

Odds and Ends

By: Kimberly Hillestad O'Bannon

The breeze didn't cool off a thing with the Arkansas humidity. Typical July day. They were tired of walking, and each other, but had another block before they reached their bootleg repairman's house. The state was in a complete lockdown due to an outbreak of a new strain of COVID. They were not allowing traffic on the roads or stores to be open. Everyone was mandated to stay inside their homes, no matter what, for the next week until the case numbers declined. The cops would give out tickets if they caught you outside and were on patrol.

Malik's house was next door to Golden Acre Mobile Home Park. He spotted Tammy Sue outside scooting after her noisy little chihuahua, dressed in his crystal-studded collar, and trying to corral him back inside. He barked and bounced around as if he didn't know she existed. Malik went over to help her, like he always had to do if he wanted him to shut up. She asked, "You know anything about TV's? Mine just flickered and BAM, screen went black. I banged on it but that just ain't doin' it today."

He said, "Naw, but my AC went out and I can't be havin' that. I got kids mane. My girl gone KILL me if I don't fix it. Let me get one of them cigarettes, Big Tam."

She handed him one and said, "Well, I know a guy a couple blocks from here that works on stuff. He don't charge much and if he ain't completely tweaked out, he can get things fixed pretty quick. Got my microwave goin' last week in about 10 minutes and all he wanted was a couple cigs and a tall boy. Good deal if you ask me."

Malik knew it was a risk, but he was willing to go if there was a chance to make his wife happy and get his kids cooled off. He said, "You can get us there? I'll walk with you, we just have to make sure we don't get spotted by the 5-0's."

Tammy Sue took one last drag and exhaled a big cloud of smoke. "Sure can."

The sun was going down and they set out, heading about two blocks away. They had to be on the lookout for the patrol cars, so they didn't get a ticket and sent back home. They moved as fast as they could, considering Tammy Sue was well over 300 pounds and going full speed in her hover round. It was working overtime and the left wheel squeaked loudly with every rotation.

Malik said, “The cops gone hear us coming the way you got that chair screaming. I swear if I see one, I’m dippin’ out and you on your own. I ain’t gettin’ shot or goin’ to jail today.”

“I ain’t cut out for this here heat, Malik. I’d much rather be in my recliner with my winda unit blowin’ right in my face.” Tammy Sue was drenched in sweat and mad as a wet hen about it. She wasn’t used to leaving her trailer unless she was going to her doctor’s appointments or cashing in some winning scratch offs at the Valero around the corner. Most of the time her son grabbed those when he brought her pack of Pall Mall 100’s and 6-pack of Diet Cokes every Tuesday. “I just need my TV fixed before my shows come on. I love me some Judge Judy, she has me just a hootin’ and hollerin’ every week. AND I’ll miss who gets cut on the Bachelor this week too! Stupid lockdown...”

“Woman hush, all you doin’ is complainin’ and we not even halfway there. Chill out wit all that. You sure your dude gone help us when we get there? I ain’t walkin’ all this way with you for nothing. You get on my nerves just like your dog.” Malik needed Tammy Sue’s help, although he wished he didn’t.

As they got about halfway down the second block, there was a flash of light and then complete silence. They heard something rustling in the woods to their right and looked to see a figure dart across the lawn. They couldn’t make out what it was, and it moved swiftly into the trees.

“Aw hell naw, Big Tam. What was that? Did you see it?” Malik said, pacing back and forth.

Tammy Sue was frozen in her chair, just staring into the wood line. “I think we needa get out of here, Malik. I ain’t never seen nothin’ like that before. You know them guys on the news said UFO’s are real now. Not just regular ol’ Joe blow, trained pilots saw ‘em. They even got pictures. What if -”

Malik cut her off, “Don’t. You talkin’ crazy. Ain’t no way.”

Then they heard it. A small, faint cry. It came from the direction of where the “thing” went into the woods. Tammy Sue’s head spun around and locked eyes with Malik. He wanted to take off running, but he knew he couldn’t leave her there. As they looked back to the trees, a small boy appeared.

He looked about 6 years old, clothes ragged, one shoe gone. He saw them. “Help,” he muttered as he slowly began walking toward them.

Malik, having 4 kids at home, wanted to help but was hesitant considering what they had just seen before the boy showed himself.

“Hey sweetie, you okay? Where are your parents?” Tammy Sue said as the boy whimpered, inching closer.

Malik whispered, “Big Tam, this ain’t normal. He ain’t come out of nowhere. I don’t like this.”

The child was a few feet away and stopped. He murmured, “Help.”

“Hun, you shouldn’t be out here alone. Where is your home?” Tammy Sue’s voice was shaking.

The boy looked straight up, not saying a word. He slowly looked back at them as he raised his hand and pointed toward the sky.