

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NATHAN POLK

By Avie Thacker

Three-Minute Horror Story Contest, 2nd place

Sherriff Breaux stood outside the Polk residence, a small home deep in the heart of the bayou. This was his third visit in a single week, and he still wasn't sure what he was hoping to find. He knocked on the door, knowing that Mrs. Polk and her elderly mother were home. The sweet smell of home cooking wafted through the breeze.

Abigail Polk cracked the door open. "Well, good evening Sherriff!" she exclaimed in her sweet, southern voice. "Would you like to come in for a bit?"

He nodded and removed the well-worn hat that sat upon his graying hair. "Thank you kindly. I'd enjoy that."

Breaux stepped inside. Abigail's mother was seated at their table, and gave him an acknowledging nod. The old woman never said much.

"Would you like some pork gumbo, Sherriff?" Abigail asked brightly, stirring the pot. For a woman whose husband was missing and presumed to be dead, she had sure been upbeat over the past few days. Not a tear ever fell down that lovely cheek. "Pull yourself up a chair."

"Thank you for the offer, Mrs. Polk, but I don't think my wife would appreciate it if I spoiled my dinner." He smiled, trying to keep things friendly. He knew that Abigail was weary of him prying. "We're still trying to find him, ma'am. No one's seen or heard a thing. I was hoping you had."

Abigail's demeanor changed. It was slight, but Breaux had been doing this long enough to recognize it. She didn't smile quite as brightly, and her eyes turned cold. Word about town was that Mr. and Mrs. Polk didn't have the best relationship. Nathan Polk was a vicious, cruel man, especially to his wife. Everyone was surprised that Abigail had put up with him for years. Now he was missing. He'd left the bar last Saturday night, and no one had seen him since.

Abigail claimed he never made it home. Breaux knew better.

"Haven't heard a thing. But you'll be the first to know when I do." Abigail began pulling dishes out of her cupboard. "Is there anything else, Sherriff? I'd like to feed my mama her dinner."

"Of course, ma'am." Breaux glanced around the room while Abigail busied herself in the kitchen. No signs of foul play; everything was as it should be. Breaux had no doubt that Abigail hated Nathan enough to murder him, and if she didn't do it, then she told someone to. And most men in town would have been eager to hurt Nathan.

But there was no body. It was as if Nathan Polk had disappeared in a puff of smoke.

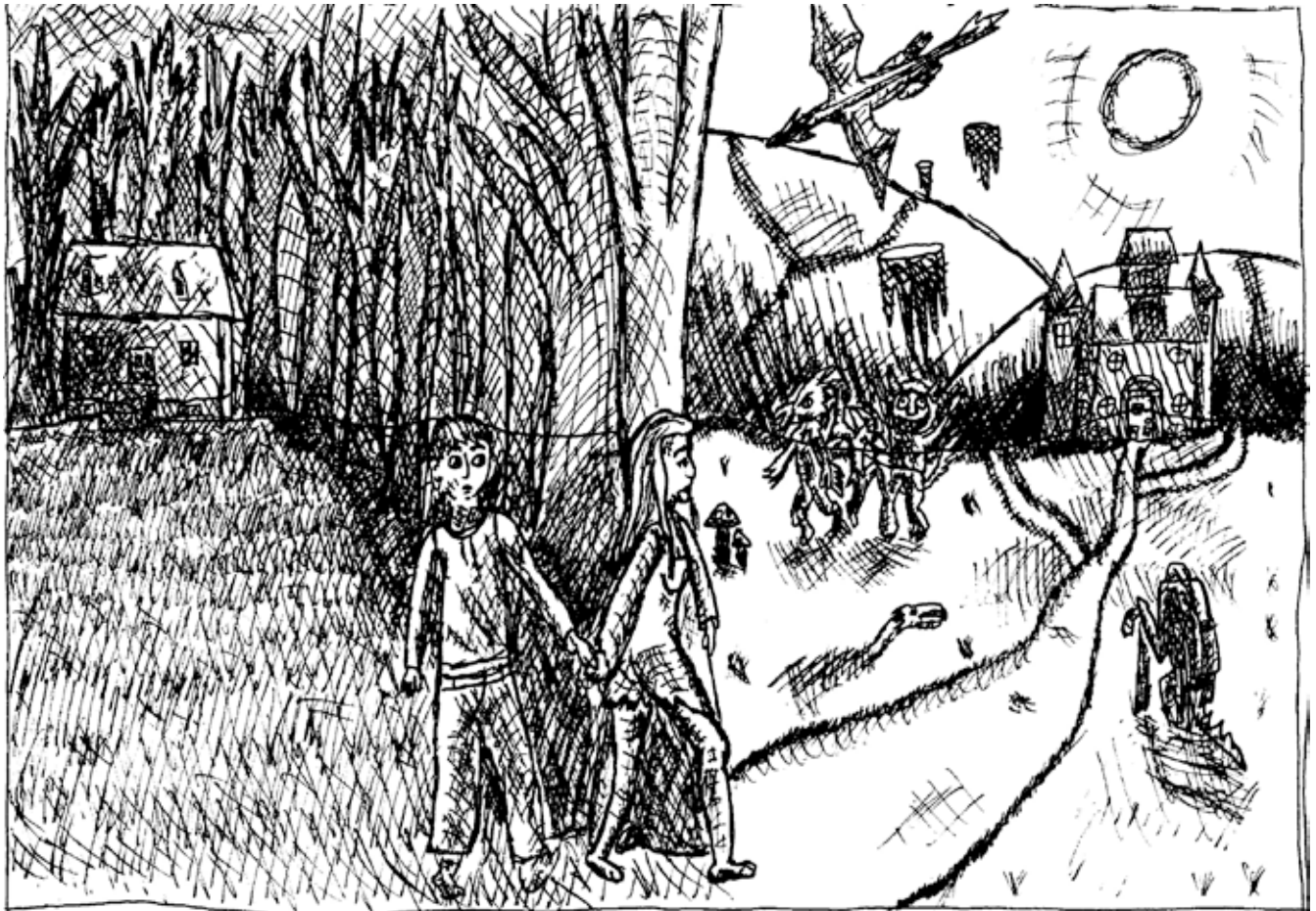
Breaux's gaze met Abigail's mother. The old woman was scowling, and clearly wanted him out. According to rumor, her husband, Abigail's good-for-nothing father, had abandoned them. This was years ago and miles away, but word traveled fast and people in small towns remembered such things. She didn't like or trust anyone as far as Breaux could tell.

"I'll see myself out. Thank you, ladies." Breaux stepped out into the cool night, and the door shut behind him.

Abigail spooned gumbo into a bowl. "Mama, I bet old Breaux would have a heart attack if he knew what he was looking for was right in front of him on the stove the whole time."

Her mother nodded. "Just a few more bowls and that sorry man will be gone for good." She took a bite. "I think he tastes better than your father did."

Abigail laughed, and the women ate their dinner. ▲



Joseph Holsapple, New Life