

The Siblings Jones



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Deep in Davy Jones's locker there's a scroll commemorating his late brother Casey, train wreck hero of popular renown. Davy, malevolent spirit of the seven seas, has borne many a shipwrecked sailor to a watery grave. But his behaviour is as nothing compared with Casey's satirical philanderings, his monstrous drunken guilt, the way he whittled on the glans of his penis with a craft knife until, erect, it looked like an intricately carved mahogany baluster, and in repose like a decaying vegetable. Had Casey been fired from his job on the Illinois Central Railroad, he could easily have joined the next freak show that passed through Water Valley. Of which Davy knew nothing. To this day he mourns the loss of his only brother.

But living in the ocean depths poses its own problems. Davy feels the cold more acutely than when he was a youngster, and over the years he's been obliged to shift his house nearer and nearer to a geothermal vent. The sulphurous stench used to bother him, but no more. Hot water streams constantly through the tightly meshed windows and doors and exits via cracks in the walls. His house badly needs caulking. Frankly, it needs a woman's touch. That's another thing Davy wouldn't know about.

Unless Casey's widow, Janie, gets her way, that is. She's

always been rather fond of Davy. The way she picked strands of dried sargassum out of his hair was noted by everyone, Casey included, which triggered another unhappy bout of philandering and whittling. She even claims to enjoy the company of Davy's boon companions: the swordfish, the giant squid, the great white shark, all of whom relish the human titbits he provides for them. Janie they give cold appraisal – is she food or not? Only time will tell.

No-one knows why Casey didn't leap to safety, why he held on to the brake lever after it was locked in position, after the engine was put in reverse, after the sanders were opened, and as the train slithered down the track towards catastrophe. The official report into the train wreck declined to speculate as to why Engineer Jones remained on the footplate. According to Davy, Casey was wrestling with the brake lever as with a laocoonian sea serpent. Or suchlike. Davy lives in a state of almost constant hallucination. But when reality is so strange, who can tell the difference?

The equinoctial tides are running high, higher than ever before. Towering waves are crashing together. Spray mists the face of the moon. Even in the ocean depths this turbulence can be felt. The water slews one way, then another, and during a particularly powerful surge Janie is swept off her feet and dumped, fishnet stockings and all, into Davy's lap. The nautical chart he was consulting sashays to the floor.

Janie and Davy, happily ensconced. Another storey has been added to the house. In the inky night (marginally inkier than the inky day), Davy works downstairs while Janie sleeps restlessly overhead, dreaming turbid dreams, her legs entwined in sheets of woven kelp. He's keen, as ever, to finish the task and join her in their bed of sponge and seaweed. But his concentration is shot. He's finding it hard to tally up, harder still to reconcile his joy with the sailors' last words, their pitiful cries and exclamations.

An architectural peculiarity of the house is a narrow staircase, an inch or two wide, up which Davy's pet eel, Casanova, slithers.