Flash Fiction Competition 2012

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Yon Cauld Dirty Harbour by Martin Osler

‘Ah tell ye ah fair jumped when the twa beings in their get up came doon the wharf wi yon outlandish bubble hats wi a wee windae tae peer oot an big metal ears an huge swollen rubber bodies. Twa beings fae oot of space come doon tae earth tae snatch humans fir experiments back on some far aff planet.

‘Yin gadgie fae the longshoreman’s office brought the beings doon tae the dock an they wis helped into a wee boat wi aw kinds of new fangled equipment. There wis rubber tubes fir them tae breath through an ropes tae attach them tae the boat so they cud be pulled oot the watter.

‘Ah stood on the side agin the railings an smoked while the beings got the breathing hose attached an talked in ghostly tones aboot whae wis gaun in first. A photographer from the P and J wis there hiding behind yon black curtain an ducking oot frae time tae time tae tell someone tae staund still or another tae move tae the left a bit.

‘Ma hauns were turning blue but it wis something ye didnae see every day. Yon Detective Chief Inspector Percival was brought alongside in another boat wi Broon like a bluidy admiral at the helm an auld Bob keeping it steady. Another polis had a small telephone in a box roond his neck makin calls tae headquarters aboot progress.

‘The watter was murky as a drinking howff and some loon rigged up a lantern on ropes above as if that wis gaun tae help the beings dae their work. Anyhoo, the first being was helped intae the watter an Percival pointed to a spot an the being moved towards it and like a bulbous seal slipped doon intae the murk.

‘Ach, they wis at it fur hoors. Ah gave in eventually mostly on account of ma hauns. They never foond the wee lassie. It maks me shiver tae think whit it must huv been like fur her in yon cauld, dirty harbour.’
Heavy Footers by Elizabeth Joan Howliston

It rained hard that morning after a raw night. The harbour walls were finished, but the work to the wooden quay was slow because of the weather. The improvements meant that larger vessels, once over the bar, could come safely into a good depth of water. The last timbers were going in as sleet whistled into the bay. Bosses are well dressed buggers with big ideas and smart shoes, he was no different. It had to be done he said, never mind the full moon and filthy weather. Winter dives are tricky, but Jim was calm and proud, wanted to show ‘Mr haven’t a bloody clue’, just how good we were. I wasn’t worried. Speed is folly in this line, and Jim wasn’t going to be rushed.

The cold cuts right into the folds of the suit, it feels like a knife in the flesh, makes your head bang a bit until you are underwater. Then silence closes over, and warmth like you’ve wet yourself creeps up the body. It’s best not to think and feel. War hero Jim was, one of the first submariners, no way to treat a war veteran, a real heavy footer. They piled rubbish from the harbour works near the quay, supposed to have taken it away, but they were cutting corners. Jim taught me everything I know, rescued me screaming once. I remember he looked at me, his eyes said, silly bugger, calm down, watch me, and do what I do. He put me in the boots, taught me to walk the suit, manage the currents.

That’s me on the right watching Jim, you watched him close if you had any sense. He was always first in, I looked after his lines, checked the pump before joining him in the water. I saw his airline free and clear, watched him safely down. He had begun to trust me, we looked out for each other. Guilt is a terrible thing, he always said accidents happen, just not on his watch. He said, ‘if I get it Rob, cut the hose, don’t leave me down there with the air running out’. We always checked the suit and lines but he couldn’t have known the bloody great boiler would come down, sinking into the rubbish him pinned under it.

They said he wouldn’t have felt anything rammed down by the weight, they kept the air supply going, then I went down, he was struggling. I remembered, he said, ‘don’t leave me Rob; if I’m running out of air, don’t leave me’, so I didn’t. I looked into his eyes and cut it. He held my hand, then let go, it was quick. Like I said, I always looked after his airline. I hate this photo, but I’ve kept it because I like to see his lines free and clear. I can hear his voice now, ‘keep the lines free and clear Rob, free and clear’.
“Look again.” He urged, “The man at the back with the umbrella.”

Jemma pouted a bit, “You’re mad!” she said, “It’s just an old photo. This is boring; let’s go!”

Later, after he’d left her at the bus stop, he bought some chips and stood eating them, trying not to think about the man with the umbrella… the man with no face. It was getting late now, but across the street the lights were still on in the library. He stuffed his half eaten chips safely into his jacket; he had to take one more look before the library closed or he’d be thinking about it all night.

“Five minutes till closing time,” the librarian warned. Jamie nodded, moving quickly past her desk, through the quiet aisles to the photo display that mapped the town’s march through time in sepias and greys. There was a little rope up in front. He stuffed his half eaten chips safely into his jacket; he had to take one more look before the library closed or he’d be thinking about it all night.

The librarian sighed, five minutes had come and gone and there was still no sign of the boy. Outside the autumn evening was closing in quickly and she wanted to get home. She called out again… nothing. It was so annoying when they did this, thinking it funny to hide in the library and force her to hunt them out. She turned off the lights and waited by the door. That usually worked, no-one wants to spend the night in a dark empty library, but there was no sudden squeak of panic from the shadows. No running feet or anxious calls. Nothing.

She turned the lights back on and for a moment, in the sudden bright arctic silence, something felt so very wrong that she wanted to lock the doors and run for home, but the sensible side of her knew that would not do. She started a methodical search of the library, her heart pounding with each empty aisle she looked down. Then she saw it, a small huddled thing on the floor by the photo display. It was a box of scattered chips. She cursed softly as she picked up the mess before reaching across to straighten a tilted photo.

Her hand instinctively clenched the frame as she noticed… She blinked and looked again, but the boy with the umbrella, that she’d sworn she’d seen waving madly, was just another person frozen in time. His face looked strangely familiar, she had no idea why and that bothered her. She stepped away. Never mind, it had been a long day and her eyes were as tired as her feet.

Tomorrow she’d look again.
All that he could see by Shane Strachan

As stationary as possible, The Amber Lady rests on the coarse North Sea by the Dunbar oil platform, her orange hull stark against the slate-grey water. At a cost of over a hundred thousand pounds per day, of the ninety-five members of crew onboard – captains, navigators, technicians, I.T. experts, divers, chefs and cleaners among them – the majority monitor the progress of the vessel's two diving bells. One of them currently sits on the seabed two-hundred-and-sixty feet below the surface. Snaking out from the white diving bell is a thin, umbilical pipe through which air and heat is pumped into the diving suit of a man named David.

David is connecting one of several pipelines that carry some of the three million barrels of oil produced in the North Sea per day up above sea level to be refined and sold as fuel the world round.

When he first started commercial diving several years ago, David would fumble with the equipment in the chubby grip of his thick gloves; now he works away dexterously, sparks of light shooting out the tip of his welder as he solders the pipes in place. He looks up from his task at the surrounding sea through the thick glass plate in his helmet: it's like staring into a fishbowl up close; his torchlight scans the murky depths where small shoals of fish glide lazily between the legs of the rig.

Looking back down at his hands, he goes into autopilot and forgets himself. He thinks back to school and remembers standing in the music classroom doing actions with his arms as he sang a song. He can remember the tune: da-dum ditty dum-dum-dum, da-dum ditty dum-dum ditty dee. When the words come back to him, he starts singing aloud, his voice high-pitched from the oxygen, nitrogen and helium mix pumped into his suit.

Hundreds of feet above the seabed, in the control room of The Amber Lady, a crewmember places the vessel’s Tannoy microphone against the diving bell speaker, and all through the ship, David’s voice can be heard singing,

Oh blow the winds owre the ocean
and blow the winds owre the sea
Oh blow the winds owre the ocean
and bring back my Bonnie to me.

Two male chefs arguing over who is to blame for burning chicken pies stop barking at each other. They look up at the speaker to listen more intently to its alien sound:

Bring back, bring back,
bring back my Bonnie, to me, to me.
Bring back, bring back,
bring back my Bonnie to me.

There is a coughing noise and the singing stops. The kitchen is silent. The chefs glance at one another: they suppress a smile and face away. Each chef takes half of the burnt pies and throws them in the bin, then they sprinkle flour on their worktops to start anew.
Back Hame! by Norman Ferguson

Back Hame!
(The Gazette, 12 November 1900)

Yesterday saw the most excitement the city has seen for many a year. At exactly twenty-five minutes past 10 in the forenoon our intrepid Men of the Ocean emerged from the water at a point near to the harbour wall. Their voyage under the sea was over!

As avid readers will recall, James McLaughlin (43) and his partner Peter Braebuck (36) had set out from nearby the very same spot over six months ago on their circumnavigation of the British coast. On that spring day they were dressed in the latest sub-marine engineering apparel, which had been supplied by Wm Wotherspoon (Nautical Engineers) of Dyce after rigorous testing. The diving outfits proved their mettle throughout the journey along the seabed and both men encountered minor leaks, which were soon remedied on board the support boat Rose of Cove with gum and rubber.

Mr McLaughlin said on reaching the safety of the harbour that the trek had been a proper test of men and equipment but admitted to being glad it was over. He told our reporter “At times I will admit to some doubts about the intention of the walk and the ability within us to complete it. It is very dark at the bottom of the sea and most of the time you are fatigued and trepidatious about falling into a chasm or becoming fatally entangled in debris. We all remember what happened to Rowbotham and Flavell last year, but we have done it and that is that. No one can take away our achievement.”

Mr Braebuck is getting married within a month’s time and brought his bride-to-be a special present: a horseshoe for luck made from a length of steel he found on the seabed!

When news of their approach was heralded, word spread around the harbour and beyond. Over eight thousand people were reported to have descended onto the seafront to see the two men make their final steps, although constables kept them away from the nearer quayside in case of mischievousness or confusion.

Of course both of the men were not in the water at the same time, due to the rotational system they employed. While Mr McLaughlin began the journey, it was fitting that Mr Braebuck made the final yards and in our exclusive photogramatic image can be seen ascending the sea-ladder.

Her Majesty was kept informed of the progress of the jaunt at Balmoral, and it was intimated that a reception may be held at a future date depending on the usual factors.

One bystander said, “Some folk may think that walking around the country underwater is a pointless and doubtful endeavour, but I think it has helped put us on the map. These men will not be forgotten in many a long year.”
They came down to the waters edge in cars. They came wearing their city suits and their city hats and talking their city talk. Derren shook his head and rolled his eyes to see them and their ways. But then they threw their city money after their city words and that got things quickly done.

Men were found, paid to put on rubber suits and helmets with small glass windows and tubes that fed them air to breathe once they’d been dropped into the dark water at the base of the harbour wall. Birnam and Howie, and the city men telling them what to look for and where, though with their helmets on few were the words that they could have heard.

Birnam nodded to me and grinned unconvincingly through the glass, his gloved thumb thrusting upwards to indicate he was ready. The air hose uncoiled at his back and I began working the pump by hand. It was hard at first until I got into a rhythm; I took turns at the crank with old Carter.

Then Birnam was in the water and the city men leaning over the side of the boat and looking into the dark eddying murk, seeing only bubbles breaking on the surface but looking all the same. Orders shouted from one boat to the other and heartless laughter and then an optimistic nothing.

Only small noises for some time, the city men talking in whispers like men in Sunday church, and scratching under their hats, and one scribbling in a notebook, though what he had to write about was a mystery to me. Nothing to see for the longest time, just the dragging of the air hose through the water and old Carter spitting into the palms of his hands before taking his turn at the pump and above us the screamed questions of gulls in swooping flight. One man looked at his silver fob watch and held it to his ear to be more certain of the minutes and minutes that Birnam had been down there.

Then, just at the far reach of hope, a tug on the line and I was the only one who saw and I shouted that he was coming up. A winch set to raise Birnam to the surface and the glass windows of his helmet were misted over so that we could not see his expression and he pointed to the furthest end of the wall and nodded his head like before.

He was a hero afterwards, when city money filled the coffers of The Ship Inn and Birnam’s name was toasted with bottled beer, and a newspaper man asked him questions about what it was like. Late into the night and the light from The Ship was like the sun shut in a box.

In the morning they’d all gone and the story, Birnam’s story, was quickly old, and work at the harbour slowly returned to ordinary and to normal.
Dive Cycle by Janette Ayachi

I found this old newspaper cut-out in a crate in my grandmother's attic, the edges were crumpled, and it was stained tea-bag yellow with age. The photograph pose of the men above the article pulled me in, their grainy eyes and stiff postures in the greasy rain. But there was no naval disaster as I had first thought; instead the divers were gathering the body of a small boy, thrust out from the wreck that was his mother.

The mother was prescribed sedatives and a blood transfusion as they searched- she was to be shipped to the asylum after the recovery of her son. Her body was a rupture vessel as she shivered and bled out into hallucinations of her boy a crowned Messiah in a world under the sea. I imagined her eyes were as black as the oil prints on the diver's dress, glazed like the stiff sutures of a waterproofed skin-suite, rigor mortis in the winter freeze. It was always November in her nightmares.

She lowered herself from the dock with her new-born cradled in her arms. A cloud fixed itself into place like a heavy eyelid over the gaze of the moon- everyone was thankful for the dark. Her titanium-white nightdress stained with clots of blood hiked up over her waist and tailed behind her in the water like the spread-wings of a massacred swan.

The divers took the diving-bell to the sea-bed raising the alarm in the ocean, chiming a call for prayer. The dead boy was found trying to reach the surface, the placenta sack a Medusa jelly fish sifting plankton through its collagen grin, the umbilical tentacle a stubborn shooting star. The infant's skin glowing aquamarine, more alien now, but still mineral- its tiny lungs inflated to gills. He was a nomad child with uncertain roots and no beginnings.

The first diver cupped the tiny infant in his over-sized gloved hands; it was blue as a Bunsen burner flare in the pigmented lantern light that shattered into bubbles in the shallows. The detective perched on the deck of the small boat arching his bowed head for clues as the uniform of men in hats circled the scene. Witnesses crouched over the pier with their hands in waistcoats- fiddling with pocket watches and chronographs, measuring inhalations and heartbeats in silence. The fishermen; the police, the journalist, the oil rig owner lending equipment, the coroner and the two divers in their three-bolt copper helmets, weighted boots and their own umbilical cords connecting them to the surface.

Her asylum years were spent with clumsy suicide attempts, the meticulous braiding of her own hair and innovative treatments with side effects worse than death. I will never know the connection of this story to my grandmother now that she has passed, and no one ever discovered why it was the unnamed woman drowned her new-born son- both remain a mystery. But it was always November in her nightmares.
What the Diver Saw by A. Penman

For the eighth time that week, the divers had gone through the motions of a thorough underwater search, but returned to the surface with nothing. Motivation and anticipation had waned since the start of the operation, over a fortnight ago, yet this was the day the newspapers finally turned up to cover our efforts. I didn’t realise how downtrodden I’d been feeling until I saw that photo in the evening edition. At a glance, our team looked like a disillusioned and worried bunch. That slimy reporter had given me an uneasy feeling from the outset. His column, relegated to page five, had a mocking tone. I should have trusted my instincts and told him and his cameramen to clear out of the harbour. What good did I think he could do us at that point?

It all felt far removed from my initial enthusiasm and to how I’d hoped my management of the operation might go. It seemed obvious from the photo that hope was all we were holding on to by that Friday afternoon. My self-doubt was creeping in like the cold, damp air down the back of my collar. Lord, I was tired of the cold. At least Thomas, standing next to me, managed to look more self-assured, leaning on the ropes and chains he had worked for years, a hand in a pocket, as if unfazed. No, that report just made me, and the University, look like blue-sky thinkers. People must have thought we were wasting money in order to prove a flimsy theory - little more than a hunch.

But it had been more than just a feeling: I’d had plenty of research behind me, or I wouldn’t have been backed by my superiors in the first place. Who wanted to hear about the months I’d spent in archives and pouring over case files? No one. Everyone around me wanted results, not a lecture. Working in those conditions, day after day, who could blame them?

My team had gradually given up: four divers dwindled to two and twelve local hands became five. Without any findings they had tired of listening to my - as they heard it - plummy accent. Our crowd of onlookers was noticeably smaller. The weather had turned around the same time.

If it hadn’t been for Thomas, we would never have found a trace. He telephoned me late on Friday night, as I sat staring out of a window at another heavy downpour: “Well, if you say they’re down there somewhere, I believe you. No man would start this circus just for the fun o’ it, and certainly not for the attention. I trust you an’ I’ll see you back there in the mornin’.” What I felt the next day, when our lead diver surfaced with the first findings, was profound relief. Relief, and a tinge of jealousy, because he was the first to see the bones.
**Old Photographs** by Duncan Clark

The cutting edge of the new century’s technology, his suit was the latest on the market boasting all the conveniences and advances of the age. It even had a talking tube to signal the surface.

Despite the drizzle, a crowd had gathered to watch him descend to the depths of the harbour. A seal performed the same journey but managed to return to the surface with a crab in her mouth making short work of as she bobbed on the surface. He hadn’t been that productive in looking for what damaged one of the Navy’s ships.

The group of men at the other end of the winch had fashioned an underwater inspection lamp from bits of an old whaling flood light they’d borrowed. So far he’d seen barnacles and bits of chain. Nothing that could put a hole in the side of a dreadnaught though. Perhaps, he’d have more luck asking the seal.

In one of the rowing boats above him, the man in the pale overcoat (who’d looked shifty from the off, with his bowler hat, thin moustache and shiny shoes) fretted over the messages he’d seen describing strange lights and sightings coming from stations across the Empire as far apart as Scapa Floe and Bombay which had had been received by the Admiralty with increasing frequency.

It was getting close to the end of the diver’s shift and for his colleague to take over. That’s when he saw something reflecting back the beam from the lamp.

He knew to avoid some of the sea’s more inquisitive residents from experience. But his was a northern European deep water harbour, not Hong Kong or Sydney. The seal should be about the biggest thing he’d expect to find here. But something was down here with him that he didn’t recognise.

Returning to the surface, with the pop of a photographer’s flashgun, he wondered what this little group of men would look like without the context of an explanation.

With the porthole on his helmet unscrewed, he spoke with the bowler hat who looked paler than before. The hat spoke with the dock keeper who was in touch by telephone to the Admiralty in London.

If you weren’t used to watching, you’d have missed the hat’s nod to the two policemen behind the camera on the quayside to ‘follow up’ with the photographer about the negative plates.

And that was it. The last pieces of evidence of this incident sit quietly in a file in an old drawer along with the sketches made by the diver after he was quietly employed to return to the damaged vessel with a small gift from the explosives store.
Escalating by Rebecca Mackay

She made three. Three girls who had their lives cut short. Three couples of parents who had lost their child. Three times my partner and I had to visit the piers and pray it was a mistake. The divers had retrieved her body that morning, the faces of the spectators ashen in shock as she was pulled to the surface, face up. Her eyes were open; hollow of emotion; so young. It was outrageous that someone was targeting these people-so innocent and young. She was barely fifteen, just like the others. It was going to be hard to tell yet another set of parents that their beloved daughter had been brutally murdered.

When the body was taken to be examined, my hunches rang true. She, as well as the other two, had bruising and swelling on her face. There were rope burns on her wrists and ankles, and more bruising around her body along with minor cuts, scattered all over. But the worst part was seeing her torso. The killer had burned her with a candle, leaving horrible marks behind and small red drops from where the wax had dripped onto her. Below that laid the signature cut that stretched all across her body.

It had been nearly thirteen years since I became a homicide detective but cases like this still shook me to the core. They made me feel sadness for the girl, whose life had been cut short and for the parents, who had their child taken from them in the most horrifying way. They made me feel rage as the killer felt secure enough to continue on reeking mayhem and misery onto all those who were involved. They made me feel cold. I vowed I would find this killer, I vowed I would do it soon and God help me if I killed him because deep down, I knew he deserved it. She had been alive. She had been conscious as he cut into her and burned her flesh. She had to sit through the torture with no means of escape. I really hated serial killers.

“Detective Haze.” I blinked, looking clearly at Detective Moors. I had been reading over the report trying to find a shred of evidence as to finding out who did this. I had got nowhere, again. “Yes?” we had been working together for just over six years now but to me, he still looked like the jumpy new kid that had first arrived at my office. He had a grim look on his face and I intently looked at him to guess what was inevitably coming.

“Haze.” Don’t I thought. Don’t say it. “We’ve got another girl. A fisherman found her body just now.” Damn. Three was turning into four quicker than I liked. I thought we had more time. Obviously not. I picked up my coat in silence and flicked the light off just before closing my door. It seemed that I was flicking off all hope of finding this monster, and fast.
Another body, floating face down in the murky water. This was the sixth in the last month. Cause of death: drowning, just like the others. The boat rocked gently as the men reached in to haul the body aboard. As they carried the pale washed up man to shore, the spectators surrounding the dock gasped. The inspector at the scene addressed the various media in a dull voice “This is the sixth drowning in the last month, and although rumours are surfacing that this is the work of a serial killer we have no reason to suspect foul play. We will continue the investigations into the deaths however at this time we are viewing the circumstances surrounding them as not suspicious. Thank you.” He dismissed the incessant interviewers and made his way towards the ambulance containing the body. “Are we good to go sir?” asked the pathologist.

He sighed. 1:28 pm.

The inspector looked at him, “Somewhere more important you gotta be?”

“It’s the Mrs’ birthday and I was kinda hoping I’d have time to get her a gift. She is constantly raving about these diamond earrings but the store closes at five o’clock. If I miss another birthday she’ll kill me, literally.” He looked at the driver with a smirk “It’s gonna be tight but I reckon I can finish the autopsy by 4:30.”

“Rush the autopsy all you want, it’s your ass on the line, not mine!” he laughed as he drove the ambulance away from the docks.

“ 3:50 pm; chief examiner- myself, David Ingrid and I am carrying out the final autopsy on a middle-aged male drowning victim- identity remains unknown.” The pathologist began to look over the body with rushed neglect to typical procedure. “No visible marks or signs of struggle except from minor bruising around the wrists and a small cut on the upper lip.” He continued the autopsy, every few minutes looking up at the clock as it ticked past 4:23 pm. Taking a final glance at the clock he concluded the autopsy and began sliding the body into a white canvas bag. “Michelle’s gonna kill me.” As he zipped up the corpse something caught his eye: an earring, a hanging silver sphere. It seemed odd to him: an unusual choice for a male. The earring seemed slightly transparent, he noticed. Removing the earring he inspected it more closely: there was something inside. Picking up a scalpel he gently forced into the sphere, breaking it open to reveal a small rolled of piece of paper. He unravelled it and squinted at what seemed like some form of writing. Placing the paper underneath a magnifying glass he read what was written:

Oh I do like to be beside the seaside

Oh I do like to be beside the sea
Oh I do like to see them slipping underneath the waves

Beside the seaside

Beside the sea

He dialled the chief of police’s number into his phone; the earrings were going to have to wait.
In the Deep, Dark Depths by Natasha Pitman

“The anonymous tip was sent in the early hours of this morning. Many of the same nature have been cautiously sent to the local police department over the past three months. These specific tips are taken very seriously as the others have been quickly proven true. The call came in at around 0200 hours and was traced back to a payphone just 400 metres from the entrance to the Aberdeen downtown harbour. No name was given.

The city was left in shock as a result of nine heinous murders of young women. It is understood these murders were committed near the Aberdeen downtown harbour and all were thought to have happened between 2400 and 0330 hours. Seven of the nine bodies were lifted by divers from the depths of the murky harbour water and the three remaining bodies were discovered washed up on the nearby shores of Aberdeen beach. It is heavily suspected that all nine murders were committed by the same person as the murderer has left a red ribbon tied around each victim’s right arm.

The police are referring to the killer as the ‘Ribbon Killer’, who, however, has not yet been identified. Key witnesses have come forward to give their statements and any vital information they have on the killer’s appearance. The public are urged to contact the police if they see anything suspicious. Chief Constable Andrew McMillan spoke earlier today, “The police department advise the public to remain indoors at all times unless it is essential to leave, and if so, it is necessary to be accompanied by an older, responsible friend or family member.”

The police department also warn the public not to attempt to search for the killer as it is extremely dangerous. A full time, trained senior investigation team are following this high risk criminal inquiry.”

I read the newspaper report only yesterday but took very little notice of the severity. I knew I should not venture out this late at night, let alone on my own. Every sudden noise startled me as I tip-toed along the dark, narrow, cobbled downtown alley. The only source of light: a flickering streetlamp near the end of the alley. The numbing winter air hung silently with the low hum of cars in the distance. The chilly air nibbled my cheeks while enveloping my shivering body as I hastily yet hesitantly walked through the darkness towards the light. My heavy breathing ceased as I heard a car screech to a halt on the adjacent street. I fell silent and stopped. Hide. I trod gingerly to the back of an open dumpster and slowly crouched down behind. As I glanced towards the road I noticed a man in a long, black trench coat dragging what seemed to be a body to the car… I then saw it. A sinister blood-red ribbon escaped his concealed pocket and drifted delicately through the air, landing on the ice cold pavement metres from the dumpster. Run.
*Cadaver Collection* by Lucy Buchanan

It appeared a scene of tranquillity at that moment: the gentle rippling of the low tide slowly swayed the wooden rowing boat back and forth, back and forth. The well-groomed men stood in camel long-coats, clenching their clammy fists so tightly, their delicate blue veins shone through their milky white, goose-bumped skin. The harsh, Aberdeen winds blew at their perfectly placed bowler hats, willing them to topple off into the dark, enigmatic sea. Small beads of rain caught on their flushed cheeks, which they brushed off with haste in their anxious state. Everything about the docks was alien to them: the situation was not.

The other men in the boat were different; different in every way. They wore sung flat caps, that despite the gale’s best efforts, remained fixed as if permanently attached. Their ill-fitting jackets, untidily rumpled around their bodies, protected them from the harsh elements of that cold winter: endless rain and sleet. Waterproof trousers matched their jackets and boots crept half way up their muscled calves. Even their facial hair matched their scrappy and dishevelled appearance and seemed to dwarf their portly faces. They knew everything about those docks, but nothing of the present quandary.

What seemed a small audience stood above the gathering of mismatched men on the boats below. They peered over the cold, chained fencing as it swayed in the wind, eager to catch a glimpse of the imminent arrival; of what, they did not yet know. They shuffled from foot to foot, hands pushed firmly into deep pockets, stamping down hard on the concrete ground to prevent the biting cold from creeping up on them. It was all a mystery to the, and they revelled in the excitement of whatever was to come. Their sheer determination to witness this unknown event seemed astounding to the long coats; whether the perceived it as an admirable act or simply as the ‘nosiness’ they all too often experienced was another question.

And finally there were the divers, dressed head-to-toe in what seemed the most unconventional of outfits: bulbous rubber suits covered their bodies from the neck down. Their solemn faces were trapped under extravagant metal headdresses covered in bolts and screws, with only a small circle of cloudy glass to peer through into the murky distance. A long, white tube protruded from the rubber, twisting and curling like the body of a snake. One of the men lowered themselves gingerly into the nebulous waters below, placing his feet assuredly on each creaky step of the ladder as he descended. It was all routine to them: the water, the hustle and bustle, and what lurked below. The body.
The sudden flash startled him, cutting through the grey rain. Quickly he dipped his head, hoping the photographer hadn’t captured his face, and cursing himself for not noticing the tripod being set up on the opposite pier. There was nothing he could do about it now. Even if he sent one of his men to deal with the evidence, the man would probably have been dispatched by one of the big papers and would no doubt miss the return of their employee. So far they had managed to avoid attracting too much interest in their activities; hidden amongst the industrial machinery and stacked equipment and stores round the port, a few men on small rowboats hardly warranted a closer look, but they had gone to great efforts to conceal the divers’ other-worldly suits and breathing tanks. But there was only so much one could do whilst the men were at work on the harbour seabed to distract from their presence.

But it wouldn’t matter soon. The divers, working in round the clock shifts, were getting close. It was only a matter of time before they confirmed what he and his brother were sure of, and then everything would change. As soon as the first fragments could be extracted from the decades of silt and marine growth, as soon as his divers could make the short journey back to the surface, then the true prize would be revealed and he would be proven right. He’d researched everything in painstaking detail, he was so certain that he had left no stone unturned; the flight timings, eyewitness accounts, the coastguard logs, the harbourmaster’s report… he had even gone to the parish records to make sure nothing had been missed.

Too certain.

Air hissed from the diving suit as the helpers heaved the heavy brass helmet over the man’s head. Sweat formed a pale sheen over his face as the warm air from the suit steamed upwards, quickly dissipating in the rain. He looked up at the quayside.

“One more trip”

“Yes”

No more words passed between them. Jones wound up the telephone immediately and placed the receiver to his mouth. The helpers glanced at one another. They’d been well paid to keep their mouths shut but it was impossible not to wonder what was lying unseen in the black waters. Day after day for two months the northerner had watched as they worked. One more trip. The excitement prickled and shivered over their tired cold skin.

Macdonald quickly worked to pack up his camera, frequently glancing up to check he was not being approached. He had to get back and develop his work. Day after day he had watched and waited and froze and soaked and finally had been rewarded. He knew the danger now. He knew he’d been seen but he didn’t know what the northerner would do. Strangely, he was more excited than afraid. After all this time, at last, the small plane had been found.
I can feel it tugging on my leg, but smile they said, smile for the future, so that's what I do. Rain falls slow and uncaring to merge with the water that lies still and promising below. It sits dark and opaque beneath me, an oily black gateway to a world away from staged poses and photographs, and somewhere underneath it pulls at my leg. I can hear Hamish to one side, remonstrating on a call to nowhere. You'd never catch him at the quay on a normal day, but they do say the camera brings out the best in people; it certainly brings out the quantity if not the quality. I wonder how much of me they can make out through the view port of my vessel, the suit that covers my body for hours of every day. I stare out from my transport to a simpler world. It's complicated up here, where rain falls to lie, but down there in its resting place everything is so much clearer - a world where you can rarely see your hand an inch in front of your face. Nobody to tell me when to smile, no menacing facial hair, umbrellas or demands, just me. Me and whatever is tugging at my leg.

It's probably an eel, having a rummage in the thick tar of silt and rusted remains that smother the harbour floor. Perhaps someone had told it about the photograph. But I couldn't see it, couldn't make out what unknown tendril had coiled about my being. Dark was the bottom where the docks went to die, my second home. The moment lingers and I can feel the pressure of the boss to my right, his presence and his moustache weighing down above me. Maybe if I smile long enough they'll go back to their offices and their desks, away from the interminable drizzle that coats the day. Away from the mud, and the tugging, so I can reach down and tug back. I'm not even sure I'm still smiling.

Jim is looking over at me rather than at the camera. He's going get what we call a "reet good tellin' aff" for that, but Jim's worked the docks long enough to recognise a man who's not sitting comfortable in the water. Still, best hope the boss doesn't aim his moustachioed disapproval Jim's way. There's a whole lot of disapproval hidden amongst that bushy mouth guard, and even if he doesn't notice now, he's certain to when the photo gets developed. Then a whole lot of people are going to spot the one person not looking at the camera. Progress they call it, a world where what people don't see at the time they can go back and tell you off for later. I really do hope they caught me smiling. It's out of my hands now though, and into the wizardry of chemical development. I have more pressing concerns. Time to find out what's tugging on my leg.

Limited exposure by Josh Turner
1. When the divers bring up a haul, find an excuse to examine it. Discard anything smaller than a child; although shapes can be changed, a body's mass is constant. Do not be fooled by faces. It will have altered its features. Look instead for the rise and fall of breath.

2. Remember to bring pins. It may be playing dead. When no one is looking, jab the pins into uncovered patches of skin. If it flinches, it lives.

3. If you cannot examine the haul, you must investigate after the fact. Magnify family photos. Look particularly at the hands: are the fingers separate all the way to the knuckle? If so, is the webbing scarred from scissors or scalpels? Check also the neck just beneath the ears. It is not as simple as spotting gills; look instead for unfashionably high collars, elaborate hair-styles, even neck braces. Circle the defect in red and leave the photos on the kitchen counter. It must know that you cannot be fooled.

4. Earth is not enough. Sea is not enough. But requiring the produce of both: that is the true sign. Give it bread and water to reassure, then hold both back. It must understand that you are the dominant species.

5. Select a date with a full moon, then awake at midnight and creep to the shore (if your family are heavy sleepers, the creeping is not necessary). Find a flat rock and wait. You may need to wait a while, for it will be cautious if it knows of your suspicions. Do you see its silvery hump in the shallows of the sea? Do you hear the lure of its song? Does the disgust rise up in you when you realise that this thing has been living amongst your people? Now creep back to bed. It must not know that you are ready to act.

5. If it is your neighbour's wife, proceed with caution. However well you know your neighbour, he may not believe you at first. Take care to collect your evidence, and present it calmly. Bring heavy chains in case he wants to deal with it immediately. Help him, and do not flinch.

6. If it is your own wife, you may do as you wish. If she admits her nature and chooses a home – it must be earth or sea, one or the other, to be selected and lived with forever – then return her to it. If she selects the sea, do not try to change her mind. It will not work. Take her to the shore and do what must be done.

7. No matter how much she splashes or calls, you must not look back. This is her final trick. Do not succumb.
Underwater Wonderment by Caitlin MacEwan

The loch had been an attraction for hundreds of years. The small adjacent village used to be just a fishing village but once they discovered the uniqueness of their water, the intrigue began. At first, scientists came – but for such wonders the rich come to experience something so unusual too.

To go in the water, people were clad in metal suits from head to toe. Their only source of vision was a small circle at the front of the helmet, but it would be enough. Once lowered into the water, people would often take a few moments to adjust. It was colder than would be expected and the pressure from all around tightened each breath. The muteness caused by the pressure in their ears would at first be a distraction, but soon forgotten when the leader of the group started moving. The area is lit from underneath with huge lamps, allowing almost-clear vision this far under water.

Inexperienced people may wonder slightly at the strange, swaying plants that line the edge of the pathway, or at scallops moving by in a strange clapping motion. They may even think it’s beautiful how quick the tiny fish move. But no one would travel somewhere remote just to look at fish and plants. They come for something more obscure. It’d take maybe half a minute to walk on land, but five underwater with slow, weighted steps.

They eventually reach an enclosure lined with wire netting. People pay hundreds of pounds just to come in the water; a sighting must be a guarantee.

The leader of the group unclips a box from his hip with the thick gloves. He opens it, dead fish half-floating out along with a small gasp of blood. It takes only a second for the curious creatures to appear. Their skin is a sickly grey colour, looking a little too stretched over their child-sized, humanlike form. Some of their webbed fingers push at the netting, small ridges around their chest, below their stomach an outward curve. At their waists, the grey skin becomes large silver scales, getting smaller as their bodies eventually narrow to a large, patterned tailfin.

Their hair looks perhaps similar to long, fine dreadlocks, able to move freely in the water around their heads. When they move, it flows after them, twisting. Their humanoid faces are distorted, the eyes too large and positioned closer to the side of their heads and the mouths too wide. Upon opening their jaws, a hundred needle-like teeth can be seen, all intermeshing when shutting. Their expressions are simple if intensely focussed towards the smell of blood.

The tour leader pushes some of the fish through, watching them flash around, fighting and eating as if starved.

The tourists find it enthralling, the circles of their faces showing wonderment. The guide, however, has a more appropriate fear of them. He has seen those teeth more than most. And he’s not sure how much longer they’re going to be content in that cage.
Rusty Auld Dreams by Graham Rushe

-Ah was up in the big smoke the other week, bringing the chislers to see ma sister like. Big Jim Keane announced to his slender compatriot Arthur Evans.

-So, what half-arsed rambling you coming out with now? Arthur sneered from the side of his mouth. Big Jim took his palms off the countertop and turned them earnestly in the direction of Arthur: a routine defensive gesture of Jim’s from all his little domestics with the missus.

-Will you give a man a chance to get his words out? Jim sputtered, turning a little red in the cheeks. Arthur nodded solemnly and thought it best not to fluster Big Jim: a man whose shovel hands could knock him out with one lofty blow.

-Anyways, as I was saying like, up in Dublin with the chislers, and they hounded me to bring em down to the docks. Sure they’d never seen the sea before. Big Jim paused; took a sip of his pint and continued:

-There was some craic down by the docks, newspapermen and all were pegging about, and sure the little ones went stone mad.

-And what was going on like? Arthur leant in earnestly and asked.

-Listen fella. So we make our way through the hustle and bustle to the front of the railing looking down onto the boats, and no word of a lie, but there were two men cladded-out in these golden suits and big rounded helmets to cover their whole heads. Jim arched his hands around his head to display the physical dimensions of the helmet.

-These men had gigantic tubes running from the back of the helmets to some
huge contraption that was making a hellofa racket. One of the boats even had a fella on a wind-up telephone updating what was happening there like.

-And what exactly was happening man? Arthur instinctively asked, on the brink of proper excitement.

-Divers… That’s what the fella next to me said they were called. These suits let them lads breathe underwater, and the tubes were full of air that went into their helmets.

-Well I’ll be damned, how in the name of Christ did they manage that? Arthur slammed the pint glass onto the wooden counter and shook his head.

-One of the lads stayed under for some time, and when he came up he had this big lump of metal. Walking under water, who would have thought it! Jim roared.

-Jaysus if we could get somebody down here with that we’d be sorted. Think about it like, all them lakes around us are probably full of gold and riches from auld Celtic times. The stuff is waiting to be fished out man! Arthur laughed, hopped off the barstool and wobbled off to drain the spuds.

Big Jim chuckled to himself and ran his fingers over the coppers in his right pocket. Should he get in another round of drinks, or go home to Martha and the children?

Ah sure, one more couldn’t do any real damage.
Catharsis by Michael Court

The rhythm of the row boat beneath his feet was nauseating. As he looked down at the swirling water and a diver disappearing into it, he could think only of the Lethe. He wanted to forget, and couldn’t think of any better way.

* * *

‘Robert, I’m leaving you’. She looked into his eyes for just a moment, and then pushed past him out of the house, dragging her suitcase behind her. He took off his coat and hat, wondered into the kitchen and sat down.

Since then, he’d capitulated. His work as a Detective Inspector had suffered; he’d gone from an astute highly competent officer to a meandering fool, and had been taken off of more than a few cases. One by one, his friends had become estranged, and he’d replaced them with vices. Of an evening, he’d languish in the dining room his wife had decorated, reading the newspaper, and then retreat to their empty double bed. The idea to kill his wife’s lover had occurred to him as he lay, drunk, staring at the ceiling. The next morning, he’d disregarded it as absurd, but as he slipped back into liquor’s embrace the following night, it seemed attractive once more.

Gradually, a plan began to coalesce in his mind. The momentum of seeing to it that all of the details were attended to and all of the possibilities considered, brought some order back to his life. He never thought that what he was doing was a crime, but instead pursued it as if he were conducting an investigation.

His paradigm of efficiency came to end the night before his plan was to be enacted. His eagerness betrayed him, and he had to have a drink to keep himself from breaking down and calling it off. His living room was so serene, reminding him of what he had lost, and the clock on the mantelpiece was almost mocking in its record of the hours and minutes that he still had to endure before he could rectify his life.

As he arrived, he made his way to the water’s edge, pushing past on-lookers and journalists. About a minute after the second diver descended, he took out his pistol and pointed it at the man operating the machine that supplied air down to the suits. Confusion and panic ensued but no-one dared approach him. It wasn’t long until both of the divers bobbed to the surface, their faces contorted with pain. His breath was visible in the cold air of the morning and he breathed in deeply, while glaring down at the guilty man. They were clutching at their helmets. Foam was seeping out of their mouths, like a baby spitting out food it didn’t like the taste of. Amid the splashing water, their bloodshot eyes could be seen staring out at the world around them. He watched, oblivious, as the last whimpers of life left the man’s features and then he smiled for he was finally at rest.
The night seemed long and hot punctuated only by snores of varying length and pitch. Edie wondered idly if she could orchestrate the snores – a symphony for aggravation. Perhaps she could book the Albert Hall. Lying on the narrow camp bed in the darkened school hall she looked up at the cobweb festooned ceiling and her mind wandered back to the afternoon. The police had toured the district with loudspeakers, sounding slightly panic stricken. Everyone had to pack a small bag and assemble at the school hall – NOW! As she had scurried to the meeting place clutching her small case she had glimpsed the divers in the river and the grave faces of the watchers. No-one would tell her what they had found, or thought they had found.

Edie sighed. Old Mrs Smithers had had to be helped from her flat, her legs still in the process of being bandaged by the district nurse and she was now in a crumpled heap on the next bed, her bandages like festive ribbons trailing on the floor like the aftermath of a riotous party. She moaned and snored alternately in a major and minor pitch. Edie pulled the scratchy woollen blanket over her ears. The WRVS had been very kind but there was only so much tea one could drink and the school toilets were not coping very successfully with the influx of adult bladders.

At the other side of the hall Edie caught sight of Billy Watts sitting watching, just watching. There was something odd about that boy, she thought. The different parts of his face seemed to be growing at vastly different rates. At the moment his ears were winning at the expense of his mouth and eyes. It gave his face a rat-like quality. She shivered slightly as his eyes swivelled round the hall. Just then the majestic snores of Mr Rostov swelled magnificently round the room like the opening bars of a fugue. This was followed by some subdued muttering from other evacuees. How did Mr Rostov always manage to get to the front of the sandwich and tea queues, Edie wondered. His wife had cried steadily and quietly all evening, rocking the youngest child (who had the appearance of a startled pig) and clutching ineffectually at the twins. An occasional sob could still be heard.

What if they couldn’t get back tomorrow, what if whatever it was under the water surfaced and proved too awful for them to return? Edie contemplated life as a refugee, living cheek by jowl with her neighbours and sharing a living space with the likes of a potentially delinquent Billy Watts. A particularly long, penetrating snore rumbled round the walls and reverberated through the wall bars, ending with a spluttering cough. Determined, Edie made up her mind and, picking up her bread knife which she never left behind, decided on her course of action.
I could have smashed his face in, the big boss, for making us do that.

Me half in the water, James up there on the step. The lads aw ready to get us away. But no, instead we were waiting; weighed-down and waitin, weighed down and wasting precious time while some wee tumshie stared intae his camera, wavin his arm at aebody and shouting, directing, like we’re a chorus line o quines in the theatre. A saw his mouth, teeth. A nightmare.

I’d got there before dawn. Hardly slept. How could ye? The wind and rain battering the slates aw night, screamin through the windaes. I’d telt Agnes; ah’d said tae her there’ll be work the day.

It hud died awa quick, streets silent. But two boats wur late and one hadn’a made it right intae the harbour; smashed up hawf way. Ah recognised it, Ally Milne’s, lying there oan its side, listin; a wounded animal. ‘How many?’ James asked Mr Ferguson.

‘Three.’

Three men missin.

Climbing intae oor suits, the breast plate lifted ower ma heid by two o the lads, I was listening careful to Mr Ferguson’s low voice when Ally cam rushin in, worrying arouond aboot us, sayin is how he’d shouted in the dark, heard voices aneth but jist couldnae get tae them, wi aw the water floodin, he’d had to get oot. The lads laced up ma boots, slid the gloves ower ma hannds. They lowered my helmet doon, locking it, checking the seals. Ally’s face hud cam right up close, peering through the glass at me, his haunds oan my shooders, desperate.

At the pier, gawpers wer waitin fur us awready, hanging over the railings in the rain, drookit. Anither rowing boat, auld Stevie’s, wis tae come too. His nephew wis one o the missing; a loon o eighteen.

We wur aw set, oan oor way, when they rolled up. The big boss, along wi that craiter fae the paper; the doited photographer mannie trailing behind. A photograph, they said. A record o the company’s commitment.

Ah was riving. Auld Stevie, James, the lads; we couldnae believe it. A caught Mr Ferguson’s eye and he shrugged, embarrassed.

So there we wur, waiting, just waitin. Glunching it the camera, the lot o us. Apairt fae the big boss; lookin at the picture, he’s the ainly one who couldna even keep his heid still. Says aathing.

When we goat doon under, Ally’s wreck wis pitch black, creaking ‘n slippery underfoot. No easy.
I foon the first lad; felt his airm sticking oot, twistit. Ah shouted and James cam
looming through the dark. Two ither bodies, brithers I foond oot later, floating behind
him. James and me looked through the murk at each other and looked awa. He
signalled; he’d tell them.

We’d gaun back in the boat, poor auld Stevie, crumpled, couldnae tak the oars, heid
in his hauns. His sister waitin at haim fur the news.
Great-uncle Ken was 92 and thought every woman in our family was his wife. He’d also become increasing hostile; adamant we were stealing the batteries from his hearing aid. We’d only done that on one occasion.

“What are you doing here?’ he barked.

‘Hello Ken,’ Mum said. ‘You look good today. I’ve brought Johnny with me this time.’

‘I was listening to the wireless but I can’t now you’re here.’ He sat up in his chair. ‘You need tell me when you’re turning up.’

‘Ken, we did. It’s moving day.’

He looked at me. ‘What the hell is she blethering on about?’

Mum sighed. ‘You’re moving to a lovely wee flat.’

‘Has she lost her bloody mind?’

Mum paused. ‘Johnny, why don’t you start clearing out the garden shed?’

‘But it’s freezing.’

‘Well, at least you’ll be by yourself.’

The door to the shed was barely hanging on its hinges. Inside, it smelt of damp and was crammed with junk. I stood inspecting old china and a stuffed owl, but then my eye caught a copper diving helmet. I thought about putting it over my head but the idea suddenly made me feel a little sick.

I carried the helmet into the house and dumped it on the coffee table in front of Uncle Ken. ‘Where did you get this?’ I asked.

‘It’s mine. Don’t you dare take that away from me.’

‘I’m only asking why you have it.’

He looked at me like I was an idiot. ‘It’s my helmet for diving. Pop it on my head and I’ll show you how long I can hold by breath for.’

Mum arrived with a kettle in her hand. ‘Johnny, what are you playing at?’

‘I can hold my breath longer than anyone,’ Uncle Ken said.

‘Of course you can,’ Mum replied.
‘We lost some of our best divers down in the Pacific. They were silly buggers.’ He shook his head. ‘But in war…’

Mum took me by the arm. ‘Go and sit in the dinning room. All his jabbering sets my migraines off and you’re encouraging his tales.’

It was late afternoon when Mum finally took Uncle Ken away. We’d found over £1000 of Marks & Spencer vouchers stashed in various places and Mum divided them up for everyone. I was given my share but there was nothing I wanted from Marks & Spenser. The diving helmet was still in the living room and I went to inspect it again. I sat on the carpet to get a better look and noticed a piece of metal wedged underneath one of the table legs. I pulled the metal out and turned it over in my hand. It was some sort of war medal, like the ones I’d seen in museums. It was badly bashed and the ribbon had been torn off, but I somehow knew it wasn’t just junk. I placed it back under the leg and it really did balance the table out perfectly.
**An underwater cathedral** by Martin Cathcart Froden

The first time Graeme tried he managed three turns of the hourglass. Then he blacked out and his father had to pull him out of the water, forbidding him ever to try again. Graeme was only six and all he wanted was to go out on the divers’ boat with his grandfather. Over the years three turns became four, then five, the secret practice with his brother eventually amounting to eight turns.

He now spent all his time in the blue underworld. He fell in love with the resistance of movement and the notion that he was just a fish inside a man. His natural buoyancy was counteracted by a flat stone tied to a rope he held onto when going down. Once he got back up, after turning the hourglass in his head five times, he reeled in his ballast. He gave his harvest, whatever he had found on the bottom, to his brother who lay it out to dry on the deck of their little boat. Five turns was good, six amazing and seven supernatural. But he wasn’t happy. He wanted to be under for twelve, twenty-nine, seventy, ∞.

When an idea travelled across from the mainland he was easily enamoured. He was the first person to try the Standard Diving Suit. After talking himself hoarse about the advantages of the new innovation, after walking on the ocean floor seventy metres below the ship he was tied to, and bringing up more and better samples than anyone had seen, twelve divers signed away most of their income in exchange for a Suit.

His parents worried but Graeme smiled and tugged at his father’s grey sideburns and gestured to his mother – a mid-air motion like he was patting an enormous dog – to calm her.

Two weeks later he was paralysed from the neck down and the same week three of his customers, his friends, died. Graeme was now a head without a body. A burden without anything more than the villagers’ unbridled hate for killing their sons and his self-loathing, so strong he couldn’t meet his mother’s eyes. There was no science, only superstition on the island, and there was no guessing who the Diving Disease would hit next.

After another three weeks he pleaded with them to take him out to
where his grandfather was last seen diving. He kissed his mother and his father, but his resolve was unfaltering. He made them tie his rock – his tool, friend, lodestone, around his waist and topple him over. The last thing he saw was his brother smiling and crying.

Graeme buried himself in the underwater cathedral where he had grown up in, under a great slab of water next to his grandfather. He relaxed and let out his breath one last time, and his father saw the bubbles come to the surface after eight turns of the hourglass and wept, saltwater staining the deck.
The fisherman's wife by Benone Alexandru Popa

“Can you tell me how you killed her?”
“Kill who?”
“Who? Are you really even more stupid than you look?”
“I’m sorry, sir. But I really don’t know why you’re suspecting me for this crime.”
“Because she was your wife”, the detective answered. “Really, Jonathan, what is with this man?” the detective said to his partner while wiping the sweat on his forehead with a dirty hanky.
“Sir, I was not in good relations with my wife because I suspected her to have been cheating on me. But in no case could I possibly kill her in such an outrageous way”, said the fisherman.
The two policemen wanted to finish this as quickly as possible because the fisherman’s house actually smelled worse than the suspect. It was an incredibly small house with only one room. “No wonder he’s so stupid, his mind must have died in this isolated room”, thought the policemen.
“Hey, Jonathan, what do you think?”
“He’s playing dumb with us. He’s definitely the culprit. The policemen found his diary yesterday where he wrote ten ways in which to kill his wife: stabbing, strangling, drowning, shooting, beating, starving, torturing, throwing her off a bridge, burning her alive and burying her alive. The man is a psychopath.”
“How come I haven’t been told this?”
“You rushed into his house without giving me the chance to tell you the latest news and yesterday you went directly to that stinky bar. I could actually say you stink as much as that fisherman’s house”, he said with a grin in the corner of his mouth. The other detective was angry. He was older and he wanted Jonathan to respect him. He was actually a very good detective but he noticed that Jonathan was actually more skilled; he was young and did not have any vices. He was always clean, dressed in his black coat and had polished shoes.
“I will send word to the HQ to arrest the fisherman. He will probably be hanged in two days”, said the older detective.
Two days later, the man is being hanged in public.
“Did you hear about what he’s done?” said an old woman to another one.
“No, I did not.”
“This fisherman described in a book ten ways how to kill his wife. Do you know how the coward chose to kill her? He tied a boulder to her leg and pushed her down the river. Awful way to die... Poor creature... They used those weird costumes to get her out of there, she had such a terrified look on her face”, said the old woman while slowly shaking her head.
“But wait a minute... I didn’t know he could write. I’ve known him for a long time and he wasn’t too smart at all.”
“People say they have seen a tall man dressed in a black coat and dark polished shoes entering the fisherman’s house when in the house was only his beautiful wife. Isn’t that a mystery? People say that the diary might have been written by this man.
"The day has come, gentlemen," his voice roared with passion. A scene unfolds before our very own eyes. Professor Plume, attired in his trademark black bowler hat and velvet frock coat, stood atop a boat. It appeared to be an ordinary boat but in actual fact it was not an ordinary boat. This boat is the entrance to a state of the art submarine powered by steam which in approximately eleven minutes will depart on a journey to the murkiest depths of the ocean in vain hope to discover Atlantis. This is the moment - on March 28th, in the year of 1888, at 5:04 PM - when the lives of six individuals will forever be intertwined. Follow me. Come on, please do hurry a little. We haven't got all day you know. Let your sight take a hand-in-hand stroll with me; on the rooftop of the submarine, beside Professor Plume, whose eyes still contained that spark of childish curiosity and excitement, stood Silas, Professor Plume's childhood friend and adoptive brother. His coffee brown eyes fixed firmly on an isolated figure that stood only five feet away. A hard, calculated look in his eyes. Why is this man, this Jeter here exactly?

Jeter returned the hard look. Was Silas aware that Jeter was a double agent, working for Professor Magnum? That he was here to jeopardise this expedition? Jeter and Silas danced a cold tango with their eyes as Callan, who keeps his distance, regarded them curiously. Callan the mysterious. He used his words sparsely, his clear cerulean eyes speaking volumes of words that the others were blind to. Does he know something the others don't?

Captain Ambrose stood the furthest away. His vividly green eyes looked ahead blindly, his sight clouded by the raw yearn to avenge his Rose and Molly. His beautiful girls. He knew for a fact that once they reached Atlantis - and they would because he of all people knew it existed - they wouldn't be returning. He would join his wife and daughter soon enough. At the thought of Molly, he glanced at Maxwell. Her disguise was poor - any beggar with eyes could see that. Oblivious to the internal clashes occurring around her, she smoothed her moustache firmly to her skin, and inconspicuously brushed a strand of long blonde hair under her wig, eyes bright with excitement. Her eyes briefly skittered over to Professor Plume and as their eyes touched for two seconds, they shared a mental sweep of excitement. "Welcome to the Expeditia," Plume announced with a flourish.
Desperate Descent by Carol Shea

Rust drizzled from the dock gate chains like droplets of scorched amber into a pool on the slimy quay. Syrupy tea could not purge the tang of brass and iodine from their mouths as the diving crew prepared for the 2nd dive of the day. This was no ordinary dive and no ordinary day.

Only a week before the dock had been dredged in preparation for the arrival of the new cruise ship. The liner had almost completely disembarked her passengers, mostly from the edges of the Soviet Union, for their onward journeys to a bright new world. A guttural cry, the words unrecognisable and shrill had cut through the hot and dirty air. Workers preparing to install new hydraulics for the dock gates stopped and stared at the dark coated young woman.

That had been 6 days ago. At first the ubiquitous cup of tea, or several, had been poured but the woman had soon needed medical support as minutes and hours ticked by to no avail - her 12 year old son was missing.

After initially dismissing the incident as child playing hide and seek, the Captain ordered a full scale search of his vessel. Every cabin and cubby hole was examined, every tarpaulin lifted and shaken but no child. He hadn’t stowed away on the pilot boat either – he had last been seen shortly before that pulled alongside to guide the liner in.

Then the police were called. Uniform officers went door to door asking questions and searching yards and outhouses. The rumour was that he had run away. ‘Not surprising’ was a common judgemental muttering.

On day 2 the crime investigating officers arrived in force. These were the chaps in the beige raincoats, bowler hats, polished shoes, smoking high quality pipe tobacco and talking in accents that belied their upbringing.

Day 3, the weather turned and the local news reporters were talking to the barmaids and stevedores, the ferry office staff and even the prostitutes who tried to blend into the alleyways.

Day 4 brought national bigwigs, national papers and a steady stream of voyeurs whom the police had no way of holding back.

It was on the morning of the 5th day that the sodden plimsoll was taken to the boy’s mother for identification. Spotted bumping against the inner harbour gates handed in by some rod fishermen on their way to work.

Day 6 was when they called in the divers. The crowds gathered, undeterred by the rain driven in horizontally by the unseasonal north easterly. Shortly after descent the signalling ropes twitched. Cutting equipment went down.

Job done. Accompanied only by the solemn drips of the clinging foul sea returning to the depths the men hauled themselves back to the surface, painfully slowly in air-bloated rubber body suits and removed their weighted Frankenstein boots.
Mission accomplished by Elizabeth Williamson

He had only known this man for a few months. He had found him in a crumpled heap at the end of his street and, unusually for him, a busy young man, he hadn’t passed him by. Samaritan-like, he had saved the older man’s life. This man soon became the most important person in his life, the father figure he had never known, the mentor, a wise man who loved the beauty of every part of the natural world, especially the underwater world, an outsider who believed in the Big Things: equality, justice, freedom. Having experienced discrimination and prejudice, this man bore little resentment, apart from the “Bowler Hats” of course.

Now the younger man sat by his friend’s curtained-off hospital bed. The older man lay, diminished, oxygen-dependent, entubated, his life “in their hands”. Unable to detect the “patient’s level of consciousness” the younger man, unfamiliar with the fringes of death, glanced guiltlessly at his Diving Magazine.

Time passed.

It was the “Diving in the Past” magazine picture of divers, helmets and tubes (and Bowler Hats), that triggered the reaction. The “patient” jerked as near upright as the oxygen apparatus would permit.

“That picture, that diver, that’s me!” he croaked. “I was the best there was. No-one could touch me when it came to tough jobs: building caissons, clearing debris, harbour construction. See the Admiralty helmets: copper, three windows, six bolts, rubber and canvas umbilicals, phone inside helmet, lead boots. A tricky job: I was asked to do it. I loved it, that was my element, subsea, where few men go. I did my job, but I disliked those Bowler Hats. They just gave orders, never thinking that we were human beings. They never went down, stayed above, home at 5 o’clock sharp to cosy homes, tidy lives, neat wives, two children.”

The dying man’s voice became softer, but stronger.

“Down below I was in another world: instead of darkness, all was light with luminous, beautiful creatures, mermaid-like, floating along with me, smiling, playing, bringing gifts of shells and pearls. Ethereal, no Bowler Hats there. I was King in my underwater world, a kind personage, ruling only with the consent of others. No-one believed me. It was “above” that all my troubles began…”

A nurse’s head appeared through a gap in the curtains.

“Can I go now? I’m ready. Helmet on. Umbilical checked. Connect me up. Just make sure there are no Bowler Hats around. I’m going back to the place where we’re all equal. No persecution. Go well. Live well.”

The younger man’s magazine slipped to the floor as he realized that this wise father-figure who had taught him to love was going to his own definition of heaven. Mission accomplished.
Above, the Earth reined a war on itself and below, hidden inside our bunker, we fought with one another. The supplies were running out. There, I said it. We had kidded ourselves for the last few years that we could stretch the provisions among ourselves and the new mouths. Lack of mental stimulation leads to multiplication. 

It was pretty clear now that this delusion regarding the food had fed on last of our optimism. The same arguments began to be thrown back and forth: I’m hungry, you’re eating too much. But this time a change. It was the old doctor who said it. Being a man of science, he kept away from debates and focused on reality.

“The fact is”, he said, “Our population has become too large yet we won’t be able to leave the bunker for several more years.” He stopped and shifted his weight before continuing. “We will have to reduce.” No one had disagreed with him. No one had tried to fool themselves into believing it wasn’t true. Like I said, the optimism had been drained dry.

In reality this wasn’t our only option. We could all live happy fulfilled lives together without worrying about the supplies if we resigned ourselves to die in the bunker. Now if this was a cheap science fiction paperback then the older generation would have picked an arbitrary yet comfortable age at which they all agreed to sign off at. The younger generation would grow up having heard stories of the world outside and would one day be able to venture outside for the first time, marvelling at the texture of the grass below their feet, blinding themselves by foolishly staring in wonder at the sun above their heads. Oh look at the beautiful blue sea! How it stretches out forever!

They say that everyone is inherently selfish. It’s true. The doctor showed us the tablets that he carefully placed into labelled envelopes and handed them out. Like I said, he was a man of facts and the fact is he was right. We retreated to our designated areas and administered them. They worked. The children never woke up. This generation would be forgotten and we would produce another to care for us in our old age. We would train them as needed to reclaim the Earth. Luckily we had two doctors though as we found out the next day that the old doctor had earmarked an envelope for himself as well.

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When the time came at last to leave our bunker we knew that now we could raise a new generation freely. We would grow old in comfort, the bunker a small dark memory in the back of our minds. We were fruitful and crucified. There would be no second coming of mankind. The years in the bunker without sunlight has left us all with vitamin D depravation. Any children that were born were frail muscled, fragile boned. The weak shall inherit the Earth.
He falls.

He falls through the steel grey water, through clouds of life and past fish that darted around him and gave him not a second glance. He is calm, he has done this many times before, but he can see his partner’s face is inquisitive and pressed up against the glass of his helmet. He feels that the weight in his arms and legs is still manageable and slowly waves to his partner, pointing with his other arm to the peninsula to their side. It is covered in a short spread of anemone and seaweed, and tiny swarms of tiny fish dart in between the crags. He sees his diving partner’s face light up as he peers through the gathering dark and dust.

The rocks are closer than he thought: There is a jolt as he passes a rocky outcrop and he snags himself, but the weight pulls him free and then he is falling again, past the rocks and into the crevasse. By now the water is getting darker, and only a few fish and jellyfish float past him in a minute. Something cold spreads across his back, but he cannot turn around to properly see it. It spreads further, and he realises he has torn through his suit. There is a leak. The water comes in slowly at first but gradually increases its pace until he can feel the freezing water collect in his boots.

He tries to signal to his partner or to enable his fail-safes and get pulled back up, but by now he is being pulled down by the pressure and his arms are too heavy to move. He pulls again, but they just don’t move and he doesn’t have a foothold to push off from. He feels panic creep in and he tries to suppress it. It won’t help, it just clouds his judgement, but by the time his head is cleared again the water is up to his chest.

He gives up. He can’t move, his partner can’t see him through the fog of dust and by now the cold and the fear is paralysing him, filling his mind. His fingers are numb and the water level is up to his neck. His helmet drags him down and the air inside it becomes stuffy from his panting.

The cold dark reaches his helmet, forces his way into his lungs and consumes him.

He keeps falling.
From our reporter at the scene:

I am standing at the quay-side of this pretty seaside village, where the harbour waters have been drained in an attempt to reveal the sea-monster which has been terrorising the seas in the area. Burly volunteers have been recruited to don diving-suits and assist in the search for the beast.

Harriett Melville, one of the first residents of the village to spot the monster described it in this way: “It had a great, ugly, horrible head…horrible red eyes…big yellow teeth…and a horrible roar…”

At the quay-side, local fishermen have also been assisting in the search. Bill Bentley, whose right hand was lost to a whale on a fishing voyage some years ago, is keen to catch the monster: “Yes, I’m looking forward to cutting the £*%&^?!$.”

This kraken, as I said, has been sighted by several witnesses. It is generally described as having a dark, bulky, form, glowing red eyes, and a bellowing cry that can be heard for miles. Some residents have also reported a foul smell in the area.

Edward Enderby, a Scientist from the University, has dismissed the idea of a sea-monster and suggests that perhaps people in the area have spotted a whale or a seal, both of which are common hereabouts.

Most residents of the village disagree. Another of the fishermen assisting in the hunt, Elijah Mapple, had this to say: “I know what I saw”. A gruff fellow, he had many tales to tell us of his encounters with fantastic creatures of the deep, spotted on fishing voyages, and he claims to have had romantic liaisons with mermaids.

Youths of every description are gathering on the docks. Many of them claim to have seen the monster on more than one occasion. One stepped forward to relate this tale: “Oh, it was horrible…it ate Jimmy’s dog…gobbled it in one bite…then it nearly gobbled Jimmy too…but he ran.”
Just at this moment, the diving-men have gone into the water. The atmosphere here is tense, the crowd, which has been growing through the morning, is almost silent.

Over to the left of the boats, the water is stirring; the diving-men are signalling that they are ready to be pulled to the surface. They are now being pulled up…one diving-man appears to be holding the beast’s head…its red eyes dulled…the other diving-man appears to be carrying the beast’s body…it looks like…the beast is dead…the crowd is cheering.

By now…our readers may have realised that both the residents and the Scientist were wrong…As the carcass of the beast was taken onto the boats, a group of youths ran from the docks, howling with laughter…the ‘sea-monster’ seems to be little more than a painted-puppet…This reporter is not amused…and is cursing the inventor of the ‘Wind-up Telephonic Communication Devise’.

Note from Ed: Tomorrow ‘Leviathan revealed as hoax by Our Reporter’