

## *“The Bright Abyss Expedition”*

*Yeah...*

The day had come, everything he had lived for. Countless hours, days, and years working and looking for the right people to get this opportunity. It was finally time. It was time for him to get out of his boring and lifeless office and actually see what his work had come to. Ever since he was a kid, questions would pop every so often in his mind. Just a kid who wanted to explore and conquer the unknown parts of this endless world. Ivan just wanted his name to be known for something big. But of course, he still craved the thrill of exploration. Put one and the other together and that's how Ivan got to the point where he is today. By the end of the month, he'd hopefully be a newfound explorer plastered on every newspaper or even a billboard.

A few months ago, Ivan was working with some seismologists and detected some unusual seismic activity in the South Pacific Ocean. Each earthquake had a different pattern and a different time of occurrence. It was weird and disordinate like the local choir group where anyone could join. Ivan saw something new, right there he knew that this was it. After this new observation, he immediately went to organize an expedition. And after some exhausting months, here he is, getting ready to take off. Before he knew it, the oxygen tanks were getting ready, and the vitals were almost set. The unknown submarine was still being prepared. Being in the same place as that machine gave Ivan the chills. He hadn't seen it, but he hoped it'd be something beautiful. He was excited, yet so nervous because what if it was just nothing? What if the countless hours, money, and people's talents just wasted in a little glitch seen on a screen? Nevermore, Ivan brushed this feeling off and tried to walk around to calm down.

“Hey there!”, said a voice coming from behind. Ivan turned around to see who spoke to him, “Ivan Mainhart, correct?”, says a rather joyful brunette man. He seemed strong, but not too much; his bright green brackets would distract you from it anyway.

“Uhh yeah?”, says Ivan still distracted by the bright green braces.

“Jakob Jensson, at your service.”, says the man as he extends his arm joyfully, expecting a handshake. “I'm your work partner for this trip”, he says all smiley.

“Alright then...” Ivan shakes his hand firmly. “Uhh your name...is it Icelandic?”

Jakob laughs awkwardly. “Yeah, I don't really know...” He shrugs it off and places his hands in his pockets. “See you in a few.”, and before Ivan could say anything, Jakob walked the other way. Ivan didn't know he'd have a partner; he'd thought that he was going alone. Although now that he thinks about it, that was a fairly dumb thought. But to his defense he got told that the submarine was very small and limited; it had a control and communications room, the entry and exit room to go out in the ocean, a very tiny kitchen, and a very small room. He got told that it was about the size of a New York apartment, whatever that meant. The expedition wasn't given much importance. Yet it made sense to throw someone else in; you can't just throw in a hotheaded explorer and expect he'd come back alive. Ivan for now just thought of him as some meat shield if he saw some sharks, *that* was the worst thing they could come across, or so he thought.

Ivan's nerves were getting the best of him. To distract himself, he paced around, the only visible sign of nerves you could see. Ivan was a tough guy, but a passionate soul. Though it never showed since he always tried to hide it. Before he could take another step and have another stressful thought, a loud screech sound came from the rusty speakers. A screech so annoying it basically cleared Ivan's head

“Uhh...oh ok...ehem...Ivan...yeah, Ivan MainHEART? Oh hart...Ivan Mainhart and Jakob Jensson please make your way to gate 6”, said a squeaky female voice, it either belongs to a young woman or an extremely old one.

Well, that was it, what Ivan had waited for his entire life. The only big thing he'll ever get to do, or he hoped. This whole time, Mainhart hadn't really done much with his life. He had partially proud parents and a mediocre house and overall life. This could be where everything changes. No one knew what would be uncovered in this expedition, what the dark sea had, or what caused the weird seismic activity. Ivan just hoped it'd be something worth it, something big. He then gained control of his legs again and was able to start pacing towards gate 6. He had no idea where it was, but his excitement overwhelmed his critical thinking. He passed gate by gate and, let's face it, he probably passed gate 6 a couple times before actually acknowledging it. Before Ivan could pass the gate again, a firm arm stopped him from passing; it was Jakob. “A little nervous I see. That won't really help our situation here,” he says. And before Ivan could speak, Jakob patted his back and went towards the entrance of the gate.

Mainhart wasn't a materialistic guy, but the submarine surprised him. He knew it'd be small, but he didn't expect the outside to look so...wasted. He *is* grateful for this opportunity, but the thing looked like junk. It looked useless. Eh, but it's the tiny things that don't matter, Ivan thought. He looked to his side to see his new partner's reaction, thinking he'd be disappointed too, but a genuine smile crossed his face revealing those blinding braces.

"You should appreciate these last few moments of sunlight before we leave", said Jensson while he looked around. "See you on the other side", he then enters the piece of junk. And without thinking about it a lot, Ivan entered it as well. It was then when the most boring weeks started.

Mainhart had forgotten that it takes time to travel from one place to another, especially when you have a big metal box moving against the ocean's water pressure. At first it was boring as hell, but Ivan found many things little and boring. He and Jakob wouldn't talk much. Only a little bit at the tiny diner table when Jakob would try to strike a conversation. And that was only if their eating schedules would match. The first few weeks Ivan tried to avoid the poor guy, but he slowly started getting obligated to listen to Jakob's rants about his life at home. Jakob would mention his dog that pissed everywhere (Ivan assumed the dog did that), his little girlfriend who cooked the best lasagna, and would even talk for endless hours (according to Ivan) about the color of the sky that shines through his tiny window every morning. Jakob was annoying. Or at least he used to be. He *was* the only person he could talk to face to face at these moments. And giving daily updates through the radio doesn't really count as socializing. The bright green braces weren't so bright anymore.

One day, it was unclear when, Jakob was looking through one of the tiny circular windows. "Hey Mainhart...I think you definitely want to see this." He says with both hands behind his head, his eyes wide open and a smile bigger than the one he had the day he saw the submarine for the first time.

"What is it?" Ivan says tiredly and forces himself to stand up from the couch. He made his way to the tiny window. "I don't see anything..."

"Look down.", says Jakob. Ivan did as he said, looked down. Once he did, he didn't see anything; they were deep in the sea. But he did see a glowing light that seemed never ending. Last time Ivan checked, the sea got darker the deeper you went.

“How many meters down are we?”, asked Ivan to Jakob since he was the brains in the duo. Jakob knew everything about radios, those weird bright buttons, how the transport’s structure worked, you know, all that weird technological stuff that Ivan couldn’t understand.

“Ehhh...”, Jakob headed to the control room. Ivan could hear the little buttons from the other room. “About 700 meters down and 5,400 miles from departure...”, shouts Jensson from the other room, his voice cracking a little bit.

Ivan chuckles. “This has to be *it*, Jensson!” Ivan shouts. “How many more days till we reach the bright abyss?” Mainhart excitedly asks Jensson, he already gave that thing a name.

“No idea,” Jakob says re-entering the room. “But I have a feeling it’s going to be soon.” He says smiling a lot.

“God, you really *have* to get rid of that braces color...” says Ivan in a serious tone, but with intentions of joking around.

“Shut up about my braces color for once, Ivan. I get it, you don’t like them!”, says Jakob falling for the trap. “Let me go make the progress update...” says Jensson defeated and heading to coms.

“Can’t believe what that girl convinces you to do”, says Ivan still feeding onto the joke.

“Leave Klara out of this.” Jakob shouts from the other room. Then came a silence disrupted by Ivan’s laughter and then, silence again. It stayed that way.

Just a few minutes, not more than an hour, passed and Jakob ran to Ivan. He seems agitated and worried, like he knew something that Ivan didn’t. “Do you feel that?” He says, not letting Mainhart speak. Jakob drags Ivan around and grabs one of the sturdy tubes on the wall. He held it like he was holding it for his dear life, but Ivan still had no idea what was happening. He didn’t feel anything weird. He still decided to hold onto another one of the tubes.

“Jake, what the...”, Ivan tried to ask, but Jakob already had his eyes shut, expecting something. “Jake-”, Ivan tries to reach out to him but loses his balance due to a random and strong pull. Ivan couldn’t make sense of what was happening due to the shock. Sooner or later, he did; the submarine was being sucked into the abyss. It felt like a roller-coaster or maybe even what a plane falling would feel like. That thought made no sense since they were underwater. But nothing

made sense at that moment. All that was able to process in Ivan's mind were his instincts to hold onto that dammed tube. It felt like it was never ending, like many things had been recently. It was like falling from a skyscraper. It continued and continued, until it just stopped, no crash, no impact. Mainhart opened his eyes and looked at his partner, "what...was...that...".

Jakob finally opens one eye and then the other, "No idea...". He looks at the windows and Ivan's eyes follow. The window had water drops. "We're outside water...though we just *fell* into the ocean", he says looking at the water drops that dripped down the tiny circular window.

Ivan looked at the window puzzled yet determined, "Let's go out there."

"After all that just happened? I say we call for help!", says Jakob frustrated with Ivan's stupid idea.

"It's what we're here for! To find and discover the weird stuff going on here!", says Ivan trying to control the frustration.

"No! I'm here to help you not make stupid decisions!" Screams Jakob.

"You're here to help me accomplish what *I'm* here for", says Mainhart poking Jakob's chest. "And that's what you'll do, captain's orders."

Jakob looks at Ivan, amused, stuttering, and at an unbelievable loss of words. He stays quiet for what felt like an eternity, "Fine. We should suit up and bring essentials at least."

After getting ready, they head to the exit of the submarine. They both look at each other, giving each other scared but approving looks. At the end of the day, they had each other, and it all felt less scary with that thought in mind. They open the door; it takes a bit to open completely due to its obvious old age. A bright blue light like the one they had seen before the fall blinds them as the door opens. When their eyes accommodate to the lighting, they are able to see that it really was a path. Everything around them was completely dark except the bright path that only illuminated about six feet to each side. Ivan could feel his skin tense up and gritted his teeth. He knew that there were only two sets of eyes, but it felt like there were dozens just...watching. He took a step forward, and the sound of the step echoed, just once. It didn't sound exactly like the sound of the step he took, but it was close. Mainhart couldn't really describe it; it was just off. Something didn't

feel right. It felt like there was something that just didn't belong. "Stay near me", said Ivan to Jakob.

"Stay near me", said the echo. Again, just once.

Ivan and Jakob looked at each other, eyes wide open. They weren't alone, not at all. They shared the instinct of clinging close together. Ivan could hear his heartbeat and how quick it was going and, maybe it was paranoia, but he swore that whatever was watching them was imitating each and every heartbeat. Every heavy breath either of them would take. Ivan wanted to go, but the fear and anxiousness made him forget and block these thoughts. The boys walked forward, into the darkness, and followed the bright path. They didn't know what took over them, but they just shut up. No words are spoken. Ivan let go of Jakob for one second. He wanted to take a weapon or a flashlight out, but when he reached out for his friend, nothing. The panic reentered Ivan's system.

"Jakob!" screamed Ivan, breathing heavily out of panic.

"Jakob!" repeated the echo, with the exact same heavy breathing that Ivan had.

There were a few moments of silence, but then Jakob's screams could be heard. Jakob's harrowing screams were heard from a distance and echoed through the darkness. "IVAN!", screamed Jakob and the echo, once again, repeated it. Just once. Ivan ran to where the screams were coming from, hearing every step and breath of his echo and echo. He just couldn't find him, the thing that mimicked Jakob's cries and screams for help confused him, but he was out of focus. But he tried and tried. The echoes that corrupted his mind drove him insane, and it felt like his mind and ears would explode any minute. He kept running until he tripped on something. The thud his body caused echoed, just once. Ivan looked down and there poor Jakob was, crying, out of breath, half-eaten stomach.

Blood dripped down from Jakobs' mouth, yet his braces were still green and bright. He was crying, but he couldn't cry hard anymore, you can't do that with a missing stomach. His weak cries echoed; each cry echoed just once. Ivan grabbed him, still in shock. He held him close and started crying. Mainhart tried to tie his shirt around the giant hole in Jakob's belly.

"Talk to me", cried Ivan and the void repeated. "We'll get through this, you'll recover", he said, trying to convince the both of them.

“I’m done, Ivan...”, Jakob says weakly and looks up at Ivan. He coughs; every single one being echoed by the invisible entity. His body not being able to contain his blood, it spills out into Mainhart’s arms.

“No no no no no”, Ivan said with a shaky voice, trying his best to not cry. “You still have to get those braces changed.” He says holding him close, not caring about the bloodbath on top of him.

Jakob is able to laugh a bit, but it’s obviously painful. “Tell mamma I love her, feed my dog...take care of Karla...tell her I’m sorry I couldn’t go back home...”, he tries his best not to panic and make things more intense and holds back his tears. His heavy and agitated breathing stops and closes his eyes.

As he held his bloody companion in his weak arms, he heard those weird creatures mimicking his cries and sobs. It was there that he realized there was an anomaly, something that wasn’t right. But ohh no, it wasn’t the laughing entity. It was them. *They* were anomalies. Little brainless flies that serve no purpose but to be slapped away and killed like nothing. Everything Ivan and Jakob had lived for was useless, meaningless. Their work wasn’t even a speck of what the world contains and is capable of doing. What is the purpose? There is none. They serve no purpose. *We. Serve. No. Purpose.*

*End? Who cares if it is.*