

# The Silver Wave

Short Story - English Assessment by Eva 7C

Dr Nicholas Hepburn raised his cool glass of Chardonnay to his best friend and flashed his breath-snatching smile at him. The wind whipped his curling brown hair around his head, miniscule baubles of sea spray alighting on his eyelashes. His brand new yacht, *The Silver Wave*, cruised down the Jackson River, a debutante at her ball.

A debutante whose first journey was serving its purpose well - to see Adam Barnett smile.

His best friend had been through a lot in the past year. Winter had been merciless in the little county of Dorset, beating down electricity pylons and freezing livestock to death - and it hadn't helped that the poor man was up to his ears in debt. He had risked everything for his new business, so confident but so desperate, for it to succeed. Setting up a practice that gave out free bionic surgery had meant the world to him, but it required a lot. Money, for instance, which Adam had never had much of, and brains. Time. Influence. And Daisy had fallen ill. Daisy Barnett had been so bright, so full of life - and Adam had loved her so much, so dangerously much. Nicholas had visited her in hospital once before her passing - her once-rosy lips pale and chapped, her once-vibrant voice reduced to a husky whisper.

Her eyes like fallen stars.

So, Adam had been through a lot. But the darker the storm, the brighter the rainbow, and Adam had come out from it older but wiser. Barnett Bionics had pulled itself together. He had started seeing a pretty young woman called Emily Grey. His life had skewed horrendously, but now it was back on track. And what better way to celebrate than with friends, drinking Chardonnay, on a big, expensive boat?

"Adam," said the doctor, taking a sip from his glass. "What a fine day for a cruise, hey?"

It was indeed. The riverbank was overflowing with birds and beasts alike, and every meander was breathtaking. The luscious green foliage shaded them slightly from the sun, and what sunlight was left dappled the river in fascinating flecks of gold.

"One might say so, doctor. How are things at the ol' office?"

Adam's smile was amiable. Nicholas gave a loud chuckle.

"Hardly an office, my friend."

"Yes, yes," dismissed Adam, laughing.

Nicholas' wife, Alicia, sauntered onto the deck. She bent down to kiss Nicholas and talked directly to Adam.

"Hello, dear. Gosh, I haven't seen you in so long! I never thought we *would* see you again - you were so buried under all of that work. But it's all good now, isn't it? I heard that Barnett Bionics was really flying high. Care to sell us some shares, Adam? Half price?"

Adam grinned.

Nicholas sighed. Alicia was such a flower.

"Nicky," she addressed. "The cook isn't half as efficient as Mr Lintey promised. We ought to find a new one."

"Okay, darl. Call me if you need me, hm?"

Alicia left, descending the stairs. They watched the darkness swallow her up.

"You're so lucky to have Alicia." Adam sounded almost regretful.

Nicholas smiled. "Yes... but what about your girl, hm? Why isn't she here?"

Alicia was so desperate to make her acquaintance."

"Yes..." sighed Adam. "I'm not sure about Emily. She's lovely, truly, but I don't think I can... I'm not... I'm not over... her. Yet," he choked. Those were tears in his eyes.

*That wasn't very tactful, Nick,* he thought.

"Anyway!" he said brightly. "Any interesting news recently? I've been so clogged up with... patients. I haven't seen the news at all."

He hoped he had sounded light-hearted. Thankfully, Adam was only half there at that moment, and had registered Nicholas' words, not his tone.

*Patients, Nicholas? They're hardly patients...*

"Did you hear about that great upheaval in the medical department? That was quite fascinating, I should say."

Nicholas knew exactly what he was talking about.

"Oh, you mean the whole pandemonium about the stolen corpses?" he said casually. "Of course I've heard. How could I not?"

He made sure to make his voice sound cynical and mocking.

Adam wasn't dim, and he picked up his tone, because now, he was listening.

He raised his eyebrows, only to lower them as they turned around a bend in the river and the sun spilled into his eyes.

"Oh, so you don't believe it?"

"Hardly credible, Barnett. What would a man do with stolen corpses? Hang them on the wall? Gift them to his wife?"

This time, when Adam laughed, it was uneasy, like a dog confronted by a black-eyed stallion, unsure of its own safety.

"You ought to know, you old tease. Selling them, of course. To morticians. Surgeons. You know..."

Nicholas blushed and inwardly pinched himself for his bumble. Of course he knew what a man could do with corpse parts. Adam didn't know half of the possibilities.

Adam smiled, once more at ease.

"So, enough about missing bodies and unnecessary chaos. About this beauty!"

He gestured to the deck with his foot.

"Yes! *The Silver Wave*. Isn't she beautiful?"

He could talk about her all day. She was a marvel, to be fair to the man. She was a sleek ballet of machinery that glided through water like a sword through skin, soundless, the only evidence of her existence the white froth worshipping the water she had cruised through.

But Adam did not want to talk about the boat.

"Tell me, my friend - how did you come into the money for this beauty?"

Nicholas bristled. Adam was wonderful, but he had a nose, and he liked to poke into places where it was not welcome.

With a jolt, Nicholas realised the thing that had been worrying him since they had embarked on their little trip.

Adam was his best friend.

But friends always know you that little bit better.

Adam didn't know about his secret little side hustle.

But he *suspected*.

Nicholas froze with realisation.

"Well?"

*Nicholas, he knows. You stupid man, could you not even hide it from a depressed man? You have to do something! You have to make sure he never tells anyone. You have to-*

"Adam! Tut, tut, tut. Always about the money, you are."

*You're stalling, and HE CAN TELL.*

Nicholas tried to hide his shaking hands.

It was possible that he only suspected him, that there wasn't any real danger.

Maybe he was being paranoid! Maybe there was no cause for alarm.

Maybe he did suspect, but nothing drastic had to happen?

*Nothing drastic? Nicholas, this is your fault! You can only trust Alicia! HE KNOWS HE KNOWS HE KNOWS HE -*

"Well," he started. He had to silence this awful voice in his head, somehow.

The voice that had been born when he had been looking at the corpses in the mortuary, and he had seen opportunity.

“Awfully depressing business, really. Great-aunt Esther passed, and I inherited a good few thousand. Poor woman,” he lied, his voice full of fake mourning.

“Driver mowed her down... at least she went quickly. Poor husband. He was desperately down on it all. You understand.”

There was nothing Adam could say to *that*.

*Perfect, Nicholas. Now, here's an opportunity - grab it!*

“Oh, sorry, my friend. Didn't mean to get *you* down, too. Fancy a top-up? Chardonnay needs to be drunk...”

“Go on then, Nick. You'll be the death of me, you will.”

Alicia sashayed onto the deck again. She didn't know what a perfect distraction she was. She assumed conversation with Adam and Nicholas poured him another glass. He turned away.

He had always kept a little vial of deathly strychnine powder in his pocket - Alicia had sewed him a secret one. It was just in case the whole corpse-selling business went wrong.

He poured it all into Adam's glass, enough to fell an elephant.

“Here, my good man.”

He thrust the champagne glass into Adam's hand.

He placed it on the little mahogany side table. It nearly fell off as the boat swerved. Nicholas tensed. That had been his only vial.

“Careful with that glass, Adam,” reminded Alicia softly. “It was Nicholas' great-aunt's.”

“Great-aunt Esther?”

Nicholas glared purposefully at Alicia.

“Yes, Adam, it's very precious, especially since her passing,” Nicholas butted in with meaning in his voice.

“Er, yes,” said Alicia, her brow furrowed. “Cancer is a terrible thing...”

*Damn.*

Adam narrowed his eyes.

*It's now or never, Nicky.*

“Alicia, you're a little muddled,” he almost yelled. “A toast!”

Adam absent-mindedly picked up his glass. His mind was on something else.

“A toast! To Adam! And the perking up of his life! It has been... diluted...”

He fought to keep his gaze off Adam's glass.

“...But now that... dilution? Is... being drained.”

Alicia and Adam stared at him.

He laughed nervously.

“To Adam!”

They drank long and hard.

Adam was slightly less tense. Nicholas was too. Seeing Adam drink down death reassured him.

His good friend wouldn't live to see tomorrow's dawn.

Nicholas grinned.

Adam grimaced.

"Nicholas, this Chardonnay doesn't weather well. It's a tad bitter."

Thank everything he hadn't befriended someone of his profession. They would've seen the signs of strychnine.

Suddenly, the boat gave an unusual splutter. It was perfectly safe, but a perfect excuse.

"Oh *dear*."

"What is it, darling?" asked Alicia anxiously.

"She doesn't look so good, Ali. We might have to cut our trip short."

"Oh no!"

She turned to Adam.

"Sorry, dear. We -"

"No, that's fine, Alicia. I don't feel so well anyway."

"Yes," murmured Nicholas. "Best you get off. We wouldn't want to... *endanger* you."

And so they banked, and Nicholas called them a taxi. It dropped them off at the car park, and carried Adam home.

He waved him goodbye for the last time, and drove Alicia home.

He waited for the telephone to ring with news of Adam's death.

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It was 8pm, and Nicholas was sipping his chamomile tea contentedly, sinking into the seat of his favourite cerulean blue armchair.

The panicked ring of the telephone echoed around the large house.

Nicholas smiled.