



Shaun Bailey was born in Flint, Michigan, where boomtowns had a big influence on him. Finding little work, he left these to pursue writing in the style of his role model, John Steinbeck. This migration, together with his career writing about estuaries, led him to pen the novel *Mud Puddlers*; a book about hard-working migrants altering the course of arguably the grandest river of them all: the Colorado.

Bailey has since migrated back to Michigan, where he currently lives in Rochester with his wife and two children.

LEADEDAGE

By Shaun Bailey

John's brow glistened as he peered at the narrow test strip, its white paper shaking between his pinched fingers. His gaze then shifted to his stopwatch as he licked his parched lips.

The water test's result was clear, causing the city worker to sigh in relief.

"Just as I thought," John said, "no lead; your water's never been safer."

The home's retired owner lowered his arm after a long drink from his bottled water. His yellowed eyes then glanced at John, but they quickly returned to his oil-stained copy of *Autotrader*.

"You have any questions before I leave, sir?"

John took the man's silence as his cue to exit, which he was happy to do. His truck had air conditioning after all, and through the window he could see some neighborhood kids selling lemonade.

The children watched as the outsider approached their card table, sweat blotting his button-up shirt. John tugged at its loosened collar as he reached into his pocket and pulled forth a wad of crumpled bills.

"How much?" he asked, scanning the kids' transfixed faces.

The tallest kid rubbed his bare chest as if adjusting suspenders and said, "Dollar a cup, mister."

John had just handed over his dollar when the retiree rushed forth and thrust a plastic bottle into his hand. John looked at the bottle and saw it was filled with yellowish-brown liquid; swill roughly the same color as his coveted lemonade.

“For you we have a special cup,” the man said, his chin quivering as if from tremors.

John looked down at his sullied clothes, to the bottle in his hand, and then to his briefcase. That’s where he retrieved a letter and replied, “Silly me, I forgot to serve your collection notice ... you know, for unpaid water bills.”

As if from nowhere, one of the children sprang forth and, her arm outstretched, threw cold lemonade in John’s face. He should’ve been mad, but instead he just set his money on the table and drove back to Flint headquarters.