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A Night on the River

by Richard Rewell

When I woke up the other side of the bed is cold. I don't ask why; all I do is think of the previous day. Swaying willow trees. The shimmering silver waters of the river. The undulating reeds waving in the summer breeze. The thatched pub on the bank, the sound of happy patrons drinking and eating in its garden. The sound of a pint being pulled by the landlord, the cows mooing in an adjacent field and distant church bells. I laugh watching our friends capsizing in their dinghies. A happy day, it had been the first of our summer holiday.

Now it is night and my hand crawls to the bed's edge. She is not there. My fingertips touch something cold and wet. Water.

"What the Hell" I say as my upper body springs to attention. My cabin swamped in monochrome. Silvers, greys and black. I cannot see my wife.

"Jules." I cry.

I wonder why the carpet glistens. Regardless, I twist out of the bed.

"Jesus" I shout, as cold water laps around my feet.

Bang. A white flash from outside lights up the cabin. I hear shouts. More bangs. I hear crying. I hear cars starting up. I hear an explosion.

"Jules. Where are you?" I scream, wading towards our cabin door.

The cabin door opens. Water rushes in.

“This way,” orders my wife and we race upwards to the deck, “Don’t talk. Just jump” she shouts and we leap to the bank.

We race along a footpath, but I cannot resist looking back. Boats ablaze. Strange shapes shooting at screaming holiday makers. The smell of burnt flesh. Bodies floating on the river.

“Come on.” shouts Jules pushing me forward. “Wait, there’re some of them ahead. Into the ditch.”

We wait. Shivering. Cold and scared. And they pass us by. Whatever they are. Until one stops and slowly turns its head towards us.”