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GULF OF AMERICA

MARTHA'S BEACH ADVENTURE

MARTHA TWINE

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Meanwhile, two large vans pulled up outside Julian's villa. Technical staff dismantled the industrial equipment ant removed it to another site, not that far away, which also had a private beach. All Julian's staff were relocated to the new site where they carried on their duties as before, under a new boss. All the staff, that is except Tomas and Mateo. As a result of sharing the drink that Martha had mentally created for them, their vibrational rate had benefited, and they now saw life differently.

In fact, they now experienced perfect health of mind and body, and the cleverest brain in the universe, something which comes as standard with Martha's food and drink creations. (See the first three books by Martha Twine). As a result, Tomas now had a stall in a local market selling second hand books, just to get by, and Mateo worked in the same market selling fashion scarves. Just off the market square was a building used by a charity that helped people to come off drugs. Tomas spotted it out of the corner of his eye.

A moment later, Tomas and Mateo were round there offering their services as volunteers. It was not long before they graduated to working for the charity full time. At first, they worked for free, just getting their food and lodgings provided. But later they were offered permanent posts with a regular salary. Such was their commitment and their success that they were eventually asked to take on honorary positions working alongside local government, enjoying a fulfilling life as respected members of their community.

Martha looked out of the window - grey clouds. It was getting colder too, and soon the fish in the pond would go into hibernation. Martha missed the sun. Just occasionally when she had time, she took a day trip to some part of the world that had really warm water, and go for a swim. On the wall was a small picture of the hills and coastline of Western Australia. A moment later, Martha was in the picture, wearing a wet suit, in a small cove, surrounded by rocks and clear warm water. A turtle swam slowly by. It was early morning, and Martha had the beach to herself. She turned down through the shallow water and sat on the sand, looking up at the changing colours of the sky. Then her peace was shattered. Five kids dive-bombed in, and started splashing about. Martha got out and sat on a rock. A man in his thirties came and sat next to her. He struck up a conversation.

'Warm, isn't it?' he observed.

Martha nodded.

'Talking is not what I want,' thought Martha, 'I'll go to the Gulf of America. The water is great there too.'

Making her excuses, Martha disappeared and reappeared under water just off a beach near Pensacola. She was sitting at the bottom on the sand, and looking around, all she could see was people's legs. It was like a cocktail party in the sea, with standing room only. People's feet were shuffling around, dangerously close to some sting rays, which were trying to bury themselves in the sand.

'Oh, I don't think so,' thought Martha, 'Take me to a nice beach with no people.'

Using her mind, she threw the dice in the air and allowed them to fall wherever was best. Suddenly the scene changed.

'Now we're talking!' thought Martha.

She was still in the water, looking into an inlet with a sandy beach. Behind it was a large villa, obviously private property. Martha could see that access to the beach was protected by a series of nets which did not show above the water. The nets lined a path through a nearby

channel into a mooring bay, where three boats were moored.

'No matter, I will keep away from the mainland,' Martha thought, and she moved away into deeper water and dived down. As she descended, she could see the walls of an underwater canyon, with many plants growing there, their leaves, swaying in the current. Yellowish fish with black stripes hovered over rocks, and the tentacles of a giant squid were extended from a crevasse in the wall. Up above, some silvery-grey fish about six feet long dominated the canyon.

'What are they?' thought Martha. Later, she looked them up on the internet, and discovered that they were totoabas, an endangered species only found in the region of Baja California, Mexico.

While Martha was enjoying her peaceful under-sea stroll, two bare-chested men in their late forties, wearing shorts were watching her from the cliffs above.

'No back-pack!' said the stouter of the two men, whose name was Tomas.

He pointed out the absence of oxygen cylinders on Martha's back.

'Let's get the boat,' said the other man, whose name was Mateo.

A few moments later, the men were speeding along in the Gulf of California, the boat cresting the waves, with deep blue sky above, and a fresh breeze. It was ideal for a day's fishing, and the two men were intent on their catch, but they had not brought their fishing rods. Instead, they were using a sonar sounding device.

'Look, there she is!' cried Mateo.

The two men got out a deep net suspended from a metal pole.

'We'll soon catch her with this,' laughed Tomas.

Martha looked up from her undersea reverie and spotted them.

'You cannot be serious!?' she thought, and made herself invisible.

Feeling pretty cross, she reappeared at the top of a cliff on some rocks, overlooking the Gulf. What she did not realise was that all her movements, from the moment she first arrived in the Gulf, had been

mess and applied another mask, while the paramedic attended to Lula, who was now also unconscious.

The doctor and paramedic brought out two stretchers, and rushed Julian and Lula by ambulance to a private hospital. The two patients were wheeled into separate rooms, where they were put on assisted breathing machines, and heart monitors. Lula eventually came round, but Julian remained unconscious, his heart in a weakened state. Finally, his heart stopped. Emergency resuscitation was applied, but it was no use, Julian had gone. The doctor phoned Jenna, and she contacted Julian's top boss, who was Alvaro's supervisor. On the top boss's orders, cleaners were called in to clear the house. The villa had to close, because the clinicians in the private hospital knew too much. Bella came back from shopping to find her belongings packed in bags, ready to go.

'We need a forwarding address,' said Jenna.

Numbly, Bella nodded and provided it, her hands shaking as she wrote out a location in Massachusetts. Then a henchman appeared. He handed her a wad of notes.

'That's for your air fare and any inconvenience,' he said, adding 'I'm sorry, Julian was a lovely guy.'

Bella bowed her head. She took the cash and went downstairs where a taxi took her straight to the airport. She boarded a plane out of Baja California and eventually arrived in Boston, never to return.

Alvaro had not been informed of Julian's ill-health, or the delay to the shipments. He was at his desk as usual, when two henchmen pushed in through the office door. One of them shot Alvaro in the head with a handgun, and the two men trashed the office, to make it look like a robbery. The price of failure to deliver on time was high in Alvaro's business. By the time the body was discovered the men had long gone, and there was no trace of them, as the CCTV had been disabled. Martha's picture had disappeared from the wall and was never found.

tory. The liquid had set into crystals in each tray. Julian and Lula broke up the crystals into small pieces. Then they transferred the pieces into polythene bags which were again weighed and recorded, before being placed below the trays on a shelf designed for that purpose.

Julian took the first bag and went to a large white machine that contained blades like a coffee grinder or kitchen blender. Martha noticed that his facemask was round his neck, not on his face. He had forgotten to put it on. He poured the crystals into the blender, and switched on the machine. There was a grinding noise and then partially-processed white chunks were violently ejected into the waiting bag beside the machine.

Julian frowned.

'What's gone wrong?' he asked.

'Try again,' suggested Lula.

Julian repeated the process. It took three goes to get the crystals transformed into the white powder that was required for the first bag. The machine was just not working properly. Partially ground powder was lying in the residue tray and floating around the room. There wasn't time to get another grinding machine, as Julian was working to a tight deadline. He and Lula worked through the morning to get the powder bagged up, but they were nearly two hours late. As they got to the last bag, Lula began to feel unwell and left the room for a moment. She went into the villa's reception room. Jenna, the housekeeper, came over to her and took a look.

'You need a doctor,' she said, 'I'll call an ambulance.'

Five minutes later Julian came out of the laboratory gasping for breath.

'I've inhaled too much,' he whispered.

The ambulance was already at the door, and a doctor came hurrying in with a paramedic. Julian collapsed unconscious on the floor, and the doctor quickly applied an oxygen mask. Unfortunately, Julian immediately threw up inside the mask. Jenna and the doctor cleaned up the

caught on CCTV by these two Security guards, who were monitoring the entire area. Their surveillance included drones and sensing devices around the underwater nets.

The two men were somewhat crestfallen at Martha's disappearance.

'We've lost her,' muttered Mateo.

A few minutes later, they could be seen struggling up the rock path to where Martha was sitting.

'I could have caught her, if she'd stayed there,' observed Tomas.

'Oh really!' thought Martha. 'What a cheek! You need to clean your mouth out you scum,'

And she mentally created a jet of water which gave Tomas a cold shower, including inside his mouth.

Tomas shot bolt upright with shock as the water poured over him. Then he started coughing and spluttering as the water jetted out of his mouth. Martha immediately stopped, feeling guilty that she might have choked the man.

'Sorry,' she called.

Then she created his favourite drink, which turned out to be a short cocktail with a lot of sticks, cherries and umbrellas in. It was surprisingly colourful. Martha offered Tomas the drink, which he accepted. He took a big swig and sat down on the rocks with a sigh.

'Ah, that feels better,' he said, with a smile of satisfaction.

Mateo was feeling left out. He grabbed what was left of the drink and took a sip.

'That wasn't meant for you,' said Martha, and she disappeared the glass.

At that moment, a tall man in his late thirties, wearing blue and white Hawaiian shorts came up the hill. He was the men's boss and his name was Julian. Martha decided to make herself scarce, and disappeared. Julian ordered the men to bring back the boat and moor it, as he and his lady were planning to go to a fish restaurant for lunch, and the men were needed back at the villa to keep an eye on the place.

Julian's lady was quite a stunner. Her name was Bella. She was a professional photographic model, with a warm golden-brown all-over tan. Her white blonde bob matched her bikini, as she lolled on a sofa under a poolside sun structure. There were two pools, a shallow one and a deeper one. Bella waded into the deeper pool up to her shoulders and stood there sipping a drink. When Julian returned, the two of them went into the villa to change, while Tomas and Mateo sailed the speedboat into the mooring bay through the maze of security nets.

Martha was still somewhat unpleased at the way the men had intruded on her peaceful undersea time, and after the men got out of the boat, she mentally cracked the propeller. After a pause, there was a 'clunk' as part of it fell off into the water. Mateo heard it and turned round. He found the broken bit of the propeller and inspected the damage.

'We'll have to tell the boss', he observed.

By now, Julian and Bella were sitting on the sofa in the bar of the fish restaurant, along with several friends and regulars. Bella had swapped her bikini for a matching white top and miniskirt with white kitten heels. It looked like a party, and there was an atmosphere of expectancy. Then cheers and applause could be heard outside, and a man came into the bar carrying the front half of a huge totoaba fish. It must have been stuffed or a replica, and it had moving parts, at the gills and through the body and tail. Another man brought up the rear, supporting the rest of the giant fish. The fish was welcomed in with due ceremony and then ropes from the ceiling were let down, and the fish was hauled up there, where it hung, as if supervising the proceedings.

As the excitement died down, Mateo looked in through the bar doors and beckoned to Julian to come out. Julian joined Tomas and Mateo outside. Mateo was carrying the broken part of the propeller.

'It just fell off. Must have been cracked' he said.

Tomas nodded to confirm it.

'You'll find it on the video' he added.

'I'll have to tell the Chief,' said Julian.

He got on the phone to the Chief whose name was Alvaro.

the wall units and took out a pipette. Then he delicately opened the polythene bag and sucked out one crystal. One of the wall units had a small transparent door on the side. Julian opened the door and placed the crystal on a metal table. Then he closed the door and activated the equipment. While the equipment was carrying out its tasks, he began opening the other boxes and preparing to carry out the same test on each of them.

The equipment went silent. The assessment was complete. A reading was displayed on a dial inside the adjacent wall unit. Another wall unit produced a print-out of the reading. Julian took the hard copy and filed it. The quality of the crystals in the first box was satisfactory. Julian went on to complete tests on all the boxes. He then put on a white coat, gloves, hairnet and face mask, before transferring the crystals into smaller polythene bags, which he checked for weight before sealing.

There was a knock at the door, and Julian's assistant, Lula, a woman of Hispanic ethnicity came in and put on similar protective clothing. Then the two of them went into a long room equipped as a laboratory to start the main process. The room had a sink with taps, and a water dispenser which provided what Martha thought was probably distilled water.

The main body of the room was filled with two rows of wood racks three feet high, with supports underneath, divided into sections in which there were large empty metal trays. Julian and Lula took each tray and cleansed it using a special fluid. Then they poured distilled water up to a level indicated on each tray. Julian brought in the bags of crystals and rechecked the weight of the first on a weighing scale. Then he opened the bag and poured the crystals into the water in the first tray. He continued until all the trays had been filled. After that he and Lula locked the work area and left. Lula went home, and Julian went into the kitchen in the main part of the villa and fixed himself something to eat. Bella was out on the sofa by the pool, and he joined her. Then they had an early night, as Julian had to be up early next day to complete his work. Next morning Bella went out to the shops and Lula returned. Together Julian and Lula checked all the trays in the labora-

His eye caught Martha's picture on the wall.

'Ah. I know who that is.' He observed.

'So do I.' replied Alvaro.

The other CAI man looked in through the door.

'Got two ghouls on the roof, too,' he said.

Then turning to Alvaro, he extended his hand.

'Don't worry, you won't be troubled again. Thank you for your time,' he said, and the two men left.

'Well, I'm glad that's over,' thought Alvaro, 'Now I can get on with some work.'

Martha had seen enough too, and went off for some food. Her beach trip had been taking far too long, and she had plenty of household duties to fulfil.

That evening, Julian was walking on the beach outside the villa with Bella. He put his hand on her shoulder.

'I'm working tonight,' he said, his voice expressing the warmth he felt for her. They understood each other perfectly and had a deep respect for each other.

Looking into her eyes, he added 'See you later.'

Bella nodded and smiled. She knew she should find other things to do for now. She phoned a friend and arranged to go out.

A couple of hours later, the speedboat was parked on the beach, piled high with boxes. Julian took them out and brought them into a separate part of the villa where he worked. He went into a small room lined with wall fittings that looked like beige metal plant and equipment. It might have been central heating units, but that was not its purpose. Julian put the boxes on shelves above the units. Then he brought one out and placed it on a table in the middle of the room. Carefully, he unpacked it. Once the wooden packaging was removed it disclosed a large polythene bag full of white crystals. Julian weighed the bag and recorded the result on a laptop. He opened a draw in a dresser below

Alvaro was sitting in his palatial office. His desk faced the door, so that he could always see who was coming, even if his secretary wasn't there, but he had a long side window with a spectacular view of the beach and rocky bay. He picked up the phone.

'Yes?' he said, recognising the number.

'It's about the boat,' said Julian, 'there's been some type of accident. Half the propeller's fallen off.'

'Oh, no problem,' Alvaro replied, it's still covered by the guarantee. Don't worry about it. I'll have it fixed.'

'Thanks, Chief,' said Julian, 'Talk to you later,' and he rang off.

Martha was viewing remotely now, and was about to withdraw her gaze, when unbelievably, she heard the speedboat start up. True the key had been left in the ignition, but who would do that? And anyway, there was only half a propeller. She watched as the boat carefully navigated the security nets and picked up speed, racing and bounding over the waves.

As she looked closely, she could see two figures at the wheel, figures she recognised. They were in their 'lighter' bodies, in which form they were known to those in the know as 'ghouls'. They belonged to a criminal private militia from New York, who were paid to tail her at all times. (See Terror in Britain by Martha Twine for more on this). Those two bad lads couldn't resist the sight of the speedboat just sitting there, with the key in the ignition, just asking to be switched on. They had 'borrowed' the boat and gone for a spin. As they raced and turned, curved and skidded along in the Sound, Martha could see they were taking in water at the back.

'Haven't you forgotten something?' she asked.

The two culprits looked up at her.

'You've forgotten there's only half a propeller,' Martha observed.

It was as if their balloon had been burst. The two New Yorkers realised that they couldn't have been driving the boat normally. In their

enthusiasm they must have been driving it with their minds - something they were not used to as it was strictly forbidden for ghouls to do this by their organisation. That realisation stopped their mental process and the boat began to sink. Quickly the two men created new speed boats like the first one. As the original boat sank for ever beneath the waves, they now had two new ones to play with. They raced over the water, turning corners at speed, creating a wash behind them, and bouncing over the waves. Then they lined up next to each other and drove along slowly, chatting to each other as they went. Suddenly their New York boss looked in on them, frowning. Then he called out.

'What the hell do you think you're doing? Get yourselves back up here now!'

The two men looked up anxiously at their boss's angry face. Then their figures were hauled swiftly upwards, and the boats vanished.

Later that day, Julian was on the phone to Alvaro again.

'Sorry Chief,' he said.

'Yes, what is it now?' Alvaro replied, somewhat crossly.

'Looks like we were invaded yesterday. The boat's been stolen and sunk. We've got them on video.'

'What?' cried Alvaro.

Then he relaxed.

'Even better,' he said expansively, 'If its theft, then that fully explains the propeller. Must have been malicious damage. No problem. The whole thing is covered. I'll have another boat delivered. Don't worry about it. Oh, better send me the full video please, I expect they'll want it.'

'Will do,' replied Julian, and he rang off.

Next day one of Julian's henchmen arrived at Alvaro's office, carrying the CCTV record of everything that happened from the time of Martha's arrival. The henchman sat next to Alvaro as he watched the video. When they got to the bit where the boat was 'borrowed', the henchman gasped and turned pale.

'What is it, man?' asked Alvaro.

'I've seen those type of figures before,' said the henchman.

He looked rather shaken.

'They're from New York. You don't want to mess with them, they do magic.'

'Magic, is it?' Alvaro responded. 'Doesn't look like magic to me, I'd call it criminal damage myself.'

'Leave it with me, Chief,' said the henchman, 'I know who to call, and believe me, you need to call them, otherwise the place will be crawling with them.'

'Oh, all right then,' Alvaro replied. 'And while you're about it, I'd like a still picture of this, framed for my wall please.'

Alvaro called up the image of Martha in her wet suit, sitting on the rock.

'Yes,' Alvaro continued, somewhat wistfully, 'That's how I like to see women ... sort of wild and natural.'

'OK Chief,' said the henchman and he left.

Next morning he was back again, holding a parcel.

'Here's your picture, Chief,' he said, 'And I found the right people to call about those figures in the boat, they'll be here shortly.'

'OK, thanks,' said Alvaro, unwrapping the picture of Martha, 'Now let's see...' he inspected his wall, 'Where's the best place to put her.'

Martha wanted to see the picture, and leaned forward. At the same time, the two New York bad lads tried to obscure her vision with a laser, as their official remit was to annoy her wherever possible. At that moment there was a knock at the door. Two men wearing goggles were standing outside, and one of them seemed to be checking the roof.

'Mind if I come in?' said the other one.

He showed his ID to Alvaro.

'CIA Special Detection Squad,' he announced.

Then he unpacked some kit and started pointing it around the room. He picked up the two New Yorkers immediately.

'Got them!' he announced, activating his ghoul-buster equipment.