

A small forgiving smile pinched the corner of the boy's mouth. "You don't like when people tell you the truth."

"Truth or no truth, Sonny, I don't remember askin' you a goddamn thing."

"I was just trying to help you."

The man leaped from his seat with a flash. "Goddammit! I don't need your help!" He sent the milk crate flying with a swift kick. "I don't need anybody's help! And I don't remember askin' you a goddamn thing!"

"You probably don't remember a lot of things."

The man rushed the boy, and the boy's eyes grew wide in surprise and he backed up in a hurry.

The man went to leap over a pile of rubbish that stood between him and the boy, but his pant leg got hung up on an old rusty bike frame and he went down hard, but somehow managed to protect the bottle from being shattered.

"That's what you get!" the boy scolded, though as soon as he said it he felt like shit.

The man wasn't moving, but lay sobbing with his face buried in the crook of his arm.

The boy looked around before approaching the man very cautiously. "You okay?" he said, a slight tenderness in his voice.

The man didn't respond.

As the boy got closer, he realized the man wasn't sobbing; he was laughing. The boy didn't know what else he could do for the guy. He thought about calling an ambulance. But all they would do would be to treat him, then turn him over to the Santa Cruz PD, which may or may not toss his poor ass in County.

At least he wasn't dead.

The boy wasn't so sure that was such a good thing anymore.

He reached down and stroked the back of the man's head. "Silly ol' Badfish."

The boy took off up the tracks and towards home, which really wasn't a home to him as much as it had been an unpredictable motel of unknowns, where the shadow of a man resembling his father had wandered drunk among the empty bottles scattered about the dark room like corpses as he quoted from Revelation and tended his broken heart.

The man could not see the boy as he went off, but he could hear the gravel crunching underfoot as he walked

away. After the footsteps faded, he lifted his head to look up the tracks and he saw a silhouette of the boy set against the light of the moon. He watched him walk and walk until he rounded the curve and was out of sight. "Come back, Sonny! Come back!" He started to cry into the sleeves of his raggedy shirt. "Don't go! I'm sorry!"

He stretched his arms out into the dark, in the direction the boy had gone, until his arms tired and gave out on him. After that, he lay there for a while with the rubbish pile and stared at the moon. It dawned on him that the liquor stores would be closing up in the next few hours. He knew if he didn't get his face cleaned up and get a move on and head downtown and start playing to get a few bucks together to get himself another bottle, it was gonna be a helluva rough night.

When he finally got back onto his feet, he dusted himself off with an air of dignity befitting a king and gracefully finished off what was left in the bottle, then gently set it down with the trash. He walked over to the thick ivy patches near the old sofa and retrieved his pack and slung it over his back, then reached into the bushes nearby and pulled out a tattered black guitar case. He stormed off past the liquor store and on to the outdoor showers at Cowell's Beach. "Silly ol' Badfish," he muttered, and wondered where the hell he'd ever heard such a thing.

Anthony Detro is a native of Santa Cruz, California, which is the setting of some of his most treasured memories. "Badfish" is loosely based on a Buddhist parable, and was originally written to be adapted into a feature length film with original music. This is Detro's first published work.

NOAH BUCHANAN

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Oil on linen, 29 x 46 in



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