

LITTLE FERDINAND'S LITTLE FINGER

An Absurdity by:
James Riva W38533

Once there was a little village on the shores of a mighty lake surrounded by mountains. In the little village was a young man named Ferdinand, but everyone in the village called him Ferdie. This is the story of Little Ferdie's little finger.

The village was named Slumberton, and ever since the gold mine ran out of gold, the only source of income was the tedious job of carting lumber through the mountain passes to the larger towns where furniture and housing timber were milled. Ferdie was a ne'er-do-well that tried his hand at cutting timbers, and occasionally running mule carts of timber to the outlying towns, but he really didn't like the extremely demanding work, and wished for some other opportunity to present itself.

His mother Alice, was anxious for him to move out of the house because he ate like a horse, but seldom contributed to the table fare. And also Alice was trying to re-marry.

Having Ferdie hanging around the house discouraged the few suitors that came looking for a woman of Alice's age. Ferdie senses his unwelcome, and it further cemented in his mind that he must find a more lucrative way of earning a living.

Now the gold mine at the edge of town stretched back into the mountain a good half mile, but they hadn't found any new veins in over twenty years. And so, the village elders voted to suspend operations until such time a new shaft could be dug on the gamble that more veins could be found.

Now in the days of yore when the gold mine was making everyone in the village wealthy there was a so-called "golden rule." The golden rule was that all the gold diggings at the end of the day were submitted to the commonweal. In other words, each villager got any equal share. Absolutely no hoarding, theft, smuggling was allowed. The penalty was severe for even tiny thefts from the community goldmine. It was, amputation of the right little finger. Caught with a few stolen nuggets from the mine at the end of the day, the finger comes off in the morning after a village meeting.

It kept people honest and forthright for the most part, however, there were some thefts over the years. In total about three dozen thefts in the forty two years of mining operation. So the deterrent was in fact quite effective.

The village was on a lake on one side, and it used to be teeming with fish. Now, there was only one fish in the lake, an enormous largemouth bass everyone called Ralph. It was easily the world's largest largemouth bass, weighing about 500 pounds. Ralph ate everything, every fish in the lake. Attempts to re-stock the lake, even with female bass for Ralph failed. Ralph ate all of them. But the villagers blamed themselves. In the days of yore when a thief was de-fingered at the mine, the little finger was ceremoniously fed to Ralph the bass.

Granted ceremoniously feeding a piece of a human, albeit a

criminal human to a fish as punishment is at odds with evolving standards of decency. It also smacks of witchcraft. As a matter of fact, it was widely believed by the people of Slumberton that the reason behind Ralph the bass' phenomenal growth and longevity was this unusual dietary supplement. The villagers wanted an end to Ralph, and to have a lake alive with fish again. But attempts to net Ralph, or hook Ralph, or spear Ralph had all been dismal failures. For a fish, Ralph was supernaturally cunning, and he was about 500 pounds, so it's not like Ralph couldn't defend himself if need be. Many a would-be trophy fisherman had wound up tipped overboard and had to swim to shore all the while nipped at their shod feet and even at their fingers. Nobody wanted the monster fish around.

As for Ralph himself, he found a way to feed even though he had eaten all the fish in the lake. Ralph could leap spectacularly and snatch low flying birds, and swimming ducks, and geese. Hardly fascinated, the people wanted Ralph gone.

Now the errant Ferdie being someone seldom employed in a full time job, was wandering the woods around the village with a tiny crossbow fitted with eight inch darts. His quarry was squirrel, and his mother often made a delicious squirrel stew. So Ferdie had treed a half dozen squirrel and was circling the tree to get a clear shot, when suddenly he stumbled into a loosely covered over chasm- a weak rock structure that crumbled under his weight. He fell about twenty feet and landed on the sandy bottom surrounded by black rock walls with veins of quartz imbedded throughout. Striking a match he lit a stub of candle he carried in his pocket. He swore softly. There in front of him were veins of gold melded into the quartz- hundreds of pounds of gold. "I will tell no one!" He yelled out as loud as he could.

He surveyed the inside and began to pile rocks against the wall until he had a climbing way to the surface. He carefully covered over the entrance with fallen branches and brush. Then he sat there and schemed.

Ferdinand knew very well that the bylaws of the village required all gold mined from the environs of the village to be community property- stated forth at the inception of human habitations in the early 1700's. To deliberately keep, and conceal and then hoard such a treasure could end with the loss of his little finger, which would probably be fed to Ralph the bass. Still, the risk was worth the fantastic wealth he could amass by being sneaky. He added some more leaves to disguise the entrance, and walked home whistling.

Ferdie scrapped together some tools, and set off at dawn the next day. He had a lantern, a pick, a hammer, and some rucksacks. By noon he was famished, and had separated a full pound and a half of yellow metal into the sack. He emerged from the pit and covered over his crime.

Ferdie's next move was to borrow a donkey and ride twenty miles to another town that had a full fledged bank. Hungrily the bank manager scooped up the gold pieces, and paid out to Ferdie thousands of dollars. He rode all nite to arrive home at his mother's tired as tired can be. When he awoke, there was a terrible surprise.

The bank manager, like all the people in these mountains, had long since known that the goldmine in this village had gone dry a long time ago. He telegraphed to Ferdie's village asking about any new strikes. Ferdie was mentioned, and now dozens of angry villagers were at Ferdinand's mother's house demanding answers.

Ferdie fell apart under the questioning, and soon confessed to the whole scheme. Sentence was pronounced.

Ferdie's little finger must be cut from his hand. No disagreement. Afterall, the Saracens amputate the whole hand for theft. The ancient Romans in the Bible crucified the thief. What they practiced was just and warranted.

So the village crier cried out at the assembly, "Little Ferdinand, also known as Little Ferdie, it is decreed that

you are guilty of common theft in violation of the bylaws of this village. You willfully hoarded and did not disclose the newly discovered vein system of gold in the commonweal, thereby depriving the village and causing your fellows to live in dire poverty to your own enrichment. Therefore your little finger on the right hand will be cut free in public, and fed to Ralph the fish."

Immediately there were loud protests.

Not from Ferdie who quietly whimpered, but from concerned villagers.

"Why do we have to feed that devil fish, anyway? Its Satanic, thats what it is, and thats probably why our goldmine failed four decades ago, and its definitely why the lake is barren. That fish is God's curse on us, not for amputating the finger, but feeding it to a fish instead of burying it in Potter's field."

"Here! Here! What he says is true. Ralph the bass is an evil omen for what our forefathers have done!"

"But wait! I agree its Satanic to feed Ralph the fish a portion of one of ours. Its definitely withcraft that has come back to curse us. But Ralph won't bite at normal baits. We've tried everything to kill that devil fish and failed.

Just this one more time if we feed Ralph, but hide a large hook inside the finger and attach some goat liver, it could fool Ralph. Attach it to black painted steel wire and bind that to a vinegar barrel left over night. If he bites, he'll tire himself out by trying to dive hauling that barrel behind him. Then we can spear him and be rid of the curse. We can all promise God never to feed the fish human pieces again."

"Here! Here! I second that! Just this once and we'll be rid of Ralph for good!"

"Yes!"

"I say also!"

"For all!"

"So its settled. Little Ferdie, come here. Place your right hand on the stump and hold very still. Do you want a blindfold?"

"No."

And so the constable placed his Bowie knife edge down against the little finger of little Ferdie, and placed his other hand on the back of the blade- it was one quick thrust down like chopping an onion, and little Ferdie whooped out a few choice words. Ferdie was coated with honey and pitch and then bandaged.

Soon the severed finger was fitted with a very large iron hook, and the shank of the hook hidden with a strip of goat liver. It was fixed to a twenty five foot steel wire painted black attached to a small wooden barrel. At dusk it was set adrift with the villagers giving a solemn prayer. Even Ferdie participated in the prayer.

By agreement all the village had lights out at dusk.

No sounds. Strict silence. But come morning the village found Ralph half killed from exhaustion floating on his

side weakly moving his gills. The men paddled over to him and speared him. Ralph, the devil bass was finally dead.

The village had an enormous feast. Baked bass, fried bass, barbequed bass, pickled bass, bass stew, and all the cats and dogs in the village had pieces of Ralph, raw. Ferdie himself had the choicest cuts, eating Ralph's heart.

And so the tiny village of Slumberton was once again prosperous. The goldmine produced out of the newly opened system of veins, and slowly the lake was restocked with barrels of fish carted in from nearby lakes and ponds.

So all you would be thieves approaching the environs of Slumberton- BEWARE! Your little finger, like Little Ferdie's might be forfeit!

July 20, 2018

J. Riva

James Riva W38533

0CCC

1 Administration Rd.

Bridgewater, MA 02324