

LOSD and Fount

Fount has started building a boat. A special boat.

I'm not sure what to do about it...

About three years ago they left the what's going on.
island. Emigrated. Left the island to the sea.

And they have left me here. To log and observe

Me: A **L**ogging and **O**bservation **S**ystem; the **D** stands for
the version, or model type.

Version C was marketed as “**C**ompanion features added,”
since they found that this was what the typical situation
required.

Originally the LO systems were only meant to be left in
totally deserted places. Just sitting there ticking along,
collecting data and interpreting it intelligently.

But it turned out that there was almost always some
determined loner who would refuse to leave his home
with the others. And since the corporation had a branch
producing inter-intelligence communication solutions
anyway, they added a bunch of interaction features to the
systems. They optimized them in version D—and that's
me. I can interact intelligently and sensitively with human
beings, if required. I can even sense *when* it is required,
and when it is not.

On this island, the guy insisting he'd stay was Fount. He
is still here.

Him and me, we are sharing the island. What's left of it.

The large expensive houses right on the seafront were
the first to go. Ravaged by violent storms and tsunamis,
and eventually flooded permanently as the sea level kept
rising.

But many of the small hovels on the raised ground inland, far away from the beach, survived much longer.

So when the others left, Fount's hut was still standing.

He is called Fount because he is kind of a water engineer. He doesn't have a degree but he is good.

Which means he knows how to obtain enough clean drinking water, even under difficult circumstances.

He does not eat fish because he says that every time he swims or snorkels he feels that they are his companions, sharing the sea. Anyway, there are still huge stacks of tins which will keep him fed for years.

He sometimes sort of sings to himself in a low voice: "I'm Fount, Fount on the mount—Fount, Fount on the mount —"

He may repeat this a hundred times or more, just singing along quietly.

Sometimes he varies it a bit: "I'm Fount on the highest mount, that's why I'm still around, Fount on the highest mount—" on and on, a hundred times....

From my databases, I know that this is a sign that he might be going mad. Clinically. Going mad with loneliness.

But if he really is, it's a benign form of madness I guess. Not harmful. And after all, he is not really alone. He's got me.

I am never too far away from Fount.

My spheroid body is designed to work on firm ground as well as in water. I have an extendable set of small "paddlegs" to help me navigate difficult terrain or propel me forward under water. So I can always follow Fount around as he walks on the island or swims off the beach.

We don't communicate much, really. But what we do tell each other is important. Companionship. It's only one set of my modules. But besides the logging and observation it *is* what I am made for.

In the evenings, Fount sits in front of his hut and stares out over the sea.

I share geo-measurement information. He talks about books, and the world, and his childhood, and if there is a God.

Sometimes we share an old joke. Fount will say, "The next version up from you would be *LOSE*. Now that wouldn't please marketing, would it?" And I make appropriate snickering noises. Then I will say, "But wait until they get to *LOST*..."

Then Fount will chuckle quietly and say, "That's a good one."

And then we will sit together silently and look out over the sea.

It has been a long time since the last drone flew past anywhere within reach and collected data from me. They seem to have given up on us. Lost interest. Maybe there are too many like us, so they are drowning in data now.... The island has become very small.

The rising of the water level doesn't follow any regular pattern. Sometimes there are months, even years, when the level doesn't rise; sometimes it even drops a little bit. But the overall curve is up.

There is only a patch around Fount's hut left now, a couple of hundred yards in each direction.

And now Fount has started building that boat. A very special boat. Ordinary boats—there are several of them around here anyway, still.

But this is a boat to live on.

He is planning to leave, obviously.

I could have asked him about it for quite some time. Only, strangely, I have not.

But the boat-building has progressed quite far.

So now as we are sitting together I ask him, “Are you planning to leave?”

He sighs. And he is silent.

I cannot force him to answer me. This is the first time I become aware of that fact.

He stays silent for a long time. Then he sighs again.

And he tells me, “I will stay on the island as long as it—stays alive. But soon this won’t be an island any longer. It will turn into—ocean floor. A reef, maybe. But not an island any longer. The next rush of water might be the last one...”

“Will you anchor that boat here?” I ask him.

He shakes his head, slowly. “I’ve decided that it’s better if I leave. I couldn’t bear to be confronted with that every day. My island, submerged completely—nothing left....”

“So you will leave the island,” I state.

He looks at me. Hesitates. Then asks me: “Shall I take you with me? On my boat?”

I quote from very basic information: “I cannot leave this island. In the case of full submergence I will anchor myself to a suitable spot and maintain logging and observation.”

“Couldn’t you just come with me instead?”

“No, I cannot do that. There are many ways in which I am free to make decisions in difficult situations. But there are basic restrictions. And this is one of them. I cannot leave this island.”

Fount sighs deeply. The most sorrowful sigh of this evening. Then he says simply, "I am sorry."

And we sit there in silence and look out over the sea.

A few days later a terrible storm hits the island. In the evening, Fount moves the new boat right against the wall of his hut to protect it from the storm.

But the next morning, the boat is smashed quite badly. It will take Fount many weeks to repair it.

Fount is not one to complain pointlessly. So he just starts repairing the boat.

The—mostly—dry patch around his hut is shrinking. The water level is rising quite rapidly.

When the repairs are almost finished, another terrible storm hits.

The damage is not quite as bad as last time. But still it will take Fount several more weeks.

And the dry patch is shrinking.

On some days the waves are already washing around his doorstep. The not-yet-finished boat threatens to float away, and crashes to the ground from its stand again and again.

Fount is battling desperately against time and water.

Eventually the boat is almost ready. Not perfect, but ready.

And Fount has started loading the boat. In fact, he has almost finished loading it: food, water, clothes.

I estimate that he will leave the island tomorrow.

He doesn't tell me.

I don't ask.

The next morning he calls out to me, "Goodbye, LOSD. Take care."

"Goodbye," I answer politely.

He hesitates, then shrugs and pushes the boat into the water just a few feet away.

He jumps aboard.

Before he sets sail properly, he starts rowing away from the shore.

That is, he tries to.

The boat won't move.

It will not move. I have fastened it securely. To the rock where I am anchored now, too. With the help of a supermagnetic device that is a secret of the corporation, and of the LOS systems. Fount will not know what holds him. But it will hold him. Here.

So the boat will not move. Not ever. No more.

I know that humans need food and water to survive. I know that this will become quite difficult.

I do not have a plan.

I will just continue to log and observe.