Perseverance

May not be used without written permission of the author
EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - DAWN

Gentle waves lap against the sandy Southern shoreline, as a light rain falls.

SUPER: ALDABRA ATOLL - THE SEYCHELLES

A small herd of ALDABRA GIANT TORTOISES make their way out of their underground nests, heads held high on long necks, mouths open, taking in the tiny drops of precious rain.

More tortoises join the gathering, head towards the interior of the island, where their "tortoise turf" waits.

Young and old, big and small, they graze, heads popping up now and then, looking back towards their rocky nests.

A pack of cat-sized RATS watch the herd graze, while several of them make their way back towards the tortoise nests.

INT. TORTOISE NEST - CONTINUOUS

Underground, barely visible in the low early morning light, fifteen tennis ball-sized eggs lie unguarded.

Five rats scamper into the nest, attack the eggs madly with their teeth and claws.

EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

A large female tortoise raises her head in alarm, followed by her mate, who weighs in at some four hundred pounds.

They make a beeline back to the nest, with surprising speed and agility, but the distance is too much to cover in time.

The pack of rats scurry away, back into their rocky dwellings.

INT. TORTOISE NEST - MOMENTS LATER

The female tortoise slumbers in, eyes fourteen broken, empty eggs, lets out a low, echoing cry.

EXT. JUST OFF THE COAST OF PICARD ISLAND - MORNING

The "Camile", A sleek eighty five foot yacht, bobs in the gentle surf a hundred yards from the Western shore, as the rain subsides.
EXT. CAMILE - FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

VICKIE STODDART, 35, rotund but pretty, dressed in black dive suit, watches as the sun climbs over the atoll. She stretches, arms over her head, a smile on her tanned face.

She turns, as KOFI, 50, dark skinned, approaches from inside with an elaborate underwater camera and a satphone.

Note: All Seychellois characters speak with a Creole accent

KOFI
It's your daughter, Miss Vickie.

He hands her the phone.

VICKIE
Thanks, Kofi.
(beat)
Hi Camile! What ya up to?

CAMILE (V.O.)
Just finished dinner...Nana made spaghetti. How's the coral bleaching looking?

Vickie motions to Kofi to get the tanks ready.

Kofi turns to the bridge.

KOFI
Jojo, get Miss Vickie's tanks ready!

VICKIE
Well, they're definitely bleached, but, not as bad as last year, and there's lots of new growth, so I'd say we're persevering as best we can.

JOJO, 25, a younger version of his Dad, enters from the bridge, carrying a white double SCUBA tank.

CAMILE
Mom, I need to tell you something...Dad called me this afternoon.

VICKIE
Oh God, what now?

CAMILE
Well...he's in The Seychelles too, and he'll be on Picard at La Gigi this afternoon.
VICKIE
Shit...so will I.

EXT. UNDERWATER - MORNING

Vickie glides through the water with grace and ease, contradicting her non athletic body frame, camera out in front of her, as sunlight trickles down from above.

Below her, Kofi carefully removes coral specimens, placing them in a net bag.

The coral is definitely "bleached" in many places, but underneath the milky white, bright colors bloom, as small FISH dart in and out.

The sealife teams with multitudes of colorful species - RAYS, BLACK TIP REEF SHARKS, GREEN TURTLES, and PARROT FISH.

At the surface, three WHALE SHARKS slowly glide by, temporarily blocking the sunlight.

Vickie notices, swings her camera up, and follows the gentle giants, as they swim out to sea.

EXT. GRANDE PASSE - DAY

The Camile glides between Picard and Polmnie islands, into the huge, bright aqua-blue lagoon of Aldabra Atoll, with Kofi at the helm, Jojo on the foredeck, and Vickie filming from the aftdeck.

Tortoises dot the craggy shores...everywhere. Hundreds, maybe thousands of them scuttling here and there.

EXT. LA GIGI - AFTERNOON

The small research station is a buzz with life, as MEN scurry about, carrying on their daily chores.

Numerous small buildings dot the makeshift village.

CHIKE, 65, dark and grizzled, watches, as Vickie approaches, in a work cart, a wide smile on his face.

CHIKE
Miss Stoddart, so good to see you, my friend, and you look great, as always.

Vickie hops out of her cart, hugs Chike, pulls back smiling.
VICKIE
Chike, it's good to see you too, but no need to lie...I look like one of your tortoises these days.

CHIKE
Stop it, girl, you look just as fine as you always do.

VICKIE
How's life?

CHIKE
Every day I get to see my tortoises and this beautiful world God created, I have to smile and be thankful.

VICKIE
And how are they doing? We saw so many as we came through the pass.

CHIKE
Oh man, the rats...the damned rats take so many eggs, but the tortoises...they persevere.

Vickie frowns, shakes her head.

VICKIE
Speaking of rats, have you seen Dick?

Kofi and Jojo pull up in two more carts with large coolers.

KOFI
And we come bearing gifts...a feast for tonight!

Several MEN, excited smiles on their dark faces, run over to help with the coolers.

CHIKE
Yes, your hubby...uh...I mean, your ex-hubby is here. Came in this morning, actually.

Kofi and Jojo pull beers from a cooler, toss more to the other men, playfully.

VICKIE
So...who's the asshole with this time?
EXT. MALABAR ISLAND - AFTERNOON

Sand dunes and occasional "coral mushrooms" cover the beautiful shoreline. Several tortoises meander about,

RICHARD BUTLER, 45, well put together, squinty eyes, cocky smile, snaps pictures of MANISHA AUBEl, 23, shockingly gorgeous, and completely naked.

    RICHARD
    Work it for me, Manisha.
    (beat)
    Let me see that ass, too. Nice and slow, Babe.

Manisha slowly spins, as she dances.

    RICHARD (CONT'D)
    That's what I'm talking about...spread those cheeks...that's what sells.

A huge tortoise casually walks between Manisha and Richard.

Richard scowls, bends down, picks up a rock, heaves it at the animal.

    RICHARD (CONT'D)
    Out of the way, you big bastard!

The rock hits the tortoise square in the head. It bellows in anger, then trots away, angrily.

    MANISHA
    (French accent)
    Richard! Why you do that? We on their island, no? You not nice person.

Richard smiles, pulls a fat joint out of his shirt pocket, extends it towards Manisha.

    RICHARD
    Fuck that...I'm not nice? You don't think? Get your sweet ass over here and show me how nice you can be.

Manisha coyly smiles, walks toward Richard.

    MANISHA
    Oh, I nice...you know how nice I be.
EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - EVENING

As the sun sets, tortoises come out of their nests, munching on the tortoise turf and low hanging branches of shrubs.

Rats watch closely, and when the time is right, they make their way into the tortoise's nests.

EXT. LA GIGI - NIGHT

Steaks and seafood sizzle over an open BBQ in the middle of a circle of chairs, where the group sits, talking.

VICKIE
The coral is recovering...still in danger, but, like your tortoises, they persevere.

Chike raises his beer, looks to the group, who raise their beers as well.

CHIKE
To perseverance and to all that God has created!

ALL
Here here!

Richard and Manisha approach, both a little tipsy.

RICHARD
Well, if it isn't my wonderful ex-wife.

(break)
Looks like you've gained a little weight since I saw you, Dear.

Vickie stands, hand on hips, while the others merely watch in surprise.

VICKIE
My asshole ex-husband, and...who do we have here?

Richard pulls Manisha forward, spins her around.

RICHARD
My girlfriend, Manisha Aubel.

Manisha shyly waves, approaches Vickie, extends her hand.

MANISHA
Hello, Vickie.

(MORE)
MANISHA (CONT'D)
Richard has told me much about you...it is nice to meet you face to face.

Vickie doesn't accept the handshake, looks Manisha up and down, shaking her head.

VICKIE
Just call him, Dick, Girl...most everyone does. He's used to it, and you'll be too before you know it.

Kofi and Chike share nervous smiles, while Jojo erupts in laughter. Richard also seems amused.

RICHARD
Still got that killer sense of humor, don't ya, Babe?
(beat)
Listen, Vick, we need to chat real quick...I thought it was better we speak face to face than having our lawyers do the talking.

An uncomfortable silence overtakes the festivities.

Manisha looks down to Jojo.

MANISHA
You have beer for me?

EXT. STONE PATH - MOMENTS LATER

Vickie and Richard walk towards the lagoon, a bright full moon lighting the way.

Tortoises lumber along in front of them, while rats scurry in and out of the rocky outcroppings.

RICHARD
So how's Camile?

Vickie stops, turns to Richard.

VICKIE
How's Camile? You tell me...you just spoke to her earlier today, right?

Richard stops as well.

RICHARD
She misses her Dad...I miss her too.
VICKIE
You haven't seen her in three years, Dick! Three years! You know how she feels?

RICHARD
She feels like you're preventing me from seeing her.

Vickie gets up close in Richard's face, finger pointing directly at him.

VICKIE
Bullshit, Dick! That's bullfuckingshit, and you know it.
(beat)
What's this all about? Why are you here?

Richard smiles...a cocky, crooked smile.

RICHARD
Listen, Vick...I need more money. Say an extra ten grand a month, and we can continue on like we are...meaning I stay out of your hair and we let bygones be bygones.

Vickie's eyes go wide with anger.

VICKIE
Another ten grand a month? What's wrong, your porno business isn't paying the bills? Your strippers aren't pulling in enough cash?

Richard rolls his eyes, begins walking back towards the village. He stops, turns around.

RICHARD
Manisha's a model, not a stripper.
(beat)
You've got the money, Vick. It wouldn't make a difference to you. Get back with me in five days, or your lawyers will be hearing from mine, and the discussion may just involve some form of joint custody when you're away on long trips...like this one. Understand? See ya round.

EXT. LA GIGI - NIGHT

The embers of the fire slowly fade.
The workers are no longer present, as Kofi and Jojo load what's left into their coolers.

Vickie and Chike hug each other tightly.

**VICKIE**
Until next year, Chike. You take care of your tortoises.

**CHIKE**
And you take care of your corals...and you. Richard a bad man, but I know you will persevere. Give my love to Camile.

**EXT. GRANDE PASSE - NIGHT**
The Camile slowly makes her way out to sea.

Tortoises line the shores, their necks elongated, looking up to the starry sky.

**EXT. JUST OFF THE COAST OF GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - NIGHT**
The Camile is dark and quiet in the calm waters.

**EXT. JUST OFF THE COAST OF MALABAR ISLAND - NIGHT**
The "Richard", a fifty foot yacht, bobs up and down in the surf. Jazz music wafts into the quiet night from below deck.

**EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - JUST BEFORE DAWN**
The sky is alive with a strange muted color.

**INT. TORTOISE NEST - CONTINUOUS**
A large male and female tortoise cock their heads to the opening of the nest, obviously alarmed by something.

**INT. RAT NEST - CONTINUOUS**
Several rats awaken, sniffing the air wildly.

**INT. LA GIGI - CHIKE'S SHED - CONTINUOUS**
Chike's eyes pop open. He sits up in the small bed, looks around, obviously alarmed by something.
INT. CAMILE - KOFI'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Kofi's eyes pop open. He sits up in bed, looks out the circular window.

INT. RICHARD - MASTER SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Richard's eyes pop open. He's alone. He sits up in bed.

EXT. CAMILE - FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

Vickie, in black dive suit, stands, watching in disbelief, as hundreds, maybe thousands of tortoises run into the surf, off the sandy beach.

Kofi exits the bridge, alarmed.

KOFI
Something's happening.

Vickie points at the tortoise migration.

VICKIE
That's for sure. Look at the tortoises...they can't swim, but they're all entering the surf...together.
(beat)
I'm going in the water. Grab me a tank, Kofi...quick!

EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

Rats watch as the tortoises run towards the Southern beach, then head to the nests, where the unprotected eggs wait.

EXT. RICHARD - FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

Manisha lies in a recliner, smoking a joint, eyes closed.

EXT. UNDERWATER - MOMENTS LATER

Vickie swims about ten feet below the surface towards the beach, a hundred yards away, camera in front of her, filming as she goes.

As the tortoises hit the water, they walk out along the sandy bottom...not swimming, but walking underwater.
Tortoise after tortoise, line after line, the throngs continue to wade out to sea.

EXT. ALDABRA ATOLL - DAWN

A bright sun rises, cutting through the odd colored pre-morning sky.

There's a RUMBLE, which increases in intensity, followed by a massive blast of wind.

From the East, a huge Fireball races through the sky, only a few hundred feet above the treetops.

A Blinding flash accompanies it, as it speeds over the atoll, heading due West towards the coast of Tanzania.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Vickie continues filming the tortoises as they walk underwater away from the shoreline.

Above her, a blinding flash passes overhead, and is gone in an instant.

EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

Dead tortoises, rats, birds, and lizards litter the land.

EXT. LA GIGI - CONTINUOUS

Chike and his men all lie dead around the village.

EXT. RICHARD - FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

Richard's dead body lies half in half out the bridge, while Manisha lies dead in the recliner, her joint still smoldering.

EXT. CAMILE - FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

Kofi and Jojo's bodies lie dead, hand in hand.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

The tortoise procession has stopped, but the ones already underwater turn as one, and head back to the beach.
EXT. JUST OFF THE COAST OF GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

Vickie surfaces, eyes on the beach, where thousands of tortoises lie dead.

She turns to the Camile, bobbing up and down, still and quiet.

EXT. CAMILE - FOREDECK - MORNING

Vickie stands over Kofi and Jojo, tears streaming.

She turns toward the island, watches as the tortoises, thousands of them, make their way out of the water to the beach, and head inland to their nests.

The satphone rings from the bridge.

EXT. GRANDE TERRE ISLAND - MORNING

Thousands of tortoises make their way over their dead comrades, as well as dead rats and other animals.

CAMILE (V.O.)
It was a meteor. It hit Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania...initial reports are that everyone is dead within a thousand mile radius.
(beat)
I thought you were too...I called and called, but it wouldn't go through.

VICKIE (V.O.)
The tortoises...they knew somehow. They knew they'd be safe underwater, even though they can't swim.

CAMILE (V.O.)
How'd that save you?

VICKIE (V.O.)
I saw them entering the water, so I jumped in to film them. We persevered.
(beat)
I love you, Honey. I'll be home as soon as I can.

FADE OUT