

1. *The tail of Jacko's sister*

Grinning smugly, Crispin Smythe steered the gleaming white speedboat out of St. Ives harbour; his knuckles were still hurting as he fingered the bag of jewellery in his pocket. *This lot ought to fetch a bit; she's going to get the shock of her life when she sees what I've done to her precious picture. Serve you right bitch!*



Priscilla Hartford-Jones was a socialite who Crispin had set his sights on straight away; she was the daughter of a local businessman and entrepreneur *and* worth a small fortune to boot. They had met when he had blagged his way into a high-status party; she had fallen for his easy charm and good looks, and all looked set for him to be on the road to a very advantageous marriage.

However, there was a fly in the ointment, a dirty great big one in the form of a man called Jackie “Jacko” Tremayne. He was a swarthy self-styled artist and boat owner who ran fishing trips for the Emmets who swarmed down to Cornwall in the summer season.

Pris thought the sun shone out of the little oik's arse, as Smythe would have said and flirted around Jacko, spending nights drinking with him at the Gaff Cutter, a popular watering-hole on the harbour front; frequented by tourists and locals alike. Things started coming to a head when Tremayne presented her with a painting based on the legend of the Zennor Mermaid. It was fair to say that the picture of the aquatic beauty was outstanding, almost lifelike and her bust was, to say the least, pert. Pris loved the *damned thing*, giving it pride of place on the wall above the fireplace in her expensive apartment with its view over the bay.

Crispin had been working his way into Pris affections over the weeks, and the artist was a distraction that, in his eyes, she did not need. Worse still, she had begun to divide her time

between the two of them. Following a long argument, she had agreed to see more of Crispin, even allowing him to move some of his things into her home. Despite this and her assurance that it was merely friendship with Tremayne, he would often find himself glaring jealously at the picture of the mermaid; *you are not going to ruin this for me, my friend. One day, you and I are going to sort things out.*



A few days later, Pris returned very late from a supposed girl's night to find Smythe at the flat. "Are you sleeping with that toe-rag artist?" he enquired sourly.

"I never said we were exclusive, did I, my lover?" Pris emphasised her reply in a mock Cornish accent. She was slightly tipsy.

"So you are, then?" he could feel his anger rising.

"What's it to you Crispin, you're only after daddy's money when all's said and done?"

"Oh, not that again; Pris, I love you, you know that?" the one thing he had always liked about the woman was her gullibility; *since when had she been this perceptive?* "They're his words, aren't they?"

"No, but Jacko has made me realise what a conniving bastard you are." Priscilla looked adoringly at the picture. "He's such a sensitive man, and he's so good with his hands," she side-eyed Smythe with a sly grin.

"That's it, I've had enough! I'm sleeping at my place tonight, bitch!" he snarled, slamming the door on the way out.

Best go before I do something I regret.

Early next evening, Tremayne was coming out of the Gaff Cutter after a quick drink when Crispin approached him in the car park. "What do you want, Smythe?" he asked cautiously.

"Are you sleeping with Pris?" he snarled.

“What’s it to you?” asked the artist. “Just because you got a posh voice and a fancy name it don’t make you special. You’re just a money-grabbing *tuss*.”

Crispin was enraged by this but held his temper in check. “Why don’t you come with me to Pris' place then she can tell us who she prefers, face-to-face?”

“Isn’t she out over Penzance way tonight?” asked Tremayne.

“She had a last minute cancellation,” he lied.

They walked through the back streets to the other side of the peninsula and made their way to Pris' apartment. “She’s not here, you twat!” remarked Jacko on finding the flat deserted.

“I knew that, you little prick; you’ve been turning Pris against me, haven’t you?” snarled Crispin.

“What do you want, an apology? Cos’ if you do, you can sod right off!” Jacko felt a sudden pang of panic. He had never really noticed how much taller than him Crispin was; or how well built.

“I don’t want an apology, you little oik; I want to break every bone in your body, but since I haven’t got time for that, I’ll settle for this!” with that, he punched the artist in the face to break his nose, and knock him to the floor. “Good with your hands, Pris said? Well, let’s see how good you are after this?” Smythe stamped on each of Jacko's hands in turn, enjoying hearing him yell in pain. Then, dragging the slighter man up by his collar, he hit the artist repeatedly until he passed out.

Priscilla returned an hour later to find her home ransacked, but worse was the sight of Jacko, sitting propped up in the fireplace. The painting was around his neck like a collar; his bruised and bloodied head protruded through a ragged hole in the canvas where the mermaid's face had once been. “Oh god, Jacko,” she pulled off the broken frame to hold him in her arms.

“Please say something!”

The artist stirred groggily. “Pris, I think I need an ambulance.” He looked at his broken fingers and exclaimed. “Bastard!”

She called 999 then sat on the floor, her arms around him. “Who did this to you, my love?”

“Who do you fucking think? Crispin fucking Smythe, that’s who!” he paused before declaring in a panicky slur. “We’ve gotta find him!”

“We’ll leave that to the police.”

“No, we’ve gotta find him before my sister does. She don’t take kindly to people hurting family!”

“I didn’t know you had a sister?” exclaimed Pris in surprise.

“She lives local, but we don’t talk much; she’s a bit odd.”



Crispin Smythe, or Christopher Robin Smith as he was known to the West Midlands police, was a con man with a history of violence and a short fuse. Smith had genuinely liked Priscilla, seeing her as more than just another mark, but having lost it with that little prick of an artist, that was the end of that. Smith had taken over a thousand pounds in cash, along with two credit cards and all of her expensive jewellery; *stupid bitch, serves her right for leaving it lying around.*

He would have to get rid of the boat he had coerced Pris into buying, but *hey-ho, he would see what tomorrow brought.* Smith was heading north into the falling dusk, keeping close to the coastline, when he spotted something white in the water; it was a woman, and she was waving frantically. She was obviously in trouble. He considered ignoring her plight, but,

deciding that he had been enough of a bastard tonight, half-reluctantly steered towards the pale figure. She began swimming towards the boat, and she appeared to be naked; with a grin, Smith reached over the side to help her aboard, and it struck him that her face seemed very familiar. She looked exactly like the mermaid in Pris' painting! The woman raised her face to him and smiled, to bare needle-sharp teeth like those of a predatory fish; he tried to let go, but the creature grabbed his arms to cling to them with a vice-like grip. He reeled back in horror, half-lifting her out of the water and the shock of seeing her toothy smile was nothing compared to that of seeing the golden scales that covered her lower half. The mermaid hissed, and he screamed in terror as she dragged him from the boat and under the water.

As the ripples abated, a golden tail flipped briefly out of the tide before sliding beneath the surf, leaving the white boat adrift and abandoned.