

500 YEARS AGO OR SO  
AN INSTALLERS STORY

PART THREE

BY TREVOR SHIP

The sound of people pretending to have fun, seemingly competitively, rang through the labs. Maisie glanced at her watch, was it too early to justifiably leave? The 24<sup>th</sup> December is an important day for many reasons, but for Maisie it was mostly important as it meant the last day of having to be with her colleagues for about two weeks.

The problem was that it meant being at home on her own for approximately two weeks, apart from the enforced family visits.

Nothing says fun like mandatory fun. In the next room glasses clinked, laughs were projected around with abandon just to demonstrate how hilarious people were.

Maisie felt wretched. A work party, after a few of them it is very easy to work out what is going to happen. Someone will get drunk and tell someone else what they really think of them. Maisie knew this one all too well as she had been on both ends of that particular one.

Then someone will snog someone that they really shouldn't, starting up the rumour mills on work social media over the festive period. That was something to avoid, which Maisie largely had managed. There was, at least, an upside to being unpopular at work. She turned up her noise cancelling headphones and grimly tried to concentrate on the code in front of her but it was to no avail. It danced across the screen mocking her and not doing what she wanted it to do. She glanced across to the coffee machine in the main room where the party was going on and could see that there was still some in there.

'Be brave, I can do this.' She said to herself, not believing it in the slightest, and moved towards the coffee machine, staring at it and looking nowhere else, she must not catch anyone's eye. Geoff grabbed her hand and shouted something wildly inappropriate about the way that she looked. She pointed at her headphones with her free hand and made out she had not heard what he had said. She had, but she really wished that she hadn't.

She ploughed on towards the coffee machine, the young woman from the admin department tried to talk to her, this time she was tempted, she could not deny that there was a certain charm to her but Maisie had worked very hard on keeping her private life just that, A work indiscretion, no matter how attractive, would make that hard to continue. Smiling at the woman, whose name she still did not know, she pointed at the coffee machine and poured herself a cup. It was not great coffee, it never was, and it certainly was not improved by having been stood for so long. Maisie simply did not care, she took a small mouthful of the dusty liquid and swallowed happily. Geoff walked across, greasily pushing the woman from admin to one side and poured something from a flask into Maisie's cup.

'What the hell Geoff?'

'It'sh good for you!' He slurred, trying to look like he was being romantic and looking more like he was considering whether or not he should fall over. He then spotted the woman next to them and started to try and flirt with her, Maisie could no longer stand this and turned to walk away.

She heard a squeak from the her as Geoff obviously did something he shouldn't. Without a moment's hesitation Maisie took her arm, pushed the hulking figure of Geoff back, causing him to knock over the temporary table and end up on his back with his legs in the air, and then she led her away. He looked like an overweight upturned woodlouse in a cheap suit.

'I am so sorry about him...' Maisie started to say, then looked into her eyes and was momentarily lost. She could not help fall into pretty eyes with tears in them.

'Focus Maisie, focus'

'Sorry, what did you say?' Sniffed the woman opposite her. 'Thanks for helping me with that man. It felt like a large sweaty couch was trying to hold me down.'

They both shuddered involuntarily at that description.

'I take it you know how that feels too?' She smiled.

'I do, he repeatedly will not take no for an answer.' Mumbled Maisie, feeling disorientated.

'He's not your type, is he?' She smiled.

'Not exactly, no.' Maisie felt very uncomfortable, yet oddly at ease, the woman was gently mocking her, but it seemed to be well meant.

'I am Natalie by the way.'

'Pleased to meet you Natalie, I am Maisie...'

'Oh I know who you are.'

'That sounds ominous, are you in HR?'

'Not at all, I am careful about who I talk to at a new job, particularly given how office gossip can run rife.' Smiled Natalie.

'So...'

'You are not very bright for a bright person are you Maisie?' Laughed Natalie. Maisie could not help but hear the music in her speech. She was at sea and was beginning to drift further and further away from shore on the sound of Natalie's siren song.

Natalie gently put her hands on Maisie's shoulders and smiled, 'I know, I felt the way that you looked at me. It was so, well, sexy.'

At this point Natalie dropped a piece of paper with her name, and contact details on into Maisie's jacket pocket, she felt that in the cold light of day Maisie might come round to what she was trying to tell her. Natalie wanted to kiss her, but was scared of how she would react.

'Really? Sexy is not a word people use to describe me very often, or ever actually.' Said Maisie and took a hasty mouthful of the coffee, only remembering when she swallowed it that Geoff had put something in it.

She immediately knew something was wrong, the world poured away from her, sliding past her like grains of sand in an hourglass. The ground beneath her feet became soft and quickly absorbed her feet as she fell into it. Colours became smells and noises as she blacked out.

Natalie panicked and shouted for help, none of her colleagues were in any rush to move away from the party but her continuous shouts eventually forced their attention. They lifted the slight figure of

Maisie onto some chairs, and lay her down, her dark hair spreading across the blue fabric . Someone said they would call an ambulance, but a voice boomed out over the crowd that was not necessary.

‘I wonder why you don’t want the emergency services called Geoff?’ Screamed Natalie in the large man’s red and sweating face. ‘Shall we call the police as well? Or are you going to tell us what you slipped into Maisie’s coffee?’

The murmuring stopped, a sudden sullen silence fell on the crowd. They were ready for a bit of a laugh about Maisie not being able to handle her drink and then the banter could have moved on. They did not like this serious turn at all, it was really quickly ruining their fun.

‘I..’ Murmured Geoff, looking more guilty than a good many politicians.

‘WHAT DID YOU DO?’

‘It was a drug that the boys in the lab were testing, it was just meant to relax her a bit.’

‘She is more than relaxed Geoff, if she dies you will end up in prison, you get that right?’

At this point Maisie went into a cardiac arrest and everything became a bit of a blur, there was shouting, screaming and recriminations. She was not reacting to anything and the ambulance was nowhere near enough, at that point one of her other colleagues remembered the cryogenic chamber that they were working on.

‘We could put her into one of our cryo-pods to keep her alive until help gets here!’ He shouted and they hoist Maisie up onto their shoulders and moved rapidly, if unpredictably, towards the cryogenics lab.

The usual safety protocols were not observed, partly due to time pressures, but mainly because of inebriation, but Maisie was quickly placed in what can only be described as an aerodynamic white plastic coffin and her core temperature was quickly brought down. Everything looked to have gone to some sort of plan.

‘How long will she have to be in there?’ Asked Natalie.

There were lots of people suddenly not saying very much.

‘How long will she have to be in there?’ Asked Natalie again, this time more desperately.

‘We don’t know, we have never cryogenically preserved a human using this technique. It is all very experimental.’ Said one researcher, proudly until he remembered the situation.

‘You have never done this before on a human, and yet you suggested this as an answer?’ Gaped Natalie.

‘When you put it like that, it does not seem like the best idea does it?’

‘NOT THE BEST IDEA? You don’t say?’

There were more recriminations, but at least Maisie had something she had always wanted. Peace and quiet at work.

It wasn't the worst end to a work day that she could have imagined. If she were able to imagine at all.

Crystalline structures of white ice formed slowly across the glass of the pod and gradually Maisie's face disappeared behind the cold fog. Natalie's tears fell onto it and froze almost instantly before they had chanced to roll off over the curved sides.

Time now had no meaning for Maisie, but her dreams were really very vivid. She could also divine no happiness from the fact that she had been wrong about this particular work party being boring and predictable, but she would have preferred that to effectively being dead if she had the choice.

Just over five hundred years after this Maisie was rummaging around in the pod that she had been found in and pulled out a small folded piece of paper that must have fallen out of her pocket. Opening it up she smiled to see a telephone number and an email address. Neither of which would be any good now, but it made her feel a bit better.

Smiling broadly, she went to tell K3n and Zoe that she now had some memories of what had happened to her.

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