

## **A Halloween in Aruba**

**By Broken Poet**

The husky, sweaty Aruban detective sipped his black coffee, making a slight whistling noise as the smell of the coffee mixed with the air.

The room was basic and cold. A table. No windows. The fluorescent lights made the room appear whiter than the actual color of the faded walls. Everything seemed artificial. The door was some sort of particleboard. The wood on the table was fake. The chairs were plastic. The cup was Styrofoam.

A young man sat across from the detective. One wrist was handcuffed to a table leg. His head rested on his other arm that was folded across the table. He had a two-day beard. His face, body, arms, and legs were dirty, scratched, and bloody. Deep puncture wounds, defensive wounds, on his forearms were noticeable. His white linen shirt was covered in blood, partly torn and, oddly, appeared to be covered in black hair.

The detective leaned back and blew on his coffee again. “In the United States, didn’t they make a law about coffee not being too hot? Something like that? Some lady in a drive-through got burnt?”

The young man didn’t move. His head remained on his folded arm.

“Come on, Mr. Sanford, don’t you know all about the law? Aren’t you some hot shot lawyer from Miami?” The detective’s tone was condescending. Abruptly, his tone changed, “You sick fuck! Why did you kill her? Just confess and we can all go home!”

The young man picked his head up and looked at the detective through his weary, bloodshot eyes. “I have already told you. And I know it sounds impossible. I know it sounds like I am crazy.” He starts to speak through a cracking voice and tears. “I swear it was the cats.”

“Here we go with the cats again! I can do this all night long, Mr. Sanford.” This time taking a good pull of coffee. Time had cooled the hot beverage.

“I just got married. I was on my honeymoon. I would never have killed Summer. Let me tell you again...”

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## Two Days Earlier

A young man and a young woman are lying in bed, spooning, in a five-star hotel in Aruba. The young man's lips caress the young woman's ear, and he starts to playfully kiss it.

"Stop that!" she said. "Stop, stop, stop! We are going to be late! We've gotta get out of bed now! Don't get me excited again."

"Oh, come on. A quickie!" he said with a laugh.

She pushes him away, gets out of bed, and heads toward a tray with coffee and two mugs sitting on the dresser. She pours two cups and brings them to the bed. He sits up and receives the mug of coffee. She climbs in bed with her coffee and leans on his chest.

"I like the service in this hotel. Please ma'am, can I have more sugar?"

"You had better not get used to this."

Eventually, she gets out of bed and begins to put on her bathing suit. "I am really excited about our tour today. Come on, get out of bed, and put your bathing suit on and wear that sexy white shirt."

"Let me finish my coffee. After last night, I need the energy. Soon as I finish, I will get up."

The woman wandered onto the patio with her coffee and a pamphlet from Carmen's Day Tours. She half mumbles to herself reading, "A native of Aruba, Carmen has been operating daily tours in Aruba for more than 40 years. She will take you all over the island and will open your eyes to the island's natural beauty. As she takes you from one natural treasure to another, Carmen will also educate you about the history of Aruba and its folklore. Being a hippie and a spiritualist, she will even read your palm and tell your future if you desire." The woman pauses and looks at him getting out of bed. "Where did you find this character?"

"You said you wanted something special on your favorite holiday, Halloween! I got you a spiritualist in a Jeep. How about that?"

He finished dressing and they organized their backpacks with snacks, water, a towel, a mask, a small batch of weed they had scored after they landed, and some other provisions to keep them well supplied throughout the day. It was scheduled to be an all-day, private tour, just the three of them.

Just as they finished packing, there was a knock at the door.

Summer opened the door. “Good morning. I am Summer and this is my new husband, Jack.” Jack waved from the bedroom and yelled, “I will be right out. I have to FaceTime with Captain.”

A lovely round, elderly woman with black hair and dark, weathered skin and colorful clothes was standing at the door. “I am Carmen,” she laughed to herself, “but you already knew that. Come on and we will get you settled in the Jeep while we wait for Jack. Jack told me you were going to be on your honeymoon.”

“Jack will be right out. He has to Facetime his cat, Captain.” Summer said with a look of embarrassment. “He is crazy about that cat.”

Summer followed Carmen to the Jeep, which was an old Volkswagen “Thing.” It was painted in colorful island art. Summer noticed what looked like signatures all over the vehicle and she excitedly asked, “Can we sign your car?”

“Of course! It is part of the fun. People have been signing this car for about 30 years. Just throw your stuff in and take a seat.”

Summer jumped into the back seat and chatted with Carmen as they waited for Jack.

“So, how has your honeymoon been?” Carmen asked. “A honeymoon on Halloween? I like it! You know we celebrate Halloween down here too. Tonight is the night.”

“Halloween is when we met and Halloween has always been the most special day for us. Our first kiss. So we had to get married and then go on our Honeymoon to celebrate Halloween. Sort of a dream come true.” She thought about how happy she felt.

“This trip has been perfect.” said Summer. “We ate at the restaurant that has tables in the water. That was so much fun and romantic. We went snorkeling off the

beach. This island is just beautiful. Tell me about being a spiritualist, that is what you call yourself, right?"

"This island is loaded with spirits," Carmen said. "It is easy to be a spiritualist on an island like this. I am self-taught. There is Frenchman's Pass, where the French trapped hundreds of Indians in a cave and then lit fires to try and smoke them out. Sadly, all the Indians died from the smoke. Now they say their ghosts haunt the caves. On one stretch of road, people claim to see spheres of light they think are spirits. However, the only one that scares me is the pet cemetery on the southeast coast. I would not be there at night and certainly not on Halloween. I will read your palm when we have lunch."

Jack soon joined them in the car and looked to the back seat. "Mrs. Sanford, do you have everything?"

"Everything! Now let's go. It's Halloween. Carmen says there are ghosts all over the island. Woo hoo!" Summer is cheering and dancing from the back seat.

Jack jumped in the front passenger seat, "Ghosts, just what I need on my honeymoon. Woo hoo!" Jack joined Summer in her excitement.

Carmen pulled the car away from the curb as she rolled her eyes. "Woo hoo," Carmen said under her breath as she rolled her eyes.

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The three of them were about half way through Carmen's day tour. They had already jumped in the water and wandered some of the caves and fed goats that were on the side of the road. Summer and Jack seemed to be having the time of their lives.

They stopped for lunch at a roadside seafood stand. Carmen recommended the lobster and Jack went to the window to order, pay, and pick up the food. He was sitting by the window with a cold beer waiting for his number to be called.

Summer was enjoying her day. "So, when are you going to read our palms?"

"I actually think now is a good time for you. I'd like to do your reading while you are alone. I don't think it is good for your husband to know your future. Pass me your hand."

"Have you done Jack's today?"

“I did Jack’s while you were snorkeling.”

“Wow! He didn’t even tell me. Is that a violation of our vows?” Summer laughed, somewhat half-heartedly. She wondered why Jack had not told her about his palm reading and his future and it bothered her. “Which hand do you want?”

“Your right.”

She reached out her hand and Carmen began to study the lines. Carmen sighed and her face became a little twisted.

“What is wrong?”

“Nothing. Pass me your other hand.”

“What, is my right hand defective?” Summer gasped a nervous laugh. “Are you just messing with me because it is Halloween?” She reached out her left hand as a replacement. “This is the only other hand that I have, so this one better work.”

Carmen studied her left hand this time and the same quizzical look came over her face.

“Your palm is very delicate. You do not have many lines because you are so young and vibrant. So it is hard to read. Look.” Carmen reached out and took both of Summer’s hands palms up.

“Typically, and I am going to reveal some palm reader/client privilege here, but like Jack, most people have a lifeline. It is here.” Carmen taking her finger and pointing to the bottom center of her palm and tracing it past the thumb to the right side between the thumb and the pointer finger. “But you don’t have one. I have never seen that. Maybe on children, but never an adult. You must have good skin.”

Suddenly four boys wearing beautifully decorated and colorful skeleton masks came running through the restaurant being chased by police. One boy, wearing a black skull mask with white painted eyes, nose, and teeth, stopped, looked right at Summer, and yelled something in Papiamento, the island’s Creole language. He repeated it two times, then continued his escape.

When the boy first stopped at the table, Summer instinctively jerked her hands back from Carmen to protect herself.

After the four boys had run off, Jack ran back to the table. Arriving right after the cops had run past chasing the boys.

“Are you OK? Wow! What the fuck was that?” He sat down next to Summer and hugged her. He could see she was visibly shaken. As soon as his arm went around her, she broke down in tears.

“I thought I was going to die. Carmen said I don’t have any lifelines and then, a second later, this crazy looking skeleton runs up to the table and screams I don’t know what right in my face. I thought he was going to kill me. Oh, my God!” Summer broke down and began to cry a little. “I am going to try and make sure this doesn’t ruin the day. Well, I always said I wanted to be scared on Halloween.” she wiped away her tears as she now began to laugh to herself.

“They were just kids,” Carmen said. “They probably just stole some candy. Aruba is very safe. Very safe.”

“Yeah baby. I know you were scared. See you’re already starting to laugh. Good to be scared on Halloween, right? This is like a real-life Halloween Horror Nights in Orlando and it’s free!” Jack starts to laugh with her. Carmen joins in and the three of them laugh until they cry. Circle complete.

A short while later, Jack brings three lobsters and two cold beers to the table.

“Mrs. Sanford, your knight in shining armor is here. Let’s let the lobsters cool down. They just took them off the grill. We can wander with our beers and go have a smoke.”

“Jack, Carmen probably doesn’t approve of smoking, you don’t need to give up our secrets,” Summer said.

“Oh. I have been on this island doing tours for 40 years,” Carmen replied. “I have seen it all. Go smoke.”

Jack and Summer finally got over previous incidents and the good weed helped them calm their emotions. The lobster was fresh and grilled perfectly. They ate well. They had several more beers as they enjoyed their Halloween lunch.

After lunch, they explored more caves and saw the ruins of the houses of the early Indians and settlers. They did all of this as they headed toward their final stops, Arikok National Park and the Natural Pool. If time permitted, they were going to visit the pet cemetery on the farthest southeast end of Aruba.

The weed, the lobster, and the beer had caught up to Summer. She fell asleep in the back seat. She wanted to rest so she would be ready for the Natural Pool. She had dreamed of posting pictures of it on Halloween.

Jack, a lawyer by trade, began cross examining, in a nice way, his tour guide. He was learning about the unique history and culture of Aruba. Carmen seemed to know everything about the island.

“Now that I remember, what did that kid in the seafood shack yell at Summer?” Jack asked.

“Nothing really. You know, we are only about ten minutes from the Pool,” Carmen said.

“No, really, before Summer wakes up, let me know. What did he say? I know you speak that language.”

“He said, twice, “The dead will take your life.””

“What does that mean? Is that some sort of Halloween saying down here?”

“It is something from an old Indian legend about the dead coming out on Halloween to take the lives of the living.”

“Sort of like a zombie.”

“Yes, exactly.” Carmen agreed. “You had better wake up Summer. Tell her to get ready. The Natural Pool is right up here on the right. Time for selfies!”

Jack reached around and woke up Summer gently. She smiled. She had regained that honeymoon feel. This Halloween was very special.

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The time at Arikok National Park and the Natural Pool was exhilarating. Summer was amazed at the clear water. She never expected beautiful, colorful fish in the pool. The combination of Summer’s natural beauty, the hyper colorful fish, and the gin-clear water made for photos that were more like works of art. These would be spectacular honeymoon photos and on Halloween no less.

As they gathered their stuff and started to pile back in the colorful Volkswagen Thing, Carmen mentioned, “I am glad you guys loved the Natural Pool. I think we

are going to be a little late for the pet cemetery. Maybe we just head back now and take it slow.”

“I think we have time. Even if you just get us there and we take a couple of photos and leave. I really want to see that on Halloween.” Jack explained.

“If you really want to go, let’s leave now. I don’t want to be there after dark. A pet cemetery on Halloween? Not a good combination.” Carmen said with authority.

“Let’s sign the car before we leave here.” Summer grabbed a Sharpie and signed the car. She went with the traditional, “SS loves JS. True Love Always.” She handed the pen to Jack, who wrote, “The dead will take your life. Halloween 2022.”

“What the hell is that?” Summer asked.

“Oh, while you were sleeping, Carmen translated what that kid yelled at you. It is a traditional Aruban saying for Halloween. I thought it was kind of cool. Maybe I am stoned.” Jack said with a laugh.

“Kind of freaks me out,” Summer responded.

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It took a little while over bumpy terrain to get to the pet cemetery. The vehicle was open air, so Carmen didn’t mind smoking in the car. Jack pulled out a joint and lit it. The couple passed it back and forth like teenagers. Now that it was the end of the day and they had been smoking and drinking beer for a few hours, both of their eyes were like slits. They were stoned. The sunset was even more beautiful.

“Yeah, the sunset is beautiful. But that means we only have about a half an hour of daylight left. The pet cemetery is at the end of this road. Let’s take some pictures and get back on the road. I am already going to run over time with you guys.”

Carmen made sure she made her game plan clear.

Just then Jack and Summer started to set off for the end of the island. Between the roadway, or the path that it had become, and the ocean, was a small patch of sand, littered with small crosses and handmade headstones. It stretched for what seemed like miles.



“Wow. This is amazing. What a testament to how much people love animals.” Jack said as he began to take some photos.

“I think I am going to cry. This is so beautiful. Each little cross has a different pet’s name on it. Each name is different. So beautiful and so sad.” Summer was trying to live-stream as she was dictating.

As the two stoned honeymooners were wandering around, the sun continued to descend and time was passing. “OK. Sorry to burst your bubble, but I have to start heading back to the city.” Carmen said, a little more forcefully.

“Carmen. I just can’t leave. I am feeling a vibe. I can feel the sun. I can feel the Indians. I can talk to the ghosts. I can feel all this energy.” Jack said, looking at her through the small slits that had become his eyes.

“Jack and Summer, I am leaving.” Carmen said from the driver’s seat with the car on. “I am not staying out here after dark. Not for any amount of money. I would advise you to jump in my car.”

Just then, as the sun was dangerously close to disappearing, Summer exclaimed, “A cat! Actually, a kitten.”

Summer began to hurriedly walk down the path, snapping her fingers softly and calling the kitten.

Jack, the cat lover that he is, started to chase Summer.

“I am leaving!” Carmen yelled from the Volkswagen.

“Go ahead. We will figure it out. We can find a way back. It is only about 6 o’clock. We will be fine. We can’t leave this kitten all by itself.” Jack continued to follow Summer.

“OK. But I really don’t think you guys should stay out here after dark. Not on Halloween. I loved having you as guests. I feel terrible. Please give me a good review.” Carmen put the car in gear and headed out slowly, just in case the couple changed their minds. The old Volkswagen slowly disappeared as did the sun.

“Wow. Carmen was right. As soon as the sun goes down it gets dark.” Jack confirmed.

“How are we going to find this kitten in the dark? You realize the kitten was black, right?”

They walked hand-in-hand, enjoying the cool ocean wind. The almost full moon was now rising. The waves, strong and powerful, crashing against the shore made for quite a soundtrack. They both felt as if they could feel the positive energy of all the dead animals sleeping permanently in their graves. Maybe it was this scenery, mixed with the weed and the beer, and the fact that they loved each other, that made the walk super special. Once in a lifetime. They didn't care if they had no plan as to how to get back to the hotel. They would figure that out in due time. These were the crazy things you did when you were young and on your honeymoon on Halloween.

Just then they both heard the kitten. "I think I have a flashlight in my backpack." Jack suddenly remembered.

He took his backpack off and found his flashlight. "I forgot. It also has a laser pointer. I used to use it with Captain." He turned on the flashlight and shined it toward the sound of the kitten.

With the flashlight they finally saw the kitten. It was sitting on one of the pet graves right in front of one of the hand-painted crosses. "Baby" was written on it. "Its eyes are red." Summer said in a surprised voice. "It's as if they are glowing."

"It must be the flashlight." Jack tried to explain as they began to approach the kitten.

The kitten began to make an evil hiss.

"Jack. Stop." Jack and Summer both stopped a short distance from the kitten. Summer then said slowly, with a very deliberate tone. "Did you notice that this kitten has no shadow? I am so stoned. Am I stoned, or does this kitten have no shadow?"

Jack rubbed his eyes. "It's just dark. We are stoned." Jack began to take the flashlight and shine it toward the kitten in various angles. Trying to see a shadow. However, the more he shined the light at the kitten, the more he realized that the light was shining through the kitten and not bouncing off it. Further, every time he would shine the light against a background like the cross, the kitten wouldn't generate any shadow. Finally, he also realized that the kitten's eyes were glowing red and this was also not being caused by the flashlight.

"I have an idea."

"What?" Summer was now fully scared.

“Let’s turn off the flashlight.”

“Why?”

Jack said slowly in a whisper, “If I turn off the flashlight and the kitten’s eyes continue to glow red, then it is a ghost.”

“Turn it off,” Summer said, holding her breath.

Jack squeezed Summer’s hand tightly. He was a grown man, but he felt like a six-year-old kid again. His heart was pumping almost out of his chest. He slid the switch down the flashlight to the off position. Click.

Their eyes took a moment to adjust.

In an instant they both realized the little black kitten’s eyes were glowing red even more intensely now. Then their eyes saw another set of cat eyes glowing red to the right of the kitten. Another one to the left. These eyes were larger. And then another and another. Bigger and bigger. More and more.

Then they heard the collective roar of what sounded like a hundred cats. They were all hissing. The sound was like a hundred cats in heat.

“They’re ghosts!”

Jack held Summer’s hand even tighter and began to run back to the cemetery’s entrance. He was dragging Summer along with him. The cats were chasing from behind. Their red eyes filled the darkness like little red comets passing through the night. Their hissing and howls broke the silence.

He turned back on the flashlight. It illuminated the path. He and Summer were both in good shape and were fast runners, but they could not outrun what seemed to be a hundred ghost cats.

Jack saw a large mausoleum. He couldn’t be sure it would be open, but if he and Summer could get to that shelter, they might be safe.

He grabbed Summer’s hand and tugged her off the path. They made a mad dash to the door. Jack grabbed the handle and the door swung open. Just as the door swung open and he was stepping inside, Summer cried out. “Aghhhhhhhhh!”

Jack looked down and saw a large black cat with devil red eyes, its canine teeth and its claws sunk deep in Summer’s calf. Jack instinctively swung the flashlight

at the cat. The flashlight and his hand holding it passed right through the ghost cat. Summer was crying out in pain. Blood was starting to flow down her leg.

Despite the unnatural cat on her leg, Jack pushed Summer past the doorway and into the mausoleum and slammed the door shut. The ghost cat or demon began to crawl up her leg using its claws and teeth and Summer was helpless to fight.

Jack was still swinging the flashlight at the ghost to no avail. Just then Summer's hair pin fell to the floor. The hairpin had been a wedding gift. Jack knew it was sterling silver. Jack had remembered the story about werewolves and silver bullets. He grabbed the pin and shoved it through the cat/ghost's neck, and it finally reacted. As the pin hit its neck, the cat made a sound like a balloon losing its air and it completely disappeared into thin air. Summer collapsed from the pain.

Jack was now sitting in the dark mausoleum. His wife had passed out from pain. She was bleeding. She had been attacked by, from what he could tell, a ghost that looked like a cat in the middle of a pet cemetery on Halloween. Just thinking that made Jack feel like he was losing his mind. His mind still racing from the beer and the weed. He could hear the other ghost cats gathered outside. Their cries breaking the silence of the Halloween night sounded like fingernails on a chalkboard.

The couple sat in near darkness. Just the flashlight lighting the mausoleum. Summer still passed out. Jack held her and tried to keep her warm. He could feel her shaking. Probably from shock. Jack noticed that the mausoleum had been built for a German Shepherd named King. There were carvings of his exploits in the marble. This was probably the reason the ghost cats that were howling outside were not allowed to enter. The mausoleum was a testament to the love a human can give to an animal and vice versa. Jack, for a brief moment, had forgotten about the terror he was living through and thought about love.

“Jack!” Summer awoke in terror. Shaking and screaming. Jack held her tight, acting as a straitjacket until her tremors ceased.

When Summer finally stopped screaming and crying uncontrollably, she wept softly and tried not to groan in pain. She was losing blood from her wounds. She needed medical care.

All of a sudden, Jack heard a noise.

“What was that?” Jack’s ears heard a familiar sound. It was the distinct sound of the Volkswagen’s door slamming shut.

“Hey, crazy honeymooners! Are you guys still out here? I couldn’t leave you out here alone!” Carmen’s familiar voice was like a lighthouse in the darkness.

“We’re in here!” Jack yelled. “Help! Watch out for the cats!”

It took Carmen a few minutes to grab a powerful flashlight and make her way to King’s mausoleum. As she opened the door and looked inside, all she could see in the darkness was Summer’s bloody leg and two scared faces. “Oh my God! What happened?” Carmen gasped.

Carmen immediately ran in and helped Summer to her feet.

“There are ghost cats that attacked us. That kitten we chased. It was a baby ghost cat named Baby. By the time we caught up to him and realized he was a ghost, the other ghost cats surrounded us and attacked.” As the words came out of his mouth, he realized how crazy it sounded. All on Halloween.

“The dead will take your life.” Carmen uttered. “Why do you think I came back? Let’s get her out of here.”

The three of them, Summer in the middle, Jack and Carmen under each arm carrying her with flashlights, open the door and leave the safety of the mausoleum. Hoping to get Summer medical care. Despite the darkness. Despite the cats howling on Halloween.

As they exit the mausoleum, they immediately begin to see red eyes begin to surround them. The howls start to grow louder. At the speed they are traveling, they are easy prey for the ghost cats.

“These were people’s cats once? That is what you think?” Jack screamed to Carmen.

“Yes.”

Jack turned his flashlight off. And then hit the switch for the laser. The laser that his cat, Captain, would chase for hours. He shined the laser several yards in front of him. The ghost cats immediately jumped onto the path and began to chase the laser.

“It’s working.” Carmen whispered.

Jack continued to shine his laser like a pied piper herding the ghost cats. The howls turned to purrs. The red eyes turned soft again. Carmen turned her light off. They all followed the laser and walked by moonlight.

They almost made it to Carmen’s car, the colorful jeep with the phrase, “The dead will take your life, Halloween 2022” written upon it. But Jack stumbled and the flashlight with the laser fell to the ground and it immediately went out. There was nothing left but the moonlight and the red eyes of the ghost cats. The purrs turned quickly into wild cries.

The ghost cats jumped on all three of them. Summer was easy prey, being almost unconscious when the flashlight fell. Carmen made it to her car. However, the ghost cats had enjoyed the warmth of her hood and had gathered there until she returned. Pouncing upon her until she could no longer fight them off. Hard to fight ghosts.

Jack fought the hardest. He kept Summer’s silver hair pin and used it as a saber. Every time he would pin a ghost cat, he heard the sound of a balloon losing its air. Almost as if the cat’s soul was running back to its grave. He was able to fight until he fell off the cliff and into the ocean. Turns out, not even ghost cats like water. He was lucky to have survived the waves, the sharp rocks, and the sharks until he washed up on a beach the next morning.

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The coroner concluded that Jack had fashioned a weapon using cat teeth and cat claws. He did this to disguise the fact he had killed both Carmen and his new wife, Summer. This would explain the horrific wounds they both suffered. The coroner also concluded that Jack had used the same weapon on himself to fake injuries consistent with the bites and scratches of a cat and then he jumped into the ocean. A sort of murder/suicide plot. However, unexpectedly, he had survived and washed up on the shore the next morning, November 1, 2022.

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