

The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems.



**Fable News Network
By Jamie White**

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Author's Note: This story came from a picture prompt given to one of the groups I'm a member of. The picture was of a rumbled bed.

"Hello. This is Ann Stevens for Fable News Network. I'm standing outside the home of the three bears, where it seems an intruder has been found." She looked to her left and then back at the camera. "There's one of the victims now. Let's see if he'll talk to us." Ann motioned for the cameraman to follow her and walked over to a big bear

dressed in a shirt and hat. "Excuse me, sir. May I ask you a few questions?"

The bear's gaze drifted from her to the cameraman and back. He shrugged. "I guess so."

"Thank you for agreeing to speak with us. Now, can you please tell us what happened here?"

"Well, we were going to get some breakfast, but the porridge was too hot again. So we went out for a walk to let it cool off. We got back and this crazy chick is in our house."

"What did you see when you first walked in?" Ann pointed her microphone at the bear, fake concern crossing her features. She just knew this was going to be a great story.

"Well, we got into the living room and someone was obviously using our chairs. The kid's was destroyed... he's gonna be complaining non-stop until we get him a new one. Then, we noticed some of the oatmeal was eaten. I mean, really. Can you believe it? Who breaks into a house and eats your food instead of just taking something? This girl is not right." He rolled his eyes and gestured periodically through the rant to emphasize his point.

Ann nodded, once again trying to convey a sense of empathy while wondering what the ratings on this piece were going to be like. Maybe she'd win an award finally to make up for getting robbed on the Sleeping Beauty report. "I see. So nothing was taken from the house? What else did you find?"

"Nothing but the food. That's not the weirdest part of this whole thing, though."

Ann's left eyebrow raised, confusion in her eyes. "What do you mean by that?"

The bear shook his head, a small laugh escaping him. "You wouldn't believe it. I wondered if I was imagining things, too. That is, until the wife and kid saw the same thing."

"And what was that?" Her voice carried a hint of excitement, although she tried to hide it.

"The crazy chick was actually taking a nap in one of the beds! Can you

imagine? I mean, who breaks in a place and decides to sleep awhile? I tell ya, I've seen some stupid things, but this really takes the cake here." He shook his head. "You should've seen her face when she woke up and saw us looking at her. She ran so fast, she was nothing but a blur. They're still looking for her now."

Ann nodded. "Well, there you have it. An intruder is on the loose in Fable world. This is Ann Stevens for FNN. Back to you, Bob."

The Most Frustrating TV Show ever!

By DiVitto Kelly



Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale so frustrating you'll start pulling your hair out trying to decipher a logical explanation why certain individuals decided to hop aboard the S.S. Minnow. And after you've exhausted yourself, pounding your head against the wall, wondering why a prominent billionaire and his prissy wife would even set foot on a charter boat in the first place . . . with a trunk load of cash. See? This is how it starts. Ahhhhhh!

I'm bringing all this up because one of my favorite shows of all time, Gilligan's Island, is making the rerun rounds on ME TV, a cable channel dedicated to television programs from the 1950s through the 1970s. I've even hooked my two children on GI, both willfully putting down their iPads for a

spell to watch the zany antics of the seven castaways. They dig the show, but it didn't take long for them to start asking those logical questions. Such as . . .

"Why does Ginger have so many clothes," asked my daughter. She followed this up with, "Why did they build a large wooden stage when they could just build a boat instead?" She also pointed out the leg-powered car, record player, bike, and on and on it goes. All those frustrating feelings I had as a kid began percolating up again like a kettle on a hot stove.

"I know, I know," I replied. "It just doesn't make sense."

My teen son, the aspiring scientist, wondered how they were able to plant veggies in a sandy climate or how their transistor radio always seemed to have better reception than my car stereo. Then he asked THE question we fans of this priceless sitcom have been asking for decades. "Why would the Howell's be on that . . .?"

I stopped him in his tracks, the kettle whistling steam like a locomotive. And that's when I had to get this down on paper – or at least on a Microsoft Word document. It actually turned out to be therapy for me.

The whole freaking show doesn't make any sense. It IS the most frustrating television show ever. How many times were the castaways this close (I'm observing the razor-thin space between my index finger and thumb) from being rescued, over and over again? You figure after, let's say, by the tenth time Gilligan blows it you'd march him off one of those beautiful island cliffs. Am I right? "Hey Lil' buddy, check out the view. Good bye!"

Anyways, to keep from going bananas, I decided to dissect Gilligan's Island with a fine toothed . . . bunch of words, to perhaps clarify why the seven passengers being on the S.S. Minnow in the first place.

Let's start off with the crew:

Jonas Grumby, the Skipper: This appears to be a no brainer. And it makes perfect sense for the Skipper to be chartering his beloved boat, the S.S.

Minnow -- a nice looking craft too, leisurely around the big island of Hawaii. Plain and simple, it's his job. Or maybe he was up to something more sinister, perhaps illegal. Can you say drug smuggling, anybody? Hmmm.

Willy Gilligan, the first mate: yes, his first name was Willy. He's a good-hearted individual, but a total screw up. I'm sure you're wondering how someone as competent as the Skipper would hire this nincompoop as first mate. After much intensive research, I discovered that Gilligan actually saved the Skipper's life while they were in the navy. I guess he felt an obligation to hire his Lil' buddy, but my hypothesis is he hired skinny G with a lowball salary. Hey, cheap labor – nothing wrong with that! But seriously, I mean, would you hire Gilligan as first mate? Not unless you wanted to end up on some . . . deserted . . . island.

The bottom line, if this was a real situation, there's no question the guy wearing the goofy white hat, long-sleeved red shirt and white pants would have been wacked the first time he screwed up a potential rescue attempt. I mean, there's only so many chances someone's gonna stumble upon that tropical paradise (although it did seem to happen a lot, didn't it?) And there's do doubt in my mind that if food was scarce, which could have been a distinct possibility living on a deserted island, Gilligan would have ended up on the dinner menu. Boney or not, cannibalism, here we come!

Roy Hinkley, the Professor: This seems logical. Of course it does; he's a professor for cod's sake. Why was he aboard the S.S. Minnow? Maybe there was some brainiac convention in Honolulu, or perhaps he was simply on vacation, taking a break from the greater forty-eight. Maybe he was a professor at the University of Hawaii or some local community college. Is that so far-fetched? No. There are a handful of reasonable scenarios why he's there. I see no reasonable doubt or conspiracy. Strike this one for making sense. Then again, he knows how to 'cook things up' doesn't he? Could he

be in cahoots with the Skipper? Let's move on.

Mary Ann Summers, the Midwest Cutie: Vacationing from Flyover Country of the United States; a kinda Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz meet tropical paradise. Hell, living in Kansas would make Hawaii look like Oz to me too. Follow the sandy beach, follow the sandy beach. Perhaps Mary Ann won a sweepstakes and earned a week-long trip to the island of Don 'Tiny Bubbles' Ho. A Midwestern chick soaking up the tropical beauty of Hawaii; she decides to take three-hour boat cruise. The price is right because you're sharing the cost among a handful of others. This one makes sense too. Unless, she's really an undercover . . . Never mind.

Now things begin start to get a bit dicey. And you know it too.

Ginger Grant, the actress: So you're telling me a big time movie star is going to take a three hour excursion on the S.S. Minnow, a charter boat maybe thirty-five feet long, tops? What would possess her to take a trip with a handful of strangers? What, does she really need a captive audience that badly? Was Ms. Grant being hounded by paparazzi like a pack of hyenas? Was she that desperate to get away for a spell? Only thing, the boat at some point was returning back to port so this doesn't make much sense. Was she merely buying time? If so, from what?

Perhaps she was doing research, getting into character for an upcoming flick? Yeah, that's the ticket, and a bit more plausible. Ms. Grant figures she'll earn her sea legs by taking a quick trip aboard a well-respected charter boat. She'll learn proper nautical terms like bow, fore and aft, lubber's line, and buoy. And she had a nice pair of buoys too, didn't she? Shame on me; I'm sorry. All this seems feasible, right? Well . . . no, not really. I'm grasping for straws here – you know it and I know it. This one makes little or no sense.

So far, we have the Skipper, Gilligan, the Professor, and Mary Ann. Those are plausible. Ginger? Not so much. Last but not least, the crème de

la crème, the two people who had absolutely no business being on the S.S. Minnow. Not now, not ever. Or did they? Hmmm? No, no, and no.

Mr. and Mrs. Howell, the Billionaire couple. Let's take a gander at the ruthless money-absorbed billionaire Thurston Howell, III and his loyal and supportive wife, Lovey. Remember her maiden name? A little side trivia folks -- it's Wentworth. You're right, who cares.

So what in the name of Sam Hill was the 'Wizard of Wall Street' doing on a charter fishing boat with a bunch of every day schlubs? Since the Howell's are the biggest 'Why' in this equation, let's speculate albeit, lottery long-shots, shall we?

Possible reasons: Could it be that Mr. Howell's football-length yacht, moored in the same marina as the Minnow, was having engine problems? Perhaps TH3 was in such a hurry to make a swanky dinner party aboard a friend's private yacht he chartered Grumby's craft? Maybe he offered the Skipper some quick dough to make a special trip to his very own private island. Why else would they pack so much stuff onto a boat? All wealthy people travel with a trunk load of cash, I know I do. Well, more like a small, Ziploc bag.

The most plausible reason might very well be he was suffering a severe case of Ponzi scheme. He figured he'd better vanish ASAP before the Feds move in and hide out somewhere in the Pacific. Suppose Mr. Moneybags was nothing more than a blue blood, Tom Ripley type? "How's the peeping Tommy?" Or maybe a ruthless, upper crusty Tony Montana? I could just picture Thurston the Third uttering, "Say hello to my little friend" in that patented Howell voice. Don't think so.

Since there are nil reasons to justify a billionaire chartering the S.S. Minnow, I returned to the Skipper. Could this supposed Jolly Roger of a man be nothing more than a modern day pirate? A noted kingfish of the sea -- a drug runner? I'm sure Gilligan, with all his bone headedness, probably killed off

potential clients from time to time, so the Skipper had to make up for the lost revenue. And lovable Gilligan would never piece things together. He could play stupid no problem, and claim his Oscar afterwards. Got you thinking right? Okay, this whole story is just plain goofy. But you're reading it . . . hopefully.

I remember pondering these situations over and over in my head back when I was a kid back in Cincinnati. I thought I'd put those thoughts to rest in the deep, dank, dark basement of my brain, but thanks to ME TV, I'm watching Gilligan's Island reruns with my children -- and now they fully understand the frustration of viewing this program. Perhaps not as deep and entrenched like me, but it's there. The bug's been planted.

As for me, I need to change the channel real quick because I know the castaways aren't going to be rescued . . . again.



**Brothers
By Rick Weber**

Charles and Aaron grew up on the near east side of Detroit in the Brewster Housing Project. Their mother, Edna, raised them alone. Their father walked out on them before Aaron was born. Edna did not hold down a job. She could not due to having Sickle Cell Anemia. The family subsisted on local charity handouts and food stamps. Their home was an apartment in this

fallen down housing project which the city wanted to raze.

Charles, a couple of years older than Aaron, began skipping school before he was in the ninth grade and took to the streets acting as a look out for a local drug dealer. It brought some extra money to help out at home and to help Charles gain "respect" for himself in the "hood". Edna knew that Charles was up to something but she did not know what it was. They had no telephone service and the Post "office" had long since stopped delivering mail to this notoriously violent complex. As such, Edna never knew that Charles had quit school even before he was old enough to do so. Edna was too weak from dealing with the events which are part of Sickle Cell.

Aaron looked up to Charles. Charles impressed him with some of the jewelry and clothes bought with his ill gotten gains. It was no surprise when Aaron was about to go to high school that he followed in Charles' footsteps. Charles had risen from lookout to drug runner working for Stone, a folk hero to the project's residents and a villain to the police. It was the 1980's and crack ruled their world.

It was the 1980's, and minimum mandatory drug sentences at the time called for a five year drug sentence just for being in possession of a quantity of 50 grams of cocaine or heroin. The State of Michigan prosecuted these cases vigorously, as Charles' predecessor found out when two narcotics detectives stopped him coming out of the stash house with two ounces of cocaine. A search warrant was obtained for the stash house resulting in the seizure of a kilogram of the drug and the arrests of the two women sitting on the load. These two women felt the hard edge of the mandatory sentence statutes which called for a mandatory life term in prison for those having more than 650 grams of heroin or cocaine in their possession. Charles was approaching the age of seventeen when these laws would apply to him. Right now, both he

and Aaron were juveniles and Stone knew that.

In no time flat after the raid, Stone was back in business with new a new stash, new employees to sit on it, a new runner, Charles, and a new lookout, Aaron.

Stone knew Aaron so no introduction or references were needed on his first day on the corner doing what Charles had done for the past couple of years. All Aaron had to do was signal the next lookout at the entrance to the project when he saw a police scout car coming down the street. The work was easy enough and Stone paid good wages.

In Charles' new position, he made runs to an empty apartment where Stone had his "office" from the stash house which was nearby. With Charles' new job came additional responsibilities such as not getting stopped by the police and keeping his mouth shut if he did get caught. He received codes on a pager supplied by Stone as to the amount he needed to bring to the "office". He varied his routes to the "office" on foot and was told toss the load if he felt that he was going to get caught.

Charles was smart, or so he thought. With the additional combined income they both had, Charles and Aaron were able to provide for their mother. Edna was too weak to question their earnings and knew that they would need a new place to live soon because the city wanted to close their building.

All went well until one day until Charles got picked up in a police sweep of the projects. He had just turned seventeen and was bringing a two ounce coke package over to Stone from the stash. Charles was toast and he knew it. Ratting out Stone and the stash location were out of the question. Jackson State Prison was his next destination.

Stone took it all in stride. Once again in a short time, he moved his stash and had a new runner in place. The new runner was not Aaron, who was too inexperienced, but Troy

another kid from the hood. Without Charles' income, Aaron became Edna's sole support.

Troy and Aaron were friends and they talked about Stone's crew taking two hits in such a short time from the police. They both agreed that there had to be a rat, someone selling them out to the police but who among the crew was that disloyal to Stone puzzled them. Stone did not seem to be all that worried. To him, it was business. You had to take the bad with the good.

One day several weeks after Charles' arrest, Aaron finished his duties on the corner for the day and stopped in a nearby Coney Island hot dog shop to buy dinner for him and his mother. As his order was being bagged up he saw Stone getting into the back seat of a Lincoln Town Car which he had never seen in the neighborhood before. Probably a business meeting Aaron thought as he made his way home on a cold January night with lake effect snow coming down on the sidewalk. A few days later, Troy was picked up in another drug sweep which the police called "Operation Crack Down." Troy had only a half-ounce of cocaine on him at the time and quickly bonded out of Wayne County Jail.

On the corner a couple of days later, Troy and Aaron talked about this latest bust. Troy was the only one from Stone's crew to get picked up this time. Some of the other crews did not fare as well. Flops, a "colleague" of Stone lost his stash house with five kilos of coke along with six of his people, a serious hit. Rumor had it that Flops had gone into hiding fearing that he would be next. Troy and Aaron concluded that there had to be more than one snitch to do all of this damage. That night while walking home one night, Aaron saw Stone getting out of the same white Town Car he had seen Stone in the week before. This time it was on a dark side street a few blocks away from the project. Aaron thought to himself that nothing shook up Stone. That is why everyone called him Stone because he was hard and cold. To

Aaron, Stone was probably setting up his next load from the people in that car.

Edna and Aaron visited Charles, who was detained at the jail pending the outcome of his case. Aaron told Charles about the recent arrests at the Brewster Project and Charles advised him that he already knew. With Edna out of earshot in the visiting room, Aaron told Charles about his talks with Troy. Charles agreed with their assessment that to take out two crews at the same time the cops had to have more than one snitch. Charles warned Aaron to be careful. Without the money for a private attorney and no option to cooperate with the law, Charles told Aaron and his mother that he was resigned to plead guilty straight up to the charges and take a five year stretch at "Jacktown". Charles also whispered into Aaron's ear before the visiting session ended that he would let him know what the jail's walls had to tell about the recent events in the projects.

As he stood on the corner tending to his duties, Aaron saw the same Town Car which he had seen Stone getting into and out of on those prior occasions and wondered why Stone's new connection risked driving down Wilkens Street in broad daylight. Aaron figured that it had to be important but Stone would only tell those who needed to know if he told anyone at all. The next day, the cops swooped down again and made some arrests including Aaron. Since he was only sixteen and had no drugs in his possession, the police did not charge him and released him to his mother with a warning that he was hanging with the wrong crowd.

Troy was also picked up by the police and had an ounce of coke on him which he was bringing to Stone's "office". This time Troy knew that he would not be able to bond out of jail and hoped that he would get a cell in the same section as Charles where the East Siders looked out for each other. Also caught in the dragnet was Flops along with another five people from his crew. Flops was now out of the picture and his crew was for all practical

purposes, decimated. To Aaron, this appeared to be good news. This meant that Stone would be getting more business from the void left by Flops' untimely departure. Flops' long list of past arrests and convictions also meant he would be held without bail.

Aaron was hoping to become a runner in Stone's expanding enterprise. To his dismay, Stone kept him as a lookout telling Aaron that he had to make "his bones" first before he would be given any shot at advancement. Aaron was a bit dejected but glad that Stone thought he held promise.

It was visiting day again at the jail and Aaron accompanied Edna to see Charles. Aaron was also anxious to hear what the jail's walls had to say from Charles about the recent events in the Brewster Project. Charles told Edna that he was holding up fine under the circumstances, which is what she wanted to hear. Overall, Charles' wait time pending court was not too bad. Troy had been assigned to the same cell block with a couple of Flops' runners, Derek and Joe. Flops, on the other hand, was moved a block predominated by West Siders. Not that this was a bad thing for Flops, no one in the cell block bothered him but it did mean that he could not run his business from the inside by getting messages out to the remnants of his crew in the hood. Flops knew that he was done but not by whom, which puzzled him as it did Derek and Joe.

The visit with Charles went well for Edna. When Edna turned to talk to Troy's mother who was waiting for her son to be brought into the visiting room, Charles whispered into Aaron's ear to be careful and gave him the rundown which he, Troy, Derek, and Joe put together.

Charles advised Aaron that Aaron was picked up first by the cops so he could not alert any of the runners moving about inside the project giving the police time to move in. Charles added that only the lack of dope in his possession and his age kept Aaron out of jail. There were no turf battles at the time between the crews working in the

projects. There was enough work for everyone and no one appeared to be greedy. Charles opined that someone on the outside may be looking to move in but did not know whom. The discussions among Charles, Troy, Derek, and Joe did not yield any potential candidates.

When Aaron heard this, he said that Stone did not seem to be bothered by the arrests of his own people and that Aaron seen him meeting with a new connection who drove a white Town Car. Charles asked Aaron some questions about the Town Car and told Aaron that he had no idea who Stone's new business associate was. Their visit concluded with Charles advising Aaron to be careful and saying goodbye to his mother.

Stone did not bring anyone new in to fill the void left by the latest arrests from his crew. Stone also did not appear to be eager to take over the customers left by Flops' arrest. Stone never gave any reasons for his actions to anyone, even to those in his crew. In turn, no one from his crew ever asked him about his business decisions. To those on the crew, the less you knew, the better off you were.

Work did pick up for Stone's crew despite his apparent lack of interest in Flops' customer base and talent pool. Soon, Aaron was moved up from lookout to runner making about the same money Charles was earning in that position. This made it easier on Aaron to care for his mother, who had now become too ill to be cognizant of anything he did. Aaron remembered Charles' warning to be careful and he took no chances in his new position. Aaron would vary his routes each time he left the stash house for Stone's "office".

Another night after he finished his rounds for the day, Aaron took a circuitous route home so that he could pick up on anyone tailing him. As he crossed St. Antoine Street, he saw Stone down the block standing bent over beside that same Town Car talking to the driver who was out of view. Stone had his back to Aaron, who really

did not pay Stone or the car very much mind. Aaron had to get home to tend to his mother.

When he entered their apartment, Aaron found Edna, unconscious and unresponsive. He found a neighbor home that had telephone service and asked that neighbor to call for EMS. A brief time later the paramedics arrived and transported Edna, accompanied by Aaron, to Detroit Receiving Hospital. On the way to the hospital from inside the ambulance, Aaron saw Stone still talking to the driver of the Town Car. At the hospital, Edna was immediately taken into the Emergency Room treatment area where doctors and nurses gathered around her to assess her condition by first asking Aaron questions about her. Aaron was able to tell the hospital staff that his mother suffered from pulmonary hypertension as a result of Sickle Cell. It would be a long night for Aaron, who would have to be at the hospital alone tending to his mother because they had no other family members in town.

Edna's condition was critical. She had pneumonia and the prognosis was not good due to her weakened condition. The doctors were candid with Aaron and did not hold out much hope for Edna to recover. This left Aaron wondering what to do next when his pager went off. He saw the code from Stone wanting to know where he was. From the nurses' station, Aaron was able to call Stone's cellular phone, a device which few people had at that time. After telling Stone about his mother's condition, Stone told Aaron that everything was cool and to take care of his mother. Stone also told Aaron if he needed anything to give him a call which gave Aaron some sense of relief. The next thing on his mind was how to let Charles know that their mother was in the hospital. Aaron left a message at the Public Defender's office for Charles' attorney to contact him at the hospital. Suffice to say, Aaron's mind was not tied up with work matters.

Aaron spent the day watching his mother who had become comatose and was slipping away. This made him sad.

Edna had been moved to a hospital room and Aaron was with her. Charles' attorney returned Aaron's call and offered to contact the jail to notify Charles about their mother's condition. Aaron was relieved to hear that but who else did he have to call. Edna's brother James lived in Alabama and was the only other living relative Aaron knew about. Aaron had not seen his Uncle James since he was eight years old and had no telephone number nor address for him.

As he pondered this over, he looked up at the television in his mother's room which had the local news on. The lead story was about another drug sweep in the Brewster Project. Aaron watched as a couple of his co-workers on Stone's crew and the rest of those left from Flops' group were being "perp walked" in front of the news cameras to waiting scout cars. Another hit, Aaron thought and now, what would come up next. As he watched the TV cameras panning the scene, he saw the white Lincoln Town Car belonging to Stone's contact parked near the entrance to the complex. It did not appear to be occupied. Aaron then began to think if both Stone and his associate had both been picked up this time but he could not dwell on it. Edna's breathing became hard and labored. Aaron called for the nurses because he knew the end was near. A couple of hours later, a doctor pronounced Edna dead.

Not knowing what to do, Aaron called Stone and hoped that he was not in jail.

Stone answered on the first ring and assured Aaron that everything was fine although a couple more people from his crew did get arrested on some minor charges. After hearing about Edna's death, Stone offered to pay for her funeral. Not that Stone had a soft spot in his heart; he knew the value of good public relations to keep up his image. Stone also knew that such "good deeds" would give him an extra layer of protection in the neighborhood to keep the police away from his "office" door.

Charles' attorney was able to have him notified not only about Edna's

hospitalization but also, about her passing. Being incarcerated meant that Charles could not attend his mother's wake. Stone kept his word and paid for a simple but dignified funeral for Edna. Through social workers at the hospital, her brother James was advised of her death and he made it to Detroit for her funeral. James was glad to see Aaron after such a long time and offered him a place to live. James was a steel worker in Birmingham, where he lived with his wife and daughter. His offer to Aaron meant a simple but secure existence, which Aaron accepted.

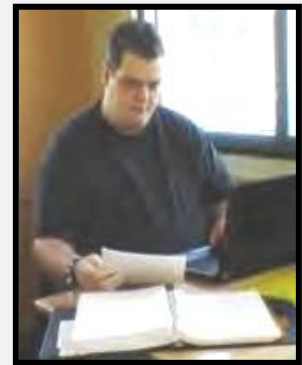
Shortly after the funeral, Aaron and his Uncle James packed up the mementos from the apartment which Edna had shared with her sons. While James was depositing some unwanted items from the apartment at a local church charity, Aaron stopped by the "office" and turned his pager over to Stone. Aaron thanked Stone, who uncharacteristically smiled and said, "Anytime." Without much more conversation, Aaron bid his goodbyes to Stone and what was left of the crew. He then headed back to the apartment to pack up his scant belongings. When his Uncle James returned, they put them in James' car and stopped by the jail to visit Charles on their way out of town to Alabama.

As the car passed into Ohio from Michigan and entered the city of Toledo, Aaron looked off to see the sun setting in the west and he felt strangely at peace with himself.

At the same time in Detroit, as Stone was walking to his car parked on Brush Street, the white Lincoln Town Car pulled up to the curb next to him. Two men got out of the Lincoln and one of them said, "Stone, we have to have a little talk." This time, Stone became nervous and quickly turned around as if he wanted to run but he found the second man standing in his path. It was a bitter cold day and no one was on the street to see what was happening. The second man checked Stone to see if he was carrying a gun but only found his off-white colored brick of a cellular phone in his coat

pocket, which he threw onto the front seat of the Lincoln. The first man opened the rear door of the Lincoln and told Stone to get in. With a quick shove from the first man, Stone complied while the second man made his way to the opposite rear door.

The first man got behind the wheel and moved the car down Brush Street. "Where are we going?" screamed Stone. "Our place," the driver answered. With that the second man ordered Stone to lean forward and put his hands behind his back. Stone complied and he felt his wrists being restrained. "What's this all about?" Stone demanded. "You didn't think we were going to let you double dip. Did you, Stone?" the driver asked rhetorically. "You wanted us to put Flops out of business," the second one said and added, "Well, he's done but, you couldn't dream for a minute that we were going to let you take over for him even though you threw a few of your own people under the bus." "If you did, you were wrong," the driver chimed in. Then the driver added, "And now, you're done, too," as the car pulled in front of 1300 Beaubien Street... Detroit Police Headquarters.



Gift From Heaven
By Edward White/CP Bialois
<http://cpbialois.wordpress.com/>

The Keane family had always been a family of hard workers and passed the tradition down through the ages. They were very likable and respected

by the people of the small farming town of Crown, Pennsylvania. Like their neighbors, they weren't wealthy by material means but they were spiritually. Elijah and Margaret Keane were often among the first to enter church every Sunday and never missed a single sermon. Their pastor was an old family friend as well as the town doctor, so when Margaret became sick it had only been natural that he was the first one they called.

The Keanes were a good natured and religious family. Elijah had been raised to be a God-fearing man, obeying the word of God without question his entire life. He never once had his gaze turned by another woman, never used the Lord's name in vain, and righteously cussed out anyone that did. Of course, it went without saying he never killed another man. So when his wife came down with a severe case of pneumonia at the onset of winter, he never once doubted. Between the medicine from their beloved doctor, Pastor Evan Greer's prayers, and their faith, they were confident God would see them through as he always had.

With little worry, Elijah took care of his wife's every need, often neglecting himself to see to her comfort. Their neighbors sent the customary gifts in the form of homemade ointments and salves as well as meals and deserts to help entice her body into healing. They had even come over and offered to help as well, an offer Elijah rarely accepted out of pride. She was his wife, after all, and he felt he could offer her the most comfort. The few times he did accept the offerings were due more to a chore that would take him most of the day to complete and couldn't look after his wife. With the constant snow and cold of winter, those moments were few and far between.

They were blessed to have so many wonderful and caring friends around them. Over the next few weeks, Margaret began showing signs of improving. She'd even become strong enough to attend church, though Greer maintained that it was more important for her to get her rest. To appease her,

he held private prayer meetings in her home for her and her husband. Sometimes their neighbors would attend and the event would turn into a small party as they'd bring sweets and other snacks for everyone.

Despite the hardships winter, and her health, had brought on them. The Keanes were in good spirits and looked to Christmas Day. It was the one day of the year they both felt the most alive; when they were sure God touched the spirit of people everywhere. Elijah took care of everything, the cooking, the cleaning, and the decorating. They were both sure it was going to be a beautiful Christmas.

From the moment they woke, they could tell it was going to be different. Margaret felt better than she had the previous couple of months and that filled them with joy. By noon she even managed to talk Elijah into letting her out of bed, so he helped her to take her first steps in months. The rest of the day was wonderful. They spent an hour in prayer and were certain to thank God for everything He brought them throughout the year. Even her sickness was appreciated that day, as they ate a large meal and sat in front of the fire in the living area of their home. It felt good to be alive, snuggled under a single blanket and letting the warmth of the fire cascade over them while the light outside began to dim.

Elijah slept soundly that night, it was the first time Margaret hadn't been wracked by a coughing fit in weeks and he dreamed of the morning when they'd wake to the bright sunshine filtering through their bedroom window.

The first rays of the sun had been as he expected, bright and beautiful as they struggled to pierce the thick bedroom curtains. Next to him he could hear his wife breath and move slightly in her deep slumber. He wanted to wake her by throwing the curtains open so she could marvel at the beauty waiting for them, but he rolled over instead. He didn't have the heart to disturb the first good night's sleep she'd had in weeks.

When he felt he slept enough,

Elijah noticed his wife was pasty and warm to the touch. He feared that she overworked herself the day before and that he'd been a fool to let her out of bed, even to sit on the warm sofa before the fire. He slid out of bed and opened the curtains. The light poured into the room, covering the bed with bright light. She didn't move as the light touched her, not even to shield her eyes.

Alarmed and full of panic, he ran through the front rooms that consisted of the living area and kitchen. They kept her medicine was in a kitchen cabinet and he quickly returned with it.

Elijah sat next to her on the bed and measured out the medicine as he'd done hundreds of times before. With great care, he slid his hand behind her head and lifted her so she could drink the medicine. Her eyes fluttered as she opened them and were filled with a softness he often dreamed about. Through the years, her soft brown eyes had held love, joy, and now wisdom. They seemed to tell him that she knew she was dying, that the medicine wouldn't make a difference, but most importantly, that he shouldn't be upset. It was God's plan.

Elijah paused for a moment with the small spoon filled with medicine an inch or so below her mouth. He wanted to believe her, wanted to feel safe and warm in her love, but how could that be once she was gone? He couldn't let her go, not like that. Slowly, he moved the spoon towards her mouth to try to coax her into taking a swallow.

Margaret knew he would never understand, so she allowed him to give her the medicine. It tasted bitter, but the taste didn't last long before it slid down her throat. She smiled as best she could to comfort her husband, to let him know everything would be alright and that she wasn't scared. Margaret watched him nod and knew he understood. She needed to have faith that he would understand. Somewhere deep inside, a voice told her he would. She smiled at him one more time with all her love, and then as he sobbed and held her, she closed her eyes one final

time.

The wind blowing across the field was icy cold, uncommon for that time of year. It was late August as Elijah worked in his fields; the day was close to its end on the busiest time of the year, harvest time. It'd been ten years since he lost his beautiful wife in her fight against pneumonia. Reverend Greer had expressed his sympathies, but it had been God's will and He always worked in mysterious ways. At least, that was how a man of God explained it, which was not the answer Elijah had been searching for. Well, that's not entirely true. It was the correct answer, but it was the reason, or lack of one, causing him to question.

He stopped cutting the wheat with his scythe and stood to gaze over his field. Ten years earlier it had been a thing of beauty, as flawless as the wheat and corn field to its left that swayed in the summer breeze, but not anymore. After so many years of neglect, it was little more than a pile of dirt. Oh, he tried to plant there on several occasions, but nothing seemed to want to grow. In a fit of sarcasm, he mentioned to Pastor Greer that it must be God's will that he starve during his last visit to church, eight years earlier. He proudly rejected the church, its Bible, and God as he chose to worship in a place of his choosing- the bottom of a whiskey bottle.

It took Elijah little more than a month to be established as the town drunk. The friends he hadn't pushed away after his wife's death soon abandoned him. Each had their own reasons, but in the end they all agreed, Elijah Keane had become abusive and sought to wrestle their beliefs from them. He became a spokesman for the devil as he spouted nothing but hate and ridicule towards those that remained faithful. They each feared the man they had once known and cared for. He was lost to them.

He stood, gazing at the sun as it moved towards its hiding place behind the mountains. It'd been a long day, but he'd only been outside in the heat for a few short hours. It had taken him longer

to harvest his shrinking fields with each passing year. His taxes remained fully paid for through the years, though if he knew it had been because his neighbors felt sorry for him and paid them out of their own pockets, he probably wouldn't have cared. It bothered him little; they could take the farm if they wanted. Hell, he'd give it to them. The one thing he wanted in the world was lost to him forever.

His life had taken a sorry turn and he never missed a chance to tell himself or anyone else about it. Such was his existence, filled with nothing but suffering. With a sigh, he dropped the scythe and turned his back on the partially fallen sun and what was left of his previous life. What good was it all anyway? It meant nothing to a man that had ceased to live ten years earlier.

Had he waited for just a few seconds more, he would've noticed a bright spec streaking through the sky above his farm. After he walked no more than ten strides, it impacted in the center of his wheat field. The explosion was deafening and the force of it sent waves through the ground similar to those on the ocean. Between the upheaval of the ground and the force of the shockwave, Elijah was launched through the air, landing thirty feet away and outside the edge of his field. The moment he struck the ground, the world around him spun before going black, the latter of which he warmly embraced.

Elijah felt something moist on his face, it felt like a tear but it wasn't warm. He tried to wipe it away, but it was replaced by another. Slowly, he opened his eyes and gazed around him. He was surrounded by darkness with pinpricks of light above him. He wasn't dead, the pain in his back and shoulder told him that much. When he tried to push himself up, pain he never felt before shot through him like lightning. The suddenness of it caused him to fall back to the ground. While his fall was only a couple of inches, it still caused another painful surge in his head. He decided it would be better to remain where he was for the moment

and wondered why he hadn't been allowed to die. Had he been forsaken to the extent that he would never be allowed to join his beloved again?

The thought he'd been denied even that solace brought a surge of anger and rage from deep within. At first, Elijah only heard the scream, it sounded faint and far away, but it grew closer with each passing second. When it stopped, he realized it'd been him screaming. The sudden quiet that followed was nearly unbearable as he lay there, gasping for breath. His head began to clear, allowing him to remember where he was but not why he'd been thrown away from his field. Elijah thought God let his vengeance rain down on him to punish him for his lack of faith. But if that were so, then he would've been dead. Too weak to force himself to get up, Elijah slumped back down onto the warm ground as the rain continued to fall. The rhythmic sensation and sound of the soft drops of rain helped to soothe him as darkness once again enveloped him in its uncaring embrace.

His sleep, if one could call it that, could best be described as tormented. His mind was filled with visions of a strange substance. The substance was more like a puddle that was folded upon itself, like a small pile of clear jelly that could easily fit into the palm of your hand. Each time Elijah tried to understand what it was by looking closer, it seemed to disappear by turning invisible. The strangeness of it sent ripples of fear through him. Each time his fear was close to drawing him out of his shock induced rest, a small voice inside of him whispered to relax and that it would pass. In his mind it all was a dream, everything that happened over the past ten years was nothing more than his own imagination.

How wonderful if that would truly be the case! He'd then wake in his own bed with his beloved Margaret next to him. The thought was almost too much for him to bear, but the joy of the possibility overcame any of his doubts. Even the voice that spoke to him told him everything would be fine, that he'd

have his life back as it should be. Filled with the joy that his life would be his own again, Elijah barely noticed the warmth spreading through him. It wasn't unpleasant, but it was something he never would've thought possible. Perhaps the Divine Spirit hadn't forsaken him after all.

When he woke, he was still in the field. The rain that had fallen left both he and the ground wet to the touch, but he didn't feel sick or any pain. The sun had begun to rise in the east, but it remained hidden behind the soft clouds that passed over him during the night. He thought it strange that he wasn't hurt. The realization confounded him; surely he should've been in pain. He remembered being tossed through the air like a leaf in a gale and the intense pain that greeted him when he landed.

Slowly, he sat up. The same effort had caused him to pass out a few hours earlier, but that time he managed without any effort or discomfort. Furthermore, he should've been shivering as the fever gripped him. Even the youngest child knew better than to spend any length of time in the rain as it brought about fever and other illnesses capable of killing, much as it had his wife. Despite the knowledge of common sense, he was fine. In fact, he hadn't felt so well in years.

Lost in his own metamorphosis, he'd nearly forgotten about his field. Filled with horror, he turned and half expected to see it all gone, having been engulfed in flames during the previous night. Much to his delight, it remained as he remembered it. The only difference being a large mound of earth in the center. He was certain that was what caused him to fly. Curious, he took a slow step towards the mound then stopped. Mist still rose from the mound as the rain cooled whatever had struck his field.

After a couple of deep breaths, Elijah took a few more steps. Then a few more until he stood at the base of the mound. The mound was only about waist high and he could see into the indentation rather easily. At the center of the crater sat a large spherical rock

with a soft, orange glow emanating from it due to the radiating heat. Elijah held his hand in front of him to ward off anything that may be dangerous, but after a moment he realized that even though the meteorite was glowing, it wasn't from heat. Curiosity overrode his sense of fear and Elijah stepped over the edge of the mound and reached out to touch the rock.

He hesitated with his right hand inches from the rocky surface. Inside of him, his fear grew in strength and voice as he stood there frozen, unsure of what to do. As each second passed, Elijah began believing his fear and what it told him. He was in danger, he should've run away as soon as he regained his senses, but he hadn't. He'd chosen to see it, to touch it, but he couldn't bring himself to do the latter. Elijah didn't know what to do, he wanted to touch it, felt he *had* to touch it. He also knew he needed to run away. Elijah never thought of himself as a coward. In an act of bravery, he leaned forward and rested his hand on the surface.

A sickening feeling spread through him as the rock pulsed beneath his touch like a living thing, like a giant's heart. A shrill scream of terror ripped itself out of him as Elijah turned and clawed his way over the mound in a mad effort to get away from the throbbing meteorite. Heaving himself over the crest of the crater, Elijah slid down the couple of feet to its base before he was able to regain his sense enough to get to his feet and run. Terror compelled him to run as fast as his feet could carry him until he reached the safety of his home. Once there, Elijah ran inside and locked the door behind him. Without wasting any time or effort, he grabbed his rifle from its place over the fireplace. Never a man of violence, he'd only used the rifle to hunt, but at that moment he was the hunted. Thoughts of strange beasts and hellish creatures filled Elijah's thoughts as he poured powder down the barrel and packed it with the ramrod.

"Why are you doing this? There's

nothing to fear."

Elijah spun around; pointing his rifle in the direction of the voice but nothing was there. Terrified, his eyes moved across the room, realizing he had failed to put a ball into the musket barrel. "Who's there? Who are you?"

"Don't you know? You brought me here." The voice was rather pleasant to listen to. Elijah thought it to be rather soothing, despite the sound continuing to terrify him.

"You're some sort of demon!" Elijah's eyes darted across the room as quickly as fireflies in the night. "You're here to destroy me!" His eyes began bulging from his exertion to search the room. Nobody was there, but he knew there had to be someone. Where else had the voice come from? How else would a voice be able to reach him? Unless it was a demon of some sort, but if that was the case, why not just kill him and take his soul, as pitiful as it may have become.

Instead of denying Elijah's accusation of being a demon, the voice laughed. "I am what you wished me to be. Nothing more, nothing less."

"I wished? I did no such thing, demon. Be gone!" Silence filled the room along with an oppressive emptiness. The air became hard for him to breathe as it seemed to turn thick like water, straining his movements as though he were trying to move through mud. Terror as Elijah never experienced before seized him as he struggled to move towards the door. Each movement brought a pain he hadn't thought possible as he struggled against the force working against him. His struggle felt as though it would never end. When he was about to submit and collapse, his hand touched the door. The voice of his tormentor returned to him at that moment.

"I've been with you since the beginning. It was I who helped you find your way until your anger and self loathing pushed me away. Do you not understand your own creator?"

Elijah's eyes widened in absolute fear. He'd cursed God enough times for

the troubled inflicted upon his life, for ruining it on a simple whim. *That*, he knew, was the reason he was to be tormented so. Elijah had been spared throughout the night to meet the judgment the Almighty had passed down on him. Somewhere inside of him that same anger still burned. It hadn't been cast out with his fear, merely buried. The restraints holding him back were broken as his anger lashed out.

"My creator? You are nothing more than a tormentor! You promise Paradise yet you give me Hell! Be gone from here, I have no use for your lies!"

The silence returned to the room, but unlike before there was no oppression, no restraints of any sort. Elijah looked around trembling as the strength his anger had given him left. The musket fell from his hands onto the hard, wooden floor with a solid thunk. It was followed a moment later by Elijah as sobs wracked his body. His hands went to his eyes to cover them. "Why didn't you take me, too?" His question came out as a weak whimper. His headache never left him and was forced into the light once more.

As Elijah knelt on the floor, a small string of clear liquid pushed itself out from between his fingers as though his tears were overflowing. The liquid pooled on the floor by his side until it resembled a clear ball of jelly and slid across the floor towards the door similar to a trickle of water without leaving a trail. The small globule slipped under the door and outside into the rising heat of the early morning. As it slid across the porch and into the grass, the light caught it in a way that it shone with all the colors of the rainbow.

The globule felt Elijah's suffering more than the man could've imagined. During its continuing experiments, the being chose to test him by taking Elijah's wife. The reactions of their creations were both remarkable and pathetic. The pain it caused in someone so strong had been a pity. Such emotions were common among its kind, to feel sympathy for their creations as anyone would for their pets. Perhaps the globule became too

close, as had been the accusation by its superiors. Living inside their scientific experiments was often argued among its kind as barbaric, even if they were only there to watch. Its people didn't have a name, at least not a single name, as they were known by many among their specimens.

The globule slithered up the side of the meteorite much as a droplet of water would, only away from the ground. It couldn't help wondering if it could've helped his specimen if given the proper time, ten years to the globule's specimen was nothing more than a passing minute to its own kind. But then the decision wasn't its to make. When the elders summoned one home their orders were followed. It slid into the crevice it'd been assigned and transformed into solid matter, matching the surface of the meteor. Once it was secure, the meteor was launched into the air by a massive explosion of air beneath it. As it soared through the sky, the globule wondered if the human specimen would last much longer. Elijah had been such a good specimen at one time.



The Aquarium By DiVitto Kelly

It was a good run. Sixty years is a long time in the entertainment business to be the top dog, or in this case, the top dogfish. Marineland, the first ever constructed aquarium of its kind way back in 1938, was now vacant, victim to the newer, multimillion dollar grandiose species. The ancient tanks were

drained and emptied years ago, the assortment of sea life shipped off to newer facilities.

Back in the day, Americans far and wide lined up to experience the world of Jacques Cousteau up close and personal, encountering dolphins, sharks, and a myriad of tropical fish through tank windows. Now, the only things remaining were rust covered railings, crumbling cement walls, and the ghostly cheers of children soaking in decades of dolphin shows.

But there was something left behind in a makeshift shed, set off in the back, adjacent to the maintenance building where visitors never ventured. A lone circular tank, no more than fifteen feet in circumference and eight feet deep, remaining unspoiled. It was filled to the brim with stagnant water thick as soup, a green film sat on top. Dragonflies and other insects hovered above, but never landed. Occasional bubbles belched from the center.

Daniel blurted out to his friend Seth as they approached the abandoned facility at half past midnight. "Where's the spray paint?"

He was built like a fire hydrant, short and stocky. He always wore the same weathered Rolling Stones t-shirt with olive drab shorts that went past his knees, making him appear like some Neanderthal groupie.

"Keep it in your pants dill weed," Seth answered abruptly, a former high school football star now borderline slacker at age nineteen. "See? I got it right here: red, white, and blue. Very patriotic don't you think?"

"Idiotic more like it," Daniel replied. "Where the hell are the neon colors? No orange or green in that bag? That's what gets us noticed!"

The two soon to be twenty-year-olds thought of themselves as budding graffiti artists, but more closely resembled bored, middle class burnouts. They had taken a fancy in defacing the old aquarium, spray-painting fat rounded letters around the facility like some sort of Botero inspired alphabet. Daniel was particularly proud of his latest, a Jaws shark painted with

a big fat dube hanging from its crescent shaped mouth.

“Over here,” Daniel called out, like he’d discovered a hidden treasure. He waved Seth over, pointing to the towering wood fence. “This needs to come down.”

“Why all the warning signs?” asked Seth, observing a half dozen posted haphazardly on the faded blue painted fence. He was Frankenstein strong, enough where he could probably rip the individual planks out one by one. Standing on a cement bench, he placed his meaty hands on the top of the rotted wood and pulled one right out, repeating the process four more times. As Seth peered through the opening, he spotted something else.

“Hey, there’s a chain-link fence behind this one.”

“A what?” said Daniel, taken aback by the double fences. “Maybe the aquarium people forgot something there – something valuable.”

Both young men perked up, Seth especially, whose eyes lit up with dollar signs. He was broke, and his parents were tired of flushing money down the toilet for their begging son.

The two managed to squeeze through the wood fence opening then greeted the chain link kind; the door secured with a heavy-duty padlock. It smelled stale, like an old refrigerator that hadn’t been opened for months. “Crap, looks like we’ll have to climb it,” said Seth, pulling feverishly at the locked door.

“It’s doesn’t look too bad, maybe eight feet tops,” said Daniel confidently. “I’ll lend you a hand.”

“Why me first?” replied Seth, sounding like a dimwitted sidekick. He looked at his friend; he knew what was coming next.

“Chicken are we?” said Daniel, a bottom of the barrel loafer who specialized in nothing particular. “Here, you can borrow my flashlight.”

Seth snarled at this friend. “Alright nipple head, but I get sixty percent of what’s in there, you hear?” Daniel nodded, a bit surprised by his friend’s sudden assertiveness.

Seth scaled the fence like a circus monkey; already halfway down the other side in a minute before dropping the last four feet onto the damp, moss covered floor; his heavy body weight creating a loud, squishy sound. “Hey, there’s a tank in here; decent size too.”

“Maybe there’s a rare species of fish in there,” Daniel called out, who was horrible at climbing anything. He quickly experienced an elementary school flashback where in gym class he failed to climb the fitness rope. All he could remember was his whole class laughing at him.

“Are you coming or not?” asked Seth, looking back at his friend. “This is really cool.”

Seth focused the light beam as he circled around the three foot high cement barrier wall like an archeologist discovering some ancient temple. The strange body of water was still as death while an indistinguishable green growth drooped along the walls. The reflected moonlight shined through the yellowed rectangular skylights, providing the young man with more visibility.

“Hey, I see bubbles. You gotta get over here.”

“I’m tryin, I’m tryin,” said Daniel, slipping back down to the pavement floor. His blunt tan boots made it impossible to get a grip inside the tight chain link spaces.

“Try taking your boots off; you’ll get better footing,” said Seth. Daniel shrugged his shoulders like he should have come up with the idea himself. The floor was damp and he wasn’t keen on dirtying his white socks but figured if his friend could climb it, so could he.

“I’m on my way,” announced Daniel, like he was doing something monumental. “Not too bad so far.” The fence rattled and squeaked in the quiet room as he prodded his way up ever so slowly.

Seth continued to circle the tank, hoping to spot something – anything, in the murky liquid. He shined the flashlight on the inside walls and noticed cigarette butts and empty beer cans – some full, scattered along the

dank floor. “Other people have been here.”

He noticed a small opening on the opposite end where someone had crawled through. He picked up one of the full cans of beer, sniffing it. “Dude, this beer ain’t too old.” He wiped off the top and popped the top, beer shooting out everywhere before subsiding. He poured some in his mouth, but quickly spat it out. “Ugh, this beer is skunked supreme!”

“I coulda told you that, pumpkin nuts,” commented Daniel, still struggling with his inner climbing demons.

“Come on D, get moving,” said Seth, searching for a stick. The dollar store flashlight, cheap with a weak beam of light, barely penetrated the water. There under rotting cardboard was a foot-long decaying stick. He picked it up then stroked the surface, brushing away the thick green coat of slime. But something didn’t feel right.

“What the hell?” Seth ran the beam of light down the stick. “Oh for Christ’s sake!”

It was a human bone, ants nibbling on the remaining bits of flesh. His foot knocked into something heavy, the object skidding a few feet. His heart racing, Seth pointed the flashlight and observed a human skull, partially decomposed.

He trembled, doubling over like he was going to puke. “Oh holy shit,” he uttered under his breath before turning back to the tank.

Seth glanced back at the water, suddenly mesmerized by a slight movement in the center. His eyes followed a stream of bubbles heading in his direction. He inched closer to the edge of the tank and peered as hard as he could through the muck, but couldn’t decipher anything. There was a shape, slowly emerging through the murkiness -- closer and closer, like a revealing magic eight ball. Seth gazed harder.

There, like a horrific reflection. It looked humanesque, but with reptilian features. It had a textured dark army green face, a tapered snout and eyes sinister - slanted, but with a human-like

mouth only larger with savage teeth. Seth's wide eyes were way ahead of his words. He didn't have time to scream. The shape lunged out of the water, chomping down on Seth's jugular, dragging him underwater in an instant.

"Alrighty, I'm here," said Daniel, finally scaling the metal fortress, jumping down to the ground like his friend. "Seth?" He picked up the flashlight from the floor, brushing it off. He noticed a faint ripple in the water then wondered if his friend fell in, or did he take off, leaving him there alone.

"Alright now, time to jump out and scare me," said Daniel as he pointed the flashlight at the tank. The water had a brick red hue, almost rust colored; he could have sworn his friend said the water looked green.

Seth's body suddenly rose to the surface, bloody and mangled. Daniel let out a primeval scream. He stood frozen in terror when the thing emerged from the water. Daniel stared in disbelief then scrambled towards the chain-link fence in desperation. He flung his outstretched hands upwards, grasping the thin metal, making a frenzied attempt to escape. "Help me please, anyone! Help!"

The gilled creature spilled out of the tank, then stood upright on its two legs, nearly seven feet tall. There was a rusted shackle attached to its right ankle and a chain that led back to the center of the tank. Whatever it was, it was meant to stay hidden. The creature hissed, closing in on Daniel, still frantically climbing the fence. He was almost to the top; almost. The creature, using its webbed hands and claws, easily scaled the barrier. It grabbed Daniel's bowling pin like calf muscle and tore into it, shearing the flesh to the bone. Blood poured from the tattered wound. The creature climbed higher, digging its claws around Daniel's waist. Both fell to the floor, the creature landing on top of the hapless victim. The last thing Daniel saw was the creature's open maw biting down hard on his throat. The

creature dragged the corpse to the side of the tank before devouring him.

A month later, a construction crew was out demolishing the remaining structures, making room for a brand new aquarium, promising to be bigger and better than the last one. The foreman surveyed the wood fence surrounding the decaying building and ordered it removed. A machine trashed both the wood and chain-link fences, revealing the round tank.

One of the men took a sledge hammer and crushed part of the barrier wall, the green water pouring out. It was later drained completely, revealing a mass collection of human bones. A thick, heavy chain sat on the bottom, the shackle severed in two.

I Saw it Coming By DiVitto Kelly



"Is it alright if we talk a bit, sir, you know – before we . . .?"

The gentleman, dressed in a rumpled charcoal gray suit and sporting a properly trimmed mustache and wire rimmed glasses glanced at his watch. "Uh, I guess it'll be okay. Just make it quick, alright?"

"Okay. The man was missing a front tooth. His complexion was beached-out weathered -- tan and wrinkled.

"Well, where to you want to start?" asked the suited man. He'd caught rumors of the middle-aged mans' farfetched tale. His stomach rumbled, sounding like singing humpback whales. He'd missed breakfast and it was nearing one in the afternoon.

The man nodded in appreciation. He rubbed his hands on his face and paused then took a deep breath.

"I saw it coming . . . I saw it coming a mile away, maybe more. No one else seemed interested or concerned, but I was. I saw it coming, clear as day."

The man was already irked, his arms crossed, thinking he should have at least grabbed a couple of his son's favorite cinnamon Pop Tarts. That would have at least held his grumbling stomach at bay until lunch "Where were you again?" He looked bored.

"I was on the beach as always. It's a nice secluded patch of sand off the beaten track. It's kinda like my own private beach, not many people go there."

"Sure."

"It was late afternoon. I was by myself as always. The best place in the whole wide world for a homeless man is the beach, you know. There's showers, the sun, and of course, the Gulf of Mexico. I feel normal there – like anyone else, just soaking up the rays and enjoying a swim here and there. I pick up food money making hats from palm leaves. I'm pretty good at it."

"I'm sure you are." His gut churned again.

"But after that day, I swear to God I won't set foot on a beach again . . . ever, that's it. It's why I wanna move. Maybe I'll get a job as a camp counselor. You know I used to be a middle school history teacher back in Louisville Kentucky, my home town. No ocean there, only the Ohio River, and I sure ain't gonna go for a swim in there. Some parts are so thick with pollution the fish hafta learn to walk."

He cracked himself up. "Always liked that joke." He paused, trying to regain his spot. "But seriously, my story is gonna stay the same no matter who I tell; it's tried and true."

The man smiled weakly. "And if you don't mind me asking, what made you move to Florida?"

"It's where people like me end up I suppose -- nowhere else to go, messed up a lot in life. It's the last stop for a lot of folks. For me, it's been like a stop-

gap from life, or maybe just an extended vacation. Either way, I thank God for the Sunshine State.”

The man smirked. “Continue.”

“Well, I was lying on my back, my arms folded in on my trusty black and orange beach towel like chicken wings; you know what I mean? I peered out into the water. The color of the Gulf always looks better through sunglasses, did’ya ever notice that?”

The man offered up an expressionless gaze and exhaled.

The homeless man shifted in his chair and cleared his throat. “This object seemed to target me and the half dozen folks still enjoying the rest of the setting sun. Whatever it was, it was heading straight for the beach, no question about it, like some evil torpedo. I didn’t see much at first. No dorsal fin sticking up high like a sail, but the movement was there. It cut through the water with a lot of force, against the grain of the incoming waves.”

“I stood up and took off my sunglasses just to make sure. Maybe I don’t look like the most trust-worthy type. My hair’s long and disheveled, wavy and gray . . .”

“Nice word – disheveled that is.”

“Thanks. I know a few,” he replied, smiling. “Like I said, I used to be a teacher, but I still got a serious case of country twang in me. People automatically think . . .”

“No harm in that.”

“No harm at all, sir.” He paused again.

“Well, I was wearing my customary Levis cut-offs, nothing fancy, unlike those stupid bathing suits today that trail past your knees. What’s the point of wearing something so long at the beach? How are you gonna get a good-looking suntan? They make you look like a little man, a midget – I guess that’s not politically correct to say today, but that’s what they look like to me.”

The man leaned back, still crossing his arms. “Can you get to the point?”

“Sorry sir.” He gave the man a cold stare before getting back to his yarn.

“I stood up, making sure I was seeing something and not a mirage. I walked down to the water, the waves pushing gently just over my ankles. It felt good and warm -- the Gulf of Mexico’s like that, not like the cold Atlantic and such. Well, it was harder to see at water level so I trudged up the hill to where the dunes are. You see lizards and stuff up there all the time – an occasional beer can or a fast food bag, but I clean those up pronto.”

“What you really gotta watch out for them bastard sand spurs. You step on one of those mothers and you’re in a world of hurt.”

The man looked at this watch and gestured with his hand for him to pick up the pace.

“From up there I could see it coming, clear as a bell. It was maybe fifty feet from shore now, paddling hard. It looked dark in the water. And long, like a Cadillac. It wasn’t too wide though - maybe like one of those silly little smart cars -- those are just plain stupid, aren’t they. I like big cars that get shitty gas mileage. Oops, sorry for the curse word.

“It happens.” The man perked up a bit, his hands placed on his thighs. “Go on.”

Anyway, I started screaming for everyone to get out of the water and off the beach. I swear I tried. I come running down the dune, even stepped on a bunch of sand spurs, but I didn’t care. I turned my foot right over and yanked ‘em all out in a split second. I was worried about those people. I swear to God.”

“What did they do?” the man asked, inching up in his chair, his eyes getting bigger.

“They just stood there like statues. I may not look like Ivy League material, but I certainly know monsters when I see ‘em. And this thing was gaining speed. If people didn’t leave that beach it was gonna be a blood bath. I went up this couple -- had two beautiful children. They were building cute little sand castles by the waters’ edge, paying no mind. Everybody thought I was crazy. It was getting closer. I could see the

outline, but nobody was paying attention. I screamed and hollered. That’s when they started throwing things at me, shushing me like I was in some God damn library. This one guy with his perfectly cut hair and designer sunglasses come over and grabbed my arm -- told me to get the hell away, or else. So I did.”

The suited man asked the woman behind him for a glass of water. “What did you do next?”

“I hurried back up that dune again, away from the beach. There’s lots of trees up there too: sabals, coconuts, and a couple of those tall royal palms – they’re beautiful. It’s a real secluded. No one usually goes there except me. I like my solitude.”

The man gestured, realizing he was running behind schedule. “Are you almost done?”

“Almost,” he said, apologizing. “I’m sorry you think I’m wasting your time, but this is important, and it’s the God’s honest truth.”

“On the contrary, sir, please continue,” he replied, hooked by the man’s story, or maybe just amused.

“That thing was almost at the shore. I hollered one last time. That’s when one of the people stood up. He saw it coming, but by then it was too late. He had it coming alright, for being so pigheaded. It’s just a shame; a damn shame.”

The man stood up. “And then what?”

“The screaming and the blood; that’s all I remember. I crouched behind the scrub and sea oats and watched the massacre. I was terrified; felt like burying myself in the sand to hide. It ambushed ‘em, right from the shallow waters with its flipper legs and huge jaw filled with teeth. They were bright white, blinding like porcelain. And long. No one had a chance. The adults and children, all killed. That thing just tore them to pieces . . . just tore them to pieces. I’m so sorry – it’s just that . . .”

“You need a tissue?” The woman returned with the glass of water.

“No, I’m alright.” The man sniffled and wiped his nose with his arm sleeve. This didn’t need to happen, not at all. I

stood there, screaming and hollering. I warned 'em what was gonna happen, but they didn't believe me. I know I don't exactly look too presentable and all, but you're supposed to at least listen to someone warning you. You gotta respect people who are trying to help. Don't you think?"

The man nodded in agreement. "I ain't . . . I'm sorry, I am not dumb you know. I've seen stuff like this before and it's the same thing always. People don't listen to you and they end up paying the price. People really need to listen more, you know what I mean? Why is that so hard? Are you okay? You look a bit uneasy. It's all true, so help me God. You DO believe me . . . don't you?"

"You said you've seen this before?"
"Uh huh."

The man stammered in disbelief, but caught himself back into reality. He exhaled then stood up. "I guess we're ready?" He glanced back at the two other men, one a sheriff's deputy, the other a nurse. They escorted the man from the doctor's office. "It's time."

"Well, why the hell not," he said. "Seems like a good a time as any I suppose." He looked at the man dressed in a charcoal gray suit. "You know you look a bit disheveled yourself."

"Yeah, I guess you could say that." They transferred the man to the mental hospital only miles from where the six people were killed.

Two weeks later, a young couple jogging along the same pristine white sand beach in the early morning stumbled across body parts, a foot here, a hand there. The news that night reported a pair of missing retirement-aged fishermen. Along the blood-stained beach were strange flipper-like imprints, just like the ones the homeless man had previously described to a tee.

The following week, the homeless man, cleave shaven and presentable, was released soon after, no questions asked. After sleeping all day at a cheap beach motel, he returned to the scene of the crime. The man sported a fresh

pair of knee-length khaki shorts which he rolled up and a light blue tee shirt. He picked up a forgotten celery green and white beach chair lying against the water fountain then marched up the sand dune and planted it between the towering royal palm trees.

He took in a deep, salt-aired breath. The Gulf was flat, barely a ripple registering on the bath warm water. A gentleman wearing a charcoal suit struggled up the sand dune and called out his name.

"So this is paradise, huh?" A pair of dying palm fronds rattled in the slight breeze.

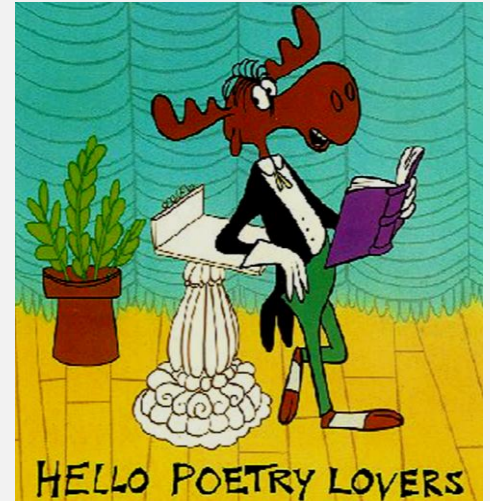
The homeless man turned, surprised anyone would want to visit 'death beach' as it was now called.

"You responsible for getting me out?"

The suited man nodded. "Two more people were killed here; same way too, flipper tracks and all."

The weathered man shook his head. "I'm leaving tomorrow, taking a bus to North Carolina. I got a brother who moved to – get this -- Transylvania County. Ain't that a kick in the nads."

The suited man let out a genuine laugh. "Another good word."
"I know a few."



Portal Poetry Corner

HAIKU FOR THE SEASONS

By Barbara Jean Kaufman

FALL
I MISS AUTUM
CRIMSON, GOLDEN-BROWN, DEEP-
GREEN LEAVES FALL.
APPLE AND PUMPKIN PIES. A COZY
TIME.

WINTER
CONNECTICUT SNOW
A TALL WHITE BIRCH STANDS
ALONE
RED-GREEN, WOOD-DUCKS WAIT
TO MATE.

SPRING
MY BROMILIAD BLOOMED
A HUMMING BIRD SIPS NECTAR
TOO FAST FOR GRAYSON, MY CAT.

SUMMER
HOT, SOUTHERN, FLORIDA
BEACHES ARE FULL. WHERE IS
SHADE?
FINALLY, A COOL, SUNSET.

Beginning in January 2014, meetings will be held the second Monday (6-7:30pm) of every month in the second floor conference room.

Upcoming dates: Mar. 10, April 14, May 12, June 9, July 14, Aug. 11, Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Dec. 8.

From picture books to novels, stop by and discuss your ideas. Submit your short story or poem to be published in the monthly Portal to Michael Kelly at mkelly@broward.org.

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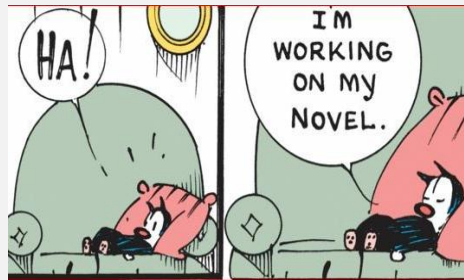
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FEEDBACK CORNER

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