

NOVEL EXCERPT: Jimmy Gollihue

by George LaCas

Jimmy Gollihue awoke to the howling of a bloodhound, a long voice from up the mountain, and the baying of the dog pulled a keening lament from his dream of the highway.

Waking was slow and it stretched out like a nighttime road, and he was Little Jimmy, not six years old. He sat in his grandmother's kitchen and watched the old woman. That there is a river banshee, said Granny Gollihue. When she starts her crying, you better get your affairs in order. It means your time has come.

Jimmy sat up in bed and rubbed his face, and he let up the blind. The August sun glared above the trees. He looked over at the clock. Ten-thirty. Pool hall opens in half an hour and I ain't even up yet, he thought.

He peered out the window at the trailer lot drive and watched for a minute, and he imagined the visibar on top of the county sheriff's car, the green and white of the paint job, the gold star on the side.

Then he pulled on his jeans and put on his boots and got his pool cue.

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Bad omens are a funny thing. They'll repeat on you if you aren't careful. Several hours later, like a raven walking on Jimmy's grave, Henry Dixon shuffled into the pool room. Hat in hand, and his face a mask of horror, he announced:

“Old Cody got eaten by an alligator! Pulled him right off the river!”

Jimmy, who stood there alone at the table, remembered the hound dog howling, the banshee crying in his dream, and he shivered in the close heat.

One or two men murmured words of surprise, but most turned back to their games of eight ball and nine ball and one-pocket, shaking their heads in disappointment and disgust.

“False alarm,” said one old boy.

“Damn gators'll eat anything,” said another.

Dodgie came back over to the table.

“You hear that shit?” said Dodgie.

“Yeah, I heard it,” said Jimmy.

“You believe that?”

“I believe it's your shot, Dodgie.”

Jimmy hadn't known Old Cody, but he'd heard rumors. He pictured the scene: Old Cody floating along in his battered skiff, drunk as shit, dangling a line in the river that probably wasn't even baited, and all of the sudden a monster alligator explodes out of the water, all teeth and growling hunger, and drags the old bastard down. Jimmy wondered what that must have been like, and which was worse: dying by gator attack, or drinking yourself to death. He asked himself, briefly, what a gator was doing this far north.

But he became bored, and then absorbed in the game once more, as

he watched Dodgie miss his shot on the six ball. Then he beat Dodgie three more games, a total loss that took a modest bite out of the boy's SSI check.

But not too much, thought Jimmy Gollihue. You got to keep them coming back.

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In a trailer camp on the edge of the forest, Iris lay in her bed and stared at the mildewed ceiling. I just seen the future and this is what I wake up to, she thought. What a weird dream.

Through it all it she was aware of being warm and naked in bed, yet she floated like a fairy spirit, diffuse and all-seeing, above a dark wooded scene, sure that something was about to happen, sure that she'd turned into air and cloud.

In her dream the road is a river, and the river's a road, a twisting turning green-scaled monster that follows a fool wherever he runs. First it's just a dirt track, and she hears a yelping and a baying and a great big gray hound dog comes running down it, his nose to the ground, and it is clear he's caught him a scent and he's hard upon it and not about to stop for nothing. The hound dog can't see it, but she can, as she watches from above: there's a terrible cloud on the road ahead, and the dog's about to run into it. She turns in her bed, and feels fear for the poor bloodhound.

Then the dream changes, as her dreams sometimes do, and the road is a river again, dark green and nasty and dangerous-feeling, and there's a dim shadow coming up from the bottom, rippling the dark water darker. The river changes to a road once more, and down it walks a young knight.

Iris begins to wake up but she doesn't want to, because now the

dream is turning sexy, maybe the knight is on some errand in her name. She sees how handsome he is and her hand creeps like a spider down her tummy, and at the end of the dream she swoops down to the foolish knight, so close she can smell his skin, and she can almost tell his purpose, she can almost say his name.

She got out of bed and right away she shivered in the shadow of the big stone house on the hill. The whole caravan camp sat squarely in the middle of its darkness. She looked out her window through a hole in the tinfoil, but all she could see was her own reflection in the dusty glass—a witchy green eye amid dead brown leaves.

Often, at dusk, Iris looked at the house's silhouette on the hill, like a black backdrop of her dreams to come, and she wondered what it was like to live there.

But for now, she shook her head and put on Aunt Fiona's old robe and went down the hall for a wash. Ain't no time for dreams, girl, she told herself. Ain't no time for knights in shining armor.

