

Just My Imagination.....

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Just My Imagination.....

by

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Dedication

For Steven.....without whom this story would have been lost

“But it was just my imagination,

Running away with me

It was just my imagination,

Running away with me”

-Norman Whitfield/Barrett Strong, 1971

Preface

Michael Geoffrey McAllister had finally made something of his life—at least that’s what his parents told their friends now. He was 42 years old with no real family to speak of, but content with himself these days as an author and screenplay writer living in both the Pacific Northwest and Los Angeles. For most of his adult years, he had bounced from job to job, never seeming to fulfill expectations, both his and those of people close to him. It wasn’t that he had trouble finding work to adequately support himself, it was primarily that the modern world and the things that most people considered important or critical just struck him as trivial and that he just never seemed to be able to fit in. He knew that his parents. Despite their lack of encouragement or support during his childhood years were relieved, if not exactly happy, with his current employment situation—at least from the standpoint of “at last you’re settled” as they told their friends back in Green Harbor, South Carolina where Michael had grown up. Michael could now see clearly that his ability to write and market his screenplays was a direct result of everything that he had been told was wrong with him as a kid—his imagination.

Hollywood was now pounding down his door to get the latest creation from the imagination of Michael McAllister—the very trait his parents, particularly his overbearing, detached father, had repeatedly told him would be his worst enemy. Even though a sly and mischievous grin now slowly formed at the corners of his mouth, Michael could not totally ignore those voices that reminded him of that as he stared blankly over the water from the large deck of his modest—at least by LA standards—but comfortable home perched above the Pacific Ocean on Thursday morning. He still laughed to himself at his success despite all the “guidance” he gotten from home while simultaneously feeling an uncomfortable chill creep up his spine as he once again re-read the morning’s newspaper headline, “Unexplained Murders Return to Quiet Southeastern Town.” Michael briefly considered reading the entire article, but he instantly knew that there was no need to do that—that quiet southeastern town was undoubtedly Green Harbor and that the unexplained murders did on fact have a very plausible explanation.

He had the answer—not that anyone would actually believe him—just as no one had believed the 15 year old boy in 1970 when the horrors had first occurred. Michael’s hands trembled slightly

and paper fluttered helplessly to the deck as the hard truth of what had been born in 1970 had now somehow been reincarnated in 1997. The perpetrator of the murders was not some hideous, deranged, mentally ill serial killer or the result of a drug-induced psychopath or local drifter, but a far more sinister and menacing source—the imagination of Michael Geoffrey McAllister.

Even as the sun glared down unmercifully on his slight frame, Michael recalled with chilled revulsion the knowledge that his parents may have been right after all. The former peaceful and idyllic Green Harbor had remained quiet these 27 years since his childhood trauma when the first murders had occurred just as it had always been in the many generations before his birth. The police and other authorities could never seem to piece together the fragments of the hysterical young boy who had seemingly been the sole link to the homicides. Michael had told them all exactly what happened—at least his abridged version. Being 15, he had never even considered the possibility of concocting some wild scenario that would protect his or his family's reputation and standing in Green Harbor....though this is what many accused him of.

None of the local residents, including the investigative authorities, were interested in taking any serious account of that “scatterbrained McAllister boy with the overactive imagination”. The case was finally shelved, being labeled unsolved and everyone in Green Harbor eventually slid back into their everyday routines and wither consciously or unconsciously buried the entire incident. “The vivid imagination”.....how this phrase now echoed and resonated with deafening tones within Michael's mind and conscience, almost literally lighting up like the bright neon that adorned the old Olympia Diner that he had frequented as a young man in Glen Haven, ME while briefly employed in the local hardware store. He knew then.....and he definitely knew now.....his imagination was the killer.

Chapter 1

Life in Green Harbor, South Carolina in the 1960's was actually quite unusual when compared to the revolution that was exploding in most of the rest of the country at that time. The rising tides of social consciousness, civil rights, and the anti-war movement went by virtually unnoticed in Green Harbor. The population has remained fairly constant for about the last 10-15 years in the small coastal community of 500. Despite a few straggling tourists each season, Green Harbor is a quiet cove on the Atlantic, seemingly oblivious to the outside world. The town itself consists of one main thoroughfare with about half a dozen side streets that are frequented by the locals. There hangs a solitary stoplight two blocks from the intersection of 3rd Avenue, the main drag, and the coastline—there is no real traffic to speak of and in fact the stoplight has not worked since 1985. It wasn't that Green Harbor is a dying entity—far from it—it's just that no one seems to feel that it is necessary to have the thing repaired based on the sparse population base and lack of traffic.

The streets themselves resemble most any that might be found in any of a number of smaller southeastern communities—small groups of people milling around the sparsely set local businesses, chatting with each other about the weather, the fishing, or any juicy bits of gossip that might be hot at the moment. Upon entering the business district, one's attention is immediately drawn to the small boat harbor which is the heart and soul of town. Green Harbor has no real definable or distinguishing style in terms of architecture or layout, but the harbor draws your eyes to it immediately. It's not that the boats or structures are remarkable—they were as ordinary as any along the southeastern corridor—it's more like that it is located at the end of a funnel and that there is some sort of unseen force guiding your attention to the docks. Perhaps it is the modest

and unassuming character of the remainder of the town along 3rd Avenue, but it just feels like there is this invisible hand that constantly redirects your gaze to the harbor—especially for the first time visitor. The best analogy I can think of is—and this is a tortured analogy at best—is that famous painting in which the eyes seem to follow you no matter where you go.

Green Harbor's geographic location, at the southeastern-most point of South Carolina always puts the inhabitants on instant alert for the most current passing tropical storm that might sneak its way over from Florida and the Caribbean. Due to numerous such brushes with these storms over the years, none of the locals seem pressed to decorate the immediate downtown area with an overabundance of landscaping that would inevitably be transformed into missiles launched at the various store fronts. Green Harbor has not in fact endured any type of major storm damage since Hurricane Edna in 1954, but the overall sentiments remained and the streets are still relatively unadorned. The stores themselves along 3rd Avenue are simple—no vibrant colors or fancy facades—just subtle blues, grays, and some other earth tones with an occasional green awning decorating the few stores along the street.

Actually, once the interstate freeway system became firmly entrenched in the minds of the average traveler, Green Harbor became—at least to the long time locals—nicely isolated from the onslaught of a busy America—which if you ask them, is just fine. The old timers are not exactly what I would classify as antisocial—just simple, uncomplicated people who prefer a slower, sheltered life and the less intervention from the outside world the better. Green Harbor has never been what you would call a vacation spot to begin with and as such never found itself dependent on a regular influx of tourist dollars to survive, unlike many of its nearby neighbors. As the remainder of America seemed to be ravenously anxious to expand and constantly touting economic and demographic growth, the residents of Green Harbor were—and still are—content with the status quo. The town is very much like an old Norman Rockwell painting that refuses to change with the times simply because everyone else has bought into the idea. The locals are not struggling to survive and therefore see no need to rush headlong into unregulated or uncontrolled growth that everyone else seems to be embracing—and that remains true even today.

No one can remember the last time that there had been any real problems or unrest—they run their grocery store, the post office, a couple clothing retail places and department stores, a gas station, a small 2nd run movie house, 2 marine supply outlets, a general hardware store, and of course, Emily's and just see no reason for anything more. Emily's is the closest thing Green Harbor has to a real restaurant outside of Wellsport 30 miles to the north. The main subsistence of the town is the fishing industry plus a few scattered ongoing enterprises in agriculture.....these plus the retail offerings and that is about it. Even today Green Harbor is still known around the southeastern US for its wealth of superb shellfish and variety of wonderful fresh fish. For some reason, the waters off the coast there have always been richly supplied and so the fishing industry has been the lifeblood of the town.

Growing up in Green Harbor is having available a vast and natural playground readily on hand. The low population and secluded location along with practically no traffic provided Michael with an endless array of choices for roaming in the summers. He often talked fondly of spending his childhood days wandering the various fields and forests plus what he described as an endless expanse of oceanfront—not the nice sandy beaches that attract tourists in endless numbers like so many lemmings elsewhere in the Carolinas—but one of his favorite retreats al the same. In fact, I am sure—knowing Michael—that it is just this aspect of the shoreline that made it one of his favorites.

Michael was the only child of Jack and Helen McAllister. Early in their marriage, the McAllisters had planned on a large family—at least Jack had. Jack's unspoken map was to provide many strong and able bodied boys to help work his small, but thriving—at least in Jack's mind—fishing business. Jack envisioned a healthy line of boys, tough as he was to help on his boats.....well.....actually he had just the one boat at the time, The Malfine, but he was sure that through their aggregate sweat and effort that The Malfine would soon evolve into a multi-boat fleet; that his boys would inevitably inherit and carry on the operation after he was too old to man the nets and lines. Not only would this make Jack proud of his lineage, but for him it would keep his name spinning through Green Harbor history in some sort of twisted legacy..... "McAllister and Sons".....he pictured.

Unfortunately, due to complications during Michael's delivery, Helen suffered a mild stroke and had been virtually bed ridden since—in fact, Michael had nearly died during the delivery and just like that, Jack's dreams of McAllister and Sons vanished much like the early morning tendrils of fog that hovered magically over the piers of Green Harbor until the sun reached full strength and burned them off. Jack had tried desperately for most of Michael's early years to interest his son in the family business, but it soon became evident—even to Jack—that Michael was never going to be a fisherman. The combination of the loss of his pedigree, a partially debilitated wife, and a son that refused to be molded into his image of what a man should be was just overwhelming and Michael soon became the immediate recipient of most of Jack's expression of his disappointment with his life.

When he was old enough, Michael immersed himself in countless hours each day reading to his mother—newspaper articles, magazine spreads, and the occasional novel—often Steinbeck or Hemmingway, two of Helen's favorite writers. Michael performed these acts mainly from a deep devotion to his mother as well as from a growing ability to endlessly absorb the written word. However, an additional component that to his attraction to this offering was simply to escape his father's tirades of reminding him of what a pathetic excuse of a man he was becoming for a while. Helen treasured these moments with her son which had become even more important to her since Jack had grown so detached from her as well. She adored the timbre of her son's maturing voice and his ability to transport her to the settings of the readings. She also loved seeing the young boy's blossoming intellect as he grew—a characteristic that she had known as a young girl but never held any importance or impact with Jack. For Michael, it was pure wild escape.....he could instantly imagine himself as any of the numerous characters he read about and in those fleeting, ephemeral moments he was no longer Jack McAllister's great disappointment. In those times, he was one of an endless stream of colorful and vibrant personalities.

Michael was not a particularly intelligent child as he matured, outside of his obsessive interest in the written word, but he was by no standard stupid either. Michael's outwardly flippant attitude

toward school in general sadly led his teachers to evaluate him as slow or at best disinterested. In reality, Michael had come to find the regimented routine of public school boring and unchallenging. By the time he was 8 or 9, Michael was actually reading on a much higher level than any of his classmates and the material being shoveled at him in class was merely not providing enough intellectual stimulation to hold his interest. For this reason, Michael often appeared to be daydreaming when he was in fact creating in his mind the basis of what was to become his livelihood as a much in demand author and screenplay writer for Hollywood—you see....Michael had the gift. It wasn't the gift of high intellect that might allow him to unravel the mysteries of medicine or science, nor was it the gift of the muse that might provide him the ability to compose world-renown music or poetry, nor was it the gift of physical strength and agility thus making Michael a word class athlete. Michael McAllister had received the gift of imagination—or perhaps more accurately, the ability to spontaneously create situations within his mind so vivid and realistic that he often had difficulty separating these visions from reality. This is not to infer that Michael was afflicted in any way, but the end result was often compared to that of a schizophrenic that could not discern their fantasy world from real life—in the aftermath, Michael could eventually discern the two, but his writing and descriptions were so lifelike that he could easily fool even the most jaded observer.

Upon recollecting such creations from his younger years, Michael often had the feeling that most people describe when awakening suddenly from a violent or particularly disturbing or extraordinary dream, and just for a moment—just that one brief passing blip of time—of no knowing what is up or down—having trouble discerning whether the dream was just an expression of their subconscious thoughts and feelings or maybe that in fact what had been experienced was real. Michael was the reluctant recipient of this ability that his parents and others used as an explanation when he seemed to temporarily “space out” or as Thoreau might have elegantly put it “march to the beat of a different drummer”. To Michael, though, he saw it as just a viable escape mechanism from the routine ennui that seemed to infiltrate and permeate his life in Green Harbor.

As he grew, even Helen began to worry about Michael's apparent detachment from the real world and reluctantly came to agree with Jack that their son might be heading for trouble down the road unless something could be done to alter his behavior. From all outward appearances, Michael seemed to slip into a trance-like state when he had these visions that made up his inner world. Even as a very young boy, Michael recognized these glimpses into his inner mind as an escape from the harsh realities of Green Harbor and Jack, but also that they were providing a unique and desperately needed form of self-entertainment based on his only child status with few friends with which to associate. From his perspective, the other kids near his age were not open to accepting Michael into their inner circle for most of the same reasons that the adults in Green Harbor held him at arm's length whispering about his peculiarities behind his back. For the most part, Michael never saw this as a significant impediment in his life as he generally found more than enough solace in his long journeys along the coast and forays deep into the heavily wooded acres that were located on the northwest corner of Green Harbor, known locally as Edison's Woods.

Chapter 3

When he was growing up, Michael had never heard how the woods had come to have their name, and he just called them Edison's the same as everyone else in town. He loved the deepness of the woods equally as the openness of the seashore and never took either for granted often expressing gratitude that he had been blessed with the good fortune to have both at his immediate disposal for unlimited exploration. The shore washed over him with all the sights and smells that oceanic tidal regions offer without being forced to experience it through the visage of McAllister and Sons. Michael often roamed the desolate coast near his house looking for unusual rocks and shells which he kept as a collection in his room much like the other kids he knew collected baseball cards or coins. Edison's Woods, while not huge—at least not on the adult scale of huge—felt like going back in time. To Michael, Edison's was where he went to dream.....to escape.....to create.....

The forest itself was not all that large, but had become so densely overgrown that little natural light could penetrate to the most central parts. The trees were primarily deciduous—poplars, locusts, and beeches—with a few scattered Norfolk Pines that are common in the Carolinas. No real trails exist there other than those that have been randomly formed from isolated populations of white-tail deer that seem to have their run of the forests from Georgia to Maryland.

Since 1952, no one in Green Harbor much goes to Edison's Woods anymore—not since what had become known locally as "Minson's Day". Back in '52, Walter Minson emerged from the woods one afternoon with some superficial to moderate wounds over most of his body while deer hunting. He relayed a rambling and incoherent story while gesticulating wildly about having been attacked by a female black bear that was protecting her cubs. However, in those days, Walter's

obsession and love of his home distillation operation put considerable doubt as to the veracity of his experience. Walter's wounds were not life threatening and most people in town just made the natural assumption that Walter had gotten spooked while on a bender and had injured himself while crashing through the woods trying to get out. Also, black bears have not inhabited Edison's Woods since sometime in the '40's and none of Walter's wounds appeared to be bear inflicted.

However, most everyone in town held a soft spot in their hearts for old Walter and more or less humored him and the whole thing was just forgotten. Still the same, no one really ventured into the woods from that day forward—either from a fear of believing that what had happened to Walter might actually have been true—which became known whimsically among the old timers as “Walter's Dance with Death”—or simply living cautiously and not wanting to get winged by Walter if he went back to the Woods with a bag on looking for revenge against his ursine enemies.

In all the time that Michael had spent wandering through Edison's Woods, he could never recall a single time in which he saw a bear, or even another person for that matter—a feature of the forest that appealed to him immensely. As Michael grew to utilize the forest as part of his semi-self-imposed isolation from the general population of Green Harbor, he had come to truly relish the desolation there. The more time he spent there, the more he was fairly reassured that his sole companions would be squirrels, deer, birds, and perhaps the occasional muskrat or raccoon.

Michael's growing disdain for people in general was matched only by his growing love of nature and animals, although Jack forbid him to have any pets of his own. His father had repeatedly lectured him against going into Edison's alone by droning on and on about Walter Minson, but as is usually the way with children and their parents, his warnings were falling on deaf ears. By the time he was maybe 7 or so, Michael's curiosity was high and he decided he would take a look for himself anyway. Besides, his father rarely showed any interest in Michael's life anyway so this was as good of an excuse as any to disobey him. This trend continued progressively until Michael approached his 15th birthday—that special age at which most adolescent children entertain the notion that they know all there is to know about the world and that their parents are most likely uneducated idiots that aliens are using in some galactic plot to ruin their entry in adulthood. Michael was no different in this regard and he began to spend more and more time both at the shore and deep within Edison's just pondering deeply—or at least as deeply as a 15 year old can—on why his life was heading in the direction it seemed destined for and why he had been saddled with these two alien implants as parents.

These days Michael's only respite seemed to be found in his long days in a small clearing near a

very old stand of locust and pine trees that were adjacent to the only running water that he had ever seen in the interior of the forest. It was nothing spectacular, just a small but brilliantly clear rivulet near the clearing where he could often guarantee the sighting of this family of deer he had come to recognize over the years. As he carefully lowered himself into the crook of the tallest locust tree of the group and onto a thick mat of moss and lichens, Michael inwardly remarked how this deer family seemed to have become like his family. By this time, the deer had grown accustomed to Michael as well and never seemed to express any fear or sense of danger when he was near them. On this day as Michael casually observed the Deer Family he found himself nonchalantly flipping old pieces of bark into a tiny pool that had formed in the clearing—this was Michael's cubicle—his magic space—where the wild and vivid images flowed nearly non-stop through his mind. When he came to this place, he felt as if he were stepping into another dimension or state of consciousness.....like his mental creativity seemed to get supercharged by a bolt of electricity.

Michael Geoffrey McAllister has finally become a success as a novel and screenplay writer. All the players in Hollywood are clamoring for his next project and fiction readers eagerly await his newest novel. Michael was ostracized as kid growing up in a small town in the southeast because of his special abilities which eventually led to his runaway career as an adult. However, his abilities discovered as a youth may have returned in an all too real manifestation to destroy his new-found success. All he did was write what came as second nature through his inner vision.....was this a blessing or a curse?

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