

Accidents Can Happen
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The sun was setting on the Columbia River as Jonathan's boat sped towards the ocean. It was a small boat; there was just enough room for him to man the motor at the rear while Maddy sat three feet in front of him, staring out towards the Pacific. Jonathan turned around and took in the sight he was escaping from: the Megler Bridge, Astoria, and, shining atop the hill, the Astoria Column caught his eye. It held special meaning to him, and why wouldn't it? He'd met Maddy there.

"Do you see the Column, Maddy? How we can see it so clearly, even from here?" Maddy didn't respond, and kept her eyes focused on the waters ahead. "C'mon, it looks so cool lit up, don'tcha think?"

Silence.

That was fine. Maybe Maddy was shy. He had to admit, he didn't know her very well. They had only met, what, five hours ago? And what a five hours they had been!

"We met there, Maddy. Remember that?"

Memories swept Jonathan away, back up to the observation deck while the sun was still high in the sky. He remembered looking across and seeing her standing there, looking out over the town. His first thought was about how pretty she was, and his second was of how he could win her over. Perhaps some trivia? The girls always liked Jonathan's trivia. He liked teaching them something they didn't know. It was a good thing he met her here, he knew lots about this place!

Working up his courage, Jonathan walked over to the stranger and stood close to her, close enough to give off a friendly vibe, but not enough to make her uncomfortable.

"Wanna know something cool?" Jonathan asked. He didn't give her enough time to reply. "This place was originally meant to just be a really big flag pole. Do you think this many people would come here if there was just a flag pole up here?" It was true, it was a populated area. The parking lot below was full of cars, with others circling like vultures, waiting for a spot to swoop in on. Yet despite the packed lot, Jonathan and Maddy had the deck to themselves.

"Huh," Maddy replied, not looking towards Jonathan. Did that not impress her? That fact worked before.

"My name is Jonathan, by the way. What's yours?"

"Maddy." She took a small sideways step away. Jonathan didn't notice.

"Well it's nice to meet you, Maddy. Y'know, this place kinda has two different names. Some people call it the Astor Column, but some just call it the Astoria Column. All of the signs in town say something different. Isn't that weird? What do you like better, Astor or Astoria?"

This time, she finally looked towards Jonathan, a patient, yet irritated look on her face. "I guess I like Astoria Column better."

Dang it! thought Jonathan. *Why did I have to like the other name better? Maybe I can lie and she will like me a little more.*

"Me too! Hey, we got a lot in common!" He smiled at her.

Maddy took a step backwards. "Yeah. Listen, I got to be going. It was nice meeting you." She started walking towards the stairs.

Panic started to set in. She couldn't leave yet! "Wait! Don't go!" Jonathan took a step towards her. "I have more cool things I can tell you!"

"No, really, I have to be going now." And with that, Maddy was through the door and winding down the stairway. Jonathan gave her a few minutes, and then followed after her (he always gave his girls a few minutes, so that way he wouldn't scare them). From the base of the Column, he watched her get in her car and start pulling away.

Slam!

The boat came crashing down against a wave, and Jonathan almost flew out of the boat. Maddy had fallen over and lay on her stomach.

"Maddy!" Jonathan let off the throttle and the boat slowed, yet still rose and fell in the waves. They were almost to the ocean now, where they would hit one last rough spot before they found calmer waters. It was a clear, calm night, perfect for boating.

Jonathan made his way to the front of the boat and helped Maddy up, turned her around, and sat her down on the bench seat. Jonathan sat down next to her, wrapped his arms around her, and leaned her head against his chest.

"You're not hurt, are you?" No answer. "Good. I was worried that I hurt you again. There, now can you see the Column?" It shone in the distance, now barely visible, a light in the dark. "I'll always think of you now, whenever I see it. It used to make me think of Carolyn, but ever since I saw you up there, I don't think of her anymore."

He brushed her hair back behind her ear where the biting wind couldn't whip it around. "Let's get going now, okay? We're almost there!" Jonathan left Maddy for the back of the boat, and she slumped over as it surged forward.

The sky was clear and the moon was full, lighting the path ahead. There were no chunks in the water, so Jonathan felt no qualms about testing the small motor's limits. Soon they were flying by the jetties and into the open ocean. "Woooh!" he shouted, as they cleared the last of the waves and reached smoother water. He turned his boat to the northwest, and started heading away from land. The lights along the shore slowly dimmed and faded, until the only thing illuminating the night was the moon and the stars. Jonathan could tell exactly where they were on the Earth by looking at the stars. He was a savant, and trivia and navigating by stars were his forte.

Soon, he was at his spot and slowed his boat to a stop. The motion of the water gently rocked them back and forth. Maddy had slumped backwards against the front of the boat, the moon shining on her swollen and bruised neck. Jonathan once again took his place next to her.

"I have to leave you here, Maddy. Or else they might take you away from me. You don't want that, do you?"

In the silence, he heard a no.

"I didn't think so. What? No, you won't be lonely. Remember how I told you about Carolyn? Well, she'll be down there too. There's others. I promise that you'll be fine down there. I'll come back and visit you all the time too, okay. I love you."

The wind whispered, and Jonathan heard his affections returned to him. Overjoyed, he hoisted Maddy's body over the side of the boat and into the chilly waters of the Pacific.

As he turned his boat and began his journey home, Maddy's body, full of life and unviolated just an hour ago, sank towards the graveyard. Her body came to rest not five feet from Carolyn's bloated body, among the bones of a dozen other women.