

The Folamh Island Hermit

I send these letters in the hope that someday, someone will be curious enough to scoop an old average looking soda bottle from the ocean and have the curiosity to look inside. My name is Benjamin Burns and I write my thoughts now not only as a record of two mens struggle to survive isolated and stranded in the middle of the ocean, but also as a way to keep myself sane - however the latter seems to be harder and harder to achieve as the days slip by. Should anyone find these, I would hope that you give them to my wife Fiona although as I have no idea what the future holds for me stranded here, I would urge you to use your judgment as to the details that you share with my loved ones. It is my hope that they remember me for who I was when I disappeared and should anything contained in these pages tarnish that image in their minds and cause them distress, then I leave it to you to be my editor.

Trusting you, hopefully as a person of goodwill and kindness,

B.B.

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My dearest darling I cannot tell you how much I long to see your beautiful face. I dream about you each night - it seems so real and for however long I lie in my slumber induced

paradise, that is when I am at my happiest and most peaceful. The sinking feeling of awaking on this dead island every morning never fails in its soul crushing reality. Months have passed and still no sign of rescue or even a hint of a ship or plane in the distance. Nothingness surrounds me day in and day out except for an almost constant blanket of mist and fog. Gradually I began to notice a steady decrease in the number of seagulls which frequent the island daily until last week when my suspicions were confirmed, and I witnessed the last gull circle the island and then fly off into the distance. It seemed a symbolic representation of my hopes of rescue slowly fading away into the horizon until they disappeared completely. I never thought about it, but I miss their cries greatly, it is as if there is a large part of me which has vanished along with them. They were my company, unwitting companions on my struggle to survive, and without them I fear that I may have lost one of the main motivations to continue to exist. I say exist because I feel that is all that I can hope to achieve being marooned on this desolate wasteland.

There is no hope of any sort of a life here for me. Almost nothing grows in this place - jagged rocks stretch inland for as far as you can see, and in all my months here I have yet to spy any sort of land animal of any shape or form. The best I can do is just to survive - to exist, and cling to hope that someday someone will pass and rescue us. I say *us*, but I am not so sure anymore. Whilst out exploring one day, Fenton took a fall and damaged his shoulder badly, I offered to help but he flat out refused any effort I made to assist. From what I could see through the blood it looked as if he had suffered a rather nasty compound fracture, he must have been in absolute agony. We had been getting along strangely as of late - lately being the last few weeks prior to his injury if I had to hazard a guess. My thoughts on the matter is that he's after ingesting too much salty seaweed or sea water and it has finally taken its toll on his mind. He has become increasingly more deranged and erratic in his behaviour. It all came to a head last week

when he struck me, or at least he tried to - were it not for me slipping on a slimy stone on the beach and luckily avoiding his jab, I would have something a lot more serious to show than a scrape above my eye where the edge of the rock clutched in his hand just grazed me. It was over something trivial, I can't even remember what we argued about but his reaction was of great concern to me at the time and it is something I cannot shake off. A deep seeded worry has overtaken me and I cannot seem to fully trust my friend anymore. For as long as we have been here, it seems like only yesterday when we found ourselves washed up on the small pebble dashed cove.

I regularly cast my mind back to the night we fell overboard from our trawler. I remember clinging onto a stray piece of wood from the deck along with Fenton and us both promising each other that we would not let go. I remember screaming at him, cursing and telling him to just hang on. I don't recall much after that until I woke up on the shores of this godforsaken island. I know that when we entered the water it was in the middle of a raging storm and some of the worst conditions I've encountered at sea but how we managed to drift so far north in the freezing water and manage to not only survive, but to stay together I will never know. I am eternally grateful to have had Fenton with me during all of this, but the seeds of doubt have been planted and I fear there is little that can be done now to reverse my feelings.

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The situation with Fenton has gotten much worse. He has taken it upon himself to abscond and fled further inland where he knows, or thinks I will not follow him. Before he ran off, and pretty much from the moment we found ourselves stranded here, we often spoke about

the legend of the Folamh Island Hermit, the famous tale about a man turned monster, traditionally called Mooranacky, who was a cast away just like ourselves and one day found himself washed up upon this very island decades ago. He managed to survive to this day by feeding on anyone who is unlucky enough to be stranded on this rock with him. I remember hearing stories when I was a child of the uninhabited island off the northwest coast with its distinctive and unusual dark, black cliff faces and barren jagged rock terrain. I gave the tales little food for thought when I was younger but as soon as we washed up here I knew exactly where I was and suddenly, the urban legend which I scoffed at all these years seemed too real. Fenton and I had always traversed the island together for safety. We would explore up to a certain distance then retreat for the night making sure we knew every inch of the ground we had covered before setting out the next day and exploring a few feet further. It was a slow process but at least we knew our surroundings.

As the months went on we got more and more hungry and we seemed to exhaust our sources of food, primarily seaweed, moss and the few crabs and washed up fish that we would occasionally find on the stony beaches. We sharpened a piece of wood as much as we could into a spear and tried to spearfish from above the water but could never compensate for the refraction. More often than not the water would be far too rough to see anything and one day I slipped on a rock and our makeshift fishing spear fell in the sea, never to be seen again. Fenton pushed for deeper exploration, expressing his confidence that there was no cannibal stalker on this island, citing his belief that if there was, then we would surely have seen him or have been eaten by this stage - after what must be about four months. Hard to argue with that logic. We eventually managed to scout the entirety of the island and worked out a way to fully get around the entire surface in around a day - keeping a fast pace. It is important to note the word *surface* in

the last sentence because we also discovered a network of subterranean pathways which lead to destinations unknown at this present time. We had confidence that the chance of a monster lurking on these islands was highly implausible but on the off chance the tale was true, then these tunnels would surely be where a beast like Mooranacky would retreat to hide or hibernate.

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Fentons recent injury seemed to have had much more of an impact on his psyche than I would have thought. The hunger must have caused him to disregard rationality and flee further inland in an attempt to avoid me. I am now left with the unenviable choice of staying in the relative safety of our tiny cave and makeshift lodgings on the beach or pursuing my demented fellow cast away into the heart of this lifeless rock. Reluctantly, I think I shall choose the latter. Truthfully, I am not sure if it is my willingness to get my friend back - albeit a crazed one - or my inability to be on my own which has made up my mind. Whatever it is, my decision has been made.

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It's been about four days now since I last saw Fenton. I do not know where he is, or how he is - but my guess is that he must be in bad shape. I haven't eaten since long before I set off and have spent my time trying to source rockpool water wherever I can find it. Luckily it rained yesterday so I was able to squeeze water from my saturated clothes. I toyed with the idea of just taking the paper out of my bottle and using it to drink from but these writings are truly the only

form of sanity I have left and I cannot lose them or have them disintegrate in the rain. I can see myself visibly wasting away over the past few weeks - my hip bone is clearly visible and protruding under my skin and my thighs and arms have simply shrunk to the point that it looks as if there's nothing but bone - I shudder to think of what I must look like as a whole. I've also been coughing for the last two weeks and I cannot seem to shake whatever I am coming down with. These last few days being fully exposed to the elements haven't helped and I feel as if it has intensified my illness - I'm coughing a lot more frequently and the amount of phlegm that's present in my sputum is worrying to me, as is its rapidly darkening colour. Nevertheless, I plough onward in search of my dear friend. Intense hunger is omnipresent and I know that between my worsening illness and lack of food I have become a lot weaker - but for now I persist in my search.

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I call out my friends name regularly now in desperation to find him. I was hesitant at first fearing Mooranacky would hear me but I am since convinced that there exists no such creature prowling the island. *Really, a monster!?* What was I thinking letting such nonsense run wild in my head and lead me into a state of paranoia and fear in such a desperate time. I now have the entire surface covered from every side almost three times over. I had seen some drops of blood the other day but I lost the trail but at least I know that Fenton made it a considerable distance and I hold out hope he is still alive. The steep hills and jagged rocks slowed me down considerably and took a lot of energy out of me but it was on top of one of these hills that I discovered some ruins of an ancient ring fort indicating that once upon a time, this now desolate hellhole was

indeed inhabited, and once home to many residents although the non existence of these people today quickly reminds me of the realities of my situation.

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Still no sign of any birds and it looks as if there is a storm coming from the west. I have developed a constant wheeze and a persistent headache but I must continue on. There is not a morsel of food to be seen but my mission to find my friend is the only thing which is keeping me going. I am ashamed to say that I have not dreamt of you, my dear wife, since I left the safety of our makeshift dwelling on the beach. Maybe it's because I'm not sure I actually get any sleep anymore, between the rain, the wind and my coughing. I think I have also forgotten the sound of your voice. I thought it was not possible but the more that I try to remember the less I can recall. I am sorry my darling. You are always in my thoughts even if I seem to be losing my mind, rest assured that you will be the last thing that leaves me.

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I have begun to search a set of subterranean pathways which I discovered lead to a series of vast caves deep underground. They really are something special. Some species of bioluminescent plant litter the interiors resulting in fantastical views the likes of which any scientist or nature lover would kill to witness. I tried eating one of the plants but got violently ill soon after so I learned my lesson. Although I felt terrible, vomiting luminous blue bile was a

strange but rather fun event but one which I am in no rush to replicate any time in the near future. Still no sign of Fenton but he must be residing in one of these caverns.

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I am overjoyed to report my mission a success. I discovered my friend semi conscious but alive inside a cavern concealed down a crevasse which I almost missed when searching on the surface yesterday. He seemed far too delirious to recognise me properly but I was ecstatic upon finding him. My immediate concern shifted from my own declining health towards Fenton and his arm which looked to be infected badly and he was running a high fever. I spent a few hours just holding him out of both relief in finding him alive and relief at not being on my own anymore. A storm is raging over our heads making our return to our beach impossible for the moment although it is providing a lot of water for us to drink. I have washed and cleaned his wound as much as I can and have been giving him water to drink whenever he stirs enough for me to rouse him from his delirium and wet his lips.

While he was sleeping I explored further into the caves in which I found myself effectively trapped for the time being. This particular cavern seemed to sprawl endlessly, passing through the very heart of the island but still no sign of any life down here except for us. I stumbled across a few small bones probably from some rodent which died decades ago. Through my own lack of paying attention I tripped over a crack in the ground and was sent crashing into a low hanging stalactite which broke off as I fell against it. It was sharp and jagged on one end making the perfect spear - at last I had a weapon to defend myself and Fenton with should we run into the horror which was said to stalk these lands. I am ready should the time come.

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I may or may not be imagining this but the more time I spend down in these caves the more I am convinced a monster dwells within. I keep thinking I hear breathing apart from that of myself and Fenton and a voice speaks to me through the murky darkness in isolated corners of the cave. I patrol our lair often to make sure that we are protected and thankfully have found no sign of the monster, but also, still no sign of any food either. The hunger is beyond anything I have ever experienced or could have imagined. I am certain that I have become delirious myself and don't know how much longer I can last. I must attempt to head back to our beach and do my best to capture some crabs or something to feed Fenton and myself. He is unconscious almost all of the time now but I am afraid to leave him alone in case Mooranacky discovers him - I would never forgive myself. His arm is verging on necrotic and the smell is just putrid. The storm is dying down and I must make my move as fast as I can if I am going to leave. I am delighted to have found my friend and eternally grateful to have had Fenton with me during all this time stranded here but for some reason, I can't seem to leave this cave.

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My friend. Comrade. Fellow castaway, Fenton Patrick Daniels is no more. The heartbreak I feel is indescribable. It seems as if the last chapter in my old life has been concluded and I am now resigning myself to the fact that I will be stuck on this morale sapping, barren, lonely netherworld for eternity, damned and destined to spend the rest of my time alone and more than

likely sick until I succumb to either the elements, or whatever infection is causing me to gradually fade away. Hope has abandoned me. It truly has. I picture your face but it does not have the calming and reassuring effect on my morale that it once did. I fear I am truly lost - both to the world and to myself. My darling how I long to see you again but I feel that now is the right time to start being realistic. I discovered that in order for me to have any chance of surviving, I need to cast away all memories of my previous life and any false hope I still cling to and I must fully embrace the path which now lies ahead of me. I also realised that Mooranacky - the Folamh Island Hermit, whatever you want to call it, is not so much a myth or legend, but more of a self fulfilling prophecy. What I feared most on this island when we first washed up didn't exist originally, but without a doubt it definitely does now, because for the first time in so long - I am no longer hungry.