

WILLIE'S LAST NIGHT

by Ian Hanson

You don't know about this son, but when I was younger I saw Willie. Right before he left. Grandpa used to tell me stories about all of Willie's adventures: Willie's Trans-Atlantic Voyage From Norway, The Great Guppy Migration of 1835, Stevie Sturgeon's Secret and so many more.

See, I used to sneak out of the house with my fishing pole near midnight and run down to the bay to throw a few casts under the bridge. I always figured night time was better for fishing because they wouldn't expect me.

And one fall night as I was walking back up the hill toward the Holiday Station, I saw Willie coming down out of his house (you know, the concrete fish, well, he lives in its belly) all bent and dull with a suitcase in one fin and a duster draped over the other. He looked tired and I told him so.

He said, "Kid, I'm old, and lonely... I swam all the way from Norway, yah know?"

I looked at his overflowing suitcase and his dirty old jacket and wondered aloud if he was leaving.

"Yeah," he said. "Pictures and postcards just ain't doing it for me anymore. I need the open water."

"Where are you gonna go?" I asked.

"I don't know," answered Willie. "Home the other way. I hear the salmon out West are a laid back school. I need something... different."

“Well,” I said, shuffling my feet. “Be safe and look out for the Guppy Brigade.”

He laughed and said he definitely would. I must have looked sad because he came back over to me, shook my hand, patted me on the back. Then he mulled something over for a moment before handing me a key and saying, “I’ll be back next fall. Watch over my place would ya?”

I nodded and Willie turned toward the bay. He flopped over to the dock and flipped into the water with a loud splash. I never saw Willie again, but a month after our conversation down by the bay he sent me a postcard from Portland, Oregon.