

The Portal

A cool collection of short stories and poems



**Excerpt from
DiVitto Kelly's upcoming
novella, Sharks Bite**

The tangerine orange moon glimmered off the water like sunrays penetrating deep through stained glass. Marine biologist William Finley, alone in a two-room bungalow, struggled to sit down on the rickety framed chair positioned directly in front of a wood framed folding table.

"This will be the last time I write to you, my dearest," scribed Finley as tears dropped onto the ivory linen stationary, blending in with the fresh ink laid down by the distraught man.

Struggling to grip the fountain pen, he continued. "It is becoming too difficult. I hope you will forgive me. I will love you forever, your husband William." He and his wife Liddy were due to celebrate one year of marriage when he returned home to Seaside, Oregon.

The bungalow sat a coconut's throw from the secluded lagoon

where he performed a majority of his research for the past four months. Finley already placed the postage stamp in the top right corner, slightly bent. Before, when he could still had full use of his hands, the marine biologist squared away most of his research papers and belongings.

The rustic structure was dimly lit, illuminated only by a pair of burning candles, both now standing an inch high. He finally managed to place the letter in the envelope to be mailed out. Finley reached for another candle when a shot of ocean breeze blew through the open window. The envelope lifted from the table and fell to the floor. Finley struggled to pick it up, trying to grasp the dog-eared corner but it slipped out of his outstretched stiffening fingers. The envelope fell into a crack on the worn, makeshift wood floor, now out of reach.

"No!" begged Finley, sobbing. His arm and leg muscles began to spasm more, the pain intensifying. His labored to breath, his sides aching. He leaned up against a bamboo table before shifting over towards the doorway. The marine biologist glanced at the dinner plate-sized hanging mirror, housed in a seashell frame. He'd purchased it from a quaint gift shop on the big island, promising to give it to Libby as a gift when he returned. He turned away coldly, repulsed at what he had become. Finley stepped outside, shuffling through the cold sand, passing six flaming Tiki torches set up in a row along the walkway, using them as a guide as he approached the secluded lagoon.

Finley caught a glimpse of vibrant orange reflecting off the water. He raised his head and

stared at the moon. Tears welled up in his eyes. He was struggling to breathe, fighting hard to inhale deep breaths. His skin was dry and coarse. He lowered his head and tried to speak, but no words came out. Glancing once more to the full moon, Finley dove head first into the calming surf. Moments later, he was gone.



**Excerpt from
Seal Cove, a Novel**

**By DiVitto Kelly
Chapter 10**

The sun was desperately peeking over the dawn horizon, making its best effort to be seen. Andrea and Michael were sound asleep, Fiona snuggled in between, holding her smaller blue and white stuffed animal dolphin she dubbed Indigo. Brian had returned to his bed, completely submerged under his blankets. He had an odd habit of placing his lone stuffed animal harp seal on his head, wearing it like a fez.

The storm was gone having traveled down the coastline past

Tangier, but a heavy fog concealed the shoreline. If the Cove was famous for anything, it was two things: lobsters the size of a sub compact and heavy, coastal fog. In the Cove, determined local lobster fishermen always boasted about being able to cut their way through anything. The morning hours would put that description to the test.

William Coslett, a retired constable in his late sixties, originally from Toronto, called out to a pair of lobster boats sputtering along the calm surf. Scaling along the craggy coastline near the lighthouse, the slightly overweight man nearly slipped on a patch of damp seaweed.

“Save a couple for me,” he called out. The fishermen gave a quick honk of their horn. The fog hung in the air around the man as a faint mist cascaded down. It wasn’t nearly enough to discourage the passionate fisherman. He ambled through a small pocket of cold air that made him shiver. “I should’ve brought my coffee,” he thought, glancing up at the gray skies.

“Hell, I’d fish during a monsoon,” muttered the recent retiree, who with his wife Margaret moved to Seal Cove four years ago. Coslett especially wanted to retire to a calmer, more tranquil “back to nature” kind of place. He was finished, done, kaput with city life back in Toronto. Nova Scotia fit the Cosletts perfectly, having the dubious words “Canada’s Ocean Playground” embossed on its license plate since the early 1970s.

A few more steps and he would be at his favorite fishing spot, twenty-five meters to the right of the lighthouse, next to a raised and

weathered flat dull gray rock nearly four meters wide. Even with the wide-ranging volatile tides of the Cove, he could pronounce himself safe and dry from incoming water. Most of the time, he brought a folding chair complete with cup holder for his coffee or beer, depending on what time of day it was. However, today, he sported a brand new pair of thigh-high waterproof black boots. He felt a bit goofy as he squeaked with every step.

If any rain was in the forecast, Coslett made sure to wear his police issued raincoat, still kicking, despite two decades of serviceable use. For the last three months, he’d been on a ‘no fried foods’ diet at the strong urging, more like pestering, of his ever-caring wife. A struggle at first, the husky-framed man was now nine pounds lighter, although his craving for fried onion rings was still forever imbedded in his taste buds. This morning, after yet another bland morning bowl of mineral-solid Grape Nuts, Coslett snuck a softball-sized chocolate chip muffin from his wife’s private stash, right next to the hidden box of Fruit Loops. She was a classic, do as I say and not as I do type of woman. “Damn, I really should have brought my coffee.”

His hands were full, carrying all his fishing gear. The retiree had his trusty licorice red fishing pole, complete with Shimano spinning reel with forty-pound test line, bright yellow bait bucket, and a high-end two-tone olive green tackle box that boasted three tiers of compartments on each side when opened. The rod and reel was a birthday gift from his wife, who still couldn’t comprehend what her husband of thirty-eight years enjoyed about fishing. He told

her on many occasions it was the best present he’d ever received, even more than the original set of floor mats and polished wood stick shift knob she bought on eBay for his classic 1970 pale yellow Triumph Spitfire Mark III convertible, a perfectly explainable midlife crisis purchase when he turned sixty.

Their marriage, all those years ago, nearly lasted mere hours when he was caught fishing off a frayed wooden dock on their honeymoon night in Key West, Florida. Coslett had woken up just past one AM to use the bathroom. Instead of going back to sleep, he stepped outside their honeymoon suite, savoring the warm tropical breeze. Before returning, the newly crowned husband spotted a man fishing on the resort dock, sucking down a beer. He slinked towards the dock and sparked up a conversation with the divorced man, who lent the new groom a fishing pole. The two fished and drank beer until nearly five in the morning. The bride woke up from the boisterous laughter outside. Finding Mr. Coslett AWOL, she pulled back the curtain and spotted him holding up a fish, grinning from ear to ear. The new Mrs. Coslett threw open the sliding glass door and stormed down to the T-shaped dock.

Trying to calm his bride, he slurred and smiled, taking her petite hands and best explained his passion for fishing by quoting former United States President, Herbert Hoover. “Fishing is much more than fishhhhh. It is the great occasion when we may return to the fine sim . . . plicity of our fore skins – I mean forefathers.”

The freshly married man stood proud of the words he had just

spoken, and then he burped. He gazed into his wife's eyes and stated ever so eloquently, "That . . . is why I fishhhh."

Mrs. Coslett blushed a pinkish hue, paused, and blurted out, "Bullshit!"

"Huh?" he replied, not expecting such a verbal punch in the gut.

"Fishing . . . what a waste of time," she barked. "And why on Earth would you quote a horrible U.S. President like Herbert Hoover. For Christ's sake, at least quote Reagan." There was no more fishing for the rest of their honeymoon.

The bait bucket was teeming with shiners, caught yesterday with his cast net. He loved catching (and eating) sea bass, but on occasion, he enjoyed the battle of landing a medium sized shark or two. His proudest moment was the time he reeled in a nearly eight-foot bluefin tuna on a shared deep-sea fishing trip with friends. After taking a bunch of pictures at the dock, he sold the fish for a boatload of cash. It was the first time his wife ever appreciated fishing.

Observing the ocean water brushing up against the shoreline, he noticed a gooey bright green slime mixed in with the kelp and sea foam. He'd never seen that before. A couple of dozen dead fish littered the rough beach exterior, laying down a healthy stink.

"That's not a good sign," Coslett said to himself, then peering out to sea. The caw of a half dozen seagulls hovering above made him look skyward. Like most of the time, the weather in the Cove was always a crapshoot, a potpourri of precipitation on any given day. Nova Scotia had earned the title of

stormiest province by the Climate of Canada publication, but at least this particular morning, the waters were calm and the usual brisk winds nonexistent.

Shiners were leaping out from the water, being chased by something bigger no doubt, he thought. "Now that's a good sign," he boasted out loud. "That means there's fish out there."

A moderate breeze cleared the smell of stinking fish away from the shore. Coslett inhaled the fresh salty air and exhaled it, savoring the briny scent with bravado. He was content. Coslett appreciated nature, especially the ocean. Although an avid fisherman, he found freshwater fishing to be completely boring. It was never a mystery what you'd catch, the retiree mused. However, the ocean, you just never know what you might reel in. He reached in his pocket to pull out the muffin when a gull dropped a big blotchy poop on the toe of his new boots.

"Damn, you gull bastards," he shouted as he shook his right foot in the shallow surf. Then he dropped the muffin into the water.

"Oh, for the fucking shit, I'd STILL rather be here fishing!" he exclaimed, but with less enthusiasm than before. He was convinced eating healthy – salads, fruit, and pasta were making him cranky. Coslett tried convincing his wife that heftier people were happier. He even tried using Santa Claus as an example.

He failed yet again, his forever loving, yet blunt-speaking wife, Margaret, simply stated, "The guy works one day out of the year and those elves do most of the work. He can afford to be fat. You can't and won't!"

The mist was turning into a steady light drizzle now. The man debated about returning home for a split-second, but then remembered his wife would have a scroll full of chores waiting for him, beginning with the garage. Although he loved his full-figured wife dearly, fishing was always a great excuse for not being at home. He glanced at a couple of plump harbor seals to his right on the rocky shore that snorted at him.

"Both of you could stand to lose a few pounds too," he said, laughing ever so briefly. The seals continued their blank stare at the man. "Tough crowd, guys."

Seeing pelicans flying above made Coslett reminisce about the time he had accidentally hooked one a decade ago. He was fishing off an old cement pier in Clarks Harbor, just east of Yarmouth, when he cast his line out just as the bird flew by. At first, he didn't see the splash of his bait hitting the water. Next thing he knew, the fishing line was streaming from his reel. He'd hooked the fowl in midair. He reeled in the pelican towards the dock and had a fellow fisherman wearing gloves remove the hook. Coslett told the story at least a hundred times since, joking it was the first time he'd ever gotten a birdie.

Staring for a few moments, he stepped backwards a few feet, keeping an eye on the two seals. Despite the drizzle, the man reached for a pack of cigarettes, another vice his wife wanted him to quit, but he couldn't. Coslett searched inside his coat pocket for a match, but didn't find one. He remembered he kept a lighter in his tackle box, hidden somewhere amongst the hooks, sinkers, rusty pliers, and disposable camera.

The lighthouse stood tall along the coastline. He looked up, admiring all the improvements the Keatings had put into it. Coslett donated five hundred dollars for building materials when work escalated over the past summer. On a few occasions, he'd asked Michael to use the bathroom, especially after downing a few beers after hours of summer afternoon fishing. He didn't know them too well, but enjoyed teaching their kids the art of fishing, and to Coslett, fishing was an art.

As the man turned away from the direction of the lighthouse, he stumbled over something along the fog-heavy shoreline. He landed flat on his trimmed down, yet still protruding gut, mostly concealed by his raincoat. The bait bucket spilled over, shiners now flipping and flopping on the ragged shoreline.

"Ow," blurted Coslett, lying motionless on the shoreline. "Maybe I should have slept in this morning." He got to his knees, both stiff in the early morning cool. He spat out a damp piece of kelp, and then noticed the open bait bucket. The man helplessly watched as the baitfish danced into the creeping waves and darted away. He growled in angst.

The man positioned each arm out in a push up position and gradually stood up from the wet beach surface. Thankfully, he landed on a flattened patch of beach, void of jagged rocks or sharp debris. He righted himself up, brushing the sand and seaweed from his clothes and wiped the moisture from his wire-rimmed glasses. Then he took notice of a peculiar shape on the water's edge.

The puzzled fisherman took off his hat and scratched his head, trying to size up the shape, but the fog still hovered around shore, making things difficult to see. The man had tripped over something dark and rubbery. Tires maybe? He guessed, knowing Nova Scotia produced a hell of a lot of tires, mostly Michelins. The retired man knelt down to one knee, but quickly postulated it to be some sort of tail, but to what, a large seal, a log, maybe a whale? Hold on, whales don't have tails like that, he thought, although he liked the rhyme. He stood up and counted off each step: one, two, three . . . all the way past nineteen feet in length.

"Geez Louise," he uttered. Just then, a slight gust helped push back the fog, unveiling something he'd never seen before. His jaw dropped in amazement.

"Well, I'll be a seal's ass," said the astonished fisherman before a chill ran through his body. The two seals barked loudly and waddled into the shallows, sputtering away into deeper water. He backed away, not sure if the thing was alive or dead. He stood upon his favorite rock and simply stared, absorbing the moment. Coslett thought about calling his wife, but he never brought his cellphone when he fished. No way in hell would he want to be interrupted.

Coslett stepped down off the flat rock. "Here's something you don't see every day. You look like some sort of supersized tadpole."

The shape lay motionless and appeared dead. Seaweed draped the body as delicate waves brushed lightly against its bulbous flesh. The four rubbery legs seemed out of proportion to support such a

creature. Blunt gray nails protruded from each of the five-toed feet. Still mystified, the man slowly reached out with his hand to touch it. As he did, his fingertips pushed into a slimy clear coat covering the skin.

"Oh, how totally gross," he said in disgust, washing the substance off in the water. "My God, I sound like my teen granddaughter, for Christ's sake."

The camouflage tan body, with a mixture of muted green and burnt umber, was smooth and round, built like a huge manatee and prehistoric looking. The man gradually approached the head area, which made up a quarter of the creature's body. Along the back ridge were thin streaks of muddy yellow and subtle hints of crimson red. The closed eyes were the size of Frisbees. In the center of the bulbous head were two ten-inch slanted nostrils located just above the mouth. He didn't hear any breathing. The creature was easily bigger than the man's treasured English convertible roadster, for sure.

Coslett stood directly in front of the object now, about two meters away. It almost appeared to be smiling. "Now that's a big mouth," he said with a chuckle. "You'd give my wife a run for her money." The man noticed the two harbor seals poking their heads above the waterline, keeping a watchful eye on the beached creature.

The fisherman bent down on one knee, opened his tackle box, and reached for the disposable waterproof camera tucked neatly away under a pair of brown work gloves, stained with fish blood. He grabbed the lighter too, but dropped the pack of cigarettes into the

water. “Ah screw it. I need to quit anyway.”

He stood up and wiped off the cheap camera lens. “Just in case I catch the big one,” he often exclaimed. “And boy is this thing the big one.”

His wife Margaret believed less than ten percent of his fish tales, and that figure would certainly drop after describing his latest fish story, but with a photo as proof? Coslett closed the tackle box, took a few steps back, and positioned the camera, wiping the mist away from his glasses again and turning the bill of his baseball cap backwards. Excited, he accidentally took a picture of his boots.

“Crap!” he said. “Oh well, I still have seventeen more pictures to go.” Looking down, he forwarded the film with his thumb and peered through the plastic viewfinder, ready to line up the shot.

“Say cheese,” he said. He clicked it once, looked down and then prepared to take another photo.

“This picture will probably end up on Field and Stream! No, scratch that, the Drudge Report!”

Suddenly, he had an idea. The man unhooked the line on his fishing pole and carefully placed the barb on the creature’s mouth, laying it on the protruding lower lip. “I’ll take a, what do they call it -- a selfie?”

He couldn’t control his enthusiasm. “This is so totally awesome,” he said with a bit of Valley Girl flair, now sounding exactly like his teen granddaughter. He was already dreaming of mega television interviews, making the cover of well-known magazines,

and of course, a guest spot on the fishing channel. “And to think I was going to go back home and probably have to scrub the toilet and change the litter box.” The tide was coming in, touching his bait bucket and tackle box. He was oblivious.

“I’ll say I caught this behemoth and landed it right here, I’m one hell of a genius!” he exclaimed. He snapped away then prepared to line up the next shot. He peered through the tiny viewfinder again, stepping back a bit more to get the whole shape and his fishing pole into the picture.

“Nice, now work with me,” he said, giddy as a school kid. Coslett moved in a little closer to capture the essence of the creature’s face. “Try finding this in a lake!”

He wiped the raindrops again from his glasses. “Now give me a charming smile, you big galoot.”

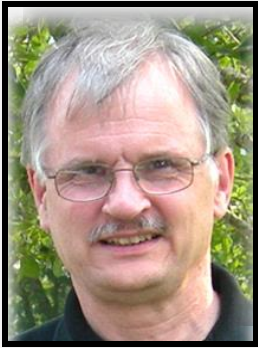
First the eyes opened, and then the mouth, like an automatic garage-door. A deep exhaling sound exuded its reeking breath. The man kept peering through the viewer, not exactly sure what he was seeing. He slowly raised his head above the box camera, taking a picture, but then dropped it in the oncoming tide. He glared at the smooth glasslike teeth lining the upper and lower jaw. The cavernous maw was the color of Pepto Bismol. Strands of goo stretched out like a spider web as the mouth opened wider. The two observing seals quickly dropped below the surface and torpedoed their way towards deeper water.

“Oh shh . . .” The creature lassoed its blackish tongue around the helpless fisherman, dragging him and his fishing pole, snapping it

in two, into its open mouth. In one gulp, the screaming man vanished from view. The creature shook its head back and forth as it was attempting to swallow its prey whole. The creature thrashed its globular tail, creating a froth along the shoreline.

One of the fisherman’s hands flailed away just outside the closing jaws. Like a bear trap, the creature bit down, biting off three of the man’s fingers. They popped off, perfectly severed, falling into the clumps of seaweed and rocks being stroked by the incoming surf. A few curious seagulls cawed at each other as the creature became stationary again, closing its eyes. A stream of blood washed down outside corner of the mouth where the creature quickly flicked out its tongue, slurping it up. One brazen gull, not too impressed with the newly discovered creature, picked up one of the fingers and flew off. Another gull landed on the creature’s back, its feet sinking into the gooey-filmed skin, but then swiftly flew away. The rising tide crept in, reaching the tackle box and bait bucket until both were floating. The creature remained stationary, tilting its head to the left before letting out a deep, resonating belch.

**Check out DiVitto’s
debut novel, Seal Cove,
at www.divittowrites.com
or at www.amazon.com**



The Eagle By Rick Weber

Phillip watched Gertrude move around the tables as efficiently as a crowded lunchtime pub would allow while serving each customer with a smile. One patron made an announcement which Phillip did not hear at first. Asking Gertrude when she came back to the bar, she reiterated, “He said, ‘We found the secret of life.’”

“Not as rough as what a Lancaster crew would belt out in here after a mission,” he told her. They both laughed as Phillip finished filling the champagne flutes for some other patrons, who were there for a special occasion. Gertrude took the bubbly out to the guests, and Phillip forgot about the minor interruption.

Gertrude took her job at The Eagle during the war to help out her family at home. It was here she met her husband, Phillip, a wireless operator on a Royal Air Force Lancaster bomber. Since the war ended, Phillip occupied the space behind the bar at The Eagle. He only had to look above him at the pub’s ceiling to be reminded of his tenure with the RAF. It was marked with graffiti left by his mates, along with some from US Eighth Air Force counterparts, but the times had changed.

The war had been over for more than seven years. Phillip did not miss it and seldom reminisced. He married Gertrude right after the German surrender and took up his current position as bar steward while the Americans were headed home.

The crowd nowadays was almost all academics from the nearby Cavendish Laboratory who claimed they were working on some scientific project which promised a major breakthrough. Having no formal education beyond high school, Phillip thought their assertions were great. He preferred this crowd more than his old friends because they were less rowdy. *At least, they don’t mark up the ceiling like my old gang used to.*

Later at home, Phillip asked Gertrude, “What did that man mean today when he said, ‘We found the secret of life’?”

“I don’t know what most of those men from the lab say when they’re in. The chap who made the announcement today, I think is a physicist originally from Northampton, and the young man who was with him is a zoologist, a Yank. They’re both very nice.”

“I have no reason to doubt that,” Phillip retorted. “I was just wondering what would cause him to make such a grandiose statement.”

“I don’t know,” she said before turning out the light and going to sleep.

The next afternoon in the pub Phillip saw one of his regulars, a researcher from the lab they called Jangle, who had been in the day before. Phillip asked him, “How big was the news that fellow let out here yesterday?”

“It could be big,” Jangle told Phillip. “Then again, it may not be. People have been working on DNA for almost a hundred years. We just have to wait and see. That’s science.”

Phillip shrugged not knowing what DNA was and set down a glass of ale in front of him.

“There could be more to the story,” Jangle added when he was almost through with his first pint. “I heard they were shown some research work product, a photograph a woman in London had without her permission. I don’t know where it’s all headed. Now, how about pouring me another round?”

Phillip did not know what to say as he took Jangle’s glass to be refilled. The pub became busy as the university’s rugby team piled in after

practice, and he had to serve them ending their chat.

At home that night, he mentioned his conversation to Gertrude. “You know that gent from the lab who said they found the secret of life. Jangle came in today and said those young men may have seen other research without permission.”

“I don’t believe that. They seem to be such good people.”

“I don’t think they were intentionally looking into someone else’s work. Jangle told me that they were shown something called ‘photograph 51’ or so I think. He said the picture belongs to some woman in London who’s working on the same subject.”

“If Jangle spent more time in the lab and less gossiping in the pub, he would probably get more work of his own done. He can’t be getting much accomplished with all the time he’s at The Eagle.”

Both laughed and went to bed.

Over the next few weeks, Jangle would come in at his usual time, and Phillip would get the latest gossip from inside the lab. As he spouted off his tidbits, Phillip would ask, “What about the secret of life?”

One day Jangle informed him when asked, “Oh, that, it looks like they’re talking to the lady about her ‘photograph 51’. There may be some headway, even talk about some articles being published. The lads are trying to get her and her collaborator to mend their own fences. I don’t know either of them so I can’t say much more. I know that our director here in Cambridge is talking to their director in London.”

Phillip mentioned this update in passing to Gertrude, who could only smile in acknowledgement, as she picked up a round of drinks for waiting customers. Later, he advised her that “her boys” were also in direct competition with an American who was on the road to the same discovery. A look of concern darted across her face but was quickly erased when he told her, “The Yank can’t come across the pond to look at their work. He seemed to have trouble getting a passport.”

Jangle finally came in one day and told him, “They’re getting an article published in ‘Nature’ set to come out in April.”

“That’s great!” shouted Phillip as he went about his work around the bar.

True to his word, one day in early May, Jangle came in with the scientific journal, ‘Nature’, under his arm. “Look!” he shouted to Phillip as he opened the volume to page 737 and Phillip saw a one-page article, titled: “Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids.” Phillip was lost. He admitted that it was way over his head even after Jangle gave him an explanation.

“So, this is the secret of life,” Phillip remarked as he went on to wait other customers.

Years later, Jangle dropped by and told him, “It looks like the lads have made it big from that article in ‘Nature’. They’re getting the Nobel Prize for medicine.”

Phillip looked at the man in total astonishment. “All that from a one-page article. I don’t believe it. Wait till I tell Gertrude!”



Temptation By Jamie White

Temptation. It’s a hard thing to resist as a kid. How do you pass up an empty house full of old stories just waiting to be explored? Lauren and her friend Grace had heard stories about the house down the street from them for as long as they could remember. Rumor had it a witch once lived there and after she moved out, no one wanted anything to do with the place again.

Until now, none of the kids in the neighborhood had the guts to do more than point and whisper at the run-down house that had become such an eyesore, the neighborhood association were always talking about what to do with the place. Who wanted an abandoned property on their street?

Laura and Grace didn’t mind, though. They’d made up their minds one morning that they were going to be the first kids on the whole block to check the place out. It would get them all kinds of cool points, something that means everything when you’re in school.

They waited until after dinner so they’d have a better chance of not getting caught. As soon as their parents sent them up to bed, the girls snuck out of their bedroom windows and met outside the mysterious house. They snuck

around the back of the property and tested the windows and back door. To their surprise, one of the kitchen windows had a broken latch and they were able to open it easily.

Grace peeked through the window, scanning the room for several minutes before she was satisfied no one was hiding within and snuck into the kitchen with Lauren following close behind. A musty odor assaulted their nostrils as they made their way across the floor. Lauren coughed as she inhaled some dust and Grace turned around to give her a nasty look.

“Quiet,” she hissed. “You don’t want anyone to hear us, do you?”

Lauren narrowed her eyes and stood up straighter. “Who’s going to hear us? No one lives here, duh.”

“So? Someone could be walking by. Come on, let’s try the other room.”

The two girls had no sooner stepped through the kitchen door than the sound of the front door greeted their ears. The girls turned to look at each other with wide eyes before racing back into the kitchen. As they fumbled their way out of the window and ran home, an unspoken agreement passed between them.

No one was going to know they’d failed.



By CP Bialois/Ed White

**The Winter Creek Hunter
Excerpt by CP Bialois coming to
amazon.com May 15, 2015**

Prologue

A gunshot rang out, echoing off the surrounding hills lining two sides of the valley. Blake Mathews remained unmoving as he watched the man in a light blue jean shirt and dark blue jeans stumble before falling facedown into a stream.

Judging the man's position, Blake felt certain his mark was dead, and if not, he'd drown in a couple of minutes. Never one to risk his wellbeing more than necessary, Blake looked through the scope and rested the black crosshairs on the center of the man's back and fired again. The man's body jerked slightly from the high-powered rifle's bullet, but that was it.

He's dead.

That simple deduction caused Blake to pause in thought. After he'd take the body to the authorities and collected his reward, he would head out to gather information about his next mark. The twenty thousand he just earned was enough for him to take a long vacation, but he loved his work too much to stop. Besides, it wasn't

everyday he was given a silver bullet to use *and* offered a hundred thousand. All he had to do was find and kill some monster a couple hundred miles away.

Hell, he reasoned, I wouldn't have heard of Winter Creek until now if it hadn't been for those killings.

Chapter One

Jay Lightfeather stepped out into the cold mountain air and took a deep breath. Winter had come to the small town of Winter Creek with little fanfare except for the town's year-old tourist industry slowing to a crawl. Like many of the townsfolk, Jay was uncomfortable with the town's sudden popularity. They were a small town that preferred to stay that way without all the undue attention the larger cities got. Sure, the local businesses flourished, but that was the only boon he saw.

With the year's first snowfall the previous weekend came his relief. The mountain roads were treacherous this time of year, and, aside from the main highway, weren't always plowed and cindered. The state left the back roads' upkeep to the town, and Winter Creek really only plowed the roads needed due to the cost. The result became a four-wheel drive or snowmobile heaven.

He couldn't help but glance to the sky in silent thanks. The snowfall was light, but it gave him an excuse to close the more dangerous roads to outsiders looking for the Beast.

Maybe now things can return to normal around here.

He knew the thought was wishful thinking. Reporters continued to call and ask if there

were any more Beast sightings, if he knew of any more out there, or for his comment on the killings yet again. It didn't help that Edith Baxter, the sheriff's office's dispatcher and resident mother hen, had been reading and sharing insights into ancient cultures and how they cremated their dead while trying to get him to quit smoking by talking him into only using matches to light up. It was as though everyone were trying to drive him insane.

Of all the people in town, Edith was the only one never to bring the Beast up to him. For that, he was grateful and kept quiet during her "educating" him. He hated the knowing look she had when looking at him. It felt like she could see into his soul...

Jay shook his head, chasing away the thought before it could grow into something more than a passing irritation. Taking his cigarette pack from the breast pocket of his dark blue shirt, he shook one out, then felt in his other pocket for his matches.

His search only lasted a few seconds and he sparked a flame with a quick flick of the match against the striker part of the pack. This was the first time he had a chance to really relax since the killings had stopped. Even the white glow of the Sheriff's Office sign behind him wasn't as harsh as it had seemed a moment before.

The sheriff office's door opened and closed behind him, but it was the high-pitched voice that caught his attention.

"Sweet Lord Almighty! It's cold out here, don't you think, Sheriff?" Edith exclaimed.

Jay couldn't help but smile. "It is that, Edith. Cold as a witch's teat."

She slapped his arm as she reached him, scolding, "Now you'd best mind your language. You ain't too old to be put over my knee."

He chuckled while taking a drag on his cigarette. "And I bet you're just the one to do it, too."

"You know it." The corner of Edith's mouth twitched upwards, betraying her good humor. Following the death of her husband to cancer a few years before, she'd taken on a positive outlook and boosted Jay's mood whenever she was around him.

A brown pickup truck with a white cap on the back pulled into the two spaces next to Jay's Jeep, interrupting their conversation. In years past, Jay would've taken umbrage with someone coming to the sheriff's office in such a manner, but he learned the out-of-towners never learned. It was as though only the people of Winter Creek were taught manners.

A tall bear of a man opened the truck door and climbed out. "You Sheriff Lightfeather?" The man's beer belly was as large as a tire under his black and orange checkered jacket and his sparse reddish beard and narrow eyes gave Jay the impression he was a rat without a tail.

Jay heard Edith mutter something about Loons (the townsfolk's nickname for tourists), but he chose to ignore her for the moment. Nodding, Jay took a final pull on his cigarette before dropping it to the ground and stepping on it. "I am."

The man's face split into a wide grin, which only served to narrow

his eyes further. "Damned glad to meet you." He extended his hand. "I'm Blake Mathews."

Jay took the offered hand, but froze as the man's name registered. "You don't mean, 'No Trial' Mathews?"

Blake nodded, taking joy in hearing the nickname. "The one and only. I mean to collect on a bounty and I heard you're the man to check with. I always like to make nice with the local authorities."

Though he didn't know why, Jay had the feeling he wouldn't like the answer to his next question. "What bounty?"

"Why, the bounty that's on that creature been doing the killing around these parts."

This was the first time Jay heard anything about a bounty. He wondered if any family members of the Beast's victims had quietly put one out. He let out a slow, deliberate breath before saying, "I don't know how to tell you this, but whatever did the killing is gone. Has been for a year now."

Blake shrugged. "Maybe it is, maybe it ain't. That's why I'm here. I intend to find it." He fished in his jean's pocket before pulling out, then tossing a piece of metal to Jay.

Jay caught the object and looked it over. It was a silver bullet. When he looked up, Blake's expression appeared more like a shark than a rat.

"Thing is, Sheriff, I don't think it was a bear. And neither do you. Am I right?"

Jay looked back down at the bullet before shrugging and tossing it back to its owner. "It won't shoot

worth a lick, unless you're in a *Lone Ranger* serial."

"You need me, Jay?" Edith's voice was low and took on a protective quality Jay had grown accustomed to hearing over the last year.

Jay shook his head. "No, you go on home. See you in the morning." He was grateful for her leaving so he could think better. No matter how often he told himself otherwise, he was sure she knew about what had happened last year in the mountains.

Blake waited a few seconds before shrugging. "All right then. I've been staying at the Look Out Lodge if you decide you want to help." With a finger to the bill of his baseball cap, Blake turned and headed back to his truck.

Jay watched him for a second before opening his Jeep's door. Once he was sitting in his Jeep, he thought about what Blake had said. *Been staying?* Nothing about the wording or intention behind it made him feel comfortable. The last thing he wanted was for a bounty hunter digging around for the Beast. Men like Blake Mathews had a reputation for tenacity that intimidated criminals and law enforcement officials alike. The last thing Jay wanted was for him to be searching through the mountains. The out-of-towners were city folk hobbyists. Mathews was a professional.

As he started the motor and waited for the engine to warm up, his mind went to the gravesite where he buried the boy and he hoped the weather would keep Blake from going that high into the mountains until he could do some checking of his own. Winter Creek

suddenly felt a lot smaller and colder.

Blake watched the Sheriff through his side mirror while chewing on his tongue. He was used to having the locals react a certain way, but this time he expected something more. What, he couldn't say. He did see some shock, but whether that was due to the silver bullet or something more he didn't know.

He thought of himself as being a good judge of character, but he couldn't get a handle on Jay. Just when he thought a crack had formed in the Sheriff's exterior, he watched it close. *Something about him ain't right.*

Turning his attention back to the road, he put the bullet he still held into one of his pockets. Maybe the woman that hired him was right and there was more to the town than met the eye. It was something he had trouble accepting despite the information he'd been given. The deciding factor was the lack of evidence he could find. It was either a hoax or the real deal. Until he could find proof that the Beast was a rogue animal, he would treat each of the townspeople as a possible supernatural creature. He hated to admit it, but he knew his pa wouldn't look too kindly on him for chasing fairy tales. Not that it mattered much to him. Until the money stopped flowing his way, he would approach the problem like he did any other.

He was trying to figure out a list of possibilities while driving when he reached the side road leading out of the town and into the mountains. It was only wide enough for one and a half cars to pass

along side one another, but it served his purpose. As was his way, he'd been in town for a week to learn the lay of the land. During that time he located all of the side roads and their destinations. This one, simply named Lee's Way, was the back way to the base of the nearest part of the mountains. It connected to the main road by the river the town was named after and near a hiking trail.

Until the last couple of days, he'd blended in with the other people flooding the town. It had worked out for him as he was able to pick out those he thought simple or stupid enough to wander off and get attacked. While not having any of the armchair naturalists getting into an accident was a good thing, he was disappointed. So much for blind luck and natural selection.

With the out-of-towners all but gone overnight and his first idea a wash, Blake was more in his element. He thought the Beast a rogue, wandering from place to place to kill, but now he wasn't so sure. Signs of large animals were all over, but none that matched the photographed footprints from the murder scenes he had been sent. That meant it was still in the area or dead.

Blake brought his truck to a stop just before the back road combined with the main road and turned off the engine. He liked to come there to think, and this time he really needed the seclusion. He was sure one of the townspeople had to be the Beast, but whom?

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Portal Poetry Corner

My Secret Storm By Yvonne J. Edwards

I'm walled in with sorrow up to my head
Deep anguish around me spread
Muddled and confused I tried booze instead
But the tempest blew harder overhead
And it filled my heart with dread

Sorrow, much sorrow shut me in
Drenching my soul from within
I must rise above my sorrow
Because it pierced me like an arrow
Causing me a broken heart
And it's tearing me apart

Amid the storms of my life
I see a great divide
Pushing me to commit suicide
But out from the pit of helplessness
God's voice spoke with boldness
"You need a change in circumstance
A thorough transformation
To point you to a new direction."

Nothing is too hard for me to overcome
No one knew what I can become
If I go down I will rise again
I know I'll be at the helm
Rising higher than my fears
Rising higher than my cares
I'll trust in God to remove all my tears

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:

May 11, June 8, July 13, Aug 10, Sept 14, Oct 12, Nov 9, and Dec 14.

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**Happy
“Author”
Birthdays**

Arnold Lobel 5/22



Ian Fleming 5/28



Margaret Wise Brown

5/23



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