

ONE

The solitary figure sat hunched over the desk straining to see the conundrum in front of him by the meagre flickering light overhead. A mystery he had thus far been unable to unravel, despite what seemed like hours of trial and error the sequence of seemingly random numbers eluded him.

Behind him the tin door rattled on its ever weakening hinges, threatening to break his already tenuous concentration altogether as the storm outside threatened to edge towards the biblical.

He wondered what kind of diabolical oriental imagination had invented such an infernal torture devise as this. The light overhead dipped again and for a long moment he was left in darkness with nothing but the rain and wind beating against the window in front of him for company. He looked out through the rattling glass but the outside was as dark as within.

"C'mon," he whispered and willed the light to come back on, the thought of spending the night here in darkness wasn't a welcome one. But he knew if today was anything to go by, the day tomorrow wouldn't be much brighter.

The light came back on and he breathed a sigh of relief and after taking a sip of coffee from the cup on his desk, he returned to the paper but it just seemed to make less sense than ever. Then, as if out of nowhere the numbers seem to fall in to place. He spoke out loud as he scribbled the sequence onto the paper. Of course, it had been right there all along.

"Right let's see, one, two, three, four, erm, five. Shit! Got no six." His heart dropped as the puzzle threatened to outwit him once again. "Got no six on this line yet." He traced his pen along the squares on the paper. "Ten? Hang on how the hell did I get a ten in there? Oh, no hang on that's crossed out, should be... Six, that's it! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Sorted. Finished, easy." Victory.

The speaker of the powerful radio transmitter next to him sparked into life. "Okay smarty pants. Now you have to fill in all the other lines, making sure they all have one to nine in them, oh and each of those little boxes have to have one to nine in them as well. Then you have to make sure each row and each column all have one to nine in them too. Easy?"

The puzzle hater's heart dropped. "Eh? That's impossible!"

Thankfully this battle of man against mathematical puzzle wasn't life and death to Pete Mulgrave, it was just another way to while away the seemingly endless hours of his shift here at the lovely titled Widow's Bay island volunteer lifeboat station. Which was a good job because it had well and truly kicked his round arse square. He threw his pencil down in disgust.

Mooney's distorted voice came through the radio's external speaker again. "Not impossible, just bloody hard, mate."

Pete threw the speaker a look of distain, he had the distinct feeling his colleague on the mainland was winding him up. He looked at the puzzle. Just what the hell did Sudoku mean anyway? Probably mental torture in Japanese. "Have you finished yours?"

"Yep, ages ago."

"Bollards, fax it through."

"No, then you'll see the answers. Besides the faxes are down remember?" Mooney reminded him.

"Oh, yeah." How could he forget? He had been cooped up in this shack all day due to the storm.

The increasingly strong winds buffeted the side of the prefab office at the back of the lifeboat station he was in sole charge of tonight, and he could have sworn he actually

felt the whole building shift. The builders had been working on the new office building when the storm hit and Pete knew this would mean it would be another week or so before they all moved into it. Still at least the lifeboat was safe in the new boathouse which had been completed first.

"Christ I'm bored," Pete said. He took great delight in screwing up the Sudoku and throwing the balled up paper into the waste bin across the office which he missed, of course.

"Anyway," Mooney said. "Here's something for you to wrap your tiny brain around. You're only bored because you associate the word bored with that feeling."

"Eh?"

"Try not using that word, replace it with something else, see if that works."

"Moon-man you're not making a drop of sense, mate."

"It's psychology, you associate being bored with the word bored. Y'know? Just use something else, or simply say 'I am.'"

That was so Mooney, if he wasn't reading some Zen book or other during the considerable down time between lifeboat call outs, (especially in this type of weather) he was reading

psychology, that or torturing him with the latest brain teaser craze.

"Okay," Pete said drawing out the word. "I am, I am... I am what? I am a carrot, I am a chair? I am... I am still fucking bored!"

The radio's speaker distorted as Mooney exhaled theatrically. "Christ's teeth Mulgrave, you have the IQ of both a carrot, and a chair. Why don't you watch tele or something? I'm sure there's some Jeremy Kyle on or some such shite to match your brain capacity?" Mooney asked.

"No signal," Pete lamented. The station didn't have cable and the radio was supposed to be for urgent communications only. "I swear it feels like the dark ages on here. One little storm and the whole island goes to shit." He complained. "We're only a mile from the mainland for Christ sake! Might as well be on the fucking moon."

The power had been in and out all night, the main phone lines to the island were down and you could forget about using a mobile at the best of times on Widow's Bay. The place felt like it was twenty years behind the rest of the country, which was a blessing to the hundred or so residents who for whatever reason had voluntarily opted to stay on the rock. These were mostly made up of students who had a small campus on the other side of the island from which they monitored the local

wildlife which was protected by the county side commission. That coupled with the isolated nature of the place made it an idea 'spiritual' getaway for those looking for some kind of peace and tranquility.

Pete wondered with a smirk how they were liking Widow's Bay now. Intermittent power and internet, and worst still, no TV. "I tell you, Mooney, I'm half expecting a mob of internet starved students to come up here carrying flaming torches and pitch folks to demand our generator."

"Well at least they can help you with your Sudoku!" Mooney offered.

Pete was about to tell his colleague, who had been lucky enough to be stationed on the mainland tonight where to go when there was an almighty crash from outside, followed by the sound of splintering wood and shattering glass. "Jesus!"

Pete jumped up and went over to the window and cupped his hands either side of his eyes as he strained to see through the rattling Perspex glass and outside. As he watched, the roof of the old storage building which sat adjacent to his prefab office was torn off and flew off into the darkness. The scene put him in mind of the Wizard of Oz and he wondered grimly if he was next.

"Fuck me!" He gasped. Pete did a quick recap of the last couple of days preparations. Yes as far as he remembered

they had cleared the old storage building a couple of days ago and the old place was due to be torn down anyway soon enough so no harm no foul.

"What? What's happened? Pete you alright mate?" Mooney asked.

Pete came away from the window. The lifeboat station was situated well out of the way of any of the other properties on the island, at the end of a half mile dirt road on the coast's edge. He sat back down on the swivel chair. "Fine, mate. At least by the end of tonight the contractors won't need to worry about demolishing the storage hut."

"You did clear it out?" There was an uneasy edge to Mooney's voice through the speaker which set off a spark of recognition in Pete's head. He laughed out loud. It wasn't completely empty.

"Ha! All expect your moped, remember? You were supposed to take it with you at the end of your last shift, but you couldn't be arsed!"

"Oh, bollocks! Pete, get out there and bring it inside, would you?"

"Are you shitting me? It's biblical out there I'd get blown away or decapitated by some of the crap flying around."

"Shit," Mooney lamented, but then added with better humour. "Ah well, it could do with a wash I guess."

"Still as bad where you are?" Pete asked.

"Yeah, but hey, don't knock it. At least no dickhead is going to go swimming or sailing in this weather. We can just kick back."

This was true Pete thought and as long as the storm blew itself out in the two days before the weekend, he was happy enough. TV or no TV. "Have they said how long it's going to last?" Pete asked. He knew Mooney had access to all the relevant info on the mainland office in Scarborough.

"One day, two tops," he replied.

"Good," Pete said. But if it hadn't cleared by the time his shift was over, storm or no storm he was going back to the mainland, even if he had to swim back. He sat back in his chair for a moment, he knew he would have to sign off with Mooney, the radio was supposed to be for emergencies only. Still he couldn't help adding; "God I'm bored."

TWO

There was dedication to duty and then there was suicide, PC. Ian Williams thought as the high winds buffeted his police car once again. He had decided to give the dock area of the island the once over when the lights in the police station (such as it was) had gone out again. He knew they would soon come back on but hadn't relished trying to work in candle light until they did. Besides the storm was so violent he just had to do a sweep in case anyone had been foolhardy (or drunk) enough to be out and about in this maelstrom.

But as he had, for the second time tonight, nearly ploughed into a parked car he had decided to give it up until the storm let up somewhat. He carefully pulled the car over to a stop and contemplated his next move. No one would be out tonight that much was clear. You could barely drive in this let alone walk without getting blown off your feet.

Williams had noticed the lifeboat station had power when he had done his sweep so that meant Pete Mulgrave who he knew was on duty tonight would welcome the company and be ready with a warm mug of his signature hot chocolate, which was one of the very few perks of being stationed on Widow's Bay.

He was contemplating this when the patrol car's engine suddenly, without so much as a warning splutter died and Williams was plunged into darkness. "Oh, you have to be shitting me," he cursed. He tried the key and pumped the gas pedal, but got nothing. "C'mon, not now, for Christ sake!" Then he wondered if the car had actually been struck by lightning, but there hadn't been a crack, bang or whatever happened if you got hit by lightning. Surely there must be something? He was about to dismiss the idea when he got a faint whiff of static in the car's musty interior.

"Jesus," he realised the hairs on his arms were bristling with a faint energy. He reached for his radio, but it was as dead as the car's electrics. "Fuck me," he said out loud. "I've been struck by fucking lightening!" Williams couldn't help but laugh. But that soon stopped when he realised he was stuck in a dead car in the middle of a storm. A quick calculation told him the lifeboat station was still closer than the police station, but still that was a long walk in this weather.

The dashboard suddenly lit up again and the car's headlights came back on full beam. Williams yelped in surprise and was damn glad he was alone. He tried the ignition and the car started first time. He gunned the engine and it gave a satisfying roar. "You beauty!" Then the breath

caught in PC. Ian Williams throat. There was a figure caught in the headlights standing some ten yards ahead.

Williams strained to see through the torrential rain hammering down on the window screen and wondered if he was hallucinating. But there it was, definitely a figure and by the looks of it a woman, with her back to him. Her hair and clothes blowing wildly in the wind. Just standing in the middle of the road.

"Christ!" Williams got out and was instantly assaulted by the blistering wind and rain. He ran as best he could over to where the woman was still standing seemingly oblivious to the headlights on her. "Hey!" Williams shouted above the storm but the word was barely audible, even to himself.

"Miss?" Williams came around to face the woman and was about to add that she should really get out of the damn road when he stopped dead seeing her face which was blank to the point of catatonia, her coat was unbutton and flapped in the wind and although she must have been freezing and soaked to the skin, she made no attempt to pull it around herself.

"Miss?" He said again and took a hold of her shoulders but she just stared off into space with no acknowledgement he was even there. Williams shook her shoulders but again got no response. Had she also been hit by the lightning?

As her coat flapped open again Williams got a glimpse of her white blouse which was splattered with dark patches. As she was all but silhouetted by the car's headlights he turned her slightly so the beam hit her head on. "Shit," it was blood. The light was now directly in both their eyes, Williams cursed and brought one hand up to shield his face but she didn't so much as blink.

She was in deep shock that much was clear even out here. But apart from the blood on her blouse she didn't seem to have any physical injuries, "Come on, let's get you out of here." And with that he gently coaxed her over to the car. It was like leading a mannequin of sorts she moved so stiffly, almost as if she didn't actually know how to walk at all. And after much effort he managed to get her into the back seat.

Williams, soaked to the skin and shivering out of adrenalin and cold knelt next to the open door and gave the woman a quick look over. Yes, now that he had her out of the rain and under the meagre interior light of the car he could see it was blood on her blouse. The material seemed intact, but he would need to get her to a doctor to make sure. He took a moment to compose himself a little and looked up into her young face. She was only in her late teens at most and he still hadn't seen her so much as flinch. Her ashen face was

set in a blank expression, her clear green eyes just stared ahead unblinking.

Was she one of the students from the small wildlife reserve on the other side of the island? Then it hit him, if she was a student wandering around out here, was she on some drugged out trip? It wouldn't have been the first time he had come across a drug addled student tripping their face off out here. Maybe, but there was just something about her blank expression that unnerved Williams. He shook it off, time enough for that later. He needed to get her to the nearest help. That meant Widow's Bay lifeboat station. They had power and a decent radio if needed.

Williams slammed the door closed and keyed the mic on the radio which was clipped to his shoulder. Seeing as it was out of season and they were down to a skeleton police force of just two tonight, he could only call one person.

"Munro? This is Williams, do you copy me over?" After a moment his radio sparked into life.

"This is W.P.C Munro, over." Suzy Munro was the only other police officer on the island tonight. She was holding down the fort at the island's very small police station, still without power no doubt.

"Suzy, I need you to get over to doctor Mayfield's and drive him over to the lifeboat station, I'll meet you there.

I have a woman here, looks to be in shock or something, she's got blood on her, but I don't think it's hers, over."

"Roger that Ian, I'll get him straight up there. Has there been an accident, over?"

"Unclear as yet. Meet me up there I'm going to have a quick scout around here, just in case. Over and out."

Williams was about to go back over to the car to tell the woman what he was going to do, when something off near a group of derelict buildings right on the dock's edge caught his eye. He strained to see through the torrential rain and took out his torch from his duty belt. He swept it around his surroundings and it caught a large plume of smoke coming out from the back of the buildings. "Shit,"

He ran over to the dock and over to the back of one of the buildings where the smoke was at its thickest. The wind suddenly shifted and the cloud blew right at him. Williams braced himself and held his breath against the oncoming acrid and possibly harmful odour, head down he narrowed his eyes to slits and let it hit him. The instant it did he realised his error, the cloud wasn't smoke, it was odourless, and his eyes didn't sting. It was steam of all things.

It took Williams a second to comprehend this and once he had gotten his bearings somewhat he gingerly moved through the

steam cloud and around the building, where even above the wind and rain he could hear hissing.

"What the hell?" Williams stopped dead at the surreal sight he was met with. Behind the building was a large open space that looked like it had once been a loading area. Large piles of rubbish and old lobster crates were stacked against the walls and judging by their state of decay they had been abandoned there for some time. Steam was rising in great billowing plumes from the ground and half way up the building's walls. It took the policeman a moment to realise that despite the storm and pummeling rain the whole area was dry. The hissing and steam was coming from where the rain hit the stone and brick work.

He stood transfixed as the rain slowly started to finally begin to wet the ground and walls and the steam began to fade under the onslaught of water. Williams instinctively crouched and held his hand, palm down over the stone ground which was still somewhat dry. He could feel heat even before he touched the ground. He instantly pulled his hand away. The stone was warm to the touch. He stood again and shuddered, the whole place just felt wrong.

A massive clap of thunder overhead snapped Williams out of his frozen state and he cried out in shock. "Fucking

weird." He turned and ran back over to the police car and jumped in the driver's side and slammed the door shut.

He winced at the violent action and craned his neck around to the woman in the back. "Sorry about..." The words stuck in his throat. The woman was still just staring blankly ahead as she had been doing when he had left her. He doubted she had so much as moved a muscle since he'd been gone. He watched her for what seemed like a full minute until finally she blinked, but still there was barely any life in those green eyes. *Weird* indeed he thought and started the car. He put the wipers on full and slowly set off along the road.

It would take a good twenty minutes in these conditions to get up to the lifeboat station but it felt good to have to give it his full attention so he could keep his mind off the strange woman in the back of his police car, not to mention what he had seen at the docks. But still he couldn't help wonder again if a lightning strike could have caused what he had seen there. It was as if a blast of heat or something had evaporated all the water there for God only knew how long before he had gotten there.

And Williams couldn't remember if he had seen any blackened charring anywhere. Surely a lightning strike could have set something on fire, the place was littered with boxes, crates and all kinds of rubbish. He cursed and tried to push

it out of his mind for now, it had been too dark to make much out. First things first he needed to get the woman somewhere safe and warm, let the doctor give her the once over, then maybe they could get some sense out of her.

Williams chanced a glance in the rear view mirror as he drove and caught the woman's lifeless gaze. It was like looking at a photograph she was so impassive. Whatever she had witnessed had shocked the life right out of her.

"Christ," Williams said under his breath. He thought of the blood spattered on her dress. He knew once Suzy and the doc' were with him up at the lifeboat station he would really need to come back down to the scene for a more detailed search. Storm or no storm, strange phenomena or not. He would have to come back because if that wasn't her blood. Then just who the hell's was it?

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

