

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Hathrac, and for the story Unremembered Loss.

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I entered a short story contest this month - don't know if I won yet. 500 to 750 words, a waterfront location, planning can lead to success or a desire to escape, inner conflict: someone does not want to be there, and a camouflaged villain, a mask, or a disguise. To get future copies of the newsletter, sign up at www.douglasclarke.com/lists/?p=subscribe

Better Alone

by Douglas G. Clarke

The water lapped her legs with each wave. Her back rose and fell slowly with each painful breath, refuting the look of her body - black and blue from head to toe with deep lines of red and black crisscrossing it - which declared her dead. In her hand she still grasped a black diving mask, contrasting with the white of her underwear. In the distance, a siren grew steadily louder giving her the hope need to take another breath.

The coral ripped across her back as another wave pounded her against its barley concealed knives. She struggled to lift herself, to let the waves push her past this obstacle to the beach beyond. A mighty wave struck her. She flew across the reef as it shredded her. Head spinning from the pain, she swam with all her strength towards the sound of the breaking waves, only to find herself thrown against the rocks. Three, four, five times her body was smashed against the rocks. Her world went black.

The hours had passed slowly as Martha struggled to stay afloat. When she heard the sound of the surf pounding the shore through the darkness she would swim towards it. Otherwise she floated on her back - her thoughts haunted with the vision of the man's eyes staring at her through his black plastic mask. Eyes that seemed to radiate his hatred - dark and blood-shot, unblinking. She tried to think of something else, but those eyes kept returning.

Martha's world went black as she was dragged down into the sea. A hand grasped her left ankle like a vice and pulled with unyielding force. Her arms stroked in a vain attempt to stop her decent. Her lungs burned as if she had swallowed fire. Still she descended. In her panic, she bent her legs in an attempt to find a footing on her assailant from which she could jump. Instead her other leg was captured. Somehow she managed to reach downward and grasp one of her attacker's arms, then her hand found his face and his mask. With a desperate pull, she ripped it from his face and was rewarded with freedom. The surface of the water seemed to take forever to come, but finally her head burst forth and air rushed into her hungry lungs.

Flare gun in hand, Martha climbed the stairs onto the deck. Seeing no one she headed for her diving gear at the stern of the boat. She decided that her only hope was to swim for shore. She slipped out of her pants and blouse and was pulling on the left leg of her wet-suit when she felt her tank crash into her back. She tumbled overboard - pain shooting through her shoulder and arm. Moments later she heard someone else splash into the sea behind her.

As Frank prepared the diving gear, Martha descended the stairs into the cabin to talk with the captain. She froze. The captain leaned against the wheel. She wondered for only a moment if he was drunk. That thought

died when she noticed the pool of blood forming by his feet. She held the scream that wanted to explode from her in an uncertain check. She grabbed the radio microphone, finding its cord had been cut - the captain's keys were missing.

The ride out to the dive site had been pleasant. The sea was calm, the reefs beautiful, and the dolphins playful. Martha had sat on the bow of the small boat enjoying the sea mist blowing against her face. The anchor's chain rattled as it fell from the boat, sending jolts of energy up Martha's spine. Frank climbed out of the cabin, looking like a shark with legs. No skin showed - only the black of his wet-suit - not even his face which was covered by a thick black beard and a diving mask. The only thing she could see were his eyes - dark and unmoving.

Martha filed the trip plan with the harbor master. She had already obtained the salvaging permit she needed and had contacted the local museum about purchasing any artifacts she brought up. She had also chartered a boat and hired a local diver to help her. With signed papers in hand, she headed for her ship and the dive she had been planning for three years. A doubt gnawed at the back of her mind - what of the others who were looking for the same wreck as she.