

STORIES IN GLASS BOOK 3

BALLS IN PLAY

PAUL S. MOORE

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Book Three from Stories in Glass

Paul S. Moore

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

6

I TRY TO BE CLEAR

O TIS OPENED HIS EYES TO THE SIGHT OF SPINNING CEILING FANS, fuzzy in both thinking and vision. Breathing in the odor of stale beer and cigarettes had the effect of smelling salts. His attention turned to a woman leaning against a long, curved bar. cigarette in one hand, highball glass in the other.

“So, Dude, why are you here?” The woman sloshed her drink in a circle and watched the ice spin while waiting for an answer

Otis pulled himself into a sitting position and glanced around the room before he answered. A middle-aged man, possibly a bartender, stared at him from behind the bar, his chin resting on his hands. A man in the doorway stared as well, his weight resting against the handle of the shovel that gave Otis his headache.

Something was off in the décor. The painted piano sat in the right spot. The curved bar and hookahs added legitimacy, and the ceiling fans looked right. The big-screen TV and wall hangings were out of place. The room itself was too small to replicate *Rick's Café Americain*.

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Otis pulled his body onto a chair and moaned, "Why am I here? The question is getting old. Why greet me with a shovel to the face? I came to talk."

"To me? You want to talk to me?" The woman tossed her head back and poured the drink down her throat, catching an ice cube with the last drops. She bit down, and the sound of ice being crushed mingled with her words. "Hit me again with the ginger ale, Mr. Velas. Yes to the *Brain slap*, no to the ice."

Otis responded energetically to the bartender's name. "Velas! From movie night and ... and ..." His voice trailed off into uncomfortable silence. He wiped a dripping line of blood on his lip before continuing. "Dorothy mentioned you. She says you came to the guesthouse when Mr. Wally ... You saw Dorothy on the day"

Velas stiffened, his mouth worked into a sneer. "That was not me, *brujo*."

"I understand. Dorothy told me what happened." Otis extended an arm to the woman at the bar. "And you," he said, "Huana. I'm happy to know you survived the war. We need to talk."

On the last bar stool, behind the final curve of the counter top, in the shadow of a decorative pillar where Hollywood movie actors sat in secrecy while they monitored the comings and goings through the front door of the fictional Casablanca gin joint, a light flared. Otis turned his attention to the corner in time to see a silhouette appear in the glow of an inhaled cigarette.

"You have me confused with my sister," a voice from the shadow said. "Caspi's the pretty one."

A face moved slowly into the light, a cigarette dangling from the lips and an eye patch over the left eye being the features that first stood out. A young woman in red sweatpants and a yellow T-shirt hopped off the bar stool and walked toward Otis. A large scar at the corner of her mouth and the offset slant of a poorly repaired broken nose made the threat of the large butcher knife in her hand feel very viable. "I'm Huana," she said coldly. "Would you prefer your tombstone to read Dead Bitch, or do you want to give me your name?"

"Otis Beckley. I'm Otis Beckley, I have reservations."

Velas answered, "We don't have a Beckley coming."

"I'm listed as Milton. His secretary was going to call."

Caspi laughed. "That information would be handled on the mainland, at the dock. You're two days early. How did you get here without taking the boat?"

"I'm a friend of Mr. Lockjaw. I came to talk."

"Did you know Willa? Was she your friend?" Huana ran her finger over the blade of the knife. "Where did you beach your boat, Mr. Beckley/Milton?"

"I don't have a boat."

"Yep. He's one of them," Velas drawled. "Want me to set up for video or just dump him in the swamp?"

Huana walked to Velas and set the knife on the bar. "Set up the video equipment," she said. "Splice the acetaminophen discussion from Mr. Wally's flash drive onto the execution video and upload it from Sam's laptop. They'll get the message."

Otis slumped in his chair. "Test me. I can tell you things the X-Club doesn't know. I know you helped bury the shiny beast near the helicopter crash. I can show you which of the wall hangings in the bar were made by Dorothy. I think I'm here to finish her work."

Like a projector freezing on a frame, the silence in the room seemed to wrap around the frozen movement. The people around Otis held tight to their place in the room and gave no indication they even breathed. The stillness lingered until the ash from Huana's cigarette fell to the floor and she asked, "What was my intelligence report on the day we knew we were at war?"

Otis searched his memory. "I don't have the mind of a Savant, so pardon me if I don't get it word for word, but you told Dorothy the news about Lock and Willa. You said you wet your pants, Caspi was going to be raped, Dorothy was going to be dissected like a frog, and everyone was going to die. Close enough?"

Caspi and Velas looked toward Huana. Otis glanced toward the door and noticed the man with the shovel leaning toward her as well. It was clear that only Huana knew if he'd given the right answer. Smiling in relief, he felt confident enough to add a phrase Huana would be familiar with.

"I try to be clear."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul S. Moore was born in the Missouri Ozarks, raised in St. Louis, and eventually settled in the sand of central Florida. He calls each of these places home.

His inner mix of hillbilly river rat, lowlands daydreamer, sand road hermit, and reader of nineteenth-century history writers form the base of a non-elite education. These roots allow imagination to turn historic events into serendipitous thoughts. Those thoughts organize into stories, and stories become novels.

With the remedial help of a good critique group, and the birth of publishing companies that read a manuscript without asking first, "What are your credentials?", he's found a voice to share those stories.

Is it true that heroes are made, not born?

Does the right stuff come out of hiding when we recognize the moment the game is on the line? Who will come off the bench to save the world from itself? In these times, it's good enough just to force the game into extra innings.

Otis McKinney, Dr. Henry Millton, Huana's embattled tribe on a Panamanian island, a failed baseball prospect, a dedicated cab driver, and the Asmudi family walk into a club ... It sounds like the first line of a joke. This club is no joke. They're playing for all the marbles.

In a chain, stretching from before the Great Flood and into tomorrow, the weakest link is up to bat and he doesn't know the game rules until he makes them up in the last inning.



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