

The Life of a Gargoyle

By Ryan Mitchell

Three men stood staring at the drifts of sunlight, like statues, until he entered. He had twisted brown hair and pale skin that wrapped smoothly around a crooked nose. There was another strange moment of silence until Mr. Hardly spoke.

"Pleasure to meet you Mr. Farlance..." He motioned to the others at the desk. "This is Mr. Birch and Mr. Leplang." The other men were much like Mr. Hardly, they wore the same type of suits and signs of anxiety below their eyes and on their sweaty hands. "Do have a seat, Mr. Farlance."

There was a plastic cup of water prepared for him on the desk, like a dull offering to a god of statistics and boardroom miracles. It reassured the image of dry businessmen not prepared for the true dangers outside the office. He would be a god, Jared thought, if he made the deal, a real big shot.

Jared smiled. He was the least worried in the room, and this was an immediate advantage. As he sat he made an introduction.

"Let me tell you a little about myself gentlemen. I am an Industrialist in a time when industry is moving to China and whatnot. I am a riser in a falling economy..."

As Mr. Hardly sat down it was clear Jared's spell of curiosity had trapped him.

"What is your Industry like, Mr. Farlance? If I may ask."

"I currently own a large amount of worked-on farmland. In Ohio, Illinois and a bit in Mississippi."

"Corn?"

"Mainly."

"Now are you in on the Ethanol plan?" Jared sneered as he could see Mr. Hardly probe deeper.

"Corn will only ever be a food...That's what I'm interested in food, not fuel."

"As you can tell..." interrupted Mr. Leplang, a Chinese man with foggy glasses and a nose that reminded Jared of a pig. "We are entering dark times...We can sell you twenty square miles of farmland in southern Illinois. It--"

"Is there corn on it?"

"No but...but the soil is good for a multitude of..."

"That will devalue it...I expect corn on the land. Well, the price and terms of purchase along with legal matters are on this sheet."

They looked at the sheet with shock.

"You do realize we're on the edge of bankruptcy," said Mr. Hardly defensively.

Jared smiled passive-aggressively as he drank the rest of his water.

"Yes, that is why I hold the advantage."

The train for Chicago whisked through wheat and cornfields at a surprisingly rapid rate. Jared sat in first class, headphones jammed in his tight ears and a newspaper in his hands. Old Irish fiddle blared as he shuffled through the newspaper.

The headlines talked about a drive-by shooting killing four Latinos and a Canadian. The photo revealed splatters of blood, making him smile. Blood was a liquid and one associated with violence and action. The perfect liquid to wipe away the dryness of tense businessmen and unprofitable sun-baked fields. The world of the dry and mundane was fading with the day.

He read deeper into the article and felt a strange sense of insight into Mr. Laplang. Had his family arrived to the USA later he could have been an immigrant trapped into a cycle of poverty and crime rather than a cycle of straight talking and money fondling. As he thought of this he fantasized about the recession taking down Laplang. He thought of the legal troubles of bankruptcy and how Laplang would burn in that financial hell. The smile widened.

He had always had a grudging respect for criminals. Sure they were idiots but they were bold. The first criminal he had seen was on the TV when he was eight, Old Captain Silver Eye, the deadly pirate, and he was bold as Satan. He brought his brutish crew on a rampage through the Caribbean in search of treasure.

He watched it intensely until his father, smoking a cigar, burst in and screamed at him to get off the couch so he could watch the game. Jared was too absorbed in the show to get up; everything about the pirate enthralled him. His father smacked him on the head and screamed obscenities until a scared little Jared darted outside crying.

Outside the cold air froze the tears. He lay down in the grass of his back yard, misery crushing down on him mercilessly- until suddenly an abrupt pause in his suffering occurred.

A bat came down from its moth hunt and gently landed on Jared's chest. He felt the warmth of love or something like love and as he looked up into a sky filled with bats spiraling and swooping viciously, he knew he had found his family. The words of Old Captain Silver Eye came to mind:

"Well, me mates. Been greed that's brought us together and it shall be greed that shall unify us and bring us to glory for all time..."

It was ten when he arrived. A gravel driveway greeted him at his house. Small potted Italian trees leaned against the maroon walls as the house towered over the smaller versions that the suburbs had to offer.

Bats flew over a garden of poppies and he could almost hear their shrill cries congratulating him on another successful purchase. He wanted to thank the bats but he thought of neighbors noticing and marched in quietly.

Jennifer Farlance lay on a green leather couch, wine in her hand and trying hard to reminisce as she flipped through an old high school yearbook.

"How were the men?" She asked as he took off the coat.

"Failures, Jenna, Failures. I sold them down the river for a fraction of what they wanted. You should have heard them; Please we need the money"

Her face was covered in makeup, tanning lotion and a look of perpetual boredom. It seemed even the dryness of that office had sneaked its way in. He poured some wine in a glass, sipped some and tried to add some energy. "It's funny you know. Two years ago those men were kings and I was a nobody."

"I know sweetie, I know... By the way I talked with the vet, Igor's 'disorder' just requires some pill. I'll get it tomorrow."

"I am going to see Igor."

He walked towards a darker room filled with paintings of old ships lost at sea. The biggest attraction of the room was Igor. He sat in a gilded cage always holding his head up high. He was from Costa Rica and had a vibrant pattern of green, gold and blue feathers that shimmered in the moonlight.

"Hey Buddy." Smiled Jared attempting a kind face. "Why don't you repeat something?" There was a moment of silence. "Oh you want me to hit you?" He reached as if to strike then retreated his hand. "Just kidding, I would never do that to you. You aren't like those douche bags in those suits. No, you're just a bird...An innocent little bird."

He returned to see Jennifer watching the TV. Her inability to concentrate on the past had made her watch the news. The images of the drive-by shooting played and he could see her violent red lipstick form the lines of a frown.

She would soon remember she didn't have any sense of what ethics or compassion was and her once blue eyes would turn critical once again.

There was nothing to say to avoid the slight discomforts of their marriage. All the profound words Jared had in his brain were for making deals not growing anything remotely resembling romance.

"I'm heading up to bed...Honey."

"I'll be up soon."

The early days of their love had been a montage of desperate attempts to drop into their collective fantasy. The fantasy was essentially all about mutual success.

As they stood together at the beach on a cold October day hand in hand, they both were thinking the rules were pretty well laid out: If Jared could get rich they could be able to support their love. They never saw the hidden emotional fees; the arguments, the bitterness, and the crushing depression.

Randomly she asked him if he had a happy childhood and, taken aback, he gave an unrehearsed response;

"I didn't have a golden childhood...But I did see things..." A sudden burst of romanticism kicked in. "...Things that brought me to you."

She flung her arms around him and they kissed but then he saw a dark winged beast in her eye. He could feel it ordering him to make the play. "Honey, You remember how the lawyer gave me the 500 G's."

"Yeah."

"Well, I've done some research and there is some cheap farm land in north Illinois...Um, What I'm trying to say is... let's move to Chicago."

He could see the flood of devastation rushing in her eyes.

"Um..." She had friends "...Um..." She loved the coast "...Um..." She had had a very happy childhood in Portsmouth, but it was clear Jared had broken her. "... Sure, I guess."

Somewhere on the other side of the world a bat stabbed its fangs into a fleeing moth.

He lay on the mattress on the second floor. A fan blew away the heat but not the sound of cars. He hated the sound of cars. The way they grinded and stirred seemed so different from the sound of a boat gliding gently against water.

The water was far from gentle. It shattered the fog and smashed against the side of the lobster boat. The seas hardly bothered Jared at this point. It was three years back and being a lobstermen was the past, present and future for Jared.

He pulled in one of the traps with the help of Mr. Suit and they sat back as the older men sorted through the trap. Mr. Suit's hair was wild blond and his eyes seemed to pop out comically as he watched the lobsters get tossed into the bin. Everything about Mr. Suit was childish. He was the son of a Russian immigrant and had believed that America was safe even for immigrants. His naïve mind gave Jared an ideal way to try to hone his conversation skill. Jared would often lecture him on different places in New England that had fair prices. Mr. Suit would smile and then return to pulling in the traps.

They leaned against the side of the boat smoking cigarettes and talking to kill time.

"Weather gonna suck today." said Jared with a sense of authority.

"Not too worried about that. I'm...Oh dolphin!" He signaled to a fin peaking fearlessly through the water. He always pointed out the wildlife.

"Cool," grunted Jared, unenthusiastically.

"Listen," said Mr. Suit, "Dolphins are the future of research on humans...they have a lot in common with us."

"Not as much as rats."

"Yeah, but who would you rather swim with a dolphin or a rat?"

Jared chuckled into the breeze. It was this inner child that dominated Mr. Suit that would no doubt lead him to swimming with dolphins.

Later in the day Jared wandered through Portsmouth to his apartment. A single painting of an enlightenment galleon hung on the wall, a signal to his desire for a larger collection. The rest of it was quite bare. A mini fridge had a small wooden cutout of a lobster and piles of newspapers were shuffled in the corner. But none of these things could keep away the image of an inhumanely bare apartment.

He was sitting at a table, drinking cheap whiskey and shuffling through the paper when the doorbell rang. He opened it to see a man in a dark suit with sleeked black hair and a moustache.

"Mr. Farlance?"

"Yes."

"I am Mr. Chupra, Mr. Elron's lawyer. May I come in?"

"Sure..."

He entered and took a seat at the table.

"Whiskey?"

"Oh, no thanks."

Jared sat down.

"So... who is Mr. Elron?"

"One of the most successful realtor's in Montana and one of the most wealthy."

"And how does he relate to..."

"He was so hardworking that he never had time to marry. The bulk of his family is dead...except for you."

"What?"

"You are connected by some minor thread of family to him but that was enough to convince him to give you a portion of his will."

"How much?"

"Five hundred grand."

"Jesus Christ!" A sense of unreal joy and shock overwhelmed him.

"Congratulations Mr. Farlance, Lady Luck clearly loves you."

He could almost see his agricultural empire growing through those three years. As sun streamed in through the curtains, he thought about the growth of his farmland.

Igor's lonely cries rang through the house like a strange rooster's call for morning. It called again and he glanced at Jennifer, her face down on the pillow. Even in sleep she looked bored.

He got up and dressed. Igor's morning call died down and the sound of cars returned forcing him to pull tighter on his tie.

He arrived at the train station at eight a.m. He looked at the people with an angry sneer. He would have to return to the south to wrap up the purchase and sort out a mess of

minor logistics. He bought a pack of gum and dug his teeth in to trying to push off the thoughts of another day with those men.

The train seared once again through the cornfields and Jared felt the weariness of day approaching like a dry tidal wave of paperwork and nervous politeness. He longed to see blood. He didn't care from whose veins it just needed to come to wash away the day.

The train came to a slam by a field of grazing cattle.

"What the hell?" said a woman.

A moment later the intercom came on.

"I am sorry for the inconvenience. There are some troubles with the engine. We hope to be moving again within the next thirty to fifty minutes."

"Shit." muttered Jared as he whipped out his cell phone and dialed.

"Hello, Mr. Hardly's secretary speaking." said a cheerful woman.

"Yes, This is Mr. Farlance. Could you put me through to him please?"

"Sure."

Mr. Hardly's droning voice came on the other end.

"Hello, Mr. Farlance."

"Hello. Listen my train is having some technical difficulties. I will be about an hour or so late."

"Oh well. Don't worry. These things happen...Listen,I was meaning to tell you something came up, I won't be there. You will have to sort out the logistics with Mr. Leplang."

"Mr.Leplang." He suppressed his rising anger. "What about Mr. Birch?"

"He is going with me. Please excuse this."

"Yes, of course. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

As he hung up he could see his day becoming drearier.

Mr. Laplang smiled viciously as he entered.

"Have a seat, Mr. Farlance." Jared sat and glanced at the table to see there was no cup of water. "Sorry about your train ride."

Jared stared at him. "Let's get down to business. I signed my half of the contract. Mr. Farlance, you sign yours." He handed Jared the contract, letting his malicious tone of voice set in. Jared read the fine print.

"These aren't the terms we agreed on."

"Mr.Farlance, I am less financially trigger happy than my desperate colleagues..." He leaned in baring his teeth like a bat. "...I know when I am getting sold down the river."

His mind went back to the climax of the movie, a rival pirate gunned down Old Captain Silver Eye.

The bats continued to attack the moths by the garden as he walked in. They shrieked angrily at him. In a cry that sounded similar to 'failure'.

He entered to see Jennifer sitting on the couch, wine in hand ,watching the news with cold critical eyes.

"Hey, honey."

"Hey." he said roughly putting up his coat.

"I got Igor the pills. He is eating now."

He walked to the dark room to see Igor pecking away at his feed. He tried to smile or muster some sort of joy at this. But even Igor seemed cold and dry.

Up in the room he turned on the fan and lay on the bed. He thought of Mr. Suit swimming with dolphins in some blissful paradise in the south, filled with multicolored parrots and tranquil seas.

The thought was most painful when he thought of himself being there. Shuffling through beautiful tropical rainforests and miraculous seas, looking for land to buy.