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"Papa Piraña"

by Angel Leigh McCoy

"Señorita Doctor, I need you," said Señor Lopez in Spanish, "to confirm that my daughter is still a virgin." He stood beside the examination table, flies dancing around him, his oily black hair reflecting the overhead light.

I nodded, stalling, while I searched my mind for an appropriate response. Lopez already had her lying on the table. I looked from him to her.

Her name was Kachá. She was fifteen and a beautiful aboriginal girl, bronze-skinned, black-haired, and dark-eyed. She wouldn't look at me, but instead turned her face aside. Her cheeks and neck raged where they had broken out in a flush.

I chewed the inside of my lip and finally said with my *gringo* Spanish, "Why do you need to know this, señor?"

He replied, matter-of-factly, "Because she is worth more money if she is pure."

The city of Iquitos nestled at the foot of the Andes Mountains, so deep in the Amazonian rainforest that you couldn't reach it except by plane or river boat. It bustled and put up a brave front, pretending to be modern and sophisticated. Yet, once you peeled back the top layer, you uncovered the old ways and belief systems that were always the nature of the Amazon River basin. This included arranged marriage and the exchange of a daughter for a dowry.

Because I spoke fluent Spanish, the United Nations' Volunteer Doctors organization had agreed to send me to Iquitos, my first choice, to provide education and care to people who could not afford it otherwise. I worked with a nurse in a tiny clinic in the slums, a neighborhood known as Belén, where the roads were water, the cars were canoes, and many of the houses floated on balsawood platforms. My own house was a typical two-story wooden structure raised on stilts. It had a corrugated tin roof that rumbled when it rained, which was most of the time. I had been warned that, if the Amazon flooded, I should transfer everything to the second floor. This was common practice for the residents of Belén who had centuries of experience with the river's caprices.

"You will check her, yes?" said Lopez, lifting his daughter's skirt up to her waist.

Even after ten years as a doctor, I felt Kachá's embarrassment as my own. I stepped up and put her skirt back down, averting my eyes. There was protocol for these things, less violent ways of approaching the patient. I focused on Kachá and asked, "Do you want this?"

She met my eyes and, though she hesitated, she nodded.

I performed the pelvic exam as quickly and gently as I could and pretended not to notice when she wiped tears from her face.

Lopez had me sign a document testifying to Kachá's virginity, then turned to leave.

"Señor," I said. "I would like to check your daughter's lungs and heart."

With a wave of his hand, Lopez dismissed me and Kachá. "Go ahead." He took the document and left.

"Is your father always so single-minded?" I asked her as I guided her to sit on the edge of the examination table.

"Sometimes even more," she replied, her Spanish less colloquial than her father's.

I listened to the earnest beat of her heart. "Your father is looking for a husband for you?"

"The *pusanga* has already found one." Kachá folded her hands in her lap and kept her eyes on the door. "An American has offered a fortune for me."

"How much is he paying?"

"Twenty eight thousand *nuevos soles*."

"That's ten thousand dollars."

"It will mean great happiness for my family."

"And for you?"

She shrugged.

The *pusanga* was a potion made by an Amazonian shaman from local leaves, roots, seeds, and fresh water collected from the rainforest. Superstition said that, when smeared on the skin of a man or woman, it opened the spirit to love and thus attracted a mate. One of the local women had convinced me to try it, and three days later, I met my lover, Trumak.

I asked Kachá, "What's he like, this American?"

Kachá didn't immediately answer. When she did, she chose the order of her words carefully, "Rich. Fat. And old."

Fat and old. Memories of my father surfaced: me, lying in the dark; him, lurching toward my bed. I could still, and always would, feel my innocence dying.

I eased around behind Kachá to hide my reaction and put the stethoscope to her back. “And your mother? What does she think of this plan to sell you to an American?”

Kachá shook her head and stated, “She is dead.”

“I see.”



“Dear Carma,” the letter began. I checked the date. It had been written nearly a month earlier. It took that long sometimes for mail to get to and through Iquitos. As I read, I experienced a strange sense of dread.

“You’ll never guess,” it said, “who showed up. Dad. He appeared on the doorstep a few days ago, lots older and sicker. He’s dying. He wants to see you, sis. Truth is, we’d all like to see you. When are you coming home? How about now? I don’t think Dad’s gonna last all that long. Well, I hope you’re okay, maybe shacked up with some hot jungle native or something. Call me. I need to talk to you.” And it was signed, “Your brother. Remember me? Jack.”

I stuck the letter into the flap in my suitcase, along with the others.

That night, I cleaned up my office and the exam room alone. I ate alone, and I stood on the porch staring out at the rainforest—alone, except for the rising waters of my thoughts. When they became unbearable, I took my dugout canoe into the canal.

Flood season was still months away, so the tributary was near its low point. I breathed shallowly, though I’d become accustomed to the smell of sewage and garbage in the water; it meant Belén to me. I had long since stopped looking closely at the debris, trying to figure out what it might be. The residents used outhouses that drained directly into the river. They threw their bones and other garbage into the water as well. The pigs, chickens, parrots, and occasional monkey that lived upon the floating wooden walkways and platforms treated them like their barnyard. It had taken my western sensibilities a long time to get over the sight of aboriginal children swimming and playing in that water, as they had for a thousand years.

I paddled along and was struck again by how peaceful it was compared to the city. There were no cars, no pollution, and no street lights. A zillion stars cluttered the sky, and the moon was just rising, distant and slivered, above the treetops. All around me, life hummed. A fish flopped, my ore splashed, and laughter rippled from inside a hut. Insects buzzed, and frogs sang a chirping *landó* blues tune.

I found myself approaching the Lopez house. It was a floating wooden structure, single story, thatched with *irapay* palm. The house was dark, but as I skimmed closer, I saw Kachá sitting on the end of a plank, dangling her legs in the water. She had haunted my thoughts, and there I was, drawn unwittingly to where she was.

I turned the nose of my canoe toward her. The night had a dulcet smoothness that made me feel like less of an outsider. I didn't know what I would say to her, but her situation weighed heavily upon my heart.

I was shouting distance away when I saw a figure emerge from the water and climb onto the plank beside Kachá. I stopped paddling and watched. I thought perhaps it was one of her brothers, but the boy sat too closely beside her and put his arm around her waist. He was naked, and the moonlight shone on his wet, brown body. His long, black hair drained down his back.

They put their heads together and talked quietly. When I saw her shoulders shake with sobs, I forced my eyes away, swung the canoe around, and paddled back to my house. It took me many hours to fall asleep that night.



I dreamt of darkness. My eyes were hazed and half-blind, colors coming at me here, there, one side or the other; and I was underwater, swimming. I zipped along without need of sight. I knew where I was going. I dove and pushed through schools of *pirañas*. They scattered before me; I was the predator.

Others like me appeared. They swam with me. I sensed them and sometimes they brushed their smooth bodies against mine. We were one tribe, and together, we rode the flood inland, calling out and listening to the trees' responses. We found the secret ingress into nooks once dry and feasted on fish until our bellies hung low and full, and our undulating slowed.

I was *un boto*, one of the river dolphins that lived in the Amazon.

We left the flood plain and joined the river again, leisurely dancing and bumping one another, rising to the surface for a quick capture of breath, and then diving into the depths, through and among the currents, to the muddy bottom, and back up again.

Suddenly, there were voices bouncing off me like droplets of rain. I followed them to the surface, and there above me on a dock, was Kachá, dressed only in a child's white nightgown, her feet bare and brown. Standing beside her was *my* father, just as I remembered him, with his

troll-sized head and hands. He grasped Kachá's upper arm, holding her in place, while a priest recited their marriage vows.



I awoke drenched in sweat. I put an arm over my eyes, kicked off the sheet, and listened to merchants taking their bananas, fish, alligator tails, medicinal plants, and other goods to the Belén market in the pre-dawn darkness. Women called to one another as they brought water back from the public pump or swept dirt from their floors into the channel, and children played Pat-a-Cake and sang, "*Papas, papas, para Mamá. Las quemaditas, para Papa.*"

Gradually, the level of activity outside increased. Locals who didn't go to work stayed on their balsawood platforms, chatting with neighbors whose houses were tied together on either side—to keep them from floating away. They ground corn on their front porches and fed their animals. They dried herbs and slices of fish, brandishing sticks to fend off hungry birds.

The heat became sweltering, and I indulged in a shower. The clinic had a rainwater tank that refilled with predictable regularity. The water almost felt cool as I pulled the cord to spill it down upon my body.

I had decided what I needed to do. I put on a sleeveless shirt, a pair of cargo shorts, and my leather sandals, then headed for the door. Someone had left a basket of woven banana leaves on the doorstep. It contained several varieties of fruit (*caimitos, aguajes, guyavas, and coconas*), a rich feast, undoubtedly offered in gratitude for medical services. I took it with me into my canoe.

This time, I went to the Lopez house on purpose. I paddled up to their dock and tied my canoe to one of the posts. By the time I stepped onto the balsawood platform, the whole family had come to the door to greet me. Señor Lopez stood at the front. Just behind him, Kachá hovered with her arms wrapped around her younger brother.

"Señorita Doctor," said Señor Lopez. "Welcome to our home."

I stepped up to the front porch. "Thank you," I said and offered the basket of fruit. "I wanted to speak with you, if you wouldn't mind."

A look of surprise and suspicion crossed Lopez's face, but he accepted the basket with a nod of his head. He turned and handed it to Kachá, then stepped aside to let me in.

Their house was small with only two rooms and the outhouse. The main room had two sleeping mats at one end (presumably for the children) and cooking utensils at the other. There was no couch or table, no television or radio. The family sat on the floor on rugs woven from old clothes and various plant materials. In one corner, near the sleep mats, there hung a plain white dress and a lace veil. It looked as out of place as I did.

Lopez and I sat facing one another. Kachá placed the fruit in the corner and covered it with a towel.

Lopez asked, “Señorita, is everything okay at the clinic?”

I nodded. “Yes, thank you. I’d like to see more patients, however. There are many sick and injured who never make it to our door.”

“They do not believe in western medicine.” Lopez looked up as Kachá brought two glasses and a pitcher of *chicha morada*. “They prefer the shamans’ treatments.”

I watched Kachá pour, taking advantage of the distraction to study her. She looked tired to me, as if she hadn’t been sleeping, as if she too had lain awake for hours, wondering what would happen, wondering what she had done to deserve...

“Señorita,” said Lopez. He offered me a glass filled with the sweet and spicy drink. I could smell the cinnamon, clove, and lemon. It was the same rich color as the purple corn they used to make it.

“Thank you.” I waited for him to have his glass in hand, then toasted, “*Salud.*”

He lifted his glass. “*Salud.*”

We sipped, and I smiled my approval of the drink to him.

The pleasantries had come to an end. Lopez held his glass in both hands and asked, “What can I do for you, señorita?”

“I wanted to talk to you about Kachá’s marriage.”

Lopez’s eyebrows went up. “Her marriage?”

For the briefest moment, I lost my nerve. As I tried to find my mental and moral footing, I blurted, “Do you know anything about this American man?”

“I know he is rich, and I know he is American. My daughter will have a good life in America.” His brow furrowed.

“There are bad people in America. Sick people. Men who prey on children.”

Lopez shook his head. “Kachá is no child. She bleeds. She’s a woman and ready to marry. She will grow to love this man and will bear his children. My grandchildren will be American citizens and will have all the riches that I could never give them.”

I was beginning to feel sick to my stomach. “What if Kachá doesn’t want to marry him?”

“She wants to marry him. Ask her yourself.”

I looked over to where Kachá had taken a seat by the wall. Our eyes met.

“Yes,” the girl said. “I want to marry the rich American.”

“You don’t know this man,” I said.

“I know him,” she replied. “He is the kind of man who...comes to Peru to find a wife. I am lucky he chose me.”

Lopez stood, prompting me to do the same. He said, “Señor Mason will be here in three days. The wedding will be next Sunday. Please, join us for the celebration. You can speak English with him.”

We drained our glasses, and my welcome came to an end. Lopez accompanied me to the door.



I heard him before I saw him, but only because he wanted me to know he was coming. That was how Trumak was. He never scheduled our meetings, nor did he give me any warning other than the soft slap of his feet on the patio stairs. Somehow, he always knew when I needed him.

I looked up to see him step into the shadow of the doorway, his brown skin still gleaming with river water. I had never known him to wear clothing. He was barely an inch taller than me, thick in muscle and light in bone, broad-shouldered and narrow of waist. With his black hair cut short, it accentuated the Amazonian fierceness of his cheekbones and jaw. His entire expression was serious. I had rarely witnessed his full lips turn up into a smile, and maybe that’s why I fell in love with him the first time they did so for me.

I stood and faced him.

He hovered in the shadows, studying me until I felt a blush rise to my cheeks. Then, as if inspired, he crossed the room and scooped me against his chest with one arm around my back. With his other hand, he held my chin in place so he could touch his lips to mine.

My body responded with a familiar heat, one he had ignited the first time I saw him emerge from the river.

Clumsy with my western clothes, he said, “Be naked with me.” And so, I undressed myself. In the jungle heat, it felt good to remove them, to be naked with him. I had visions of living like a native, children at my bare breasts, my man crouched beside me. It was a self-indulgent dream, and one I suspected could never truly be as lovely in reality.

The way he made love to me, though, took me into the rainforest of my mind, into warm downpours and the exotic aroma of orchids and dirt brought to life by moisture. His body undulated against mine, rocking me in a way that reminded me of my dream, of swimming deep in the river, fast and furious, cutting through currents, and breaching the surface for a gasped breath when I could no longer hold it.

Afterward, we lay together in my bed, the mosquito net separating us from the world, and I listened to his heart beating in his chest.

He said, “You can’t help Kachá.”

I lifted my head to look at him. “You know about Kachá?”

“I know.” He pressed me back down against him. “Kachá has a decision to make, the most important one she will ever face. You cannot help her with this.”

“But, her father is selling her to an American. God knows what kind of pervert the man is if he’s willing to buy a fifteen-year-old virgin from Peru. I can’t—”

“*Maracuja*,” he said, invoking the term of endearment he used for me. “It is her choice, not her father’s.”

“No, it’s not. Don’t you see?” I pushed up again, so I could see his face and read his dark eyes. “She’s just a child. She’ll do whatever her father tells her to do, whether it’s best for her or not.”

He didn’t immediately respond, and I saw the hint of a smile playing on his lips. His gaze circled my face.

I gave him a gentle push. “I’m serious, Trumak.”

He grinned, and it was sunshine breaking through jungle foliage. “You are beautiful when you are serious, *Maracuja*.” The nickname meant “passion fruit,” and he had once explained to me all the healthful benefits of eating it, including calmed nerves and improved sex drive. He was implying that I had the same effect on him.

I could never be angry with him. He wasn't mocking or dismissing me. He was enjoying me, including my bitter and sour notes.

"Trumak," I said. "He could be taking her to America to rape and kill her, or worse. I can't let that happen."

"Or, he could be taking her to America to drape her in beautiful tokens of his love."

I snorted. "You don't believe that." I sat up with my back to him. His fingers immediately found my spine and walked up it.

"No," he admitted. "I don't believe it. But, it doesn't matter what you or I believe. What matters is what Kachá believes. She is at a fork in the river and must choose which way to go. It is her life."

"I don't understand how you can say she has a choice." I felt myself relaxing as he massaged my vertebrae, finding all the tight muscles around them.

"She has a choice because there is someone who loves her." He rolled against me and touched a kiss to my hip. "And, who will take care of her if she chooses to stay here?"

Quietly, I said, "The boy I saw her with."

"His name is Intl." Trumak pulled me down to lie spooned with him. "And you?" he whispered to my ear. "What will your choice be? Are you going back?"

I didn't answer. I pressed myself against him, moving in such a way that made words no longer necessary.



Another letter arrived from my brother. He wrote, "Dear Carma. Dad passed away."

The date said he'd sent it three weeks earlier. My father had been dead for three weeks. He had been ash for almost that long, stuck in the family mausoleum, next to Mom and the rest of them.

I read the whole letter. It was more of the same. *Come home. We need you. We miss you. We love you.* I didn't understand why they needed me, why they missed me, or even why they loved me. I hadn't been there in almost fifteen years. They didn't know me. They never had.

The only poignant emotion inspired by the letter was a profound sense of relief when I realized my father could never hurt anyone else, ever again.

That morning, I left the clinic in my nurse's hands and made a trip to the Iquitos post office. From there, I called my bank.



I had a plan, and I thought it was a good one, but it hinged on whether I could get Kachá alone or not. After my talk with her father, I doubted he would allow it, so I waited until just after the dinner hour, when most of Belén's working class was going to bed. I splashed down the stairs to my canoe, letting the rain wash over me unhindered. It felt good after the day's heat, and my skin soaked in the moisture.

The canals were deserted. Only a few elderly sat on their porches, smoking and talking. Some waved to me as I passed. Others talked about me in low voices. I smiled and waved to them all.

I didn't hurry. I paddled along, into the waning light, and gradually night fell around me, cloaking me and sending the locals into their shelters. I paused when the Lopez house came into view. There was no moon, so it was difficult to see whether anyone was there or not.

Then, Kachá moved, and the shift of her hair revealed her. She was sitting at the end of the plank, her legs dangling over the edge. All around her, the stillness was pregnant with anticipation.

I held my breath without realizing it, and only when the boy—Intl—climbed up out of the water did I exhale. He sat beside her again, his arm possessive and protective around her waist. They bowed their heads together.

I saw my opportunity, and I paddled up to the mooring post.

They didn't hear me as I tied my canoe, nor as I climbed out onto the floating platform. They were holding hands, foreheads touching.

Lopez startled us all. He crashed out of the house like an angry tribesman, wearing only a length of cloth wound around his waist and through his legs, and was upon Intl before anyone could do anything. He spoke so fast that I caught only every third word. He wanted to know who the boy was and whether he'd deflowered Kachá. He didn't wait for an answer, but shook the boy.

Kachá was screaming, "Stop! Papa, stop!"

I was rooted in place, unsure of what to do.

Intl began to fight back. He said something I didn't catch. Then, he punched Lopez in the face.

Lopez grabbed the boy by the hair.

I saw a glint of metal in the starlight and watched, horrified, as Lopez made the motions of stabbing Intl in the stomach, over and over—more times than I could count.

Kachá pleaded with her father, to no avail. She grabbed his arm, but didn't have the strength to stop him.

Lopez threw the limp boy into the river. In a voice as cold and slow as the Andean glaciers, he said, "Now, you will have nothing to pine for when you're eating chocolates in America."

I couldn't think. I couldn't breath. I was paralyzed by Lopez's violence. I stood in place as he walked by me, his torso and the cloth wrap stained with the boy's blood.

Lopez glared at me on his way into the house.

Kachá lay on her stomach, on the dock, reaching out into the water. Her voice was a mewling plea for mercy, for the boy to return, begging him to be alive. "Intl! Intl, please."

I saw his body surface some distance away and float into the darkness.

"Kachá," I said, voice low and full of too much breath. "Kachá. Come with me." When she didn't respond, I forced my legs to move. I took her by the shoulders and guided her up. "It's going to be okay. Come with me."

I got her to her feet, but I couldn't make her move.

She shouted at the house, "I was going to marry the American! I was going to be a good daughter!" Her face was contorted and wet. She cried, "You didn't have to do that, Papa! I was going to America. I had made my choice!"

"Kachá," I said gently. "Listen to me. You don't have to go with that man. You can come with me instead. I'll pay your dowry, and you can be part of my family. You'll be safe."

Her eyes, shadowed beyond their own natural brown, beyond even the night's blackness, turned on me, and I saw despair like nothing I'd ever seen before. "No," she said. She indicated the water with a twitch of her hand. "No more America."

She stood straighter, so I let her go.

"You'll be safe with me," I promised. "I won't let anyone hurt you."

Lopez called from inside, "Come inside, Kachá. Your husband arrives tomorrow."

“My papa has betrayed me,” Kachá said, her tone soft with shock. “I owe him nothing. Nothing.”

“That’s right,” I said. “Come with me. I can help you.”

“I was wrong. I should have chosen Intl.”

I wiped my hands over my eyes and so didn’t see Kachá take a step back toward the edge of the plank. Suddenly, there she was, tipping out over the water. I grabbed and caught her wrist. Hunkering back, I tried to counterweight her fall, but all I did was turn her to face me as she toppled.

Kacha’s eyes gleamed in the darkness, the same metallic glint of the blade her father had used.

I didn’t let go.

It all happened so fast. There was nothing to hold on to, and though she was a slight girl, she was dead weight. I had no choice but to let go or go in with her. I chose the latter.

She hit the water just before me. Debris scattered as we passed through it, and the water closed over us.

I held onto Kachá’s wrist, but she clawed at my hand. I ignored the sting of her scratches and reached for her with the other.

She bent my finger back until I nearly cried out from the pain.

My lungs were burning.

I let go and swam to the surface.

After a breath, I dove back down again, searching with my hands, diving all the way to the river bottom, blind, feeling my way through mud and discarded objects.

Again, I surfaced, and again, I dove. I searched, hands in the lead, turning this way and that. I stayed down longer that time, long enough for a current to capture me. It dragged me into itself and accelerated me along. I was tumbled and turned where two currents met. I swam upward, fought my way to the surface. I tread water, but I was drifting away from the houses and toward the broad river.

“Kachá!” I screamed. Emotion and exhaustion were making my muscles shiver. The strength was leaving my limbs and my soul. All I could think of was Kachá and how important it was to save her. I came so close. I had a plan. I was prepared to outbid the American man for Kachá’s freedom. Lopez, the greedy *piraña*, would have accepted.

But, I'd been too late. Kachá was dead, and the father lived on.

Drifting, I felt the water cool as it carried me from the Belén tributary into the Amazon itself. I wasn't afraid. I dipped below the surface once, then twice, making the minimal effort to stay afloat. A thought told me I should die with Kachá. I was her. She was me when I was fifteen, and I'd failed to keep her safe, just as others had failed me.

I closed my eyes, and the dream returned to me. The Amazon and I had been one being. I'd ridden the currents as I rode my own breath. The plants of the flood plain stroked me again, and the taste of fish exploded in my mouth. I willed my body to change, to become one of the *botos*, the river dolphins that swim in the Amazon. Their lives were so simple and beautiful.

I'd seen them several times, once I knew where to look. It began the night Trumak had made love to me for the first time. As he was leaving, shortly after midnight, he paused at the edge of my dock, turned and gave me that first grin that won my heart.

Then, he dived off the edge. He changed in mid-air, before he hit the water. My eyes saw his body shift into the form of a river dolphin. They watched in amazement as he swam away, and they welcomed him back the next night when he came padding up the stairs, naked and nervous that I'd reject him.

I dipped under the surface a third time and stayed there, still human and limp, nothing more than a fallen leaf. I waited for the *pirañas* or the inevitable inhalation of water, as patient for it as a monk waiting for martyrdom.

Something large, smooth, and gentle came up under me, undulating, and lifted me toward the surface. My face came into the air; and my mouth opened, diaphragm descended, and air filled my lungs. I coughed and sputtered.

The warm body bumped and turned me. It let me slip under, then pushed me back to the surface, nudging me as if I were a toy.

I touched him, felt the curve of his back, the ridge there, and the contours of his tail. I caught a blurry glimpse of pink at the surface and heard the huff of his breath. His name came into my mind, "Trumak." He had come for me.

As we neared the shore, I felt him change. His body warped beneath my hands, bones, muscle, and skin rearranging, becoming man where he had been dolphin. *El boto*. He put his arms beneath me and carried me against his chest as he walked out of the water on two legs.

I wiped the river from my eyes and looked into his face. His expression was hard. It hurt me to see his eyes so sad.

He set me down, propped against the roots of a large tree, and crouched beside me. He wiped the hair back from my face.

I said, "Kachá is dead."

He nodded. "She made her choice. She belongs to the river now."

I shook my head and looked out across the wide, black waters. "No. Her father made the choice for her."

"This is how you see it, but I see it differently. She could have gone with Intl, and he would have loved her to the end of his days. Instead, she chose to ignore the *pusanga*. That is why he lingered too long with her. His heart was breaking."

I cried for a long while, and Trumak held me. Then, we walked downstream and found a canoe to borrow. Trumak took me home and put me in bed.

He sat beside me and asked, "Have you made your choice, *Maracuja*? Will you stay or will you return to your America, your family, and your luxuries?"

I rested my head on his thigh and considered his question.

He caressed my hair and face, coaxing my body and mind to relax. He had the patience of the rainforest.

Finally, I said, "My father is dead. I don't have to hide from him anymore. I can go back and feel safe."

Trumak nodded slowly and ran a finger up my nose and over my forehead.

As if he were lifting a veil on my thinking, I suddenly knew what my choice was. I said, "But, I belong here."

He bent over me and pressed a kiss between my eyes. Love vibrated all around us, separating us from the world. We stayed like that, in silence, for a long while until, as I was falling asleep, I confessed, "I dreamed I was a dolphin, like you. I think I almost changed into one out in the river."

His smile lit his face, crinkling his dimples and warming his eyes. "No, *Maracuja*. You are not a dolphin." He put his hand on my belly. "Our son is. He shares his dreams with you and with me."

"Our son?"

Trumak ran his fingertip around my navel. “Yes, and when he has his first change, he will be grateful that he has the river to swim in, and not a concrete swimming pool.”

THE END

Thank You from Angel Leigh McCoy

Did you enjoy "Papa Piraña"?

I'd love to hear from you directly. Contact me any time with your thoughts on this story. My contact information is available at AngelMcCoy.com.

While you're there, sign up for my mailing list so we can keep in touch.

Sneak Preview

Also in appreciation, here's a taste of the next story I plan to release.

"The God Bloom"

by Angel Leigh McCoy

The voices in Bert's head droned on.

...are optimistic that the new superstrain of HCB, that's hydrocarbonoclastic bacteria for you non-biojackers out there, will consume the spilled crude oil and return the Gulf to a state of health. We haven't seen such a disaster since 2010, when the first Deepwater Horizon explosion released 185 million gallons. Biotech has advanced. Back then, it took years to clean up. Today, it takes days.

Bert passed through the marina gate, half-listening to the program. He liked the background noise in his head. He'd spent the majority of his life in one of the noisiest places in the world: a kindergarten class. Now that he was retired, he was never quite comfortable with silence. He'd had the Cephalopod™ implanted after he left the school system, and he rarely turned it off.

...numerous accidents on the I-10 this morning. Expect long delays.

Outside his head, the dock was quiet. The occasional squeak of a boat bumping a rubber pad, a splash of water against a pylon, and the cry of a seagull were all that broke the stillness—and Bert’s own footsteps. He wore shorts, a tank top, and his dock shoes without socks. The day promised to be warm, and he preferred to wear light clothing under his submarine coveralls.

...bio-hazard leak suspected. Patients are being flown to Gulfport Memorial Hospital for treatment until the cause can be—

“Time?” Bert said quietly, and after a beat, the Cephalopod in his head replied, “The time now is 07:27.” Bert oriented himself in the time stream. He had half an hour until the kids were scheduled to arrive.

He continued down the dock, past yachts and fishing boats to his berth. His Antipodes mini-sub sat low in the water. He stepped across to the flat deck and began his preparations. He unlocked the hatch. Once the seal was broken, the musty smell of sea water and sweat puffed out. His Antipodes could carry up to five adults, one adult and eight kids, or some other relative combination of big and little people. Most of the year, Bert took adult passengers: tourists or college students studying oceanography. But, once a year, Bert took groups of kids, pro bono. It was his way of reminding himself who he was. For him, it was that first week of school all over again, when he was learning names, and the kids were over-excited and anxious.

...responding to an apartment building collapse. The building had more than eighty units on eight stories. At this time of morning, there could be nearly two hundred people trapped in the rubble. Police are trying to build an accurate list of who lives in...

Bert climbed down into the mini-sub and began checking systems. He could cross the sub in three strides, and he usually stood or sat in the center, leaving the bench seats at either end for his passengers. The benches curved against two hemispherical, convex viewports five feet in diameter, one at each end of the sausage-shaped sub. The Antipodes had been designed for observation of underwater environments.

All systems were good, and supplies were restocked. Bert had to carry extra provisions during Kindergarten Week: emergency scuba systems, snacks, and vomit and pee bags. Nature would inevitably call during the dive, and a kid would ask, “Where’s the bathroom?”

TO BE CONTINUED...

To be alerted when "The God Bloom" is available to download—[sign up for my newsletter](#).

About the Author



Nobody truly knows Angel Leigh McCoy.

Though she has worn many faces and lived many lives, writing has been her one constant. From plotting horror stories on the Great Plains to spinning love poetry in the cafés of France, to imagining worlds of darkness and weaving intricate tales for millions of fans.

At the time of this writing, Angel is the creative force behind the [Dire Multiverse](#), and a collaborator on the [Wyrdwood Project](#).

[Sign up today to receive news](#) about her progress. Her whirlwind gathers debris at [AngelMcCoy.com](#) and [@angelmccoy](#) on Twitter/Facebook.

Short Fiction

- "[The Haunting of Mrs. Poole](#)," short story—A horrific ghost haunts a young woman on the cusp of marriage in 1800s Virginia.
- "[Creating Belle](#)," short story—A talented artist in Paris attempts to ease his loneliness by creating the perfect woman.

- "[Cookies for Gio](#)," short story— When martial law turns on its own citizens, a mother and her disabled son find ways to resist.
- "[Coquette](#)," 2009, *Vile Things* (anthology); Comet Press
- "[The Christ of St. Jozef Church](#)," 2018, *Dark Rainbow: Anthology of Queer Erotic Horror*; Riverdale Avenue Books
- "Illegal Lane Change," 2014; *Silkwords* (ezine)
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- "Lion and the Heart of Wonder," 1999, *Changeling: Pooka Kithbook* (gamebook fiction); ArtHaus Publishing
- "The Tooth Fairy," 1998, *Changeling: Inanimae* (gamebook fiction); White Wolf Publishing
- "Syrinx and Pan," 1997, *Changeling: Kithbook Satyr* (gamebook fiction); White Wolf Publishing

Anthology Editor

- [Another Dimension: Anthology](#), 2016; Wily Writers
- [Deep Cuts: Mayhem, Menace, and Misery](#), 2013; Evil Jester Press
- [Future Imperfect: Best of Wily Writers 2](#), 2012; Wily Writers
- [Night-Mantled: Best of Wily Writers](#), 2011; Wily Writers

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