

The Portal

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short stories and poems**

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stories/poems
in Spanish!**

Fall Edition



Bait's A Bitin'

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

Charlie Robertson spent his entire twelve years in the small town of Portsmouth, Rhode Island. From as far back as he could remember, his older brother Chris was always at his side, showing him the ropes and teaching him everything there was to know about how to catch a Largemouth Bass. That morning was the first day Charlie planned to fish by himself at the small lake near his home. With

several houses around it, the lake was the central hub on their community and the neighborhood childrens' favorite place to go during the summer. For countless hours, Charlie and his brother would swim in the cool, refreshing water. In many ways, the lake was another friend to him. One he felt he could always count on for fun and food.

At an early age, Chris taught him to use nightcrawler worms for fishing because they were the fattest and juiciest bait one could ever hope to use. So out of a desire to be a great fisherman like his older brother, Charlie woke before the sun rose in the East so he could catch himself a large bucketful of nightcrawlers. To be sure he'd be ready, he made sure a tin bucket and a garden spade were set aside just inside the shed's door. As luck would have it, the shed sat behind his house and was hidden from sight by a short line of bushes. Before he could leave the house, Charlie snuck into his parent's room to borrow his father's flashlight. Without it, the pail and shovel were useless until the sun rose, but then it'd be too late to catch any good bait. Having secured the flashlight, Charlie closed the door to his parent's room and made his way out the back door. Once outside, he stifled a giggle at how easy it'd been. He imagined himself to be one of those robbers on TV, except he didn't have to worry about the police since it was his house and he was only borrowing the items.

Minutes after his daring "theft", Charlie began searching for his prized bait. Chris told him nightcrawlers were lightning fast, so Charlie would have to be just as quick to grab them. The nightcrawlers burrowed to the surface of the ground and into the

night air during the summer and spring nights. Usually, they kept half their body hidden under the ground so they could escape any predators that may be after them. Chris explained to Charlie that once the light from his flashlight settled on one, it'd shoot back underground so fast it'd make his head spin. If one's quick enough to grab the nightcrawler, the trick was to just hold it and not try to pull it out of the ground right away. The large worms extend small hairs into the surrounding walls of their tunnel so firmly that if you pulled on them, they'd rip in half. After he held the worm for a few seconds, it would release its hold on the earth and he could then pull it free.

Always one to pride himself of being a good student, Charlie did just as he'd been instructed but his morning hadn't started out with much luck. The first few worms he spotted did just what Chris said they would. Each time, the nightcrawlers disappeared underground without a moment's hesitation. He took great pains not to become frustrated when he failed on his first few tries. In time, his determination paid off as he was able to gather a small handful, though he thought it smart to ask his brother why the small hairs in their one end hurt so much. The worms he found dug their hairs into his right hand like they were trying to push themselves away. The pain was intense but Charlie couldn't wimp out, his friends would tease him mercilessly if he did. Being the inquisitive and tough young boy he was, Charlie remained determined to prove his skills equal to those of his older brother. Besides, the pain seemed to die away after a few minutes and he was sure he just needed to rinse it off in the cool waters of the lake.

Frustrated with the trouble the few night crawlers he caught had given him, Charlie began the short walk to the lake as the sun began to rise in the East.

Once he reached the lake, Charlie wasted no time in washing his hands in the cool water and the burning feeling slowly passed, though he began to feel a little light-headed. He sat back a moment and gazed out over the calm water of the lake. The sun managed to slip through the protective shelter of trees on the lake's edge and the light reflected off the water in a blinding brilliance. Charlie let himself enjoy the early morning light for a few moments as he thought about his brother and how much Chris would enjoy seeing such a beautiful sunrise.

Charlie smiled at the thought before turning his attention to the old rusty pail he had at his side. "Hey! Where do you think yer goin'?" To Charlie's horror, some of his bait had begun to attempt escape as they tried to climb up the smooth sides of the pail. He gave the pail a gentle shake, just enough to cause his bait to fall back into the bottom of the can. *Time to get to business*, he thought as he readied his fishing pole. It was a phrase he'd learned from his father who uttered it whenever there was work to be done. His fishing pole was his pride and joy. Charlie's granddad made it for his father when he was a boy and it was then passed to Chris, then from Chris to him. Made out of hickory, it was Charlie's prized possession. With slow deliberation, Charlie stuck his hook into the largest of the nightcrawlers he caught. He thought it odd the worm thrashed around the way it had and with an audible "ouch", Charlie sucked on one of his

fingers. He must've gotten stuck by some of the hairs again.

Irritated the morning had started off so rough; Charlie cast his line into the water and waited. His little plastic red and white bobber moved from side to side but nothing that resembled a real nibble. He thought it more likely his bait was trying to get off his hook. He could understand why, having a hook stuck through your middle wouldn't be much fun. He continued watching his bobber until it settled down, but Charlie felt very tired and cold. That was a strange thing, since he was always being told he could never sit still and the morning was warm. He almost nodded off, but just when his grip began to loosen on his pole a sound in the brush behind him caught his attention. Although he was sleepy, he turned to face the man standing there and smiling down at him.

"Morning. Anything bittin'?" There were few things Paul Lansky enjoyed more than a morning walk around the lake. He doubted there was a more peaceful and serene place in the entire world. It never surprised him to see others at the lake enjoying themselves, but few ventured out so early in the morning. The sight of the young boy caused him to smile, he was a cute kid.

Charlie returned the man's smile as best he could, but it was difficult. When he shook his head, it ached like he'd bumped it against something very hard. "No sir, but the bait is."

Paul looked at him with an amused, but confused look. "What's that, son?"

Charlie nodded towards his small rusty pail and showed his right hand to the man with its numerous red marks and blisters on

it. "My bait is. Chris says night crawlers have hairs they use to lock themselves in the ground. I guess that's what got me."

Paul looked at the boy's hand as his heart caught in his throat. He quickly looked at the small pail the boy motioned to. Even though he knew what he would see, his eyes still widened in surprise at the four Copperhead snakes trying to climb out. At least they were just babies. If he'd picked up an adult... Paul's eyes returned to Charlie's hand. "Did they get you very often?"

Charlie tried to think, his head hurt and he wanted to close his eyes. "Yeah, five... six times maybe." He paused for a few seconds, "Mister, I don't feel very good. Could you call my folks? We live right over there." He tried to point but his left arm wouldn't rise.

Due to his daily walks Paul had become quite a nature lover. In fact, he'd become good at identifying certain animals with no more than a glimpse. Copperheads were poisonous, especially to children and the elderly, and they could be found all over the place around the lake. The fact that the boy found a nest and lived that long gave him some hope. For the life of him, he couldn't remember if Copperhead young were as deadly as the adults. That question he left to the experts as he reached down and picked the boy up as gently as he could.

"C'mon son, we'd best get you home." Paul carried Charlie the quarter mile to the boy's house. As a rule, Paul didn't carry a cell phone. He didn't even have a phone in his house, so the only hope for the boy was if they could get to a phone in time. That hope was gone by the time he reached Charlie's house. The young boy died while still a short distance from

his home. While his parents and brother were upset and helped each other, Paul couldn't help thinking about how the impetuosity of a naive boy led him to think Copperheads were nightcrawlers.



Double Indemnity
By Jamie White

<http://www.jamiebmusings.webs.com>

Intro: This was from a challenge where you had to write one of the worst things a character did to someone and then write it again from the other character's POV, plotting what they'll do in revenge.

Katie

There are times I just don't know what the hell is wrong with me. It's like I have some mental defect that renders me completely incapable of not screwing up. Open mouth, insert foot— that's pretty much a typical day in my life and it sucks.

My friends always said my mouth was going to get me in big trouble one day. I had no idea it would end up costing me my best friend. I swear, I wish I knew why I am such a ditz. If I knew maybe I could stop myself from doing it again.

It was a pretty innocent thing, really. I was in the bathroom before

classes one morning getting ready for the day. Sarah always used to bring me clothes to change into since my parents are clueless about how actual people dress. They hate makeup too, which is another reason why I always make a stop there. Excuse me... made a stop there. Not much point anymore. It's not like Sarah's going to be there to bring me one of her shirts or something.

Anyway, I'd just walked out the door in an attempt to get to class before the bell rang when I ran into Leah. She's the most popular girl in the school... mostly because she's rich and people want stuff from her. It's definitely not for her winning personality. The books I was trying to balance in my rush tumbled to the ground with a thud and the papers I'd slipped inside flew all over the place.

"What the hell? Why don't you watch where you're going, you little freak."

Typical. Of course Leah would blame it on me. God knows she's too perfect to be the one at fault. I mumbled an apology and started gathering up papers without even looking up at her. There wasn't a point anyway. It's not like she was going to apologize back and help or anything. I figured she was already long gone, getting ready to tell the whole school about what an inept klutz I am.

I finished gathering the papers and raced down the hall, still hoping that I'd be able to make it in time. I guess whatever deity out there is in charge wasn't listening, because the bell rang almost a full minute before I got to the door of my math class.

I walked in the room and took my seat as I tried to pretend Miss Priss wasn't sitting a few feet away. I opened my book and began reading along with the teacher. The class is a real snore. She seriously sits and reads the text and that's about it. Have you actually sat and listened to someone recite the quadratic formula? It's a wonder I make it through each day without seriously humiliating myself by falling asleep. My friends say I snore. Like a buzz saw.

Fifteen minutes into the class, I could tell I was in trouble. I heard a couple of whispers coming from my left. Trying not to be conspicuous, I snuck a glance over and saw Miss Priss and her groupies talking. They weren't being inconspicuous. They might as well have stood up and told the whole class about it for all the effort they made to hide the fact they were laughing at me. I just couldn't figure out what I did.

The small book being passed around made my stomach lurch and I had to fight the urge to get up and run out of the room. What were they doing with my journal? I'd started keeping it last year and I record everything in it: All the embarrassments, all the good things, my thoughts. There is nothing I don't put in that book. Having so few friends kind of sets you up for being the introspective type. It wasn't until I thought of the few friends I have that I really freaked out.

For all the time we'd spent together, there was a lot I didn't know about Sarah. Until last night, I had no idea that her parents were a mess. They put on a great front, but they spend most of their time running scams. She'd been keeping it quiet for so long she needed

someone to unload on and it happened to be me. Talk about a bad move.

It got worse later on. By lunch, the whole school knew about her con artist family and they were doing everything they could to throw it in her face. She ended up going home sick, so I decided to stop by and see how she was doing.

I knocked on the door and held my breath as I said a silent prayer that she wouldn't be angry with me. The door opened and there was Sarah, standing there giving me a look that would've made Miss Priss run for the hills.

"You get the hell away from my house and don't you even think about coming around here again."

With that, she slammed the door in my face and I was left standing on the porch, my mouth hanging open in shock. I turned around and walked back to the sidewalk, then made a left toward my house. The cool air brushed my skin as the silence of the evening wrapped itself around me like a python. I couldn't breathe as the full impact of what I'd done hit me. One stupid entry in that little book I'd been carrying around for years had just turned a friend's world upside down and there was nothing I could do about it.

So much for prayer.

Sarah

I should've known better that to trust that little wench. That's what I get for being such a wuss instead of letting the losers fend for themselves. I've known Katie my entire life, but she never really knew me. Not really. She never knew about everything my parents pulled

to afford all the fancy crap they think means something.

And they say we're the immature ones. At least I know better than to pull scams and think I can get away with it forever. The latest one was the worst. I mean, I didn't like it, but I could deal when they were selling worthless crap to people who believed they were getting some priceless antiques. I could even handle them occasionally dabbling in pirated movies. All that stuff sucked, but somehow I could do as they said and keep my mouth shut.

Then I found out they were getting donations for some phony charity that was supposed to be helping kids. They were all over the local press with it and people ate that crap up. They couldn't do enough to help these awesome people who were trying to do a good thing.

What a crock. It started eating at me and I had to tell someone, ya know? You'd think my best friend could let me unload and keep her damn mouth shut but no. She had to go write about the whole thing in that stupid book of hers. The whole rest of the day, people were treating me like a leper. It was horrible and the worst part is, I didn't even do anything. Not really. I mean, what are you supposed to do when your parents tell you to keep yourself quiet? The last thing I needed was complicating my life any more that it already is.

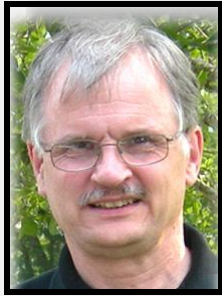
Who even writes in a freaking journal anyway? So lame. And it takes a special kind of stupid to write about someone else's problems and then carry it around with you. All I can think about is knocking that stupid look off her face to teach her a lesson. It's times

like these I wish I had special powers like characters on TV, like Piper from *Charmed*. I can just picture the look on her face now as she stares at what's left of her stupid phone that she loves so much. It's her favorite thing, so of course that's what I'd blow up. Or maybe I could destroy her bike... she never goes a day without riding that thing. Yeah, that'd be good. She'd think twice about blabbing then.

Of course, there's always the humiliation route. I could sabotage her clothes while she's in gym class. Stupid wench probably doesn't remember she gave me her locker combination. Even if she did, she'd never imagine I would actually do anything to her stuff. It would serve her right though. Thanks to her not only does everyone in school hate me, but my parents are being investigated. I'm probably going to end up at my grandparent's house out in the middle of nowhere. It's not like I know them even. I see them maybe two times a year if that and now they're the closest relatives who can take me if my parents get busted.

Why did she have to write about it, damn it!? Why did I even trust her to start with? Live and learn, I guess. From now on, I trust no one but me. It's a lot safer that way.





**Pundit
By Rick Weber**

I have never been at a loss for words or ideas but I think that day has come. I am sitting in my office which used to be a mother-in-law apartment over our garage with my blank, yes blank, sketch pad in hand. My life as an editorial cartoonist has been good to me. The walls in my office are covered with some of my best works, which earned me accolades and recognition. Today, however, I cannot come up with anything to draw about, a unique situation for me, because it never happened before and I have a deadline to meet. What am I to do?

I hear the door open at the bottom of the stairs and a voice calls out, "Brian, Brian...." It's my wife, Ann.

"I'm up here."

The door closes, followed by the sound of her coming up into my domain.

"Yes?" I ask in a long drawn out tone.

"I'm on my way to work but I need to do some errands today," Ann says with a slight panting in her voice.

"Can't they wait until tomorrow? I got to get my cartoon in today for the Sunday edition."

She just glares. "What have you been doing up here for the past week?" and really lays into me.

"These things have to be done today. I've been tied up at the office. Otherwise, I would have done them myself. Your suit has to go to the dry cleaner today if you want it back in time for the awards dinner next week. The mortgage has to be paid at the bank if we don't want to incur a late fee. You also have to have to mail some other bills for the same reason. We don't have any stamps which means you have to go to the post office. Last, your prescription ran out and you have to get it refilled at the pharmacy."

I am now speechless and bow begrudgingly to her demands. "Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it. I have to get a move on before I get stuck in traffic. Don't hold dinner. I'm going to be late." Without further comment, she turns and bounds down the stairs and into the garage. I hear her car back out and the door close.

"GREAT!" I shout out loud. "Now, I have multiple deadlines to meet before the sun sets."

I look at the clock above my drafting table. It's just after eight. I best get moving, too, if I want to accomplish anything today.

My first stop is the dry cleaner. They are already open.

"Good morning, Mr. Volk. Just dropping off?" I hear the owner greet me.

"Just dropping off today, Adil," I respond. "How's everything going?"

"To be honest, not very well," the Indian proprietor informs me. "Things have been slow. I think, maybe, because it is summer. I hope things pick up after Labor Day."

Ann and I have patronized his shop for years and have gotten to know him and his wife, Bhakti. They run this place by themselves

with no employees. They raised three sons, who are now all grown with lives of their own.

"Once vacations are over, kids are back in school, and parents are back to work, I'm sure then business will pick up," I say to lift his spirits.

Adil just smiles and tells me, "I hope so. Bhakti and I are here twelve hours a day, sometimes more, to get what work we have done. We'd like to retire someday but, I don't see that anytime soon."

I can only nod and bid him some parting words before I am off to my next stop.

I pull up to our town's post office to see the postmaster, Jim, raising the American flag on the pole out front.

"Brian, you're the first customer of the day," he greets me as we go inside. Behind the counter, he logs on to his machine and asks, "What do you have today?"

I go through the pile of letters Ann left me and say just these as I pass them to Jim, "Just these."

"Anything perishable, fragile, next day, or need delivery confirmations?" he asks me in quick Postal Service script.

"No, first class should be good on all these letters but, I do need a book of stamps," I respond and ask. "Are expecting a quiet day?"

Jim just looks up as he cancels the letters I brought in and says to me, "They don't call these the dog days for nothing, hot and slow, and I don't foresee our business picking up anytime soon. The internet has got us beat. People send emails instead of letters, shop for clothes, and even pay their bills on line. I do the same things myself. Our main bosses in DC want us to stay open later during the week but are also

closing some branches. I hope they keep this one open.”

“I hope so, too,” I tell him but, I cannot say much more because several other customers have lined up behind me with a number of packages to mail. “It looks like you have job security here,” as I turn to leave after Jim handed me my receipt and stamp book.

I get to the bank and am lucky again not to have people waiting in the teller line ahead of me. I hear a voice call out to me, “Can I help you?”

I step up to the window to see a new girl working there. She’s young in her early twenties. Her name tag has “Lois” on it.

“I just want to pay this,” I say as I hand her our check and the monthly mortgage bill.

“I’ll be glad to handle this for you,” Lois tells me with a genuine smile on her face.

As she processes my payment, I ask her, “Will it show as being paid today? I don’t want it to be late.”

“You’re good, Mr. Volk,” she reassures me. “It’s already in the system as ‘paid’. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“No, Lois, you’ve been very helpful. You have a good Labor Day weekend.”

“I have to work on Saturday so a long weekend is out for me even though we’re closed on Monday but, I am not complaining. I’m just glad to have a job,” she says still smiling. “I graduated college in May. This was the only position I could find. Most of my friends from school are still looking for work.”

“Well, at least enjoy the holiday,” I say returning a smile as I head out the door.

“I will,” I hear Lois say from over my shoulder.

My last stop is the pharmacy to get my blood pressure medication refilled. “Who would think that a cartoonist would have hypertension?” I have asked myself many times.

A couple of elderly people are in front of me as I wait for Ira, the pharmacist, whose family started the business long before Ann and I moved into town.

When my turn comes, I hear Ira say, “Brian, what brings you in today?”

“I just need to get this refilled,” I reply handing him my empty prescription vial.

“No problem. I can have this ready for you in ten minutes.”

“Good, I’ll just peruse your magazine rack while I wait.”

During the intervening time, I looked through some periodicals but nothing struck my interest. I look around the store and saw only one customer, a teenage girl at the cosmetics counter.

“All set,” I hear Ira shout to me from the back of the drug store.

As I pull some cash out of my wallet to pay him, I remark, “Looks quiet in here today.”

“It’s been that way for a while,” Ira explains. “That big drug chain opened up a place outside of town in July and our business has fallen off a bit. We’re lucky. We still are a compound pharmacy. Most of the big places only handle drugs that are readily available. If a patient needs a special medication, they can’t process the order. When that happens, those patients come to us. We get people coming from all over for special medications. For us, it’s a godsend and it keeps our doors open.”

I tell Ira that I am on a deadline for work and head home.

Back in my office, I am sitting on a stool in front of the drafting table with a number two pencil in my hand. As I think about my cartoon which is due also today, the inspiration hits me. I pull out a sheet of twenty-four pound bright laser paper and begin to sketch.

The drawing takes shape. It will not be one of the outrageous ones which made me popular among my peers. This one will be simple and direct.

At the center of the page, I sketch an easel with a blank canvass on it. Around the border, I make drawings of the things I encountered today. In one corner, I illustrate a hot head dry cleaning press with a man operating it. In another corner, I sketch a mortar and pestle. In the third corner, I have an old fashioned teller cage and, in the fourth corner, I put in a mail box with its red flag raised. In the rest of the border, I put in tools and symbols from various occupations laid out from hammers to stethoscopes, hardhats to toques, moving vans to ambulances.

In the center of the page on the blank canvass sitting on the easel, I finish my drawing with these words to those who work for us:

“THANK YOU!”

My cartoon is finished and through the miracles of modern technology, I send in to my editor in time for its Sunday publication the day before Labor Day.





The Dinner That Wasn't There By Joanne Williams

Jorge and Maxine were on their honeymoon on a beautiful tropical island near Bermuda. Standing outside of their resort, they looked at the pictures in an island brochure.

"At last, Jorge, we are here, together on this beautiful island. I love it, don't you?" Maxine asked.

"Yes, I like it too, want to go check out the scenery?" said Jorge.

Maxine smiles and nodded yes. They decided to start the morning walk down a street near the beach. There were tiki huts on the left and the beach on the right. They both wore blue green shorts and shirts to match. Jorge had on a straw hat and a camera around his neck. Maxine slipped on lightly tinted sunglasses.

As they walked down the street, Jorge was snapping photos at almost everything: the birds in the sky, the drummers and dancers, the colorful banners. He asks people to take pictures of him and his wife in front of the landmarks that they adore.

"Jorge, I need to run to the restroom for a minute, I'll be right back." said Maxine.

"OK Hun, I will be here," he said. Jorge spotted a bird he wanted to get a picture of. As he put his camera into focus, he is nearly

knocked off of his feet by a man who bumped into him on this right side. Jorge quickly catches his balance and yells, "What the heck are you doing man?"

"I am so sorry, I didn't see you there," the man said as he waved his hands.

"You need to be more careful and watch where you are going! If my camera would've gotten messed up, you would be paying a lot of money to fix it", Jorge said.

Jorge noticed that the man was around five and a half feet tall; wearing a long sleeved light brown shirt and pants, which he thought was strange for a hot day.

In an accent, the man said, "Listen, for my apology I would like to give you this flyer to come and eat a free meal at my hotel restaurant. It's located at the end of this street in the corner on the left."

"Apology accepted," Jorge said as he took the flyer. As he read it, he notices that there was no name of the restaurant on the flyer. Jorge turns around again and the man in brown was gone.

Maxine finally exits out of the bathroom and catches up with her husband. "Did I miss anything?" she asks.

"Yeah, I almost drop kicked this man for nearly knocking my camera down." Jorge said.

"Knocking the camera? What about you? Are you ok?" Maxine asks.

"Yeah, I guess."

Later on that day Maxine said, "I'm getting hungry; do you know where we can eat that's decent?"

Jorge answers, "Well, the guy that I told you about gave me this flyer to get free dinner at his hotel restaurant."

"What's the name?" asks Maxine.

"I didn't get a chance to ask the guy before he left; he did say that it was down the street in the corner on the left," Jorge said, pointing in that direction.

The couple walks down the street, looking for the hotel. When they turn the corner they see a three story hotel building painted yellow and blue. It had tall windows on the outside and double doors for the entrance. Jorge opened the door and the couple walks inside. They were greeted by a tall man in the same light brown outfit as the man who bumped into Jorge earlier that day. The restaurant was empty. The couple sat next to the window and given menus. Maxine orders the lobster with butter while her husband dined on crab. The dinner meal was the best they'd ever had.

Satisfied, the couple left a healthy tip and headed out the door. Before they can reach the exit, they hear someone call out, "hello". The couple turned around and Jorge noticed that it was the man from earlier that day still dressed in light brown.

The man asks "How did you enjoy your visit?"

"It was great. I wanted to ask you, what is the name of this Hotel?" Jorge asks.

The man looks at the couple, smiles and slowly says, "The Kalodge."

Jorge looks at him and added, "Thank you sir, but you are one weird dude."

The man smiled as the couple exited the hotel.

"Hey Maxine", said Jorge, "Why don't we get someone to take a picture of us in front of the restaurant?"

"Sounds good," Maxine replied.

The couple saw the person who greeted them at the door and asks if

he would take their picture. They poses arm in arm in front of the hotel and the greeter snapped a picture.

The next afternoon, Jorge and Maxine set out for their walk again. Jorge took pictures of everything as they walked. "I'm feeling a little hungry. Are you?" Jorge asked. "Yes, why don't we go back to the Kalodge?" said Maxine.

They headed in the direction of the hotel. As they turned down the same corner on the left, they looked puzzled. There was no hotel, only an empty lot.

"Are we on the right street?" asked Jorge. The couple spotted a passerby and asked him where the hotel was.

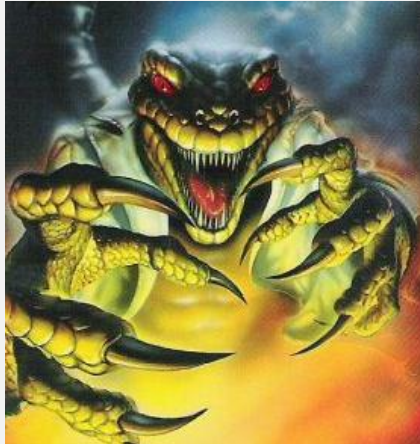
The passerby gave them an odd smile, "What hotel?"

"The Kalodge," said Jorge.

"Sir, that hotel burned down years ago, and all the staff died in that fire."

"Impossible! We ate there last night. Look, here is the picture!" said Jorge.

Jorge and Maxine both sighed in disbelief as they saw themselves in the picture, but no hotel building, only an empty lot.



The Trip Home By DiVitto Kelly

It was already past midnight. Chris Wolfe, age 44, was returning home to Okeechobee, Florida from a job interview up in Atlanta. Things were looking desperate for the unemployed city computer programmer, out of work for half a year. He'd been scouring job sites ever since the Orange County commissioners decided to Ginzu the town budget.

To save money, Wolfe slept in his car overnight in a nearby park, conserving every dollar he had for gas, food, and tolls. The next morning, Wolfe felt rejuvenated after downing a pair of Strawberry frosted Pop Tarts and large orange juice stored in his cooler. He needed this job.

The interview went well, he thought. Two of the three interviewers were fair and professional, while the other treated the experience like the 'dentist' scene from the film, Marathon Man -- the only thing missing was the drill.

Wolfe laid on the knowledge; the two women were impressed. The lone man, short, skinny and skeezy, kept delving into his past work experience. Still, Wolfe handled the

interrogation well and walked out feeling optimistic.

"We'll contact you by the end of the week," said the plump middle-aged woman, her locks dyed in Bozo the Clown orange. Wolfe heard that phrase in past interviews a few times too many – close, but not enough.

It rained most of the trip home. The tires weren't so hot on his '89 Volvo wagon, still running strong with a quarter of a million miles. Lately, Wolfe patted the dashboard every time it started up. He looked down at his watch. "One in the morning; God, I've got two more hours to go."

Up ahead, he noticed a trail of breaking red lights; the traffic backing up in a hurry. "What now?"

He turned on the radio and shifted the knob, searching for a traffic update. A tractor trailer overturned, snarling up the four-lane highway for what could be hours.

"What a suck," he said, slapping the dashboard. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it Volvie!"

He skirted off the next exit, determined to at least keep moving like a shark. Wolfe despised traffic jams, becoming claustrophobic in a heartbeat.

The rural road ran parallel to the railroad tracks, a sure sign of podunkness he thought. Wolfe popped open another Coke, trying to stay awake. He rolled down the window; the chilled wind giving him an instant wake up call. The desolate stretch of road meandered before hitting a straight line for miles. The rural darkness felt uneasy. Maybe he should have stuck to the highway.

He began counting houses. Mile after mile there were maybe three or four, set back too far to matter.



Just as he turned on the radio, something darted across the two lane road. A split-second later, the front passenger tire blew out. The car swerved violently. Wolfe applied the brakes lightly before spiraling off the road.

“Dammit,” he said before unbuckling the seatbelt. The putrid stench of burnt rubber flowed into the car. Wolfe stepped out, pausing for a moment before noticing a low rolling fog creeping over the palmetto scrub on both sides of the road.

He reached back into the car for the rechargeable flashlight stored in the glove compartment. He grabbed it like a squirt gun and revved the handle over and over. “Ah, let there be light,” he mused.

He rounded the front of the car and bent down to inspect the damage. The tire was complete history, tattered -- a deep, curving gash encompassed a third of the tire. “What the hell?”

Wolfe used to help out at his dad’s car repair shop, mostly during the summer to earn spending money. He’d seen plenty of flat tires, but never anything like this.

A resonating hiss seeped over from the embankment, the shape hidden by tall grass. Wolfe peered over, revving the flashlight again and again. The three minute charge wasn’t cutting it. He rushed over and opened the tailgate, scrambling to uncover the third row seat. He pulled out the tire, smooth as dolphin skin and prepared the jack.

The hiss was louder this time. Whatever it was, it was moving closer. One by one he removed the lug nuts. The last one wouldn’t budge. “Son of a bitch!” Wolfe placed his foot on the lug wrench and stepped on it, finally turning the rusted bolt. He mounted the spare,

tightening each bolt with his fingers first before finishing up.

The sound came closer. He revved the bright yellow flashlight again. A whip of a tail flashed near the driver’s side of the car, snapping off the side view mirror. He rolled the flat tire towards the front of the car, hoping to distract whatever was beginning to scare the hell out of him. The thing screech, a greenish limb with claws attacked the tire, shredding it to pieces.

Chris grasped the lug nut wrench in his right hand and ran for the back of the wagon. He jumped in and slammed the tailgate. The car started tipping back and forth. He dove for the front of the car and laid on the horn. The thing suddenly jumped up on the front hood, digging its claws into the metal. The thing lunged at the windshield, mouth open and snapping wildly, leaving a mass of saliva.

“Help me!” Wolfe screamed repeatedly as he bounced around like a pinball. The creature snapped off the wiper blades with its jaws then pounced on the hood, making a dent. Chris knew a little something about Florida wildlife, but this was something new. It resembled an oversized komodo dragon dressed in crocodile skin. Whatever it was, it was tearing his car apart.

Wolfe frantically searched for his keys, but couldn’t find them. The creature impaled the aftermarket plastic sunroof and pried it off like a can of tuna. The creature stuck its head inside, its jaws thrashing about.

Wolfe eyed a can of WD-40 that rolled from under the front passenger seat. He grabbed it, flicking the narrow red stem and fired away into its eyes and mouth.

The creature gagged, retreating momentarily.

The terrified man stuck his head out of the sunroof and screamed until his lungs and throat burned. He heard a gunshot and ducked back inside the car. “Oh crap . . . now what!”

More gunshots rang out from the woods. Chris revered the flashlight again but couldn’t see anything. Suddenly, the creature bulldozed into the passenger side door, cracking the glass. Wolfe yelled out again – more shots echoed from the woods. The creature leaped onto the roof of the car, this time letting out a piercing roar.

The creature stuck its tapered dark olive green plated face through the open sunroof. The dirty ivory teeth were all lined up neatly and eager to rip the unemployed man to pieces. He gave the creature a double dose of lug wrench and WD-40, unleashing the life-saving lubricant straight into its eyes.

Wolf’s back seared with pain, pressing uncomfortably against the hard steering wheel, the horn wailing nonstop. He screamed out again and again until he could utter no more. The creature dove in again through the open sunroof, the jaws snapping violently. More shots rang out, sounding more powerful . . . and closer than before.

The creature suddenly slumped over, the head dangling inside the car. Drool and blood ran down the lifeless mouth, falling into Wolf’s lap. He made an undignified roll into the bent passenger side door and spilled out onto the road. He took in deep breaths, trying to gather what just happened before nearly passing out.

“Are you okay, sir?” said an authoritative voice.

Wolfe slowly opened his eyes, a bright light forcing him to squint. “Who are you – what are you?” he asked in a hoarse voice. A group of five men stood over the mid-framed man. One of them helped him up.

“We’re from . . .” The man with the firm voice cut him off.

Wolfe rubbed his eyes and creaked his back. “Are you guys military? CIA?”

“No. And you?”

“Uh, unemployed computer programmer returning home from an interview.”

“I didn’t know you guys interviewed at night,” said one of the men.

“We’re a unique breed,” answered Wolfe, still trying to catch his breath, his aching all over.

“Actually, the interview was in Atlanta today. I’m just returning home – cross your fingers ‘cause I really need it. Oh, by the way, what the hell was that . . . thing?”

“New species discovered in the Everglades,” replied another man, his black baseball cap worn backwards. “You have no idea what’s brewing out here.”

“There aren’t more of them . . . are there?” He glanced back as four of the men removed the carcass from his chewed up wagon.

“What you got is a bunch of nipple noggins disposing their exotic pets every day in the Glades. It’s becoming a freak show of nature out there.” Wolfe nodded, still stunned. “You heard of frankenfish, haven’t ya? Well, it’s really a cross between a piranha and largemouth bass.”

“So what the hell was that?” asked Wolfe, as he pointed at the deceased creature. “Frankengator?”

One of the men giggled. “Frankengator; I like that.”

“Zip it dill weed,” barked the man in charge.

“I mean, look at my car; it’s totaled. What am I gonna do?”

“Tell you what. We could use a new programmer at our facility. We can start you out at 75K. Hell, we’ll even throw in a company Jeep.” Wolfe’s eyes lit up. Seventy-five grand would come in handy right about now.

“Anything else I need to know?” asked Wolfe.

“Well, you’ll be working with former military people, dedicated just like yourself,” said the man in charge. “You’ll run the computers, provide statistics every month, learn to handle a firearm -- just in case, and if I’m not mistaken, our health plan is pretty darn good.”

“Sounds great . . . I’m sorry, stammered Wolfe, “in case of what?”

**Queen of the Iguanans
Barbara Jean Kaufman**

On a hot afternoon in June, during a school week, LaLuna, a local psychic/spiritual healer, was driving in the area of Sterling and Davie Road, in Hollywood, Florida. As she was driving into the parking lot of Beacon Hill Academy where she spotted those vivid green Iguanas and brown lizards again, hiding underneath the sidewalk area, near the shady trees. Today they were everywhere!

They were surprisingly close to the Academy, but, thank goodness away from the young school kids’ play area. She loved to observe and even take pictures of the bright green, slow- moving Iguanas. She saw them in other places, like the college lake area, and just about

every canal. But, this time, there was such a large group. And yet, she had to park very close to the critters, in order to go into the front door of the school.

As LaLuna was just about to open her car door, she noticed two women in the car on her left, eating lunch. They got out of their car before she did though. The next thing she saw was they placed their left-overs right under their car. How could they just leave food on the parking lot, hidden under the car? And with trash bins only a few yards away! She could already see the ants coming.

She shut the car door, she saw two dark brown lizards and one large, bright green- iguana coming towards her. They were squeezing through the schools metal-screen gates. The reptiles were known to be vegetarian and passive, but the three ended up scrambling for the food.

They seemed either real hungry, or they liked the left-over oranges and taco shells. She heard the brown, ugly lizards were poisonous and was scared of being bitten. They had no trouble tearing apart the food and gulping it down without competing in a vicious and violent way, like other species do.

La Luna decided to walk towards the front of the school where she felt less threatened. As she was just about to enter its doors, a large Iguana called out to her.

“LaLuna! Don’t tell the security guard or teachers about out measly food pickings.” She proceeded in a regal voice, saying she was Queen of the Iguanans. She claimed that she and her large clan of reptiles were safe and were fed by the Academy. The Queen talked constantly of moving, needing to adapt as humans must do.

Unfortunately, humans for generations have taken more and more of their green and earthly lands.

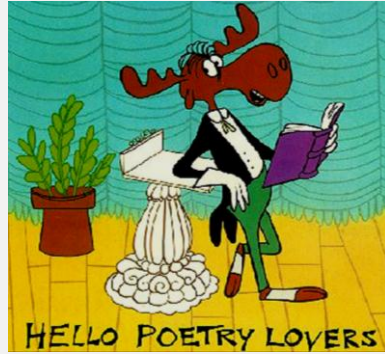
The humans have continued to dirty and pollute the beautiful waterways and lands that have flourished for so many, thousands of years. She continues to say that it's been hard to adapt, and that they lost a lot of their clan reptiles. Queen Iguanas told LaLuna that people are so afraid of the way they look, that they are usually killed by being cut-up or poisoned to death. The Queen talked of how they were part of a much larger group of species, very powerful indeed. In fact, they were so tall that they reached the tallest trees for food and shelter.

“LaLuna,” she spoke, “We want you to be one of our advocates. Please tell as many people as you can about the plight of iguanas and lizards. We don't want to become extinct.”

LA Luna promised Queen Iguana that she would help out any way she could. She took their pictures and fed them her Oatmeal-Raison Cookies. LaLuna was grateful and honored.

“Gee, how did the Queen know my name?”

Portal Poetry Corner



The Mental Gourmet
By Ana O. Cooper

A man of discriminating palate
Choosing only to savor
Whatsoever is just
Whatsoever is of good report
Whatsoever is of virtue
Whatsoever is of praise
A woman preparing for herself
A thought feast
Garnished with prayer and
meditation
Her meat, the expressions of
kindness
Her bread, songs from heaven
Her fruit, affirmations of hope
Her wine, the omnipotence of good
The mental gourmet sees her table
spread before her
The Creator is her Host
Waited upon by immutable
universal principles
She dines
Graciously accepting the Divine
Bounty

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: 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 DiVitto Kelly at mkelly@broward.org.

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