

One of Us

Bertram lies sleepless, stuffed up and congested with a head cold, despite the thick spread of Vicks that his mother had doused him with. *What a lousy birthday*, he thought but happy he had finally turned thirteen.

Finally, I'm a teenager.

He tried falling asleep thinking pleasant thoughts about his birthday dinner the night before. His mother had baked a key lime pie, a favorite of his. His sister Elizabeth had secretly painted a lighthouse and a three masted sailing ship on his bedroom wall while he was fishing with his daddy, and then there was his school project to create a time capsule to be buried at the New Bristol Methodist Church where his father, John Kingsley, is the minister. The time capsule will be sealed tomorrow after Sunday's church service. Each student has to contribute one item- something that when the time capsule is opened in a hundred years that people will appreciate and teach future Bahamians about New Bristol and Conch Cay. He reviewed all his options.

My pocket knife, maybe the one with the broken blade, or my model of the Star Wars Millennium Falcon. It had been given to him by a Canadian woman who kept a winter cottage on the island. *Elizabeth's idea is lame- a doll dressed in a Loyalist costume. Who cares about that stuff. Stinky is only two so all he can give is a dirty diaper or a handful of snot.* He chuckled to himself with that thought about his brother. He reviewed his best friend Noah Curry's idea to take a photo of each of their classmates, write their names and birthdays on the back, and put them in a waterproof box inside the time capsule. *When the time capsule is finally opened*

in a hundred years they'll be dead, but maybe their children or grandchildren will see them. He suddenly sits up. *I think I got to pee.*

He slips out of bed and makes his way to the bathroom, carefully avoiding the floor boards that are loose and squeak when you step on them. The house is old-built by his grandfather Isaac Kingsley after the 1932 hurricane had destroyed their original home. When he opens the bathroom door, he is surprised to see a light coming from below the cracks between the floor boards. He is even more surprised to see that the light is moving. He kneels and places his face close to the floor trying to peer between the boards. A blinding shaft of light pierces the floor crack illuminating the entire bathroom. He jumps up startled and races to the front door onto the porch and down the steps then crouching to see below the porch within the three-foot crawl space-built just high enough to avoid the flood waters of most hurricanes. A disk of pulsing green light darts below his house. It is about eight feet long and appears metallic.

“What are you?” he exclaims.

As if startled by his arrival the saucer darts from below the house and rockets skyward above Royal Street speeding above the tree line to the end of the village. Bertram jumps on his bicycle and follows the disk until it disappears over the trees where it seems to be descending onto Lowe Hill. He passes his school where the road turns sharply onto a narrow driveway that extends northward to the top of Lowe Hill. The Lowe House is long gone, a victim of Hurricane Irma, and only its foundations and debris remain within an open grassy lawn where the house once stood.

He sees the craft hovering about twenty feet above the ground. He watches spellbound as it emits a green gas creating a cloud growing ever larger and moving towards him. In a panic, Bertram jumps on his bike and races home. His heart is beating so hard he can hear it. As he nears home the sun begins to rise above the horizon. When he arrives home, he leaps up the steps two at a time letting the screen door slam behind him. His mother is already up and has started the morning tea.

“Momma! Daddy! Come quick! I saw a UFO!”

“Bertram, why aren’t you in bed? Where have you been?”

“Mom, I’ve seen a UFO! It’s landed on the Lowe Hill. It was under our house!”

His father, Johnathan, walks out of the bedroom.

“Son, what is all the commotion about?”

“A UFO has landed Lowe Hill! I saw it!”

“Son, I’ve told you about story telling. Lying is a sin.”

“No, it’s true! It’s a UFO ! It was under our house! Please come see!”

“Maybe it’s something that fell from a plane. We’re close to the Marsh Harbor Airport.”

“I know what I saw. It’s not from a plane!”

“O.K. Let’s take a look, son.”

“Wait Bertram”, said Mother. “You don’t go anywhere without a proper shirt and shoes. And put some more Vicks on-you’re still sniffing from that cold.”

Bertram quickly grabs a shirt and his shoes. His Mom sticks a finger full of Vicks below his nose. Bertram turns his head in protest. John instinctively grabs his straw hat from its hook

next to the door, putting it on his head and opens the screen door with Bertram following. They get on the golf cart and drive down Royal Street until they reach the driveway to Lowe Hill.

“It’s over there- behind the trees, in the opening!”

“Ok son, let’s take a look.”

Johnathan parks the cart and they walk pass the trees into the clearing. The metal vessel has landed on the ground. It has multi-color lights that circle the rim of the craft.

“Dad, what is it!”

“It doesn’t look like any plane or anything I’ve ever seen. Maybe it’s one of those drones. I am going take a closer look.”

“No! Don’t go near it!”

The craft begins pulsing with a bright green glow. A metal rod suddenly rises from an aperture on top the vessel. What looks like an antenna is actually a tube that begins spewing a greenish mist. It spreads like a fog across the field.

“Son, wait here.”

“Dad...don’t go!”

Johnathan walks into the green mist. It engulfs him like a sticky cloud.

“That smell,” said Johnathan. “It’s familiar. It smells like cinnamon and nutmeg – like my mother’s special tea. How I loved that tea.”

“I don’t smell anything,” said Bertram.

As Jonathan approaches the craft a shadow suddenly blocks the rising sun. A large cigar shaped vessel silently fills the sky. It’s at least two hundred feet long and moves directly above the clearing and stops.

“Dad! Come back!”

His father makes no response but only stares up at the silent craft with an odd smile. Bertram is terrified.

Suddenly a green beam shoots from the giant craft striking Johnathan directly on his head. He weaves and staggers falling towards the ground, but in that terrifying moment before he hits the ground he levitates. His body slowly rises above the ground without respect to gravity. Johnathan says nothing but has the same odd smile. Bertram runs to his father and grabs his father’s legs trying to hold him, but as soon as he touches him, a jolt of energy knocks Bertram off his feet. John is lifted above the ground traveling directly into the open portal of the mothership.

Bertram is frozen with fear standing below the craft that has swallowed his father like a giant whale eating Jonah. Bertram breaks into a dead run, his legs pumping hard as he jumps on to the cart and races home.

He leaves the cart running as he runs up the stairs.

“Mom! Mom!”

“What’s wrong? Where’s your father?”

“They took him! They took him!”

“Who took him?”

“Aliens! Those aliens in the UFO!”

Elizabeth said “Aliens?”

“I’m telling you, they took him!”

Stinky is crying from all the commotion. Bertram is shaking, his voice quivering, “Dad’s gone”.

Suddenly the door opens. Johnathan is standing there.

“Who’s gone?”

“Dad, they took you! Don’t you remember?”

“Now, Bertram, let’s not alarm your mother. Where’s my tea?” orders Johnathan as he makes a beeline to his favorite chair.

“Dad, what happened?”

“ Now there’s no more to say.”

Johnathan picks up the bible from the table next to the chair. “I have a sermon to prepare for tomorrow’s service.”

Bertram is in anguish but knows his father’s stubborn ways are not to be challenged.

Beatrice returns to her kitchen chores and Elizabeth carries Stinky into the bedroom.

The next morning Johnathan is up at dawn while Beatrice makes the family Sunday special: Johnnie cakes, bacon, and eggs. He reads his bible while he eats. After breakfast he bathes and dresses in his Sunday best – a starched white shirt and gray pants. He brushes his salt and pepper hair backwards revealing his receding hairline, but does not look in the mirror because he believes that mirror gazing is a sign of vanity and that God has given you your looks because they are uniquely yours. “You should accept the looks that God has given you without protest,” he often said, “Who are we to challenge God’s plan?”

At 9 AM, Johnathan with bible in hand, calls his family to the door to leave for church. They march single file down Royal Steet, with Johnathan at the lead, followed by his wife and children. The Methodist church is only two blocks from their house. The street is filled with families: men in starched white shirts, women in flower print dresses that touch the tops of their shoes; all freshly bathed and neatly dressed for this one day to escape their daily toil of fishing, clerking, building or whatever work maintains them, to be seen by their neighbors as being amply rewarded by their labors and visible to the community,

Upon arriving at the church Johnathan unties the plastic cord that holds the double doors together. The townspeople begin arriving. Bertram and Elizabeth race inside to sit in the pew closest to the aisle so they can escape unnoticed later in the service.

Good morning, Mr. Curry,” said Johnathan extending his hand. “I hope the week was good for you.”

“I had a big haul of lobster this week,” Andrew Curry said. “I filled my boat freezer.”

“It’s God’s favor,” said Johnathan. They shook hands again just as Kendal McCain arrives.

“Good to see you Kendal. It’s been a while,” said Johnathan.

“I’ve been busy taking tourists to the bone fish flats. Lots of time I got to work on Sundays to make ends meet.”

The Eldridge family, Milton, his wife Anna and their two sons are next to arrive. Milton is the director of the Conch Key Museum. His two boys gallop into the church to join their school mate Bertram. “The boys are excited about the time capsule. They brought some special things to put in there.”

“Anna, you are looking younger than ever. How are you, Milton?” asks Johnathan.

“I’m just dandy. I’m excited that I finally found photos of Princess Margaret’s visit to our island.”

“Good to hear,” said Johnathan. “When Royalty visits Conch Cay that is an event worth documenting in our museum.”

“I was only a boy when she came in 1958. She shook my hand.”

“It’s about time to wash that hand,” said Kendal with a grin, “What has royalty ever done for us?” Milton, flustered, turns away and walks into the church.

The church is soon filled. At precisely 10 AM Johnathan marches down the aisle to the pulpit. With bible in hand and exuding confidence he casts his gaze across the parishioners like an open net catching a school of fish.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome. I am blessed to tell you that yesterday a miracle occurred on Conch Cay. Yesterday, I saw the chariot of God, a chariot that descended from the sky with a Godly light burning with a heavenly fire. In that chariot was a heavenly being who told me of a promised land where all of us may live if only we believe. That being was Jesus. That promised land is our village. Jesus took me into his heavenly embrace and said to me ‘you are here to bring my message to the sinners on Conch Cay, all of you who have lied, cheated, taken God’s name in vain, coveted wives and husbands of others.’ All of us who have strayed from God will feel the rapture. He has promised that at noon today after this very service, He will appear to confirm his return. Yes, a miracle will unfold today at Conch Cay and our village will be redeemed. Our village will become a beacon for the world to follow and pilgrims will arrive to meet our heavenly visitors. We must welcome Him and his angels because they are one of us and soon we will be one of them.”

” Our miracle was not the first. I discovered last night in reading the bible that the miracle I saw was the same as that of Ezekiel. I read now from Ezekiel 1:4-28. ‘I looked and I saw a windstorm and an immense cloud with flashing light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human. This was the appearance of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I feel facedown and I heard the voice of one speaking. “

“Like Ezekiel, I have been blessed with the vision of the Almighty, the son of God. He hath commanded me to open your hearts and souls to his teachings. He has come to Conch Cay to teach us his love. Today he has promised to arrive in a chariot of glowing silver. Let he who has faith follow me to our moment of redemption and welcome the Almighty.”

Johnathan closes his bible and walks down the aisle to the door. As he passes the parishioners, each row stands and follows him in order onto Royal Street. Bertram and Elizabeth and the other children run pass the crowd back to their house porch to have the best possible view. Mother is right behind them trying to quiet Stinky who is crying and pulling her hair.

It is not certain who saw the distant light first. Perhaps several saw the strange light just above the ocean surface moving quickly, but without doubt, it was Bertram's loud voice that laid claim to the first view of the UFO.

"There it is! There it is!" he yells pointing at the broad cloudless sky that caps the turquoise sea. The saucer moves closer turning right angles putting on an airshow. The people woo and gasp in shock; some understandably out of fear, others delighted by the spectacle. The saucer arrives above Royal Street making a slow descent at the far end of the road near the school. It lands on the road. No one moves. There is a hushed silence. The lights dim to silver and a tube extends slowly from top of the orb, spitting out a green mist that moves quickly down the Royal Street engulfing the viewers in a pea green fog.

"It's a loving cloud," announces Johnathan. "Smell the nutmeg."

"I smell roses!" said Beatrice.

"No....it's lobster cooked in butter," said Kendal.

"I smell hot chocolate," said Elizabeth.

At that moment a circular hatch on the top of the vessel spins open and out emerges the visitor. Three others follow.

“By Jesus’s breath, it’s Him,” said Curry, “Look at those golden locks of hair and eyes with blueness of the sky.”

“It’s Jesus,” said Andrew Curry, “Are you blind? Can’t you see he is as black as I am!”

“No, he’s white!”

“Black!”

“White!”

“Black”

“He’s black alright,” said Percy Stubbins, “but he’s Dwayne Wade.” Dwayne was dribbling the a basketball with expert skill down Royal Street then passing the ball to his three team mates.

Esther Ambrister falls to her knees sobbing, “Mother. It’s my long dead mother

“My God!” exclaims Milton. “It’s Queen Elizabeth. How in God’s name is she here? She’s dead!”

Johnathan admonishes everyone. “What’s wrong with you! It’s Jesus’ with his three little angels. A miracle has come to Conch Cay! Praise the Lord!”

Bertram cannot make sense out of this rainbow of visitors. Everyone sees the creature differently, but he sees that the creature is bipedal, dragging from its back what looks like a tail,

its skin is a dull pinkish translucent with what appears to be veins and arteries visible below the surface. Its head is wide with two dark elliptical eyes. No nose. Its arms end without hands, but have three wormlike extensions from each arm.

In a sudden epiphany, Bartram pulls the Vicks from his pocket. “Quick, spread the Vicks under your nose! All of you!”

Elizabeth takes it first then the Eldridge brothers. After spreading the Vicks on their face each child stares in stunned horror at the visitors. One of the Eldridge boys begins to cry. Bertram’s dog Dylan begins furiously barking and charges into the street at the creatures. The lead alien unleashes a serpentine tongue wrapping it around Dylan pulling him to the open aperture of what may be a mouth, or perhaps an opening of some unknown function.

“Look how Jesus embraces even an attacking dog – bringing it to his bosom,” said Curry.

“Dylan! Dylan!” screams Bertram. He picks up a potted plant from the porch and throws it at the creature. The pot is vaporized mid-stream by a green beam fired from the disk. In unison the other children begin throwing rocks. Elizabeth heaves a large potted plant off the veranda, but before it reaches the craft it disappears into a cloud of vaporized mist. Stinky is on a rampage tossing his toys over the balustrade, each pulverized by the laser, which begins to amuse him as a new game, until his favorite teddy is blasted into particles.

The craft makes a beeline for the unruly children. A laser slices through the porch’s wooden boards like a cheese, inching upwards to the second story balcony. The children scream. Several run into the house. Bertram leaps from the veranda to the branch of a dilly tree.

In a singular act of infant rage, Stinky presses against the porch balustrade, drops his shorts and shoots a stream of pee that splatters onto the disk for the longest minute. The urine quickly finds its way into the laser gun. The laser beam flashes, dims, and is extinguished like a snuffed candle flame. The craft vibrates, emits a sputtering sound, and then crashes to the ground.

At that moment the three cherubs morph back into their lizard like form, and Jesus/Queen Elizabeth/Dwayne Wade returns to a less satisfying reptilian creature, no taller than three feet and certainly incapable of any adequate crucifixion, dribbling a basketball with authority, or a coronation worthy of a queen. People scream in horror with this revelation-many run back into their homes, while others stare in silence, frozen in fear.

The diminutive creatures race back to the open portal of their vessel. The larger lizard like alien pushes the want-to-be cherubs aside in its haste to get in first. The children of New Bristol continue to shower them with rocks. With the aliens inside their craft the saucer portal seals shut and for a moment everyone is silent, all standing and staring at the metal orb. Johnathan cautiously approaches it. The others follow and soon surround it.

“We need to call the commissioner and the police!”, said Curry.

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Johnathan, “It will make a spectacle of our island. Newspapers will swamp us. They will consider us freaks, and we will never have peace on Conch Cay. There are some things about Conch Cay that should not be told to others. It’s best that our fishing and livelihood not be interrupted by dark distractions.”

“Then what should we do?”

“All of you men grab it. Pick it up! We’re taking it to the church.”

“Why it’s as light as a feather!” exclaims Curry.

“I sure hope it’s not radioactive!”

“I don’t see any glow.”

The six men carry the saucer to the church yard. Other villagers follow with Bertram staying by his father’s side. The children swarm around them filled with excitement. They walk to a large rectangular hole lined with newly poured concrete wall.

“Now let’s put this evil thing into the vault,” said Johnathan.

“Daddy, that’s for our time capsule!”

“I know son, but we must rid ourselves of this evil. Bertram without further comment throws his pocket knife into the vault enjoying the metallic clink as it strikes the saucer. The other children quickly follow. Elizabeth tosses in her Loyalist doll. Noah throws in a half-eaten chocolate bar. Marbles and plastic toys soon follow.

Johnathan turns on the cement mixer and points it over the vault. The liquid concrete soon covers the saucer in a grey sludge obscuring the craft. After the cement fills the cavity, Curry pulls his mason trowel across the top of the wet cement creating a level surface.

“It’s time for the marker,” said Johnathan.

Curry pushes the brass marker into the wet cement.

“Son, wash off the wet cement from the plaque.”

Bertram cleans the plaque and the bronze plate glistens in the sunlight. It reads:

When you open this time capsule

you will learn about your ancestors

and discover that you

Are one of us