

No Snowdrops in July (extract)

This extract is taken from the end of the second chapter. The previous evening Monroe and Juliet had a mighty row, culminating with Juliet walking out on Monroe. He slept on his own and in the morning met up with two of his old friends for a fishing trip on a small trawler.

Something large is caught up in the trawl net and they are trying to deal with it.

Monroe wound in the large winch, situated in the centre of the for'ard area, while Les stood over the bow, watching the net carefully as it closed on the boat. Johnny stayed at the helm, keeping the vessel steady and with just enough forward momentum to stop the tide pushing the boat out to sea. The warm sun of the morning had disappeared behind some large grey clouds. Each of them, within minutes of each other, had pulled on a sweatshirt or jumper. It seemed strangely eerie.

Monroe slowed up the winding under Les's direction. The net was close to the boat and required two of them to pull it onboard. Les let it float until it was alongside. Each time a wave washed the net against the boat a slow, deep thudding sound broke the silence. Les and Monroe exchanged sombre glances.

Monroe stared down at the squirming fishes and into the net. He could just about make out the outline of a long black object about one and a half metres in length. It didn't seem to be moving. Les and he pulled hard to bring the laden net onboard. It was so heavy they could hardly lift it. They called Johnny for his help.

'I was looking down from up there,' Johnny said, motioning with his head to the canopy as he joined the other two.

'Looks a bit thin for a dolphin,' he added, meeting the worried, inquisitive looks from his colleagues.

'What is it?' asked Les.

'I don't know,' Johnny replied, frowning.

'A shark?' he added. He didn't sound convinced.

'Look,' yelled Monroe. 'Over there. That dark patch.'

The three sets of eyes all turned to where Monroe was pointing.

'That's blood,' Monroe said, breaking the silence. 'No mistaking it.'

'Come on,' Johnny said, assertively. 'Let's get this over with. I'll call one, two, three, and then all pull together.' Each of them took a firm hold on the net.

‘Ready...’

The net rose up slowly out of the water. An awful and shocking site met their eyes. Monroe let out a large moan and vomited several times into the sea. He let go of the net and slipped down to the deck. He rolled over and vomited again.

‘Get the long hook,’ Les shouted to Johnny. ‘I’ll try and hold it here.’

While Johnny ran off, Les clung desperately to the net with both his hands, not wanting to drop it back in the water. He glanced once or twice at Monroe, lying in a heap on the deck. Timidly, he looked again over the side. He shuddered. Many fish darted back and forward, entangling themselves amongst the swirling blood and the unmistakable strands of human hair attached to a lifeless head, bobbing below the surface. He, too, was sick.

Les grabbed the woman’s leg that was sticking out of the water and Johnny took hold of one of her arms and they pulled. As the body broke the surface and drew level with the boat’s side, sea water poured off the remains of the black clothing cladding her bloated body, sluicing away most of the eels and fish that had surfaced with her. With one heave the two men wrenched her over the side to fall flat with a great squelch and thud on the cockpit bench; water and blood oozing from all her orifices. At the back of her head was a large, gaping bloody hole. Gingerly Johnny took hold off her hair and started to turn her head over.

‘No,’ Monroe croaked. ‘Please don’t. Let her stay like that.’

Johnny and Les turned to where Monroe had been lying. His right elbow was on the ground supporting his head. His fingers covered his mouth. He raised his left hand and waved in a negative gesture.

‘No, no,’ he mumbled. He looked ghastly.

‘That’s Juliet, I saw her face in the water.’