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## Horse and his Fishermen

J. R. Angelella

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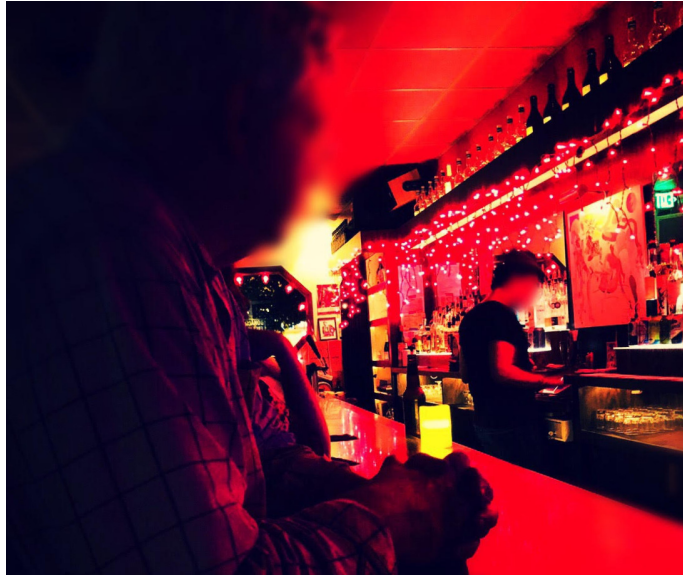
**J. R. Angelella** is the author of the irreverent and twisted coming-of-age debut *Zombie: A Novel* (Soho Press,

2012). His work has appeared in various journals, including *Hunger Mountain*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Sou'wester* and *The Coachella Review*. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the Bennington Writing Seminars and currently teaches writing at the University of Maryland College Park and Towson University. He lives in Baltimore.

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Horse and his fishermen lean arms into the worn wood of the bar, sucking juice from boysenberries. Horse and his fishermen sip water and smoke cigarettes, faces salt stained and cracked raw. Their fishy eyes fall on girls.

The girls eat jumbo shrimp with seashells in their hair.

A bartender reads a book about ghosts.

Another round of boysenberries, Horse says, tapping his empty bucket.

The bartender says, No more berries. He says, I am not going to get harangued again.

Fancy word—harangued, Horse says. He swats at a fly near his face.

Surprised you know, the bartender says.

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Surprised you're surprised, Horse says.

Boys better leave, the bartender says.

Beer, an old man says, slamming an empty glass on the worn wood of the bar.

The bartender closes his book and fills another glass. Not asking, the bartender says to Horse, sliding the beer to the old man.

The old man drinks his beer and burps.

Boysn—Horse says. Then—berries.

Fresh out, the bartender says.

The girls finish their shrimp and order a bucket of boysenberries, too.

Fresh out, Horse says to the girls.

The bartender resumes his book about ghosts.

We're asking for berries, Horse says. Then, not trouble.

You're asking for things I no longer have, the bartender says.

Darkness stirs outside.

Boo, the old man says, pointing at the book about ghosts, laughing with a creep smile and greasy beard.

Girls want berries, too, Horse says. We all want them.

Girls want to be left alone, the bartender says.

Lightning flickers across the sky without sound.

Storms a-comin', the old man says, wheezing. White foam soaks into the curly hairs of his beard.

Time to shove off boys, the bartender says. Adios. Hit the road. Fuck off.

Gut-growls of thunder, then, descending—angry angels no longer restrained.

Last chance, Horse says, but the bartender says nothing back.

Horse and his fishermen, oh, Horse and his fishermen. They smash pint glasses on the saw-dusted floor. They shatter red glass ashtrays against frameless pictures of sailboats hung on the walls. They snap bar stools over their knees and break windows with empty buckets. They chase the girls to the bathroom and wedge the jukebox to the door. They kick the old man in the back and punch the bartender in the face. The old man collapses in a pile of cracked skin and the bartender only bleeds. They steal full bottles of whiskey from behind the bar and suck from the beer tap. They retire to their boat, snapping its rope taught, tied to the dock. They wait out the storm.

Monster waves chomp planks off the pier, curling out from the starved belly of the ocean, salt water spraying the deck. Sea foam seeps into the rubber boots of Horse and his fishermen as Horse reads aloud from the bartender's book: *and when the ghosts appeared, everyone went to pieces.*



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