

ADRIFT – by Encarni Medina-Lopez

Summary – On a remote Scottish beach, a scientist tries to recover data from equipment damaged by a recent storm. As she dwells on her personal and professional struggles, she is interrupted by a phone call from her unsympathetic boss – forcing a long-overdue confrontation.

Characters:

NARRATOR, a scientist (f), late 20's or early 30s

A wintry beach in Scotland. Distorted sounds of wind and rain.

NARRATOR: What am I doing here, *again*? Adrift...

I'm so tired. This bloody winter keeps making my life complicated. Well, that and the **(imitating her boss' voice – she does this frequently)** "standard practices" that I'm unable to change. You give your blood and tears to this job, and after eight years you are still that person that nobody listens to...

Subtle sound of waves, distant, feeling like a memory.

Stupid buoy. The fifth storm of the year, it was obvious that this was going to happen, at some point. They said it stopped transmitting data seven days ago...

She works on the buoy with tools. Metallic noises as she tries to open a slot.

The data should still be available in the memory card... my clumsy fingers are numb in these freezing temperatures... Yes, the card is here, looks good, no damage. Let's see what the laptop thinks...

Waves again, fade sound of her feet walking around while she waits for the computer to read the memory card.

She reads mechanically, not wanting to believe what she is reading

"Memory write/read failure"

Repeating, now as herself, with her voice full of stress

Memory write/read failure! Stupid storm! I knew this was going to happen. all of the data of the past week is lost! I won't be able to work out the prediction that the fisheries need for the breeding period... they have been pushing for it already. The fishing community is under a lot of pressure... And the environment agency... they're not going to be happy either **(Bitter sigh)**

Everything relied on this buoy, this useless buoy, and on me...

And what is worse, the fact that I am here taking care of this buoy means I am not doing my weekly trip to the west coast monitoring station... just what I needed, a tiny bit more pressure.

And the kids, it's the fourth time this month that I have had to leave them with the neighbours. They say they're happy to do it, but still... **(frustration and anguish in her voice)**

She comes back to the present moment. The ambient sounds are now more obvious, hitting all at once. A seagull approaching her, and a wave breaking next to her feet. Her breathing changes as she realises her phone is ringing and that's stressful because she knows what comes next.

It's her, my boss, the thought of her freezes my heart. I can feel my pulse in my throat, my hands are slightly shaky, I want to think it's the cold...

She answers the call.

"What happened this time?" she asks me, with pure disdain, like the buoy unmooring is my fault. Like I created that storm for this sole purpose! I know what's coming next: "When are you going to get things under control? This is unacceptable. We are late with that deliverable. I have a call with the customer in 20 minutes. When will you have the data ready?"

All of her questioning... makes me struggle to breathe, to speak, as usual...

"The memory card is dead", I say, voice broken under the pressure.

I clear my throat, repeat: "The memory card is dead",

"What? Speak up for goodness' sake..." she orders me, like I am a girl that doesn't know better.

"The memory card is dead!" I shout.

Silence. Nothing comes from the other side of the phone. I wait. And for a second I want to believe she is going to behave like a human being but of course:

"What? You have to be kidding me! That's going to cost us thousands! that might cost us the contract. You should have kept an eye on that data. What are you going to do to sort this out?" ... and she goes on and on. The 'this is your fault,' speech.

I try and try to explain myself, but she won't let me. She is not interested, she just wants somebody to blame. And here it comes: ...

Tense music building in the background

"You have not been on top of things. You are too distracted at home, it's affecting your work... This is going to be dangerous for the company, and dangerous for you..."
is she threatening me? This is not my fault.

She prepares herself to say what comes next. All of the ambient sounds stop, we only hear her voice, sound and solid. She knows what she wants to say

(Fast, blurting it out): "If you were not so closed minded, so stuck on old fashioned science, we wouldn't be having this conversation! After you *prohibited* me from spending any time "*playing*" with that 'crazy idea of satellites and machine learning' –I spoke to a colleague that is doing research on just that for the northern isles. And the results were great! The accuracy! It works really well! But no, you won't try anything new because of fear, because you are scared.

If we had been using satellite data to monitor the area, we would now have a good record from the past months that we could be using to do the predictions we need, instead of relying on an old buoy that can fail at any time. And I wouldn't have to leave my life behind to go running after a buoy that's broken and adrift. We are staying behind progress, why would we do that?"

She trails off, suddenly sounding sad

Soft wind sounds

She is not replying. Just silence.
I am so done with this.

"I appreciate your honesty" she says, sounding real for once. "Come back to the office. Let's speak about this." And she hangs up.

We are back to that solitude of the beginning, but now there is some hope. Back in her head, but at the same time present.

And I stand here and I listen to the wind and the waves.

Adrift.

But now, with the shore in sight.

END

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