

The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems



The Watcher
By CP Bialois/Ed White

John Hampton breathed in the cold, crisp mountain air before exhaling in a puff of white steam. This was what he lived for. Nothing was better than the smell of fresh air, especially in the higher climates similar to those of the Rocky Mountains.

Out here there was life, here one could feel themselves breathe and see the beauty of the land. In the city, where his daughter and her boyfriend chose to spend a majority of their time, there was nothing to see aside from fumes, trash, and the depravity of what the human race had become.

He fought back the tears the cold and beauty of the land tried to bring out of him. It was the same every time he ventured out on one of his hikes. He knew what most people thought of when he chose these ventures, it was the same thing his daughter, Rachel and Chad Li had said when he first told them about his plans for the

weekend. He could remember the surprised looks on their faces as easily as he could hear them huffing behind him. After pausing for a minute to enjoy what was around him, John turned to them smiling. Rachel was leaning against a tree trying to catch her breath while Chad was bent over with his hands on his knees. *Kids nowadays.*

“Almost ready? We’ve got a few more miles to go before he make camp.” John’s voice carried through the air with an ease he was certain didn’t exist in the city.

Chad let out a groan while Rachel managed to open her eyes and pleaded between gasps. “Why not here?” She motioned around them. “There’s plenty of room for us.”

John sighed and shook his head, “You can’t camp on a slope like this. One false step and you’ll roll right on down.” He nodded towards the steep hill to his left, their right. The pair shared a brief sense of vertigo before they nodded.

Please he’d made his point John smiled, “Good. Don’t worry, another mile, two at the most and we’ll make camp.”

Chad and Rachel shared a look and she pattered him on the shoulder to urge him on. “It’s only a little further.”

“Yeah.” Chad managed to catch some of his breath in their brief rest stop. “Isn’t that what he said a mountain range ago?”

Rachel smiled at him, “You think this is bad? You should’ve seen him when he was younger.”

They began following her father as close as they could get but something held them back. Chad

didn’t want to imagine keeping up with the old man when he was in his prime. As it was he managed to miss every loose foothold or tangle in their path while he and Rachel found every loose bit of ground they could. He would’ve thought such a thing was impossible given everything was frozen but nature was conspiring against them. Shaking his head Chad pushed himself to keep up as best he could. He always thought he was in shape but at least Rachel wasn’t doing much better.

Through the following three torturous miles John brought them to a stop by a large fallen tree and clearing set off to the left side of the path. Used by other hikers as a camping spot a small blackened fire pit was in the center. Someone else had been there since the last snow fall which was a couple of days earlier. With no one within shouting distance they were truly alone just as he wanted.

John had been wrong in his estimation but by then neither of his charges cared, Rachel and Chad dropped onto another log between the fallen tree and the burned out fire. They remained there gasping for air while John busied himself about the clearing by pulling out the small two man tent along with a pack of water proof matches and magnesium stick. He set his tools aside and pulled his canteen from its harness on his belt taking a deep gulp on his water. Before they set out he made sure each of them had a full canteen, snack bars, and beef jerky along with flashlights and a small aluminum cup. While they were only planning on being there that night, it was a bit much but when one went into the wilderness it was better to be over prepared

then under. The difference was often measured in life and death.

Rachel and Chad finished catching their breath and feeling this would be the perfect time to earn some brownie points with the old man, especially after it was his wiseass mouth that got he and Rachel into this mess. If he hadn't mouthed off about the older generation not knowing when to sit down and rest John wouldn't have come up with this camping excursion. While he wasn't a woodsman in any sense of the word he knew no one, absolutely no one went into the wilderness this time of year unless they needed to. Last he checked John didn't need to go hunting for food or firewood.

His final thought gave him the perfect idea so he turned to Rachel who was working on settling in on the log. "We'll get the firewood."

Rachel looked up in surprise mouthing, *We will?*

John looked up from where he was working to set up the tent and nodded smiling, "Good idea. It'll be dark in a few. Best to get that taken care of now." He looked towards Rachel, "You know what to look for honey, try to keep him out of a bear den would you?"

After a brief pause she smiled and nodded, "Sure, no problem dad." She shot her boyfriend an irritated look which he shrugged off as best he could.

Once they were a short distance away from the campsite Rachel shook her head. "Do you have anything else you'd like to volunteer us for? We could be home, *warm*, and comfortable."

Chad rolled his eyes, he didn't let her see him doing that of course,

and shook his head. "I'm sorry, alright. I'm don't know what else I can say."

Rachel turned around to face him, "You could start by learning when to shut up. God, you're the dumbest smart guy I know sometimes." With a growl she turned back around and continued their trek for firewood.

Chad knew he screwed up but for the first time in his life he didn't have an answer. Not even a hypothesis came to him as he tried to catch up with Rachel. His left foot punched through the snow covering an overhand of twigs sending him sliding and rolling down the side of the mountain into a shallow valley. He stopped only twenty feet from where he and Rachel stood a few seconds earlier but his body didn't want to cooperate so he remained there on his back and looking up at the canopy of leafless trees and gray skies.

"Chad!" He heard Rachel's call and tried to answer but at first his voice came out as a croak. By the time he was able to move he could hear the snow crunching under her feet near where he landed. "Chad!"

"Yeah! I'm alright!" He pushed himself into a sitting position then struggled to his feet with Rachel's help. Once he was standing he was amazed at how well he felt considering he came a foot or two from bashing his brains out against a couple of trees during his fall.

Rachel helped brush the snow and small twigs off of his coat. Despite herself she couldn't keep from chuckling at the whole situation they were in. "Leave it to a city boy to step on the wrong spot."

"How was I supposed to know? The snow's covering every damned

thing..."

"That's why no one in their right mind goes into the mountains this time of year."

He eyed her not believing what he just heard. "Then why are we here?"

Rachel finished brushing off Chad's coat, "We're here because someone challenged an old woodsman."

Chad rolled his eyes, "So he's not in his right mind, right?"

She took a step towards the way she came down to help him. "No, you are." Without another word she headed back for the path and after a moment he followed eating a dose of humble pie.

After reaching the path he heard what sounded like something being beaten against a tree trunk. The sound echoed in the woods around them. "Did you hear that?" Chad had a sudden rush of energy brought on by his rising fear.

Rachel shared his fear but to a lesser degree, she'd spent her youth in those mountains and refused to allow it to intimidate her. "Yeah. Come on, we'd better get some wood and get back." She wasn't spooked so much from the sound as she was by Chad's reaction to it. At any other time she would've laughed but after seeing the look of fear in his eyes she felt it was the wrong thing to do. "It's probably some other idiots out here cutting down a tree or something. Nothing to worry about."

By the time they returned to the campsite Rachel and Chad each had a good amount of wood in their arms. John greeted them with a smile upon their return and the amount of wood they managed to

find. Scavenging wood was never a fun or easy thing to do, especially when everything was wet and they didn't have a saw. The latter thought brought a smile to his face.

"Good to see you two didn't run off and left me." While they were gone John had finished setting up camp. He put up the two-man tent, cleared the area beneath the fallen tree and used a tarp to create a lean-to. He even had a small fire going from some of the scraps he found proving that they could've left him and he would've been fine.

Chad was never so happy to see John Hampton as he was right then and there. "No problem Mr. Hampton. With Rachel's help we gathered plenty of wood to keep the fire going all night.

John nodded, "I hope you're right." He gestured for them to sit the wood by the fire and have a seat. "Come on, time for dinner."

Dinner. Of all the words in the English language to use that was the most deceptive one that could've been used. Beef jerky and snack bars washed down with warm water was their feast. John and Rachel ate heartily while Chad had trouble biting through the tough dried beef. After his third or fourth bite he gave up and grabbed a couple of snack bars. Seeing Rachel slicing the jerky apart with a pocket knife and eating the smaller strips he couldn't help but shake his head.

"How can you eat that?"

She looked at him in surprise. "It's good. And better for you than the packaged crap they sell in the stores." Her comment brought a chuckle from John and left Chad without much to say.

After a few seconds of quiet John couldn't help but feel a bit of sympathy for the young man. Sure, he was stubborn and ignorant in the ways of the world but what could he expect of a college graduate? At least he made a good living and would take care of his daughter. After a few minutes he noticed Chad looking around them into the darkening woods.

"What's got you so jumpy?"

Chad opened his mouth to answer then decided against it. Instead Rachel snickered answering for him. "We heard some noises when we were out getting wood. I never saw a man go as white as he did." She chortled at the memory.

In an effort to limit the amount of damage to his pride, Chad ignored Rachel as best he could. "What kind of animals are in the mountains?"

John couldn't help but smile. "They're full of one that make noise, son. You have to be more specific."

"It was like someone was hitting a tree with a bat over and over." Rachel had somehow controlled her laughter enough to get the sentence out before she slid off the front of the log from laughing to hard.

John's eyes clouded over for a second or two, not enough for either of his party to notice. He heard rumors about such things before but as most woodsmen he didn't pay them any heed. Bigfoot, Sasquatch, what ever name one wanted to give them he thought they were nothing more than the occasional bear someone saw and mistook for something else.

"I wouldn't worry about it. Probably some bear trying to shake something out of a tree or someone

cutting a tree down. Nothing to be worried about. Still, if it makes you feel better we'll take turns keeping a look out. I'll take first watch."

That seemed to be what was needed to take away some of Chad's fears and as the hours passed by the threesome were laughing at jokes and anecdotes about John's earlier days and even Rachel's embarrassing childhood moments. By the time they were ready for bed Chad and Rachel were beginning to fall asleep in each others arms by the fire forcing John to chase them into the tent.

Once he was alone John settled in on his spot on the log. To help chase away the cold and sleepiness that threatened to overtake he pulled out a small packet of magic black powder and dumped some into his cup of water. After swirling it around in his hand he took a sip. The bitter taste caused him to grimace but what did he expect? Coffee always tasted like that in the mountains and he didn't think he'd ever get used to it.

It didn't take long for the caffeine to fill him with a rush which he controlled as best he could by whittling on a piece of wood from the firewood pile. With each passing minute he began to think they imagined hearing anything. While a creature such as Bigfoot could exist, he doubted the rumors as local propaganda. It was an old hunting technique where local residents claimed they saw a huge beast of some sort to scare away any competition. Fewer hunters meant more opportunities for them.

Shaking his head he turned his attention back to the piece of wood and knife in his hands. He was so engrossed in his carving that he

didn't notice the sound coming from just outside the circle of light from the fire. At first when John paused to listen he thought it was a deer or some other animal investigating them but the sound was different. It wasn't difficult to hear the weight of the creature as it stomped through the snow. John's first thought was that it was a bear but there wasn't the usual sniffing or casualness about its stride. Whoever or whatever it was it was cautious enough to stay outside his vision but curious enough to come in close. To him that meant only one thing, it didn't have a fear of people and that was a dangerous recipe for a wild creature.

After another few strides the sound stopped where, by John's estimation, was directly in front of him. The fire burning between them gave him a sense of safety as well as entrapment. He and the others had no where to go if the beast decided to attack. Whether it was a bear or a big cat, their fear of humans would only last so long as their hunger wasn't too bad.

Looking away from the fire John stared into the darkness around them trying to gain some night vision. When he was more comfortable he let his eyes settle on the patch of darkness outside of the circle of light. What he saw took his breath away. Across from him, probably no more than twenty feet away were a pair of large eyes reflecting the light of the fire. John sat watching the pair of eyes watch him not sure what to do or could do. In the end his fear got the better of him so he remained where he was, only moving to put more wood on the fire.

At first he thought the eyes were tricks caused from looking over the

fire but when they remained unmoving he was certain they were being watched. Worse still, he had the feeling the beast was crouching to look him in the eyes. The thought sent chills up his spine but he remained where he was with his knife in his hand. Never before had he felt so ill-equipped to deal with a situation. All he could do was sit there as the hours ticked away hoping the beast didn't attack.

Shortly before daybreak John was relieved when the creature rose to its feet and strode into the fading night. While he was grateful it was gone, John couldn't bring himself to move at first. Not until Rachel and Chad opened the tent and stepped out into the early morning air.

"Dad? Why didn't you wake one of us? You must be freezing." Rachel knelt next to him and put her arm around him.

For the first time since he saw those eyes hours earlier John looked away and smiled when he saw his daughter's face. "It's alright sweetheart, you guys slept well I hope?" He pushed the ordeal of the night from his thoughts, the sun was up and they were safe.

Chad nodded while stretching, "Yeah but I'm starving."

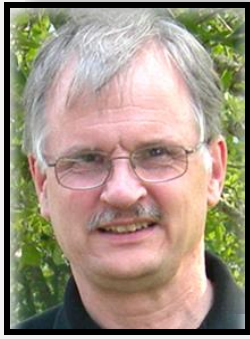
John pushed himself to his feet, the feeling of his tight joints and stretching muscles brought a grunt from him. "Tell you what. Let's get this packed up and ready to go. I'll buy breakfast at Rhonda's. They have the best sausage and eggs I've ever eaten."

With the promise of a hot breakfast of eggs and sausage both Chad and Rachel took to packing their things with far more gusto than they showed coming up there.

While they worked John had a bite of beef jerky and the last of his coffee. Once they were packed and ready Chad and Rachel began back along the path while John paused. He waited long enough so he could investigate the area where he saw the creature the night before.

Out of a need to understand it and ensure he wasn't imagining things he bent over a section of trampled down snow. It was about where he imagined the beast to be sitting the last night. Around the area he saw several footprints much larger than he ever saw before. He scanned the surrounding woods with his eyes but he didn't see anything, not that he expected to. Not wanting to let his daughter and her boyfriend get too far ahead of him he turned and hurried to catch up.

His fear diminished as they walked and he felt the peacefulness of the woods engulf him once more. Anyone else would've had that shattered by the creature but he understood how nature worked. It came to him to watch and not to harm them. So long as he continued to respect the creature, and have a loaded gun, he had little to fear. In a strange sort of way he was sorry when they reached the Ranger's Station and their parked car. The more he thought about it the better it sounded for him to wait until they got home to tell Rachel and Chad about what he saw. They'd either think he was making it up or be terrified. Either one worked for him, he'd show those kids something yet.



Breakdown By Rick Weber

“I can’t believe this is happening to me,” Jack Wooley kept shouting over and over as he stood beside his car in the garage under his company’s office building. He had an important meeting to attend and he was running late. A flat tire was not on the agenda. Adding insult to injury was that his jack was broken giving him no way of changing tires himself.

It had not been a good year for Jack. A business deal which took him months to put together fell apart due to his unauthorized disclosure of a supplier’s proprietary information. That supplier was now suing Jack and his company.

Jack did his best to put out all the fires but to no avail. When he thought he made headway, another issue always came up. He spent the morning taking care of a few small matters related to his situation which became full scale battles. This made him late for the meeting with his attorney outside of the office.

Jack altered his chant and began screaming, “I don’t need this. I don’t need this.”

“You don’t need what?” he heard a soft male voice ask from behind him.

Turning on his heels Jack saw a tall thin impeccably dressed man in his early sixties whom he did not recognize standing several feet away.

Jack on the verge tears replied, “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me.” The man’s tone was consolatory.

Jack stared at the older man. His facial features were soft with warm steel gray eyes. He did not know why, but Jack felt he could trust this stranger. At the end of his mental rope, he broke down and began to sob.

“I’ve got too much going on. I can’t take it anymore,” he cried holding on to the car’s right rear fender. Without any thought of whom he was speaking to, Jack outlined the details leading up to the collapse of the big deal.

“Sounds like you could’ve made a lot of money,” said the man.

“Oh yeah, I could’ve made a ton of money. Now, I won’t have a job before it’s all over and you don’t know the half of it.”

The stranger raised his eyebrows as Jack went into the more tawdry side of his life. As job pressures began to build from the lawsuit, Jack ended a long term romance with a co-worker on a sour note. Word of the affair got back to his wife, and she kicked him out of their house.

“It’s still not that bad,” said the stranger.

Jack looked the man in the eye and calmly replied, “I’m thinking about calling it quits. I got nowhere to go, no friends. You’re the first person who’s heard me out. If I

make it to this meeting, it all may be said and done. So, why show up?”

“Because you know how much trouble you’re in, and you’re the one responsible for getting it resolved.”

“That’s easy for you to say. When you walk out of here, you won’t remember that we even met.”

The stranger told him calmly, “You may not be able to control all of the events leading up to a situation, but you are responsible for how you react to it.”

Jack was speechless. His brain was traveling at light speed not knowing what to do next. Shaking his head, he gazed from the spare tire to the broken jack and asked, “How do I react to this?”

“I know a good mechanic with a shop close to here. I’ll give you his number. He’s usually able to come out on short notice.”

The man rattled off the mechanic’s phone number from memory to Jack, who placed a quick call. When he ended the call, Jack smiled for the first time in ages and told the stranger, “He’s on the way.”

Jack became apologetic. “I’m sorry for the way I acted. I had no right to be that way. You didn’t deserve it. Especially since I don’t even know your name...”

Before he could go on the stranger interrupted, “It’s Melvin, Melvin Baker.”

The sound of a vehicle coming up the ramp caused Jack to look up and see a tow truck pulling up by his car. Jack turned to finish his conversation, but Melvin was gone. Confused by the abrupt departure, Jack was distracted when he heard

the tow truck driver ask him, “Are you Mr. Wooley?”

Jack nodded his head and waited while the man changed his tire. Jack made it to the lawyer’s office a half hour late for his meeting, but was relieved when he found out his attorney was held up in court. Jack took a seat in the reception area and began mulling over what possessed him to open up about himself to a perfect stranger. It was something he had never done before.

“Jack, Jack,” he heard the lawyer calling his name. “Come on in, I’m sorry you had to wait.”

“That’s okay. I had a little hold up of my own.”

Inside the attorney’s office, Jack learned things were not as bad as he had perceived. A resolution was feasible, but it would not be easy.

As the meeting wound down and Jack got ready to leave, he commented to his attorney, “I met someone in our garage before I came here. He told me things weren’t going to be that bad. I didn’t believe him.”

“Who was that?”

“A guy by the name of Melvin Baker. I never saw him there before.”

“Sharp dresser in a tailor made suit?”

“Yeah, you know him?”

“I did, but it can’t be the same person. I defended a Melvin Baker who worked for your company about fifteen years ago on insider trading charges, but he never made it to court.”

“What happened?”

“Suicide, carbon monoxide poisoning. He rigged up his car in the garage at your office. Mechanic from a local garage found him during a repair call there. Melvin left a note saying he had enough and was ‘calling it quits’. The pressure got to him.”



**Faye’s World
By Jaime White**

Did you ever wonder what horrible thing you must have done in a previous life to deserve what you are forced to put up with day in and day out? It’s how I feel all the time. I don’t know where the feeling came from. I used to be perfectly fine with my lot in this life, but it’s been so much harder lately.

I guess it’s to be expected. How often can one person cater to strangers’ whims before you start wondering when it’s your turn? Every day, I go out there and plaster a sweet smile on my face and ask what I can do for them.

Let me tell you something about working with the public: there is never a shortage of strange. You wouldn’t believe the things I see and have to do to keep people happy. Still, I smile and comply. It’s my job, and I take my job very seriously. I honestly don’t know how to do anything else. It’s like this

conscientious streak of mine was ingrained in me from the beginning.

I know what you’re thinking right now. Why not just quit? Is a job really worth it if you’re miserable all the time? I’d love to say ‘no’, but that’s just not possible. Everyone has that one thing they’re born to do and this is mine. I know that, and I’ve accepted it. Still, I’m so close to my breaking point and one more demanding person will push me over it. I just know it.

“Faye, you’ve got a customer waiting. Let’s get a move on already.”

Faye sighed. It looked like it was going to be one of those days. She’d barely punched in, and already she had someone waiting for her. She just hoped this one wasn’t as bad as the last person she’d had to deal with. She’d never come across a more spoiled, entitled brat in her life. Kindergarteners were more mature.

Faye plastered her phony smile on and made her way to the front desk. One of her co-workers, Esmerelda, was waiting for her.

“About time you got here,” she complained as she pulled out a file. “Your client’s been waiting all morning.”

“Sorry,” Faye replied. “I didn’t know anyone was waiting for me already; no one warned me when I got here. Who’s the client?”

“A young woman named Blair. Here’s all the information. I’d get moving if I were you; she’s sounding really impatient and you know how that usually goes.”

“Yeah, I know.” Faye scanned the file in her hands and rolled her eyes. Another typical case. Seriously, did anyone know how to use her talents to their full potential? She was doing this stuff

in school before she got her credentials. Way too basic and stereotypical for her tastes. Still, she supposed there was nothing more she could do about it. She had to get her job done, and the faster she did it the better.

“I know it’s not the most exciting one, but what can you do? Good luck.”

“Thanks,” Faye replied. She had a feeling she would need it. There was nothing worse than an unhappy client whose needs hadn’t been taken care of properly. All the paperwork involved in complaints was so time-consuming and she’d already had one that month. She didn’t need another on her record.

Faye left the office and hurried over to her client, who she was sure was having a fit about now. The mental image was almost amusing—at least now she’d have a genuine smile when she met the girl for the first time.

“Hello,” Faye said as she walked up behind the girl.

The girl jumped, spinning around to face Faye. The girl had an accusing stare. “Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my room?”

The girl’s room was a movie-worthy depiction of a teenager’s space. CDs and other items were scattered all over the place, and posters littered the wall. She had to admit, the view wasn’t bad. This girl had taste—at least as far as the posters went. Faye found herself drooling over one in particular before focusing her attention back on her client. “Sorry. I guess I should’ve properly introduced myself. My name is Faye.”

The girl raised an eyebrow at Faye’s outstretched hand, curiosity etched in her features. “Weird name. You still haven’t told me what

the hell you’re doing in my room. You’re not a new tutor, are you? I’ve had enough of those.”

“No, I’m not your new tutor. Actually, I’m your Fairy Godmother.”

Blair burst out laughing. “No, seriously. Who are you?”

“I’m not kidding. My name is Faye, and I’m a Fairy Godmother. I’m here because you have some requests you’ve been thinking of.”

Blair gave her a skeptical look. “And how on earth do you know what I’ve been thinking of?”

“Because I’m a Fairy Godmother, of course. Weren’t you paying attention the first two times I said it?” Faye almost cringed at the remark. She was already being rude and it was just the first couple of minutes. She’d have a ton of complaints piled up by the end of the day at this rate. It might even be enough to get her demoted to working in the office.

The idea of menial work like that made her shudder. As much as people drove her insane, it was better than being stuck behind a desk all day. At least here she could use some magic. Faye decided to try again.

“Sorry. It’s been a rough week already, but anyway.... everything I just said is true. All you have to do is say what you want, and it’s my job to make it happen.”

Blair crossed her arms and gave a smirk. “Prove it.”

“If that’s what you want. Be careful, though. You’re already wasting time—not to mention your quota.”

“I have a quota?”

Faye nodded. “I’m only able to hand out five requests. That was technically one of them.”

Blair frowned. “You’re kidding.”

“Not at all.” Faye pulled a small wand out of her pocket and waved it

in the air. Out of nowhere, Blair’s bedroom window opened, letting in some of the impending summer’s heat.

“Whoa.” Blair gawked at the window, appearing to debate whether or not that was some elaborate prank. She opened her mouth, but closed it again in a hurry, studying Faye with an intent gaze.

Faye took a seat on the desk, crossing her legs as she waited for the girl to say something. Instinct told her she should let the girl process everything and speak when she was ready. Still, impatience rose within at the delay.

“Okay, so that was an awesome trick with the window and that could totally have been done without any kind of weird magic, but I’m going to play along. Ya know, just in case you’re for real and there’s a quota. For the record, I think that’s bogus since I didn’t know there was one to start with.”

Faye shrugged. “Sorry, but there is nothing I can do about that. What would you like me to do?”

Blair rolled her eyes, brushing her long red hair out of her eyes. “Okay, since I only have four requests left, I’ve gotta make this good.” She glanced around the bedroom, a thoughtful expression on her face.

Faye checked her timer, stifling a yawn. Already, this particular client was boring her. She couldn’t understand why it took people so long to get to the point. It wasn’t like they hadn’t already been wishing for things. It’s what calls them to the Godmothers’ attention to start with. “May I make a suggestion?”

“What?”

“Well, you were obviously looking for something or else I wouldn’t be here. We’re always

assigned to people who already have something in mind. What have you been thinking about a lot lately?”

“Well, there is this dance coming up and I’ve got like nothing to wear for it. My parents are being so lame! They won’t even let me go shopping for it.”

I should’ve known. Wishes are wasted on mortals.

Faye raised an eyebrow. “And that’s really the request you have? There are three more wishes for you to make.”

“Hmm. Well, there’s this really hot guy at school... Andrew? He’s the best player on the football team and every cheerleader at school is after him. Would you be able to get me him? Ya know, as a date for the dance? The looks on the cheerleaders’ faces would be classic.”

Another boring request. “I see. You have two more.”

“I guess that means yes to the date thing?”

Faye nodded, and the girl grinned.

“Awesome. Okay, well... how about some new shoes to go with the dress? I’m not talking some cheapy crap, either. I want a brand name—preferably with a huge heel. And for my last one... I want a limo to take us there. My friends will lose their freaking minds when they see it!”

Faye stifled yet another yawn. Why don’t people ever ask for more wishes? It’s the only way around the quota. “If that’s what you want, you’ve got it.”

Faye waved her wand again. A trendy, formal dress appeared on Blair’s bed, followed by a pair of designer heels. “There you go. I’ve done my job, so it’s time for me to get out of here. Your phone should

be ringing any minute now, so make sure you pick it up.”

Blair’s eyes widened at the sight of the dress and heels that appeared before her. “You were so not kidding. Oh, my God! That is amazing. Seriously, I can’t get that last request? You never warned me beforehand, you know.”

“Sorry, but no can do. It’s policy. It’s meant to make people think carefully about what they ask for.”

“So bogus, but whatever. Hey, why isn’t my phone ringing yet?”

Faye shrugged. “I said it would be ringing, I just never said the exact time. Don’t worry about it; he’ll call. See you!” Faye waved her wand, zapping herself out of the room as fast as possible. She thought if she had to spend one more minute with miss designer shoes, she’d end up doing something she would come to regret.

“Faye, can you come see me in the office, please?”

Faye sighed as Esmerelda’s voice echoed through the air. Only an hour after she’d left miss designer shoes and she was already being called in again. She wondered what diva she might have to put up with this time. Of course, she could always get stuck with some weak-willed princess who was too nice for her own good. That Cinderella girl was one of those. She would’ve told those ugly sisters to shove it a long time ago.

When Faye got to Esmerelda’s office, a huge stack of papers were sitting at the front. The large text at the top nearly made Faye scream. “Are you serious? A complaint already? I just finished that job.”

“Sorry, but that’s the way it goes. She says that she had to wait two hours for her date to call, and

then she claims the limo he and the other guys in her group were talking about getting was completely unacceptable. She wants a larger one. In classic black. Oh, and she says you tricked her out of a request.”

Faye gawked at Esmerelda. “Are you kidding me? She didn’t tell me she wanted a special color or anything. And she didn’t give me much of a chance to explain how it all works. She just demanded I prove it right away.”

“Well, either way... you’ve got extra work to do.” Esmerelda handed her the stack of papers.

Faye shook her head. It was unbelievable. How dare that little twerp try and give her grief for such stupid things. It was the story of her career anymore. She grabbed the stack and stomped out of the room. She’d barely made it a few feet when she was called again.

“Yes?” Faye struggled to keep her composure as she wondered what else her latest client had possibly complained about. Leave it to that girl to just keep adding to her list.

“You’ve got another client. This one asked for you specifically.”

Faye blinked. “Me? Why?”

“She says she’s heard about you and she wants to see what you can do for herself.”

Faye suddenly got a bad feeling about this new client. “She did? What’s her name?”

“Kelly. She says her friend, Blair, told her about you. You really should be more careful, Faye. Didn’t you tell Blair about the confidentiality thing?”

I knew I forgot something...

“Sorry. I guess I forgot. I’ll take care of it.” She should’ve known better than to forget such a crucial

detail. These people were driving her to distraction.

“Make sure you do. We don’t need anymore of her friends getting sent our way. It might make it out of their circle, and then we’ll be in a real mess. Can you imagine the deluge of requests we’d get if people actually knew about us?”

“I know. I said I’ll take care of it, and I will. I’ll see you later,” she said as she pulled her wand out again and waved it.

A Fairy Godmother just can’t seem to win. I give that girl everything she asked for, and she still complains because she wasn’t specific enough in her requests. How is that fair? I may be magic, but I’m not a mind reader here. I need more information to work with. And then she has the nerve to go around telling her friends? I can just imagine all the trash talk they heard about me. It makes me wonder why her friend even bothered to request me.

Humans.

Okay, don’t get me wrong. I do think that some can be okay. I’ve worked with plenty who have been really nice and grateful for what I did for them. But for every one of those, I get a couple of people like Blair. It’s those that really wear on me and make me wish I’d been born into another line of work. People read the story books and they think we’re these old, sweet creatures with the patience of a saint. In reality, well... let’s just say my patience has been running on low and I’m thinking it might be time for me to make some changes.

Once again, Faye appeared in a strange bedroom. This time, a brunette teenager was leaning against a headboard while she

flipped through some magazine. Music poured out of her speakers, filling the room with rock music.

They may have been friends, but that seemed to be where the similarities between the two ended. The girl’s room was a bit neater than Blair’s and filled with art supplies. Most of the posters on her wall were for movies or books, and this girl favored darker colors than Blair, who’d decorated her room in more typical “girly” colors.

“Hello, are you Kelly?”

The young girl looked up, doing a double-take at the sight of her. She recovered quickly, though, and set her magazine aside. “Are you Faye?”

“Yes,” Faye confirmed. “I’m assuming you know who I am from Blair? Did she also tell you about the quota? You only get five requests, and asking me to prove who I am will take one of them. Oh, and we have a confidentiality agreement Blair failed to uphold.” She didn’t want to tell a mortal it was her mistake.

The girl waved off Faye’s words. “Whatever. I don’t need to see proof. I’ve known Blair for, like, ever, and I know she doesn’t make stuff up. Just tell me... how specific do I have to get? Because Blair said that—”

“I know. I saw the complaint. You only need to get as specific as you want to be. Like you probably know, if you ask for a limo, I’ll get you a limo. There’s not guaranteeing what kind of limo you’ll get. Same with anything else you asked for, so if details are important, you should add them.”

Faye was glad that at least this girl seemed to be a little nicer.

“Cool,” she responded. “Okay, then. I’ll make sure to be really specific.”

Kelly frowned in concentration. “I want more requests. Ten, to be specific.”

Faye raised an eyebrow in surprise. In all her years of fulfilling people’s requests, she’d never run into someone who asked for more as their first request. She assumed that was mostly due to the storybooks that said that kind of thing wasn’t allowed. People could be so suggestible at times, it made her laugh. “Why ten?”

“Because it’s the first number the came to mind,” she said with a shrug. “That is allowed, isn’t it? I mean, those stupid books can’t be right about this stuff. They’re only stories.”

“Yes, it’s allowed. I’ve just never had anyone ask for that before is all. Okay. You now have fourteen requests left. I’m supposed to let you know that you don’t have to use them all at once. You can always save some for later.”

“Don’t like to wait,” she replied. “Okay, my next request... I want a dress for that dance too,” she added as she picked the magazine up again. “This one. A pair of shoes that matches. And a black limo that’s way bigger than Blair’s with a cuter driver. I want to get to the dance earlier than Blair does, so make sure her limo gets a flat or something on the way.”

“You’re down to the ten you asked for.” Faye raised an eyebrow. “I thought you were friends? Plus, I’m not exactly sure I can do anything that may interfere with another person’s requests.”

“You won’t be,” Kelly pointed out. “She’ll still have the limo, and it will still get her to the dance. She’ll just get there a little later. Next request: her driver should be some boring old guy who is a stickler for rules, I want a great stereo system

in my limo, my parents' camera needs to be broken so they can't make us sit through pictures, they also need something to keep them busy so they won't want to grill my date for hours, the limo should be stocked with nothing but junk food, I want a drop-dead hot date, a huge corsage, a new phone to take pictures with, I want most of our friends to come with me to the dance, and I want to win the crown tonight."

Faye waved her wand. "All right. Everything you asked for, minus any permanent damage, by the way. We don't work that way. Can I ask you something now?"

"What?"

"Why were most of your requests for something better than what I gave Blair? And if you're friends, shouldn't you be going in the same group?"

"I said we were friends, not are."

Faye frowned, suddenly wondering what she might have gotten dragged into. "What happened?"

"She stole my boyfriend."

"But I got some football player to ask her out."

Kelly rolled her eyes. "Who do you think I was going out with?"

Why am I suddenly getting a headache?

"She asked me to give her your boyfriend?"

Kelly shrugged. "She's had her eye on him all year. She just never had some magic witch to hand him over to her."

Faye balked at the insult. "Now, wait a second. I had no idea about that, so don't go calling me any names." Suddenly, a thought occurred to her and Faye regarded the girl with a wary gaze. "That hot date you asked me for wasn't someone else's was he?"

"Please, do I look like as big a skank as she is? He's a free agent."

"Right. Well, you've gone through all your requests, so I've got to be going. Have fun."

Faye waved her wand and high-tailed it out of the room as fast as possible.

Can you believe it? Thousands of years of making people's dreams come true and I end up getting used in some pathetic high school rivalry. I should've known something was wrong when I saw the dress she wanted. I still don't get why Blair would bother telling her friend about this when she used the magic to steal her friend's guy, but I have a feeling I don't want to know. Probably too self-absorbed to think about what she was doing.

Either way, I don't really care at this point. I've had just about enough of this whole situation and I'm wiping my hands of it. I didn't even bother filling out the paperwork about Blair's complaints. As soon as I got back, I took the whole stack and shredded it. I made sure to leave it where Esmerelda would see it, along with a note telling her what happened.

After that, I laid low for the rest of the day and thought about the situation some more. Clearly, our jobs are just not as noble as they might have been in the old days, and in this case it turned downright nasty. That's not how our abilities are supposed to be used, and I refuse to be pulled into any more petty dramas like that.

I sat and stared down at the wand I'd used to fulfill so many requests over the years. It's brought a lot of joy to everyone I'd used it for. Well, except for my latest client anyway. Although, that might be debatable once her scheme gets

pulled off. I can just imagine the complaints that might come in after that. Just the thought of all the work that might be yet to come was enough to make me want to rip my own hair out.

Then it hit me. I have in my hands a tool that can do anything, grant any request (so long as it's not outright evil). I've used it so many times for other people to make things better for them. Why not for me?

I almost couldn't control the grin spreading across my face at the thought. It wasn't exactly kosher; we're the granters, not the grantees. Still, there was no outright rule against it. It's only frowned on.

I zapped myself away from there as fast as possible and onto a tropical island where I spent the next year lounging around on the beach while people served me frilly drinks and exotic foods that I didn't normally get to indulge in. After all, supernatural creatures like myself don't exactly need to eat. Still, enjoyed the hell out of it. I made sure I had the fanciest room with the most comfortable furniture during my stay, which I broke up with quick stops at a bunch of other places. I went on safaris, danced all night in Paris nightclubs, and went to operas in Italy. Anything I wanted, I zapped up. Occasionally, I did a little magic for some people that seemed to need it, although I never told them a thing about it. They just happened to find food when they needed it, or their car started suddenly after fighting them. Some people just happened to get an urge to walk into the right place at the right time to win a big prize.

Esmerelda and the others weren't too happy with me, but I didn't care. I hadn't taken a day off my whole career, so I had tons of

free time coming my way and there was nothing they could do about it since I wasn't breaking any rules. After a while, I just up and quit all together. Who needs someone to tell them where to go and who to grant requests to? Not me. Not anymore.

And that's how I became my own Fairy Godmother.



The Spring By DiVitto Kelly

There is a natural warm spring in Florida that has very special healing qualities. It's a popular spot for those with achy bodies and limbs. Elderly people, mostly of eastern European descent, venture there religiously. Few Americans go there . . . ever.

The spring, located just south of Sarasota, lies in the sleepy town of North Port. The surroundings are rustic; there are no manicured landscapes or picturesque walkways. The spring has been around for thousands of years, maybe longer. It may in fact be the "real" fountain of youth that Ponce de Leon relentlessly searched for.

The spring was set up as a recreational spa in the 1940's, adding a gift shop, restrooms,

showers, massage areas, and a simple restaurant a few years later. Not much has changed since. In fact, not many of the patrons have changed since either. The story goes that swimming in the mineral-rich waters rejuvenates the body, actually slowing down the aging process.

So who am I? Well, I cannot divulge my real name out of fear so I'll just use the name, Oscar Madison. I teach elementary school math, but on the side, I'm a freelance travel writer. My family and I were on an extended summer road trip through Florida, something we wanted to do for a long time. We left our home state of Georgia in mid-June. Our goal was to spend a month crisscrossing the Sunshine State, checking out the hidden gems and off-the-beaten path oddities. We were determined to expose our children to the other side of Florida; not the Disney World/adventure park stuff. The children actually looked forward to experiencing the natural beauty and wonders of Florida, as long as at some point we ended up at the house that Disney built. My wife 'Blanche' and I promised that our last stop would indeed be Disney World. Cased closed.

The first part of our trip went as planned: visiting pristine beaches, a winery up in Clermont (no samples for the kids), the Devil's Millhopper in Gainesville, sponges in Tarpon Springs. Throw in a little sunburn, mosquito bites, stop-offs at Cracker Barrel, and iffy motels, and you had the makings of a memorable trip. But things were about to get weird.

We were exhausted, having spent the last six days traveling, snorkeling, sightseeing, and eating lots of Key Lime pie along the

Florida Keys. Instead of taking the always perilous Highway 95 back up the east coast, we opt to travel across Alligator Alley, making a quick stop off at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress, home of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. After lunch, we resumed our travels onto state road 75 heading north. Blanche browsed the Florida AAA Tour Book from front to back before spotting an interesting place called Warm Mineral Springs, supposedly the original fountain of youth.

"I could use that right about now," I said. The last snorkeling trip gave me a heaping case of sunburn and strained lower back.

It was lunchtime. We decided to veer off 75 at the town of North Port and visit the spring. After a brief thirty minute drive down a winding two-lane road, we arrived at our destination. The outside building of the Spring was rather unassuming. Its' unkempt exterior, painted in pastel hues, fostered a washed-out mural featuring marine animals, including a pair of grinning manatees. The place looked like it hadn't changed in sixty years, garnering a feeling of old-time Florida.

The main one-story building was surrounded by various types of palm trees, Australian pines (which are invasive and currently being removed by the state), and just the right amount of native Florida plants, lots of 'em. We strolled towards the entrance, absorbing the tranquil presence; you couldn't avoid it. It was certainly a change of pace from the multitude of t-shirt shops and bars we saw in the Keys. The parking lot was already three-quarters full.

I stepped up to the cashier and paid the entrance fee. Thankfully, we got the AAA discount. In these struggling times, every bit helps. According to the brochure, the spring officially opened to the public in the 1944. The gift shop was simple; the way things probably looked pre-Disney. There were kitschy Florida trinkets, pens, hats, goggles, beach towels, and salt-water taffy for sale. We bought a refrigerator magnet and one special bottle of “straight from the source” spring water.

The children were enamored with the place right off the bat, but quietly reminded me about Disney, and the Contemporary Hotel; that’s the one where the monorail runs through it. I remember staying there as a kid; that’s something you don’t forget. Of course there are other hotels (and motels) that remain forever etched in my mind. Take the Sarasota Quality Inn Blanche and I stayed in before we had children. I’ll never forget that because there was a cockroach the size of a Hostess Twinkie in the bathroom. Or the flea infested Palm Bay Inn. I think it was more dog friendly than people friendly.

There was a long-covered walkway, carpeted in AstroTurf that led to the spring. On both sides were herbal gardens with the fresh scent of rosemary and thyme in the warm, humid air. Our children, ages ten and eight, started running ahead, anticipating this curious body of water. At the end of the walkway, the children stopped with a look of astonishment. We caught up to them and inhaled the panoramic view of the spring, which was almost perfectly symmetrical. It was surrounded by acres and acres of Florida green. There were

scattered palm trees near the waters’ edge, a handful of towering oaks, and a large congregation of Australian pines that offered patrons ample shade. Lavender colored plastic reclining chairs lined the spring, most occupied already.

My kids noticed something immediately. “Where are the children?” Basking in the water were old people, and I mean lots of old people, wading around in a circle in chest-deep water. In the center, the water was black as ink.

The kids looked up to us and inquired about the dark spot in the middle. In the early morning before the water gets mucked up by swimmers, aerial views reveal a perfect black circle directly in the middle like an eclipsed sun, intriguing yet eerie.

I started reading the brochure back to front. “It says here kids the spring is 150 feet deep in the middle, they’ve actually found prehistoric bones down there.”

“Wow,” said our son, impressed. “Can we snorkel there?”

“I don’t see why not, people are swimming there, and it’s not like some sea creature is going to emerge from the depths below and swallow you whole.”

“That’s scary, Dad,” said our daughter, who eyed the shallow end designated for young folks. The kids, armed with nets and buckets, ran down to the designated area and jumped in where they discovered scattered minnows.

We followed behind at a leisurely pace but were taken aback by the low frequency buzzing of Eastern European dialect. “Are they speaking Russian?” I asked, still

dealing with water in the ear from snorkeling in the Keys.

“It’s definitely Russian, with a bit of Romanian thrown in I think.” said Blanche.

Sweating like I’d played tennis in an attic for an hour, I walked up to the restaurant to buy some drinks, soon returning with a couple of ice cold Gatorades. The woman at the counter said almost all the people who come to the spring are from Eastern European countries. She added that not many Americans come here. “Going to springs is Europe thing,” she boasts in a confident voice. “Americans prefer chlorinated pools.”

We set up shop under a cluster of Australian pines then waded into the 87 degree water, quickly adapting to the mineral-rich spring, although the slight odor of sulfur was a tad unappealing. It stated in the pamphlet that the water has dozens of therapeutic qualities. Now that I’m thoroughly entrenched in my forties, I’m beginning to like this fountain of youth idea. After an hour of swimming, I tell Blanche I’m going to use the restroom.

As I walk up the slight incline of grass, I accidentally bumped into a silver-haired gentleman, very old with a full, peppery mustache, hairy back, and black rimmed glasses. He could have passed for Einstein’s older brother. Agitated, he grabbed my shoulder and said something in Russian. His cold stare unnerved me.

After a quick lunch, mom and the kids returned to the spring. I sat in the recliner, jotting down a few notes, more like observations of the spring. I always bring a notepad just in case. The spring closed at five

pm so we made our way to the car and planned our next destination. The kids liked the spring so much they begged us to stay the night. Our search for a motel was short lived. We found a local motel right down the street appropriately named the Springs Motel. It had a vintage look – the large neon motel sign screamed 1950's. The huge rectangular pool, complete with a slide, was an immediate hit with the children. After washing up, we stopped by an old style burger joint and dined on hamburgers, fries and milk shakes. The shakes tasted great, but my stomach started gurgling up a storm. Oh what the heck, we're on extended vacation I thought. Pass the Tums, please.

After we returned to the motel, the kids changed into their swim suits and head to the pool for an evening swim. I brought out my laptop and decided to do a little research.

Surprisingly, there was scant information about the spring. Most of the info related only to the discovery of mammoth bones and other prehistoric remnants in the early 1990's. There were diagrams highlighting the numerous chambers on each side, resembling rib bones. Because the water pressure is so tremendous, nothing lives in the deeper water of the spring. In the shallows where the kids were swimming, there were small fish and even a couple of turtles. There use to be a pair of four-foot tarpons but they disappeared years ago I'm told. The water in the spring changes daily with millions of gallons of fresh water emerging from aquifers. There's also a small creek where the water runs off into the Gulf of Mexico.

The next morning after breakfast, I dropped off the wife and kids at the spring and then headed to the library for a research fix. At first, I asked the librarian a few general questions, but as I inquired more, the librarian became hesitant. I assured him I was not a reporter, just a curious tourist. I was beginning to like the idea of doing a story about all these senior citizens believing this strange body of water could actually be the fountain of youth.

The librarian pulled me aside, making sure no one was watching. He said there were stories about how some of the regulars there at the spring may be 120 years old – maybe older. Granted, most of the people there were old, but not that old. No way.

"You'll think I'm crazy, but there are stories of a serpent like creature at the bottom of that spring," said the librarian, late fifties, balding with wire-rimmed glasses. I nodded in disbelief.

"We joked as kids, calling it the fountain of death. The story goes that an old person must be sacrificed to keep it happy – in turn, you get to live longer."

"So when this mysterious creature gets its fill of elderly humans, things are peachy keen and these people get to live as old as tortoises?" I mused. The man offered up a weak grin.

The librarian said of course the story was full-fledged loony tunes, "But the truth is, strange things have been occurring here for a long, long time." The librarian grinned, but turned serious. "You don't tell anyone I said anything to you, you hear me." It was the first

time I'd ever been intimidated by a librarian.

He was upset with himself, like he had said way too much. He shrugged off his own threat and set up the microfiche machine for me. "We go as far back as 1947, but I'd focus on the 1970's; that was a particularly strange decade."

"You're telling me," I replied, "Disco, Carter, it was a mess."

As I scrolled through the multiple containers of film, I came upon story after story of people who went missing; completely vanished, all were older folks too. I came across an April 1974 edition. I noticed on the front page a photo of a particular man, probably in his late 60's, who'd caught a record sized tarpon. Where did I see this person - short, graying hair, with a bushy mustache and a thick pair of black rimmed glasses? It was the guy I bumped into yesterday at the spring. I printed out a copy and asked the librarian about him. He raised his brow, saying the man sometimes stops by the library to read the New York Times and flirt with the bingo ladies.

After dinner, I tried to relax in the hotel room, reading, but my mind kept wandering. "What are you thinking?" asked Blanche.

I must admit I don't have a great poker face. "There's something very peculiar going on at that spring," I said. "The person I bumped into today at the spring looks just like the same person in this photo, dated nearly forty years ago, and he still looks the same."

"Maybe he got plastic surgery," she answered, half seriously.

"When you're as hairy as Sasquatch, you don't worry about

looking young,” I said. “You want to know another weird thing? A large number of elderly people have gone missing. I don’t mean a few, I mean dozens and dozens of people have gone missing for decades. There was an investigative reporter from the Tampa Tribune who did a story about this oddity twenty-five years ago. I don’t know if he’s still alive, but I wouldn’t mind talking to him.”

After everyone fell asleep, I ventured outside and borrowed a bike from the motel – one of those big beach models with a wide-body seat, the metal frame painted in tropical colors. The front wheel squeaked, a little suspect, but I managed to wobble down the mile stretch of road until I saw the spring entrance. The sounds of wildlife permeated throughout the humid evening. I peddled over to the back of the property, placing the bike near a heavily rusted old farm truck then cut through the palmetto scrub.

I climbed up a pine tree to get a better view, about twelve feet off the ground. An owl perched on a neighboring branch stared directly at me. A circle of tiki torches surrounded the glass-calm water close to the waters’ edge. Strange, I thought. Maybe there’s some sort of party going on. But what I saw next was no party. Two elderly gentlemen carried what appeared to be a sedated woman, very old, nearing the century mark I guessed. They placed her in one of those cheap yellow two-man inflatable boats shaped like a Tylenol.

There was a rope tied to the front of the craft that stretched across the spring. A tall, heavy set man started to pull the boat slowly across the water, stopping as it reached the center of the spring. The sound of crickets stayed

constant. At the worn down concrete steps, two men restrained an elderly man. He was crying out to the woman on the inflatable boat. I assumed it was his wife languishing there in the middle of the spring. I recognized one of the men holding a tiki torch. He had a cold stare in his eyes and a bushy mustache.

“This is strange,” I quietly murmured. By now there were just a few people at the water’s edge. Aside from a brief turn of the boat, it remained almost stationary in the middle of the spring. The woman hung to one side, her arm overhanging, fingers touching the warm water. She tried to right herself, placing every ounce of energy she could muster, but slumped over on her back.

A swell of water from below lifted the boat up like a mammoth fountain. Quickly, the men surrounding the spring doused the flames. The sounds of crickets ceased. A pale yellow glow started to emerge from the water. The light was direct and appeared to zone in on the boat. With a brief thrust of its body, the serpent engulfed the boat in a single swallow. In seconds, all was dark with barely a ripple to be seen. My jaw dropped, speechless. I didn’t move for ten minutes. What exactly did I just see? A few of the men uttered something in Russian, barely audible, and slowly walked away.

I was about to descend when I noticed a gathering of people standing at the base of the tree, each looking rather displeased. The man with the bushy mustache stepped up, carrying his tiki torch. “We need to talk.”

I thought I was dead, and at the hands of a gang of golden oldies no less. “Just looking for my kid’s Frisbee folks -- I best be going now.” Of course that didn’t work. I climbed down the tree sweating like Nixon.

The old man glared at me looking up; his tiki torch nearly singed my hair. “You not see anything here; you understand me, young man?”

I surveyed the woods, hoping to make a run for it, but no chance. “Uh, I think I do.” The geriatric mob inched closer. The only thing missing were pitchforks.

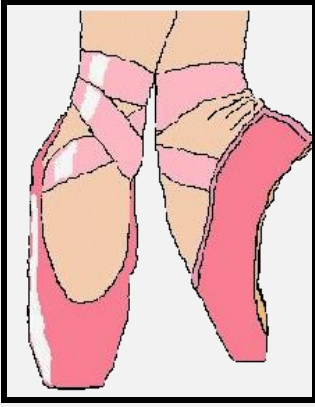
“I repeat to you again. You see and say nothing and we let your family live. Do you now understand?”

I nodded yes, unable to form the words. They handed me the bike, now bent like a pretzel, and followed me back to the street. “I think you know way back to motel. Kiss your wife and two children for me.”

I walked, more like jogged, back to the motel, slid under the covers and remained wide awake until dawn.

That morning, I barely said a word, munching down on cinnamon Pop Tarts with the kids. I jumped in the pool for a quick wake me up, changed, and drove off with the family to Orlando, destination Disney. Mum’s the word.

**For more info, please visit
www.divittowites.com**



Isabel's' Dance Recital by Loraine Brown

Isabel was very scared when she had to go on stage and perform her dance recital. She was a very shy girl. She could not believe she would be doing this.

"I can't do it", she said to her mother as they walked into the school auditorium.

"Please, let's go back home", she pleaded to her mom.

She started crying as she saw the stage. It was so big - and scary. "I can't, and I won't go up there". She murmured to herself silently.

Her mom found a seat and sat down, but Isabel was still standing close to the door, just looking scared as a cat.

Isabel Parker was a shy nine-year-old girl who was always afraid of big crowds. She had tanned dark skin and black short curly hair that captures the shape of her beautiful face. She was tall and thin and was very flexible. She loved to draw and loved to dance. Whenever she danced, she would escape all that was going on around her. Suddenly, she wasn't shy anymore. She would get lost in the music and the rhythm of the dance moves. She became

one with the song. She was telling a story -- to become alive.

But today was the big day and she has nerves that were taking over her entire body. Her dance teacher was looking for her, because she needed to be back stage.

"Let's go Isabel", her dance teacher said. Patricia found her standing in a corner still staring at the stage.

Her mom walked over and assured her. "You're going to be great. You can do this; just remember to breathe and always do your best." She gave Isabel a hug as her teacher looked for her backstage.

Seeing the other girls backstage brought a sense of ease to her, but she was still terrified.

"Hi Isabel", they greeted her.

"Hi" she said in a low voice. As she was warming up, she started to relax little by little. She closed her eyes and started breathing. She was performing her solo dance for the first time and was anxious. But deep inside, the young girl was getting excited.

Isabel was up next. She was moving in slow motion as she heard her name called. The girl stumbled on stage as the music started playing.

She didn't know what it was, but it set her at ease. It was magical as Isabel started her routine. She was full of life. All the nerves she had bundled up inside began to slowly disappear. She performed as if no one was watching. Isabel was alone with the music. It was heavenly. She twirled around and around, feeling like some amazing dream she didn't want to wake up from.

Isabel became alive! She was so happy and excited now that it was almost over. And as the music slowly comes to a stop, she smiled and exhaled in relief. The audience stood and applauded. It was overwhelming. Her mom clapped the loudest, jumping for joy like a school kid.

"I'm so proud of you"! Her mom shouted. "Go Isabel!"

She could hear her friends applauding too. Isabel fell to her knees, overwhelmed with joy. She was so happy. Miss Patricia rushed onstage to embrace her, walking her off the stage.

"Excellent job," she told her.

Isabel was overwhelmed as she saw her mom rushing towards her. "You were amazing up there. I'm so proud of you!"

"I did it!" Isabel shouted excitedly, still smiling as she embraced her mother.



Portal Poetry Corner
Participants from this year's poetry contest!

The Adornment of a Mermaid
Barbara Jean Kaufman

The seas are filled with crystals.
 They show prisms of rainbows that play with the light.
 Or, maybe it's sea glass
 The many shapes and colors,
 created from old wreckages of ships.

Maybe from bottled spirits
 consumed by Caribbean pirates
 and sailors.
 Mutiny was no option for pirates or sailors.
 If they don't like their captain
 Throw them overboard

You see, it really does not matter
 how the sea glass got there
 Because mermaids fill their conch
 shelled baskets with sea jewelry.
 They adorn themselves with pearls,
 fishnets, sea shells and glass
 Mermaids create coined-veils of lost
 or stolen treasures too

Some say the mermaid's tears
 make sea glass when they cry
 They will tell you that their tears are
 of joy
 Joy of being beautifully adorned

From the top of their halos to the
 bottom of their tails.
 Thanks to the treasures of the sea

***The Writer's Group meetings
 are held the second Monday of
 every month in the second floor
 conference room from
 6:00 – 7:30pm.**

Upcoming dates 2015:

**Aug 10, Sept 14, Oct 12,
 Nov 9, and Dec 14.**

From picture books to novels, stop
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 Michael DiVitto Kelly at
mkelly@broward.org.

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The **PORTAL** was designed,
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 instructor and students of the South
 Regional / Broward College Writer's
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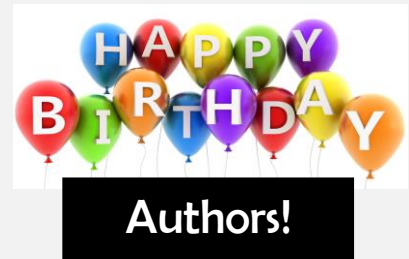
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- Herman Melville, Aug. 1**
- David Baldacci, Aug. 5**
- Alex Haley, Aug. 11**
- H. P. Lovecraft, Aug. 20**
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