

7 Big Fish Stories

by Rebecca Petchenik

1. Prologue

Out of the sea we walk, and into the sea we sink.

2. Archipelago

In the last Ice Age, the ocean's waters receded and the Leviathan beheld the sun for the first time in hundreds of years. When the seas fell away, and the Leviathan's back fin rose above the water, a flock of migrating gulls mistook it for an archipelago. You couldn't blame them. The algae and the seaweed still clinging to the gargantuan scales and the ridges along the spines could easily be confused for the lush greenery of a small chain of rocky volcanic islands.

The birds landed and did what birds do. They pecked and scratched and pooped all over the Leviathan's back. They made shrubby little nests in the crooks and crannies of his anatomy and generally made an embarrassing mess of a most fearsome and revered colossus.

When he had had enough, the Leviathan lifted his vast snout from the waters and bellowed across the world:

“Do not land on my back! I am not a perch for fowl! I am the mighty and terrible Leviathan! I am older than the stars and into my wake sink the corpses of empires. Even God himself looks upon me in despair and woe!”

The seas shook, and the clouds parted, and the whole world trembled at the Leviathan's roar.

But the birds didn't know language. So they did not understand what the Leviathan was saying, or even what he was. They flew away anyway, and the Leviathan felt like he had accomplished something, but he didn't know what.

3. Truth

My dad took me fishing just one time. He told me he wanted to spend quality time together and bond, but all I remember now is him cursing at me.

4. Lobster

The Leviathan loves to eat lobster. Krill and sturgeon and veal and even the flesh of a man can't

compare. No sweet chocolate truffle or savory roasted broccoli will wet the Leviathan's tongue quite so much as a big, red, lobster. Especially with a lemon wedge, melted butter, and some corn on the cob on the side.

The Leviathan also loves Twinkies and custard, and rich, sweet things like that. But not as much as lobster.

5. Haunted

The gray house at the end of the lane is haunted. The condemned one under the overpass. Everyone knows it. The stories go back for thirty years or more. There's something in the pool out back. Some kind of monster that lures children back there and drowns them. It's like something out of a Greek myth or a horror movie. It's drowned eight or nine kids easy. And dragged at least a dozen stray cats and dogs to a watery grave, too. And I also heard that at night it emits a radiation of some kind that makes televisions and cell phones go dead. That's what I heard anyway. Funny thing is that even though people have known about the monster for forever, there hasn't been any water in that pool since it was condemned thirty years ago.

6. Punchline.

Jonah and the Leviathan were chatting one sunny afternoon over a light lunch in a cafe in Glendale. The Leviathan complained about unreliable renovators fixing his kitchen, Jonah waxed poetic about a new girlfriend he'd met while jogging along the beach, and so on when suddenly Jonah recalled a joke.

"Lay it on me," the Leviathan said.

"Okay. What would you do if you met Jesus Christ walking upon the road?"

The Leviathan laughed and said, "Why, I'd kill him!"

Jonah sighed. "So you've heard this joke before?"

"Many times," the Leviathan said. "Even the Buddha once told it to me."

7. Epilogue

I saw the Leviathan once. For real. I did. I had to go high above the curve of the Earth like I was casting a fishing rod from a pier among the stars. I wasn't very young, but I was still a kid, and my family was traveling. I looked through the window of our plane and saw him in all his

majesty. His fin rose up out of the fog over the sea and wove between the mountain peaks below us. Our plane shook with turbulence at that exact moment, and I lost sight of him. But I swear to you here and now, I did see him. And I swear, the pictures do not do him justice. He is bigger than the islands, bigger than the seas, bigger than the mountains, bigger than the world, bigger than the sky, bigger than it all! The Leviathan is so big that time begins at his tail and ends at his snout, and all of us walk along the back of the beast into the future. I swear on my life.