

**TIME VIKING**

**EPISODE 1**

**'The Singing Fish'**

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*A*ll Svend wanted was a stone, and there was a nice round one within his sight. Holding his sling shot in one hand and his bloody knee in the other, he eyed the stone as he limped towards it. He figured that all he would need was one clean shot to the head of the beast, hard enough to knock it to the ground, or even unconscious. It would need to be a great shot and he knew he could pull it off, if only he could get to the stone in time.

The beast loomed there, hovering, looking all angry and menacing. It seemed to float through the air like a small blimp. Svend glanced up at the beast, he was slowly crawling towards the stone, and at the same time the beast was floating towards him, closing the distance much faster. Too fast, Svend looked at the stone, then at the beast and then at his bloody knee, he was trying to ignore the pain, lancing like a bunch of a thousand needles, that had previously been dipped in lemon juice and then in salt...

And also heated until they were red, then dipped in salt again then vinegar. The pain was terrible, but Svend could handle it, he was after all a mighty Viking warrior. It surely wasn't going to be a simple beast that would defeat him, he had slain at least a dozen similar monsters, some even bigger and more powerful than this one. However none of the previous beasts had managed to land a blow like the one he had received on his knee. It had been a mighty blow, given with a pointy beak, and bathed in caustic poison ivy.

The beast was a very real threat, and Svend knew that even if he could survive it, the knee would itch for months, he had seen his mentor Viking Gromml fall to a caustic poison ivy attack, the recovery had been long and difficult. This made him fearful and nervous.

Svend tried clearing his mind of that, he needed to focus on the stone, he was close enough now, he reached down with his free hand, releasing his bloody knee enough to see that the caustic poison ivy juice had seeped onto his hand, contaminating it too. He gave himself a facepalm

in resignation. He immediately let go of his face, realizing he had probably just contaminated it as well. Rolling his eyes he clawed at the stone, it was difficult to pick up as it seemed to be stuck in the dried mud. He grabbed at it, applying pressure with his middle finger to one of the squarer sides of the stone. Using his thumb as a lever he managed to ease up one side of the stone, it was slightly smaller than his closed fist, and as he lifted the stone and slid his fingers under it to raise it, he felt stinging.

That's when he saw a mudcrab. Mudcrabs were small creatures that liked to make their homes under stones, apparently in dried mud. Their diet consisted primarily of stone excrement, caustic poison ivy juice, and vile bile, but that's not what concerned Svend at this very moment. What concerned him at this very moment was the notion that a mudcrab bite, although not lethal, was incredibly painful. Not immediately, but the delayed effects of the venom were atrocious: Heart palpitations, nausea, painful muscle spasms, third-degree-burn-like skin bubbles that would wind up drying and falling out, hair loss and tooth rot, the tongue becoming numb and of course impotence for six months, followed by several weeks of burning painful erections and finally, in its final stage, swamp-ass. He managed to pick up the stone and place it in the slingshot, he pulled back as he aimed at the beast, locking his left elbow and raising his aim, he felt another sting on his good foot, he realized that not one, but two more mudcrabs had crawled out of the sinkhole that had been revealed from beneath the stone. Both were busily nibbling at his foot. He lifted his good foot trying to jump on his injured leg and toppled, losing balance.

Svend fell on his ass. The stone rolled out of his hand and away, just out of his reach as he flailed his foot in the air to try and dislodge the nibbling mudcrabs. One had already let go of his little toe and was hurriedly getting away, but the other was a clinger and was holding on to the side of his foot, he shook it off only to have it land on his crotch where it started trying to sting him through his pants.

Svend yelped, made a grotesque expressive dance with his hips, shaking them groovily in a Zombie-Elvis like twitch, and eventually causing the

mudcrab to fall on the ground with a plopping sound. It crawled back in the sinkhole leaving a trail of excrement behind.

Stunningly, the beast was still far enough that Svend could simply roll over to his side, pick up the stone and hit hard with it. Unfortunately though, when he tried to pull the tension on the slingshot, the seal tendon he used as an elastic broke hitting him in the eye. Blinking out the tears, he tossed the slingshot at the beast, then the stone, both missed their target, Svend finally gave up, rolled his eyes, tossed up his hands in exasperation and let himself fall backwards, his head landed directly on the sinkhole.

He felt a sting to the back of his head, cursed softly and passed out.

The beast was mighty, and strong, it changed colors as it willed and it could fly. It had strong talons and was even able to dive several feet under water to catch its prey, this made it a formidable foe.

Of course as a beast of prey, it could not speak or communicate in any known language so nobody had ever tried to reason with it, much less try to understand it. Still, if someone had tried to understand it, they would have failed. Its verbal skills amounted to little more than some hissing and spitting. It was largely assumed among the more scientific of the Vikings, that beasts communicated through pure evil. Not that any Vikings were renowned for their doctorates, but still, they had a few bright minds.

The beast was definitely evil, one thing it wasn't though, was very smart. This is what saved Svend, as he fell backwards and passed out, the beast assumed it had killed him, so it simply turned around and left nonchalantly floating in mid-air, flapping its wings and snapping its beak at stray butterflies.

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Svend opened his eyes, he felt groggy, couldn't move any of his limbs, he could barely operate his eyelids and his lungs but even those hurt. He had

to make a conscious effort of breathing, in, out, in, out...

He noticed mist as he exhaled, in, out, mist, in, out, mist...this went on for a while until he felt a prickling at the end of his fingers. They were cold, he managed to make a fist on that one hand. It was so cold he didn't actually feel his fingers, only the same prickling as if they were being poked at with a small needle, several small needles in fact.

It was night time. The glow of the moon was enough to provide some basic vision, but it was not enough to provide any warmth and thereby the temperature had dropped, by a lot.

Slowly and painfully he managed to regain some of his train of thought, he moved himself limb by limb, slowly, painstakingly restoring blood to his extremities, each more painful than the last. Eventually he regained enough motor function to raise one of his hands over his face and look at its flexing fingers, open, close, open, close, in, out, mist, in, out, mist...

He tried to touch his face but even though he knew his fingers were touching his nose, he felt nothing, neither on the fingers, nor the nose, he was completely frozen. Then he remembered the beast, the stone, the mudcrabs, pain..

Panic grew inside him, his heart was pounding, filling with adrenaline his breathing got faster and faster, in, out, mist, in, out, mist, pain, his lungs were burning. Panic seized him and he tried to get up too quickly, and he passed out again.

The next morning as the sun came over the horizon, its warmth began to wake up the area. There were a few morning gnats flying about and several mudcrabs had crawled on top of what, to them, was nothing more than another heap of mud. They were all turned towards the sun, taking advantage of the radiating warmth and light. Some were slowly waving their clamps at it, perhaps in an attempt to harness its heat. Others simply seemed to be admiring the view from there.

Svend blinked slowly, the light was so intense that he felt a throbbing pain to the back of the head, it was synchronized to his heartbeat which incidentally, he could hear. He blinked and raised his head, the shift in weight made the rest of his body wobble and the mudcrabs all jumped off his legs in panic, none of them stung him but once they were off, Svend was left with several small piles of mudcrab guano on his pantleg.

He groaned, chewed some invisible dust inside his mouth, swallowed a few times and realized he had horrible breath. He then lifted one hand above his head and felt his beard, it had grown up and towards the top of his head, due to the tilt of his neck on the pile of mud. He blinked out some tears and wondered how long he had been out this time.

The mudcrab stings, and the caustic poison ivy blows from the beast were still clear in his mind but he knew he would be alright, he was always alright when he woke up.

His mind raced. The beast, where had it gone? He flailed around nervously, scrutinizing the horizon, there was no sign of it. He leaned up on his elbow and heard a rumble in the distance. He looked around and saw a plume of dust near the horizon, he could see quite far as the shrubbery surrounding him was low and mostly consisted of dried tumbleweeds and small cactii. For a viking, he was definitely out of place in the desert.

The plume was moving towards him fast, and the rumble grew until he realized what it was. A dune buggy was approaching. On the one hand a dune buggy meant another human, a live one for a change and even though this meant he was in at least a decently civilized era, he still got ready for everything and checked his dagger.

He stood up and took a swift turn, looking around to make sure that the dune buggy was the only thing approaching, no aircraft or any other means of transportation were visible, he relaxed a little telling himself that the maximum amount of people, benevolent or not, that would fit in a dune buggy might be four. He could probably handle four.

The dune buggy slowed its approach and when it stopped by Svend, someone jumped out. The person was wearing a full helmet with a dark faceplate so he couldn't tell what they looked like but at least it was just the one guy. As he approached Svend realized the guy wasn't a guy at all, he noticed some womanly shapes under what appeared to be a blue and gold football jersey with a bright orange *Fanta* logo on the front at the breasts. She was wearing tight jeans and cowboy boots. As she removed the helmet Svend's jaw dropped.

The woman that had just disembarked from the buggy was by all means splendid, with chiseled features she had a round jaw and a small nose, framed by freckles. She was also positively beaming with happiness and projected a joy that Svend knew would be contagious.

Svend smiled back and started to speak but all that came out was a mouthful of mumbles. This girl was not like anything he had ever seen. He slowed down and said, "My name is Svend. I am of the Ghorstflunken Hill clan. I must have gotten lost after fighting the beast yesterday." He then looked down nodding his head side to side and added, "I Probably wandered the plain all night, the beast got away." Looking down he realized he was caressing his beard, over his chest with his free hand.

She interrupted him. "I'm Trixie." and held out her hand. He immediately regretted lying to her.

Overcome with guilt and slightly confused, Svend handed her his beard. She smiled slowly then started giggling softly and caught herself. It wasn't polite to make fun of the first live human she had crossed paths in several days.

"No, thanks. Not that I don't like the beard, it's just not something I do on a first date, touch other people's beards and stuff."

Svend stood there, beard in one hand, looking first at Trixie, then his beard, then Trixie again and back to the beard, slowly, he lowered the beard and let go of it, resting his right hand on the butt of his holstered dagger he attempted an aloof stance, turning his right leg to one side and slightly bending his knee not quite achieving an austere look. He seemed hypnotized by Trixie's chest, it had that orange *Fanta* logo that was very bright under the sun, and of course her chest was taugth under it.

Trixie giggled again, and crossed her arms on her chest. Her arms were now hiding the logo and her breasts behind it.

“Ok Svend, let's start over, what's with the dagger?”

He proudly announced that he was a Viking, member of a valiant clan named Ghorstflunken Hill, heir to become the main hunter and beast slayer. He also retrieved a yellow handkerchief from his pocket and showed off the clan's insignia, which was a crudely drawn depiction of some stick-men, attacking what looked like a dragon by using spears, rope and slingshots. All by the side of what apparently might well be, Ghorstflunken Hill.

It also looked ancient. That's when realization hitting her, Trixie looked at Svend and asked, “What year do you think it is?”

He blinked, raised his right hand off his dagger, waving it vaguely in a circle, and declared in a narrative voice, “It is the year of our lord 512, and it is Slaughtering-Month. We are about to begin slaughtering our hunting prizes and our women will prepare the meat to store it for the Winter-Months.”

He knew his lie would not keep very long. He regretted this but he had gotten terrible reactions from people when they found out his real story. Some had immediately tried to hire him as a mercenary, others had tried to kill him themselves, he had been burned at the stake and drowned twice in

the mid-west, once, the US army had him in a glass prison where he was studied until he had gotten injured again.

“Ok captain Viking, no. It’s not 512, there is no Slaughtering-Month and believe me, there are no women.” Then hesitating, “Well, ok, maybe just me but no women are going to prepare any meat for you.” she replied

“The truth is, I’m glad you’re here.” Trixie said softly. “I don’t know...” Looking down she seemed to search for something, then she looked back up at Svend and said cheerfully, “But you’re here now, and I’m here, come on the buggy, I have some food, water...and I could use the company, I told you, I haven’t seen anyone else in days.”

She grinned at him, eyes wide, dimples on her cheeks, arms spread and said, “What do you say ah?”

He looked around, searching for a clue, something, anything that would show him what to do, there were no volatiles around to disembowel, so he couldn’t read his future in their entrails. Then his eyes caught Trixie’s, she had gray eyes with a black line around the edge of the irises. She was still grinning and her arms were still spread open, hands palms forwards. She cocked her head to one side and somehow managed to make her grin even wider, full white teeth.

She started bouncing on her feet, left and right and decided she had waited enough, grabbed Svend by the sleeve and softly herded him towards the buggy. She handed him a spare helmet from the open cockpit, threw on her own and helped him to the passenger’s side, Svend didn’t need any help tying up the six-point harness and once both were secure the buggy took off.

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Trixie was happy to finally run into another live human, weird Viking dude with a beard or not, she had enough of running around alone and the last

guy she came across several months ago was a sex-crazed maniac who had continuously pestered her with unwanted advances. After saying no to him once too many he had tried to rape her and she was forced to kill him. It wasn't the first time she had killed of course but it didn't make it any more fun or easy. She looked over at Svend, he was sitting with his hands on his knees, palms down, beard flailing in the wind, white helmet with a UK flag on the top. He looked like a mildly retarded metal rock band member and despite his muscular appearance, Trixie found him endearing, he made her laugh. Besides, a dagger?

Right. She thought back to her whole first impressions with the Viking and realized he had put on the six-point harness by himself. That ruled out him being mentally handicapped, she thought maybe he was simple minded but he didn't look or act it. Was he faking it? He had after all been staring at her breasts earlier, she put that thought away for later, for now they needed some shelter.

As the buggy was literally flying over the desert hills of Nevada, there was no possibility of conversation, the noise from the engine and the wind, the helmets covering the ears, and of course the fact that neither of them wanted to say or do anything uncomfortable was making sure of that.

Later though as they arrived at the gate of what seemed to be a ranch, Trixie slowed then stopped by a wooden fence. Beyond the fence were several animal carcasses, bovine looking. One of the horny bovine skulls reminded Trixie of Clovis, the guy that had tried to rape her, it was horny and revolting. There were no buzzards around which meant that any recently deceased animal had either already been picked clean first by the buzzards, then by small mammals, later wiped really clean by insects and finally bleached by the sun. She knew they weren't going to find any livestock here. Maybe some canned goods though. She had some granola bars in the buggy, as well as a few gallons of water but that wasn't going to hold them over very long.

The farmhouse was about 600 yards inside the property and they had an

unobstructed view of it, which also meant that if anyone was in the house looking out, they would be sitting ducks as they approached. Trixie didn't like this.

She signaled to Svend, they both got off the buggy. As she produced a rifle from her side of the buggy, Svend checked besides his seat but he didn't find one on his side. She saw him looking for the rifle and thought he wasn't as retarded as he looked. She'd have to have nice long conversation with her new friend as soon as the farmhouse would be secure.

Svend removed his helmet and placed it by the seat in the buggy, Trixie kept hers on. She liked to keep the fact that she was a woman on the more discrete side. Recently, she had often wished she were a man. That way nobody would be trying to jump her bones on sight. At least not this far from San Francisco she thought, and chuckled to herself. Of course San Francisco was all but gone, deserted.

Svend asked: "where are we going?", "To check for food. If it's clear we might spend the night" she said, muffledly from underneath her helmet, "follow me and be quiet."

He knew the drill, he didn't have any firearms so he was forced to follow, and he realized this might not be the period he thought he might be in. The fact that Trixie had said he was the first human she had seen in a while, the lack of maintenance on the farm, he hadn't seen any aircraft or live animals other than the mudcrabs and a few birds on the way in. This was odd and something seemed off. He was fairly certain he had not been here before, whenever here was.

They walked slowly towards the house, Trixie noticed a water well and at least two more carcasses, canine this time. There was an old barn on the far side of the building but she wanted to check the main house before moving on to it. An old outhouse was on the side of the house, it looked like it had started to sink into the septic tank and it stood crooked.

They approached the house, the porch was made of wood, and it had a way too typically south-western feel to it, it was complete with a sofa-swing hung from the roof, white aluminium door with a top window made of glass, and a bottom window made of netting to keep insects out. A second door behind it had two windows on either side, with some dark brown curtains.

A wind chime was hung under the porch, between two windows near the sofa-swing. There was no wind to move it though. Trixie half expected Tex Willer himself to jump out from the veranda door and introduce his friend Kit Carson and their Indian guide Tonto.

They climbed the four steps to the porch.

Once both of them were on the porch, she got near a window and peered inside, drapes were shutting her view and she couldn't see any movement so she decided to just walk in. Knocking was so *passé* and besides, the element of surprise was always nice to have. She pulled the aluminium door open, and signaled Svend to hold it while she turned the handle on the other door, it was unlocked, she slowly pushed it open with the rifle.

Svend couldn't see her eyes through the tinted visor on the helmet she was wearing but he could tell she was tense, he took his dagger in his hand, out of the belt holster as he looked around, his eye caught some movement to the side behind Trixie. She saw him peer over her shoulder and turned her head, it was a clumsy motion to make because the helmet was limiting her motion as well as her peripheral vision.

A skinny brown dog was standing on the porch. They hadn't noticed it because it had been under the sofa-swing. It looked at them its head turned slightly to one side as if to listen. It looked like a German Shepard mix but the fact that it was so skinny made it look like a coyote. Of course, if nobody was around, nobody was around to feed it. Svend said "Easy boy, play nice okay?" This threw off Trixie who peered at him from beneath her helmet with suspicion.

After a short pause, she took a breath and quietly pushed the door completely open. She entered the house, Svend followed her in. The air was stale but there was no smell of putrefaction, that meant no rotting bodies or carcasses. The possibility of finding some canned goods was definitely looking better and better as it was likely the place had been abandoned for a while. They had entered directly into a kitchen, there was a table with three chairs around it, and the fourth end next to a wall. The refrigerator was a nauseating shade of olive green, so was the stove. There was no dishwasher but an old wooden radio was on the counter top and the sink was empty. Clean dishes were visible behind closed glass doors in the cupboards. There was a small pantry but the door was shut, they'd have to investigate later. The whole place was covered with a thin layer of dust but was otherwise in perfect order.

Another door led into a hallway. Trixie removed her helmet and set it down slowly on the table. She signaled Svend to hush by holding her index finger up to that crease over her top lip, where the angel Gabriel had biblically hushed all humans after telling them a secret before they were born. Svend nodded and mimicked her, hushing her back. The outside aluminium door had closed but the inside door had no closing spring so it had remained open. Svend closed it quietly before following Trixie into the hallway, covering her back as best he could with his dagger. In the hallway there were some stairs leading up, next to the stairs a white door and to the right a living room.

There was an old wooden television and two gray plush armchairs with a brown coffee table on a dark green rug. On the wall opposite the television a broken mirror was hung with a small wooden counter beneath it. Two candle shaped electric lamps were protruding from the far wall, which like all the other walls, was covered with a dark green and brown wallpaper. A green phone was on the counter along with an ashtray, a black tin box and some pipe smoking paraphernalia. Svend whispered to himself: "At least the sofas aren't green..." Trixie eyed him with amusement.

She was looking back and forth between the stairs and the door, unsure if she wanted to go upstairs before clearing the door, since she didn't know the layout of the place, that could well be an external wall and the door might lead outside or to a garage, but she hadn't noticed any garage. The conclusion was that there was a basement. She didn't have a flashlight which ultimately helped her decide.

Slowly she made her way upstairs, Svend didn't follow immediately, he didn't want both of them to be on the staircase simultaneously, so he waited for her to be all the way upstairs, she caught on to this, and once she was up the stairs, she looked down at him and nodded. He followed her slowly. He was quite a bit heavier than she was, and the wooden steps cracked and squeaked loudly under his feet. The noises made him nervous, it was quiet enough in the house that if someone was in the basement, they could certainly hear the cracking sounds he made. The dog outside barked twice, paused, barked twice more and stopped. The air seemed to stand still for a moment as Svend reached the top of the stairs. The last step made an incredibly loud and long squeaking sound, C-R-E-E-E-E-A-K as he shifted his weight away from that foot it made the same sound again, C-R-E-E-E-E-A-K Svend made a face, tightening his lips and exhaled while nodding from side to side and blinking slowly.

They both looked around without moving, nothing. Trixie started walking towards the two bedrooms that were visible in the hallway. Both doors were open and nothing seemed to move, there was plenty of light coming through each doorway, this made her feel better. Svend stood by the end of the stairs looking downwards, keeping a cautious eye on the back. He could see part of the living room off to the side through the guardrail.

Nothing moved.

He paused there for a few seconds, Trixie meanwhile had entered and cleared both rooms and both closets. She hadn't checked under the beds but they were properly made, like nobody had slept there in a while. After

opening the closets an aroma of mothballs and chest-wood bathed the rooms, Trixie came out into the hallway and whispered: "We need to check that door downstairs." Svend nodded and started descending the stairway.

C-R-E-E-E-E-A-K he stopped dead. Trixie froze and whispered: "What is it?"

"I should have skipped that step, I knew it would be noisy." he replied. Trixie smiled and said: "No kidding, I wasn't going to say anything but..." Both of them snickered and decided that if that immense noise hadn't roused up anyone, they could probably carry out a normal conversation.

C-R-E-E-E-E-A-K, he raised his foot off the step and proceeded downstairs. Trixie waited until he made it all the way down, and even though she wasn't heavy enough to produce as much noise as Svend, she skipped that first step and negotiated the rest of them silently, spending the last half looking back upstairs. Once both were downstairs she reached for the door. Svend stopped her gently and said "We'll need some light." "I haven't got any." she replied looking around, Svend moved to the small sill that was under the mirror in the living room, rummaged through a metal tin next to a pipe, he found a Bic lighter, flicked it. It lit.

"This will have to do." he said. Trixie opened the door, it revealed a bathroom with a small window that provided more than adequate light, there was a green ceramic toilet bowl, a green sink and a small green bath with a telephone type chrome shower-head. The tension dropped with both their shoulders as they giggled. Svend added "What's with all the green?"

"I happen to LIKE green." Trixie replied. They both smiled, he asked "Do you think there will be a razor?" Pointing at his beard. She said "I hope so! You look like one of the ZZ Top guys."

"ZZ Top Guys?" He asked nodding side to side. "Yeah, well we still need to check that barn before you go on a shaving spree." She said.

They headed outside. This time Trixie didn't bother with the helmet, leaving it in the house on the table, over a dust covered white and light-green tablecloth. The dog was gone, the place still looked deserted. To the horizon some dark clouds looked like they were approaching but it wasn't windy so it didn't really worry them.

They headed slowly for the barn, circumventing the house to the right, opposite the outhouse. As they circled the side of the house they saw some cellar doors were on the rear. There was a padlock on them, it was locked from the outside, which probably meant that whoever lived there had gone, locking the cellar.

Trixie gave a look at Svend as they stopped by the doors, they were slightly raised at a shallow angle from the ground, framed by cement. "I wonder what's in there." She said.

"Whatever it is, it's not coming out." Svend added, kicking the padlock. They both nodded and resumed towards the barn. As they got closer they saw both barn-doors were missing at their end, it had four square holes in lieu of windows on one side, they couldn't see the other side but light came through from inside, this side of the barn was making shade.

They walked in slowly, checking either side of the entrance carefully, the smell of hay was present but not overwhelming, probably because the barn wasn't just completely open at one end, but part of the roof was missing, and this along with the openings on as it turns out, both long walls, and at the other end, meant that it was well ventilated.

Trixie said "Well for a barn, this one sucks monkey balls." Svend looked at her with a round eye, he wasn't sure he understood the meaning but didn't say anything.

The barn was all open because clearly, it had been undergoing some major work, there were hammers, pry-bars, at least two ladders, some pails of tar and plenty of wooden planks all over the place. Whoever was here left in a hurry, which was odd considering the way the house was left.

Trixie thought that maybe whoever was taking care of the house, was not the same person that was working out here, the fact that there were two ladders also meant that the house had been inhabited by at least three people. Maybe more.

Svend said “Looks like they left in a hurry, maybe some employees?” That made sense to Trixie who nodded in agreement and thought “Smart Viking.”

She picked up a pry-bar and said “Well, we should be able to get those cellar doors open don’t you think?” But he was already nodding before she finished the sentence. “OK, let’s go get it over with.” He said.

He picked up some hay, tied it at the end of a wooden pole and dipped the whole thing in tar from one of the pails. He set fire to the end with the Bic lighter and made a torch.

She grinned at him, beaming with joy. “You’re a genius!” He took a playful bow and almost set fire to his beard in the process but recovered himself in time. She giggled, “Careful, we have no water.” and handed him the pry-bar.

They started towards the cellar doors, Svend had the torch in one hand, and the pry-bar in the other while Trixie brought up the rear, holding the rifle at her waist. The atmosphere was more relaxed now and they wasted little time with extra precaution. With a loud cracking noise, Svend pried the locking buckle from the wooden doors, dropped the pry-bar to the ground and lifted a door by its handle. He threw it unceremoniously to the side and did the same with the other one. He then peered down into the cellar but the difference in lighting was too much and even with the torch, they had to proceed carefully down the stairs, it didn’t help that they were now in plain sunlight, the whole cellar looked pitch black. Contrary to the house, the smell was terrible, similar to opening a refrigerator after a long power failure. Or opening a grave...

They both flinched, Svend started in.

As soon as he took a first step down, something grabbed his ankle, he yelped kicking and flailing his foot and the grip released somehow, he raised his leg out in the light and they both saw a loose skeletal arm still grasping loose at his ankle, he kicked it away in disgust. The arm went flying against the outside wall of the house hitting the aluminium siding, and fell to the ground with a thud. They heard a guttural grunt, slowly out of the cellar climbed a skeletal, one armed man. He looked corpsified, skin tight around its bones, the face was all teeth, cheeks set deep, the eyes were almost completely white and it had two holes for a nose. It came creeping at them, its single hand towards Trixie, it was avoiding Svend, it was clearly afraid of the torch, Svend yelled "Back! Back!" waving the torch, trying to keep the corpse away from Trixie.

Meanwhile Trixie had picked up the pry-bar from the ground and swiftly hit the corpse between the eyes with the end. With a silent cracking sound, she made a hole in its head. The corpse fell to the ground in a lifeless bone drum solo. Trixie and Svend looked at one another in amazement, then looked towards the cellar. Nothing was moving, no sound.

Svend started to descend again, this time keeping the torch well ahead of himself, the wooden steps here made no noise but once he made it downstairs, he realized that the cellar was in fact one single room. There were piles of cans, some more tools including power tools, some hemp bags that were probably used to carry hay, potatoes or other produce, paint-brushes but mostly blood, bones and rotten meat all over the ground.

As Trixie reached him at the bottom, they looked around and let the room sink in. The corpse hadn't been alone. Whatever else was in here with it, had lost a battle to the death. The smell was starting to subdue, presumably because with the doors open, the room was aerating, also the wind had started to pick up outside. A storm was coming.

Trixie approached the cans looking at them, "Food. Good!" she said with a frown. "Why would they lock food down here with that monster?" Svend asked. "I don't know." Trixie said. "But I don't think the cans are contaminated, they're all still sealed. We should grab what we can, carry it into the house and bring the buggy closer now that the place is clear." They each grabbed an empty hemp bag, filled it with cans and decided to sift through it upstairs, in the house. This room gave both of them the willies, mostly Trixie seemed uncomfortable. Svend didn't seem to mind too much, he was standing, holding a bag in one hand, torch in the other, waiting for Trixie to finish when he spotted a rifle hanging on a wall, next to a fishing trophy.

As he headed to it, he saw that it was an old rusty antique, that it probably didn't work or that at the very least it would have no ammunition available for it. As he got close to the rifle the fish wiggled and started singing loudly. "Liquid woman oh oh.. the waay you maaake me feeel aliive..."

The fish was flopping about tail and head. An electric motor could be heard whirring as it made the novelty Animatronics fish wiggle.

Startled, Svend took a step back, and in a heartbeat, Trixie picked up her rifle again and nearly shot the both of them, at first because she was startled, then after she realized what had happened, out of spite. "Liquid womaaan.. the waay you mystifyyy the aiir..." Trixie got close to the fish, unhooked it from the wall, "around meee..." the fish continued. She checked the back and removed the batteries from their compartment.

"AAs, We could use these if we find a proper flashlight that will not set fire to any of your hair." She told Svend, as she set the fish down on a small workbench and started walking away. Svend went to pick it up and Trixie stopped, looked at him in the eye and said menacingly, "Don't you dare." in a deep voice that almost scared Svend. It did rouse him slightly. He liked this girl, he decided he would try and hang around with her if she let him.

As Trixie headed for the stairs, he touched the fish with a finger then, like a child that has been caught with his hands in a cookie jar, he looked at Trixie and followed her upstairs, carrying both bags in one hand and the torch in the other. Once outside he threw the torch to the side in some dirt, it stayed lit but as the storm was approaching he figured it would either burn itself out, or be extinguished by the rain.

Rain? “Wait, if it rains, should we be collecting water?” he said to Trixie. She turned still walking towards the house and nodded yes. “We might get lucky and find some containers in the kitchen cupboards or that pantry we still haven’t checked.”

There was still no sign of the dog as they entered the house, the helmet was still there untouched on the table. Nobody had been there since they had left earlier, not that they were gone for very long. Fifteen minutes at most. Trixie carefully opened the pantry door and found two shelves with preserves on them, there was also some dry, partially rotten bread and at the bottom on a third shelf, some cleaning products. Everything looked homemade including the cleaning agents which were labeled by hand, vinegar mix, ammonia mix. There were no visible brands on anything, the preserves had what looked like a children’s drawing of cherries, apples, strawberries and blueberries on their respective labels.

On the ground there was a bucket with a broom and a mop in it and all three looked like they had been made by an artisan, the bucket was metal, the broom had wicker whiskers and the mop looked like a few old rags tied around a wooden stick.

Svend was already opening the cupboards but all he found were dishes, glasses and cups. He found a coffee mug on the last cupboard he checked but nothing larger than that. It would not be sufficient to gather any significant amount of water.

Trixie thought out loud. “Where do they get their water from?” Svend

walked over to the sink and opened the faucet, a slow whistle could be heard, he said “nothing but air in these pipes.”

Trixie answered “We’re too far from anything to have water from any grid, they must have a well no?” Svend agreed. Trixie asked him to wait in the house while she went and recovered the buggy but Svend wouldn’t have it. He would not leave Trixie alone, not after that corpse had tried to attack her. “I’m coming with you.” he said sternly. For the first time since they had met, she lowered her eyes and agreed nodding. “Okay, fine.”

They walked out of the house and to the buggy, the storm was now brewing stronger, the sky had darkened and there was some serious wind. She got into the buggy, he sat in the passenger’s seat but this time he didn’t bother locking his seat-belt, they only had 600 yards to cover. No hurry, besides they would not be going very fast, Trixie hadn’t even brought out her helmet. She drove back slowly and parked at the bottom of the stairs that led to the porch.

She got out and looked around more carefully, the sun was all but gone, hidden by some dark gray clouds and the wind was beginning to pick up some debris, dead leaves, dry branches and shrubbery as well as sand. The dog was back, it was at the far end of the house, by the outhouse, it stood still in the wind, its ears being rocked gently by it, tail low between its hind legs. Trixie, a sucker for all things animal, leaned down and called out whistling in a rising pitch. “Here boy, come see me.” she said loudly in a friendly voice. The dog looked at her suspiciously and stepped around in a circle but didn’t get any closer. It looked afraid. Svend was looking on but didn’t say anything, nor did he move. Both of them went back to the buggy, Trixie took out three white containers of water, all full, she handed two of them to Svend. “Take these inside.” He grabbed them, but waited for Trixie to follow him. She carried a satchel along with the last gallon container and her rifle. Once inside she set the water and satchel on the table but held on to the rifle. Svend did the same with his containers just as it started raining. At first the rain was soft, then after a minute it began making curtains of water, visible on the ground. Trixie said “All that good water...”

“Let’s hope they’ve still got one of those hand operated water wells, we could search around the property later, when it stops raining.” Svend said.

Trixie decided it was time to have that talk.