

Lost

Part Three: Beneath The Surface

Julie sprinted down the country lane; tears of fright streaming down her face. A cold breeze, like the ones you get up hills during the coldest winters, the ones that made your skin sting with numbness, was whipping against the back of her legs and looking up, Julie saw that black clouds were homing in on her like world war two bomber planes. Rain was falling briskly from the grey sky.

As Julie sprinted on, she turned to see no sign of the bull and when she turned her head forward again, she noticed a small hill a few feet in front. Her tired legs clambered up the mound but she had only reached the top before they gave way completely, collapsing under her weight. She fell forward, her vision was a slow-motion blur and she felt her already battered body take more hits as she tumbled clumsily down the hill and then came to a sudden climatic stop.

She lay still for a moment, her eyes barely open and the taste of sand and blood in her mouth. She moaned as she pulled her aching arm out from underneath her broken body. Her body had slipped through the void into hell; her body was ruined, wasted and empty. She rolled over and was blinded by the burning bright sunset.

Julie lay on her back on a deserted beach, the orange sky lit up spectacularly, like a candle. For a brief moment, everything was perfect. Then the sun retreated from view, down behind the grey sea. The orange light fled like winged creatures, leaving only the darkness, the emptiness and the treacherous moon which would offer you secondary light but when your back was turned, let the shadows defile you.

Julie got to her feet and looked out over the sea. The sound of a sobbing child was carried across the calm sea and shook Julie with a trembling shiver that was so cold she looked around her to see if she had been doused in icy water. With the little light from the moon, Julie wandered towards the source of the sobbing. Her cut, bruised and throbbing feet were oblivious to the jagged rocks under her numb feet. But

although her feet were numb to pain, they welcomed the feel of the calming sea that the distressed sobbing had brought her to.

Julie waded through the water until it reached up, pulling her under until at last it consumed her. With an effort that came from something other than her, Julie pushed up and surfaced. Her arms drew the water towards her and after a few feeble strokes, Julie found herself pushing towards the growing sound of crying. In the distance, Julie began to see a glowing light not too far.

Julie was back in the forest, she knew it, she could....feel it. It was drawing her towards it, calling to her. She turned and ran, as fast as her heavy feet could carry her. But not too far in front of her was the same glowing light and Julie began to make out the shape of the caravan. She turned and ran again but she tripped and fell. A dark figure was standing over her, looming over her helpless body. The old woman came into view, holding the eagle's claw knife in a bony hand.

"No!" screamed Julie. She swam forward. There was a small island in front of her from which a small campfire was burning away mercifully. The warmth of the flames welcomed her. She climbed up onto the land and threw her shivering body towards the fire. But the flames were neither warm nor comforting. The closer she put her hands to the fire the weaker the flames got until they died completely and Julie was left shivering on the hard ground with only the grey moon for light.

She pushed her hands into the ashes hoping to feel warmth but the ashes were cold. The ashes melted in her hands, melted into nothingness. In the remains of the ashes, Julie noticed another small photograph just as she had found the other. She took it up and examined it under the moon.

It a warm and sunny day at the beach. Julie lay back on a towel, a fair-haired man beside her and a small child playing in the sand just in front. Julie flipped the photograph over to see the words 'the truth is but beneath the surface' written again in black marker pen.

Was someone testing her? What kind of sick fuck takes a child from its mother's arms and lays out a pointless trail of clues, leading to what? To a corpse? She tried to push the thought out of her head but the inevitability was beyond doubt. Taped to the photograph with a small strip of sticky tape was a plastic brown button. Julie clenched the button in her fist

instantly and pressed it to her lips. A tear found its way out of her eye and proceeded down her face.

Looking up at the black sky, a blinding white light ripped the darkness apart and consumed Julie.

She was lying back on a towel on the beach. Specks of sand had formed a layer between her and the towel overtime and Julie in her state of relaxation had not found the strength to overcome it and get up but now it had become too much. Julie stood and shook the towel out. The sand flew in a sort of mid-air wave from the flick of the towel. Julie sighed as sand landed on her shoes and clothes set out a couple of meters from the towel.

She sighed and went to brush it off, and whilst there, took up a thick paperback from her bag and lay down again on the towel. She pulled the sunglasses down from her head to cover her eyes and opened the book. After reading half a page, a feeling of being watched took her over. She shuffled slightly and continued reading but she could feel something coming closer towards her.

Something grabbed Julie firmly by the ribs and she jumped, letting out a blood-curdling scream. The book fell from her hand as she turned; it landed spine-up so that the words were hidden in the shadow of the very fabric that contained them. A man of about thirty was facing her, a huge grin spread across her face.

'Can bring out quite a scream from inside such a beautiful body ey?' He said pushing her back onto the towel. Julie reached behind her and grabbed the book. She hit him hard on the head and jabbed him in the ribs in return.

There was a small scream from behind them and the man closed his eyes to accompany a long sigh. Then he smiled.

'You haven't got off just yet, later yeah?' Julie nodded and he ran off towards the sound of playful children's screams. Julie decided against reading and lay back against the sand, the beaming sun warm on her face.

Something stirred in the corner of Julie's eye; a shadow perhaps, up on the grassy hill. She turned her head quickly but there was no sign of movement. Seagulls were squawking above, circling the beach hungrily. Julie saw in the distance children running forward towards the sea and sprinting away with shrill laughter as the tide washed towards them.

Something landed hard a few feet in front of Julie, sending a cloud of sand into the air. After jolting suddenly, Julia cautiously approached the object and saw that it was a decapitated seagull lying twitching in such a way that Julie felt instantly sick. Blood poured from its head onto the sand.

A scream, in the distance but the sound vibrated through Julie's skull like it was made of steel. Julie took a step forward and moved her head towards the sound of the scream, not taking her eyes off the bird. She slowly drew her gaze up and to the source of the scream. Through the bright sun, Julie could see the silhouette of a man standing over something Julie couldn't quite make out. More figures, mostly child-sized were surrounding the scene.

Julie sprinted forward, forgetting about the bird as soon as it was out of sight, and towards the group. Julie pushed past the children and saw that the fair-haired man was tending to a boy lying in the sand, writhing in discomfort. Taking a further step forward and dropping to her knees, Julie saw that a large shard of glass was lodged in the bottom of the child's foot. Bright crimson was oozing down the child's foot from beside the glass. The tears streaming down the child's face exploded in light, cutting open the surroundings until Julie tried to open her eyes but realized they were already open. She was back on the island in the darkness and a whooshing sound was growing louder and louder.

A small drop landed on the photograph that Julie held in her hand and before she could wonder whether it was a tear or rain, the whooshing suddenly grew to an almighty growl and Julie turned to see a huge wave collapse onto her.

Julie was dragged hard into the wave and consumed by the sea. She tried to kick upward but the force was too strong. As she was pulled forward again, through the blur of the rushing water, Julie could have sworn she had seen the man in a hat standing omnipotently above her on land. She couldn't be sure if she had imagined it in her panic or whether he had been there all along and she just hadn't seen him.

Julie clawed at the water, the photograph ripping out of her hand and rushing away. She felt herself being dragged deeper into the darkness into the wide mouth of a hungry creature. Julie struggled. Her limbs were held

in place by the water, held by invisible bounds. It was like there were weights tied to her exhausted legs, pulling her down. It was at this point that Julie gave up, both in mind and body. She stopped fighting and became one with the sea. She closed her eyes and let the water pull her down. It welcomed her, an old friend.

But then something beyond her, something beyond instinct made her eyes snap open. Floating before her, in the darkness of the water was the button that had been taped to the photograph. It glowed with a warm orange light and Julie reached out for it but the button floated upward as if pulled by an unseen string. Julie kicked after it but it drifted ever higher. The strength returned to her limbs and she fought hard against the water to surface. She shot upward like an angelic arrow, cutting through the emptiness like paper.

Julie pushed up with one last force and surfaced. Air rushed into her deprived lungs as if her whole body was inhaling it. She drifted slowly to the shore and collapsed on the grey beach. Weak light was coming up in the distance and across her shivering body; Julie could feel a sudden warmth. Her eyes had long been shut when she drifted from consciousness.