

The Last Bailout

by Joe Tripician

Some people swore that the house was haunted. They were duped, but they were right.

I knew that there was a secret to the mansion on Essex Street. For too long the house sat abandoned. Its door was overgrown with ivy. Its porch infested with weeds. Pigeons had nested in the holes of its roof. And little children ran in terror whenever the wind whistled through its broken windows.

There was no doubt among the townsfolk that their fair city needed mending. Their jobs had fled overseas, leaving nothing but hope that a tourist trade could be built from the rubble.

The city was in dire need: gas, electric, sewage and emergency services were severely impaired.

Real estate prices were at their lowest, but not low enough, however, to sell the Essex Street house. This was especially troublesome because it was located in the middle of the commerce district. Nestled between the antique shop and the realty office, it might as well have worn a giant sign, advising visitors: "Get Out Now - Before it's Too Late!"

In desperation, the city council imported a shaman to exorcise whatever demons had possessed the house. The shaman day-jobbed as a children's clown in the neighboring hospital, but he was well qualified.

The clown was raised on a Native American reservation and tutored in the tribe's ancient shamanic practices. He was also a day trader, and through this hobby had special insight into the source of the Essex mansion's troubles.

It seems a hedge fund had acquired the property. The owners of this hedge fund were experts in derivatives, arbitrage and other financial wizardry that created profit against their own investors' bets. Months ago the hedge fund bought the town's local bank, the reality office and the Essex mansion. They were the source of its rumors.

They were shameless speculators who shorted the real estate market as their own rumors spread.

The hedge fund had also recently purchased the hospital where the shaman-clown worked, and downsized him along with a number of nurses, doctors and administrators. The clown volunteered his spare time, but the hospital could no longer support him in full. And so, as he departed for the Essex Mansion, he said goodbye to making balloon animals for children in crutches, to singing songs for kids in chemo, to painting faces on tots who had but days to live.

And there I stood elbow to shoulder with my neighbors on that blistering cold night, and watched the shaman, still in clown shoes, as he waddled towards the ivy-covered door.

He chanted with a quivering voice. He stomped with his oversized shoes. At his signal each of us lit a candle, and with our collective arms upraised we saw him shout and spin, like a rampaging merry-go-round.

A hailstorm poured down on the street, and quickly formed a funnel encircling the realty office, where inside the two corporate officers of the hedge fund sat, planning their next acquisition.

Fire shot up from the buried gas pipes, torching the office. The two men ran from the building and out into the street where a tree

suddenly fell across the sidewalk forcing them into the Essex mansion.

The vine parted and the door's mouth swallowed them with a horrid sucking sound.

The scent of sulfur permeated the night air as a final gust of wind extinguished our candles.

Their corrupt souls now haunt the house, which soon became a favorite tourist stop.

From that night on, we heard them wail in their tortured grief: "Sell... sell... sell..."

Nothing was ever the same again after that.

