

Welcome to the Island

By Olivia Gyuran

It watched with an evil sort of pleasure as it saw the cargo ship go down, bow sinking into the churning water with flames dancing along the surface of the water. Two ragged figures, on a piece of broken wreckage, were battling the waves and attempting to come ashore.

'Come to me,' it thought.

Captain Jacob Kimani was not having a good day. He sat furiously in front of the very dead, the very old-fashioned computer with his dark brown hands balled into tight fists, restraining his frustration and disappointment well, considering his circumstances. When the cargo ship, *his* ship, the U.S.S ODYSSEY, had gone down in an explosion of fire and black smoke, only two had survived. He'd been plagued by this gnawing guilt day and night, but not much could be done now for his dead friends and coworkers- the friends and coworkers he had sent to their ugly deaths. He was the captain. It was his fault they died. A dead computer really paled in comparison to so many deaths at his hand.

The ship had exploded so fast and so unexpectedly that he hadn't known what was happening until he was sinking down into the murky ocean amongst pieces of metal and limp bodies...

He was a strong man, though, known for his courage and level-headedness, and he *was not* going to give up anytime soon. Not until both he and the other survivor, Luka Hoffman, were dead- which could, of course, be any day. When the lighthouse on the small but pretty island ran out of the clover flowers that grew desperately between the craggy boulders, it would be starvation that claimed them. Perhaps it was poetic that the Captain saw it this way, but the island was beautiful: the shining turquoise sea shone stark against the simple, large boulders that made up most of the island, white foam frothing against the shoreline. A small comfort amongst a sea of disaster and pain.

Luka Hoffman, the young German cook that had luckily survived with their life, poked their head in the door of the tech room that Jacob sat in, the room near the top of the lighthouse. Luka was small, but good looking, with messy blond hair and round grey eyes, and a personality so timid and meek it was irritating. Back in Germany, they had been shunned by their restrictive family because of their sexuality, and had a pile of false records of crime that they couldn't convince

anyone they hadn't done. So Jacob took pity and helped them out by hiring them, even though they weren't the best cook yet, and weren't going to be anytime soon.

"It's dead," confirmed Jacob, hunching his shoulders, and running his hands over his bald scalp as he turned to the young cook. "And there's no electricity anyways. You knew that."

Luka's expressive face turned sour, their fear and upset scrawled all over their expression, as they tilted their face up to the faded ceiling, white paint chipping and peeling. Their expression made Jacob feel worse than he already did: after he had checked the batteries and found the computer dead, along with the lack of electricity, there was no way to call for help. The two were alone on the island, and all they could do was pray that someone would save them.

Of course, there were no lights except for the daylight streaming in through the small window in the corner, and the flame of oil lamps that the two had found in the creepy cellar that still reeked like kerosene after many years of disuse. The old lightbulbs were dusty and cracked as they hung from the ceiling, almost like a mockery of what they couldn't have but was just within reach of their fingertips. They had then searched the whole lighthouse for any method of communication, and had found the dead computer, abandoned and forlorn like everything else. Useless.

"No, it can't be dead," Luka said finally, their mouth turning down miserably at the corners. Jacob didn't believe in white lies, so he said nothing to comfort them.

"There *has* to be something...Captain, there *must* be a way..." Luka said softly, coming over to look at the dead computer.

As they stood there at his shoulder, Jacob suddenly felt a prickling hot annoyance that made him suddenly irritable and uncomfortable. Almost like something was watching him. He was overwhelmed by a sudden exhaustion that made his soul ache in a horrible agony for his family, his two children, his loving wife...all of the things he couldn't have on an abandoned island in an ancient lighthouse post. The feeling was so sudden and uncontrollable that he nearly spun around and hit Luka right in their timid little face. He in fact almost did it, but he resisted- after all, he was not that type of man.

"Luka, please give me a moment."

Luka backed timidly out the doorway of the old tech room, closing the heavily bolted door behind them. Jacob leaned forwards, sagging onto the computer like a

limp rag doll, and he breathed quietly to comfort himself, listening to the soothing whooshing of the air flowing through his lungs...the comforting silence was suddenly disturbed by another presence, a sinister force unseen to the human eye that stood silently behind Captain Jacob Kimani, waiting. The captain jumped when he heard a voice, whispery and mocking, echo on the inside of his skull like an invasive fungus, pushing and pulsing outwards, squeezing his brain until the pressure was unbearable. It was the sound of pure madness, something that resonated deep with Jacob's every desire, something that slowly broke and tortured those desires until they became his worst nightmare.

"*Welcome to the island, Captain Kimani,*" the bodiless voice said.

They were starving, slowly and painfully. Three days later Jacob and Luka sat on the lonely boulders that made up the miniature island, watching the waves break against the rocky shore as they stared out at the blue-grey sea with mournful expressions of their faces. Fishing had proven useless: for some inexplicable reason, there were no fish surrounding the island, even when the two just were looking instead of fishing. The island itself of course was too small for wildlife at all, seeing as the lighthouse nearly covered the entire thing, and what wasn't lighthouse was rock.

The tragedy had made them friends out of necessity: neither would survive a day longer had it not been for human company. Neither would survive a day longer alone with the voices in their heads.

Luka talked about them, worried about them, day and night, their eyes wide with terror at the idea of going crazy, while the ever-logical Jacob rationalized and told himself that thoughts did that to you. They were purposed to make you doubt yourself, so your ego wouldn't take hold of your soul and turn you into a monster. He had never told Luka about his own set of voices, of course, because if he did, he would be confirming the impossible: that Captain Jacob Kimani, the confident, smart and logical Canadian man with Kenyan ancestry was going mad like some rabid animal in a zoo. The voices rose up from the depths of his consciousness, would laugh, would taunt, and would tell him to end it, end his miserable little life before life itself stole it from him like the devil it was. It was breaking him, slowly tearing Jacob Kimani's brave and confident soul to dusty bits, atom by atom, and he wasn't sure how much longer...

But every time the voice chided, he told it *no*; he was able to resist the false pleasures it offered...for now, at least.

That was until he found Luka Hoffman's body.

On the fifth day of being stranded on the abandoned island, Jacob was unable to find Luka for a good part of the morning. He called out his friend's name, allowing panic to sharply pitch his voice as he ran up the twisting stairs of the lighthouse. He blasted through the heavy metal door of the tech room...and there they were, a horror freak show made live, smell and sight a statement of horrendous madness.

Luka hung from the ceiling by a thick rope, head hanging at a ghastly angle, body slack, dry blood crusted on their lips from their last moments of suffering. Their coat was slung carefully over the back of a chair, a casualness that was almost comedic for the situation, as if Luka believed they were going to a friendly dinner party.

Jacob screamed wordlessly, a note of pure terror, as he stumbled backward and tripped over his boots to fall hard on the wooden floor. The man he had been before was now warped so wickedly that he would no longer be recognized as brave Captain Jacob Kimani, but as a madman, a psycho. The remains of Captain Jacob Kimani crawled out of the room with his friend's body in it, reduced to a mere animal.

Overwhelmed by his terror, he didn't see the pale green light of the computer monitor flicker and blink in the far corner, like it had taken just a moment to become alive to watch the scene.

He closed the door, locked it, and never went back in again.

The next evening, Jacob sat alone in the empty kitchen, staring into nothingness. He was holding an empty, dusty beer bottle in hand whose contents had been emptied years ago, but it gave him comfort like it really had the spicy and fiery liquid in it.

The unseen presence stood, ever patient, behind him- but then, it lost its patience for the resilient human, and it left, gliding up the stairs to the locked room.

As it turned, it could see the human feel its absence too: the urge for death and the will to succumb to madness disappeared, and it watched as he blinked in amazement, like a drowning man taking in a deep breath of air after he had already committed himself to his ghastly fate.

The man, despite his horrible condition, his terrible situation, laughed: the relief was so great it overwhelmed all fear, all grief, all hopelessness. The creature just smiled: this would be a fun one, but it had something to do first. At the top of the

stairs, it glided into the room with the body in it and headed over to the dead computer. The monitor blinked green in response to its presence, and the creature sent the message.

Maybe it was cruel, or maybe it was just a movement of life, but Jacob stood up and walked towards the dusty cellar in hopes of salvaging a bottle of beer...and he never came back.

Blood darkened the rotting stairs, spattering in all directions like a leak in a water hose.

If one were to listen closely, you may have heard the sudden breeze's tone change to raucous laughter.

Coast Guard Charlotte J. Johnson was busy typing an email into her computer to her boss when a notification popped up on her screen from an unknown email, one that clearly had not been used for many years: welcometotheisland@gmail.com. She would have ignored it, and continued on with her insipid day, if not for the title of the email: **SOS**. Alarmed, she clicked on it, reading the message with her dark eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

'SOS. HELP US PLEASE. U.S.S. ODYSSEY.' And below that, coordinates. After a few rushed minutes she figured out that they led to a place in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the same location where the ghost email had come from. She rapped out orders into her walkie talkie, immediately organizing a rescue crew to hopefully save the doomed people aboard the U.S.S. ODYSSEY.

Hardly an hour later, a fleet of heavily armed military ships were circling the area, the sea turquoise and perfectly calm, salty spray splashing into Johnson's face. Two people were to go ashore to that little pile of rocks with an old lighthouse on it to check if anyone was there, assuming that the ODYSSEY had sunk and the lucky survivors had climbed ashore.

Coast Guard Johnson and Detective Percival Williams found themselves climbing awkwardly over the boulders and into the cold lighthouse. They found no sign of life after checking all the rooms, including the dusty cellar, and no one was there, nor were there any signs that anyone had visited in at least 20 years. They found an old, most likely dead computer up in the ancient tech room, but otherwise found no source of where the email had come from. They checked the computer with more detail and found it dead as a doornail- useless. They assumed that the message must have come from another smaller ship that had passed by, though they found it odd that it hadn't remained behind if it had witnessed the scene.

"Someone else must have got to them first," Williams sighed, peering out the cracked window, looking not all that concerned, admiring the peaceful and empty sea. He gasped suddenly, as if realizing that the sea should not have been as empty as it was, leaping back from the window, his simple face worried.

"Where's our ships? They're not there!" Johnson confirmed the same thing: even the boats that were supposed to stay behind had vanished entirely into the blue sparkling expanse of the sea, like a breath on a mirror.

And that was when Johnson felt an odd presence she couldn't quite place as anything is particular, followed by a spine-chilling voice.

"Welcome to the island, Charlotte J. Johnson."