

## Bruce

We're just a small country town – nothing ever happens here. Although, there was that one time a shark showed up in our public swimming pool. We called him Bruce, fed him BBQ chickens from the FoodWorks up the road. For a while all the kids in the area held their eighteenth on the grassy slope by the pool, drinking and dancing while Bruce's jagged fin swam laps of the deep end. We had photos taken of ourselves beside the pool, our smiling faces made more interesting somehow by the dorsal fin at our backs.

When that ran its course, local fishing enthusiast Stumpy Taylor took to scaling the fence in the middle of the night and casting a hook baited with marinated steak into the pool. Bruce ignored it and ignored it, until one night he had enough and tore the rod – fisherman and all – into the water, ripping Stumpy's left arm clean off.

We stayed away from the pool after that, admiring Bruce for his take-no-prisoners attitude, but knowing he'd overstepped the mark. Seasons went by. Years. The surface of the pool became a rolling swamp of mauled birds. The lawn beside it grew tall and feral. We figured Bruce was lonely. But by god we were lonely too.

And so life went on, until one morning Mayor Keeley's boy went riding through town shouting Bruce had gone belly-up. We all rushed over for a look. Sure enough, Bruce had gone belly-up. For a moment we stood in silence, heads bowed, admonishing ourselves for taking so little care of the one interesting thing that had come our way in at least a decade. But then there was the *beep-beep-beep* of a truck reversing and we all hopped out of the way, watching as Jimmy Smeaton leapt from the driver's side and scrambled through the tall grass, his forehead dripping sweat as he winched the shark from the water and hauled him back along Main Street to his shop, where Bruce presides, still, to this day, a once wild thing reduced to a taxidermied head on a menu board, staring down on us every time we open the door to Jimmy's and step inside to pick up our fish 'n' chips.