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**Opening Extract from...**

# Swimming with Sharks

Written by Anna Legat

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# SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

A DI Gillian Marsh Mystery

## ANNA LEGAT

Extract For Review

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All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

## Day Ten

At Colombo airport Gillian tries again. She has been trying to call Tara for the past twenty-four hours. She is now so close to her that she contemplates the possibility of putting the missing person inquiry on hold and jetting over to Phuket. Only there are no guarantees that Tara is there. She has been very vague about her lodgings. In fact, she is what Gillian calls in her professional jargon of *no fixed abode,* moving between youth hostels and B&Bs of dubious repute. It is a daunting prospect for an eighteen-year-old gullible girl in a country where people get hanged for carrying too many boxes of aspirin. Gillian is paralysed with worry. And Tara's telephone does not ring – it goes straight to the answer phone and in the same cheery voice Tara tells her to leave a message. Gillian hangs on to the off-chance that Tara called when she was in transit flying over the Indian Ocean with her phone switched off, but the empty voicemail contradicts that.

The moment Gillian gets off the plane, she checks: no messages. She leaves one of her own: *Tara? Mum here. Please call me on my mobile. I'm on a case – out of the country; won't be at home. Call me as soon as you get this message. Did I say you must call my mobile? I have now. Call me. Love you!* Nothing. Two hours later nothing. What time is it now in Thailand? It is 6 a.m. in Colombo.

Another plane: to Malè. It is small and it rattles. As instructed by the captain, Gillian switches off her mobile and she resents the guy next to her who, in defiance of the rules, continues working on his laptop. 'All electronic devices,' she tells him in a half-whisper. 'That includes laptops.' The man smiles at her, nods politely and carries on with his work.

Doesn't speak English. Gillian tips her head back and closes her eyes. She just wants to get there.

In her head she is *inventorising facts*. She has a name for it because she does it all the time. It reflects her thought process accurately as something halfway between inventorying and prioritising – *inventorising*. Gillian's mind works in mysterious ways, and so does her vernacular. Whenever a new case opens, Gillian mounts her spinning wheel of inventorised facts. She goes over the facts of the case over and over again, constantly reviewing the old and regularly adding the new to the spin. Like a hamster. She only stops when the case is solved. She doesn't write it down; all she does is relentless mental revision. And now she has very little to go on: a forty-two-year-old woman, a spinster, fairly well off, in regular employment suddenly breaks the habit of a lifetime and goes on a holiday. Travelling alone, she chooses a traditional honeymoon destination in the Maldives. Her decision appears sudden and unexpected – no one is aware of it apart from the neighbours who are asked to look after her pet cat. They are told the day before she departs. Her brother doesn't know. Her acquaintances do not know … Correction: the woman makes it known on Facebook but it looks like nobody reads it. This will be verified – Jon is checking the viewing statistics on her Facebook page.

Other questions to be asked: one, was she meeting someone in the Maldives? Jon is running background checks on Paul Collins and Peter Bird, the only two potential romantic interests in her life who they can verify. Both over two years out of date, however … but that was just emails; they could have evolved to meetings in person, telephoning each other (Jon to check her line and mobile calls history). Question two, who would have interest in getting rid of her? The brother seems like the obvious candidate. He is her only relative, most likely to inherit her considerable wealth. According to Jon's intelligence she is worth close to a million pounds. Unless there is a will (to be checked), the brother would get it all. If, contrary to what he says, he knew she was coming this way, then this was his perfect opportunity. The flight from Adelaide would have taken

him just over seven hours – it is doable. Robert Eagles travels around the world for work. Jon is verifying with the Australian authorities if Eagles has travelled anywhere near the Indian subcontinent in the last ten days.

The defiant man with a laptop tugs at Gillian's sleeve and points her to a flight attendant hovering over their heads with what looks like a steaming jug. 'Coffee or tea?' the flight attendant asks with a withering smile. Gillian chooses coffee, which tastes bitter but will do for now to keep her awake. Maybe Scarface is right – maybe all there is to it is a midlife crisis, a woman wanting to get away from it all, losing herself a bit in the world, looking for adventure, all in one: taking time off and wishing to be left alone. If only she had told someone! That would have spared Gillian the seventeen hours sleepless air-ferrying across two continents and missing out on her DI training (though that could be considered an unforeseen bonus!).

'Business or pleasure?' the man next to her asks in perfect English. She had been sure he hadn't understood her admonishment due to a language barrier. Clearly, he'd chosen not to heed it!

'Didn't you hear it?' she asks, astounded.

'Hear what?'

'About switching off all electronic devices!'

He smiles with a nonchalant wave of a hand. 'Oh, that! That really means nothing. I always use my laptop in flight. It's harmless, believe me. And it's business for me. Lots of homework to catch up on!' He salutes her with his coffee. 'So, is it a holiday? Where are you heading?'

'Well, in that case, I've got an important telephone call to make!' Gillian rises to reach for her mobile buried in her back trouser pocket. She turns it on. It takes a moment to light up. Hopefully Tara has called back.

Nothing. No messages.

'You won't get any reception here,' the man tells her.

The flight attendant passes by with her steaming jug, offering more tea or coffee. She directs a warning scowl at

Gillian. ‘Please switch off your phone, madam. All electronic devices must be switched off.’

As soon as Gillian gets off the plane she puts the phone back on. While queuing through Border Control, she checks her messages. Nothing. She checks if she has reception. Reception, yes; messages, no. She dials Tara’s number again, and again gets the same no-rings silent treatment. The answerphone kicks in and invites her to leave a message after the beep. ‘Bloody, bloody hell!’ she mutters. The beep comes between the first and second bloodies. Gillian rings off. She hands her passport to the officer in a booth.

‘Welcome to the Maldives. Enjoy your holiday!’

She only has hand luggage: toiletries, a couple of fresh shirts, sensible pyjamas. This is going to be a short stay. Everything costs and the budget gets smaller by the minute, Scarface informed her sourly after she managed to twist his arm into signing the trip off. The positive outcome is that she doesn’t have to queue for the conveyer belt. She pushes by the *Nothing to Declare* gate. If only she could clear her head! She won’t have peace until she gets hold of Tara. Her brain cannot multitask: she can’t turn it off to solve the missing person inquiry while it is frayed with constant worry. She decides to call Deon. It is not something she does lightly. His number in South Africa is stored on her mobile, but so far she hasn’t used it. It rings. At least it rings; she prays for him to pick it up. In the Arrivals Hall a wiry man dressed in white is holding a cardboard sign with her name on it: DS Marsh. It must be her taxi driver. She beckons him while balancing her mobile between her cheek and her shoulder. He looks surprised, and – oddly – ignores her, looking over her shoulder for the real DS Marsh. The telephone keeps ringing. ‘Come on, answer the damned phone!’

Answer machine! Gillian curses under her breath, drops the phone, picks it up – Deon’s voice says he can’t come to the phone but will get back to her as soon as he can. Beep! She starts walking towards her driver, calling out to him: ‘Here!

Over here! I'm DS Marsh!' He raises his eyebrows.

'Oh hi, Deon. It's Gillian. Have you heard from Tara? Let me know. I seem to be missing her. Her phone is off. Can you pick up? I'm a bit worried …'

'DS March?' the driver asks.

'MARSH. Yes, yes!' Gillian fumbles in her pocket for her ID card. She flashes it in the man's face. She passes him her suitcase. 'Are you parked somewhere nearby? Central Police Station, please.' She realises she hasn't rung off. 'Deon? Call me, all right? On my mobile. Thanks.' She presses the end call button.

'Let's go, then,' she tells her driver. He leads her out of the airport and into the steaming Maldivian pressure-cooker. It occurs to Gillian that even in her light bomber jacket and jeans she is seriously overdressed. She begins to sweat. 'Bloody heat!'

'Indeed!' says the driver.

He stops by a police car, opens the boot, and shoves her suitcase in.

'You're a policeman? Sorry, I thought –'

'Detective Nasheed.' He shuts the boot. 'You thought I was a taxi.'

'You thought I was a man,' she counters smugly.

'Not any more,' he beams in acknowledgment and opens the passenger door for her, 'Are you sure you want the police station? I could take you to your hotel – give you a chance to unpack, refresh,' He looks pointedly at her bomber jacket. 'We booked you into Holiday Inn.'

'I'd rather we got straight down to business. I didn't fly here for refreshments.'

In the car Gillian strips down to her white vest. She positively smells; she screws up her nose. 'Sorry,' she says.

'What for?'

She doesn't have the will to explain. He knows anyway but is too polite to admit it. 'Right, so what do we know so far?' she demands.

'Very little. No trace of her. It may be drowning. The body

may not emerge for days, possibly – never. It depends on how far the currents would've carried it into the open waters.'

'The resort manager told me drowning was unlikely.'

'It wouldn't be good for business, true, but it is the only logical explanation. You can drown in a spoon of water, you know?'

'Without a body we can't make any assumptions.'

'No, nothing apart from the fact that she is missing.'

'Did you preserve the crime scene?'

'What crime scene? There aren't any indications of foul play. Like I said, she is missing. This is a missing person inquiry as far as we are concerned.'

'Yes. I mean her room. I asked the resort manager not to touch anything in her room. He was rather reluctant …'

'We secured everything – all her belongings. We've got them here –'

'You removed all the evidence from her room!' After she specifically asked them not to! She wanted to inspect the room as Nicola Eagles had left it – to see where every single item was placed, on purpose or accidentally. Did Nicola Eagles prepare for her departure? Did she pack? Or did she leave unexpectedly, her belongings scattered on the floor, a glass of water left half-empty, toothbrush still in the bathroom, bed unmade? Perhaps there were signs of a struggle? Was the door locked, or left open? Was the TV playing? Gillian needs to know. She needs to get into the person's house – it is the same as getting into their heads. It helps her build a picture of the last few minutes before death. Or disappearance. Or both. Visiting Nicola Eagles' house in Sexton's Canning gave Gillian several vital clues. The fact that she had left the central heating on for the cat and made arrangement for his care until a specific date told Gillian that Nicola Eagles was not suicidal and had every intention of returning. The way her clothes were tidily folded and organised in the wardrobe told Gillian she was not likely to have done anything on the spur of the moment, anything spontaneous. The fact that, despite the clutter, Nicola Eagles had kept both her own furniture and her aunt's old pieces side

by side without being able to dispose of either set said a lot about the woman's character: conservative, indecisive, reverent; not the kind to sail into the sunset on a whim. Everything that Gillian had learned about Nicola Eagles in her house was turned on its head by her disappearance. People like Nicola Eagles do not disappear; they do not leave any loose ends. They are too dutiful and too caring to put anyone out, to cause any trouble. They would feel awfully guilty if anyone had to worry about them, like that lovely Mr and Mrs Devonshire. Gillian has a picture of who Nicola was – is; now she wants a picture of how – and why –anyone would want to get rid of her. Evidence left in her room would point Gillian in the right direction – in *some* direction – if it was there, but the hotel manager got it his way!

'I can't believe you didn't seal the room! I can't believe you didn't wait for me –'

Nasheed gives her a hard look: 'It is *my* jurisdiction, if I can point it out to you. *I* have satisfied myself that there was nothing in that room to indicate crime has been committed there. *I* have had the contents of the room brought to Malè for forensic examination.'

'I just wish you'd waited for me!' Gillian sighed. 'Can I at least have a look at what you have here?'

'I don't see why not. We've looked already, found nothing, but be my guest!' There is resentment in his tone which contradicts the flippancy of his reply. He takes her down the stairs to a cool basement. He requests Nicola Eagles' evidence box from a male officer with a thick mane of greying hair and the gritty voice of a heavy smoker. They are led to an empty room without windows and presented with a cardboard box. When the officer leaves, Nasheed says, 'The only thing that puzzles me is the blood.'

'Blood?'

'On bedsheets. We found a bloodied bedsheet hidden in the wardrobe, and some stains on another sheet on the bed.'

'And you call that a classic case of drowning? What did you say? *No indications of crime being committed?*' Gillian is

appalled.

'The blood could mean anything: she could've cut herself. It could be menstrual. We don't even know it is her blood. There was only a small quantity. Definitely not enough to point to a serious wound. She did not bleed to death if that's what you're thinking. You need to get a perspective before you jump to conclusions.'

'We will send samples to the UK for DNA examination. We need to know if it is Nicola Eagles' blood. If it is –'

'Even if it is, it means nothing unless we have a body. Remember that this is still a missing person inquiry.'

He must have said that twice already. She found his defensiveness irritating. Nothing must be allowed to disturb the tranquil image of the Maldivian paradise! Gillian has to hold her tongue. She depends on Nasheed; she needs his co-operation. 'I realise that. What I want to know is this: how do you disappear from an island? How do you leave an island without being seen? Dead or alive.'

'The only way is drowning.'

'There are other ways: killing, abduction, kidnap for ransom … Shall I go on?'

'We've excluded those. You imply we're doing nothing, but you're wrong and I am beginning to take offence.' Nasheed's face muscles tighten and his speech becomes more accented. 'We've explored all possibilities, interviewed potential witnesses, checked all departures from the island, talked to owners of yachts that moored at Itsouru in the last ten days … We searched. We sent boats out. Nothing. She's gone.'

'We need to find her, if only to eliminate foul play,' Gillian insists.

'All we can do now is wait.'

'You didn't search hard enough.'

He snorts, throws his arms in the air. 'We don't have the manpower to comb through the entire Indian Ocean! There are limits to what we can do.' He is irritated as much as she is. Gillian has a feeling that they are going to be stepping on each other's toes a lot …

Gillian's mobile makes her jump. She answers it without looking at the number of the caller. Deon's voice is like a call from beyond. She is momentarily covered in cold sweat. 'Deon? What's happened? Has something happened!'

'Not to my knowledge, it hasn't.' He sounds his typical patronising self: a bit tired of her, a bit bemused.

'Then why are you calling me? You gave me an almighty fright. Thought something happened to Tara. Don't do this to me!'

Nasheed realises it is a personal call, mutters a vague excuse and leaves the room just as Deon hollers in utter exasperation, 'I don't believe this! You asked me to call you, Gill! Get a grip on yourself!'

Of course, she remembers now, she did call him. If only he had answered then and there! She has forgotten – the case, as every other case in the past, has hijacked her, body and mind. 'No need to shout, Deon.'

'How do you think I felt when you called in the middle of the night? I thought something happened to Tara, for God's sake! I should ask you *not to do this to me!*'

'I was worried – I *am* worried! I can't get hold of her. Something may have happened …'

'Nothing happened.'

'How do you know? Have you spoken to her in the last two days?'

'No! And for a good reason! She's gone elephant riding, somewhere in the jungle. She didn't expect to have signal. Two – three days. Do you ever listen to what your daughter tells you?'

'Of course I do! I wasn't home when she called. She left the most enigmatic message –'

'What's new?'

'Whatever do you mean?'

'You're either not listening or not there at all! Nothing's changed.'

The hurt tone of the old supercilious Deon is unmistakable. Gillian remembers precisely why she had to leave him fifteen

years ago. ‘Nothing’s changed, indeed,’ she concedes. Her mind is elsewhere already.

‘Thanks for calling back. Must go. Bye.’ She takes great pleasure in pressing the end call button. An expedition into the heart of the Thai jungle presents new challenges, but Gillian refuses to face them. Not now. She has an explanation for Tara’s silence. That’s all she needs for the time being.

Back on the case, Gillian takes out object after object from Nicola Eagles’ evidence box. She has little interest in shampoos and toothbrushes or various items of the woman’s rather dull clothing, but by being left behind they are the confirmation that whatever happened to her was not planned: you would normally take your basic necessities with you if you were going away. The type of sensible outfits Nicola Eagles brought with her on her holiday adds another piece to the puzzle: she was definitely not meeting up with a lover. Kinky nighties, lace knickers, suspenders and bright red lipstick are conspicuous by their absence.

Gillian finds a few books, some of them in Russian. That reminds her that Nicola Eagles can speak Russian. Good Russian! If she can read *Anna Karenina* in original, she has to be fluent in Russian. Gillian flicks through the book, marvelling at the alien Cyrillic alphabet. Fluency in Russian is something that sets Nicola Eagles apart – one of her most unusual characteristics amongst the dull and the ordinary. But does it mean anything? Does it have any bearing on the case? Gillian doesn’t know but she inventorises this fact at the back of her mind.

Her telephone rings again. It’s Jon Riley.

‘How are the tropics? Hot?’

‘What have you got for me?’

‘Not much. The woman is a non-entity. No one knows anything about her. They haven’t heard from her at work. She was due to return today. Her boss said she was a reliable employee but called her Nicolette instead of Nicola. That tells you something! I got hold of Paul Collins.’

‘Paul Collins?’ Gillian is not quick enough to keep up with Jon’s sharp turns and twists in conversation. There are usually plenty of short cuts in his verbal reasoning, which she is accustomed to (as he puts it, *great minds think alike)* but today she is jet-lagged and on the edge.

‘Paul Collins – one of her blokes from that dating site, remember?’ Gillian nods to herself. Jon sniggers: ‘He pretended not to remember her, said I got the wrong man. Turns out he got married a few months ago and his wife is sitting right next to him when I call! Anyway, preliminaries aside, he claims not to have heard from her in two years. He admitted he met her – once. “And once was more than enough,” is what he said. Maybe just for his wife’s benefit. Though he did say Miss Eagles – he actually called her Miss Eagles, not Nicola – Anyway, he said she was awkward. He used the word awkward and when I asked him to clarify that, he said: “weird if you must know, son, as weird as they come. Out of touch. Psychotic!” Strong words, if you ask me, but the guy struck me as over the top: agitated, nervy…’

‘Wouldn’t you be if a cop called you about a missing ex-girlfriend in front of your wife?’

‘That wouldn’t have happened. I only have an ex-wife. Now, the other bloke – Peter Bird – wasn’t home. Spoke to his mother. Blimey, she must be a hundred, couldn’t hear a word I said, had to repeat everything twenty times. Like talking to a stone, as in stone deaf?’ He sniggers.

‘Get on with it, Jon!’

‘So Peter wasn’t home, travelling on the continent – some river kayaking thing in France. His deaf mother’s never heard of Nicola Eagles, but then … she’s deaf, isn’t she, so she wouldn’t’ve *heard*!’ Jon chuckles. Gillian is not in a mood to acknowledge his quips. ‘I want you to check that.’

‘I checked it – deaf as a post,’ another chuckle.

‘I’ve no energy for this, Jon. Check where Peter Bird is. Check where he’s been in the last ten days.’

‘Hang on a second!’ Jon protests. ‘Don’t you have DC Webber to do your dirty jobs?’

‘Webber is on holiday. I only have you,’ Gillian tries to instil a purr into her voice.

‘Ahhh,’ Jon has been tickled under the chin. He loves being indispensable – he doesn’t have much else going for him these days. He can deliver a star performance – as long as it does not involve getting out of his chair. Gillian will have to push her luck this time. Now that he is temporarily appeased, she demands, ‘Anything else? How about her calls history?’

‘Nothing of consequence. Actually no, scrap that! *Nothing* is the word. She hasn’t made any phone calls nor received any in the last three months. Do you want me to go further back than that?’

‘No. Mobile?’

‘Can’t help you there. No mobile in sight.’

‘Hang on!’ Gillian explores the depths of the evidence box. A mobile phone lies at the bottom with a charger still plugged into it. She was charging it when she disappeared – more proof she didn’t intend to walk into the ocean and die. It is an old-fashioned cheap job with a conventional keypad. ‘Okay, it’s a Virgin mobile.’ Gillian reads out the number.

‘Got it! Will let you know tomorrow if anything of interest. Don’t hold your breath. Her Facebook statistics are a record low. There are weeks when no one as much as glances at her page. Weeks! And then once in a blue moon one or two clicks. Poor woman! Never known anyone living in deeper obscurity than that! She could disappear tomorrow and no one’d notice.’

‘She *did* disappear and someone *has* noticed.’

‘Oh yeah, the cat! You’ll like this. Listen good!’ There is a faint echo of excitement in Jon’s voice – a rare occurrence. Gillian often wonders if she has ever known anyone more detached from the rest of humanity than Jon the Geek. ‘Hey, ho! Here it goes: the brother! Robert Eagles flew to Hong Kong five days ago precisely. Business trip. He’s a sales rep for a software company, one of those Aussie Silicon Valley mavericks.’

‘Except how did he know she would be here?’

‘Yeah, well … you could ask him.’

‘Clever, Jon! I did that trick already. He sounded genuinely surprised –’

‘Those sales bastards usually sound very bloody genuine. Whatever they tell you, it means fuck all!’ Vaguely, Gillian recalls a sour car deal Jon fell victim to a few weeks ago. He is obviously still very sore about it. That gives her a new perspective on the level of Jon’s personal bias against Robert Eagles. ‘Anyhow, he could be one of those few and far between views on her Facebook page.’

‘If only she’d made any prior announcements. If I remember correctly the first entry about the Maldives was the day she got here.’

‘Well, whatever you say. Just don’t write the guy off.’

‘I never do. Few more things, Jon, are you listening?’ There is a grunt at the other end of the line. Gillian proceeds: ‘Get a DNA sample from Nicola Eagles’ house. We’ll be sending some blood samples from here, see if they match.’

‘Got that. What else?’

‘Find out if she has a will and who gets how much when she dies if there’s no will.’

‘Right … That’s it?’

‘Find the cat.’

‘Say again?’

‘The cat took off yesterday from my place. Answers to Fritz. Must be on his way home. Find the cat, get him into a cattery. The neighbours will kill me if I don’t find that cat, never mind his owner!’

‘How am I supposed to find a cat?’

‘He’ll be loitering somewhere around the woman’s house. That’s what cats do.’

‘What the hell does it look like?’

Gillian ponders the question for a minute. ‘Like a cat,’ she says, ‘fluffy and fat.’

‘That narrows it then.’

‘Thanks, Jon!’

‘You’ll have to thank Miller. I’m passing this one to him. I don’t do outdoor commissions.’ He rings off.

Gillian gets back to the box. She pulls out a laptop. This must be the one that replaced the old one left at the house. The switch button doesn't work: the screen remains black. How much she needs Jon to be here at hand!

'It's the battery – gone flat,' Nasheed is leaning against the door frame. She is glad she hasn't said anything critical about his handling of this case on the phone to Jon – he must've been outside, eavesdropping.

'Where's the cable?'

'In the box, I guess.'

'You guess?' Gillian is certain he has not inspected any of the box contents. He couldn't be bothered to so much as turn on the laptop. *Drowning; case closed!* She is fumbling in the box for a cable, finds it and plugs it in. The laptop makes a joyful noise and lights up. Luckily there is no password. Once on, the machine takes her to the last place Nicola Eagles visited before her disappearance. It is her Facebook page. With a draft entry awaiting posting. For some reason Nicola failed to press *PUBLISH*. Did she decide against it? Was she interrupted? Did she forget?

Gillian purses her lips and knits her brows as she tries to make sense of that entry: there is a photograph of a well-built, middle-aged man wading through water, heading towards the beach. The photo is of poor quality. It was probably taken through a window as there is a reflection of – probably – Nicola Eagles holding a camera, which is interposed against the image of the man. A short enigmatic caption underlines the photo: *Count Karenin*. Gillian contemplates it. The name sounds strangely familiar. It is a Russian name – sounds it, like Lenin or Stalin. Then it comes to her: *Anna Karenina!* Naturally, it cannot possibly be a real name of a real person. *Count,* at that! Nicola Eagles has been called weird … What was the term: *out of touch*? The man in the picture is real enough, but it seems to Gillian that Nicola Eagles has taken the picture without his permission: he isn't exactly posing and she is hiding with her camera behind glass. Weird indeed!

'Could we enlarge this photo, do you think?' she asks

Nasheed. He comes close and looks over her shoulder. ‘It may be nothing, but –’

‘We could enhance it, get rid of the overlay, yes,’ he says, suddenly intrigued and unexpectedly co-operative. ‘*Count Karenin*?’ he asks. ‘A count? It shouldn’t be hard to find a count.’

‘She was reading *Anna Karenina*. Count Karenin is Anna Karenina’s husband.’

‘A character from a book came to life?’

‘My guess is as good as yours.’

It is not yet lunchtime when Gillian feels numb with fatigue. She hasn’t slept a wink in the last twenty-four hours. In England this would be her bedtime – a well overdue bedtime. Her brain is fuzzy; she doesn’t even know what she is looking at as she wades through the contents of the box. Mindlessly, she is paging through every book. A scrap of paper is all she finds. It looks like a flight itinerary. She thinks she recognises the flight number from Colombo to Heathrow. The paper is well crumpled, torn in half; something is scribbled on the back: words which mean nothing and some numbers, which may constitute a telephone number, or may not. Probably random notes. Gillian gives up the ghost. She asks Nasheed if he could take her back to her hotel. ‘Holiday Inn,’ she says, ‘sounds like paradise on earth. Can’t think of a better place to be right now.’

Nasheed smiles. His teeth are large, whiter than white and so even that they seem unnatural. Gentlemanly, he opens the door for her and lets her through. He is glad to be rid of her for the day. He drops her in the foyer and watches as she staggers to the lift with the key to her room in her hand.

In her nice, air-conditioned room Gillian drops onto the wide double bed with fresh white sheets and instantly falls asleep.



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