

Somnambulist

by Jamal H. Iqbal

The fish, believed to be a lancetfish, washed onto the shore along Nags Head, along the Outer Banks, just south of Jennette's Pier. On the water, nothing much was heard except for the slight drip where an overhauled Honda Marine 4-Stroke's fuel pipe leak created a rainbow patch for the fish to slip through.

Although still uncertain of whether she was a *she* fish or a *he* fish (she definitely hated being an *it* fish), the fish liked what she saw of Nags Head. Finally, a world that gave her a choice. And felt no need to verify whether she was a real *she* fish, or just a *he* fish pretending to be one. Nor justify, as long as one ticked off a multiple-choice. And garnered a like. Or two.

"I NEVER Knew You Could Do this With An Orange. Everyone Should Try This!" the fish exclaimed, emphasizing each word as the latest news story fed into her fish brain via the *Pier Gazette* fluttering about the dock, still greasy from the chips it had held earlier. *This hack is perfect for emergencies (e.g. power outage) and completely made out of household items!*—was the headline.

"The power of this life hack beats the Dalai Lama's on simplicity! And seldom needs forwarding to seven mutual friends. In fact, irrespective of whether you share or not, the trolls will comment!" the fish continued, feeling excited at the potential applications of this life hack. Could it, perhaps "Unblock past loves and rekindle tomes lost in a haze of memories gone dim?" mumbled the fish as she tilted her head ever so slightly to the left, so the gills would get some breeze before moving on to the next story:

A Pakistani immigrant beat his wife to death in their Brooklyn home after she made the mistake of cooking him lentils for dinner instead of the hearty meal of goat meat that he craved, according to court papers.

"Lentils?" the fish murmured, pondering over the next highlighted article her eyes had scrolled to, "But lentils are good protein." Uncertain whether it was just an attack of synapsial overload or a

targeted selection edited to scale, the next few stories in the Nags Head Pier *Gazette* all dealt with protein, added in one form or another. Starting with the artist's statement from an exotic painter that laid colorful eggs—*"My work explores the relationship between consumerist fetishism and the emerging recycling culture within the visual arts. Due to our society's over consumption of plastic children's toys, the materials I need for my assemblages are all very accessible."* And ending with an obscure declaration from an en vogue blogger with a million fans—*"I think I might just stick with my dirty martinis and Xanax,"* the blogger deadpanned, glancing warily at the neon concoction a friend thrust in her face.

The fish decided not to scroll any further.

She chose instead, to post a selection from his favorite entertainment pages to her favorite cousin, *15-year-old Pennsylvania teen hero, Temar Boggs, who chased down a suspicious looking vehicle on his bike when he recognized a missing girl inside the car.* The selection consisted (in order):

A — Her favorite music, two years in the making, alternative rock band Coldplay's new album, essentially a concept piece about Chris Martin's break-up with Gwyneth Paltrow.

B — Her favorite candy crush alternative, *Angry Super Mario 4,* finally announced at this year's Comic Con.

C — Her favorite place, Dubai's only real Gastro-Pub spot located in the city's financial district DIFC, recently in the news for their deconstructed fish and chips: *Gold-leaf caviar over a yellow-fin tartare with a balsamic reduction and prawn crackers.*

As the fish completed her upload at the post office, a notification from the registrar next door caught her eye—Archie marries Valerie. Happy that status quo had finally lifted, the fish sent them a Starbucks mug, a <3, and a private message.

Her happy smile quickly turned turtle though, as a local administrator poked her about making public her recent views of the *Saudi King on a Mediterranean holiday, with the Crown Prince in charge.* Wearily she responded with a long explanatory thread about an era "Where secularism was portrayed as an upwardly mobile,

drawing room discourse they were inept at. Where a *mother loses custody over a bikini picture.*"

"But technology is singularity in pluralism," argued her friend, the administrator, citing the case of *Pizza Delivery via drone in Mumbai by Francesco Pizzeria pizza company—a first in the country.* "The Party will soon start a door to door contact programme to directly reach out to citizens. The purpose of the door-to-door contact programme is to listen to the people, understand their genuine concerns, learn from our mistakes, and clear all doubts due to negative propaganda aimed by sections of media and other parties at the benefits of drone technology," concluded the administrator.

The fish, beady eyed by now, decided to end their chat. It would soon be light and she didn't really fancy an early morning ride dodging pelicans, briefly or otherwise. Vowing to maintain a low profile at the next port she docked at, and never seek messengers again, she filed off her log and slipped back into the stream, far away from social niceties. Lurkers in the area thought she was simply hidden from view.

All except the ombudsman with the dark net, who had been tracking this anonymous browser's journey from port to port. Waiting for the moment he could make it pay for the mark it left on him. Even placing cookies covered in batter to lure it in. Vowing never to trust snooze button again he observed the scale left on the pier's edge.

"We shall block her exits, the next time she's unaccounted for," the fish heard the man without a job brag, as she sunk deeper, barely conscious of the sun's first rays hitting nearby window screens.

"It," the man bearing the mark quietly declared.

It's an "*it.*"

