

THE LAND WHALE MURDERS

CHAPTER 1: Eel That Heaven Allows

AUTHOR

Our story begins now in earnest. If earnest was the name of New York City, which it isn't. I think Fred would be a good name for a city but ... instead let's begin as the Four Elementals, a group of scientist friends, meet at the home of Hiram Blud, their leader and lead Elemental - he has called them together for dire reasons ...

1.1:

The home of HIRAM BLUD.

HIRAM

Enough talk of nut and meg, I call to order this conclave! I have summoned: The Four Elementals! And I, Hiram Blud, call us to order! There is something afoot! And it cannot wait for you see –

AUTHOR

Actually no. Let's not start there. Sorry. Stories are funny things. Let us begin with a different member of the Four Elementals, one Eugene Neddly and his trip earlier that day down at the East River Docks ...

1.2:

Slip 12. Down on the docks. LONGSHOREMAN unload cargo. EUGENE hops along the docks.

EUGENE

Oooh it's crowded here! Oop, 'scuse me, pardon, ooh that's a lot of. Yep, pardon, let me just squeeze by. They don't call these the docks for nothing. So much work to pick up a package. Maybe this way?

AUTHOR

Package indeed. For isn't life a package in its own way? For Eugene the package was marked urgent. Because as the new century was about to turn our country was facing ecological peril. Eugene was often found with his relatively long nose in a book or watching birds from his Westside brownstone. The New York of 1896 was not a nature lover's paradise. But Eugene wanted to change that, and he had a plan. Was it a stupid plan?

Sure, but most plans are. Invading Russia in winter, defending the Alamo, electing James Buchanan. But sometimes it works. Especially when you have a big heart and a sharp mind. Eugene had one of these. And he wore that heart on his sleeve. Along with several stains of which he just noticed.

EUGENE

Aww is that gravy?

(Tastes it.)

Nope that's mud. Let's see. I've come down here so many times and I never remember ... is this slip 12? Sir, sir, is this slip 12?

LONGSHOREMAN

What's it say there?

EUGENE

Slip 12.

LONGSHOREMAN

Avast! Does it now? I'm illiterate so I always wondered.

EUGENE

The problem is everything is labeled slip 12 ... it's very confusing.

LONGSHOREMAN

Purposely so! It's to confuse the Boll Weevil, the scallywag who is raiding ships from here to Perth Amboy!

EUGENE

Why is he doing that?

LONGSHOREMAN

Legend says he was a Free Silver Populist who after the Panic of 1893 lost everything and then avowed to maraud until the government ends the greatest issue of our day - the Bland-Allison Act!

EUGENE

Of course the fallout from the Bland-Allison Act is well known! It's vital to our everyday lives at this time in history ... 1896. And people will always be talking about it! That's terrible, but still crime is bad. He shouldn't do crimes. I hope never to hear about this Boll Weevil again.

LONGSHOREMAN

I hope we *do* hear of him! Learning be a fruitful use of our modern times. Willful ignorance be not my bailiwick. Too many Knickerbockers don't know nothing. I'd blame Barnum but ... I don't!

EUGENE

Also he's dead.

LONGSHOREMAN

Exactly what he wants you to think. Wink. Wink.

EUGENE

Wink. What?

LONGSHOREMAN

Avast. Now give me your invoice that I may retrieve your cargo.

EUGENE

Fantastic! I can't wait to get my hands on that woodcock!

LONGSHOREMAN

How'd you know I had a peg-dick?

EUGENE

A what?

LONGSHOREMAN

A fish took my manhood for you see it's –

EUGENE

Oh no please don't finish that sentence. It's. A woodcock is. It's. Um. A bird. And when I said. It was um. There's no good way to end this.

AUTHOR

And soon after a bit more sputtering the cargo was retrieved. I'm not sure how an illiterate longshoreman reads an invoice but. Anyway, Eugene was given a small crate with several holes drilled into it. He was giddy as he looked inside ...

EUGENE

They seem to be mostly alert. Good. Ow. One pecked me though the hole.

LONGSHOREMAN

Avast, sign here then. Avast.

EUGENE

You say that a lot.

LONGSHOREMAN

It's a nervous habit ... you see I'm really a shy lad.

EUGENE

I understand that. And this cargo you ask –

LONGSHOREMAN

I didn't.

EUGENE

This is the final box of birds for my big bird launch. I've created a wonderful event. I'm going to release every bird mentioned in Shakespeare into Central Park! I've already got most! There's starlings, ravens, pigeons, some eagles, two peacocks –

AUTHOR

Eugene spent the next several minutes listing birds and then the plays or sonnets in which they could be found.

LONGSHOREMAN

Stop saying things!

EUGENE

And now finally these woodcocks! But it wasn't all smooth birding, several of them did not survive the shipping process, but ... I'm storing them all at the Acclimatization Society of North America Headquarters. I'm the vice treasurer.

LONGSHOREMAN

Avast. Sounds like one of the many groups of science loving weirdies prancing around our fair city stinking it up with chemicals and equations. Avast!

EUGENE

Well we do love our Sulphur. I'm part of several coteries pursuing noble pursuits. But most important: I'm one of the Four Elementals. Perhaps you've heard of us? Gadflies of the ologies and isms.

LONGSHOREMAN

Avast I know of none of that. My wife be too jealous. Once she punched a mule - and old Sal and I were only doing some light kissing. It was for a play but she didn't cotton to none of my reasonings.

EUGENE

I should get these birds ready. The big release will be a fizzing good time! If you'd like to come –

LONGSHOREMAN

Not even a little!

EUGENE

Well I shall leave one of these flyers about it here. Get it, flyer! Bird release! Clever. Me. Nothing? Fair enough, well now I'll just walk through this impoverished slum via that dark alley and catch a carriage uptown!

EUGENE whistles and walks away.

AUTHOR

And though his head was mostly empty, his heart was full. Eugene whistled as he walked, the bird release dominating his every thought. So much so that he didn't even notice an angry young woman who he bumped into.

1.3:

BEANS

Watch it, mackintosh!

EUGENE

Sorry, hot birds coming through!

BEANS

What a puss on that mug. What's he so happy about? Don't matter none. How dare he! Doesn't he know I'm -

AUTHOR

Sorry she's not important to this story! I'm not even that sure why I mentioned her. This is a story about The Four Elementals. Phew, this is tricky. Now let us meet another Elemental, Maryanne Blud as she delivers a chapbook of poems to her editor.

1.4:

EDITOR

Have you made those changes?

MARYANNE

Some. Though I'd rather not rhyme fungus with cowabungus.

EDITOR

Listen poetry is about selling. Poetry is junk entertainment for the masses – you know that. Additionally the Cowabungus Corporation will give us a hay penny each time we work their name into a poem. Money, dollie, money!

MARYANNE

Still though ...

EDITOR

All the best writers do it. Poe hawked Raven's brand hair oil and their 'nevermore snarls guarantee.' Lincoln worked in three references to Baxter's Boots into the Gettysburg address. Are you better than Lincoln?

MARYANNE

The poem is a meditation on the death of General McClellan. Does it honor his memory and service saying:
His heroism was mighty, his deeds spread like a fungus
Have you seen the latest great products from Cowabungus?
I feel like it's --

EDITOR

Feel. Feel. That's the female problem. You feel too much. I feel with my hands. And you know what I want to feel? Greenbacks!

MARYANNE

Fine. I do need the money ... I have some irons in the fire and I need to keep the flames well-funded. Cowabungus it is.

EDITOR

Great! I'll get these galleys to the printer.

MARYANNE

If but one person would take me seriously.

AUTHOR

But she was a poet and her friends were scientists. And poets were notoriously looked down upon by the scientific set. Elsewhere the last of the four Elementals, Anjus Troup was at the Botanical Gardens overseeing the planting of newly arrived rubber trees.

1.5:

ANJUS

Careful. Air layering is the best way to propagate a rubber tree.

GARDENER 1

Yes, mum.

ANJUS

It's doctor. Dr. Anjus Troup.

Sorry

(Beat.) What's her deal?

GARDENER 1

GARDENER 2

What'd ya mean?

GARDENER 1

Her right eye is milky white and blind, surrounded by a spider-web of scars!

GARDENER 2

You don't know what happened to the right eye of Dr. Anjus Troup!

GARDENER 1

No.

GARDENER 2

Me neither but it must have been bones crazy.

GARDENER 1

And what about her left hand?

GARDENER 2

What'd ya mean?

GARDENER 1

She covers it with a glove but you can tell by its lack of movement and loud thunk that it's a prosthetic!

GARDENER 2

You don't know what happened to the left hand of Dr. Anjus Troup!

GARDENER 1

No.

GARDENER 2

Me neither but it must have been bug nuts.

GARDENER 2

How is it a woman can even be a doctor?

GARDENER 1

You don't know how she became a doctor?

GARDENER 2

No.

GARDENER 1

Me neither but it must have been hookoo cuckoo!

GARDENER 2

And what about her –

ANJUS

You know I can hear you. I'm right here.

GARDENER 1

Yipes! Garden faster, chum.

GARDENER 2

I'm tilling as fast as I can, pal.

ANJUS

Tis no wonder I prefer plants to people.

AUTHOR

Indeed there was a lot of mystery around Anjus. But she didn't mind. She kept her life private ... one could almost say mysterious. But now let us return to the home of Hiram Blud as night sets on New York City. The rats scurry looking for trash. From the second floor window of his brownstone Hiram Blud watches one of the rats.

1.6:

HIRAM

Rats off to you ...

AUTHOR

He says to himself as he closes the curtains of his study. His study is a study in fish. All the treasures of the sea have been trawled up and then stuck to the walls. Hiram checked his mutton chops in a squid shaped mirror. It was hard to keep them even. The right side looked a little off. But before he had time to do anything about it his sister Maryanne pushed her way into his study.

MARYANNE

Eugene and Anjus are here, but -

HIRAM

This is serious business, Maryanne. And ... a moment. I was eating algae earlier and it's stuck in my teeth.

MARYANNE

Why were you eating algae?

HIRAM

To understand fish you must eat like a fish.

MARYANNE

I don't think that's true.

HIRAM

You're a student of the soft arts, not the hard sciences. You need not eat a poem to write one.

MARYANNE

And yet who won that haiku eating contest?

HIRAM

You've always supported me. My mission. But –

MARYANNE

You will not support me.

HIRAM

You're my sister. There's a type of sea cucumber I used to collect for Old Man Grovers. Grovers would pay ten half quarter-pennies for a bucket. This was when I was first doing research at Buzzards Bay, which –

MARYANNE

Are you about to compare me to a sea cucumber?

HIRAM

Favorably ...

MARYANNE

Do not compare me to a sea cucumber.

HIRAM

Spoken like a true sea cucumber. For you see --

MARYANNE

Is that smoke coming from the parlor? Hold on.

AUTHOR

Maryanne grimaced, she knew what the others thought of her. Her blue eyes sparkled as her nose sniffed the air. It was no wonder Eugene loved her. Speaking of Eugene he was in the parlor waiting for Hiram to finish his algae floss.

1.7:

EUGENE

Oh a model of a ship.

He breaks it.

EUGENE

Oh, I guess that comes apart. Um, let's put that back on the –

Knocks things off the shelf.

Why ... that's no good. Maybe ...

More things fall off.

EUGENE

ANJUS

What are you doing?

EUGENE

Nothing, Anjus.

Sounds of more things falling.

EUGENE

Shelves aren't like they used to be. All broken.

ANJUS

Is that so?

AUTHOR

Anjus Troup frowned. She narrowed her milky white right eye and then tapped her artificial left hand. She always narrowed her eye and tapped her hand when she was annoyed with Eugene. Thus she did this quite often.

EUGENE

It's just ... I can fix it. So let's just ...

EUGENE tosses the mess into the fireplace.

Mess into the fireplace.

The fire flares and roars.

EUGENE

ANJUS

That smoke looks toxic.

EUGENE

I'll just put it out with – oooh sleeve is on fire. Ow. Ow. Ow. MARYANNE
enters.

MARYANNE

What is going on in here?

EUGENE

Just a small fire, not like the fire that burns in my heart. Heartburn – you. Are.
Burn. Ow. Ow. Ow.

MARYANNE

I'll get the fire pail.

MARYANNE exits.

EUGENE

Fire pail, pales in ... comparison to the bucket of your ... face? Oh she's already
gone.

ANJUS

Well done. Have you heard of the gentle touch, subtlety?

EUGENE

My dear Anjus, I am the very model of subtlety. I'm so subtle I'm sub- subtle.
Sub-sub-subtle. They call me sub-sub-sub. Who's there? Oh it's old sub-sub-sub
... sub.

ANJUS

That why you flush at the mere sight of Maryanne?

EUGENE

Flush? Whaaat? Maryanne who? Oh Maryanne Blud? The woman with the best ankles in all of the Eastern Seaboard? Whose poems strike my ears like naughty mittens? I don't know what you mean. Ha. Love her? Who said that? The wind? Shut up ... wind. You crazy breeze. Wow, it's hot in here, are you hot? Is it hot in here?

ANJUS

You were just on fire ...

HIRAM bursts in.

HIRAM

Fire, indeed, fire in our bellies -- passion! So speaks me, Hiram Blud and
– what is that burnt smell? Oh the fireplace is -

MARYANNE enters with the fire pail.

MARYANNE

On it.

AUTHOR

Maryanne who has entered with a fire pail and plate of cookies; she deftly places the cookies on the table then douses the flames with the fire pail.

MARYANNE

Problem solved. Also I baked cookies. Here we go.

ANJUS

Chipped chocolate, in a cookie? This must be a serious matter.

EUGENE

Delicious and deadly, like a tiger in lipstick.

HIRAM

Indeed ... striped and saucy.

ANJUS

Though maybe too much nutmeg.

HIRAM

Enough talk of nut and meg, I call to order this conclave! I have summoned: The Four Elementals! And I Hiram Blud call us to order! There is something afoot! And it cannot wait for you see, I must tell you this grave news without haste! ... Except that decorum demands we do an official role call and all sign the log book.

Maryanne – THE LOGBOOK!

MARYANNE

Duty bound I pass around the book, sign here. Sign here, sign here, and there we go. Witnessed. Stamps. Stamp here, stamp here, there. Initials.

They all sign and stamp the book.

HIRAM

Initial faster! This news cannot wait!

EUGENE

Don't rush me, I get nervous and write all R's oh I did it again! Damn this nervous R condition. If only my name were Rrrrrrrr. Then I'd be fine.

MARYANNE

And now the check-marking of the names.

She makes some quick check marks.

MARYANNE (cont.)

We've been checked and marked. Proceed Hiram.

HIRAM

Hurray! Good! This news is earth shattering so we will get to it ... right after the auditory rollcall! FOUR ELEMENTS ASSEMBLE YOUR THOUGHTS AND FOR THE GOOD OF THE WORLD CONSIDER YOUR TALENTS AND THEN UNLEASH YOUR POWER ...

OF SPEECH ... IN LETTING US KNOW WHO YOU ARE! Dramatic pause, dramatic pause. First ... I am Hiram Blud, sailor of the seven seas, the great lakes, the lesser lakes, the worthless lake, and even the pond of some note. My love of angler fish is well known as is my fear of zebra coral. I've named thirty-two species of fish, and once kept a baby eel alive by feeding him from my own bellybutton. Here I stand before you ... humbly. Hiram Blud – Master of Water.

ANJUS

I am Anjus Troup, mistress of fern and stem. Twice award winning in categories of green botany and brown botany. I lost my perfect facial beauty to the cruelest flora. I've cut through jungles and grew the great Stalk that Saved Philadelphia from a tiny seed. Flowers bend toward me.

Here I stand ... humbly. Anjus Troup – Mistress of Earth.

MARYANNE

I am Maryanne Blud. Wielder of the red hot pen of poetry. I have spilled the ink of my heart across my seven best sellers, three very good sellers, and two should have sold better. I've chronicled my brother Hiram's travels in my seminal sonnet: Sea Shanty, Shan't I See. I've melted the heart of a Czar with a limerick. I penned a verse that made President Grant hazy and President Hayes grant me a wish. Here I stand ... humbly.

Maryanne Blud – Mistress of Fire.

A beat the wait for Eugene who is eating his cookie.

EUGENE

Huh, oh right – the –

EUGENE moves to get up but bangs his leg on the table.

EUGENE (cont.)

Ow, table. Let me just –

EUGENE tries to stuff the cookie in his mouth, starts choking.

EUGENE (cont.)

I'm good. No one help!

MARYANNE

We weren't ...

EUGENE

Great, I'm. Oh chocolate in my lungs. Breathing is ... cocoa. Ok. There. Good. I'm good. I am Eugene Neddly. Master Birder. I know all the birds of Audubon ... by their secret names. I once hid in a large wooden decoy to watch the mating dance of the shiest duck – the noggins duck. The Trojan Quack I called the decoy. I once stalked a stork and took the place of a baby eagle to be raised by a mother eagle to learn the secrets of eagles, and have a caring mother – Mrs. Flaps I called her, she called herself screeeeeeee! Screeeeeeee! But that's eagles for you always screeeeeeee! Screeeeeeee! Whereas hawks are all like scrawwww, scraaaaaaw! Hawks and eagles, will they ever get along? No. Oh and reminder!

EUGENE gets out a stack of flyer from his pockets.

EUGENE

Bird release broadsides! Sorry they're crumpled, they were in my pocket. Have one. Take one. There you go ...

HIRAM

Why are they wet?

EUGENE

I have a medical grade dampness.

ANJUS

Ah the great Shakespeare Bird Release ... how many survived?

EUGENE

Most. You like Shakespeare, right Maryanne?

MARYANNE

He was talented ... for a bald man.

HIRAM

Eugene finish, so we can start.

EUGENE

Oh right ... here I stand humbly. Eugene Neddly – Master of Air.

ANJUS

Now, Hiram, what the devil is so important?

HIRAM

Problems, my friends, we are plagued by them. And perhaps me more than most. Not to be a braggart but I have a lot to worry about. My fame. My fortune. My life's work in the areas aquatic. But that's not why I've dragged you to my house this eve. For I have terrible news ...

EUGENE

Is it that whale oil baron Henry B. Lubbins the Third?

HIRAM

Lubbins. No ... Lubbins will have his day ... I have plans for *him*. But no. It's much more dangerous. Closer to home. For you see ...

MARYANNE

Who wants tea?

HIRAM

Right in the middle of – is this the time?

MARYANNE

We must have tea, Hiram, what are we circus folk?

ANJUS

Circus ... oh ...

ANJUS remembers there's the sound of a fire in the distance some odd laughter and calliope music. It's distorted and terrifying.

EUGENE

Anjus?

ANJUS

Huh? What?

EUGENE

It seems like you were remembering a painful memory?

ANJUS

N
o
...

EUGENE

Oh, OK, then let's forget all about that. Hiram, do get to your important news that cannot wait which we've all been waiting for.

HIRAM

My friends, mistakes were made, perhaps –

There's a banging on the downstairs door, and the sound of a bell.

MARYANNE

Sounds like someone's at the door.

HIRAM

There's no time for that!

The banging gets louder.

H

IRAM (cont.) Anyway, here's the real important bit it's –

MARYANNE

Perhaps you should get it.

HIRAM

I'M RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF! I'm so close to getting to what needs to be said!

MARYANNE

It could be that delivery of odd Oriental fish from that trawler you've been waiting for.

HIRAM

Damn I cannot refuse the celestial finned wonders of the Orient! Excuse me! I will be right back and then I will get to the news. It cannot wait for anything! It's vitally important and must be told without delay! Now I will be right back!

HIRAM exits.

ANJUS

What is going on, Maryanne?

MARYANNE

I have no idea ... he has been distant. But ...

AUTHOR

Maryanne didn't want to mention that Hiram had applied to the Adventure's Club without her. "You're just a writer," he said ... she pushed the memory away.

ANJUS

We all have our secrets, city is full of them.

EUGENE

Indeed. After the summer heatwave I saw several congressmen kissing each other for no reason.

ANJUS

There was a reason. The Congressional kiss-off their fundraiser to raise funds to fund the mutual fund fun fund.

MARYANNE

Yes the mutual fund fun fund teaches all the fun of funding mutual funds. They kiss long and hard for that cause.

EUGENE

So I guess everything is peaches.

ANJUS

Hardly. None of my acorns sprouted, I have no idea why ...

MARYANNE

It's the city! That's why. The smoke. It's all unnatural, slag and factories filled with children. We're automated and yoked. We call ourselves naturalists and nature lovers, but we live in the most unnatural of places!

ANJUS

Ever since you did that tenement walking tour –

MARYANNE

Yes I visited that tenement and what I saw, all those poor stinking people with their poor smelly traditions, we need to treat them better. That tour changed me, Anjus, you don't understand it, but you've always been cold. I'm doing more than you could know to fix this city! This world!

EUGENE

Such passion it's –

Sound of a scuffle from downstairs.

MARYANNE

What was that? It doesn't sound like the scuffle of research! I must check on Hiram!

MARYANNE exits.

EUGENE

That passion! During the big Bird Release I'm going to –

He's stopped by the sound of Maryanne letting out a blood curdling scream.

ANJUS

What was that!

She heads off.

EUGENE

It sounded like Maryanne – screaming! Oh you're already ... rhetorical, I bet that was ... they did say rhetoric was in this season. But then again –

AUTHOR

Eugene continued to talk about rhetoric as he headed to the front door of Hiram Blud's brownstone. But he was shocked into silence when he saw the scene lain out before him! Hiram was dead! He was ...

1.7:

EUGENE

Impaled with a swordfish!

ANJUS

Right through the heart!

MARYANNE

He was murdered! I saw the culprit fleeing! Oh, Hiram, Hiram. A swordfish ... your 87th favorite fish ...

EUGENE

Or a small Marlin. Identifying the fish could lead us to the killer! Details matter. Like how all rectangles are boys but not all boys are rectangles.

MARYANNE

What?

EUGENE

Sorry when faced with tragedy, I ... and this is a tragedy, a real ... but also Tuesday morning is still the Bird Release so ... flyers? Let me just put some on ... Hiram was so excited about it. And now he'll miss it ... unless we prop him up and –

MARYANNE lets out a wailing sob.

EUGENE (cont.)

No of course not ...

ANJUS

Maryanne, we'll find this cur! I swear by the Four Elementals – we shall find your brother's killer!

EUGENE

This stinks.

AUTHOR

History doesn't specify if Eugene meant the murder fish or the murder itself, but was true, this did stink, a lot. And like many fish on the menu of a lazy chef's restaurant this mystery would have small bones that would threaten to choke our heroes. For Hiram's murder was only the start

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END OF CHAPTER 1