

Voyage of the Black Swan

(A Judicial Inquiry Regarding an Incident at Sea)

TIME: The near future on the hottest day of July

PLACE: New York City: a street on the Upper West Side; a Mount Sinai hospital room and cafeteria; and the sitting room of a yacht at sea

CHARACTERS: (three women, two men and one nonbinary character)

SISTER ANGELICA ANNE BOYLE, an elderly Irish emigrant nun

AUTUMN BLAZER, an artist and hospital volunteer, age mid 20s

DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN, a resident internist, age 40s

JULIUS (JULES) HUMPHREY HOTCHKINS, a British medical scribe, age late 20s

DOCTOR FLORIAN HEATH, a radiologist and amateur climatologist, age 40s

THE SEA CREATURE, an amphibious intersexual

HAZMAT TEAM MEMBER ONE

HAZMAT TEAM MEMBER TWO

PLOT SYNOPSIS:

In the near future, on the hottest summer day on record, an elderly nun faints on a city sidewalk and is rushed to the nearest hospital. She is diagnosed with heatstroke and left lying unconscious in a private room where a dense cloud has formed above her head. The nun is identified as Sister Angelica Boyle, a popular choirmaster and the subject of a city wide search. When she awakens, the Sister is surrounded by doctors, a volunteer named Autumn, and a medical scribe named Jules. Sister Angelica claims the cloud is a gift from Saint Swithun, patron saint of weather, in response to her fervent prayers. Later, when the Sister is left alone, she inadvertently swallows the cloud, then coughs it up in the form of a crystal sphere capable of generating more clouds. Jules offers the use of his yacht to transport the doctors, Autumn, and the Sister Angelica to the ocean where the sphere produces a funnel shaped fog that skims the sea, leaving a wake in which a stranger is spied clinging to a plank. The rescued stranger speaks in watery trills and appears to be part male, part female, with gills, webbed feet, and a barnacled body. The stranger's presence unsettles the passengers, testing their capacity for empathy until boundaries of civility are crossed, and an ensuing fight leads to tragedy. The story of the voyage is told by Jules who is testifying before an audience of jurors at a coroner's inquest. Jules is also writing a novel based on the voyage and explains that his plot, like the cloud, is proving problematic: a metaphysical mystery that may never be resolved.

