

HIP

"Got a good feeling about today," Harold said, smiling as he fussed with his gear.

Jamal, in a t-shirt of his own design and dark sunglasses, nodded but kept his focus on his own equipment. "Yeah, if the fish are as ready as you are," he joked, though there was a hint of tension in his voice.

Two kindred spirits united by fishing. Harold, a retired mechanic, loved stories of the old days, while Jamal, a freelance graphic designer, enjoyed



the peace and quiet of this Green Cove life, away from his bustling downtown Jacksonville grind.

"Let's see who catches more today," Jamal muttered, casting his line with a flick of his wrist. "My money's on these good ol' worms." He grinned at Harold, busy threading his line into the swivel of one of his new lures. "The way you love those lures! You like a 'Lure Whisperer'! It's *unholy*!"

Harold chuckled, a deep, hearty sound that spoke of years well-lived. "*Family Dollar*" thinking, those worms!" Harold barked from behind his dark glasses, focusing on his own rod, "Those *Family Dollar* fish about as ready to eat worms as you are," he joked, though tensely.

An hour passed with little more than a few nibbles. The air was filled with the gentle sounds of an occasional distant bird call and the thrum of a far-off boat motor. Despite the initial tension, they fell into their usual rhythm, exchanging stories and friendly jabs.

Then, Harold's rod jerked violently. "Got something!" Jamal watched, impressed despite himself, as Harold reeled in a decent Redfish, the fish flopping energetically on the concrete dock.

The morning retreated, the air thickened over the river, now a sheet of glassy, molten silver, shimmering like a mirage settled in under a sultry, sunbaked haze. The distant shore was obscured, blurred and softened, seen through a heat-warped lens. There was a mingling of smells, baitfish and brine, oddly floral notes and sweat, all a distinct metallic tang, that hangs heavy in the stagnant, humid air. Florida summer, heavy on the senses.

"Guess the lures won this round, *Ha-role*", a reluctant if sour grin creeping onto Jamal's face. "But tomorrow, it's my turn to show what these worms can do when word gets out you sending them a mouth of *plastic*."

Harold laughed, "Looking forward to it, Jamal. Rain or shine."

Soon, Jamal had packed up and started along the pier, the promise of another day by the river settling in comfortably between them.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

