

Bait Shop

by David James

They wanted to go fresh water fishing, so I had to buy worms. None there in the saltwater town. Drove about 10 miles over the long bridge to cross the bay. I'd been there before. Walked in and a crusty, little skinny man got up from his chair.

He: Watcha need?

Me: Fresh water bait. I bought some here a coupla years ago.

He: We got 'em. Nightcrawlers. Good uns from Canada. They's \$3.97 for 25. Want two boxes?

Me: No, I don't think so, just taking my grandkids. They're little, 6 and 9. One box should do it.

He: Where ya goin'?

Me: I have a place in the big resort. There are 9 lakes there.

He: They's some 'gators in 'em lakes. Watch out for 'em kids.

Me: Used to be some for sure. Rare to see one now.

He: Lemme show you what I caught this mornin'. Come outcheer on th' porch. (he opens a large cooler) That there redfish is an 8-pounder. If I caught him last fall he'da won th' class in th' fishin' roDAYo, I'd a won me \$6000.

Me: Wow, it's the biggest redfish I've ever seen.

He: Me, too. You from 'round here?

Me: No, Atlanta.

He: Big town. We get's a lotta ya'll in th' summer. You married?

Me: Yeah.

He: I been married 4 times. They's all dead though. I'm 60 and have 5 kids spread all over. How 'bout chu? How olda you?

Me: Older than that.

He: Bull shitin' me, ain'tcha. You look younger 'n me. (He is a burned out looking fuck, nobody looks older than him.)

Me: Well, I'm a bit older.

He: Hold on a minnit (he goes to the back door and yells. Marla, sugar, com'ere a minnit.) Marla is an obese woman, he introduces as his "partner in crime".

Me: Hey, Marla.

He: Marla, he says he's older 'n' me.

Marla: Doan look lack it to me. Mr., you telling it straight?

Me: Yes.

Marla; Well, I'll be goddamned.

He: I been workin' here 18, no, 19 months. Bought me a boat and 'at camper trailer out back where we stayin'.

Me: Are you retired?

He: Shit no. I wuz in jail. Not no bad stuff. Stealin' a car. That wuz my second time in. But, I'm out uv th' trouble business and jes happy to be right where I am.

Me: The last time I was here there was a woman and a man here. I guess they were married..

He: Fuck no, that's her brother. You ain't gonna believe it, but he stole half the stuff on her. She run him off. She bought this bait bizniss from the insurance money she got when her husband got hisself kilt on his motorcycle. She told me if he — the brother — comes around, shoot the stealin' motherfucker.

Me: Well, I gotta go. Take care.

He: Yeah, bye. And come on back. If ya need more bait..I gotta a load uv it.

Me:(Remembering how young he said I looked) Fuck, give me another box of night crawlers.

