

Mark DeCarteret

*from Off Season*

1. ANALOG

A disabled neon sign at The Wreck non-announced the return of Bulge for the weekend. The drummer of which would let his kit have it. With a limp arm the size of a doll. And would often score weed off his buddy Russell. That stunk of the wet fur of service dogs. Most nights loading himself up with such an array of capsules and powders. They had to fit his head with a paper bag, talk him out from a stall. Then pass off his sorry ass to the sliding glass doors of the 24-hour clinic. Blaise tremored in front of a monster truck's interrogation lights like a newborn seal. Sand papering his eyes. The wind aping his dwindling spirit. Even a flat liner would know the sea was near. By the unearthly luminescence. Those lowest grade murmurs. The fetor of rotten fish. And the complimentary lemon slice. To help fight off the fetor. Before crossing the street towards the acres of parking lot. Blaise checked to see if anyone had had any success getting their cars started. Not won over by snow. And refraining from rain. Sleet encased it all into a half-frozen vignette. So, it looked even less like itself.

And so, it would seem, here in Seatown, even the precipitation was of two minds.

A week ago, Nate told him he'd watched as they chiseled up a frozen deer from the main drag. Further inland where the bogs would give way to the mostly logged forests. Then the lots with the half-finished capes. And their foreclosure notices strung out on hot pink stakes. That the teens would steal the copper. Then, kick the shit out of the sheetrock. Before setting the entire theme park on fire. Yet, another teaser for the apocalypse. It was the fifth strike that week. Seatownies insisting this one was missing its backside. Its legs twisted into an

elegant script. Before being hit by the Cutler widow. And reducing her Buick LeSabre to what appeared to be a deep fryer basket. While others were seen sans their organs. Their spines ratcheting up to the sky like this most off-white of extension ladders. Or were sworn to be opened up wide at the neck. Their arteries teaming with the air to dream up this ungodly of steams. All of them, supposedly booking it out of the woods, on that stretch where the auto body shops multiplied like lip sores. And the pawn shops stockpiled weapons and potpourri. Forgoing the fog as if something ill-thought-of and deficient of light had been giving the ruminants chase. Something once cast in the image of Christ. And mostly game sticking it out in Our Lord and Savior's shadow. Before finding itself all out of sorts, reborn. With an even keener sense of smell. And this unholy of appetites. Much too ambitious for the likes of Seatown.

Or at least that was the talk. The only thing Seatownies had more of than misery. An utter lack of a calling. O how things darkly spiraled in this slop-sink of a place. Paling in comparison to the rest of the color-by-number coastal communities. Where you entered by code. And nature was co-sponsored. Mainly in name only. While Seatown-- part spun art, part wished-out stars blacking out into asterisks. Merely splashed off the wheel. Where it settled like wet ash. To be cashed in for arcade admission, fees. These ex-fantasies. They'd eventually shack up with. Out here, on the edge of the edge. So outer limited one sometimes doubted its existence. As if it the outskirts of Beckett's hell, where one's eye downplayed their own tricks. And one took in skit after skit of these comedies. Blacker than a bomb-tick. Or cartoons where coyotes were toyed with. Then side-kicked off another ledge. That is, until God began. Feeling the most uninhibited, fun-loving. He'd felt since Creation Fest. Those first seven days of self-indulgence. Pre-blueprint (Oh how original...), sin. And They unleashed what would end up being. The absolute worst of Their body of work.

A pom pom hatted kid romped by with a bouquet of jerky and a Slurpee the size of an artillery shell shouting, "My face feels like my fingers," to the bargains-hid windows of Rough Seas Variety. At this hour, its brethren mostly flocked in for coffee and antacids. Packaged donuts and scratch cards. The occasional party favor or craft idea. Blaise flippered down to the ocean. Where it was still Seatown officially, but the spit was always saltier. The soundtrack of sea bird hysterics and sloshing always louder. And the clouds more worked up about something. Today, the beach looked recreated from a police artist's sketch. Or an amateur's catch-all of the day.

Snow taxed with exhaust. Ice pocketed with surprises. And soon, all the pools, thawing. So now, what have we here? Slugs, so ugly. Scale worms, so monstrous. They had no need for a green screen. Or computer degeneration. Not to mention, all un-manner of hellish shell tugged at and gutted. This resin-brown seaweed, all blistered and alien, more sinister and outlandish than anything you could outdraw in some video game. And though Blaise tried to oust thousands of pirate-ghosts from his nose. And couldn't feel the outer reaches of his toes. His brain was terribly alert. Trained on this sudden misprint of light. Like a rainbow. A frigging prism.

Here, a cormorant moved as if targeted by a magnet underneath it. There, dovekeys were snapped across the sky as if by elastic. While up ahead, razorbills threatened to slit the throats of the water. Then, entice the dovekeys, into tidying it all up. Have no doubts about it, Blaise was picturing it in steps, as if pet-sitting the fair-animal tent of his imagination, with the intensity of some dim-witted boy being incessantly told to get out of a step-relative's sight. Now, waddling along the water's edge like Lazarus lugging four days of laundry. His tongue was problem solving the air and then disappearing, caving into gravity. Before remaking a face camera-ready, faker. *My little spelunker what have you uncovered?*

He had called into work sick for the second day in a row and was experiencing the penetrating vision of excess leisure. Blaise was a text-executive when it came to coming up with excuses. Head of operations when tossing off his assorted stories. So once again Carson would have to man the carpet cleaner by his single-celled self. Dragging hose behind him like some tragic myth. Or magic unicorn. Snorkeling up odors and/or stains by the millions. While he frothed at the mouth. Air-kissing these sickest of figures. Another simile, Blaise had thought, he might liken to anything. Except maybe a smile. Or the missing limb one still bestowed one's top billing. One's suffering so fussed over it was somehow set free of its surface firings, defused. For as long as the forced analogy had one crucified like a butterfly. Ah yes, Blaise was a free agent when it came to language. Never able to keep a metaphor. From speaking up for. Whatever self he had cooked up that morning.

But out here, the universe couldn't be bothered to explain itself. Or try to find the right words. For all that had been done. Wrong to the world. And continued to. In ways humans couldn't even yet fathom. Do the theorizing or super-sizing. Never mind the math. Smothering the earth with more self-important tropes. When nature had already served up a billion characters, bites. Long before any clown. Got their white mitts all over

them. So, come out from under your high hats. Your low brow denominations, stats. Nature rarely feeling the need. For telling it. Nothing like it was. Sound off, unfoundedly. Impart wisdom out the same hole it ate whole. Or worse, resort to poetry-lite. Just to tower up a few floors. Woo and/or amuse. Swoon over some endangered bird. Or slam more of Whitman's atoms to the mat. Outdo the biddings of some lifetime membership, dribble. I mean, one name for the moon's one too many. Even, one star harmed made too much of. Still, the cosmos fosters a soft spot for mimes. And likes haiku enough in small doses. Will even carry a tune. Cause there's literally nothing on the radio. Opting for mostly top 40 from the 70s. Country, when it was country. And not thousands of idolatrous ditties. Rerouted south. Till they crashed at the shrine to the divinely whined, sacred: Disney. Where, instead of Nirvana, one is granted. For an unlimited time. Vanity offering plates, leftover gruel. And more talentless Americans. Corporate pop. So all-purpose, softly rocked. It's blended into one big boy band. So off Broadway. So up with people. They'll go download. On any blog. With a Dickinson wannabe. We've wasted cloud. Automatically tuned to the same unforgivable note, static. So overproduced, slick. We're lip-synching a link to our signing off, kill switch. Or praying we'll be hit and run by the lottery. Tell me, what's the use of keeping at it? When seriously, it all peaked with Shakespeare. Like, for real, Lear.

Still, Blaise thought himself lucky. Thankfully, hand-culled off the floors of some fish tank. In the waiting room of some dentist. And released ten or so blocks from the sea. In, albeit a rental. And it the most off of off seasons. Finned and sniffing out the indefinite. Now, let's give a big hand, to high summer's far less fraternal twin, winter. In its final weeks here at the Casino. Already a thousand nights in. A total mess of a month. A non-month. It's March again. Never quite on. Even remotely. Like February without the lover's touch, charm. Or April, minus the cross and absolved sin. Thus, any miraculous birth.

Blaise tried to walk it off. Raise his brain from the dead again. With his lantern and spray-on tan. Lautreamont's lobster on the tightest of leashes. But there was little to rasp, forget praise. Or to see in his breath. No shore-ode or door prize. No hint of a breeze. Only Olson's loneliest of notations, reassurances. All those lost solos of his. Scored into decorative bone. Halfway between Melville's blown out valves. And Blaise's bugle horn. Always taking on water. Spouting more nonsense.

*What's another six-letter noun for unsound? Early onset sun downing? Out-taking one for the meme?*

Besides, Blaise's only desire, was that he was. Ideally. At a loss for words. Virtually, rid of the world. And drowned, whited out, by the thundering undertow and thoroughness of the Atlantic. His voice thrown to a ground. Forever shifting beneath his feet. To be made even more of a mess of. Smearred beyond recognition. Earshot to hell. All that hadn't been hemmed in or medicated, suddenly deemed immaterial, infinitely clueless. All his random modes of thought and overly game images. The unluckiest draw of his skull. That had tortured Blaise since childhood. Utterly silenced. Let be.

Blaise had to hand it to those crews. Who'd soon spring into action. And rework the beach. Designer sand hatched in sand labs. Or made off with from islands. Perfect specimen uncrated and then mechanically raked with Zen-like precision. In the same way, every one-time fun fact, having to do with volcano or cloud, dandelion or louse, now seemed instantly 3D printable--beamed down towards our main drives, assigned a file, and then stared out a screen from our ergonomical chairs, becoming yet more second rate, unnecessary. At the very least, third party to. The wet dreams of scientists and the inbred reasoning of soft-worn engineers, vying against the ancient memories of the ocean and the unseen clout of the moon. With outcomes too sundry and numerous, done-to-death, to even mention, never mind tame.

The less the present. Forever tensed up. Into the past. The more strapped in. Blaise sensed himself, felt. For any future. He would never be sold. And which was always getting old. A part too two bit, small. To even call a walk-on. Make into a cameo. And a lacking in all character. Here, only to kill time. In the belly of the last whale. With the skill and the artistry. Of God's orphan, puppet-son. So, it's little wonder this child. Co-star in his own head. Has ironically grown. Into the best man for the job. Of trying to put up with words. See, long-drawn-out to. Poor, poor Seatown. And its most short-lived of brands.