

# Colorblind

## The Katrina Monologues

by  
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### I - THE DEAD

*(middle aged or elderly man)*

Now you get to see how the other half lives...and dies too for that matter. And on TV to boot. So you know it must be true eh? The attention is little bewildering so you'll have to excuse us if we seem...you know...out of sorts. I've seen my city on TV a few times, and it always seemed no bigger than Bourbon street. With the booze flowing and the trumpets blowing...and...you know.....all them saints going marching in.....it's like the whole world shoved into an alley. But we're out here on the fringes too. I don't get to Bourbon street much really. From where I sit.....we usually have more pressing things on our mind than getting a co-ed to lift her shirt.

*(short pause.....takes in the audience)*

And that's especially true now....because....well.....I'm dead. I shit you not.

And worse even, I'm dead and nobody *knows* it yet because I'm stuck down here under all this....stuff. It stinks down here really. But you can put up with things easier when you got company....and I got lots. Some ain't in a very good mood mind you, but I understand that.

*(fixing himself some.....perhaps running a hand through his unkempt hair or trying to rub the wrinkles out of his filthy shirt)*

And I'm sorry 'bout my appearance too.....but there's not much call down here for a shirt and tie. Everybody says..."well, they got plenty of notice....knew she was coming....shoulda gotten out"...but....well.....you know....

*(puts his hand up...like "one thing at a time")*

Later.

*(pause...Now looking towards the sky...for someone to come)*

I guess the water is keeping 'em. I ain't blaming nobody you understand. I can tell you one thing 'bout being dead. You suddenly develop lots of patience. And I can see some things too. In my head like. Not sure how but I can. I see folks 'bout going crazy waiting

in line for gas. Shit. I wonder if they'd like to trade places with me? Right 'bout now I'd gladly stand in line and wait for anything. *(laughs)*

They told us to get on out of here....but I don't just have my SUV quite yet....which makes sense not just 'cause I can't afford one but 'cause I don't know how to drive. Lived here my whole life. Can get around fine without one.

Maybe they thought I'd call the limosine service or something. Get out of town in style eh? I had 7 dollars and 72 cents total...and even that got swept away.

I wonder how far it would have got me anyways? Maybe a gallon of gas right? *(laughs at the absurdity of this)*

*(sits down now)*

Hell....they've been trying to scare the daylights out of us folks for years anyway. What's one more...right? I've ridden out a few. But the water come at us this time different. Used to it maybe roll down the street like you see the waves that kids'd be playing with in the ocean. You take some water on the toes....but then it goes back where it came. But this time....well.....they say the Lord works in mysterious ways normally. But when he comes to New Orleans.....all bets are off. Somebody wrote a letter once to the local government 'round here. "Pardon me" it said. "But is the majority always drunk?" *(laughs)*

*(Now stands.....looking up again wondering where the help is)*

What a sight it's gonna be when this water recedes. Man....it's hard enough to look at a person wrapped up in a sheet. But nobody I know is gonna walk up and pull that sheet away. I feel bad for the poor bastard who's gotta drag my dead behind out of here. I wish I could tell them that.

I really do.

I've been thinking lots though....'bout lots of things. Got lots of time now. All these people coming into town now. The Big Easy...right? My ass. Nothing easy down here.

New Orleans ain't supposed to look like *me*.

All of us in here crouching behind these levees.like we're under siege...right? Pontchartrain.....the Mississippi. From all sides. And folks gotta come in now and try to understand what it feels like to be swept away by something we've been holding back for all these years. It's been like a truce between us I guess. Both sides get itchy to get at each other sometimes during a truce....but you got some honor so you don't break it. But we musta done something to get her in here. Maybe when they get me outta here and I go wherever I'm supposed to go I'll know why.

*(more animated now)*

And politics is breaking out everywhere! I'm down here waiting for a hand and I see it's busy patting somebody else on the back. I wish they'd do their patting later. We do our politics a little different in New Orleans anyway. If some money needs to change hands nobody wets their pants about it. Ol' Huey Long came in and if he saw something that got stuck he'd grease it to get it moving again. And if the grease costs money, well then so be it. Nothing's free down here. What do you call it? Red tape? Shoot.....down here red tape used to be something we used to tie up bureaucrats. I remember what Huey said. "The time has come for all good men to rise above principle."

The more organized you try to make a place like New Orleans.....the more you're gonna muck it up.

"The only difference I ever found between the Democratic leadership and the Republican leadership is that one of them is skinning you from the ankle up and the other from the neck down."

Old Huey said that too. I wish the corrupt bastard was still alive. I wouldn't be down here if he was.

*(long pause...contemplative now)*

Everybody talking 'bout black and white now too. It's good for people to be talkin' 'bout it really.....long as they don't be foaming at the mouth 'cause then all you get out is spittle.

We got just about any color you can mention down here.....but what we lack in common in the looks department we make up for in the pocketbook.....if you know what I mean. Shoot....we're *all* poor. I got no time to blame somebody for the color of his daddy. And let me tell you something.

This goddamn water is colorblind.

But I don't want to take up all your time. There's some others that want to talk I suspect. And I'm gonna let 'em. I don't think folks are gonna learn much from me....but maybe if you just remember I'm down here....that'd be alright with me.

## **II – NURSING HOME**

*(Woman wheels herself over to imaginary window. Tries to look outside. Panic covers her like a blanket. She wheels back towards center stage and picks up the phone and dials. She is scared but still confident that she won't be abandoned. This is, after all, America.)*

Billy? Billy? It's your Mamma. Yes. Yes. No...I'm ok. Really. I am. Listen. Oh hush up Billy you work for emergency services....you need to calm down some to get your own job done. How's it gonna look with you going on TV all riled up. You'll scare people to death. Now just calm down you hear? Ok....now what are you and your boys doing down there? When are you coming to get me? This water is not looking too good. They already got us on the top floor as it is. Did the levee go or what? Well....you point a gun with one bullet at your head one too many times you're gonna lose your head right? Now you get down here...you hear me? Ok...when? Alright now....don't wait too long. I know it won't look good with you putting your mother at the head of the line....but....well...you know..... put your mother at the head of the line. *(laughs)* Alright. Yea...I'm fine. Don't you worry. I'm not going dancing or anything. You know where to find me...hear? Top floor. Ok?

*(she hangs up the phone and speaks almost to herself)*

He's a good boy. Prone to panic though. Like his father that way. All the men on his side are like drama queens. This whole city. People acting like they on camera 24 hours a day.

I can tell you though....watching water rising is no way for an old lady in a wheelchair to spend her days. I'd much rather be bored.

*(She wheels herself over to the "window" again and worriedly peers out. Now a quick up and down fade with the lights.....signifying another day has come and gone. As they come back up she is on the phone again)*

Billy? Billy? It's your Mamma again. I was expecting you yesterday. What's going on down there? I can see the water coming up the steps. Yea....we're as high as we can go. It's about halfway up the stairs now I guess. Listen....when you come to get me can you bring me a cold beer and a steak too? What do you mean? Who's gonna come then? What the hell is a FEMA? Is that a boy or a girl's name? What about Nagin? Can't he come and get us out of here? That's what we get for electing a television repair man governor. Good God....I gotta rely on republicans to get me out? God help us all Billy. Pat Robertson ain't calling for us to be shot is he? Well that's good news then. Billy, laughing is all I got left right now. I tried crying you know what it does to me? Yea...it makes me feel bad. Well when they coming? Today? When today? You know....I wanna make sure I have my make-up on when they get here. Now calm down. They'll be here. They ain't gonna let an old lady die up here. My son is an important man. I'm talking about you in case you're confused. Billy....I hate to talk this way to you but I really need to get to the toilet. You understand? Ain't nobody here to help me Billy. Ain't nobody here to help me. *(now slightly annoyed at him)* You know where I am right? I mean....you *did* put me here. What day is it Billy? Is it Tuesday? Son you gotta come. Everybody's gone.....

*(she hangs up the phone)*

He's a good boy. He's gonna make sure somebody comes. He's a good boy. I'm not one for the language.....but I have to tell you. It sucks to be old.

*(She wheels herself over to the "window" again and worriedly peers out. Now a quick up and down fade with the lights.....signifying another day has come and gone. As they come back up she is on the phone again. True panic has sunk in now. She is growing much weaker)*

Billy? Billy? It's your Mamma again. Billy why ain't nobody coming? Why can't you come Billy? The water is at my feet now. It's up the steps and at my feet. I got nowhere else to go. I can reach down and touch it. I'm so thirsty I almost grabbed a mouthful. But the smell.....it's ungodly. You gotta come. I can't go any higher. What's today now? It's Wednesday already? Can't you turn the pumps on Billy? All you have to do is say so right? Just turn 'em on. People will listen to you. When you coming to get me? You coming today? I'd rather you come Billy. I want you to come. I don't want anybody else to see me like this. I had to go Billy. In my pants I mean. I don't want somebody seeing me like this. You're my son. You should be coming. You come tomorrow Billy? Promise me now. Somebody coming? The water Billy. The water....

*(Now a quick up and down fade with the lights.....signifying another day has come and gone. As they come back up she is on the phone again. Now nothing but true despair)*

Billy? Billy? You still there? Somebody coming right? I can hear the dogs. They're yelping from outside. You ever hear a dog cry Billy? It's the worst sound in the world. I thank God I can't get out of this chair to see through that window. You know that Billy? If you can't come can you make the dogs stop crying Billy? Can you come and get the dogs instead? I keep waiting but nobody is coming. The water keeps coming. I'm as high as I can go Billy. All I can hear are the dogs. Can you hear them where you are? It's so loud. The water Billy. The water. Everybody is gone...

*(Now a quick up and down fade with the lights.....signifying the last day has come. As they come back up she is on the phone again. It probably doesn't work anymore. The water is up around her neck. As she speaks these final lines she tries desperately to keep her head above the unseen water)*

Billy? Billy? Are you there? Nobody coming Billy. Nobody coming. Why you leave me alone to die? I want you to come. I want to hold you in my arms....like a baby. I still got the strength to do that. I think I do. Billy it's dark again out there. Dark again. It's lonely enough when the sun is out. Don't you think Billy?

When you coming for me son? When you com...

*(the last word is cut off.....blackout)*

**III – ON TV**

*(Middle class middle aged white woman)*

What I tell you I swear is a true story. I met some neighbors the other day. You know....boomers. Freshly pressed and blown dry. New to the neighborhood. SAAB in the driveway. A pack of probable illegals cutting their brown grass.

We got to talking about Katrina and they wondered if the water could get to us. I said I doubt it since Lake Pontchartrain is....you know....*in friggin' New Orleans*.

Turns out they thought New Orleans was on the east coast...and hoped that if it came here it wouldn't be like another Ag-e-ness. They pronounced it that way too. Three syllables. Ag-e-nes.

For some reason this entire encounter....which I somehow made it through without my pills by the way....made me feel like New Orleans was the kind of place you could see with a telescope..

Hell.....even the president keeps referring to it as being in “this part of the world”....as if *he's* standing in the middle of Mozambique or something.

But after I took my pills I got to thinking. Even though *I* smugly realize New Orleans is not near Boston....and unlike our fearless leader.....I would *feel* better saying it was in “this part of the *country*” as opposed to “this part of the world”.....but I shouldn't feel *too* superior now. I mean....what the hell do I know of New Orleans?

Or Biloxi for that matter? The only reason I know where *Biloxi* is is because Neil Simon wrote a play about it they turned into a movie with Matthew Broderick...and you can't swing a dead cat 'round your head without hitting something that Matthew Broderick is involved with. I think he may be in New Orleans going house to house in a boat ...but that could be Sean Penn. I get the two of 'em mixed up.

What do I know of *anything* outside of our valley for that matter? We tend to hole ourselves up around here....like turtles with stockpiles of xanax.

I know Fats Domino lives in New Orleans. I know the Neville Brothers are there....and I know that Randy Newman song they sing (*sings*).

*“Louisiana.....Louisiana....  
they're trying to wash us away...  
they're trying to wash us away”*

Sorry....I'm no Aaron Neville but you get the idea.

I know that I quit drinking about 10 years ago so I'm probably not allowed anywhere *near* the place. I had a friend who went to Mardis Gras twice and bragged that he only got arrested once.....(*laughs*)

I read a book about the great 1927 flood a few years back and the only thing I could remember about it was that poker was invented in New Orleans.

I figure that's relevant now but I'm not sure how. I can come up with a bad analogy if you give me enough time (*laughs to herself*).

Oh...and the Marsalis brothers live in New Orleans too although I always get the two of 'em mixed up. Brandford and Wynton are their names. And Harry Connick Jr...who has a name that always makes me think I *should* know who his father is but I don't.

And so now this....this place...is being drowned and we all get to watch the show on TV.

And I sit here....and watch. And when I get hungry I eat....when I get thirsty I drink....when I have to pee I just walk over to the bathroom. I flick a switch and lights come on. I pick up a phone and get a dial tone.

The mailman comes every day and if there's a car parked blocking our mailbox he won't deliver because he won't get out of the truck. (*sarcastically*) I tell you....there's inspirational stories like that everywhere 'round here.

It's a wonder *we're* not on TV.

But then again....nobody is shooting at me....which is always a bonus.

And at night I tuck my kids in bed....read them a story....pack their lunches....and then when everything is quiet....what?

(*long pause.....staring straight ahead. Affected now*)

I feel awful.

I wake up and I swear the same roofs have the same people on them.

Folks that went to sleep on the side of the highway *woke up* on the side of the highway. In *America*. Am I the only person in the world watching?

My neighbors are having a labor day party. The booze is flowing. Music blaring. People puking up their plastic cups of Coors Light on the road before it even gets dark. Is this a distraction maybe? Do they have it right? Or is it just....one obscenity meant to battle another?

But then who the hell am *I* to feel this way?

Football stadiums are filled with tens of thousands of fans...actually *caring* about what's happening on the field. While a few hundred miles away an old lady in a nursing home is abandoned and left to drown while sitting in her wheelchair.

But then who the hell am *I* to feel this way?

People are dying on *live* TV. I can actually *see* people dying. It's perverse. Can you imagine.....being left to die up here in the valley and having CNN stick their camera's in *your* face and having the state of *Louisiana* watching live from *their* homes? If that sounds bizarre it's because it damn well is.

But again....what or who gives me the right to pass judgement?

On Sunday I didn't go to church. I wasn't sure what I was gonna say or what I would be asked if I went, so I stayed home. God's funny that way.

But in Mississippi....they went. Or at least they gathered where their church used to be. And they scratched out an area and had services. Posted a sign. "Mass at 9am. Bring your own chair."

They locked arms and sang. They *gave thanks*. Fires were actually burning *in the water*....but they were giving thanks.

Ignored before the flood....and ignored after the flood. And when the water finally recedes, they'll be ignored yet again.

By me.

*(pause here.....let that line sink in)*

But the beauty of our time is that you don't have to pull a Bin Laden and crawl into a cave to get away. You need only to turn off the TV. You can become disengaged without getting off the couch. With very little effort you too can think that New Orleans is somewhere near Boston and that Ag-e-nes is coming to wash you away.

But listen to me....I'm feeling all superior again.

Our gift and curse is a short memory. So this too shall pass....as they say. People like me will move on....and people like them.....

Why do I say that? People like *them*?

Look....I've got no reason to lie to you. Like most people I save my lies for people I know and love. *(laughs)*

But as repulsive as what I'm seeing is.....I can't help think that deep down....and I mean way down.....what I'm *feeling* is just as bad.

#### **IV – NEW ORLEANS POLICE OFFICER**

*(NOLA police officer sitting on a chair holding a gun and a folded piece of paper)*

Funny. I've been outgunned.

*(stares at the gun in his hands)*

Until now.

When you pick up this note....make sure to give it to a police officer. I want them to see it first. They'll let my wife know. I want it to come from them. No offense....but I don't really know you all. This kind of thing is so easily misunderstood.

This city broke my back first. And then it broke my heart. You need both for this job. The water took the order away....swept it....gone. And when you lose order....tell me.....what you got left? Order is my job. I could always restore it before. But now....there's nothing I can do. I tried....and it didn't work.

We knew it was coming too....and that makes it even worse. And when it got dark and stayed dark.....we lost the ability to communicate. And so when we were being preyed upon....we lost that sense of unity that makes a cop powerful. You take down a cop....you gotta deal with 100 more. Here.....we were alone. In the dark. With lots to lose. And when you're alone fighting somebody with *nothing* to lose....well then....that's not a fair fight.

I started thinking 'bout things I shouldn't have. Home. Wife. Kids. That's not the job. That's later. The job is now.

*(pause)*

And I just can't do it anymore.

You ever hear a shot ring out? In the dark I mean?

*(lights go out and a shot is quickly heard)*

When you hear it every night you can tell where it's coming from. You can tell what kind of gun they're firing. You can tell how close it is. And you go towards it. The gangs...the drugs.....they lay across everything down here....like mosquito netting. We'll go and get one....and two more take his place. You take those 2 down....you got 4 more hiding in the shadows. And they got nothing. And fear is just worrying somebody gonna take what you own away from you. But when you got nothing.....there ain't no fear. These guys are

getting blown away down here every night. You think fucking lake *Pontchartrain* is gonna scare 'em?

This is *opportunity*....you understand? A couple hundred of our guys just disintegrated. Some died in the water....some lost their families....and some just walked away. So we're weak. And these guys can smell weakness. It's like the stench of the water. We got no lights. No gas for the cars. All we can do is hole up inside. We go up on the roof...protect the building....while people are dying down below in the dark. You can hear 'em screaming. But up there it was like being in a WW I trench. You put head above it.....you could be dead. You understand what I'm saying? We're *losing*.

We got *no control*.

They're asking us to stop the looting. Hell....*we're* looting. Most of the guys are wearing clothes they took off shelves. Chief said you could tell who didn't lose their homes 'cause they were still in uniform.

The guys they always be making fun of me. I like everything neat. My desk....everything's where it's supposed to be. You got a phone it belongs in the back left corner. Next to it is where the family pics go. In the middle is where you put your little clock. On the right corner is your lamp. You gotta create your own order. Otherwise...what'd you got?

You got drawers in the desk.....you use 'em. Top of the desk ain't a drawer. Somebody dump stuff there I go crazy. Press calls me and asks what happened, I tell 'em straight. Kid gets his head blown off.....you gonna sugar coat that to the newspapers? Rape? What you say about that? Ask me a yes/no question and you're gonna get a yes/no answer. Ask me why I'm sitting here with a gun in my hand and I'm gonna tell you.

I've seen enough....and I don't want to see no more.

We had no gas so we had to siphon it from other cars. We had no food. We were looting gun shops ourselves to keep the ammo off the street....and we were keeping some for ourselves. (*showing the gun*) What I got in here are looted bullets. How's that for irony?

I saw a woman out on I-10. She was carrying her baby. And she was begging me for water. I had none. There was no water. And she told me her baby hadn't had any water for 3 days. She was screaming. "You're a cop....you *have* to help me...my baby is gonna die out here." And I couldn't do nothing. And she tried to force the baby into my arms. She still figured she was safer with me than anybody....because I was still a *cop*. In the midst of all this madness....I was still a police officer. But I wouldn't take her. I drove away. I think about what might have happened to them.....I try not to....but I think about it all the time. And when I see the bodies I wonder. Is that her? Is that my baby?

And I'd go back to work and everybody would want to *talk* about it all the time. What they'd seen. What they'd heard. And it got so I couldn't talk to nobody. Not even my

closest friends. And the more I wouldn't talk....the more they'd come to me. "Suck it up" they'd say. "Better days are coming. Suck it up man."

Better days *are* coming.

I'll tell you one more thing I saw. In the Garden District. There was a woman's body laying there for days. After a while you didn't even notice. But some guy gathers stones from somebody's garden and makes this crypt for her. Right where she lay. And he makes a white cross out of some wood laying around and with some black spray paint writes next to the body.

'Here lies Vera. God help us.'

When God won't....the police are supposed to. And I could not save Vera. I could not save that woman on the bridge....or her baby.

And now I can't even save myself.

Believe me when I say.....you've never really seen New Orleans.

Make sure this note gets to a cop.....you hear?

*(lights.....and the final gunshot is heard in the dark)*

## **V – A CHILD**

*(little boy with a piece of paper he will read from)*

The grown-ups are asking me to do this. Tell my story. I'm not too good at telling stories. I like it better when my Mom tells *me* stories. But I'll try if you all promise not to laugh. I like it better 'cause I can't see you. I can pretend you're not there I guess. But don't laugh 'cause just 'cause I can't see you I can *hear* you fine. Ok?

I wrote this all down because the grown-ups asked me too. So I'm just gonna read what I wrote. They helped me with some of the hard words but they didn't write it, I did. So don't worry about that Ok?

*(now reads the rest)*

There were 6 of us. Seven I guess if you count me. They were my brothers and my sisters and some were my cousins. And then the water came and daddy and mamma said we all had to go up on the roof. I asked Mamma if there was gonna be food and water on the roof but she didn't answer me so I knew that meant no. When my mamma don't answer it's always no. My baby brother needed his milk and if I had some I would have given it to him but I didn't have any. When he doesn't get it he cries. And he was crying louder than usual....which is really loud in case you're wondering.

But we were on the roof when the helicopter come and it made me as scared as the water really. It's so loud and it brings the wind with it and the wind can knock you off the roof if you're not careful enough. I grabbed my baby brother she he didn't fall and pretty soon a man slides down from the helicopter and lands on our roof. I asked him if he had any milk 'cause he had lots of pockets in his pants...zippers everywhere I mean....but I don't think he heard me because the helicopter is so loud. But it still wasn't as loud as my baby brother. And when you are louder than a helicopter that is pretty loud so he must have been really hungry or mad or something. I was holding onto his hand but he kept grabbing onto my neck instead so I just picked him up. I'm strong enough to do that.

Then the helicopter man brought down this basket that look liked something I saw in a movie one time about kids at Christmas time riding their sleighs. I never rode a sleigh in the snow but that's what this looked like. But he told Mamma and Daddy that he could only fit us kids for now. I guess there wasn't any room for grown ups in the helicopter or something. But he kept saying...."25 minutes....25 minutes.....we'll be back to get you in 25 minutes". When I knew that we were supposed to go without Mamma and Daddy I wish we had stayed inside instead of coming on the roof. And then Mamma started to cry and so did the rest of the kids but I didn't because I know that to get Mamma to stop crying....if I cry that's not good. So I just told her I'd take care of my baby brother and thought that would make her stop but it didn't it just made her cry louder. I don't really understand how to make her stop crying but I thought I did but I do know that I can make her cry easy though.

And then Daddy told the man to go. And we got in the basket and went up to the helicopter and my baby brother stopped crying and kept saying "look look look" but I had my eyes closed so I couldn't. And when the helicopter started to fly again I saw my mamma and daddy getting smaller and that he was hugging her or maybe holding her so she wouldn't fall off. And I could see all the water too. I thought water was supposed to be blue like in the pictures from school but this water was brown so it must have been a different kind.

They brought us to a place that was dry....and then when we got out they went back up. I thought they were going to get mamma and daddy but I don't think they thought we had one 'cause they went the other way instead and they couldn't hear me yelling....probably because my baby brother was still pretty loud. So we just started to walk. My baby brother had a diaper on and it was kinda saggy so I don't think he felt like walking so he grabbed my neck again and I carried him. The others just followed me and it was like a parade when I looked back 'cause they were in a line like. There were lots of people around so I just kinda went where they went until an ambulance picked us up. They didn't know were mamma and daddy were even though I kept saying they were on the roof.

They were asking us a ton of questions just like in school. None of the kids would talk but I told them my name and they asked what Mamma and Daddy looked like and I told them my daddy was tall and my mamma was short and I told them what school I went to.

I wish I was in school there now. I can't believe I'm saying that. I gave them my phone number too but the last time I saw my phone is was underwater so I don't think you could hear it ring like that.

My baby cousin wouldn't talk at all until somebody took a picture of her and then she saw it and said "Gabby Gabby"....which was her name. My other baby cousin had his name on his shirt so that wasn't too hard. My baby brother got some milk and I thought he was gonna drink about 5 gallons of it but he stopped and fell asleep on a cot for like a really long time. And after 3 days a man who was my new friend told me my mother was in Texas and that we'd be going to see her in a airplane. I've never been on an airplane before but I guess it's kinda like the helicopter. We drove in a car to get to the plane and my baby brother was hugging me again....and I kinda felt like I wanted to hug somebody for a change so I asked my new friend and he said his arms were big enough to hug both of us. And he did...and he carried us on the plane and I never did stop hugging him so he asked if he could come with us to Texas and they said ok. When I got there I told him I didn't have to hug him anymore because I could hug my mamma now. I didn't want him to feel sad but he cried anyway.

He said...."goodbye daddy."

He called me "daddy" because I took care of the other kids I guess. Like a daddy would.

*(stops reading)*

That's my story. I hope you liked it. The end.

*(Lights)*

## **VI – MAN ON ROOF**

*(Man. Middle aged)*

I moved here 12 years ago....from Texas of all places. So I guess the world really is round. We keep going in circles.

When I moved in a neighbor come over and says..."you got an ax in the attic doncha?"

Well...I knew this place wasn't exactly Beverly Hills but I didn't see the need for no ax. And I told him that and he says...."no no.....the ax is in case you need to go crashing through your roof". He could see I didn't understand and he says..."if that water comes you'll wish you had an extra floor." And then he smiled some and left. Welcome to New Orleans right? I just put my life savings into this house....and my new neighbor is smiling and talking about taking an ax to it.

Well...that was a long time ago. And 'bout when the Mayor goes on TV about the evacuation....the same neighbor comes over the knocks on the door. I open it and he's

got an ax with a red ribbon wrapped around it. He says, “Merry Christmas early” and winks at me and that’s it. Walks away. He knew I didn’t listen to him back then. Man....you come down here you can’t hide anything from nobody. Your soul is on display if you stay long enough. That’s why I never planned on leaving. I don’t mind sharing.

But when the water came.....it came like it meant to hurt people. It wasn’t just passing through, if you know what I mean. It was *invading*. So I get to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.....and I start counting the steps that ain’t covered. 10,8,4,2.....and now it’s on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. And it’s dark. You can hear it...and you can feel it. But you can’t really see it. You just kept thinking...you know.....the pumps. They’d be going...right? It’s gonna go down. But now it’s got your shoes. Now it’s got your socks. And now it’s got your belt.

Let me tell you something.....when the water comes up past your dick....it’s time to get to higher ground.

So up in th attic....there’s the ax. Still with the ribbon on it. Man....you ought to try swinging an ax at something above your head that’s at an angle.....and do it in the dark. I’m lucky I didn’t swing the damn thing around and decapitate myself. But it finally bust through. A little hole. Then a bigger one. Then I used my hands to rip out the sides. And I was out.

You get out or you die. That’s it.

Well....let me tell you what it looks like from up there. You’re on a roof...right? But you can’t look *down* on anything. If you was Jesus and could walk on water you could step right off without having 2 feet in the air at the same time. I’m a praying man, and I’m not ashamed to say it. But being up here....by myself....well it didn’t exactly make me feel closer to God.....you understand? And you look for landmarks....something to identify. And they’re not there. I couldn’t make out which house was which because all I could see were the roofs.....and here’s something I hope you never learn firsthand. All roofs look the same.

But like I said I’m a praying man. And I only thought ‘bout this part later...when I was seeing what it looked like from the sky. But the water come up and up....but it didn’t cover the roofs. It stopped. Maybe that was God finally steppin’ in.

*(pause)*

I lost track of time really. You tell yourself you can swim....but where you gonna swim to? Another roof? So you sit and bake. It got so hot you could see the steam rising off of the water. Sometimes a helicopter would fly by.....and I’d wave my arms....but it’d be gone. You didn’t know if they saw you or not. You get so thirsty.....my tongue got swollen. My lips started to bleed. I read a story one time about a homeless guy in Philadelphia....saying that after living on the street for years....through them freezing

winters...well, it could never get too hot for him again. And I'm thinking now...they'll never be enough water for me to drink. Ever.

And I don't know why I'm telling you this but I was so glad I was alone. No wife anymore. My kids stayed behind with her in Texas after the divorce. I knew they were safe. And I guess I'm thinking that I can get through this alone....but if I had to worry about others there'd be no way. A man sees his kids suffering....if there's nothing he can do for 'em....well he just breaks apart. I could stay strong as long as it took....by myself. But if my kids were crawling through the hole in my roof and crying for water....I can't say I wouldn't just walk off the damn roof and drown. Strength in numbers? Like hell. That's where weakness comes in.

So you feel like a shrink now or what?

But I never thought that somebody *wouldn't* come. I had a can of spray paint in the attic and managed to fish it out. White...for touching up the walls and stuff. And I don't know what made me do it but I scribbled in huge letters across the roof...

**BY ALL MEANS.....TAKE YOUR F-ING TIME!**

I was being politically correct in the most politically incorrect city in the world. I figured my kids might be watching on TV I guess.

And dammit if the next copter that I heard hovered and a guy starts being lowered down. When he reached me he was smiling....but before he could say anything I said..."of course I don't mean you...man."

And he hooks me up to this harness and we start being pulled up. And you know what he says to me as we're being pulled up? It was really kinda nice. He says...."you wanna take one last look?" He knew that things were never gonna be the same again. I said..."no, you describe it to me instead." And he goes...."well.....it looks like Baghdad underwater."

We get into the copter and there's 5 others in there. And one of 'em is my neighbor...the one who gave me the ax. And he gives me a big smile and says "ho ho ho".

And it looks like we're heading out.....and without saying anything all of us crunch together to make more room...for at least one or two more. We could see more now....and the guy doesn't make a fuss or nothing. He just says...."ok....we'll go down once more."

That's the big easy for sure. But now....we got nothing. Sounds like a cliché though don't it? When you say it fast enough. You know...."I lost everything". But take a last look at me. You see these clothes? That's all I got in the world.

**VII – PHOTOGRAPHER**

*(Middle aged man)*

I'm a photographer....and we're all a little crazy to start with, so you should know that going in. I view the world through a small lens. And it's usually only when something *doesn't* look right that I focus in. When things are working....I feel like that country band from the Blues Brothers movie that shows up after everybody is already gone home. The Good Ol' Boys....right? *(laughs)*

Disorder...anarchy....whatever you want to call it. I guess it's disorder when folks are white and anarchy when they're black. But when something like this happens it's almost like people and places and things are playing to the camera....and they feel as comfortable around me as I do around them.

But the images don't lie...right?

That's what they say. We put the soundtrack over them. And sometimes....we don't like what we hear coming out of our own heads. A black lady comes running out of a store covering her face with diapers....trying to get away without being seen. A black man fills up a bucket with water and snacks to bring back to his neighbors. And then.....there it is. Focus in now. This is the shot they're paying me for. A punk kid from the projects...wired on something that ain't legal....in the background with a TV perched on his head...like an African villager carrying water. Damn looters. We ought to shoot 'em all. Right? President says he's gonna come and get 'em. Dead or alive.

And now here's a white couple....waist deep in the water. Floating a garbage bag behind them. A bag filled with "commandeered" supplies. And we all say in our heads.....hey....you gotta do what you can to survive. You gotta feed your babies. And you put yourself in that situation....and you rattle it around in your head some....and you know damn well you'd do the same thing.

But you wouldn't "loot"...right? You'd "commandeer". And you keep harking back to the pictures I took....of that doped up kid with the TV. Here's another of some kid standing in the water wearing a brand new pink fur coat. And that lady with the diapers for her child? That man bringing water and food to his neighbors? They're gone already. Now *they're* the aberrations. See? How you gonna compete on the 24 hour news networks with a gang banger in a pink fur coat?

Hell....I know this city. I was born here. Founded by pirates and slavetraders and rumrunners too drunk or too newly rich to realize they were standing underwater. And with that type of karma floating in the air everybody wonders why supposedly normal god fearing folks get into politics down here and all of a sudden turn into well dressed respectable white collar criminals. A lawmaker described New Orleans as being "half under water and half under indictment."

This is the only place I know where termites consume entire neighborhoods while politicians have their backs turned. Mardi Gras is like having one of them sound machines in your bedroom to drown out the noise and make you sleep better.

People started *dying* and when you called FEMA you got *voice mail*. The head of FEMA says...and this is a direct quote now..."we're seeing people that we didn't know existed".....and the poor bastard doesn't realize that *that's* the problem. If New Orleans dies....it ain't gonna be because of the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain.

You talk about race? Not easy in this country. Whites roll their eyes and blacks grit their teeth. It's like walking down a dark alley alone....with nothing to protect yourself. Add to that mix the dueling ideologies.....well....you got trouble. You got networks on TV that would wax poetic if Bush shit on a plate and served it to 'em.....and others that treat every facial expression he makes as some sort of subliminal personal insult. Somewhere in the middle is the truth....but to be in the middle these days is to risk being run over in both directions.

But images don't lie.....right?

Here's a white couple in the Garden district....wonderful old home....wrecked. And they're sitting on their porch surrounded by water and debris and bodies tied to street lamps so they'd stop floating.....eating dinner on the finest linen table cloth you ever saw.

Here's a black man who's using his refrigerator as a boat....and his pregnant wife is inside it.....he's desperate to get her help. He waited and waited....and can't wait any more. Nobody thinks this is strange....using a refrigerator as a boat. Nobody is paying him any mind at all. And up on the bridge there are cops pointing guns at black spreadeagled looting suspects on the ground....interrupted by a white guy stopping his car and asking for directions to the interstate. All of these images. And then the one of the old black woman shivering from fever.....finding the only thing to slow down her chills. An American flag. She wraps herself around it until all I can see is the colors. Red...white....blue....and black.

I click....and then I move.

So here's Harry Connick Jr. at the convention center passing out supplies. And here's the office of Homeland Security saying...."what? nobody ever told us about problems at the convention center".....and FEMA is saying...."there's no way for us to get in there"....and people all around the world are slowly putting things together and going...."well, if you didn't know about the convention center...how does a fucking lounge singer know about the convention center?".....and....you know....."does Harry Connick Jr. have access to some sort of hybrid vehicle that FEMA doesn't know about? Did he float in on his piano?"

And when Harry Connick Jr. appears to be the only white face at the convention center...you gonna tell me you're *surprised* that race is being put on the table? The problem with ideologues is that when they hit a wall....they keep banging their heads against it until they die bloody.

But you know the one shot I didn't get? I'll tell you. It was inside the chaos of the superdome. And all of a sudden I hear this violin. Bach it was. My god. You're thinking that this place is hell.....and then you hear Bach.....and you say..."it can't be".

It was a student...from Tulane probably. And he was walking as he played And he says to me...."these people have nothing. I have a violin. I should play for them." And then he moved on. And I didn't get the picture.....but I'm glad of it. He wasn't playing for the camera. He was playing for *them*.

In this case.....you had to *hear* it.

## **VIII – BACK FROM IRAQ**

*(Soldier. 25 years old)*

I just celebrated my birthday in Iraq. My buddy asked me what I wanted the most. Know what I said to him? I said...."Junior.....how old am I?" And he said...."well....25". And so I says...."I just want to *feel* 25 for a few days."

I'm part of the 256<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team.....and we're 35 lighter coming home than we were going over. Everybody's talking 'bout where we're headed...but we can't forget where we've been either. And that makes it doubly hard. Man....I'm so tired. I used to *daydream* about coming home and sleeping. If there's a shrink in the house you could have a field day with that one.

But at least I got a home until this plane lands. Once it does....well....I ain't got nowhere to go. My home is gone. My family is scattered. It just feels....well....I stopped trying to feel things a while back. You walk streets everyday with your finger on the trigger...wondering how normal looking the next guy who tries to kill you is gonna be. You bury that sentimental shit quick. I've been living with blinders on and I don't see too good to begin with. You know what I'm saying?

Always thought I was storing it away so I could call on it when I got home. Pick up where I left off. But....no. It ain't there. Maybe when I see it with my own eyes I'll feel something. But now.....nothing.

A navy customs official briefed us as we were leaving Camp Victory in Kuwait....and he was cheerleading...you know...."are you all happy to get home!" A few hoo hahs....then he tried it again and he got nothing. Poor bastard thought he'd lost his touch or something, until somebody whispered in his ear that most of us were from New Orleans. His mouth dropped like somebody just snagged his bottom lip with a fish hook. We just

spent a year in Iraq trying to straighten out that mess....and now we've turned into goddamn orphans in our own country. Man....I love my country but I'll be goddamned if I'll ever love another one.

We just made a stop on the way....to Shannon Airport in Ireland to refuel. Lots of guys went to the bar....whooping it up. Pints were flowing...and guys were ordering cognac and pronouncing it wrong....you know....cog-nak. Chugging it like Jack Daniels instead of savoring it....like you should.

Some of the younger ones....man they don't understand. They just survived a year in a war zone and they think they're gonna live forever. Invincible...you know? They'd scream in a valley and then run up the side of a mountain to punch the echo. They *still* think they're going home and maybe have their ticker tape parades in boats or something.

Most of us though.....we know. We've seen enough.

I hear about what's going on.....and I wonder if we're the guys you really want on those streets right now? I hear them talking about some "shoot to kill" policy with the looters. But hell.....we're soldiers. You think they train us to shoot and miss? We've been shooting to kill for a year now. You standing at a check point in Tikrit and somebody comes walking up....I don't care if you're the spitting image of Fats Domino.....you don't identify yourself immediately we're gonna take you out. What you've been watching on TV for the last week is what I see before breakfast everyday in Iraq. So you wanna ask me to make an immediate *distinction* between the two? I don't know that I can do that right now. I think it's best that the guys in there right now aren't the guys coming back.

We've done our bit. Let somebody fight for us for a change.

It just seems that everything around me has been...what?.....*broken* for a year.

Homes...roads...buildings...bodies. All broken. And if you manage to build something back up you turn your head and somebody breaks it again. It gets damn tiring after a while. And then I see the pictures on TV.....my home broken too. I see guys in the water...hanging on to trees...or tires...or road signs.....and I think..."shit man, that's me". All my time over here has been spent hanging on for dear life....hanging onto home....thinking about home and getting back there. And now someone or something has gone and taken that away from me. It wasn't much.....but it was home.

So what do I do to keep the water from sweeping me away too? I ain't got nothing left to hang onto.

My fiance got out.....she's somewhere in Houston last time I heard. We were gonna get married in the fall....out in Southern Oaks....which is a hall on the shores of Pontchatrain. And it's weird.....but some nights I gotta *sort* the things that are gonna

keep me tossing and turning.....like they start lining up when they know I need a couple hours sleep and are all vying for my immediate attention.

But a few nights back I knew she got out....but I couldn't stop thinking 'bout what might have happened to her wedding dress. She had it made special.....I kept asking for pictures but she said it was bad luck for me to see it beforehand.....but she has the taste of an angel.....so I know what it looked like. And I'd seen things over here that'd make the devil wince.....I held friends in my arms waiting for them to die. And I never cried...not one time. But for that one night....whenever I'd close my eyes I'd see this dress...in the water. All mudstained. Torn. Floating first here.....and then there. Nowhere to go. Useless. And it finally happened. My levees broke.....and I cried like a goddamn baby.

Oliver Stone said that the first casualty of war is innocence. I don't know if that's true or not. If it was.....I probably wouldn't be crying over a damn dress I never saw. But it's gotta be hard to pinpoint the exact moment the innocence goes. Is it when you see the elephant? Or when you survive it only to realize you don't have *yourself* what you're fighting for.....for others?

There's some disease. I don't know what it's called.....but it ages you. Like a kid might be 6 years old and look like he's 60.....with the wrinkles and everything. I mighta only read about it in the National Enquirer or something.....or maybe seen it on an episode of Star Trek, But it could be real. But whether it's real or not....I think I got it now. At least on the inside. I feel like the oldest damn 25 year old in the world. If they turned this plane around and sent me back to the desert....that'd be OK with me about now.

## **IX – HOLDOUT**

*(Old man refusing to leave his home. Sitting on his porch. Confused and nearly delirious.....but animated throughout)*

I think I put a bullet in a looter's ass yesterday. I told him I was sorry too....cause I wasn't trying to hurt him at all. I was trying to *kill* him.

*(laughs loudly at this...then pauses to collect himself)*

Everybody coming floating by telling me I gotta go.....but nobody telling me where we gonna go *too*. I think that's a reasonable question don't you? This is my home. Been here 50 years....maybe more than that I lose track of time sometimes 'cause I ain't as young as I used to be. If I was strong like when I was in the army I'd be swimming around here gathering up everything I need and I might even take a crack at getting the power back on myself while I'm at it. I used to do that kind of work in the army. Don't know what's taking these younger fellas so long to get the water out.....but I ain't gonna let 'em come in my house and sort through my stuff. All I gots is inside here. Leave it? Hell....I ain't leaving.

First they tell me the mayor says I gotta go.....then the governor.....and now they saying the president says so. So I'll make a deal with 'em. They bring the president down here with some cold beer and good barbeque and the key to the Lincoln bedroom....and I'll reconsider. They look at me like I'm crazy but that's just 'cause they don't know me. Plus, they ain't from the 9<sup>th</sup> ward. I can tell.

*(stomping his foot now)*

Ain't nothing wrong with this here porch. Made it myself. Sturdy as can be she is. Little water ain't gonna sweep away something built the right way. They build them levees the right way from the start the water'd minding her own damn business right now instead of causing all this fuss. My country want me to stare down Hitler but run away from some water? We ain't built that way down here. No sir. We ain't built that way. They be talking about diseases...hell....I ain't never missed a day of work in my life when I had work. I never smoke when I'm asleep and I never drink nothing stronger than water for a chaser. That's a recipe for clean living right there. They just trying to scare me with that disease talk.

President Truman said if you want a friend in this world you should get a dog.....so I did. Got lots of 'em over the years 'cause they don't make dogs that live all the way back to Truman. Don't know why a man can live to be damn near 100 and a dog gotta go checking out at 10 or 15. Doesn't seem fair...'specially since my dog is more interesting than most people I know. Treats me better too. Don't see no dog rowing up and down the street trying to get me to leave my home.

I got a gun too....just in case I felt lonely when the dog was sleeping. These boys are trying to get me to come out and leave my dog behind. Well....he's resourceful as hell but he is still a goddamned *dog*. He needs me and I ain't leaving him. We ain't built that way down here. No sir.

And my wife....she's inside too. She's sleeping I guess. I tried to wake her but my heart wasn't in it. So she still sleeping. Took some water but I dried her off and she's good now. Sleeping. My kids are gone....but we still got the pictures hanging on the walls. I leave here and somebody'll take those for sure. I got me some good looking kids. Them pictures won't last long with the looters. No sir.

But we were talking 'bout the porch right? Always suspicious of the man who ain't got no porch. How the hell he see what's going on in the world with no porch? You peeking through the curtains like an old woman is what you doing when you ain't got no porch. I ain't trust nothing 'less I see it with these 2 eyes.

I can probably stay out here for a year or so.....got me canned goods inside....and some water too. Not much call to leave home these days when things are dry. Take on a little rain and things are supposed to change? Nothing changes down here. I liked it when the water got some of the clocks...cause now they stopped and I gotta guess what time it is. You know with the clocks stopped they still be right twice a day? Them are good odds.

Better than most folk'll have dealt to 'em. When broken clocks get better odds than poor folk...you tell me why I should be up and leaving? No sir....we ain't built that way down here. No sir.

Won't be long now that everybody be streaming back here....and I'll get to ask 'em all where they been. No sir....won't be long now. And ain't they all gonna feel silly. Yes sir. Silly is how they gonna feel.

Sun come up.....stays up 'till she gets bored.....and then she goes down. Stars'll come out and maybe the moon....shine just enough light on you to help you or to hurt you...depending on how the good Lord made you. And then it all starts again. And it don't matter if you be sitting on this porch or sitting in some European trench somewhere. That's the way the world goes. You take me outta here and you know what's gonna happen? The sun is gonna come up....and she's gonna get bored.....and then she's gonna go down. Probably don't make one damn bit of difference to her what happens to me.

*(pause.....thinking about this)*

But then she's so used to seeing me sitting here that I'd hate to disappoint her. If she maybe is built more like a dog than a man....maybe she'll stop and come looking for me....what's that gonna do to the rest of the world? It's gonna throw the timing off. I ain't gonna be responsible for that. No sir.

Now what you want with me? I keep telling you I got everything I need here. The water didn't sweep nothing of mine away. No sir. It didn't touch nothing of mine 'cept the clocks.

## **X - THE DEAD....AGAIN**

Well.....that's that I guess. Much more efficient than FEMA I'd say.

The water is being drained out. Just about everybody who wants out is gone...except for me of course. I'm just waiting my turn. One of their big fears is that folks like me are gonna clog up the pumps draining the water out....but....I hate to tell 'em....there's not much I can do about that now.

God willing I'll be heading to St. Gabriel.....which used to be a leper colony believe it or not. The temporary morgue is there and they'll be waiting to identify me under a sign that says "Mortui Vivis Praecipiant"...which means "let the dead teach the living".

Man...if ever there was a time for that it's now.

The odds are against them ever finding out who I am though. If they don't.....they'll just give me a number. Better than nothing I guess.

And they say that just like a civil war battlefield.....years and years from now folks'll still be digging up bones down here.

“The south shall rise again!”

*(laughs)*

*(winding up now...getting ready to leave)*

What you gonna watch now? You gotta wonder what they put on the TV *before* Katrina came to town...right? What you call this? Reality TV?

*(laughs)*

But to me...when the Dalai Lama appears on Larry King, things are definitely winding down.

All the talk gonna be about rebuilding now. But when I really think about my place in this city...it makes me wonder if they should re-build *all* of it. I mean...to *re-build* means building back the stuff that was already here....right?

But most of that stuff is the stuff you never saw until now anyways. So when the cameras are gone.....and the bills come in, I wonder how much patience you're gonna have to rebuild something for *us down here*. It's one thing to fix up the hotels and the garden district.....but you gonna send a crew down to put up another housing project too?

We all know the water is colorblind....but are you?

Union, justice, and confidence. That's our state motto down here.

Believe that?

*(chuckles and walks off. lights)*

***The End***