

Freedom, Fish and Felons



Created by: The Launceston College Wordslingers

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Parameters

Primary Character 1: Actor

Primary Character 2: Council Worker

Non-human Character: Mermaid

Setting: Hardware Store

Issue: Burglary

Random Words:

Patch

Prickly

Clock

Silver

Struggle

Prologue

She remembered a world so full of blue that you couldn't put a name to the million shades of it. It was a deep and endless world and a creature such as her could travel all of it, every fantastic rainbow coral forest and the caverns of glittering ice. All lost to her now . . . Caught in a fishing net, wires twisted in her fins and hair, becoming more entangled every time she'd tried to escape. And the net dragged through the water and into a truck by lazy men who hadn't bothered to check it. She dumped herself in a nearby lake desperate for fresh water and that was where they found her, still twisted, stinking, muddy and moaning to herself unhappily. Now she remembered a world so full of blue . . . All lost to her now. Unless . . .

Planning her escape in the light of the setting sun, Sylva lay twisted and motionless in the thick mud, hidden between the reeds of a lake. Her shimmering gold and silver scaled body She gasped silently as she laid out of the water she so desperately needed to breathe. Every time she tried to free herself she became more tangled, until the net became so tight it started to cut into her skin. She longed to return to her home in the harbour of Sydney, but here she was, tangled and beached in the thick lake mud unable to slip back into the cool water where she could make her journey back to her home.

Chapter One:

Detective Dingo closed interview room three's door behind him. He took a breath, shook his head, and made his way down the corridor. Sitting down at his desk, the young man grabbed his headphones and placed them onto his head. Dingo sat for a moment, contemplating the case. Theft. An incredibly valuable object stolen from a hardware store. Why would someone take such an item? Perhaps he missed something in the interviews? No matter how hard he thought, to grasp the whole picture was quite a **struggle**. He grabbed out his recorder, plugged in the headphones and pressed play.

Click

Detective Dingo:

This is Detective Dingo of the Newcastle Police force at 12:04pm. I'm here with Mr Chad Charrington. Now, I understand that you saw what happened this morning down at Nice Guys Electrical Hardware. All the security cameras went down in the store, so we need everything you can give us.

Mr Charrington:

Everything?

Detective Dingo:

Everything.

Mr Charrington:

Ok, so, I got to the store around nine and went inside. There were... 3 blokes working at the time I think. Also, over by the batteries was the bird. Anyway, I went over to the belt sanders and started checking 'em out. I need one for work, you see. I'm building some stuff for the council. Anyway, I picked one up and it was a bloody ripper! Cost an arm and a leg though.

Detective Dingo:

Is this important?

Mr Charrington:

Look mate, you said you wanted everything. So, I'm checking out this sander right; plugged it into the wall and let her rip. Just then, the bloody power goes out to the entire store. Lights, tellies, and even the sander.

Click

Interesting. The detective thought back to his earlier conversation with the store manager; apparently it was a tripped breaker that caused the outage. Was that a coincidence, Dingo thought, or perhaps the belt sander caused the power out while it was plugged in. Maybe...

Click

Mr Charrington:

Anyway, I'm standing there. I've got a belt sander in my hands, I'm staring up at the lights, and these two massive blokes in ski masks come up to the front door. It was a sliding glass door, and electric, so it didn't open for 'em. They stood there, looking at it for a moment, and then one of them grabbed out a crowbar and started to pry it open. I looked around, trying to find the people who worked there, but there was nobody in sight. I considered going up to the door to stop those blokes, but they were bloody massive. They were coming through the door and I noticed that the other chick had hidden behind a shelf. Not gonna lie, I jumped to the floor and hid.

Detective Dingo:

So, these two men. They head out back?

Mr Charrington:

Yeah, they barrelled straight past us and went through the back door. Me and the chick, Stacey I think her name is, we went over to the front door, but it'd slammed shut again. Then we heard a yell from out back and we thought it'd be best to hide.

Click

So, the men forced the door open, went out back, and stole the object. What was it? Detective Dingo leafed through his files. An *Incellular Battery*.

Click

Detective Dingo:

You... hid. You didn't think to maybe help the employees?

Mr Charrington:

I told you mate. Those guys were twice my size. Anyway, the two eventually come back out. They ran straight at the door, hit it with the crowbar and ran through the broken glass.

Detective Dingo:

Well, thank you Mr Charrington. We app-

Click

So the two very large men stole the battery and ran off into the distance. After that the police were called and Mr Charrington and the other suspect were taken into custody. Dingo considered the crime. It was clean and simple. Easy even. The detective placed a new tape inside the recorder and pressed play. Too easy, he thought.

A strange woman with purple hair, a being who could walk out of the water had spotted her in the mud. She called over a large man with dark skin who loaded her into a metal box that grumbled like thunder in a storm. He approached her with a glinting object and she drew back with fear as he held it to her skin but he ripped at the net. Sylva did not understand his words but felt comfort as his soft gentle voice

drifted towards her. She had been placed into a dark room where light did not touch her. Her enclosure allowed her to breathe, but it was so cramped she only just had enough room to turn around.

Chapter Two:

Detective Dingo:

This is Detective Dingo of the Newcastle Police force at 12:23pm. I'm with Miss Stacy Stevenson.

Miss Stevenson:

That'd be correct officer.

Detective Dingo:

I'm Detective Dingo, but you can just call me Dingo miss. First, I would like your version of events, just as they occurred. Keep it concise, we don't need your life story.

Miss Stevenson:

Okay, so... I woke at seven today and my boyfriend and I are on a break, you see, and he had messaged me saying he wanted me back. So that made me emotional, and got my day off to a bad start and-

Click

Damn, not this again. Dingo wasn't sure that he could listen to the young lady's rambling again. He skipped forward ten seconds.

Click

Detective Dingo:

Miss Stevenson, we're here to talk about the burglary that occurred at around 9am this morning, not about your boyfriend.

Miss Stevenson:

Oh yes okay sorry, yes. I arrived at Nice Guys at about eight, hoping to purchase some batteries for the mics for a show I'm in, I'm an actor you see. It's a really good show actually, you should come see.... Oh, um, sorry... where was I? So, I walked in and the guys there directed me to the batteries over near the corner, and I was looking for the right ones when suddenly the power went out!

Click

Right, the detective thought, because of the sander perhaps.

Click

Miss Stevenson:

Then those men wearing horrible masks showed up, opened the door and ran out the back. I hid on the ground, along with that other man who was buying stuff in the store.

Detective Dingo:

Yes, I just spoke with this man. Did you happen to catch his name?

Miss Stevenson:

Um... no... we didn't speak.

Detective Dingo:

Why's that Miss?

Miss Stevenson:

Well there was all this shouting from the people out the back. All the men who worked there ran out the back when the lights went out and were calling out to each other. The two of us just stayed hidden.

Click

Hmm, Dingo considered what the young woman had told him. Chad told the detective Stacey's name, but she said they didn't talk. Also, she said they stayed hidden, while Chad claimed that they tried the door. Finally, Dingo smiled. Something was fishy.

Click

Detective Dingo:

Perhaps the other man was assisting the criminals?

Miss Stevenson:

Um... oh. Well, yeah, sorry officer. So what exactly was stolen again?

Click

Quick to change the subject hey Stacey?

Click

Detective Dingo:

It was some sort of expensive battery, used only for very specific instances. We're puzzled as to why someone would steal it, as you'd be very hard pressed to find a buyer for one, and the type of institutions that could make use of it could comfortably purchase one anyway.

Miss Stevenson:

How terrible officer.

Click

Well that's pretty much it, Dingo took off his headphones. There were certainly elements of their stories that didn't add up.

At first her enclosure allowed her to breathe well, but with time it became harder and harder. When the man and woman came back to check on her, the lustre of her silver and gold scales had been lost and in the reflection of the glass, her orange eyes looked dull. She moved towards the edge of the tank and pounded her webbed hands on the surface. It wobbled violently, and water flowed over the rim, gushing onto the floor of the building. The man and woman rushed over, their face concerned as they saw her deteriorating condition. It was then they knew what they had to do.

Chapter Three:

Stacey didn't dare even breath loudly as they crept from the police station. Her hands wouldn't stop shaking and her violet hair felt as if it were standing on end. She glanced into a nearby window to check and saw Chad behind her. She admired the way the man seemed so unruffled and so self-assured. He strode, confidently through the streets and glanced at Stacey concernedly. 'Do you need a ride?' he asked, for the sake of deception. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

They got into the car, doing up their seatbelts as they went. Stacey breathed deeply in the fresh leather smell and relaxed. But then she shook, more violently than she had before. She tried to control herself but could not. Before she could muffle it, a small shriek came out. 'Ha!' She clapped a hand over her mouth. Chad turned to her, the corners of his lips twitching. Than he shook too! A deep giggle came tumbling out. Stacey let loose. The two roared with laughter and the car ran smoothly down the street as merry as they were.

'He bought it! Chad, he bought it!' Stacey took a deep breath and lay back against the car. She turned and there, in the back seat, was the incellular battery sitting askew where it had tumbled down from the window. Chad grinned. 'I thought for sure I'd blow it.' 'Well, you didn't!' she cheered. 'Because that idiot bought it! He bought our stinking pile of lies like it was a bar of gold!'

He quietened suddenly, as they passed a fishing shop, sardine carcasses hanging in the window. The two contemplated the creature they had left behind in a dark garage. Stacey placed a hand on the council worker's shoulder. 'She'll be fine Chad. We'll get her there.' Chad nodded, distracted.

'You know what?' he said. 'I feel sorry for the Detective.'

Dingo pored over files and transcripts late into the afternoon. Even as the sun began to die he made notes and marked sheets. He worked at his desk, until the office became dark and empty, the muffled tick-tock of the **clock**, the only noise. Tick-tock, tick-tock, said the **clock**, until Dingo came to hate the sound and had to fight the urge not to throw the thing at the wall. There was something he was missing. Something he hadn't seen, couldn't see. He put his head into his hands and groaned.

His eyes fell upon a second paper, one he hadn't looked over and straightened up. It was something he'd requested from HQ, personal and recent details on the eyewitnesses. It had seemed droll, dates of birth, student loans and other what-have-you. But notably, Miss Stevenson had a lease on a warehouse. How could a low-paid, play-playing nitwit have enough money to own a garage? He looked at the sheet again, puzzled. No, she co-owned it. Co-owned it with . . . Chad Charrington. The councilman. Another eyewitness and one who claimed to have never met the actress.

Detective Dingo rose from the desk, placed his hat on and stared into the dark streets of Sydney. He'd caught a scent, and the sun was getting low. He smiled, a doggyish smile. Why not check on that warehouse?

Dingo called a police troop in with him and had them quietly drive up to the building, permit boldly displayed in his front pocket. He motioned for the cops to stand beside him as he squatted down and lifted the rusting roller door, expecting to find a range of stolen goods from other stores. Maybe cash, maybe even a whole gang if he was lucky.

What he got was a whole *other* scene.

Inside it was dark, but they could clearly see the waiting truck and the frozen figure of Stacey Stevenson, holding a pile of clear aquatic tubing, eyes wide and frozen in terror. Chad Charrington came in nonchalantly, and then took in what was happening with shock. His suit was dripping and the reason for this was revealed by the large fish tank. And inside it was a scaly **silver**-and-gold mermaid, looking for all the world, as if she were happy to see them.

The man and woman returned with a device that, when connected to other equipment allowed her to breathe once more. She smiled at them as her lustre returned to her scales. She placed her hands with orange webbing to the glass and moved her mouth in attempt to communicate. But her words were lost to the water and the man and woman had blank looks on their faces. "I'm Sylva," she tried to say, "I'm from Sydney." But even if they could hear her words they did not understand her language and so her voice was lost to the shimmering blue.

Chapter Four:

A bright light shone from the creature, blinding Dingo's widened eyes. He stretched his arm out in front of him to feel the glass of the enclosure, quickly realizing that the light was only a reflection of the street-lights let in by the open door. Stacey shook as though caught in headlights, and the mermaid seemed to watch Dingo closely from beyond the glass. The truck stretched into the dark warehouse without end – what other things laid back there, obscured by darkness? Matted cables ran from plug sockets in deep corners of the warehouse, emerging to convene with the tank. It must have needed a serious power supply to run. Dingo held a hand up, signalling his police regiment to wait at the door. He looked up at Chad.

“What kind of circus are you running here?” he asked gruffly. Chad did not respond.

“I'll ask again – what kind of circus do you people think you're running here?” he shouted.

“Th-those two men in ski-masks—” Stacey began, “—who broke into the hardware store... Did you work out why they stole... the thing they stole?” Dingo did not respond. There warehouse was bleak in silence.

“Quit wasting my time,” Dingo grunted, “enough is enough.”

“Charrington and Stevenson, I know that the two of you collaborated in stealing a valuable piece of technology from Nice Guys Hardware this morning – an incellular battery, no?”

“Did you think I wouldn't notice the inconsistencies in your interviews?” Dingo probed, “It started out as a moral dilemma for you lot, didn't it? Come on, you can tell me.” Dingo did not expect a response.

“The thing needed help!” Chad said.

“Yeah, yeah, you should have seen the **patch** she was in!” Stacey parroted.

As he was about to speak, Dingo was interrupted by a splashing noise. The mermaid spun and glistened in her tank.

“I want this explained to me,” He motioned towards her, “and I don't want the nonsense excuses like money, I want to know where you found this thing and what it is.” The room was silent again.

“Alright, come on in guys.” Dingo called out to his troops. A dozen police officers entered the warehouse, half of whom began poring over the truck.

“Who steals for any reason other than a lack of money!?” Chad exclaimed. Dingo looked at him with eyes cold as ice. He signalled for an officer to examine the front seats of the car. Stacey watched them with an expression of dread.

“So, you two stole the battery to power your truck to take this creature – where?” Dingo pulled a radio out of his pocket before either could answer, “I confirm, Charrington and Stevenson were the culprits.”

Something in the truck began to flicker and glow – a fearsome revving sound like the roaring of a thousand lions tore and echoed through the warehouse. Stacey sprinted towards the front of the truck and leapt into its driver’s seat. The tyres shrieked horribly as she came flying backwards. Chad sprang onto the side of the truck and took the wheel as Dingo watched on. His eyes met with the purple-haired Stacey Stevenson slouching in the passenger seat with a confident smirk. Her sleek hair and **prickly** eyes told the full story.

The chase was on!

The man and woman pressed a map to the glass of her tank pointing, gesturing. But she did not understand the low grumbles that escaped their lips and hung her head on its side in confusion. Again, the man played out his charade and the woman held the map up the tank. Then she saw something she remembered, her face brightened when she saw her home, Sydney Harbour, on the map. Sylva pointed a webbed finger to the place she longed to return to. The man stepped away and spoke to the woman. Finally, they knew where to release her and prepared the truck for the long journey ahead from Newcastle to Sydney.

Chapter Five:

Detective Dingo was engulfed in the fumes of the truck as it flew past him. He sprinted to his car and jumped in. He slammed down the pedal and pursued Chad and Stacy. The truck was barely visible now, he had to hurry. As he drew closer to the culprits, he could finally see the silhouette of the truck in the blinding light of the sun. Just as Dingo's car was approaching it, the truck roared past an intersection, seconds before a barrage of traffic flooded the path. An orchestra of horns wailed in response and a car screeched across the greasy road. Dingo's pursuit was at a halt. This caused a series of crashes with other cars, but he was too captivated in catching Chad to notice. Dingo then pulled a hard left, and slammed the accelerator into the footpath. Pedestrians scattered as dingo flew by, barely missing them. He saw an opening in the traffic.

"She'll be right," he muttered to himself as he drove into the gap, squeezing through it. The cars on the left braked hard. A series of crashes entailed, but Dingo was through. He continued along the road, with the truck in his sights. He clunked to 6th gear, and felt the car shake as he thundered along after the truck.

Chad glanced at the rear-view mirrors. Detective Dingo's car was closing distance, and fast. He had to shake him off their tail. Sharp as a blade, Chad turned off the road into a narrow alleyway, barely making it through. They emerged on an overpass above a highway.

"Danmit!" Chad grimaced as he sharply turned the wheel. The truck came off the overpass at a blistering speed. They watched as the ground hurtled toward them, screaming and landed with a jolt. The truck was roaring and howling as Chad and Stacey exited Newcastle. They emerged onto an open highway. Chad once again glanced at the rear-view mirror, and saw no signs of boys in blue. "I reckon we've lost him, Stace."

"I never want to that again." she replied

"Fair enough mate. Next stop, Sydney!" said Chad,

"Come get us Dingo!" Stacey cheered.

After an hour, they were still driving down the wide highway, Chad and Stacey heard a faint sound. But a recognisable one. Sirens. They locked eyes, exchanged their shared passion for liberty, and replaced their courage for hatred. A road sign flashed past. Sydney harbour in 2.3 minutes.

The truck turned left onto the port. Chad set his sights on a boat leaving the harbour. If they could jump on it, they'd be safe from Dingo. But all of a sudden police cars created a blockade at the end of the road. Stacy shouted "behind us!" It was the detective. There was only one escape, a tight and narrow alleyway to the left. "Hold on" Chad gritted his teeth, for the sharp turn left. The walls closed on the truck, metals sparks flew as it ground across. They made it through the alleyway onto a highway, and spun onto a road, the smell of tires scorching. Then felt the truck rumble as they accelerated.

Through the rear view mirror, Dingo was closing in. "Damnit." Yelled Chad, for the second time. He clunked the gear into 6th. The truck roared onto the open highway, as it passed cars. Another chorus of horns started up as the truck came past and a bike split across the road. A car crashed into a pole behind them but they were safe. Then they heard the sirens. Ten cops came up on either side of the truck. As they grew in closer, Chad and Stacey felt in their hearts that the end was near, for better or worse.

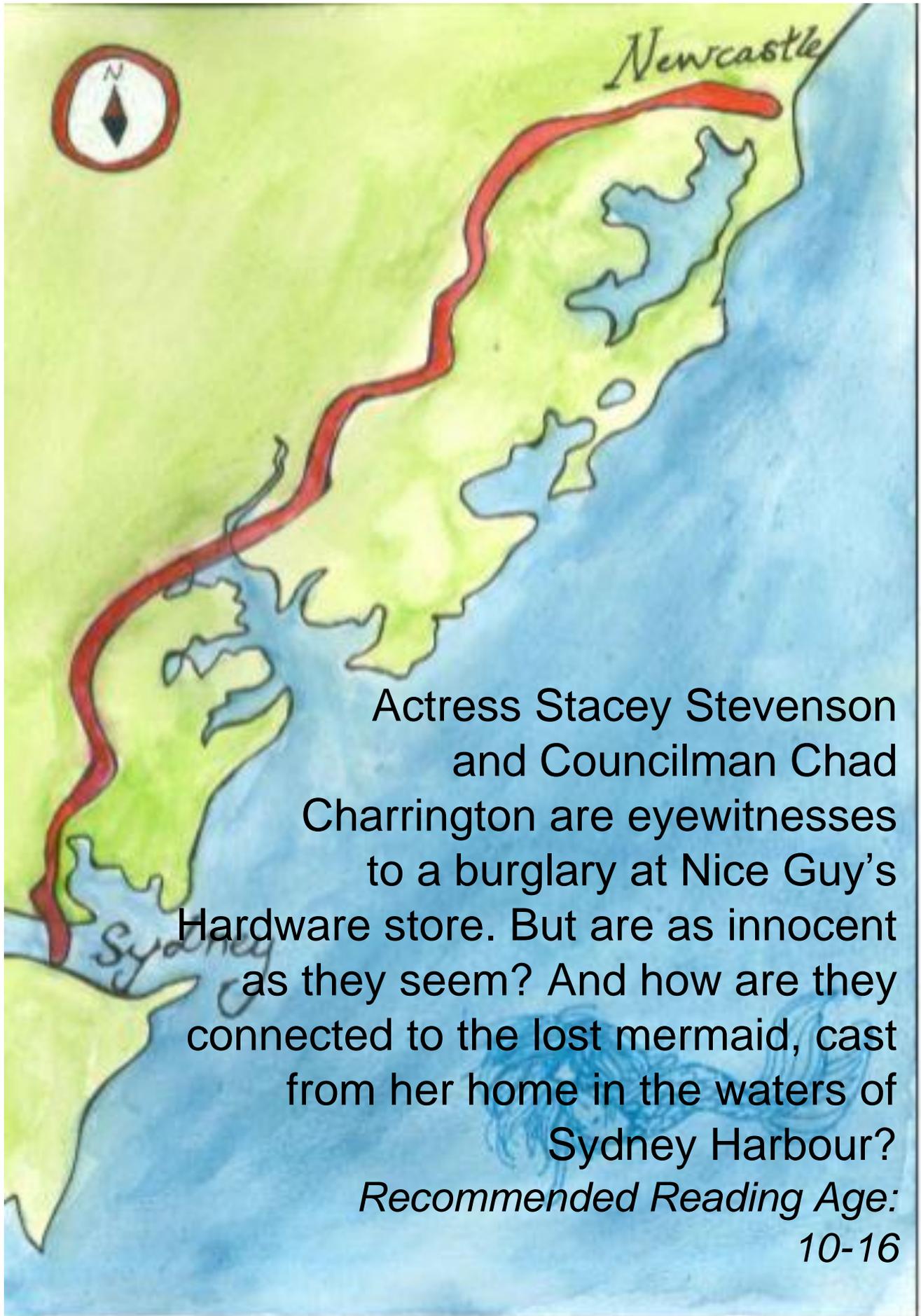
Dingo had them in his sights. He zoomed up as fast as he could. In the distance the harbour bridge came into view. He had planned a blockade at the other end and knew it was the end. His victory

"They have us". Stacey whispered as they entered the bridge and saw police at the other end. Chad looked back at the mermaid. The water sloshed around in her capsule, and the look on her face was terrified. Chad made a choice and hardened his resolve. "We're going down!" he screamed as he yanked the wheel to the right as hard as he could and crashed down toward the water.

Time froze. Stacey and Chad looked each other in the eye, and decided that they had made the perfect choice. In the back, the mermaid leaped out of her tank gracefully and into the water as she watched the truck fall in with a *boom* of bubbles. Chad and Stacey swam out of the open windows and to the surface of the water, gasping for breath, and even more so as they screamed with jubilation. Their friend was free and they watched as she swam away in the vivid orange and crimson light of the sunset.

The feeling of cool water on her skin filled her with bliss. Sylva's gold-silver hair caught in the sea breeze as she waved the man and woman away in thanks. Her shimmering sleek body plunged into the deep murky blue of the harbour, free of the twisted fishing net that had sapped her energy before, she was home.





Actress Stacey Stevenson and Councilman Chad Charrington are eyewitnesses to a burglary at Nice Guy's Hardware store. But are as innocent as they seem? And how are they connected to the lost mermaid, cast from her home in the waters of Sydney Harbour?

Recommended Reading Age:

10-16