

# Southport Village Voices

A Little Magazine  
by and for the  
Residents of Southport  
Number 32 October 2012

David Kapp, Editor

---

## SHORT STORY

A WATERY GRAVE  
by Sandy Bernstein

Denise watched in morbid fascination as the police pulled the limp body from the reservoir. She stood back with the gathering crowd as the sun dipped to the west. Its fiery glow melting into the backdrop as an eerie gray shadow cast its net over the scene. An omen she thought, *more dark days ahead.*

"I wonder who it is?" Someone whispered.

The activity wasn't far from the shoreline and the crowd drew a heavy collective sigh as divers heaved the bulky body from the murky water and placed it on the waiting rowboat.

"Probably some homeless guy," a man muttered. "What do you think?" He asked Denise.

She shrugged and flashed a nervous smile.

"Maybe it's that Peabody fella. He's been missing for months," a woman commented.

"Na, it's been too long. He looks more preserved," the man replied.

"Fresh kill," someone snickered.

Denise held her breath as the boat moved sluggishly toward the shore. The humidity was like a wet sponge about to expel its contents. She felt the mounting pressure as her heart pounded out a rock rhythm in her chest.

Denise kept silent as the scene played out in slow, Hollywood fashion, cops ushering everyone back as the boat neared the shore, mosquitoes biting. The crowd stilled.

"Is it Charlie?" One of the cops asked, lending a hand.

Denise inched forward, the knot tightening in her stomach as she tried to quell her anxiety. She saw the grim outline of a man's body. It looked bloated as the cops pulled it from the boat and placed it in a body bag. She glimpsed a light colored T - shirt and a new pair of Reeboks on the corpse.

"It does look like Charlie, Ray. Whadya think?"

"Could be. But no one's reported him missing."

"No one would."

"Well, no matter, we'll id him later."

An icy chill raced up Denise's backside as she watched them shove the body in the rescue van. The doors slammed, making her jump. It was so surreal.

The police ordered everyone home and the somber crowd dispersed as the vehicle pulled away.

Ray walked over.

"I didn't see you, Ray," she said. "Guess I didn't recognize you out of uniform."

"I was off duty when the call came in."

"Who found him?"

"Some kids, mess'n 'round here as usual."

Denise looked away. She let out a deep sigh, feeling the stagnant air. It felt as suffocating as her marriage had been. She would welcome fall, even as her fifth wedding anniversary appeared on the calendar. This time she would celebrate it alone. Her mind drifted. *"Till death do you part."* She thought, recalling the minister's haunting words. She knew then life would not be easy. Charlie's temper was like a time bomb - ticking, ticking, always ticking, ready to explode at any moment. She never knew what would set him off. The drunkenness, the verbal and physical abuse. It was too much. Charlie's low self-esteem and lack of self-control would in the end, be the end. Everyone knew it. Everyone but Denise. She had to find out the hard way - so did Charlie. She crossed her arms in front of her, feeling a sudden chill. Ray took off his nylon windbreaker and draped it over her shoulders. She gazed back, glad the waiting was over. But she could still see the look of sheer terror on Charlie's face as he turned back before plummeting to his death.

A few nights earlier he had dragged her to the far side of the reservoir after another unending brawl. It was worse this time. Her ribs ached and her face burned, blood was everywhere. She hurt all over, yet she felt numb. She could hardly move by the time he threw her in the car and drove the few miles to the reservoir. He'd cut a hole in the chain link fence with heavy wire cutters and dragged her through. The sharp steel edges felt like jagged teeth ripping her side, tearing what was left of her shirt as he yanked her by the shoulders. Charlie tossed aside the No Trespassing sign and laid her on the ground like a limp rag doll while he went to seek out the highest spot in which to toss her from. Denise knew he had already done his homework. In those long agonizing moments, she managed to pull herself together.

As she lay battered and beaten she recalled every nasty thing he had ever done to her; every hit, every punch, every cut, every curse. She thought about all the trips to the emergency room, the calls to the police, the restraining orders. The times she threw him out, the times she took him back - out of fear. She took all the threats, including his favorite, how he was going to throw her off the rocky cliff into the murky water below, where no one would ever find her. There she would rest in her watery grave along with empty beer cans, tires, and the everyday trash people tossed away. She would be the prize, a treasured piece of garbage among all the rest, shining in the muddied waters.

Denise pulled it all up inside her; all the bad memories, the pain, the shame, everything spinning faster and faster like a cyclone until she was so blinded by rage she could contain no

more. She stood on shaky legs gulping in air then barreled down on Charlie with a force she didn't know she had. She charged at him pushing him back until he fell like a rock from the ledge. She saw his head turn in that last instant, the moonlight capturing the stunned look on his face as he plunged into the darkness below. She collapsed hearing his screams.

"Come on," Ray said softly, proffering his hand. "We can go to the station now or later if you prefer."

"Now," she whispered, placing her hand in his.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

They walked away just as the sun dipped behind the granite wall. The reservoir was still, save for the buzzing mosquitoes. The watery grave behind them.