

# Coastal Calamity

Shakira May ©

On the coast of Cornwall a storm was raging, the sea was like a ferocious lion. Fog rolled in silently, and hiding in the shadows of the fog, was an old stone inn. The Seafoam inn looked like it had stepped straight out of one of those old mystery books Shakira loved; salt-stained windows, creaky floors and the rolling fog that makes everything feel like a secret. Shakira was staying for the summer with Aunt Clara, who ran the place and made scones good enough to start a cult. She expected a peaceful holiday with books, sand, sea air and swimming. She did not expect a murder.

On the third morning, when the dawn smeared across the horizon in pale grey streaks, something unusual was visible on the shore. A shape; a long, human shape, washed by waves and framed by sand. The body lay just beneath a looming cliff of jagged rock. Aunt Clara, busy clinking plates and buttering toast for guests, noted Mister Blackwell's absence from breakfast.

"Always punctual, that one," she said, frowning at her watch.

She asked Shakira to go fetch him from his room. But the room was empty, eerily so. No clothes. No movement. Just an unmade bed and closed curtains. Clara organised a search party, and within the hour, the mystery was no longer

contained to a missing man. Blackwell was found on the shore, cold, lifeless, and impossibly still.

The police came and ruled it out as an accident something about slippery rocks and bad luck, but Shakira Fox didn't agree. She thought something much more sinister had happened. She searched Mr Blackwell's room, the whole of the inn and the cliff's edge. In his room she found a torn piece of paper with the remains of a written threat and from a cup, the smell of almonds reached her nostrils... cyanide. Shakira knew this deadly poison because of all the Agatha Christie books she had read.

Mr Blackwell hated the sea, he said 'salt air ruined his genius'. He wouldn't go near that cliff on purpose. Shakira saw the muddy footprints herself; two sets leading to the cliff's edge, but only one coming back.

From that moment, the mystery consumed her.

The next morning Shakira interviewed everyone to build a list of suspects and motives, all of which she wrote in her leather notebook. For five days Shakira spied and eavesdropped on the guests. She lingered in hallways, peeked through

cracked doors and wrote everything down in tiny, slanted handwriting. Who argued in the kitchen. Who cried in their room. Who flinched at Mr Blackwell's name. Every detail mattered.

The more she watched, the more things didn't add up. Aunt Clara was unusually quiet, wiping the worktop again and again, like she was trying to wipe away guilt instead of crumbs. Jasper, the handyman, had fury in his dark grey eyes whenever anyone mentioned Blackwell. Then there was Mr. Greene, the old marine who boasted about how Blackwell had stolen his life story for a novel. And finally, there was Lila, the mysterious lady who arrived late, never smiled and flinched every time a phone rang.

As Shakira wrote, patterns emerged. Alibis weakened. Emotions boiled under false smiles. She saw it all, captured it in ink and instinct. Something was brewing beneath the surface, and Shakira could feel it rising like a moon tide.

Then, on the seventh day, with the sea still raging and the thunder roaring in the distance, Shakira was ready to present her hypothesis. She called everyone to a meeting, demanding that they listen to her, and took to the stage.

“I believe that Lila is the murderess. She is Blackwell’s long-lost daughter.

Blackwell abandoned her mother and her when she was only four years old, he wanted nothing to do with them. Lila set a meeting so that she could confront her father on the cliff’s edge. Out of sight. Out of sound. They argued and Lila, in a panic, shoved him, pushing him off the edge to certain death. Lila cleaned up the scene, retraced her steps and planted false clues to frame all of you.”

The room was completely still with silence except for the storm outside.

Gradually Lila’s body started to shake, her face crumpled like wet paper, and she burst into tears that wracked her whole body and confessed,

“I just wanted a father. I just wanted my dad to acknowledge me. To admit that I exist. When we were arguing I thought he was going to hit me, and I panicked and just shoved him away. I didn't mean for him to fall. I didn't mean to hurt him. Now I have no father at all.”

Rapping interrupted her sobbing, and everyone turned to look at the door. Three policemen entered, their boots thudding on the wooden floor and escorted Lila away towards a waiting car. They’d listened this time.

As Lila was seated in the police car, Clara noticed that the sky was clearing, the storm was softening. The rain was now calm drizzle. Everyone breathed a sigh of

relief. The room visibly relaxed as the distraught daughter was driven away. The storm had passed. Peace returned to the inn like a tide rolling in.

That night, Shakira sat by the cliff, notebook in hand, listening to the waves crashing below. She wrote it all down: every clue, every thought, every feeling, every twist. One day, perhaps she'd turn it into a fiction novel. Maybe she'd eventually get around to writing one. She already had the final line.

The sea had washed away the footprints, but not the truth. Not this time.