on the boat when she arrived. Henry would then be despatched to summon him but he was easily diverted from his mission with a bottle of local plonk which they consumed in the comfortable cockpit.

The other advantage of having a boat was that it gave Charles an excuse to join the yacht club; which had an infinitely more agreeable clubhouse than Henry's golf club. The splendid water-front location made it well worth the risk of being waylaid by one of the resident raconteurs who would regale him with tales of sailing through storms which were so violent that Charles was left with the impression that either the story was complete fabrication or the man was a complete idiot to be there

in the first place. The owners of the big gin palaces were readily identified by the glasses of champagne which seemed to be permanently fixed to their hands and were equally easily avoided.

Other yacht club members would listen and offer useful advice and, with their help, and a couple of books he bought, he slowly found out how everything on the boat worked. Soon the water in the taps was no longer green and, with some help from Jenny, he even started to learn how to use the sails. However, a new problem soon became apparent.

Cruncher never liked being left behind in the house and tried hard to follow them on their increasingly frequent trips to the boat.

“What would happen if you fell in?” Jenny asked him. “You couldn’t wear one of those doggie life jackets, you would boil.”

Finally, a suitable harness was found with a large ring on the back for lifting him out. He submitted unwillingly when Jenny tried it on him. “You look very smart. It’s Just like what those keen yachtsmen wear when going out on deck to change the sails. We should really get one for Charles. A matching one would look nice.”

They set off for the beach. The ferry man welcomed Charles but then looked dubiously at Cruncher. Jenny quickly picked him up, stepped aboard, put him on a seat next to her. The man gesticulated angrily, pointing at the cushions, but it was readily apparent that the close-cropped curls were actually cleaner than the threadbare covers and might well remove some of the ingrained dirt and salt, rather than adding any.

The wind had freshened slightly and small waves were coming into the bay. As soon as they moved off the small boat started rocking slightly but Cruncher just raised his head to look out at the boats and let his ears flap in the breeze. When they reached their boat, they came alongside and the man put a length of frayed rope around one of the gleaming cleats. Charles stepped across and waited for Jenny to pass Cruncher to him. However just at that moment a wave pulled the boats apart. The frayed rope slipped away and Jenny was caught leaning out over the water. She just managed to regain her balance but in doing so she dropped Cruncher.

Cruncher was quick. He seemed to turn in mid-air and landed right way up paddling furiously. Charles was almost as fast. He grabbed the boat hook from the cabin top and pushed the boats apart to make sure Cruncher did not get crushed. Then, reaching out carefully he had the hook through the ring on the harness and quickly dragged the soaking dog up against the hull side and out onto the deck. The two boats were now well apart and the ferry man went around and came in again. This time he used a good rope to tie to the cleat and Jenny stepped safely across. With a smiling wave he was gone, leaving them rubbing Cruncher down with a towel.

“What did he say?” Jenny asked as the man called out over his shoulder as he went.

Charles thought it had included the word “bath”.

The incident was soon forgotten as all three of them enjoyed a cruise to the town for lunch. Cruncher clearly enjoyed being on the boat and found a favourite spot to sit next to Jenny at the wheel. When they returned the ferry came out to pick them up. The same man was steering it and came in alongside.

Cruncher saw him and bared his teeth.

“Don’t worry, he’s only smiling.” Jenny said, as the man looked up at the perfect white ivories

Charles stepped across. Jenny reached down to pick up Cruncher but, in a flash, he jumped. He leapt clean out of the cockpit and onto the ferry and, as he landed he bowled straight into the man.

Charles had to offer profuse apologies and to replace all his soggy bank notes and even pay for his salt-soaked tobacco and all the time he had to suppress the incredible urge to laugh and say "bath".

6 Compartment in Boat

Charles liked to keep a few bottles of wine on the boat, but the problem was keeping it cool. There was a fridge, but it was hungry for power and the solar panel couldn't keep up, so the battery went flat if he left it running. He mentioned it to one of his friend at the yacht club.

"Lift a couple of floor boards. They usually leave a bit of spare space in the keel in case the junk they use as ballast isn't quite heavy enough and they have to add some more. It should be reasonably cool. Some boats have wine stores ready fitted down there."

When Charles looked at the floor boards he saw that little wooden plugs had been fitted to the tops of the screws to give the perfect finish to the red hardwood floor.

"You'll spoil the floor if you try to get them out." Jenny said. "A bit of warm wine won't kill you. This boat it really lovely the way it is."

The two planks in the middle looked slightly different. When he ran his finger across the top of the plug it wasn't quite as smooth as the others. Very gently, he tried to ease one out. Suddenly it popped cleanly out revealing the screw head below. Just to be sure, he tried putting it back and found that it fitted neatly back without leaving a mark.

"I think it's been set up so they can be taken out. They're not glued in at all."

Soon he had the two floor boards up revealing the wood and glass fibre in the spaces below.

Jenny and Cruncher peered down. "They didn't bother much about the bits you can't see. Mind yourself on those spikey looking bits where they didn't finish it off. They might at least have cleared away the sawdust and loose bits. Look at it."

Charles found the dustpan and started cleaning it out. Under the rubbish there were some more screws holding down what looked like a lid to another compartment.

"Does that go through to the sea?" Jenny asked.

"No, it's right in the middle. There must be more boat down there." He tapped it. It sounded hollow. Slowly he released one of the screws. The lid came up a bit. He was ready to fix it back quickly but there was no need. No water came out.

The compartment was about two feet long and a foot wide and roughly lined with plywood.

"This'll do just fine. I can soon fit a nice little rack."

"What's that?" Jenny asked. She ran her finger along the side of the compartment and picked up some fine white powder.

"Just some dust from sanding down."

Jenny showed it to Cruncher. "What do you think?" He sniffed it and started barking.

They washed out the whole area with strong bleach. When they had finished, Cruncher sniffed all round it and, before Jenny could stop him, left his mark just forward of the compartment. The drops of liquid flowed slightly across the clean surface as the boat moved.

“There. Now you own the boat. We won’t let him clean it away. It’s not where the wine’s going.” She moved one of the loose boards to hide it while it dried.

The time came to plan a journey to the city. This would involve crossing some open water, out of sight of land for a couple of hours. Charles went through all the checklists from his books and booked a visitor berth at the marina.

They set out at dawn. Henry and Margaret came with them and soon Henry had the sails set and spent his time scanning the horizon with the binoculars.

Slowly the land receded until it was just a fine line between the sea and the sky.

“There’s a ship off to starboard. Heading towards us. We must turn away to go astern of it. The ships go really quickly.” Henry said, proudly offering the binoculars to anybody who wanted to confirm his discovery.

“Yes, I’ve been watching it on the radar.” Jenny replied. “See this screen. It’s really clever. It shows where we’re going and where the ship is going. It says we’ll be well behind it if we just keep going.”

“What would it do if it thought we would hit it?” Charles asked.

“I think it would beep at us.”

“Is that all? Just a way of saying good bye?”

They could see it clearly now. A huge gleaming cruise liner which appeared to be heading straight towards them. Jenny turned the helm, [no. go close, observe details] so they would go further behind it. By the time they crossed it’s wake it was almost out of sight.

Soon they saw a tall spire ahead and gradually they could make out the cathedral on the hill and the city below it. It was a magnificent sight with dozens of small boats going in and out of the harbour.

They lowered the sails in good time and motored into the bay. Crowds of tourists watched from the sea wall as they came in. Suddenly they saw a fast launch heading towards them with the word “Customs” written in large white letters on its blue paintwork. The boat went just past them and turned, coming in alongside. Several men in uniform jumped across with ropes to hold them in while others came straight into the cockpit.

“We have a warrant to search this boat.” The man who appeared to be the captain said. “You must stop your engine and wait here.”

They sat in a row on the bench seating. Cruncher pulled on his lead and Jenny had to calm him as a large Alsatian was carried across and went into the cabin. The crowd on the sea wall were watching the action.

“This’ll be all from that man you bought the villa from.” Margaret said. “I thought he’d get you into trouble. How embarrassing.”

The Alsatian was sniffing vigorously at the floor boards. One man produced a crow bar. Charles shouted out, but he was told to stay still as the man forced the boards up in a mass of splinters.

“Are you going to smash up our whole boat?” Jenny asked the captain, hugging Cruncher. “Can’t you take some care?”

Her question was ignored.

As soon as there was an opening, the dog was in, pawing the lid of the compartment. The men gathered round as the lid was smashed off. Seeing nothing but wine, they quickly turned away to look elsewhere, but the dog kept sniffing and then crouched over Cruncher's mark. It went everywhere, gathering in pools all around. The men stopped what they were doing and stared down at it. The smell quickly built up in the heat.

The dog was banished back to the other boat. The captain swore at it and detailed two men to clean up. The search was abandoned. Profuse apologies were offered and assurances that full compensation would be paid for the damage to the floor. The crowd watched as Charles shook the man's hand.

7 Children

The large gleaming white transit van with the name of the hire company advertised on every available surface pulled into the driveway. Charles's son James got out.

"Sorry we're so late. It really was awful the way they kept us for hours and hours, searching everything. We didn't get into last night's stop over until midnight. Anyway, we got it all in, everything you left behind."

He was followed out by a dog, another family member. Cruncher leapt across the driveway to greet it. On one of his adventures some years previously he had made friends with a neighbour's dog. Having initially been angry at the prospect of mongrel puppies from their pedigree black Labrador, they then discovered the popularity and value of Labradoodles and forgave him. Nipper was the smallest of the litter and the only one whose coat was not completely black. His dark brown curls were an almost perfect match with James's wife Clare's and she followed him out of the van.

Soon they were inside, surrounded by piles of books and boxes. Through the glass doors they could see the masthead lights of the yachts in the bay. The prime minister was on the television.

"God, she looks haggard." Charles said. "Is it that bad?"

"Word has it she has tried to resign about six times." James replied. "They can't find anybody else to take over. With all the sex scandals she lost her real majority long ago, but even the leader of the opposition said she'd dug such a big hole he'd leave her in it." He paused for a drink from his wine glass. "You have no idea how bad it is, out here in this amazing place you just can't imagine it."

"It's the student loans that did it." Clare was almost invisible beneath the two dogs that were trying to sit on her lap at the same time.

"Student loans?"

"Yes, they keep trying to stop people finding out. I'm not surprised you missed it. Even the BBC never mentions it. The European parliament has voted to say that the UK loans are unconstitutional or something so the interest and repayments can't be collected anywhere in Europe. They never release the figures, but millions of graduates have gone. Most of them had no net assets to take with them, so there was no way of stopping them. It's getting hard to find anybody in Paris who isn't speaking English."

They looked back at the television. "Our policies to reduce net migration have been a great success." She managed a limp smile at the camera.

"You could put it that way." James said. "If almost five percent of your population deciding you've messed up and clearing off on your watch can be seen as a success, then you're a star."

Clare's head appeared from behind a large floppy ear. "There are no queues at the desk in casualty any more because there's nobody behind the desk either. Working there, it's desperate trying to keep going." A paw appeared and rested gently on her shoulder. "The housing shortage is history now. We only just managed to get yours sold before it all collapsed completely. You could buy about six of them now if you sold this place and came back."

"We are now introducing the policies to encourage good people to come to this country and join in our success." She was staggering on. "Now we control our own borders we can defend our prosperity."

"It's been like that book we had to read in school. The one where the government keeps altering the records, so everything looks as if they got it right." James was holding his glass and looking out at the lights reflected in the water. "Apparently, what they really meant by controlling our borders never had anything to do with keeping Johnny foreigner out, it was all about keeping the money in. You'd never get through with all your coins now. They went through everything in the van. There are so few trucks these days that they've got plenty of time."

"There's not much fresh food in the shops." Clare added. "And what there is costs a fortune, and it's only pretending to be fresh."

"You can feast on it here." Jenny said. "The shop's just a couple of minutes away and full of it. The locals keep saying how much better and cheaper it is since they stopped sending all the best stuff to the UK."

James's phone beeped to say he had a text message. "It's the hire company again. They keep asking me to leave that new van out here at a local depot and take an old one back instead. But the customs people have got wise to that one. They'd fine me a fortune. Anything that is exported must be paid for."

After breakfast the following morning Claire was soon installed on a sun lounger by the pool. The two dogs stood either side and looked down at her, but it was clear that if they both tried to sit on her they would fall off, so they retired to the kitchen to beg for food from Jenny.

Charles and James were looking down at the sea. A massive mega-yacht appeared round the headland. They watched as it headed past the swinging moorings and anchored in the middle of the bay. A large door opened in the side revealing a garage full of jet skis and a speedboat. As the door was lowered it formed a dock to launch them from.

James looked at it through the binoculars, scanning from the open front deck where a crew man was tidying up after lowering the anchor past the wide windows of the upper decks, down to the jet skis heading out from the dock and finally to the stern where a red ensign hung proudly claiming British ownership. Then a gust of wind caught it and he saw the badge in the middle with three leopards and a crown. It was the flag of Jersey.

8 Migrants

The wind came from the south-east day after day bringing with it a fine red desert dust that ran off the cars in little red rivulets when James hosed them down. Blowing into the bay it picked up a swell that was enough for some hopeful holidaymakers to try surfing. Charles looked out at the boat tugging on its mooring chain and thought it too rough to try sailing but James and Claire pronounced it to be excellent sailing weather.

The ferry-man's landing stage was sheltered by some out-standing rocks but as soon as they were clear of them his boat put up a shower of spray each time they hit a wave. When they reached the yacht, it was so rough that James had to help his father across into the cockpit; but soon they had the engine running and he went out onto the fore deck to release the mooring buoy. They motored back to the landing stage to pick up Claire, Jenny and the dogs. Moving away, James raised the sails, taking just one small reef in the main. He pulled them in hard and the boat heeled, water foaming up along the gunwales. Quickly they gained speed. Claire was at the helm, with one dog on each side of her and the wind blowing in her hair as she steered them expertly through the moored boats.

Charles helped with the jib when they tacked to get clear of the headland and they soon settled into a routine, working their way steadily to windward with the land receding behind them. With the engine off, the only sounds were from the hull slicing through the waves.

"There are some boats ahead of us." Jenny called out. "I can see one on the radar and it almost looks as if there is a second one with it."

Charles looked at the screen. "I thought they said the fishing fleet was staying in port. Couldn't handle the nets in this lot."

Tacking again, the boats came into sight, just visible when they rode up on a wave. James had the binoculars. "I can't see what they are. They're very low in the water. We'll see more when we've gone about again."

They sailed well clear before tacking again to bring them much closer. James stood up on the cabin top, clinging onto the mast with one hand and holding the binoculars in the other. He looked intently at them and then climbed back into the cockpit before speaking. "There's what looks like an old fishing boat with a big inflatable tied to it. They are full of people, all in orange life jackets. I couldn't see very well but I think they are black people. They must be refugees."

He took the helm and Claire stood up with the binoculars. "It's this wind. It's blowing straight up from Libya. They must have been hoping to get to the tip of Italy but its blown them hundreds of miles up here. They must have been at sea for days." She looked down at the chart on the screen. "If nobody rescues them they'll probably get blown right past the North of the island and it'll be another day or even two before they reach the mainland. God knows what we can do. We haven't got the engine power to tow them anywhere."

They tacked again and came within 20 yards of the boats. The people on them were waving and shouting. Several were holding up small children. At the back of the fishing boat they saw an old outboard motor with the cover off. They turned head to wind and stopped in the water. In the inflatable boat most of the people were lying slumped and motionless.

Several men suddenly jumped into the water and started swimming towards them. Cruncher growled, and the men hesitated just long enough for Jenny to start the engine and back them off. They tacked away leaving many on the boats shaking their fists.

"There's another boat coming." Jenny called out. "Coming up fast from the island."

They soon saw it. A big white mega-yacht, finding it hard going as it crashed through the waves. Everybody watched as it approached on a course to take it within half a mile of them. It showed no sign of slowing or turning.

"I'll call them on the radio." James said, reaching for the microphone. "I'll try the hailing channel 16"

"Yacht Ocean Explorer, this is yacht Sunrise half a mile on your starboard bow do you read me?"

"Sunrise, this is Ocean Explorer. We read you loud and clear."

“The vessels by us are in need of urgent assistance. They are refugees. Could you tow them in to the island.?”

There was no reply. The mega-yacht was level with them, moving away.

“Ocean explorer, this is Sunrise. Your urgent assistance is needed. Many lives are in peril if you do not help.”

It kept going past. There was still no reply.

They tacked back, keeping a good 50 yards away. One of the slumped bodies in the inflatable slid into the water. Nobody moved to help it.

“Yacht Sunrise, this is the Coastguard do you read me?” The voice on the radio was faint but clear.

“Coastguard, this is Sunrise. We read you. We require assistance.”

“Sunrise. You must not. We repeat not bring refugees to the island. Both you and them will be denied entry. We cannot accommodate them.”

“We all have a responsibility. They are dying. You must help.”

“They are 30 kilometres offshore and in international waters. They are the responsibility of international agencies who can help them. If you tow them in you will be sent back out to sea with them. Your right of residency will be revoked. Your country will not take them so why should ours?”

“They must have been watching the refugees go by on their radar.” Charles said, putting the microphone back on the radio. “Cold hearted bastards. And watching us sail out and listening to us call the gin palace. Can you keep tacking? I’ve got one bar on my phone. I’ll call some friends at the yacht club see if they’ve got any ideas.”

“Leave it with me for a few minutes.” His friend replied when told what was happening. They kept the boats in sight while they waited for his call. He was only a very few minutes.

“I’ve called the chief magistrate. I’ve known him on and off for years. He’s got real influence. I explained that having bodies wash up on their beaches right by the tourists would get them the front page of the Mail. I think he got it. He sounded really shocked. I told him we might all sail out and join you. Everybody here is horrified. I told him you had loads of photos and video, so you’d better have some.”

They half-filled the big plastic water container from the tap in the galley and tied a carrier bag of food to the handle. “There are so many – but it’s all we can do.” Jenny said as she dropped it into the water upwind of the boats and watched the swimmers collect it.

“We can’t just leave them. We must stay here.”

“We mustn’t take any of them.” Claire said. “I know it’s hard, but you heard what he said. If you lost your right of residency here, you’d be in a real mess given you can’t go back to the UK. You’d be stateless like them.”

“No Claire. Don’t say that. We couldn’t live that way. If nobody comes, we must at least try to help the children.”

They tacked back and forth. The people on the boats watched them. Several hours went by and the light began to fade.

“Someone’s coming at last.” Jenny cried out.

A big grey coastguard cutter appeared. It went right past them and pulled in alongside the larger boat. Soon it pulled away again, but they saw rope. Gradually it turned, and the rope became taut. Slowly increasing speed, it started towing. It was heading for the island.

Making good speed with the wind behind them, they followed it back and into the harbour. The cutter kept a searchlight trained on the two boats as they rode up and down in the swell behind it. [more visual]

Mooring on the pontoons, they hurried round to watch. A crowd had gathered under the ornate street lights. Some of the refugees managed to stagger off the boats. Others were carried off in stretchers into waiting ambulances. The spectators were silent.

9 School

[describe Cruncher again] As soon as he opened the door, Charles knew that he should have kept his mouth shut. After a few beers at the yacht club he had started talking about being a teacher – and even enjoying it. Then the call had come from the head of the international school. “It’s all in English”, he had said “A very small class. They’re all kids of the expats, really well behaved. We really are stuck just now, we have two on long term sick and another just called in.”

The events in progress when he entered the class room could not reasonably be classified as a riot, but they did not fall far short. Several children had gathered in the far corner and were in the process of throwing the plastic chairs at another group who were occupying the centre ground. A third group sat to one side at the front, talking among themselves, seemingly oblivious to the on-going carnage. None of them took any notice of him at all. A chair flew past, landing next to a desk at the front which he was presumably intended to capture. Then cruncher entered and, seeing the chaos, barked loudly. The room fell silent. 20 faces turned towards him, mouths open. Seizing the moment, Charles told them to stop and tidy up.

One boy, holding a chair, looked him in the eye and raised it, ready to throw. Cruncher moved forward. He did not run at the boy, but held his ground, his long low growl filling the room. Slowly the chair was lowered to the floor. Charles walked over to his desk, doing nothing about the chair that lay on its side against the wall.

“Get moving.” He said, in a calm voice, into the silence as he sat down. “I want this room straightened out and I want it now.”

Cruncher sat on his haunches beside the desk, head raised, looking intently around at the beasts that lay before him. The class appeared to be in shock, but then a girl came forward to rescue the chair from the front and the other children joined in. Soon the room was in a semblance of order and everybody was seated at their desks.

He started calling out names from the register he had been given. Then he saw it. Benfield-Carter. A somewhat obese boy from the fighting group at the back of the class answered. The apparent uniform of his group might have been classed as “sport casual” had it not been covered in huge brand labels, no doubt attesting to the huge prices paid for it. It was accompanied by enough gold chains to make a 1970’s crooner cringe. Benfield-Carter’s chain even had something resembling a medallion on it. On closer inspection, Charles thought it might well be a thousand pounds’ worth of Krugerrand from daddy’s recently acquired collection. [possibly omit]

The responses from the centre group were all heavily accented. Their accents and complexions made him guess that they came from varied backgrounds and had probably been sent to this school, so they learnt English rather than the local language. [dialog]

He recognised a girl from the quiet group at the front. He had seen her working, helping the waitresses serving the fish and chips at a British run restaurant by the beach. He remembered hearing her name as Carol and that her parents were the managers.

His brief explanation of what had caused their form teacher's absence carefully omitted to mention how comprehensively inebriated Mr Jones had been when he had fallen over. Nothing more was said. Nothing more needed to be said. It was common knowledge.

He had been asked to supervise group work on some projects. Apparently, they would all know what to do and it was simply a matter of answering the odd question. However, when he asked them to get their books out and carry on he was met with more blank looks. Eventually, after close questioning, Carol revealed that Mr Jones had mentioned a section in their geography book on the Mediterranean sea. This revelation, spoiling their chances of a cancelled class, was clearly unpopular with the Benfield Carter group, who started throwing paper darts at her.

Charles walked towards them with a loud "come along Cruncher". Hearing the name, Carol smiled, but Benfield Carter looked worried. "I'm allergic to dogs." He stammered. "I didn't think they were allowed in the school."

"Don't worry." Charles replied. "I'm sure he's allergic to you too." Cruncher sat watching the group from one row in front. "Provided you haven't got a phone." The boy now looked puzzled. "He eats them. Likes the crunch of the screens and particularly the batteries."

"Tell me." Charles continued, as phones disappeared all around him. "Your textbook says that people often fly to the Mediterranean for their holidays. How do you think that one might travel to it from here?"

Deprived of his phone, the boy looked desperately around his group for support, sensing the rest of the class starting to laugh at him. The blue sea was clearly visible through the windows, glistening in the sunlight.

"I see that you have much to learn about it." Charles cut in, returning to his desk, leaving Cruncher on guard as they finally started looking at their books.

A knock on the door and the headmaster came in. "Hello Charles, just came by to see if you needed anything." He walked across to Cruncher and patted him on the head. "I see what you mean about everybody being so fond of him. No trouble at all, is he?"

10 Migrants in town

James and Claire could only stay for a short holiday so, to have one more evening with them, Charles and Jenny joined them on the ferry to the mainland with their van; and booked a hotel in the city for the night.

After checking in they decided to go for a walk. "There's a lovely park." Charles had said. "We walked around it when we sailed across. It's got a great café where you can sit under the shade of the lime trees. We could share a bottle there before going on to the restaurant."

The streets were packed with tourists looking into shop windows full of expensive clothing, jewellery and ornaments and anything else that they might plausibly be expected to carry home. All the shops seemed to have employed uniformed security guards who stood at the door welcoming the customers.

The reason for the crowds soon came into sight. A large cruise liner was in port, and could be seen when looking down any of the streets leading to the harbour.

“They’ll be gone soon.” Jenny said as they walked towards the park. “They like to sail by seven, so they can be out in international waters and get the casino going for the evening. That’s where they make the real money.”

They rounded the last corner and looked out at the park. It was full of brightly coloured tents all over the beautifully tended lawns. “Why are they camping here?” Claire asked. “Surely there’s a campsite by a beach somewhere on the outskirts.” Then she stopped. The tents all looked similar and very cheap. Some had lines of laundry strung out to dry. Children were running around between them, and they were all black. [more visual – contrast with city – smell etc.]

“Somebody was talking about it on Facebook.” Jenny said. “They were saying quite a few boatloads had arrived on different islands and they had all been bussed in. They were going to take them out by train, but it never happened. They showed a picture of some tents, but I assumed it was a fake.”

“I saw this in Paris.” James said. “Rows of them under elevated sections of motorway. Not as many as this though, there must be a couple of thousand in there. God knows where they’re going to go. The European land borders are all closed now and there’s nothing for them to do here.”

In among the tents they saw trailers where food was being handed out on paper plates to waiting queues. Groups of portable toilets had been positioned on the gravel paths. The café was just visible beyond them, it was completely surrounded.

A group of about twenty men with black beards [describe more] emerged from among the tents and started to cross the road towards them. Cruncher and Nipper started barking but they were pulled back on their leads as Charles led the way back at a brisk pace. The group of men followed them along the first street but then headed off towards where they had seen the tourists from the cruise ship.

“I’m glad they’ve gone.” Jenny said. “I know we should feel sorry for them and they probably meant no harm.”

Claire looked back down the street behind them again. “Looks as if some more groups of them are following that one. They didn’t exactly look as if they’re going to buy any of the fancy stuff in those shops up there.”

11 Ship Arrives

The announcement from the cruise line was posted on their website but was soon picked up by the local media. Due to problems which they did not specify, they would no longer be visiting the city. In stead they would be going to the island. Due to the size of the vessels, at almost two hundred thousand tonnes, they would not be able to enter the harbour but would moor in the bay and disembark their five thousand passengers by tender. Locally based boats would also be hired to assist with disembarkation. The change would happen immediately with the first vessel due to arrive in just 48 hours. [make this a trial run?]

Charles’s friend at the yacht club had got the news directly from the chief magistrate.

“He sees it as a real coup.” He said when they met. “I pointed out that it was a bit much for us to send those refugees and then take all the trade when they cause problems, but he’s delighted. Says we can really develop it, maybe build a pier here for them, make it easier for them to get on and off and spend all their dollars in the shops. He’s got a fleet of coaches coming across on the ferry to do tours, once round the island, enjoy the views and all that. They may stop off at your beach, lots of trade for the café.”

“What did the refugees actually do?” Charles asked.

“Nothing, as far as we know. Made a bit of a mess in that park, but apart from that, absolutely nothing. They just stood in groups and looked at the tourists who all went back to the ship saying they were scared and didn’t like the place. Complained a lot on their questionnaires. One bad experience at the end of the day and they soon forgot all about enjoying the rest of it.”

The ship was due at six in the morning and Charles and Cruncher were up and in the lounge. Charles had his binoculars with him, but by the time he opened the curtains and looked out through the patio doors, it was already clearly visible on the horizon.

“Let’s watch it come in. It’s coming quite fast isn’t it? Should be stopping soon.” They watched as it slowed and turned, coming to rest about half a mile off the headland.

“Just look at that. That must be seventeen decks above water and probably another three or more below. That’s twice the height of anything round here. See the promenade below the lifeboats? If I took you for a walk all the way round it’s so long that we’d be knackered by the time we finished. Mind you there’d be plenty of places for a bit of liquid refreshment to sort that out. Isn’t it amazing?”

“God. How ugly.” Jenny said as she walked up behind him. “Is it stopping there? It’s blocking half our view. We didn’t hand over all that lovely gold for a view of that tin monstrosity. I see it hasn’t anchored, perhaps it’ll move or at least turn.”

“No. They’ll want to stay like that that so all the cabins down this side get a good view.” He scanned the huge slab side with the binoculars. Early risers were emerging onto their balconies in their nightwear. “Oops, look at that. I don’t think they’ve noticed how close they are.” He passed her the binoculars. “You always said you liked going on cruises.”

“Yes, and I like coach trips too, but I don’t want one parked in the drive. We’ll have to go into town. Have a protest. Cruncher can bark at them.” Cruncher barked. “Yes, that’s the way. And some growling too. Make sure they go back and say they didn’t like it here. Then they’ll go somewhere else.”

12 Passengers in Town

Charles walked down to the beach with Cruncher. “Where’s the ferryman gone?” The dog ran up and down, but the man and his boat were nowhere to be seen. They walked up to the café. Carol was busy setting up extra tables out on the sand. [describe more]

“Headed off as soon as it arrived. Gone to the town to try to make money doing trips round the harbour. Said something about twenty dollars a head for thirty minutes.”

Charles helped her un-stack a pile of chairs. “Any sign of him cleaning it out? It might be worth missing a day on the boat if he tidied up a bit and we didn’t have to sit in piles of wet sand and seaweed.”

Henry and Margaret joined them for the drive into town. A gazebo was set up at the end of the jetty by the visitor berths and cruise staff in immaculate uniforms were offering bottles of water to crowds of people emerging from two of the ship’s boats.

“I thought you said you had to pay for everything.” Margaret said. “They don’t seem to be charging for the water.”

They followed Jenny as she walked a bit closer. "See the little sign saying \$4.00. Carefully positioned so they don't notice it. See those little plastic things they've all got hanging from lanyards around their necks. It charges the four dollars to their cabin account."

"They do have a slightly more reputable use as well." Charles added. "Remember on the cruise we went on how they were always delayed sailing because somebody was missing. They can detect those things anywhere on the ship, so they know exactly where everybody is. They won't let people on or off without one."

"So, if we got Cruncher to eat them all then nobody could get off." The dog looked enthusiastic and lead the way to the town square. It was a beautiful place, dominated by the ornate town hall facing across it to the harbour with a church to one side and a row of small shops to the other. However today it was full of massive coaches parked half way onto the pavements.

"Watch out or we'll get mown down." Jenny shouted as a phalanx of cruise passengers came rushing up behind them all sporting little yellow stickers with the number 45 on them. "I think they must be late for coach 45."

They retreated towards the harbour wall and saw the ferry man standing next to his boat. He had a big sign up advertising his tours. Charles looked down at his boat. The seats were still covered in sand. He had no customers and looked very unhappy.

"Don't worry." Jenny said to him. "The tour groups come off first. Wait a bit and this place will be full of the people who haven't booked one. You'll be fine. Your twenty dollars is peanuts compared to the cost of a tour."

"Perhaps they'll see sitting on wet sand and seaweed as authentic local colour." Charles added.

They walked on round the harbour and found a seat while the last groups rushed across to their coaches.

"Let's get a drink before the swarm arrives at the café." Henry suggested, but they were too late. The waiter saw them as he rushed by and apologised and suggested coming back the following day. Looking back across the harbour they saw that the crowds had spread all round it. The ferryman's boat chugged past, low in the water with its load of customers.

"We'll have to form a committee. We've got to stop them. It's going to be two ships a week until the end of the hurricane season, and they go to the Caribbean, but even then, it will only give us a few months of respite." They were back at the house and Jenny was watching as the boats went back and forth with more and more people from the ship to the harbour. Some were carrying a few back on their return trips, but nothing like the numbers still leaving.

"We could always try and get the asylum seekers to come back and camp in the town square." Charles suggested. "Either that, or look out for a few boat loads of new ones. The cruise ships wouldn't stop long if we did that."

Jenny scowled at him. "There are just so many of them. Why can't it do a Costa Concordia?"

"That would be even worse." Margaret said. "Then we'd have loads more coming to see the wreck."

They looked down as two coaches arrived at the car park for the beach. Soon all the tables that Carol had set up were full. The phones were out, and they were taking pictures of the ship and back at the hill-side and the villa. Jenny gesticulated angrily at them, Cruncher barked, and they waved back and took even more. [problem elsewhere?????]

Jenny turned back to face the others, “The problem we have is that all the locals are making loads of money from it.”

“The golf club’s doing really well.” Henry added. “They get paid \$100 per head out of the tour price as green fees and then they are all buying drinks. Our trouble is that we can’t get near it while they are there, and it takes the club at least two days to clear up the mess when they’ve gone. They seem to manage to scoop about half of the sand out of the bunkers and dump it on the greens.”

“Yes, but they never see you. All they see is smiling shop keepers and golf club staff, so they fill in their questionnaires saying what a wonderful friendly place it is. All of us ex-pats just keep out of their way – which suits them fine. We’ve got to turn the locals against them.”

“We’re going to become irrelevant.” Margaret said. “If the island doesn’t need our money any more they won’t care what happens to us.”

“Start some rumours.” Charles suggested. “A bit of fake news. Say they are going to spread norovirus – like that ship that got banned from landing in Greece. Say that mooring out there will kill all the fish. Say that the cruise company is going to take over the whole island and make them all wear uniforms.”

“You know the man who sells the lovely fresh water melons by the side of the main road?” Henry asked. “Well he got paid \$50 for three hours as a caddy and then apparently he got a \$100 tip. It must take him weeks to earn that much from us with his water melons. Come to think of it, I’ve never quite worked out how he makes enough money to live on.”

13 Meet crew couple

The road that went past the villa followed the contour of the hill past the neighbouring properties and then wound its way out to the headland from which you could enjoy the stunning views across to the harbour in one direction and back to the beach in the other [describe]. Cruncher [describe] was nowhere to be seen, but Charles knew that he would not be far away as they took their regular early morning walk. Late spring rain had brought out a mass of brightly coloured flowers, but their delicate scents were completely overpowered by the fumes pouring from the funnel of the ship and carried inshore by the breeze from where it lay, just a hundred yards off. It glistened white against the deep blue of the sea, towering over everything around it like a massive block of flats. The davits were out, and the boats had been lowered. Local boats were already heading out from the harbour to wait their turn at the landing stages which had been lowered out of the hull just above the water line. The rumble of the ship’s massive generators rolled across the sea, never stopping.

Charles turned back inland. He passed the junction for the road the town. He knew that some more adventurous passengers would soon appear, walking along it, checking their phones for directions to take them to the beach. This 45 minute walk would save them the \$100 cost of a tour to the same destination.

Cruncher reappeared to trot along beside him as they got close to home. Just as the driveway came into sight he saw two strangers sitting on a bench facing out across the bay. One of them was listening to a phone and then holding it away from his ear.

“I shouldn’t bother even trying to get a line.” Charles said. “The ship’s in range of our local mast up at the top of the hill behind you and as soon as it arrives the whole network gets overloaded. You’ll just have to pay the extra and use the maritime system on the ship.”

Never slowing his pace, he walked by. But then he stopped, turned and hesitated. The man, possibly in his thirties, slight build and wearing crew uniform of white shirt and shorts, looked anxious.

The woman with him, also in uniform, looked up and appeared to be close to tears. Cruncher walked over to her and she reached out and patted his head.

“Promise me you won’t tell anybody, or I’ll have a queue outside, but I live just here. I’m sure it would be ok for you to make a quick call on our land line.”

By the time they reached the front door he had found out that the man was the chief engineer for the ship and the woman, his wife, was an assistant purser and he had offered to let them make a Skype call from his computer to her parents who were caring for their young son in Romania.

Thirty minutes later they were sitting in the lounge and the engineer was offering to pay them for the call.

“No need.” Charles replied. “I’ve got loads of unused megabits on the Wifi. But if you want to return the favour it really would make a difference if you could get them to park the ship further out.”

“Using your Wifi really was great. The satellite link from the ship never works properly. That’s the first good Skype call we’ve had with the family for weeks. It’s his birthday.” He walked over to the window and looked out at the ship. “Company HQ back in the States tells us where to moor and they’ll never budge. They’re incredibly keen about this place. They’ve apparently just announced some new plan.”

“I hope your son was ok.” Jenny said. “It must be hard for him”.

“Yes, but his grandparents are great with him and this is the only way we can afford to buy a house and get him a decent education. It’ll only take a few more years.”

They soon hurried away ready to start their next shifts, offering to arrange invitations to tour the ship and have lunch on board.

As soon as they had gone, Jenny started searching for the new plan. Finding dozens of websites with pictures of cruise passengers on the island she suddenly stopped when she saw one of Cruncher. It was a brilliant picture. He looked magnificent, galloping straight towards the camera. The text read: “saw this amazing dog – going to put it on cutest pooches”.

“See this from the business news.” Charles called through from his computer desk. “Cruise line announces development plans for popular new destination based on Disney island in the Caribbean. Shares up \$2.75.”

She quickly found the site and there was the picture again with twelve thousand likes. “Never, never, never. They want to make this a Disney island and make you a cute pooch.”

Cruncher leapt towards her, landing on her lap and sending the Ipad skimming across the carpet.

Charles read on. “Plans to build a new deep-water pier have been approved by the local administration.”

14 Meet Freddie

Freddie would disappear for months at a time, but when he was back everybody would know. To his enemies, and he had some of these, he was menacing. His face was ugly, disfigured by old wounds. To all he was cunning and resourceful, always achieving more than most could dream of. To his friends, his appreciation of fine things, reflected in the beautiful artefacts in his hilltop farmhouse, showed his true and enlightened personality.

Freddie appeared at the door looking as refreshed as always [describe]. No roads approached within a mile of his old farmhouse up in the hills, so he walked or even jogged everywhere he went,

but never showed any sign of it when he arrived. His dog, Molly, stood beside him. She was the exact opposite of Cruncher. Where Cruncher was tall and dangly, Molly was short and solid. She looked as if she could charge at a brick wall and go straight through it without stopping.

“I’m sorry to bother you on this fine afternoon but I thought we might have a brief word about the cruise ship opposition committee.”

Charles showed him into the living room, trying not to stare at the ugly scars on his left arm and leg. Molly followed obediently behind him. Cruncher saw them come in and bolted for the space behind the sofa. Jenny appeared with offers of tea and biscuits.

“The meeting was a bit of a waste of time wasn’t it. All we did was to appoint a committee and discuss how to run it. Nobody had anything useful to say about anything except appointing a secretary and treasurer. We hardly even talked about actually doing anything.”

“Yes – that’s what I wanted to talk about. I think you should keep them that way.”

“What, never do anything. Just look at it out there. We must do something.”

Freddie looked out of the window at the ship, but quickly turned back. “No, all I said was, don’t talk too much at the committee meetings. You know the one thing you did decide was to put a load of negative comments on Cruise Critic and Trip Advisor? Well, they all got taken down within 24 hours. Somebody told the cruise line about the plan and the rest was easy for them. They just checked that your names weren’t on the manifest when you said you were and told the website moderators.”

“Who do you think it was?”

[pause]

“Your friend Bonham-Carter. The ship is perfect for him. Thousands of customers and plenty of crew to use as couriers. He was apparently furious with the melon man who went off to earn a few dollars at the golf club”.

[Freddie stamp authority, specific vocabulary]

“The melon man?”

“Yes – the man who stands by the main road selling water melons and other substances.”

Charles and Jenny just looked at him. Cruncher peered out from his refuge. Molly took no notice, standing like a statue in the middle of the room, looking at her master.

“Bonham-Carter had to go into town and get his hands dirty. He hates doing that. Mind you, he’s good at it. Apparently so many chefs got stoned that night they had to take half the items off the dinner menu.”

Charles could think of nothing to say. He knew very little and Freddie. He would disappear for months at a time [repeated], sometimes returning with some cuts and bruises, but always fit again soon after. He had bought a string of villas by the coast; but rented them out. In many ways he was an average person. Average height, average build, close cropped dark hair. Possibly in his early forties, hard to tell. But the scars would make anybody think twice about him.

Cruncher ventured out, keeping well clear of Molly and Freddie as he navigated across to squeeze in with Jenny on her chair.

Charles watched him curl up. “Can you see the ship from your house?”

“Yes. I can see the sea on both sides of the island. I can’t see down to this villa, but I can easily see the ship and all the people pouring off it.”

“It may be better when they build the pier and move it.” Charles said. “I couldn’t find the plan showing where the pier was going but it must be further away.”

Freddie looked at him. “You couldn’t find the plan because it’s not on the public website where it should be. But it is on the company one. Have you got a computer here?”

They went through to Charles’s study. On the cruise company website Freddie entered several passwords and he found the plan. The ship would not move at all. The new pier would extend from the end of the headland. “If you look here.” Freddie said, showing them a cross section. “The rock will be cut away and the whole end of it will be flattened and the spoil used to widen it for a car park and access road. He led the way back into the living room and pointed out of the window. “All those trees at the end will go, back to about half way along. The whole shape of the headland will change.”

“How come the drawing was kept hidden?” Jenny asked quietly.

“Ten thousand euros each for the committee. I have thought long and hard about what we can do about it. You will understand why I said nothing at the meeting.”

“They must have broken the law. Can’t we report them to somebody?”

“My friends who helped me see what was done don’t want anybody asking questions about their methods. If anybody asks, they will deny everything. I have told you a lot. I must ask you to be discrete.”

“Yes of course.” Charles replied. “it’s very good of you to choose to give us this information. We shall let you know if we have any ideas about what to do.”

“I hoped you would. My daughter is in the class you took at the school. She never seems to like any of her teachers, but she kept telling me how much she likes you.” He looked out of the window again. “We could always try sugar in the concrete like the French resistance in World War 2. A few bags of granulated and plenty of mixing and it never goes off. Nobody gets hurt, we must never let that happen, but nothing gets built.”

15 Meet chief magistrate

Cruncher was doing his best at barking, but the crowd was clearly on a mission to get the best seats on the coach. The coach itself was in the town square and was so far onto the pavement it was almost blocking the entrance to the town hall. Charles just squeezed inside the big wooden door into the grand foyer and walked down the short corridor to the Chief Magistrate’s office.

The magistrate, a well-built man with a thick black moustache, greeted him in perfect English with only the slightest trace of an accent. He was a local, but his wife Susan was English, and her parents lived in a villa a just beyond Charles’s and were regulars at the yacht club.

He looked out of the window as the tourists rushed to scramble onto the coach. “I think they only do it so they can regale their companions at their tables at dinner with tales of their success. It really will be better when the new pier is built.”

“If it’s built.” Charles corrected him. “Then they can charge along it, ejecting their empty pop bottles into the sea, so they end up on our beach instead of your town square.”

The magistrate smiled at him. “Ok Ok Charles. Have a seat. Let me get you a coffee.” The office was large with a high ceiling and freshly painted off-white walls, which were bare except for a single picture of the president which hung behind the large mahogany desk. Even this early in the day, the window mounted air conditioning unit was already humming.

They sat at one end of a large table by the window. Cruncher installed himself underneath it to enjoy the draught of cold air. Immediately outside they were looking through the coach window at a young girl with her face pushed up against the glass staring at them. The magistrate stood up and closed the blinds. She waved merrily as her view was shut off.

“This is very difficult for me Charles, you must understand. Very difficult.”

“So, tell the cruise line to go away. Simple as that.”

“It’s not simple. The council voted to let them stay and they’ve approved the plans for the pier and what you did to the tyres really didn’t help.” The engine of the coach outside revved as it manoeuvred out of the tight space. He stood up to open the blinds again.

“That’s not fair. You have absolutely no evidence that I was involved in the despicable theft of the tyre valves. Anyway, I gather that notes were put under the windshield wipers to warn the drivers and the valves were returned the following day.”

The magistrate looked up sharply. “How do you know that? Who told you?”

“It was on the Facebook page.”

“I know. The one run from a proxy server in St Petersburg. What do you know about that man Freddie? The one who lopes around like a mountain goat? Dog like a Sherman tank?”

“Nothing. Honestly, I know nothing. You could ask Freddie if he does. What harm did it do? They got stuck for a few hours because the coach company didn’t keep a stock of spare valves on the island.”

“They go stuck for five hours at the view points and when they got back the toilets were overflowing, the passengers furious because they missed their dinner and had to slum it in the buffet, and the ship was delayed and had to burn extra fuel to make up time in the night.”

“Yes, but nobody got hurt, did they?”

Cruncher appeared from his hide-away and looked drowsily around, ambling over to Charles and placing his head on his lap. Outside, the coaches had all gone. All that remained in the square was a sprinkling of discarded bottles, cans, cartons and bits of paper.

“Do you really want that on your island?” Charles asked. “This is only the beginning. I gather that when they start blasting the rock on the headland, the dust will go everywhere. All over our boats on our side and the harbour this side. And the noise will be horrendous.”

Two young men in uniform blue overalls wandered into view and started picking up the litter and putting it into a black polythene sack.

“What can I do?” He spread his hands on the table. “The council has made its decision. Everything was done properly, and the vote was unanimous.”

“Call an election.”

“What?”

“Yes. Jenny found it. In the Brexit thing. The one and only concession. In return for letting the migrants stay in the UK, as of the start of this year, all of us expats have been given the right to vote in local elections.”

The magistrate suddenly looked tired, holding his head in his hands. “God, what a mess. I’ll have to process all the registrations and there’ll be loads of disputes. You know there isn’t an election due for years.”

The litter pickers had stopped in the shade and were lighting cigarettes. "Look." Charles said. "There are two of the great new job opportunities the ship has created."

16 Flotilla

The rock blasting on the headland had stopped to reduce the noise and dust while the ship was at anchor, but work on the jack-up piling barge continued. The drilling derrick, which normally dominated the bay, was dwarfed by the rows of balconies. The top of it was only level with deck ten and there were five more decks above it. From time to time a passenger would emerge to find themselves just yards away from the greasy shaft which kept the drill bit turning night and day as it formed the sockets for the piles in the rock of the sea bed. If that wasn't enough, just below them the diesel drive motor added noise and fumes.

Henry was struggling at the oars in the mid-day heat. [make clearer] Beads of sweat were forming on his forehead below the rim of his hat. "We'll show the ferryman we can get along fine without him." He said as they crawled out to the yacht in the little dinghy "Only takes a little bit longer this way. We're almost there. He can keep his filthy ferry." He stopped to regain his breath. The sweat was now dripping from his face. "Could we possibly get a little outboard for next time?"

Finally reaching the yacht, they set about washing off the dust. The passengers on their balconies watched as they pulled up bucket-fulls of sea water to pour over the decks and washed away the thick crust of brown grit with scrubbing brushes. Next, they worked their way round with long-handled brooms, rinsing it off the hull sides. They had just rigged the awning and fetched out some cans of beer from under the cabin floor when they saw Jenny and Margaret walking down to the landing stage.

Boats were queueing to get in and the yacht-club commodore was standing at the water's edge with a megaphone trying to organise them. [explain pick-up] Cruncher and several of his friends found themselves in the crowd waiting to board and decided that loud barking would help so the commodore had to resort to arm waving to tell the next boat to come alongside. The first yachts, full crews aboard, were moving along to form the flotilla at the far end of the bay. The first one had unfurled a large banner, tied between the fore-stay and the mast. It read "NO SHIP HERE".

Charles looks at it. "I did tell them it would look stupid."

Henry looked at it and then back at Charles. He said nothing.

"It says no ship here. Take a look. There is a ship here. It's not an aspiration, it's just rubbish."

Henry drank the last dregs from his can and went to fetch another.

Finally, it was their turn, and Jenny, Margaret and Cruncher came aboard. As they motored out across the bay Margaret produced a large bag with their banner in it. It reached all the way along the side of the boat from fore-stay to back-stay and read "CRUISE SHIP GO HOME"

"At least that makes sense." Charles said.

"What sense?" Jenny asked. "It's what you asked for, but does the ship have a home?"

"It's painted on the back." Charles drank from his can as she looked across at the vast stern. A crowd had gathered on the pool deck to watch the assembling fleet. Down below it near the water line the registry was clearly legible. "See that. Monrovia. That's in Liberia. The sooner it goes there and the longer it stays the better."

“I expect we’ll be in Monrovia soon.” Henry was at the tiller. “With that rigged there I can’t see a bloody thing. What’s in front of us?” He put the engine hard astern to stop them while the banner was raised up the stays, so he could see.

Finally, the yachts were assembled, and they started moving towards the ship. By this time the commodore, complete with megaphone, was on his yacht and took the lead. Anybody who started to come level with him was firmly instructed to drop back. Hearing this, Cruncher would make his contribution by either barking at them or growling if they had a dog on board.

As they came around the side of the ship, an officer on the wing of the bridge spotted them and was soon joined by others, alternately scanning them with binoculars and talking on their radios. The crowd on the pool deck had now moved round to the side rail and been joined by others, roused from their sun-loungers to watch and photograph the spectacle.

Two of the ship’s boats were heading towards the mid-ships landing stage loaded with passengers returning from an early tour. The commodore turned to pass close on their port side. The fleet behind him divided to form a narrow channel for them to go through. The manoeuvre was carried out with extraordinary precision except for a few at the back who crossed from one side to the other just in front of the boats, having apparently gone to the wrong side.

The boats did not slow down. The helmsmen looked out at the yachts and never noticed the trailing ropes behind the ones that had crossed in front of them. Suddenly they lost way. [ropes are untied and drift free]

The Commodore came on the radio, calling on the hailing channel asking everybody to check that they had their mooring lines securely stowed and admonishing those who had carelessly let theirs trail astern. [officers waving from bridge] “Nobody laugh too loud while they can see us.” Charles downed the last of his beer and reached for a bottle of Prosecco. “The only way they’ll get that lot off their propellers will be to get the passengers off and lift the boats out.”

The fleet moved slowly on, leaving the two boats drifting with the wind. Several yachts had offered to tow them, but their polite offers had been met with a less than polite replies.

17 Cruncher and friends

Charles looked out at Cruncher [viewpoint should be Cruncher. What is he thinking? Has the hermit been in touch?] and Nipper, just visible on the sun bed by the lights from the ship. “Come on in. I’m closing the door and going to bed. You’ll get shut out all night.”

Cruncher stepped off the bed and walked over to the door. Standing on the threshold he raised his head and sniffed the air inside the house, turned and walked back.

“I guess if they want to stay out there it’s going to be a very warm night and it can’t do any harm.” Jenny called through from the kitchen. Charles closed the door.

Half an hour later Molly appeared, moving silently despite her solid build. Cruncher took the lead and they headed out around the villa and onto the deserted road to town.

Fifi was a Bichon, loved by her family but feared by visitors. Her small cute white face had a cute little mouth containing razor-sharp teeth, capable of drawing blood from any ankle not protected by stout boots. She had the use of a cat flap, obtained by the simple expedient of leaving a puddle inside the door on every night for a month. She met them at her garden gate.

By the time they reached the turning to the new pier there were ten of them, all moving in line behind Cruncher, who lead the way, head held high. Soon they arrived at the dust bath. It was actually just a place where cars pulled onto the verge to let others pass, but during the dry summer it soon filled with fine grey dust. Cruncher rolled in it. Dissatisfied with the result, he wetted it and tried again. This time he came away with his fine black curls transformed into a coat fit for the hound of the Baskervilles. The others followed, all except for Fifi, who declined. Various attempts to flick dust at her with their hind legs were met with the toothy expression that many humans had, at their cost, mistaken for a smile.

Long before they reached it they could smell their destination. The old isolated shack with its rusting corrugated steel roof had been used for many things ranging from a fertiliser store to a rubbish dump. Now it was an “authentic local farmhouse” for the benefit of the tour group from the ship. The highlight of their special late evening departure was an “authentic” local meal at long trestle tables lit with fake oil lamps.

They moved up to take position behind the coaches. Cruncher looked out. The food was being prepared at the back of a van parked outside the door and carried in by a group he recognised as Carol’s friends from the school. He liked Carol. Whenever they went down to the beach she always put some water out for him at her parents’ café. He paused. The music was awful. Whenever they heard this singer at a bar in town, Charles and Jenny always walked the other way. He tried to ignore it as he watched.

Now he saw that the wine was being decanted from large plastic containers into carafes by two men he did not recognise. Molly and two of her heavy friends were called up to get ready. The men were heading into the shack, but soon reappeared with empties. They waited until the time was right. Both men intently watching as they re-filled them. They charged. Seconds later both men were on the ground, covered in wine, shouting. Cruncher made for the food. Avoiding the hot gas rings, he ran at a table sending sausages flying. One of the men stood his ground but, finding a white fur-ball ripping out his Achilles tendon, he fled.

Cruncher ran to the door of the shack and howled. It was a ghastly deep moan. Nipper looked up from the sausages in surprise and ran over to join in. Panic was spreading inside. Cruncher saw Carol laughing but she was the only one and he glowered at her until she stopped. The door was slammed in his face. Molly threw herself at it. The crash was met with screams from within. She ran again, one of the hinges burst. They heard the sound of a table being dragged up to support it. Cruncher ran around to an open window at the back howling as he went. Soon it was also blocked with a table top.

Molly sampled the wine. Deciding she preferred the white, a local vintage, she encouraged the others to share. Nipper was, however, busy with the sausages and could not be persuaded to accompany them with anything else. Cruncher insisted on having some imported red with his steak but did agree that the white was excellent. Fifi, located a pan full of a very hot curry. None of the others would touch it so she ate most of it herself turning the fine white fur around her face and ears a shade of red which matched the wine. After dinner they howled for half an hour. Nobody came to disturb them. The sounds from inside slowly gave way to stern words of reassurance and command but nobody emerged. Then, following Cruncher’s lead, as quickly as they had come, they were gone. Down to the beach to wash off and home.

“See that one” Charles said. Looking over Jenny’s shoulder at a blurred photo of dogs on Cruise Critic on her Ipad on the breakfast table. “No. It can’t have been.”

18 Visit to Ship

Charles's invitation from the Chief Engineer to have a look around the ship had grown into a full tour and a dinner for the whole committee. They had been asked to wait at the Yacht Club pontoon, well away from the jetty where the passengers were disembarking. At 11.00 sharp their tender arrived. It was one of the smaller ship's boats and even from a distance they could see that it had been specially smartened up for the occasion with gleaming brightwork and a Cruise Company flag flying from a small mast over the wheelhouse. An officer was standing on the fore-deck ready to greet them.

"Bloody hell, they've sent the Captain for us." Henry said quietly. "I'm sure that's him – looks just like the photo on the website."

"Yes – that's the man." Freddie added. "Stand by for the hard sell."

The captain introduced himself to each one of them in person with a practiced smile as they came aboard. The cabin had been fitted out with luxurious cushions for the bench seats and as soon as they were seated a steward appeared with a tray of Champagne glasses, skilfully balancing them as the boat moved away.

"That's good stuff" Henry said, lowering his. "Quality vintage".

When refilling their glasses, the steward carefully positioned the bottles, so they could see the Bollinger labels.

Soon they were out of the harbour and the captain was pointing out where the approach road, car park and jetty would go on the headland. They went right around the ship while he described all the systems it had to prevent it polluting the water.

"I assume you're using low sulphur fuel just now." Charles said when he paused for breath.

"Of course". He replied with the beaming smile.

"What proportion of the fuel you use on this cruise is low sulphur?"

The smile faltered a bit. "We always use it in European waters and comply with regulations."

There was a short silence as everybody looked at him. "A bit less than half" he finally replied. "We mainly keep to international waters".

The ship had deployed three landing stages along one side, two were busy with passengers, they moored up at the third to be greeted by more officers and stewards with trays of canapés. Rather than taking them straight up in the lifts to the passenger areas they went down one deck and into the engine room.

Freddie was standing next to Charles. "No ID check and we're straight into the crew only areas. They must either be very casual or desperate to impress."

They were in a wide corridor with gleaming white panelling down either side covered in switch banks and gauges. The captain was explaining that six of the twelve generators were running to supply the air conditioning and other services despite the fact that they were not moving. Soon they emerged into the control room where two engineers were watching rows of screens. He showed them one which displayed the analysis of the waste water after it had been processed ready for discharge. It was apparently cleaner than the sea water.

Next, they were taken up to the bridge. Looking out through the panoramic plate glass windows, Charles found himself staring straight at his villa. Without the need for binoculars he could see right into his living room and even thought he could see Cruncher asleep on the sofa. The captain was standing next to him.

“That’s our villa.”

“You must have a splendid view of the ship.” The smile betrayed no hint of irony.

“Yes. We can see it well and hear it and if the wind is inshore we can smell its diesel fumes too.” He smiled back.

The meal came next. One of the speciality dining rooms had been closed for passengers and the tables put together so they could dine as a group. Several officers joined them, clearly enjoying what was the very best food the ship’s chefs could produce. Charles found himself sitting next to the Chief Engineer. After enquiring about his family, he observed that the captain appeared to be very practiced at public relations.

“Yes, he’s good. He was really pleased that I had made contact with you. He has high hopes for this visit.”

After five courses and coffee a screen and projector were set up.

The presentation was highly professional with the company logo and the tag line “love cruising” in the header of each slide. It started with a list of topics he would cover. The first was a description of the pier.

“I’m sure you will have seen the plan on the website for the island council.” The captain said without hesitation.

“It’s not there.” Charles replied quickly. “But we’ve seen it on the Facebook page.” The smile soon recovered.

“How come you never went ahead with the plan to extend the jetty straight out to sea and moored the ship bow on to the headland.” Freddie asked. “It wouldn’t have blocked our view of the sea nearly so much.”

The captain turned to look at him. For the first time anybody had ever seen, he had dressed for the occasion with a smart shirt and a tie. Looking relaxed, he smiled back at the captain.

“We never published any alternative plans.”

“But you drew them up and considered them.” Freddie continued. “And dismissed them because it would cost a trivial extra 500k.”

The captain did not reply and moved smoothly on to the next slide. It showed a stunning picture of the harbour with the headline “Our great new discovery”.

“Took your time.” Margaret observed. “Even the Romans knew it was here.”

More slides showed projections for great economic benefits. Charles looked at one listing all the jobs that would be created on the island. The first one was coach drivers. He remembered being stuck behind a coach as it struggled to get along one of the narrow roads. Every time it met a car coming the other way it had to stop while the car backed down. With all the food and wine, he was starting to feel sleepy. He tried to focus on the rest of the list. Were the litter pickers there? He heard Jenny pointing out that they were using most of the same coach drivers as before, they just came over from the mainland. There was a silence. His eyes closed.

He felt Jenny's elbow in his ribs and woke with a start. He looked up. The marker in the side bar showing where they were in the presentation seemed to have moved down a lot. The topic was "Why our customers love your island" and the slide was a collage of pictures and quotes. One of the pictures showed Cruncher with the quote "lovely friendly people". It made no sense to him. The captain was reading some of them out. The air conditioning hummed. He couldn't keep awake however hard he tried.

Elbow in the ribs again. They were on the last topic. He sensed the captain looking at him. He had to ask a question. "Most of the residents on the island have come here to enjoy our retirement. We don't want jobs or a great big pier. What benefits can you offer us?"

"You can enjoy the excitement and splendour of these great ships visiting your island." The presentation ended with a slide thanking them for listening. [the captain should show his irritation – says he will send PPT in email etc. etc.]

"Enjoy some of the excitement and splendour of a great ship." Jenny said to Cruncher as she gave him the contents of the gourmet doggy-bag.

19 In town (2)

"Gentrified" would be a kind word to describe what had happened to their favourite café next to the visitor pontoons on the harbour. The walls had all been freshly painted in brilliant white, covering generations of cigar smoke stains and chalked musings. The floor had been levelled with trowelled concrete and covered with a wood-block effect finish. The old oak table tops, coloured to a gentle reddish tint by innumerable encounters with local wine, had been covered with plywood, coated to give a washable surface. The wine itself had fortunately remained the same, the difference being that the carafes of local vintages were no longer listed at the back of the menu so passengers from the ship never knew to ask for them and deplete the limited supplies.

"Enjoy it while you can." Charles said, and watched over the rim of his glass as the tenders approached from the ship.

The café was in the prime position next to where the boats came in. The creeper-covered roof now sported a large sign advertising fresh local produce, clearly visible from the ship's sun-deck. The stampede to the tour busses was almost completed so the next crowd to disembark would go straight for it.

The owner's wife, a gentle lady who placed the plates on the table in a positively reverential way, had fled for the day to the company of her aged aunt at a farm up in the hills, leaving her duties in the care of three young waiters recruited from the mainland who stood in line in front of the counter, resplendent in matching red shirts and black trousers, ready to do battle with the onslaught when it came.

It had taken the tour manager several hours to convince the owner, and Charles who was there to help, that frozen Icelandic cod, cooked with chips, could be sold to passengers coming from a ship where the food was free. They had watched in amazement as the first shipment was consumed in a few days, generally accompanied by bottles of imported beer or Coca-Cola. The local dishes, which all seemed to translate as "fish stew", were relegated to the bottom of the page. They were made with a host of varied marine life which was brought in by the local fishermen. It was served in a large metal bowl which now stood, almost empty, in the middle of the table.

“Could you tell the Captain that Charles is really sorry he fell asleep in the presentation.” Jenny said to the Chief Engineer, who had come ashore to meet them.

“I’m not that sorry.” Charles replied. “I’ve looked through the copy of the Powerpoint that he emailed to me. The whole thing is a triumph of style over substance.”

“At least say he enjoyed the tour of the ship. I hope they’re not blaming you for any of this.”

“No, I’m fine.” The Engineer replied, skewering the last langoustine in the bowl. “Just as long as the engines run and the toilets flush, my job is done.”

The passengers were streaming in now. Envious looks at the best table facing the harbour were met by low growls from Cruncher and they were soon spilling out onto the extra tables set up with sun umbrellas on the pavement of the street at the back. The constant flow of traffic just feet away seemed to do nothing to dampen their apparent enthusiasm.

[owner in dialog]

20 Priest

The church in the town square had been substantially rebuilt and extended in the 19th century using contributions from local merchants and a significant sum from Papal funds. However, by the late 20th century, with the decline in the rural population and tourism limited by the lack of investment in transport links, it was in poor repair. Then the arrival of the ex-pat retirees and their villas fortunately coincided with the appointment of an excellent priest. By organising services for all denominations using the English language he attracted a good congregation who gave generously to fund the necessary work. With the arrival of the cruise passengers he redoubled his efforts and added extra services to coincide with the ship’s visits and the resulting flood of 20 dollar bills enabled him to support many good causes and further enhanced his excellent reputation. His comments about the ancient ruin thus shocked all who heard them.

Charles had come across it early that morning. He liked to walk Cruncher down to the headland before the construction works had started for the day. Walking along the partially excavated road leading to where the pier was being built he had seen one the large dressed stones where some earth had fallen away in the side of the cutting. Finding the site manager arriving for work he showed them to him. The response was blunt. The area had been signed off as clear by the archaeologist and he would be excavating it that day.

Charles started making phone calls and, within an hour, ten of them had made camp on it. By agreement, the excavators worked to either side and more of the soil fell away revealing curved stonework, finely worked with a smooth surface and narrow joints. By this stage the Resident Engineer had arrived.

“It’s just an old well”. He said, taking photos on his phone.

“Hell of a big well.” Henry said. “Looking at that bit, it must be 20 feet across. How come most of your photos are of us rather than it?”

“We could sue you for damages. Holding up our machines costs us a lot of money. We can’t divert the road around it. We’d need new drawings from head office.”

At that point the priest arrived. Inspecting it for just a few seconds he stepped back, crossed himself and started shouting. “It is evil. You are fools to be here. It must go now. Destroy it.” The tirade continued becoming less and less coherent. They all just stood and watched. Finally, backing away, he prostrated himself on the dusty ground for a full minute before standing up, turning and running. When he had gone a few yards, he looked up and shook his fist. Following his gaze, Charles saw a stooping figure with a long grey beard staring down at them from up on the hillside. The priest

went down to the ground again. Jenny and Margaret ran to help him. When Charles looked back up, the stooping figure seemed to have disappeared behind the low scrub.

They helped the priest back to his feet. He was shaking badly but not answering any of their questions as he stumbled back along the road.

“Doesn’t look like he thought it was a well.” Henry said to the Engineer.

“You can’t prove it isn’t. Anyway, we could clear it in a few minutes and he won’t complain.”

The machines started work again to either side and some more of the loose dry soil fell away revealing carving in the stonework.

Charles climbed up to see it. “It’s Latin.” he said, looking at the letters. “It’s a long time since I tried to translate any.” He stopped for a minute. “We’d have to clear the rest of it to make sense. It seems to be a date. Something about the emperor Tiberius.”

They stood back, and the engineer went across and inspected it, looking at each letter in turn. “We’ll have to leave it to head office to decide.” He said finally; and turned to the site manager. “I’ll give you an instruction to work round it. We’ll have to get the archaeology people back. It’s going to take weeks. I think you’ll have to assume for now that we’ll move the road.”

The manager called out to the machine drivers and they stopped work and tracked away, further up the roadway.

When he had gone back to the office with the engineer, Charles went to have a closer look at the inscription. It had gone. The surface of the stonework was completely smooth. He ran his fingers across it. The others came over and joined him, scrabbling away more soil with their bare hands. They worked over the whole exposed surface, feeling the joints, but nothing else.

“You all saw it didn’t you?” He looked at them. Henry nodded. Nobody replied.

“You look like you need a drink.” Jenny said.

21 Old Ship

Charles liked to get up early to see the cruise ship come in. He told Henry that he did it to enjoy the last of the clear view of the sea before it was blocked, but, although he never admitted it, he still found it spectacular, if not exciting, as the huge vessel appeared and made its way in. Now he sat in his favourite chair scanning the horizon with his binoculars, waiting for the first sighting of the upper decks and funnel. Cruncher sat quietly at his side, clearly knowing that he would get a biscuit when it came into sight.

Finally, he saw a tell-tale trace of smoke and the ship appeared. He could pick out the big satellite communication antenna above the bridge and the funnel rising behind it. Suddenly Cruncher gave a short sharp bark of alarm, biscuit forgotten.

He looked around. A second ship had appeared from behind the headland. It had two masts but, between them, it had two enormous funnels pouring out smoke. It was nowhere near as big as the cruise ship, but it was still far larger than a yacht. To either side paddle wheels were churning up the water as she powered across the bay. Each of the masts carried two square sails and a bowsprit on the finely curved bow carried two headsails.

Soon he could see the people on the deck. They were all in Victorian dress, ladies in long skirts and hats, men in blazers, with stewards in uniform. He looked round again. There was no sign of any other boats. Nobody was watching it or filming it. It turned sharply out to sea. It was heading straight for the cruise ship.

Charles called out. “Jenifer. Jenifer come here.” But he never lowered the glasses.

Now he could see the stern. The name "RMS Persia" was clearly visible in ornate lettering and above it hung the flag of the Cunard line. It was closing fast.

"Oh my God. What is it? A ghost ship?" She ran past him and opened the patio door.

"No. Look at it. It'll be iron. Real riveted iron." Charles replied. "Could punch a really big hole before it stopped."

He could see people on the wing of the bridge of the cruise ship, all looking at the older vessel. Less than a mile away now. The sails caught a gust of wind and it surged ahead. The helmsman on the rear deck. A big man with a full black beard, staring ahead.

A single long blast of a horn echoed across the bay, but the Persia held its course. The cruise ship was turning now.

Someone was running out along the pier. It was the priest, robes billowing. A lone figure charging along the tarmac. Faltering slightly, showing his age, but not stopping.

As the big ship turned it leaned. Eighteen decks above the waterline leaning out as the drives forced it round. The Persia was turning too to meet it. One wheel stopped while the other threw up a huge shower of white water.

The priest reached the end of the pier. Facing back the way he had come he drew out a large cross, holding it high as he sank to his knees.

"He's looking at us." Charles called, running out.

"No – look behind." She pointed up at the hillside. The stooping man was there again, crouching in the scrub.

Cruncher growled at him, but Charles had already turned back. The cruise ship was close enough for him to recognise the captain, shouting commands to the helm. The great ship was turning back the other way. One hundred thousand tonnes driven round by the immensely powerful propellers leaning crazily across to the other side. On the balconies and open decks, they saw people falling, sliding down against the glass balustrading, tables and chairs following and smashing into them.

The Persia turned again, but the wind caught the back of the sails. Men were scrambling up the ratlines to re-set them, but they had backed hard against the masts. The old ship was dead in the water as the massive white bulk shot across its bows.

"The outlying rocks." Charles said. "Off that headland."

The officers on the wing of the bridge were now all looking down at the water as they made one more sharp turn. Charles and Jenny held their breath. The trees on the headland seemed to almost brush against the leaning decks. They watched for the tell-tale shudder of rock ripping into steel. Nobody moved on the bridge. Suddenly as she was part way past the drives threw up a great spurt of water as they turned right across the other way.

"Keeping the stern off." Charles said, never lowering his binoculars. "Stop it swinging in."

Moments later the whole ship vanished into the next bay. "I think they made it." He said quietly.

"The Persia's gone." Jenny said.

“Gone where?”

“Wherever it came from I suppose. I looked round and it was gone.”

The priest staggered to his feet, looked at the empty sea and limped back along the pier. Fifteen minutes later the cruise ship reappeared off the headland. Arriving in the middle of the bay it stopped. The basketball nets on the top deck had been cleared and a bright orange helicopter flew in and landed. Stretches were carried out to it. Minutes later it took off and a second one followed. The ship edged in to the pier where the island’s two ambulances were waiting.

“See this from Wikipedia.” Jenny said. “RMS Persia, Cunard line, launched 1855 for the Atlantic run to New York, laid up 1868, scrapped 1872. It shows a picture, two masts and two funnels, she was definitely the one. There’s no mention of anybody ever building a replica.”

22 Carol’s wedding

When he answered the door and saw Carol, Charles was unsure whether to take the part of her teacher at school or a customer in her parents’ café on the beach. When she said she had come to invite him and Jenny to her wedding he was so shocked he couldn’t think what to say.

“We’ll be delighted.” He said hesitantly, remembering that she was only just sixteen.

“It’s ok.” She replied. “Mum and dad are fine with it.”

“What about the priest? Carlo is your age, isn’t he? Have you asked?”

“It’s ok. We’re going to marry at the chapel on the hill. Won’t be at his church.”

Jenny appeared at the door and swept her up in a warm hug. “Of course we’ll be there. Won’t it be wonderful. We’ve never been to the chapel. It’s near Freddie’s house isn’t it?”

“Yes. It’s on Freddie’s land. He’s helping us organise it. The track’s a bit steep, so he’ll ferry the guests in his Land Rover.”

Carol skipped off down the path leaving them standing at the door.

“I think we’re very honoured.” Jenny said. “If Freddie’s ferrying everybody in his Land Rover there can’t be many of us and I can’t imagine that the chapel is very big.”

“No, it can’t be. We’d have seen it if it was when we’ve driven up that way. If the priest isn’t doing it, who do you think is actually marrying them? This isn’t some sort of wind up is it? Making fun of teacher. They’re well matched those two. Smartest kids in the class but always up to something.”

Half an hour later they arrived at the café. Carol’s parents had come to island from Yourkshire when she was a baby and set it up. As soon as Charles and Jenny sat down at their regular table they came out to greet them and to say how pleased they were that they would be coming to the wedding.

“Could we get Freddie to clean the dog hairs out of the Land Rover?” Jenny asked.

“The dog will be banished from it and Carlo has promised it will spotless.” Carol’s mother replied as Carlo himself appeared, skilfully balancing a huge tray of drinks, and smiling at them as he swept by.”

They arrived in good time at Freddie’s house and he was there to greet them, resplendent in suit and tie. Jenny made her way nervously across the rough stone driveway in her heels to the Land Rover which was, as promised, spotless. Even the rust patches looked as if they had been polished.

The track up to the chapel was steep and rough and they held on to their seats as the old Defender struggled along it. Rounding an outcrop, they emerged into a wide-open space. Facing them was a neat front door with windows to either side, the whole assemblage looking as if it had come from a perfect sea-front bungalow in Devon.

“Built him a proper front door to keep the tourists out.” Freddie said. “Head on in and you’ll find the others. Must get back for the bride and her mum. It’ll be a bit of a squeeze with the bridesmaids.”

The door was open. Inside there was a small room. A line of hooks to one side held some old coats. A pair of well-worn boots stood below them, a large umbrella leaned against the wall. Opposite the front door, another stood open. Inside it looked dark and they found themselves in a passage with rough walls carved out of the rock, lit only by the light from the windows behind them.

“I think there’s a light ahead.” Charles said. “Give it a minute for our eyes to adjust. It must be this way, there weren’t any other doors.”

“Amazing place for a wedding.” Jenny replied.

They stopped and soon heard people talking ahead of them. Setting out carefully they made their way forward.

Suddenly Charles sensed that he was in a large space. The confining walls of the passage had gone. He looked around. Huge fluted columns stood to either side of the aisle in front of him, ringed by brackets holding flaming torches. Now he could make out the walls, statues in niches all glowing from the light candelabra. High above them, vaulted arches, finely carved with floral reliefs. Then in front, a vast white stone altar.

“Close your mouth.” Jenny said. “Here comes an usher”

It was Carlo’s brother. He greeted them and showed them to some pews which were right next to where they were standing.

“See the big statue above the altar.” Charles whispered. “It’s not the virgin Mary. It’s the goddess Venus. This place is pre-Christian. Early Roman I think.”

“Yes. I was thinking it a bit odd to show Mary stark naked. This is amazing. Let’s see what happens next.”

They could see some of the bride and groom’s family and friends in the pews in front of them. Only a small congregation but seeming to fill much of the large space. Carlo himself was at the front.

A man emerged in front to the altar. He wore a long black robe with his grey beard hanging down against it.

"It's him." Charles said. "I'm sure it's him. Look at him move. He's not stooping but I'm sure it is."

"Yes, it's the hermit." Jenny said. "Weren't you expecting him?"

Music started, seeming to come from all around them. Like an organ with only higher pitched pipes, playing just one note at a time, but strangely melodic.

Before they knew she was there, Carol was right beside them. The torchlight on her white dress made it glow like a halo of fire. She seemed to glide with ethereal grace. Moving forward, her father at her side, joining Carlo to stand before the hermit.

It took Charles a few seconds to realise that he had started to address them. In an accent that would have been expected from an English country vicar he welcomed them to the wedding. He went on to explain that the service would be in classical Latin, but the full text was in the order of service which they would find in the pews.

His voice was strong and clear, so they had no trouble following the words in the neatly printed booklets which has a fine colour picture of the bride and groom on the front. They joined in the responses and did their best to sing along with the chants.

"You realise that this isn't Christian." Charles said quietly. "My Latin isn't brilliant, but I can see that the word God is in the plural in the prayers."

"Oh well." Jenny smiled. "You always said that if there really was just one all-powerful God then, looking at history, he must have a really bad sense of humour."

"Yes, but I prefer the one God and one Devil scenario generally." He stopped. A man had appeared carrying a pig. He strode towards the altar.

"Oh my God." Charles said.

"Which one?" Jenny asked. The pig was placed on the altar. Its feet were tied together but it was still struggling, squealing, thrashing its head against the stone surface. The hermit produced a knife with a long silver blade which [flashed in the candle-light... cliché]. With one powerful stroke he cut the pig's throat open. Blood poured across the altar and onto the floor. He placed his finger in it and, leaning forward drew dark red crosses on the foreheads of the bride and groom.

The final hymn started as the pig thrashed about one last time. The man reappeared during the second verse and carried the carcass away leaving a dribble of blood across the floor.

The hermit gave a final address in English, thanking them for their hearty singing.

The bride and groom processed out. Following into the bright sunlight Charles saw that long tables had been set up. A fire had been lit and the pig, he assumed it was the same pig, was roasting above it.

The wine flowed, and the speeches followed. Quite a number of people, both locals and expats, had been invited to join them, so it was a large crowd that enjoyed the succulent pork and Charles managed to slip away around the side of the neat bungalow frontage. Climbing up the steep

slope, he stood above it and could see down to the cruise ship in the bay, but, behind him, the ground was almost level, not rising steeply to form a hill with space for a cathedral inside.

23 The US Coastguard

The news reports had been confused. The BBC and most of the other channels simply reported that the ship had made some unplanned manoeuvres leading to six serious injuries among the passengers. Not many were on deck for the early morning arrival and none of the photos they took on their phones showed anything at all. A few stories appeared on Facebook about seeing the Persia, but these were generally met with responses telling them to be careful with what they smoked. One paper ran a feature claiming that the crew on the bridge had suffered from mass hysteria, but it was on an inside page and soon forgotten. The cruise line paid compensation to the injured and moved the captain and some of the other officers to what they described as “other duties”. Charles’s internet searches were soon finding nothing new. He was therefore surprised to receive the email from the US National Transportation Safety Board.

“They say that they understand that we were watching and would like to discuss what we saw.” He was looking at his lap top on a low table in the lounge, Jenny was next to him on the settee with her early morning cup of tea.

“How do they understand that? None of them would have been looking this way.”

“I expect they could see us on the cameras above the bridge. The ones they use for the webcam system.”

“Nosey horrible thing. Filming us like that in our own house. I hope the Hermit sinks them next time. Are you going to talk to them?”

“Really Jenny. You mustn’t say that. Hundreds of innocent people would drown.”

“Don’t bring them here. I don’t want some loud mouthed American in my house telling me what I can and can’t do.”

“That’s ok.” He read from the screen. “Could you please meet me at the cruise tender pier in the harbour”.

“Perhaps he wants to go to the café. Make sure he pays the bill.”

When he saw it coming into the bay, he called Jenny again.

“The cruise ship’s not due today. What’s the Hermit doing? Trying to impress these Americans you’re meeting?”

Charles was looking at it with the binoculars. “It’s a modern ship. All covered with radio masts and radar and stuff. Let’s try a photo.”

The ship showed clearly on the screen. A sleek grey hull, a gun turret on the front deck.

“It’s a real ship. It’s the Americans trying to impress us. So much for this just being the Transportation Safety Board.” They watched as it approached, putting up a huge bow wave. It slowed and turned sharply to anchor near the harbour.

Charles was met at the pier by two uniformed naval officers. The chief magistrate and the commodore of the yacht club were also invited. A few minutes later the captain welcomed them into the wardroom of the guided missile destroyer USS Howard. There was, as promised, a man who was not in uniform and was introduced as the representative of the Safety Board.

The room was very modest compared to the special dining room on the cruise ship. The whole vessel was less than a tenth of the size. There were two tables with some chairs around them. Pictures of ships were displayed on the walls, some new with a few sailing ships among them. There were no windows, he was told this was to do with reducing the radar profile.

“We were due to make a courtesy visit to this area, helping publicise NATO and show the flag, so we offered to give this gentleman a lift so to speak”. The captain had a warm friendly smile and was keen to top up his glass. However, the wine was nothing like as good as it had been on the cruise ship, so he had no trouble in following Jenny’s instructions not to drink much of it.

He smiled back, pretending to believe the captain.

The man from the safety board was equally genial. Charles judged him to be in his thirties. He wore an open-necked shirt clearly intending to look casual.

“The Persia was a fine ship wasn’t it?”

“Yes. The pride of the British merchant fleet for ten years.” He was trying desperately to sound casual in return. We Googled it and read all about it. Fascinating how it was scrap after only 12 years. That’s not even as old as this ship or the cruise ship.”

He held his drink as steady as he could. Freddie had reassured him that they could do nothing to him.

“You didn’t actually see it?”

He tried to smile. “It was fake news. That’s what the cruise line said, it was never there.” He turned to the commodore and the magistrate. Neither of them had seen it.

“You definitely never saw it?”

“All we saw was the cruise ship careering all over the place and tipping.”

“So how were you able to Google it before anybody put the name on Facebook or emailed you?”

The room fell silent. Everybody was looking at him. “What a cheek.” He could shake now, shake with anger. “You used the ship’s cameras to watch what I was doing in my own home and then hacked into my private use of the internet. What right did you have to do that? This is Europe. We have privacy laws here.” Freddie had prepared him well. Well enough, he hoped. He really didn’t fancy a one-way trip to Guantanamo Bay. “There were people on the path behind the beach, among the trees so your cameras wouldn’t see them, we heard them talking about it. They were probably the ones that put it on Facebook. You Americans know all about fake news, don’t you? Voting him in for a second term says everything.”

24 Fake news – faked illusions

“Who on earth is that?” Charles looked down at Jenny’s Ipad as he walked through from his study. It showed an image of a girl who was applying lipstick to her very full upper lip while talking to camera. Her face was immaculate, appearing to be perfectly proportioned with her thick blonde hair.

“It’s Cindy.” Jenny looked up from the screen. “She just bought that huge villa at the end of the road”.

“I thought it had been sold to that actor, the man in his forties.”

“That was last year. He obviously didn’t find his neighbours very interesting.”

Charles went back to his study and Googled Cindy. “This will be her. Born Cynthia Smith in Luton. She’s only eighteen. Twenty-two million followers on YouTube. Reckoned to be mainly teenage girls. Had thirty million last year. Perhaps they got bored of watching her put on her make-up.”

“That’s just the opening sequence. Take a look where it goes next.”

The title was “Cindy on the island of illusion.” With a picture of the Persia.

“None of the people on this island will admit to seeing these fantastic illusions”. The shot had opened up to show her on a sofa in a large room with the sea visible behind. “But Cindy has found some video for you to prove that it happened.”

The screen now showed images of the Persia steaming towards the cruise ship.

“That’s got to be fake.” Charles said. “The illusions don’t come out on video, do they? Let’s have another look.”

Jenny scrolled it back and re-played the sequence.

“Look at the angle.” Charles said. “It looks as if it was taken from her villa. Didn’t they say that there was a security camera that showed it, without the Persia of course.”

They played it again. The water could be seen foaming up from the Persia’s paddle wheels, her wash was spreading out behind her and clouds of smoke were coming from her funnel.

“Do you think it’s real?” Jenny asked. “It looks incredibly like what we saw.”

“No. It’s a fake. A really good fake. They’ve taken the security camera images and added the Persia. On the day, I don’t remember her giving off anything like that amount of smoke and, come to think of it, they’ve just got sails on one mast like the picture in Wikipedia but on the day she had them on both. Who told you about it?”

[clumsy exposition. Needs non-verbal from Charles]

“It was on that Facebook page. The one that Freddie seems to know all about.”

“There were at least six people who tried to film it from the cruise ship and none of them showed anything at all. It’s definitely a fake.” Charles went back to his study and played the video several times on his big monitor screen. Each time he looked at it he found another detail that had

been carefully created. The passengers in Victorian dress were moving about realistically on the deck of the Persia but this time the helmsman had a grey beard, not the black he had noticed.

It wasn't long before Freddie arrived. "Very sorry to bother you, have you got a couple of minutes. I assume you've seen it." He was standing at the front door with Molly sitting patiently beside him.

Jenny welcomed them into the living room. Cruncher no longer hid when Molly came visiting but he still kept close to Jenny while Molly lay down casually in the middle of the carpet.

"Cindy'll get loads more followers." Jenny said. "It'll help her keep the ones she's got who were growing up and getting bored of the same old stuff."

"That's the problem." Freddie accepted the proffered cup of tea. "The illusions were supposed to scare people away. This will do the opposite. This will make headline news. We never imagined that somebody might have huge sums to spend on video like this".

"But it's definitely fake." Charles replied. "I've found any number of incorrect details.

"You've spent the last few months denying you saw anything. You can hardly start commenting on details. Anyway, nobody cares if things are fake any more.

"How are you going to persuade her to stop?" Jenny asked. "If you don't, we'll have thousands of her fans showing up as well as all the people from the cruise ships."

"Could you invite her round? Sort of welcome the new neighbour sort of thing? Perhaps we can negotiate."

The slug was first shown close up, revealing its glistening body with two long tentacles at the front. When the image opened up to show the surroundings it first appeared that it was a trick of perspective with the trees in the background. It wasn't until it started tearing branches off the trees that its true size became apparent.

Now the camera panned round to show the interior of the coach with the passengers all shouting and struggling to see out of the windscreen. The slug was almost on the road. The coach lurched as the driver braked hard. For more than a minute the image held steady on the slug as it moved onto the tarmac, filling it from side to side, moving forward. Behind it there were glimpses of the black surface covered in a thin layer of slime.

Suddenly the coach was reversing. The image showed the driver struggling to see where he was going in his mirrors. The slug was gaining on them. Waves of movement surging along its huge body as it seemed to slide inexorably towards them. There was a short straight section. The coach surged away. Then more sharp bends. It was only yards away. All the passengers were screaming. The driver accelerated. They scraped past a massive thorn bush, but there was a ditch. They went in, smashing into a tree trunk. Stopping dead as the monster reared up over them. Then it was gone. Suddenly just gone, the slug and all its slime. But the coach was still in the ditch.

"It never happened." The chief magistrate said as he leaned against the bar in front of the television in the yacht club. "None of it. Not on this island. We haven't had a coach in a ditch for years."

"But it's great video." Charles replied. "And we all said the Persia never happened."

The news bulletin moved on to the next item.

25 Meet Cindy

Charles opened his front door to see a very large man. He wasn't particularly tall but everything else about him was massive and, right from the top of his bald head to the huge muscles on his legs, he was covered in tattoos [show don't tell], most of which depicted various aspects of the female form. Behind him there was a vehicle that seemed to be half way between a 4-wheel drive car and a twenty-ton truck. Charles took a step back into the villa surprise.

"Hello, I'm Jack, Cindy's dad." The man said, revealing a strong south London accent. His attempt at a smile was more threatening than reassuring. His hand appeared capable of crushing a cricket ball.

Two women now emerged from behind the vehicle. He recognised one as Cindy and assumed that the other was her mother. The mother waddled towards him. Seeing this as an excuse to avoid the risk of having every bone in his hand reduced to pebbles, Charles turned towards her and shook hands. Suddenly he caught Cindy's eye. Before he knew it, she was giving him a warm hug and telling him how she had heard so much about him and was delighted to meet him.

Moving through to the lounge they stood at the window looking out at the cruise ship.

"Cindy tells me you don't like it." Jack said. "I can't see the problem. You like looking at the sea and the sea has ships on it."

"It's not so bad from our villa." Cindy said quietly. "It only really blocks this end of the bay". Her father turned and slumped down on the sofa.

They spotted a woman hanging out her underwear to dry on a line fixed across her balcony. "Could we come and film some of that". Cindy asked. "I've checked, and it would be quite legal to use it."

"You should come early." Charles replied. "Catch them coming out in their nighties and suddenly noticing that they can be seen. It could be just as amusing and a lot cheaper than your computer-generated illusions."

Cindy smiled at him. "Yes – and I can see what you're worried about. You bought this villa to have peace and quiet, not crowds of young people all over the place."

Her father was up so fast that Charles thought the sofa might collapse. "Don't you go bullying our Cindy into stopping her podcasts. They're perfectly legal and she has a right to post them if she wants to." His face was inches from Charles's. His breath smelled foul.[show]

Cindy eased him away. "Don't worry dad. This is our home now and we don't want to spoil it for these lovely people."

She guided him back to the sofa and they all sat down. Jenny opened the kitchen door and Cruncher rushed out. He ran straight to Cindy, rested his head on her knee and wagged his tail. Charles looked on in astonishment.

She stroked his ears. "Hello Cruncher. I've seen lots of pictures of you on the Cute Pooches site. Did you know that lots of people from the ships look out for you to try to get a picture?" He wagged his tail even more. She turned to Jenny. "I know it's a lot to ask but could we possibly arrange to do some filming with Cruncher? He's the most photogenic dog ever."

"Was he part of that pack that we read about that terrorised the tourists at their special local dinner?" He father was leaning forward in the sofa reaching out for Cruncher's tail. "You be careful Cindy. The dogs round these places all have rabies."

Cindy guided Cruncher around, so his tail was safe. He moved obediently and promptly rested his head on her other knee. "You could come and watch us filming." She said to Charles and Jenny.

The bubbles smelt wonderful, really inviting. Cruncher had seen the lady they called Cindy pour something into the tub and it made them smell just like her. They all kept saying "bath time" but this wasn't a bath, that involved being chased round the patio with the garden hose. This had arrived in a big white van and was all spread out ready for him in a nice patch of shade. There was the huge white tub, all sorts of nice-looking brushes and some lovely fluffy towels. The big horrid man called Jack who stank and Charles and Jenny clearly disliked had gone to sit down in the lounge well out of the way.

He stepped in, as gracefully as he could. The temperature was just right, and it felt as good as it smelt. Everybody was watching him, even the man who had brought the tub and another man who was holding a machine that Cindy kept talking to. He lay down, so his head was just clear of the bubbles. He closed his eyes, this was bliss. Somebody started rubbing him with one of the brushes, it made him start, but then he relaxed and enjoyed it.

"Come on Cruncher. You've had enough soaking. Out now." Why did Charles have to spoil everything? He stepped out and they rubbed him down with the towels. But then there was another treat. They worked some wonderful oil into his coat. Not only was the smell so good he wished all his friends, except possibly Molly, were there to enjoy it, but it also looked fantastic.

"Doesn't he look amazing." Well, yes Cindy, he had to agree. His close-cropped curls looked sleek and gleaming. Not a hair out of place. They had stood up a great big mirror. Wow. Just look at that hansom poodle. He would do anything for lovely Cindy if she could get this again. Absolutely anything.

26 Dogs at first filming

Cruncher climbed into the back of the car and waited patiently for them to close the door.

"He must know where we're going." Charles said. "Never seen him do that before".

He knew exactly where they were going. The hermit had explained it all the night before. He had even suggested that the go and have a look. It was only a mile away and they had had a good look round. Typical Jenny to insist on taking the car in-stead of a nice walk.

They pulled up outside the big gates. Cruncher looked out of the back window, his friends were ready. When the car pulled forward Molly led them through, close behind the car and followed it up the long driveway in the shade of the palm trees that lined each side.

Cindy was there to meet them standing at the bottom of the wide marble steps between the fluted columns. Just as the car door was opened, and he ran towards her, his friends were there to join him. She looked surprised. How do you explain to a human that they are just friends come along to help? Lick them? Very undignified. Sniff them? Even worse among friends.

“Look it’s Molly and Fifi. Nipper, how did you get here.” Charles to the rescue. “Oh Cindy I’m really sorry. These are his friends. I hope you don’t mind. They seem to have followed us.”

They formed a line and sat down. All looking up at her, trying their best to look friendly. She looked across at the cameraman standing at the top of the steps. “They look pretty well trained. Can we use four?”

“How the hell did that lot get in.” Jack replied. “Get rid of them. I told you that the packs of dogs round here are dangerous. I’ll get my stick and teach them a lesson.”

Cruncher ran up to him. The smell was awful, but he managed to wag his tail, albeit rather slowly. More of a twitch than a real wag but it was the best he could manage.

“Just look at them. It’s as if they know why they’re here.” The cameraman said. “We could do some incredible shots with them all.”

Suddenly Fifi was up and running towards Jack. Cruncher sensed disaster and met her in full flight landing on top of her with a big paw firmly on her back. The teeth that were going to rip out Jack’s Achilles tendon turned towards the paw, but then Molly was there, sending her flying backwards with a single push from one of her hind legs. Hadn’t she listened to the Hermit? Jack may be foul but be nice and he’ll go away and try to figure it out. All eyes were on Fifi as she sat back in her place in the line.

“That was incredible.” The cameraman said. “I got the whole sequence. We could use it for the bank. ‘Do your finances keep running away from you? Get them back into line with our consolidating financial package.’ “

Cruncher looked at him. Jack had gone away so he could wag his tail properly. Where was the man with the hot tubs? Do that first and then they could do the whole sequence again six times if Cindy wanted them to.

The man in the white van only had two tubs. Cruncher and Nipper went first. The man looked really happy to be doing all four dogs and ran back and forth between them with his potions and brushes. Soon they were done, and he called Molly and Fifi to get into the water. But it was the same water. Molly stood beside her tub and refused to move and Fifi resisted all attempts to pick her up and put her in by baring her teeth and snarling.

Cruncher was horrified. How could they use the water he had just washed in. There was only one solution. He went over to Fifi’s tub and raised his leg. Seeing this, Molly did the same in hers. The man looked cross, but Cindy laughed and gave Cruncher a hug. He loved her hugs. The cameraman was busy filming it all. [viewpoint detail. Dogs need to look up]

The hermit had explained that the main thing was for them to have fun because that was what humans liked to watch. That was when Cruncher had insisted on having the others with him.

It was much more fun when they were together. If only Molly could remember to be gentle with them and Fifi didn't get upset. He had then tried to explain about product placement but none of them could understand what dogs had to do with selling mobile phones and cleaning products, and Cruncher wasn't sure that the hermit could either.

The patio had an enormous awning across it giving a lovely area of cool shade. First job was to tell Charles that he needed one like it. He was still trying to work out how to do this when he heard Jenny doing it for him.

"I know it looks good but think of the time it takes to clean it." Give up Charles. You're going to have to live with that. It'll be worth it, won't it, Jenny.

Cruncher decided it was time to look round. Summoning the others to follow in line they did a circuit. Past the patio doors they saw Jack on the sofa, now trying to ignore them. The whole right-hand side of the view was blocked by the cruise ship. The onshore breeze was blowing the fumes straight at them. He checked that the cameraman was watching and then all four of them sat and howled at it for a full minute. Then there was the pool. Normally he would have considered a dash for it, but his coat felt far too good for that. Finally, there was a long table. It had drinks at one end and then in the middle there was a sort of display of different plastic bottles. Were these the products? He had better not pick one up in his mouth because if Fifi tried it her teeth were so sharp they'd go straight through. The other end of the table was amazing. He had never seen so many dog treats. They really were going to have fun.

27 New wealth

Charles signed out of his online banking and joined Jenny in the living room. "I still can't get my mind around it. Those dogs earn more in an afternoon than I earned in a year." Cruncher ran up and stood next to him and he leaned down to pat the dog on the head. "I was a head teacher, a highly qualified and successful professional. I had worked hard for years and years. I had the respect of my peers, dozens of staff who worked in my school and hundreds of pupils, well, most of them. And now this animal. He may be lovely but let's face it he doesn't even have a pedigree."

"Do you have a pedigree?" Jenny asked.

"You know what I mean. What qualifications has he got?"

Cruncher barked and ran over to Jenny. Nipper came through from the hallway and they both sat glowering at Charles.

"Look at this" Jenny said, showing him a picture on her Ipad. It was an advertisement for toilet cleaner. Cruncher and his friends were all sitting obediently around a low table with a bottle of the cleaner on it while Cindy was leaning down to pick it up. Each dog had an angelic expression. "Could you look as enraptured as that?"

"What, about that bleach stuff? Hardly inspiring."

"That bleach stuff makes them a fortune. Flying off the shelves at about twice the price of the supermarket brands. I had a look in the shop. Cruncher's picture on every bottle."

“I have to admit I’d struggle to look that keen. To be honest you’d have to be pretty stupid to do it. I guess that’s why dogs are so good at it.”

Cruncher and Nipper started barking loudly and turned and left the room.

“You shouldn’t upset them like that. Remember they can understand what you say. They might just leave home. I thought Cindy was getting most of the money.”

“I just looked. You should see how much it is. Our cut makes my pension look like a pittance. With the pound at half a Euro I suppose it is. You don’t really believe this stuff about them understanding us, do you? I bet that picture was Photoshopped.”

“Apparently the hermit has conversations with them.”

“Who says that?”

“That Facebook site. The one everybody thinks Freddie knows about.”

Charles sat on the sofa. Cruncher and Nipper came back into the room. “Look, Cruncher. I didn’t mean it. You really are a brilliant dog.”

The both jumped up and sat either side of him. “It must just be my tone of voice they get.” He said as he stroked their backs. “If you earn enough money, we can buy another villa and move away from that ghastly ship out there.”

“What? Give up? Surrender?” Jenny almost dropped her knitting.

“I thought you were the one who couldn’t stand it.”

“Yes, but you should act like a man. Stand up to them. Now we have the money you should go for victory.”

“Can’t we just relax and enjoy the money? Get a new sofa for a start. The dogs have ruined this one.” Cruncher sat up, looked at Charles and yawned.

“New sofas cost a fortune these days.”

“Not if you’re earning US dollars they don’t. Gone up miles again. Ridiculous with that man in charge.”

Jenny stood up. The sofa was full of dogs but, when she tried to sit next to Charles, Nipper moved out of the way. “Bet you wouldn’t try that with Cruncher.” Charles said. “He’d just look at you and expect you to sit on the floor, especially now he seems to know he’s paying his way.” Cruncher looked up with one eye and an even bigger yawn. Nipper joined in as each seemed to try to out-do the other, mouths ever wider open.

Jenny was tapping on the Ipad. Charles and two dogs were watching as the video showed Cindy in her house. First, she made a cup of coffee and then she did some washing up and put some laundry in to wash.

“I thought she had half a dozen flunkies to do all that.” Charles said.

“Just watch the dogs, not the pretty girl.” Jenny replied.

On the screen, Cruncher led the way, following just behind Cindy. The others followed neatly in order and each time they stopped they all sat in line, their heads turning occasionally to

their neighbours as if in conversation. The effect was one of four faithful retainers following their mistress.

“It’s had over 20 million downloads.” Jenny said.

“You mean 20 million people wanted to see that?”

Cruncher sat up with a start, his nose level with Charles’s face, looking straight into his eyes. “Ok yes, I didn’t mean it like that. You were all very well behaved.”

Jenny replayed the video. This time Charles carefully watched the dogs.

28 Monty

Character Sketch

Monty was a corgi. The link of his breed with royalty was reinforced by being named after one of the stars of the opening ceremony of the London Olympics (explain). Not considering this enough, his owners, Henry and Margaret, always equipped him with a wide collar which was decorated with conspicuous Union Jack patterns. However, his similarity with his royal namesake was limited by serious mental and physical shortcomings. His inability to understand even the simplest instruction meant that he had to be kept on a lead at all times. His physical appearance could best be described as “scrawny” and was frequently ascribed to contagious mange; but numerous visits to the vet indicated that it was simply an effect of an intolerance to the Mediterranean heat. The result was that he had numerous bald patches and spent most of his life scratching them until they bled, and his ever-devoted owners applied dressings, making him look like the teddy bear in bandages used as a symbol for charity fund raising.

[Monty’s viewpoint??]

“Is this the millionaires’ mansion?” Margaret asked.

Charles glanced at Jenny, said nothing, ushered Margaret, Henry and Monty into the living room and noted with relief that Monty chose to sit on Margaret’s lap rather than on a cushion. Cruncher took no more notice of Monty than he would have of a stuffed toy and Monty took no notice of Cruncher because he appeared not to notice him sitting in the middle of the floor.

“We hear that you have made thousands out of these blogs that Cindy does.” Henry said, while sitting down and accepting a glass of beer from Charles. “We had a look and they do seem rather fun. I hope you don’t mind your old friends asking, but how much have they really made? Is it all rumour?”

“We don’t really know but it’s about a hundred so far from the first couple of weeks”.

“Only a hundred Euros.” Margaret beamed. “We heard that it was a fortune. Silly rumours.”

“No.” Charles said slowly. “I meant a hundred thousand.”

The silence was only broken by Monty's feeble attempts at scratching and the slight clink as Margaret replaced her teacup on the table. Having done so she leaned back in the sofa and breathed deeply.

"Oh, I see, of course." Henry said. "Presumably its going to be millions before long."

"It does rather look that way. Obviously, it's good but it does rather belittle all my hard work building up a pension during my career."

"Yes, it does. Although sterling pensions are belittling themselves without any help just now, aren't they, and bills don't get any smaller."

Another silence followed. Henry stood up and walked over to the window with the view across the bay. "Will you be getting a new yacht?"

"No. I don't think so. I have rather grown to like that one."

"A new car? How about a Jaguar?"

"What? On these little roads. It'd be a bit ridiculous."

"Margaret always fancied one."

This time the silence was complete. All eyes turned to Monty. Margaret was restraining his paw to give a temporary respite but just looking at him seemed to affect Cruncher who raised a hind leg and started gently scratching his belly. The sight of the pile of hair that the corgi had torn out and deposited on Margaret's skirt even made Charles begin to itch.

"We were going to ask." Margaret started, but Cruncher cut her short with a bark.

"It's such a shame that lovely Cruncher has to work with that dreadful vicious brute Molly." She went on when Cruncher fell silent. "What a silly name for a beast like that. She ought to be kept muzzled. The other day poor Monty was just standing there, and she sent him flying when she ran past. The blogs would be so much better with a civilised dog who could add a bit of class and sophistication."

Charles resisted the temptation to ask which civilised dog. "It was really just Cruncher who decided who to invite along. It wasn't our decision at all."

"You mean you left an important decision like that to a dog?" She glowered at Cruncher who turned and stared straight back at her. "The other one. That ridiculous little thing. Fifi or whatever they call it. Ran up to a friend of mine and bit her ankle right down to the bone. She was so convinced that no dog could be that vicious if it didn't have rabies that she went and got an injection."

"Yes, I heard about that." Charles replied. "Kicking Fifi tends to be a bit dangerous. Tends to take offence."

"Sounds like you tried it." Henry suggested.

"No, but I saw Molly try it. Quite a sight to see her cowering like a puppy."

Jenny appeared at the door with a bottle of Bollinger. "Very remiss of us not to suggest this when you arrived. As our oldest friends who live on the island, will you celebrate our good fortune?"

"But of course. Splendid." Henry replied.

Jenny filled four glasses.

“To our friendship and your prosperity.” Henry raised his glass.

“To our friendship and all our lovely dogs.” Charles raised his glass to Monty, who didn’t appear to notice. Cruncher left for the kitchen.

“To our friendship and may the cruise ship sink.” Jenny raised he glass to the pier. “and the pier fall down.” She added.

All eyes were on Margaret. She raised he glass to Monty and hugged him. “To our friendship”. His paw now free, he had a good scratch.

29 Dreadnought

Charles, Jenny and Cruncher were enjoying the evening sunshine on their terrace. Below them the yachts sat motionless on the calm blue water in the bay. Looking out to sea, the cruise ship, moored to the end of the pier on the headland, blocked their view to the right hand side. The courtesy visit by the USS Howard had now continued for a full month but it was so much smaller than the cruise ship and moored much further out so it had little effect on the view.

They watched as the men arrived on the pier in a minibus and went out along the walkways to the mooring dolphins to let go the mooring lines. The ship’s crew were finishing taking in the gangways and small clouds of grey smoke from the funnel showed that more of the generators were being started ready to set sail.

“What on earth?” Charles said, noticing a thin column of black smoke out on the horizon rising into the still air.

Jenny and Cruncher looked up, but Charles raised the book from the table beside him. “No, we mustn’t be seen watching it, but it could be the hermit again.”

Jenny also picked up her book and pretended to read it. “I wonder what he’ll do. It’ll have to be good to fool them this time.” She patted Cruncher on the head and he obediently laid down, looking as if he was going to sleep.

Charles peered over the top of his novel. “It’s two columns of smoke now, quite distinct. Can’t be a ship on fire. Wish I could use the binoculars without being seen by the cameras on the cruise ship.”

Soon he could see mast, a heavy structure with a big lookout post on it and what looked like radio aerials above it. Then, fore and aft of it, he saw the two funnels, the slope of the columns of smoke showing the speed at which the ship was moving.

It wasn’t heading into the bay, it looked as if it was heading for the Howard. Slowly the grey hull emerged, long and low with a vertical bow and huge gun turrets. Charles remembered his history. “It’s a Dreadnought.” He said, without moving the book. “World war one vintage. They’ll be twelve-inch guns. Incredibly powerful.”

“If they were real.” Jenny added.

Charles lowered the book and looked around. The cruise ship was well across the bay, he could see that, as usual, its course would take it close to the Howard.

Picking up his binoculars he looked at it. The wing of the bridge was crowded with officers and they were all looking at the Dreadnought. Passengers were gathering on the upper decks, all looking at the threatening grey monster. He scanned across to the Howard. Men were running on the deck. The anchors were almost up.

Lowering the binoculars and without turning his head he looked across at the Dreadnought. He could see it clearly now. It had slowed down, broadside on to them. It had two gun turrets at either end and two more down the side. A column of steam rose from each of them and they were slowly turning. Turning towards the cruise ship. The huge gun barrels were also rising up.

Jenny's phone rang. She picked it up. "No Cindy, we're out on the terrace and can't see anything unusual." She listened to the reply, slowly shaking her head. "It's just as well, really, because if we could see it, we might be accused of causing it, whatever it is, and then we might be liable if there is an accident." There was a pause and then Jenny smiled. "Yes, no problem. If you're worried about it, just use the camera on your phone to look at it."

Suddenly a bright flash, strong enough to light up the bay. Followed by another. They both tried not to look up too quickly. More flashes and Charles saw the guns on the forward turret fire the last shells of the salvo. Fountains of water flew up about two hundred yards short of the cruise ship. It turned at full speed, away from the iron menace.

"Won't take them long to fix that and improve their aim." Charles said. "Well within range."

"If it was real, we would have heard it." Jenny passed Charles her phone. He briefly scanned the horizon with the camera and saw nothing.

The Dreadnought fired again. The great white ship shuddered when the shell hit it and then, for a few precious seconds, seemed to recover before the whole mid-section erupted in a mass of flames. Smoke came next, pouring out of the huge wound in the superstructure. Debris rained down into the water. The ship's siren sounded, short blasts over the silent sea.

The officers on the wing of the bridge all appeared to be watching the carnage happening just yards from them. Charles couldn't see any sign of them using cameras.

"He's moved it." Jenny said.

"Moved? Moved what?"

"Look." She passed him the phone again. The image on the screen showed the cruise ship undamaged but almost stationary. "It never turned and ran."

With one longer blast the siren fell silent. "Six short and one long." Charles said. They're going to abandon ship.

"That's real." Jenny said. "I can see the crew releasing the boats ready for lowering."

She scanned around with her phone. "The Howard. It's heading straight for them. Look with cameras, you fools."

Charles looked at the destroyer. He could see clearly into the bridge. Binoculars but no cameras. "Even night vision binoculars would do it."

[more description] The two ships had returned to their moorings. The cruise ship was back on the pier and the destroyer was back at its anchorage. But nothing else was the same as before. The bow of the destroyer looked as if it had been crushed like an old beer can and the cruise ship had a large matching area where the side had been stove-in from the water line up to just below the promenade deck. The illusion had stopped just before the impact.

“That must have been the worst part for them.” Jenny said, replacing her wine glass on the low table. “Seeing it all when it was too late to stop. The moment of realisation. Realising you have been a complete idiot and watching your career fall apart in minutes.”

“I doubt that”. Charles replied. “That navy lot have a habit of running into things. You see it in the news at regular intervals, rammed a cargo ship or a dock somewhere. Might be their first cruise ship but they’ll probably just find the captain another destroyer to charge around in.”

The door bell rang. Cindy was laughing.

“We’ve got video”. Charles said as he showed her through, pleased to see that she had got away without her father. “It wobbles a bit where we passed the phone across and the audio will need deleting because it recorded what we were saying, but it shows the collision”.

“It was amazing.” Cindy said. “That old ship with the huge guns, it looked really evil. And the detail of the explosion. All the bits flying all over the place and burning. You could never make any video anything like as realistic. I can get your video on the evening news but one ship ramming another for no apparent reason is good for a laugh but nothing like what we saw.”

“Are you going to admit that you saw it?” Charles asked. “They will have listened to your call so it will be quite difficult to deny.”

“Won’t do me any harm. They can’t accuse me of having anything to do with the illusions because they started long before I got here.”

“I was wondering.” Jenny said. “Didn’t you say on your blog that when you were in Canada you smoked some cannabis? Could you just hint. Not admit anything illegal. Just hint?”

Cindy stopped to think for a minute. “You see it would imply that you can only see it if you have been smoking.” Jenny continued. “It would leave the cruise line with some explaining to do about their captain.”

“And the navy guy.” Cindy replied. “I’ll do it. It’ll give me a lot to talk about in my blogs until the video’s ready”.

“Video?”

“I’ve got the team working on it already. Re-create the illusion, same as before. I spoke to them as soon as it happened. They’re going to come here for a couple of days. If it’s ok could you spend some time putting them right on the details? Should be ready in three weeks.”

“What are you going to call it?” Jenny asked. “Video of the real thing filmed at the time or admit that it’s a simulation of what you saw. Given you claimed that the video of the Persia was real you might have to say it’s real but then you might have a problem explaining the three-week delay.”

Cindy just smiled. “Neither. I won’t call it anything. Nobody cares any more, they don’t believe any of it. You see a politician saying something on a news channel, how do you know it’s not a deep fake and they never actually said it.”

Looking at Jenny's phone they saw that as well as a clear shot of the collision her film also showed Cruncher near the edge of the frame looking intently out to sea.

"If it's ok, we'll clip that off for the news channels. I'd like to keep Cruncher exclusive to my blog." Cruncher looked up from where he had laid down on the sofa with his head on her lap.

A few minutes later the file had been uploaded and they were on their way down to Charles's yacht. At the beach they saw that the ferry man had taken a boatful of sightseers out to view the wrecks but an obliging yacht club member with a shallow draught cabin cruiser took them out to the boat.

First, they went to see the cruise ship. It had moored with the damaged side away from the pier.

"I guess they did that to try to stop too many people seeing it." Cindy said, getting her large camera out of its bag. "It'll actually make for better pictures because we can see the damage right down to the water line.

Moving through the cluster of small boats to draw closer to the ship; and ignoring the launch that was trying to keep them away, they saw the extent of the damage. While the hull had not been extensively breached, portholes had shattered, and some had been torn right out leaving gaping holes. Cindy and Charles climbed up onto the cabin top so they could look right into one of the lowest ones. The small cabin was ruined. Where the hull had been pushed in, the bunks had buckled and broken. A wardrobe had burst forwards off the wall spilling clothes all over the floor. Charles reached out to hold onto the ruptured steel plate around the hole and keep the boat steady. Suddenly the door facing them opened and a woman entered, stopping at the threshold when she saw Cindy and Charles just feet away.

"Sorry." Charles said. "Sorry to intrude."

The silence was broken when Cruncher appeared, looked at her, and gave a short playful bark. She started laughing. She said she was a waitress and had been spending her time trying to pacify diners who ended up with their dinners on their laps. [add to]

If the damage to the cruise liner was bad, the destroyer was worse.

"It's a miracle it didn't sink." Charles said, looking at the mangled mess of metal that was all that was left of the bow. "It must be about ten feet shorter than when it started."

A launch full of men with guns approached them and told them to move away. "What's your captain been smoking?" Jenny shouted back at them as they turned.

30 Local Elections

The result of the local elections landed like a bombshell. This was odd because, as Charles said, it was just like the Brexit referendum, anybody who thought about it should have seen it coming.

"The locals had been ignoring us expats for years." He pointed out, to anybody who would listen. "Welcoming the cruise ship was the final straw. If you ignore people for long enough, they will get up and bite you, even if they're going to hurt themselves as well." At this point he always

paused to explain that, in this case, unlike the referendum, the only people who were going to get hurt were the cruise line, who were going to have to pay up or leave.

The council had been delighted when the law was passed to make all foreign nationals seek special registration to remain in the country, which meant that they would pay more local taxes. They then ignored the chief magistrate when he told them about the court ruling that came through giving registered residents the right to vote in local elections.

"I keep telling them about the numbers that are registering but they just ignore me. To them, you expats are really nothing more than another group of migrants. I even spelled it out at one meeting and pointed out that there's almost as many of you as of them. Nobody can accuse me of not doing my duty to them."

"Once should be enough. We don't want them to wake up." Susan replied. Being English and a near neighbour, his wife was a frequent visitor to Charles and Jenny. Now they were all gathered in their living room.

"You certainly can't use 'take back control' as your tag line like they did in your referendum. That lot have been in control here for hundreds of years. Passed down from father to son. They can't imagine the idea of losing it."

"It was pretty meaningless back home." Charles replied. "We never had had much control. But it worked a treat. People liked to imagine a golden age when good people ran the country for them and could do anything they wanted. What we've got to do is to create the dream that if they win the election all their problems will be solved."

"How about 'Make the island great again'" Jenny suggested. "It worked before."

"I don't think it ever was great." Charles replied. "The US wasn't either. Funny how they all refer to a past that never was".

"How about 'Make the island friendly again'"

"It certainly never used to be that." The magistrate said. "There used to be regular gun fights over land disputes. Even worse when the first villas were built. Threw a hand grenade into a concrete mixer".

"Not a grain of truth in it then. Perfect for a tag line. 'Make the island friendly again' it is. Really nice ring to it."

The Facebook page had been the key to victory. Everybody knew that Freddie was running it but, because he used the proxy server, nobody could prove it. He started with the story that the councillors on the planning committee got ten thousand Euros each for approving the pier. This was at least plausible even if there was no proof. Stories about council proposals to ban dogs, close down the moorings in the bay and breed sharks in the swimming pools were denied rather than ignored, giving them credibility. Most of the electorate were already in the email group, but a single payment of 20,000 Euros to Facebook provided them with a complete list of island residents with addresses, interests and contact details so they could send targeted messages.

Charles surveyed the council chamber. It was on the first floor of the town hall, a plain room with bare white painted walls, and rows of wooden chairs, every one of which was now taken. The chairman and his deputy had slightly larger chairs and faced them at the front. It was easy to

distinguish the locals in the first three rows because the expats were all listening intently to earpieces plugged into their phones for their do-it-yourself simultaneous translation which was being provided by the chief magistrate who was just outside the door. Within half an hour of the opening of the meeting, Charles was the new chairman and Henry was his deputy. The former chairman walked slowly back to sit on Charles's vacant seat looking like a wounded dog. The first motion passed under the new regime was to hold the meetings in the English language.

Further business was complicated because, to satisfy everybody, two main promises had been made as part of the campaign: the first was to get the cruise line to pay a million Euros a year which would be used to repair all the potholes in the roads and the second was to stop the cruise ship coming to the island. A key part of the strategy had been to ensure that the two promises were never put together in the same message. Now that they had won control, they found that since approximately half of the expat councillors supported each idea and the locals opposed everything, they could not get majority support for any of the various proposals that were put forward.

It was obvious to Cruncher that something was badly wrong [show don't tell]. Charles sat staring out of the window while Jenny's gaze was fixed on an untouched cup of tea. He decided to try Jenny first, putting his head on her knee. She stroked his ear absently, never even looking away from the cup and saucer.

"You said everything would be wonderful if we won the election and took over the council. They're our oldest friends out here. Perhaps we should take all that money and go back home." In all the years he had never seen her cry, but he could imagine it now.

Charles never looked round; his eyes fixed on the huge white ship. "We'll find a compromise, something we can all agree."

"You went through all that. Henry and Margaret came up with all sorts of ideas; but you and the ghastly yacht club Commodore turned them all down without even hearing them out."

"When did he become ghastly? Come to think of it, when did I say everything would be wonderful? None of their plans included getting rid of that ship. Gone means gone."

He tried to carry on, but Cruncher started barking. Slogans wouldn't do. He ran around the room.

"Steady on old chap." Charles shouted. He ignored him.

Jenny was standing now. "What's go into him?". What's got into you, you two old fools? Falling out like this.

He stopped. They both sat down. Silence again. That cup of tea must be stone cold by now. Something must be done. He went to the patio door and barked again.

"But you were out only an hour ago. What has got into you? I suppose, if you want to." Charles opened the door.

He hated going out alone, but it had to be done. The road seemed to go on for ever. When they were in the car, they reached the turn up to the hill in minutes. He was sure he hadn't missed it. The heat was terrible in the direct sun. [more about heat] But he had got used to it. What was Jenny going on about going home? Back to the rain and snow? Awful.

The junction was in sight now. But it was uphill from now on and the road surface got pretty rough further up.

His paws were beginning to burn of the hot stones. Why were Charles and Jenny being so stupid? There had to be a solution, all they needed to do was to sit down and calmly talk about it. Just getting the council to vote again and again on the same ideas they turned down in the first place was ridiculous.

He heard a car coming. He could see it now in a cloud of dust. It was Freddie's Land Rover. He ran towards it, barking. It stopped just in front of him.

Freddie looked worried. "Cruncher, what on earth are you doing here?" What do you think I'm doing? Climbing up this dreadful hill to your villa just for the fun of it. Why do you have to live in such a ridiculous place?

Molly was out now. Running up to him, taking one look and trying to lick his coat into some sort of shape.

"Come on you two. Get in. I suppose I'm going to have to take Cruncher home."

The cup of cold tea was still on the table. They hadn't even noticed he had gone. Molly looked at him in alarm. Seeing him go to Jenny she went to Charles who flinched at first but then pattered her head.

"What on earth happened?" [more doggy] Freddie asked. "I didn't bother going to the council meeting because I knew it would end up in a mess. But surely you haven't all fallen out?" He looked at Charles and Jenny and sat on an upright chair by the writing table.

"It was really bad." Charles said finally. "We papered over the cracks for the election, but it couldn't last. We even discussed trying to get the ship to move to those cliffs on the West side."

"It's pretty obvious it wouldn't go there." Freddie said. "Cost a fortune just to make a road let alone a new pier."

"Yes, we all knew that. That's the point. That's how desperate we were. Nobody lives there so it was something we could all agree on".

"Everybody was saying they'd been cheated." Jenny said. "That we told lies during the election."

"Well, let's be honest and say a few people were a bit economical with the truth." Freddie replied.

Jenny and Charles both looked round and glowered at him. Cruncher put a paw on Jenny's lap and Molly tried to move closer to Charles only to find him backing away.

"I'll be honest myself. All I wanted was regime change. The old council was corrupt and useless. I don't actually care whether the ship goes or not provided they stop trying to buy the council."

"I think I'll resign as chairman." Charles said. "A neutral chair would be much better"

"So much for your new career as chair of the council." Jenny said. "Over before I even got a chance to announce it to my friends on Facebook and say how proud I was."

“Let’s have a drink.” Freddie suggested. Cruncher and Molly looked up hopefully.

31 New Chairman

Cindy walked up the neat garden path to the front door of the bungalow. Looking around she saw that, while it didn’t have a sea view, it was in a pleasant enough road with mature pine trees shading the gardens. The door was opened by a neatly dressed elderly lady who showed her through to the neat little lounge.

The colonel stood to greet her and helped her arrange the camera for the interview. She turned to speak directly to it.

“I have been asked to do interviews with the candidates for chairman of the island council. I’m sure you all know the colonel.”

Turning back to face him she was presented with a broad smile positively curling up the edges of his flowing moustache. Without any further prompting he gave a detailed explanation of how the cruise line would be given just a week’s notice to stop coming and the pier would be blown up with explosives.

“What about paying for it?” Cindy asked. “The agreement they have is that if we stop them coming, we must pay for the pier. That’s a million euros.”

“It’s all a matter of how you negotiate.” He was looking straight at the camera. “Never give an inch. Our trouble is that we’re too soft with people. Blow it up. Then they can’t come any more can they? If they ask for money, just tell them to clear off.”

Cindy glanced to the side and saw Mrs Colonel looking as if she might start cheering.

“Wouldn’t it be a bit of a waste?” Cindy asked. “We could use that pier for the ferry. It would be much better than the old one.”

“No. We don’t want a better pier for all the foreigners to come here.”

There was a sudden silence. “I think he meant strangers.” Mrs Colonel suggested.

The next candidate was to be found in his shop. He sold all kinds of artworks ranging from cards to framed pictures and carvings, all advertised as original works of local artists. His long hair and beard hung down over his T shirt.

Starting the interview, she quickly found out that he liked the cruise passengers coming and sold the lots of pictures.

She read out from one of the election leaflets which had the headline “Stop the cruise ship” in bold red text.

“Yes, I didn’t use that one”. He explained. “I did some of my own.” He looked in a drawer and found a small leaflet saying “Stop the waste. Save the environment.”. “If I become chairman, I’ll stop them burning their toxic fuel near our island. I read a thing saying other islands have done it.”

“It’s European legislation.” She replied. “They can’t use the high sulphur fuel near here anyway.”

He looked puzzled. "Well, I'll make sure they don't".

Her next destination was the golf club bar. The room was packed, all gathered round the two chairs they had set up. The candidate was a large man whose club tie hung down over a spreading waist.

"Do you know how much it costs to get my car fixed when the wheels get damaged?" He said, leaning towards her as best he could. "We need to get the roads fixed. I have to drive really slowly all the time. It's an urgent matter and the cruise company have said they might help out."

Cindy looked out at the car park full of Jaguars, Mercedes and even one or two Lambourghinis. She had arrived in her old Land Rover.

"How long does it take you to drive from one end of the island to the other?"

He looked puzzled. "About 20 minutes I suppose."

"How much quicker would it be if the potholes were fixed?"

Her last interview was in a brightly painted villa high on a hillside looking out over the sea. The cruise ship was right in the middle of the view. "What we need to do." He explained. "Is to get the hermit to make it disappear."

"But his illusions only work when he's out there making them. He wouldn't sit there all day doing them."

"How do we know?" He smiled. "How do we know anything about him. Perhaps he could make it disappear in a puff of smoke." He looked vacantly out to sea.

Charles and Henry sat side by side as the Chairman and deputy to preside over the session to elect Charles's replacement. Each candidate was given a chance to speak. Charles found himself having to concentrate to make sure he had his microphone switched on when trying to cut short the rambling and incoherent responses to some of the questions but switched off when quietly exchanging less than complimentary comments [examples?] with Henry. A limited number of members of the public had been admitted to the back of the hall and they showed no such restraint. The four candidates could clearly be heard being described as "Colonel blimp", "Hug a husky", "Pothole man" and "Psychedelic Charlie".

"We should now proceed to a vote." Charles finally announced. "The vote will be taken by show of hands and each member may only vote for one candidate."

"Do we really have to vote for one of them?" Charles didn't see who asked the question and wondered if they had deliberately kept their face hidden. He turned to Henry. "Any ideas? I guess not."

"Are you prepared to vote for any of them? Think of it. A casting vote from the chair appointing one of that lot."

He turned the microphone back on. "No, you are not obliged to vote."

There was a silence. Everybody was looking at Charles. Suddenly Freddie stood up. "Yes." Charles said tentatively.

Freddie said that he was putting himself forward as a candidate. There were objections that he had not entered in time, but he dismissed them by saying that if he could not stand, he would try to get a second vote as soon as the new chair was appointed. Then, without asking for permission from the Chair he addressed the meeting to explain what he would do if elected.

He was not an especially large man, but he dominated the room. When describing the corruption of the previous council he raised his voice just enough to show his passion for transparency and honesty. One of the old councillors started to stand to object but before he was out of his chair Freddie was pointing at him and shouting out allegations of bribes. He was down again. Freddie continued with his plan for the pier, quieter now but still passionate. The ship could be moored end on, he said. That way it would hardly block the view at all. He had apparently already discussed it with the cruise line, and they would pay for moving the mooring dolphins and even help them pay to improve the roads. As he finished speaking the councillors applauded and he was quickly elected. His first act as chair was to close the meeting. All other business would be considered at a later date.

Jenny waited until Charles and Henry were comfortably seated with the cups of tea and cakes that she had made for them before she started. "You complete baffoons, the lot of you. You fell for him. We could see it coming when he had hardly started. You were sitting there like donkeys, completely mesmerised by him."

"Jenny, really." Charles replied. "He seemed ok to me."

"You didn't ask him a single question. Were you worried you'd get told off like the old bloke who got accused of taking bribes?"

"Why should I? I never take bribes."

"Neither did he most likely." She looked across at Margaret who was staring at her, wide eyed. "Come on Maggie, back me up. You were laughing at them as well."

"Well you did rather resemble a flock of big woollies." She said quietly.

Henry froze, teacup in hand. "Us, sheep? Margaret, what are you saying?"

"Yes sheep." Jenny repeated. "Getting fleeced out of everything you won in the election."

"I don't get this." Charles said. "What is it we did wrong?"

"Let's start with the pier. His great compromise. Why do you think the cruise company have offered to pay to change it?"

Charles looked across at Henry. "I suppose."

"Yes, you suppose you've remembered now. A T shaped pier can take one ship across the top but how many can you fit onto either side of a pier that sticks straight out? That was why the old council insisted on the T shape. Slipped your minds in the excitement of the moment?"

"But the other candidates would never have got anything done. You saw them."

"Perhaps nothing could be done." Margaret said. "Perhaps it was all best left the way it was. Perhaps none of the plans would have worked."

“And what else do you think Freddie is likely to do.” Jenny went on. “Has he suggested discussing his plans with you, Henry?. You are his deputy chair.”

“I’m sure he will.” Henry replied. “He’s only just been elected. He’s a very reasonable man”

“Obviously some people didn’t find him reasonable. You don’t end up covered in scars like he’s got if everybody finds you reasonable. The man looks as if he’s been used for target practice. I dread to think what happened to the people who did it.”

Charles looked browbeaten. Cruncher went over to him and placed his head on his lap. Jenny went on.

“Does anybody actually know what he does for a living? Isn’t he supposed to be a mercenary soldier? Find him on Google under revolutions for sale. Perhaps we just got the economy version, twenty minutes of barely coherent rhetoric and job done.”

32 Dogs and hermit.

Cruncher saw Molly come around to the big glass patio doors.

“Oh look. Here’s Molly come to play.” Jenny said. “I’ll let you out.”

Wasting no time, Molly led the way out to the road and on up the hill. Cruncher had known for weeks that something was seriously wrong and from Molly’s expression he could see that it had come to a head. He was glad to have Nipper with him.

Halfway up the track to Freddie’s villa they turned off onto a path through the rocks. He had been expecting this. It was the short-cut to the hermit’s cave.

Cruncher saw it as a matter of courtesy, something to make them feel comfortable. It obviously wasn’t real because he still smelt like a man and not a very clean one at that, but it was nice of him to look like an old saint Bernard for them. And when they all sat down together, he may have sounded a bit like a man, but you could understand all of it, not just the usual fragments, and he could understand you.

“I don’t understand what’s gone wrong.” Molly said.[doggy – tail] “We all knew that Freddie was different when he was away working but here on the island he was always relaxed and friendly. Now all his old friends are falling out with him.”

“Had a dreadful row with Charles.” Cruncher said. “About this thing he’s planning for the cruise people. Henry was there too, but Freddie ignores him.”

“He gets really scary.” Nipper added. “Charles kept asking something about the council and Freddie looked as if he was going to jump up and attack him.”

The hermit listened in silence. They could hear crickets and songbirds in the scrub and boulders of the mountainside. He had hidden all signs of his little front room that Freddie had built for him outside the cave, but Cruncher could still smell the human-ness of it as they sat close under the rock face to keep out of the afternoon sun. From this height they could see the whole valley spread out below them. In the bay there were two cruise ships either side of the re-modelled pier. Further round the new by-pass stood out as a straight line across the undulating landscape.

“Freddie is a man of action, not a politician.” The hermit began slowly. “When you think about it, he has solved all the problems. The ships don’t block the view any more, the coaches don’t go through the town and he’s had the potholes fixed. When the council kept asking lots of questions and delaying decisions, he just stopped having council meetings. He’s actually quite right when he says that old Carlos used to run things that way when he was chairman.”

“Why did Charles call him a thief?” Cruncher asked.

“Because he quite probably is one.” The hermit replied, standing slowly and shaking out his long shaggy coat. Cruncher couldn’t help wondering how he had chosen to be seen as a dog with so much hair in the oppressive heat. “He’s very jealous of all the money Cruncher has made for Charles just because he’s a poodle but none of the advertisers are interested in Molly.”

“Doesn’t bother me.” Molly said. “What would he do with it if he had it? Doesn’t seem to have made Charles and Jenny very happy.”

“I don’t care about money either.” The hermit added. “I can find what I need to live on here on the mountain. But Freddie clearly does, and everybody knows it. Owning about six villas is not enough for him. To make things worse he’s very secretive, particularly about this new shopping centre he’s planning with the cruise line.”

“What are we going to do?” Nipper asked. “We can’t go on like this.”

“I think that everybody should be very careful.” The hermit said. “If Charles and Henry are dreaming up some plan to try to remove him as Chairman then they should stop now.”

“Freddie has lots of supporters who come up here to see him.” Molly said. “He talks to them the way he spoke at the meeting. The sit and listen to every word.”

“I have been here a very long time.” The hermit said. “And I have seen nothing more dangerous than somebody who thinks that they are a man of the people.”

Suddenly Molly stood up. “That’s him, I can recognise the sound of his Landrover anywhere. He’s just turning up the track. He gets really paranoid if he gets back and finds I’m no there.”

Cruncher and Nipper left soon after. As they reached the first turn in the track Cruncher glanced back. He saw the old man with his long grey beard sitting outside his oddly neat front door that Freddie had built for him somehow looking even more hunched than normal.

33 The lolanda

“Look at that. What on earth is the hermit doing this time?” Charles stood back as Jenny went up to the window. The ship seemed to glide across the calm sea without disturbing it. It had two tall masts and a large funnel mid-way between them. Schooner sails were set from both masts.

“She’s a real beauty, but what’s she going to do.” He looked out with the binoculars. “Look at the fine curve of the bow and the balancing fan-tail stern. I think I can get the name. lolanda. Never heard of it. Surely, she’s not going to pretend to ram the cruise ship. It’s not due to move off the pier for hours.”

“Don’t Google it.” Jenny said. “Remember what happened with the Persia.” She held up her phone. “Hold on. I can see it with the camera. I think it’s real.”

“Not much smoke from the funnel.” Charles replied. “Can’t have her original machinery. If she was burning coal, she’d be putting out clouds of it at that speed.”

The phone rang. “I’m sure it’s real.” Cindy said. “I’ve Googled it. Do you know what? It’s for sale and I really really love it.”

“Looks like it’s heading for the pier.” Charles said. There was one cruise ship at the pier, but the other side was clear.

They parked Cindy’s Land Rover opposite the line of coaches. Passengers who had done the morning tour of the island were flooding out of them to form a huge queue to go along the pier. Cruncher led the way as they joined the back of it. A security guard approached them.

“No dogs on the ship.” He said.

“We’re guest of the Iolanda.” Cindy replied. Cruncher looked at him and bared his teeth.

“Are you not cruise passengers? I’ve not been told to let anybody through to that thing. Wait here.”

Just then a young girl near them cried out “Look, It’s Cindy and Cruncher. I knew we’d see them on their island. Can I have a selfie.”

“Of course. Let’s move up a bit so you get a clear shot of your ship in the background.”

The guard looked on helplessly and the crowd around Cindy grew as it moved up the pier stopping every few yards for selfies. He was so transfixed by the scene that he didn’t even notice Cruncher running up to him and raising his leg. By the time they reached the gangway for the Iolanda at least fifty girls were all calling out to Cindy. Stepping onto the deck she turned, waved and smiled at them. Cruncher looked out below the rail barking and waving his head from side to side so his ears flapped up.

A young man in jeans and a T shirt walked up to them. “Hi. You seem to be popular with the girls down there. Are you new passengers?”

“No. We just wondered if we could have a look round.”

“Shouldn’t be a problem. Thinking of chartering it or buying it?”

“Buying.” Cindy replied.

He looked round at her. “Right. I’ll go find the boss.”

Charles looked around. The deck was planked and looked clean, if a little worn. The handrail looked in need of some fresh varnish but was sound enough. On the other side of the gangway the brightwork around the windows was partly sheltered and looked better. Glancing in through the windows he saw what looked like a lounge. He heard distant shouting and saw the guard waving his fists in the air while a small group of elderly tourists looked on in evident bemusement.

The boss soon arrived, wearing uniform, and introduced himself as the first officer. Cindy quickly explained that she knew nothing about the ship other than seeing it come into the bay.

“She’s a lovely ship.” He replied. “And, given her condition she’s a bargain. I’ve served on her for 20 years including the rebuild in Shanghai. They totally re-plated the hull and fitted modern engines. We can now run her with a sea-crew of just five, which is really good for a 300 foot vessel. She’s been out for charter for five years now and the owner has lost interest and decided to sell up.”

They went inside. The room was a good size with a carved mahogany staircase leading up and down. “Is this all original?” Cindy asked.

“Yes, all the interior is original from 1908. It all escaped being modernised except the kitchens and bathrooms.”

Cruncher sniffed the carpet, wagged his tail and looked up at Cindy. They went through to the lounge and saw the opulent but faded décor. Faded photographs in gilt frames showed men in blazers on the decks while others showed the magical sight of the ship at sea that they had seen for themselves.

There were ten main staterooms, all with the same [beautiful – describe. Bronze castings. Mermaid in shape of I] fittings. “She was built with 14. They sacrificed four of them to make bathrooms.” He said. “Bit of a shame but they had to do it.”

In the dining saloon Cindy sat down on a velvet upholstered chair at the head of a vast oval table with a polished wood surface. The walls were oak panelling with more gilt framed photographs, this time showing ancient naval fleets. “I hate dinner parties.” She said. “But I would love to have one here.”

The engine room was vast, brightly lit, and spotlessly clean. “Had two big triple expansion steam engines and four boilers in here. They had long gone before I arrived. Those two new diesels look a bit lost but they’re quite enough to push her along at 19 knots with her fine lines.”

Back in the car Cindy was even more enthusiastic. “It’s got such an incredible atmosphere. It would be great for filming, wouldn’t it, Cruncher?”

“I’ve got an old school-friend who worked on yachts for years.” Charles said. “I’ll see what he thinks.”

Just four weeks later Cindy followed the advice of Charles’s friend and bought the yacht. He said that he knew it and its captain well, the refit had been excellent because the owner also owned the shipyard, and it was selling cheap because the mega-rich all wanted modern yachts. Cindy found that the cruise line were happy for it to be moored on the pier for most of the time except when the second ship was due in. Whenever one moored on the other side of the pier, they gave a long description of the yacht and its owner over the public address system.

Cruncher and Molly would visit when the big ships were gone and the Iolanda’s crew let them roam freely around and take ownership of the decks.

34. Trouble on the Island

They were massive, tall and heavy with muscle. They all wore khaki shorts and T shirts. There were six of them and the council room fell silent when they walked in behind Freddie.

“Who the hell are they?” Henry whispered to Charles.

“Let’s think of them as stormtroopers.”

Seeing that the committee members had decided not to take the chairs on the dais facing the other councillors, the guards went to them and sat down on either side of the small table in the centre where Freddie put the folder he was carrying.

“So much for that as a gesture. Empty chairs to either side to protest about him never consulting his committee. I think they’re the committee now.”

Freddie stood, smiling at his audience. His welcome was effusive. Carefully seeking eye contact with each of the councillors he went on to apologise for the long delay in calling the meeting.

“We want a vote” somebody called out. “A vote for a new chairman”.

A short silence.

Freddie looked round at his companions who seemed to be rising from their seats. But then he gave them copies of the agenda to hand out. One of them lumbered up to Charles proffering a rather crumpled sheet of paper. Leaning forward a deep scar was visible starting on the side of his neck and disappearing beneath the collar of his shirt. Cruncher growled but he did not react at all.

The agenda only had two main items on it: Chairman’s address and appointment of committees. Freddie read out the lengthy address from sheets that Charles could see were neatly printed in a large font. It was a detailed and glowing description of the work that had been carried out. When he described the new bypass, people started heckling him. He stopped. His minders slowly rose to their feet. “It is customary.” He said slowly. “For councillors to wait until the end of the address before asking questions.”

“So, tell us how it got planning permission when there was no planning committee.” Charles couldn’t see who it was calling out. “Tell us how you got the land from the farmers.” This was a different voice.

Two of the big men started walking towards the back of the room, the noise of their heavy boots on the wooden floor sounding loud in the silence. Freddie continued with his address.

Finally, he called for questions, asking councillors to state their names when starting to speak.

“You never had permission to take the land.”

“The road passes over low grade scrub land and enabled us to make a lovely traffic free centre in the town.”

“But in a democracy, you need permission.” The audience clapped.

“Who are you?” Freddie shouted back. “A rabble rouser trying to stop the first real progress seen here in years?” He looked around as if hoping for some applause of his own. None came. “If you had checked your facts you would know that we did have permission from the regional council.”

“The regional council?” Henry asked quietly.

“I wonder what he did to get them on side.” Charles replied. “They’re always talking about devolving decisions down to the island councils, not picking them up.”

Charles stood outside the tall glass façade looking in at the groups of smartly dressed young people gathered in the foyer.

“You wanted to come here.” Jenny said. “You made the appointment, so we’d better go in.”

The receptionist looked across the gleaming black marble counter and only just managed to maintain her artificial smile when Charles told her who his appointment was with and appeared to be planning to take the dog with him. When asking them to take the lift to the twenty first floor she kept glancing down at him as if hoping that she would suddenly find that Cruncher wasn’t there after all.

The chairman of the regional council was a large man with weathered features and a long grey moustache. He looked to Charles as if he had spent much of his life farming the land or sailing a fishing boat but, at the same time, he seemed comfortable in his suit and tie with his large office with a panoramic view across the bay.

“Freddie told me all about you.” He said in perfect English. “How you got all the people to register to vote and brought real change to the island council.”

“Yes, we had great hopes.” Charles replied.

“It all seems to have worked out perfectly.” He beamed to them to join him at a small group of leather armchairs near the windows. He leant down to pat Cruncher’s head. “He told me all about how you’ve become such a star.”

Charles took a chair facing him across the low table. “He’s intimidated all the councillors with those bodyguards he has.”

“I’m sure he hasn’t meant to. He needs the guards to protect himself from the migrant menace.”

“Migrant menace?” Jenny asked. “Do you know what happened to those young men who were keeping the beach clean. They said they were Eritreans. They worked really hard for very low pay and kept it immaculate. The one day they just disappeared.”

“They threaten us all.” The man said, pausing to drink from one of the coffee cups that had appeared out of nowhere. “We need strong people like Freddie to protect us and rid us of the menace.”

“They are humans just like us.” Charles replied quickly.

He put down his cup and leaned forwards focussing directly on Charles. “Freddie has not only delivered many visible benefits such as his new road and pier, he has supported the war against migrants and drugs.”

“War? What do you mean?”

“You should be careful. Freddie told me how you bought your villa from a drug smuggler. You could be investigated. Where did all that gold come from? And what about the chaos with the strange boats appearing in the bay in front of your house. The Americans think you had a part in it. You be careful. Very careful. “

Charles felt good after his round of golf. Henry had been asking him for some time to come and enjoy the course right outside his villa and it gave them time to have a chat about what was happening on the island. With no cruise ships in for the day the only other people on the course were a few regulars who joined them and Jenny and Margaret in the clubhouse bar. Cruncher had enjoyed the walk and then consumed a whole packet of his favourite cheese and onion crisps.

The ride home was much easier since Freddie had had the potholes fixed so they were soon passing the turn off that went up the hill to his farmhouse.

“What on earth?” Charles braked sharply. Molly was standing in the middle of the road.

He edged forwards but she would not move. Opening his door Cruncher jumped right over him and out to join Molly. He walked round and tried to reach for Molly’s collar, but Cruncher bowled into him.

“They really don’t want us to go that way.” Jenny said.

They drove a short distance up the track to a point where that could look down at their villa. A large black car was parked in the driveway and a very large man dressed in khaki was standing by the door. Looking around they could see another car outside the gate to Cindy’s villa. [explain that these are Freddie’s men]

They phoned Cindy. She was on the *Iolanda* which was moored up on the jetty.

“We’re all here.” She replied. “Only my dad at the villa. I’ll call him, but I don’t think he’ll be bothered. I think he gets along ok with Freddie.”

The track was just passable if they drove with care. It curved around the hillside until it met the road which had been made to bring rock down for the new bypass. This was in rather better condition and soon they were on the bypass leading directly to the pier. Cindy was at the gangway to greet them.

“We’re going to have to sail soon.” She said.

“Where to?” Jenny asked. “We haven’t got anything with us.”

Henry and Margaret’s car suddenly appeared, driving at speed into the car park. They did their best to run along the pier. “They’re just behind us.” Henry said as he ran towards them. “Three of those black cars. I’m sure I saw guns.”

They were already casting off the mooring lines when Molly appeared at the end of the pier. Charles called out to her, but she kept up her slow steady pace. The crew just managed to keep the gangway in place for her to walk up it.

“What’s going on?” the crewman said. “We wait for a dog, but I can hear footsteps as if it’s a man.” [explain that this is the hermit]

“Don’t worry about it.” Charles replied as he turned to follow Molly across the deck.

Jenny followed. They could hear the footsteps quite clearly as they climbed up the companionway. "I just about saw him just then." She said quietly as they crossed the open deck. "Just a shimmer."

They approached a small wooden structure located just behind the wheelhouse. Molly went up to the door and it seemed to open itself.

"It's the radio shack." Charles said. "The early radios made lots of sparks and noise, so they kept them away from things. The radio officer had to stay in it for hours and hours."

Looking inside they saw a desk and a chair and a small cot bed. Just as they were turning to leave, they glimpsed the old man with his grey beard sitting in the chair, smiling, and patting Molly."

"I'll make sure the galley sends up plenty of food." Charles said.

"Thank you. I don't need much." Was the softly spoken reply.