

Chapter 1

Working Environments

Wednesday 15th July 2009

Atlantic Ocean

18 degrees West, 62 degrees North

Time balanced at the unique point when men are at their weakest, and their bodies are suggesting sleep, but for many reasons, some must be awake. Mother Earth too was in a quandary, somewhere between early morning darkness and dawn. One constant was the temperature, the biting cold found in the wild waters northwest of the Faroe Islands.

Amidst the mountainous swells sat the dark, foreboding bulk of *Spartan 4*, a Russian stern-trawler. Although a massive structure, it was lifted like a child's toy in bathwater. Few lights were showing onboard, apart from the green and red required by the laws of navigation. At the port side, a single figure stared down at something 100 metres away in the swells.

The man on the deck of the trawler wrinkled his nose, as he caught a breath of the cargo behind him. He opened a long waterproof casing and removed a rifle. It had a telescopic sight, which the user knew would serve little purpose under the circumstances, but he lifted the weapon into the aim and adjusted the scope out of habit.

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Pete Harris was one of three men in a four-metre, semi-rigid launch. He was dressed like the others in a one-piece wet-weather suit, which was worn over the appropriate warm clothing. Over the wetsuits, they wore lifejackets, which in Pete's mind, was their most important accessory.

Pete had tried a standing position, but couldn't bear it, so knelt down. He shouted to his companions. "I suppose you two have suction cups on your boots and a heating system inside your wetsuits."

Both crewmen laughed at Pete's dark humour, which was good for his credibility.

The intrepid journalist gripped the safety rope tight with the numb fingers of his left hand. He raised his digital SLR with his right hand, caught the Russian tanker in the rangefinder and pressed the shutter release. It wouldn't be his most professional frames, but he clicked rapidly to take in as much information as possible.

Even kneeling, Pete felt nauseous, slipping back and forward, but he held on and gritted his teeth. He had to fight all outside influences and inner demons to get this done. It occurred to him

there was no steady horizon, which reminded him he was 150 miles from land. Rolling up and down on massive waves in such a tiny craft was beyond even his descriptive powers. He felt sick.

He spoke, using a throat mike and headset combination. "Photographing the Spartan 4 as it sheds pollutants into the sea. Location is now between Iceland and the Faroe Islands."

The headset was attached to a digital voice recorder. It already held information concerning the trawler's sister vessels which were operating nearby.

A slight change in the wave pattern combined with a lack of feeling in his body, caused Pete to slip forward, and his face touched the icy water. Instinctively, he held onto his camera. Strong arms held his legs and kept him on the boat. His heart skipped several beats as he was dragged back to safety. Pete's mind was not in a good place.

When he turned to get on his knees again, he found Kurt, the larger of the two *Greenearth* men grinning down at him.

Pete gulped in air. "Thanks."

"We haven't lost anybody yet, mate."

The journalist slipped his left arm under the safety rope and gripped further along with his left hand. Before raising his camera, while he got into position, he said a silent prayer; asking not to fall again. Until his face hit the surface, he had been unable to smell anything, but now he had a taste of his surroundings. It blended well with the sound of the wind and the motion of the waves. Pete's body was already numb, and now his face was bitterly cold.

Determination had taken him from novice reporter to freelance writer and columnist. At forty-seven, he wasn't about to let something like a hostile, freezing ocean beat him. He took his eye from the camera to glare at the massive ship. At this range in the breaking dawn, he could now see patches of rust, all over the hull, and on the markings denoting the Plimsoll line. He saw a movement amidships and stared up at the guardrail of the trawler.

Pete said, "Is there somebody up there watching us?"

"Yes mate," Dougie said. "Be careful." He wiped the fresh splashes from his eyes. Dougie was at the helm of the small craft holding it steady. "Remember we told you, there's a nutcase with a rifle out here on a trawler."

"I'll try to shoot him before he shoots me," Pete replied and raised his camera again. In his blurred view, he tried to calibrate the movement of both vessels. He wanted to hit the mean point when he could focus steadily. It happened, like a stalling aircraft, the dinghy held position momentarily.

Pete aimed at the figure high above and pressed the button. He had to avoid thinking about his circumstances, so he spoke into his recorder. “We can now confirm there is a group of vessels,” he said and paused to focus his camera. “Three are working the waters, offloading to a relay of wet-ships. We have photographed this fleet at Murmansk and Archangel—”

He thought he’d felt a stinging in his left arm and a fraction later heard a loud crack. It took two wipes using his right forearm to clear the water from his eyes. He gasped when he saw a rip in his waterproofs. Did he see blood on his left arm?

“*Shit!*” Pete felt an intense burning sensation in his left biceps. He continued to use his left arm and trembling fingers to hold him steady. A stream of crimson ran out from the cuff of his outfit, over his fingers and onto the rope. A glance was enough to tell him blood was now oozing from the tear in his waterproofs.

Pete’s eyes misted, but he blamed the splashes of cold water. He looked up and aimed his camera amidships, his right forefinger continually pressing the shutter release. For a moment, he lowered his camera and tried to focus on the face of the man high above them. A man, he now knew, who was aiming a rifle. The features were hidden. He was silhouetted by the ship’s minimal lighting.

“Hey, guys is he shooting at—” Pete’s shook his head to clear the drowsiness which engulfed him.

The cold temperatures had been protecting Pete but had now subsided allowing him to feel the pain. He let go of the rope, and his falling bodyweight pulled his arm free. Pete was pulled onto the small deck. A metallic ‘ping’ could be heard, and sparks flew from the casing of the motor when a second shot landed.

Kurt shouted, “Go, Dougie, Go! Go!”

Dougie nodded to Kurt, spun the rudder hard to starboard and revved the outboard, but not before another shot ricocheted off the casing. The front of the craft lifted as he opened the throttle to maximum.

Pete tried to focus as he felt his body lifted almost vertically, and then he was buffeted by the deck beneath his back. He felt as if the boat was standing up in the water, racing with its underside against the surface. It was good he didn’t know how accurate his mental images were.

Kurt had harnessed himself to the side of the vessel and was using a pencil and a handkerchief as an improvised tourniquet on Pete’s arm. It was working.

The struggling journalist tried to focus on his rescuers through his tear-filled eyes. The pain in his arm increased as the launch bounced off every available wave, large or small.

“Are we going to die?” Pete said. “Please don’t let me die. I have to speak to Alice.”

Kurt slid down onto the deck alongside Pete and wrapped a muscular, reassuring arm around his chest to keep him secured. “Nobody’s going to die, mate. You’ll see Alice.” He looked to his colleague, squinting against the continuous freezing spray and nodded toward the engine.

Dougie was leaning forward from the back of the boat, steering with his left hand and gripping the safety rope with his right. He screamed over the engine noise and the wind. “We’re on the max!”

The *Greenearth* crew’s mother vessel was six miles distant. Pete’s stomach churned during the rapid escape. He continued to think of Alice as the pain increased. At times he felt aware of all around him as if he was standing against a bouncing wall, then he would doze off only to come around again a while later.

Would he ever see Alice again? Would they resolve things?

Everything went black.

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Tuesday 11th August 2009

Panama, Central America

81 degrees West, 7 degrees North

A series of countries extending from the southern border of Mexico to northern Colombia are collectively known as Central America. At the south end of this region is Panama, most famous for the canal which links the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The might of the Pacific washed up into the quiet bay at Torio on the southwest shores of Panama. A lone swimmer fought the waves, but even half a mile out, she swam with confidence. At forty-two, Gloria was renowned for her fitness. She was also recognised because of her affection for the planet’s waterways. Gloria’s sensitivity to environmental matters was one of the things which had drawn her to the profession she loved. She reached the buoy with the flashing red light, touched it, turned, and headed back for shore.

Gloria would never forget the lesson she’d learned about the power of the ocean. Her morning swim remained a training session as much as a leisure pursuit. In her field of expertise, she recognised the water for all the things it served to do. A few months before on one occasion, she’d allowed her fitness and romantic notions to lull her into a false sense of security. She’d learned how small she was in the great scheme of things.

The ocean was a violent force of nature and Gloria had almost succumbed to its untamed energy. Whenever swimming since then, she regularly saw Hermes and some of his friends as they came to swim and dive alongside her. To them, she was the slender creature with the dark mane.

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Following her swim, Gloria took a shower and had breakfast. The scientist scanned the ocean as she walked the short distance from her house to her workplace. She strolled along the covered walkway of the small lab complex and caught the aroma of coffee as she opened the door.

“Good morning, Bonita,” she called to the young assistant.

“Good morning,” the lovely dark-haired girl said. “I thought I’d make our coffee. I’ve already prepared for the morning tests.”

“What’s brought on the industrious start to the day?”

“I’m trying to learn from the qualities of the best boss in—”

“Okay,” the best boss cut in, “enough, enough.” They both giggled and enjoyed their drink. As she sipped her coffee, Gloria switched on her laptop, opened her Inbox and was delighted to see an email from her daughter.

Date: 10 August 2009. 18:30

Subject: Progress

From: Isabella

To: G. Banderas

Hi Mom,

I had a free morning and decided to drop you a line before doing anything else.

I got back here to find two of the other girls have left our course, and one of the guys has dropped out too. It seems Architecture will remain dominated by men for a while to come, but I’ll uphold the family tradition. I’ll strive to be the best and not give up.

I feel reassured knowing I have you at the end of an email or Skype; if it’s urgent. Miami is a beautiful place to study, and the campus is neat. There are direct flights to Panama too, which makes me feel at ease.

I have so much on my ‘to do’ list, but I wanted to say ‘hi’. No need to reply.

All my love,

Isabella xxx

To most people, the message didn’t say a great deal, but to the girl’s mother it said what mattered most, her daughter was enjoying her life at university, and she knew if she had a problem her mother would be there for her. She would always be there for her.

After reading Isabella's message, Gloria checked out a favourite blog site. She checked the screen and looked up. "This guy with the rifle has to be caught."

"Which guy with the rifle? I thought Jonah was a *Greenearth* activist."

"He is, and he writes his blog as an individual so nobody can say it's a statement by the organisation." She turned to her assistant. "According to Jonah, this mystery man has fired at the activists before, from a launch, and a trawler; always with a rifle."

"You mean he's trying to kill somebody?"

"The article says in mid-July, a freelance journalist was out with two activists on an observation trip. While the journalist attempted to take pictures of the ship, a man fired at them with a rifle." Her brow furrowed and she shook her head, "In the waves out there he would have difficulty aiming to wound somebody. He couldn't have cared about the result."

"Are they all okay?"

"It reads as if the journalist was injured, but it doesn't say how badly. As soon as the man on the ship fired again, they got away from there and headed back to their main vessel. They administered first aid to the injured man and sailed for Torshavn in the Faroe Islands."

"Where were they when it happened?"

"It was in an area known for its clean waters, midway between Iceland and the Faroe Islands. There are two images of the ship; a Russian stern-trawler called *Spartan 4*. There's no more information on the journalist."

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ONE YEAR LATER

Monday 9th August 2010

England, United Kingdom

0 degrees West, 54 degrees North

Pete woke at 5 am, his entire body feeling clammy. The lightweight duvet was sticking to his skin. He lay for a few seconds staring at the ceiling and reached across with his right hand to touch the two-inch scar on his left biceps.

Yes, it had happened, but now he had to get over it! He tried to sleep again, but as he'd learned from experience, he would have difficulty. Pete got up and made coffee. He donned his jogging pants, hooded top and well-worn trainers. After a light warm-up, he went for a three-mile run.

On his return, a shower followed by more coffee saw him ready to start his day. He dressed, opened his laptop, and checked his emails. Writing made his life okay, again.

At 8 am, he stood and gazed from the window of his cliff-top room, out across the glittering waters of North Bay. The house was situated two miles outside Scarborough, on England's east coast, giving an uninterrupted view of the North Sea. Pete could see the long, low, silhouettes of tankers a few miles out. Close to the coastline, he could see the filled white sails reflecting in the sun, as yachtsmen practised their skills.

He thought back to his recurring nightmare. In the incident a year before, his profession had almost cost him his life. He closed his eyes and shook his head. It had already cost him his marriage.

It had cost him, Alice.

After breakfast, Pete went downstairs to the communal sitting room, where he stood at the window to once again stare out across the bay.

The door opened, and Andy Collier entered. At forty-eight, the two men were almost the same age, but there any similarity ended. Pete was tall, had short, fair hair, and maintained a toned physique. Andy, the owner of the boarding house, was short, dark-haired, bearded, and displayed the results of a healthy appetite and lack of exercise. He maintained the appearance of his previous life as a merchant seaman.

"Here he is," Andy said, turning to his wife.

"Hi, Pete, I'm Karen," she said as she breezed into the room with all the subtlety of a hurricane. "Andy tells me you'll be settling in more permanently than our other guests."

Pete smiled as he got his first look at the woman of the house. She was the same height as Pete and looked about thirty, but he knew she was the same age as her husband. She had an infectious smile and a figure for which many women would kill. Her presence lit up the room.

They shook hands.

“What do you think?” Karen twirled around, causing her auburn hair to lift briefly. She raised the bright, multi-coloured scarf from her shoulders. “I finished it this morning.” The scarf was never intended to match her yellow T-shirt and white shorts, but Pete could overlook the mixed fashion. Karen was an attractive woman.

“I love the colour scheme; it’s very ... vibrant,” he said as he caught his breath. When Karen had raised her arms and spun around, her shirt pressed tightly against her ample curves, and it was easy to see a bra had not been included when she dressed.

Andy sat in an armchair and pulled his exuberant wife down to sit on his lap. “She gets a bit excited when she finishes a new garment.” He looked at her with pride.

Karen pulled on her husband’s beard and planted a kiss on his lips before turning to Pete. “Andy tells me you’re some a journalist. You’re not one of those investigative types are you?”

“Nothing so exciting,” he lied, as he thought back to the previous year. “I’m a freelance writer so that I can work for more than one client at a time.”

“Do you sell the same article twice then?” She cocked her head to one side.

“In a way, I can, but I have to make sure I present it differently for each client.”

As Andy sat listening, his face was tugged up by the beard and his wife looked him in the eyes in mock horror.

“We’ll have to watch this one darling,” she said. “He sounds like a slippery one.”

Her husband laughed aloud at the simple humour.

Pete’s thoughts flew back to Alice, as he remembered loving her as profoundly as these two loved each other. He pulled himself out of his momentary melancholy.

“When we have time you’ll have to show me some of your creations.”

“Oh no, mate,” Andy said. “Please don’t become a fan.”

Karen slapped her man’s shoulder, before addressing their guest. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you since I got back from the craft fair. I missed you because I was out during breakfast, so how about joining us for dinner this evening—we can get to know you better?”

“It would be good of you but—”

She held up her hand. “Oops. I’m afraid we don’t do butts here, Pete. We’ll be eating at six this evening.” She turned to her husband. “You’ll fetch our guest; won’t you darling?”

“Apparently.” Andy winked at Pete.

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Pete had a productive day, finishing off two pieces for a series he’d been commissioned to write. It was about the effects of pollution on inland waterways in the UK. He did a regular check of his emails and wished he hadn’t bothered—he received an email from his estranged wife. He was torn.

It was nearly three years since she’d walked out, so rather than reading the message he archived it. The ‘Alice’ file would no doubt expand in volume if he responded, so he decided not to do so; yet. He promised himself one day he would read her message, but for a while he would make her wait, treating her as she’d treated him.

Apart from Alice’s unexpected communication, he was on good form as six o’clock approached. Three minutes before the hour there was a knock on his door. He checked his appearance in the mirror, ran a hand through his short hair, and grimaced to check his teeth. He opened the door, and his smile emphasised the deep dimples in his cheeks.

Andy nodded. The two men went down to the private dining room.

“I’ve taken the liberty of chilling us a couple of cans, mate,” Andy said. “I hope lager is okay for you.” He handed a can to Pete. “The Scots know how to make beer.”

“I don’t—” Pete started, but accepted the can and changed what he was about to say. “I don’t mind lager or regular beer.” He cursed his lack of discipline. Now his evening would be darkened by the need for self-control. Drinking again was not good.

“Good evening.” Karen glided into the room on high heels. She was looking a million dollars in a low-fronted floral dress. She carried an oven mitt to lift the hot plates of food from the serving hatch to place them on the table.

While the two men drank lager, Karen had a glass of water. Conversation remained light as they ate, and afterwards, both men said the meal was delicious. The three of them went through to relax in the conservatory which provided a sea view.

As the evening progressed, Pete realised his second pint was only halfway down the glass, while his host’s drink was almost finished.

“Would you like another one, mate?” Andy asked, raising his empty glass. “I’ve got plenty in the fridge.”

As Pete stared grimly at the glass in his hand trying to make himself say ‘no’, he didn’t realise he was being watched.

“You take your time Pete.” Karen laughed. “We’ll let the old man of the sea drink himself into oblivion.”

Andy chuckled as he left the room.

“I’m sure if the man would like another, he’ll ask,” Karen called out. “He does have a mind of his own.”

When Andy was out of earshot, Karen whispered. “If you put it on the table it will be easier to resist.”

Pete stared at her wide-eyed as she continued.

“I used to find when I held the glass; I drank far too much.” She placed her glass of water on the table.

Pete continued to gaze directly at her and felt as if she could see into his soul. He was about to ask something, but Andy wandered back into the conservatory, humming a naval tune and carrying two fresh cans. He sat down and pushed a can across the glass-topped wicker table.

“Thank you,” Pete said and caught Karen looking at him.

She raised an eyebrow.

Andy didn’t see the brief, silent exchange.

Aiming to get the conversation flowing instead of the alcohol, Pete asked how the pair first met and how they decided on the Bed and Breakfast business. He kept the evening moving along with questions. Pete had known it would happen, and when it did, he still didn’t feel prepared.

“I’ve been dying to know something Pete,” Karen said.

“Go on.” He smiled.

“You’re a good-looking guy, with a decent job, and you haven’t mentioned anyone special in your life.” She raised her eyebrows. “Do you have a significant other, or are you married to the job?”

Andy shook his head. “You don’t have to answer, mate.”

“No, please, it’s fine,” Pete said. He turned to Karen. “I was one of those guys you mentioned earlier, an investigative journalist. Although I’m a columnist and freelance writer, I still accept occasional commissioned assignments.”

The woman nodded; her suspicions confirmed.

“I lived for my work and the excitement it brought me,” Pete continued. “When I was forty-one, I was working on a series of articles on diseases within hospitals. It was there I met Alice; a Ward Sister. We dated for six months and married. We were besotted with each other.”

Andy sipped his fresh beer.

Pete’s tone assured his companions that the past still hurt.

Karen's head was cocked to one side, and her usually animated character had disappeared, showing a soft and sympathetic side. Regrets followed a searching question sometimes, but they'd been meant with good intentions.

Pete wondered if Karen was simply the inquisitive type, or if she knew that below the surface a man might admit to himself that talking about his issues was healthy. Pete lifted the unopened can of beer from the table and glanced sideways at Karen.

She smiled and nodded imperceptibly at him.

Pete pulled the ring on the can and heard the familiar 'psshht'. He carefully poured the amber liquid into his glass. "Alice was stunning, and ten years younger than me." He took a drink. "We were great for the first year, because of the regular money and creating a home." The journalist stared at his glass. "Due to work I had to be gone a lot, and it got hard for her. She left me in our third year."

Karen reached out to take Andy's hand, squeezed it, and they exchanged a look of sympathy. They were privileged to be hearing Pete's story.

"Actually," Pete said, "I usually say I was married and got divorced."

"Did you never try for reconciliation after she left?" Karen asked.

"I gave it three years, and then I filed for divorce. It would have been hard to get in touch with me." He didn't mention his rollercoaster lifestyle and dependency on alcohol after Alice left. He also didn't want to say about the recent unopened email he had received from her.

"Was there anybody else?" Karen's eyes were bright again.

Andy looked at her with a furrowed brow, and his lips parted, questioning her silently.

Pete looked at his beer as he considered his reply. "Not as far as I know."

The man was to be admired because he hadn't slated his estranged wife for her actions. He accepted some of the responsibility, which deserved respect.

"So," Andy said, "moving onto something in which I'm interested. What's this project you told me about yesterday, mate?"

"I've sent a proposal to the editor of 'Earth, Wind, and Fire'. They are the magazine paying me the most money. I want to follow up my work on illegal fishing, the abuse of international fishing rights, and the effect on local ecology."

Karen's jaw dropped. "Do you mean the official *Greenearth* magazine?"

"Yes," Pete said. "I've already filed all my work on the problem around the UK coastline. My proposed assignment has funds allocated so I can visit Central America. The problem is rife on both coastlines there, but mainly on the southwest."

Karen's lips parted, but Andy silenced her with a raised hand.

Andy said, "Have you had any word back from the editor yet, mate?"

"I got an email earlier today," Pete smiled. "I could be on my way soon if I can find the right contact on the other side."

"Andy, how often have I said I'd love to go there?"

"Well, you're not bloody going with Pete."

They all laughed, and it eased the atmosphere. The three people finished the evening on a high, discussing the difference in the climate between the UK and Central America.

Pete stood to go and addressed them both. "Thank you both for a great evening, and Karen, the meal was superb."

"It was my pleasure," Karen said. "I'm sure we'll get together again before you go."

"I look forward to it," Pete said. "Good night."

"Sleep well, mate." Andy briefly rested a hand on Pete's shoulder.

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Monday 9th August 2010

Panama, Central America

Bonita leant the small of her back on the end of the bench. Her boss closed the diary and switched on her laptop. While the machine was starting up, the assistant made her suggestion.

"I've fixed us up some lemon tea, because it'll be pleasant out there for a while, and we can have an early morning chat before work." She held out a steaming mug.

"You mean there's something on your mind," Gloria said as she stood and accepted her drink. She went out to the covered walkway to stand beside Bonita. They both watched as the rainclouds built over the open sea. The two women held their hot drinks with both hands as a sea breeze brought the aroma of the liquid to their nostrils.

Gloria turned to her colleague. "How did it go over the weekend? Did one of the handsome young men in Torio or one visiting from Malena try to take you for a late evening walk?"

"Of course not."

"Now don't lie to me," Gloria teased. "Does it mean nobody tried, or they did but failed?"

The younger woman lived up to her Spanish name. She was pretty. As she was only twenty years old, most men and teenage boys would say in her case; pretty was an understatement. Like her boss, her hair was long and almost black. They both also had long lashes and a golden tropical tan. She flashed a smile before speaking again.

“Only one tried,” Bonita said. It was known she always stressed to potential suitors her work came first. ‘Work and study are the most important things in my life,’ she would announce as she left them looking longingly at her.

Like any attractive young woman, Bonita was aware of her desirability, and though inexperienced, she flirted outrageously with local men. Flirting with the mature men was a traditional pastime and much enjoyed by the targets of the affection. Bonita continued to observe the lightning storm many miles across the sea as she continued.

“Do you think there is somebody for every one of us?”

“I’m sure there is,” Gloria said, and her brow furrowed as she looked at her understudy. “You have a long life ahead of you. Don’t worry about such things. You’re a beautiful girl now, and you will still be when you qualify. Take your time growing up.”

Sometimes when the scientist appraised her assistant, she saw herself standing there, as she might have done when she was a student. So full of confidence and hope, eager to grow and learn more. She too had been full of wonder at the aquatic, and sometimes minuscule world she studied, and less in wonder at the world she belonged to as a member of the human race.

Years before, when she was younger, Gloria would tell herself the word ‘race’ was apt. Man, as a species didn’t seem to know how to tread carefully, and take stock of what the Earth offered. There always appeared to be a reason to hurry and discover something, purely so it could be exploited for human benefit. The next question caught Gloria off guard and brought her back to the present.

“Did you think your husband was the right one?” Bonita asked. She bit her lip. “I’m sorry. Forgive me for such an intrusion.”

“It’s okay,” her boss said, rallying to appear calm. “You see we all grow with certain ideals, as you’re doing now. At your age, my traditional upbringing had me believing it was right, and I should play second-fiddle to my man.”

Bonita’s eyes opened a little wider.

Gloria continued. “When I first married it was okay, but I had already experienced my independence, having been to university in the US.” She sighed. “Our marriage was irreparably damaged before it started.”

There was more, but she only ever told the rest to Louisa, her best friend. Some things could only be shared with a woman’s closest friend. She turned to stare out to sea again as a crack of thunder sounded, and the waves looked as if they’d responded. No seabirds were braving the change of conditions, and the sky became dark and broody.

Both women stood in silence for a few minutes, watching the power of the elements. The wind built up, rustling the leaves and branches of the nearby palms, whistling eerily through the jungle behind them. The Howler Monkeys and Green Parrots were quiet as if they knew a greater power was at play. It stirred Gloria back into action and back to the present.

“Don’t you worry, my girl,” Gloria said with a friendly squeeze of her hand on Bonita’s shoulder. “There is somebody out there for you. You have to be patient.”

Bonita turned to her wise and well-respected boss. Dimples appeared on her young cheeks.

“Now,” the biologist said. “Let’s get back inside. These specimens are not going to check themselves.” They both laughed, and the situation was eased as they went back to work. As she followed her colleague back inside, her statement made her think about the men who were recently vying for her attention. They were two very different characters.

Gloria was a woman in charge of her own life, and she had a positive outlook. She had learned a bitter lesson with her husband and felt beyond the stage of depending on a man. Any new relationship would be on a different footing. Having such an important job had seen her through the marriage break-up. It kept her going on a daily basis.

Gloria was confident when the time was right; the opportunity would present itself to her. She would experience something meaningful again, with a partner.
