

## The Bad Luck Bottle

It was here that I found myself, caught playing a cartoon character, a caricature, a façade with no depth; acting the part of the innocent in a bad (well, let's say mediocre) "B" grade movie. The simple set for this play: a small, windowless room; a well-worn wooden table; and, the obligatory (and currently occupied) three straight back wooden chairs. So boring, I thought; done way too many times.

Sighing heavily, for effect, I began appropriating appropriate emotions; channeling memories of what might have been before the cruel hand of fate struck a final blow—personifying fate, blaming bad luck on the proverbial black cat. (As an aside, I think it's totally unfair to tag black cats this way. Had one once, black as night, white paws complementing his outfit. Hell-uva mouser; often left disgusting presents of heads and brains by the front door, which was ok since I hate mice.)

So, anyway, here we go, blame it on: the moon; the winds of fortune; the universe hates me; and so on. The fact is that it was mine, the ultimate responsibility for the life of another, and, while an accident, nonetheless the burden mine, and mine alone to bear.

There's really not much to tell. Yesterday, while taking my morning walk along the powdery, sugar-white beach (Panama City Beach, if you must know), lost in thought, I barely avoided stepping barefoot on a dirty wine bottle lying there where the surf meets the sand, at the edge of existence if you will. Bending down, I picked up the bottle while warm Gulf water caressed my feet and ankles.

Beautiful white seagulls soared over me, cawing to each other, announcing my find—or so I imagined. I tried cawing back but was rudely ignored; my accent too strange, perhaps, or maybe I used the wrong dialect. Anyway, I was having a wonderful time, there in the middle of nature, enjoying creation, casually daydreaming about which oyster shop to attend to today. My good luck was in avoiding stepping barefoot on the glass bottle, which would have made a bloody mess. Perhaps that was "good" luck looking out for me. Whatever.

So that, you see, that was how I came to possess the bottle with the note marked "X" inside. I remember thinking: "X" marks the spot; amused that here was some lost pirate's treasure map with gold and jewels buried and a fortune to be had, me mateys! Arrrgh! (For some reason, you can't think or say "pirate" without saying "Arrrgh!" but I digress)

So, under the ancient legal principle of "Finders Keepers" (and since I lacked a corkscrew), I took the bottle to home to our apartment, growing curiouiser and curiouiser over the message with the "X". On my way, though, I became concerned. What if the "X" was a warning of some kind? I expressed my concerns to my friend.

"Perhaps the bottle contains some sort of deadly virus or pathogen that would be released upon opening? You know, a "Pandora's Bottle"?"

“You watch too much TV,” he said, smugly. “More likely it’s just some lame love note, stuffed in a bottle and thrown off a cruise ship by some wealthy somebody. Give it to me. I’ll open it, loser!”

He pushed me, grabbing at the bottle.

“Stop it!” I cried, pushing him back, away from the now precious bottle.

“Give it to me!” he shouted, grabbing hold of the bottle. “You owe 2 months’ rent anyway; it might as well be mine, you two-bit loser actor. Let go!”

So, I let go, perhaps a little too quickly, for he fell backward, hitting his head on the granite countertop, falling onto the floor, groaning, blood oozing out the back of his head. The bottle also fell to the floor, breaking into pieces.

“That’s when I picked up the 'X' message, discovering that it was, indeed, a pirate’s treasure map! I truly feel terrible about his dying,” I sighed my last line, “One big accident.”

“So, you found this bottle yesterday?”

“That’s correct, Officer.”

“Your letting go of the bottle, that’s what did it?”

“Yes, sir. I feel terrible, a horrible twist of fate.”

“Uh, huh.” He looked at me with clear, piercing blue eyes. “Would it surprise you to know that your friend reported finding this artifact two days ago?”

“What? That can’t be! He never said—”

“Ironically, his appointment with us was today. You’re under arrest. Cuff him.”

Just my luck.