

Shelly - by Kristine Trever

Margie approaches the tan, mustached man on the beach with a powerful stride. Hank. A journalist from some place she can't pronounce. A smooth-talker who can read and write, knows big people and big words. An interloper with connections to the past, to America. It's blazing hot, but Margie trucks on, thighs rubbing together rudely, determined to pass on her legacy and keep it cool, for now. She approaches him, notices his irregularly short-shorts that all but conceal his testicles. He licks a red freezy-pop and looks down his neon-colored sunglasses at her bulging girth. Margie knows full well what her mission is as she hulks over the lounging lug in front of her.

"You Hank?" she asks.

"Yes ma'am."

"You recognize me?"

"Yes ma'am, I do."

Margie squats on her haunches over the sand and hovers near Hank's shorts. She turns her torso toward the rippling sea and waves her hand towards what looks like a stout blue buoy that heaves and sways with the undercurrents. In doing so, she momentarily averts Hank's eyes from the flowery crotch of her panties. Behind his glasses, he squints to see what she's waving at, the leather of his aged skin crackling in the Mexico sun. She turns to him sharply.

“Yer here with us now and I’m givin’ you the deal. My body for yer pen and paper. Got it?” Margie is less than thrilled by Hank. *He ain’t no Buddy*, she thinks.

“Yes ma’am. I appreciate the trade” repeats Hank, as he finishes off his freezy-pop and reaches for a small stained notepad and pen, his eyes never leaving her body. Margie plunks her large bottom on the sand with a thud. She watches Hank wipe the sweat and sticky freezy-pop from his mustache. Back home, they used to call those ticklers. Margie giggles.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothin. You ready?”

“Yes ma’am”

“No place better to begin than the beginnin. It all started on the Old Bass Road. Buddy and I hopped into the beast and took to the rural routes where most of the bridges and passes are yet intact. We reckon to drive as far south as the beast will take us, destination be damned, long as we make it to some kinda ocean. Gas was as scarce then as is now; the war, as you know, keeps on, though none pay much mind to what’s overseas since there ain’t much left but lonely men, wrestlin’ matches, Golden Arches and Have It Your Way’s to occupy them underfed knuckleheads. We took off when we did, me -- a fugitive of the law for sellin’ wha’s mine at a fair price and Buddy for buyin’ it. The fat of the land and my lands still run fat.”

Hank interrupts.

“You ain’t lyin!” He abruptly drops his pen and notepad in the sand and shoves his hand up Margie’s dress and grabs a hunk of her chunky thigh. She

angrily slaps his hand away.

“What’s the problem, baby?”

She shakes a dirty finger at Hank.

“You wanna know -- you wanna know what the problem is? I seen this earth run out of clean water, fresh air, smiles and women.”

She gestures to the water, her triceps jiggling.

“There’s this here ocean left and tha’s bout it. Everyone’s forgot, or forgettin. It’s rememberin tha’s hard. Forgettin’s an easy enough thing. We all took for granted. And now, we’ve been taken. So Buddy and me, we took and took some more. And I ain’t gonna forget. I got goals, I’m motivated!” Margie lets out a deep breath, smoothes her skirt and puts on her best smile, revealing small teeth and a large gum line. She strokes a bead of sweat off Hank’s lower stomach.

Softly she coos, “Tha’s why yer here” and licks her finger, resisting the tension and fire that burns her up inside, a fire that, if left unattended, is a calamitous whirlwind of violence and disaster.

Margie hands the notepad and pen back to Hank. She looks away towards the water. In the distance, the large blue buoy continues to bob and heave.

“You don’t go no further til I say so.”

“Yes ma’am”

“Okay then. Listen up and write fast.”

Hank listens and briskly writes as Margie weaves her tale. She begins again at the beginning, about a year ago when the last church burned to cinders and all that was left in

the smoldering ash of wood and faith was a rusty, bright blue mini-bus that she and Buddy hijacked. The bus salvaged, in her mind, by God's divine will. Once-upon-a-time this machine was a diesel guzzler. Margie converted it, "The Beast," she calls it, to run without gasoline. A little tinker here, a new filter there, a puff of smoke and a whoop-di-do and Margie gets the blue beast running like new. Unlike other biodiesel conversions, she explains, Margie chose to fill up the tank on cookin' oil and fried fish parts on account of mass availability. "Which require we eat as much fast food as possible along the way," she proclaims.

"I love fried food!" exclaims Hank.

"Well, who don't? Every stop, from Toledo to Tuxedo, we load up with the standard fare: fries, tater-tots, hash-brown patties, chicken-like strips, them hot poppers with gooeyness and jalapeno, but mostly, we get wha's cheap and easy -- fried fish. Fish alone, fish on a bun made of paper stuffs, fish bites, fish tots, fish, fish, fish – fried with a side of fried and more fried on the side. The grease done make my skin boiled up, my hands gone slick and the few hairs I got left lay plaster to my head in curly wisps that match my nether-parts. Though now, the sun done dried up the fried in me."

Hank looks her up and down once more. He licks his lips, tasting the sweet freezy-pop leftover on his mustache. Margie huffs at him impatiently and nods for him to keep on writing.

"Let me tell you, the best approach when bribin' a teenage fry-cook when you want his used, burnt up, fish oil for fuel is to sway him with what he ain't had and likely won't get much of in the future. And tha's me. I was the best lookin' lady left in

America. No joke. Cause there ain't more than a handful o' womenfolk left, after the vaccinations went wrong..."

Margie trails off and eyes the bouncy buoy. It bounces heavier and heavier. She scratches her head as flashes of young, hairless, pimply teenage boys fumble for their zippers while Margie snacks on a chicken-ring, legs spread, waving to Buddy out the drive-through window as he fills the tank in the beast. Boys that look nothing like Hank, or Buddy, *sweet, sweet Buddy*, and never will. Boys with necks that snap like twigs at just that right moment, boys that are so easy to choke and crush and ain't got the know-how to dodge a bullet. Stupid boys. *Lord, why is this world full of stupid boys?* No answer comes to her. She shrugs, turns back to her journalist and his notepad.

"That said, Buddy killt a fry-cook or two along the way. I kill more men than I can count."

"I know all about what you done."

Hank raises his eyebrows and notices the acute erection that threatens to break out of his shorts. This makes him smile. He loves his penis. And his penis loves a strong woman. Any woman, really. Margie struggles to avert his attention and reaches for his bulge, gently running her hand across his lumpiness. She leans in real close.

"As you see, I ain't too young or pretty or graceful, but I know how to work an engine and a man."

She leans back a bit, hand still groping, "And I know'd our beast was wantin a name, an identity. I name her Shelly, after my granny, crowned 'Queen of the Great Lakes' way back in 2005, at age seventeen."

Hank closes his eyes and thinks about Margie's granny. *Bet she was a beauty*, he thinks and groans out loud.

“More importantly -- you writin’ this down? -- on the road, near Altuna, we notice a change in Shelly.”

Margie recoils and Hank assumes his scribbles as commanded.

“Buddy call me crazy and I slap him upside his block head. I says ‘You see she got fins growin’ with yer own two eyes! Dang!

“With each stop, from Pikesville to Trout Station to Bridgewater, with every leftover veggie, fishy, oily fill-up, with all the cod bits and breadin’, Shelly transform before us. Fins and gills and eyeballs -- though I say she always had personality.”

Hank interrupts and looks around, “Where’s Shelly now?”

“I’m getting’ there! Dang!”

With that, Margie removes her hand from Hank’s crank and stands up tall, hands on her hips.

“We made it to the ocean. Darn right, course we did. No matter what it took, we’s a family and we got the will to live. But God strike me down if I lie,” Margie crosses herself, “when I say the minute we pull up to this here Mexico beach, we get out the bus and not one second later, Shelly done drove herself right into the ocean and that’s where she lives and breathes. Look close, see that bouncin buoy?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Well, that ain’t no buoy! Tha’s Shelly!”

Hank gets up, drops his notepad one last time. He lowers his glasses to get a

different view of the buoy. Margie puts two-fingers in her mouth and whistles. The buoy rises and thrashes and reveals itself as a mini-bus.

“Some days you can see her front-end heave and windshield wipers go up with the rolls of the waves and rise of the tides.

“And that’s how it come that Shelly be the biggest fish left in the ocean. She’s a hunter, a survivor. Like me!”

Hank smacks his lips and rubs his hands together menacingly, “If I catch her, can we eat her?”

Margie looks disapprovingly at Hank’s stupidity, “I thought you was smart? Lord no, she ain’t edible! Though she’s all fish, all the time. I tell you, I enter the water naked and she throws fish of all kind at me, it’s our little game. Fresh fish, no more of that fried garbage we pollute ourselves with on the way to keep her goin’. Our mission was to bring her home and home we did. Buddy’s the only one Shelly let touch her.”

Hank bolts toward the water and Margie yells, “Where you goin? Don’t get too close! She bites!”

Margie’s shouts fall on Hanks deaf, greedy ears. He’s already halfway to the buoy when Margie notices his notepad on the ground. She picks it up, flips through its pages. She can’t read or spell, but she’s sharp enough to know that these ain’t letters, this ain’t words and this ain’t *her story*. This is a drawing of a pile of poo, a sketch of a dildo, a cartoon caricature of her eating fish with a gun in her hand. Folded inside the notepad is a faded and yellowed printout with her likeness and though she doesn’t know it, the biggest word on the paper says “Wanted.”

Margie looks toward the water. Shelly twists and heaves herself onto Hank and swallows him into her wide-open front-end. She heaves once more, water from her windshield fluid spigots billows out. Tears. Shelly cries for Margie, Shelly knew all along. She toots her horn and retreats under the waves, Hank ensconced and flailing in her unrelenting grip.

If Hank had only waited one more minute, maybe one more second, Margie would have invited him to crab or shrimp or lobster dinner. His choice! All fresh! He would have met royalty; there would be dancing, fire, celebration. But like all men Margie knew, save Buddy, *that saint, that gentleman, that miracle of a man*, the vaccinations done them all wrong too. She realizes that what Hank don't know and never will know is that Buddy and she are the new King and Queen of Mexico and Shelly is the Princess of the Future.

This ain't to say Margie wouldn't have killed him and stolen his notepad when her inner fire became too much and hid his words some place safe, like her bosom. Snapped his neck and taken what she needed to survive like a thousand others. Oh No. But he could have died having fucked the queen of something. Dang! Margie plops back down in the sand, pulls the sweaty tobacco pouch out of her bosom, sprinkles some tobacco out and rolls up the pages of Hank's notepad into little cigarillos and smokes them. She wonders if, in fact, Hank really is dead, or he gone out same way as Shelly. She looks at her baby and thinks *Shelly saved my skin as much as I pump her full o' one. My girl, my pride and my joy. My little girl got fangs in that grille. I rightly say she done take after me.*