



down in the dirt

v025

August 2005

revealing
all your
dirty little
secrets...

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Devolution

Gary Beck

Somewhere in the South Florida habitat migration became mostly human, replacing birds, bees, beasts, overwhelmed by hotels, motels, condos, that swallowed a peninsular tract once the showpiece of a continent, that allowed coexistence of species who were not permitted to vote, were denied government protection, were encouraged to disappear, or beg on man made marinas, another callous testimony of progress to destruction.

Happy Birthday to Michelle Greenblatt August 21st!

Nightmare Stammering

for Alexandria

Michelle Greenblatt

the story that goes untold is a long
one longer than CNN's 24 hour a day news

reporters have been mumbling
about since January 7, 2000 which was when

I got so drunk I could
barely stand up my prediction was in eight

years the United States would be the kind
of superpower

everyone laughs at right before it's sucked
into the supremacy vacuum the story that goes

untold amongst the slinging of political
mud: dead afternoon: pavement searing

hot:(this is the part where they tell you
BOOM an explosion)a car

bomb was detonated & the day is black
as pitch the little Iraqi girl next

to him her arm got blown off if
you look you can see

her sister is dead, too. her head
got caught in

the one sparse tree; it was hard for them
to get the ribbons out

of the branches; if you squint
you can see

the hole the nightmare stammering
where do I go? next

"there" will be that "somewhere"
& the nightmare stammers on

5.23.2005-7.1.2005

Peter the Great

Richard Thieme

“Which way do I do it then? Do I bring this three up and over? Carry the seven? Or what?”

Peter Bellerophon looked amazed at her dumb-assed face. The girl was twelve, for Crissake. Peter had shown her twice already. How many times did he have to go over the same goddamned thing? She wasn't even his, but here he was, spending his time telling her things she never got anyway. Let her stupid-assed father show her how to do it, if he ever shows up.

He pushed the book and pencil and paper out of his face.

“Stop asking so goddamn many questions,” he said. “Figure it out for yourself.”

Ellie burst into tears and ran down the hallway. The door slammed, then he could hear her crying through the closed door. She always ran, but never far enough, not for him.

“There you go again,” Bonnie said, sticking up for the girl for a change. “You're so nice.”

Peter lowered the newspaper, which he had opened as soon as Ellie ran out of the room, and stared at the woman. She was standing at the ironing board, one of his shirts hanging down, six of his shirts hanging clean and pressed on the rack. She wore the cut-offs he liked and one of his old plaid shirts, long tail-ends tied in a knot around her midriff. She wasn't wearing a bra, he could see, which he guessed must irritate hell out of her nipples. The thought of her nipples sore against the shirt and the sight of her chest between unbuttoned buttons turned him on.

“Hey lady, you want to fuck?”

Bonnie just looked down at the shirt.

“Fuck yourself.”

Peter was thinking of the scene in *Body Heat* when Ned Racine comes over the lawn but instead of finding Mattie Walker in the gazebo, it's the other girl, the one who it turns out really was Mattie Walker. It's this great scene where he comes across the lawn and says, “Hey lady, you want to fuck?” and this dream-girl turns around, he steps back when he sees it isn't the broad he's been banging, that's the scene he's thinking about, thinking too of getting into Mattie or Mary Anne or whoever she is from behind, her fists squeezing the sheets, hearing the girl in her room crying, thinking too how Bonnie's nipples are irritated,

hurting, which had to turn her on as much as it did him, so when she said that, standing there bent over and ironing with those hard short strokes that said she was pissed off, he didn't expect it. He didn't know where in hell she was coming from all of a sudden and he didn't deserve it.

He dropped the newspaper.

"What the fuck is that?"

He stared across the room, waiting for something to come back at him, something he could whack back, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction and he sighed. Here we go again. We certainly have been here before, haven't we? When he doesn't want to hear another word, she can't shut up, but now, when she ought to say something, when he wouldn't have minded a little conversation, she stands there ironing, pressing her lips in that tight line.

So he gave her the benefit of the doubt. He waited. But the woman did not say one goddamn word.

"Hey," he said. "Bitch. I'm talking to you."

She kept ironing, not looking up.

So he has to get up out of the chair, letting the newspaper slide onto the floor, and take a step toward her. In his mind, he is a dinosaur, a Tyrannosaurus Rex, old T-Rex himself, the one in the movie that chases the car. He sees himself huge, a predator stalking prey, striking fear into the animals running for cover. The smart ones, anyway: the smart ones run for cover.

"Goddamn it! Are you listening to me?"

She looked up this time, pulling the shirt on the board. He saw a flicker of fear in her eyes before her eyes got hard again. That turned him on even more.

"Don't start with me, Peter." She kept her voice cool, making him pause. He saw in that split second, though, how if he stopped now, she'd have him by the balls. Let her stop him just once in his tracks with a word or look or tone of voice, that's all it would take for prissy little Peter to be pussy-whipped for the rest of his life. Help me with the dishes. Yes Ma'am. Don't track mud in. No Ma'am. Carry the groceries. Yes Ma'am. Where would you like them, Ma'am?

He turned over the ironing board, knocking the hung shirts over, the rack banging the table before crashing to the floor.

"Goddamn it!" he said. "Now see what you made me do!"

She backed away, raising the hot iron in her hand. He could see the fear in her eyes, a jolt of adrenaline hitting him hard. His heart pounded and he got a hard-on. Then he went into his karate stance, moving his hands in front of her face. Bruce Lee in torn jeans and a pot-belly tee-shirt.

"Come on," he said. "Try it. Make my day."

She backed into the hutch and stopped. The iron was still plugged in. The cord pulled in the socket like a dog on a leash. The wall to the right was a few feet away, then a chair with the table blocking the way to the dining room. He watched her look left: the picture window, and through it, the bird-bath frozen over, the bird feeder hanging on a wire line, the clear blue sky of winter. Snow on the patio, snow covering the lawn.

Her eyes came back to his face. He knew she knew what was coming next. First he would hit her in the face, then grab her hair and throw her down on the floor and kick her. If the girl screamed, so much the better. That was just more music for dancing. Jack him up all the more. Then rip away the shirt and bite her nipples until she screamed. Then jerk her jeans down and fuck her on the floor, maybe from the back. When he finished he would leave her there, wiping himself on her stomach, then tuck his balls with care back into his tight jeans.

She brought the iron around in front in both hands and held it toward him. “Good,” he said, eyes shining. “Try it.” He gestured toward his face. “Come on, come on and try.”

She thrust the iron into his face, pressing it hard against his cheek. It took him a minute to realize she was doing it, not just threatening. His momentum pushed him forward until his T-Rex brain registered that his face was on fire. He smashed her arm down with his fist, the iron thudding to the floor, and then he was howling, holding his face, feeling his skin puff up and blister. Bonnie ducked under his arm as he whirled and ran down the hallway, grabbed her daughter and hauled her out of the room, the girl still crying but wondering, what’s the noise? where’s Peter? what’s happening? running with Ellie out the door, barefoot over the snow to Mary Louise next door who let her in and locked the door and called the police.

Now, this is what amazed him, after they came and got him: Bonnie was the one who tried to kill him. Bonnie was the one who scarred him, branded him a limp-dicked wimp who couldn’t control his women. She was the one who taunted him, made him feel like shit, made him doubt himself, wonder what he was fucking alive for, he was such an asshole, you listen to what she says, and he did listen, boy, did he ever. After she bought the cordless phone, whenever she used it he would go out into his pick-up truck for a smoke and plug in his scanner and listen to her telling Mary Louise or Darla what a prick he was. He sat there in the truck, blowing out clouds of smoke, listening to this woman tell the neighborhood he was the worst of the worst, the original Mister Shithead. And he was supposed to sit there, take it all in, then come

back and act as if he was living in some sitcom where everything is a joke. She must have thought he was from the psychic hot line, the way he knew everything; he would drop little hints here and there and watch her squirm, act like she didn't know he knew what he knew, laughing to himself inside, her so stupid she never did figure it out.

But now, and this is the point, she was doing all this shit to him, trying to kill him, making him sick, so sick he's vomiting in the squad car with the pain of his face, wondering why they didn't call an ambulance instead of throwing him onto the back floor of the squad car, the white cop telling him puke on his own goddamn shoes, pushing him down onto the floor, pushing the back of his neck down hard so he vomits onto the floor, then putting his feet on his back and holding him there for the ride downtown. At the station they made him clean up his mess with a towel, his face feeling by then as if something's eating it from inside out, and finally they put some cream on the burn. But this is what amazed him, this is what got him: after all that they took him back to the station and the sons-of-bitches arrested *him*. They arrested *him*. Bonnie and Ellie and Mary Louise must have told the cops all this bullshit, but naturally, she's wearing cut-offs with her hand circling on her bare stomach and the plaid shirt tied around it and she's barefoot, there's something about a good-looking barefoot woman on a winter day that makes everything she says sound like the truth, and of course she was crying, crying here and there while she puts out her story, Ellie crying quietly in the background, Ellie the violins to Bonnie's vocal, Mary Louise walking the length of the living room with this other cop, the big stupid-looking black bastard, telling him all kinds of shit she doesn't even know if it's true but believes what Bonnie tells her, women always believe each other, ask and there's never two sides to a story, the cop writing it all down and the son-of-a-bitch comes back and puts the cuffs on *him*, then walks him out to the car. By now a crowd of the neighborhood curious are out there gawking at the cruisers, those goddamn bright lights would pull a crowd anywhere but especially there where nobody has anything else to do but stand around and watch the neighbors battle it out on the front lawn.

One night he caught this fifteen year old kid in the bushes looking in Ellie's window and broke the asshole's nose with one punch. Then he told him, if he ever says who hit him, he'll have him arrested for peeping. Kicking his ass down the street, the kid trying to run away and hold his nose at the same time. That's the kind of people he has to live with, that's the kind of neighborhood she lives in, but she had the house so he didn't really have a hell of a lot of choice, now, did he?

Choice is a kind of meat, that's all. The game's not the same for everyone: that he figured out early. The game had different rules and you better learn what works. What difference did it make if he knew the rules that only worked for some rich kid whose old man bought everything he wanted? People like that live on a different planet. Their rules didn't work for him, not when he had to go to work at eleven, get the shit kicked out of him sneaking a smoke or cutting out early, watching the old man tomcat around, the old man not caring who he fucked as long as he could talk about it. Always came home and told his wife what a great fuck so-and-so was, what a great big powerful fuck, the woman home with the kids all day, up to her ass in screaming kids. Peter remembered diapers reeking in a portable washer hooked up to the sink and the foul water flowing out of the hose, a hose that bucked like a thick snake when she hit the spin cycle. He remembered his sisters screaming, somebody always sick. He was the oldest; he had three sisters, eenie meenie and minie he called them because he didn't want no mo. He couldn't wait to get the fuck out. He tried six times before it was legal. The day it was legal and they couldn't go get him any more and bring him home he put everything in a duffel bag and went to live with his friend William in a ratty apartment, a house broken up into two-room flops where they shared a bathroom and one stove with two other families.

His mother left when he was ten. One day she was there and the next day gone. He never saw her again, never heard one word. Not even a note, just his kid sister crying in the livingroom, *Mama's gone! Mama's gone!* through her choking sobs. She said someone came for mama in a beat-up Packard, more rust than finish, the trunk tied down on mama's suitcase. His father came home and raged all night, drinking and breaking things until he passed out and the kids got dinner. After that he wanted out of that crazy house. Get into the world and make his own way, work or get drunk or whatever, nobody telling him what to do and nobody but nobody kicking the shit out of him for no reason at all.

He met Bonnie one night in a bar on the highway. He was barely legal; she was well into her twenties, but he didn't know that then. He didn't know she had Ellie when she was seventeen. Didn't know she had Ellie at all, in fact. He watched her line-dancing in tight jeans and a cowboy shirt and shiny new boots going heel-toe, heel-toe in time to the music. *Coyote Moon* was on that night. He liked that group. They had this lead singer, a dark-haired girl, he got hot watching her cuddle the mike in her cupped hands. He leaned back on the bar and sipped his beer and watched Bonnie stick out her tight little ass, turning this way and that, slapping the sole of her boot, cute as hell.

By the time he bought her a drink he knew he wanted to live with her forever. She didn't say nothing about Ellie, didn't mention the girl until the week before he moved in, which should have told him what kind of woman she was. Of course he hadn't mentioned his drunk-and-disorderlies either or the suspended sentence for assault and battery and having to sit through a lecture from do-gooder dykes: if it happens again, you'll do hard time, you get it? This bull dyke with hair pulled back, tight behind, looking at him through wire rimmed glasses like he was some kind of animal, trying to pretend to listen when all she did was tell him what a prick he was. Yes, he got it. Thinking about Harrisonville, stories he'd heard. Harrisonville was no picnic.

So he guessed they had both held things back, but he got the worst of it, having to put up with the girl, whining and crying, Christ, he had left to get away from that shit, not get into it. Ellie had a stupid face that drove him nuts. It was like there was no brain in her face. She looked like a big baby. She looked like a Cabbage Patch Doll, one that nobody would ever buy. Bonnie told him what was wrong, it had a name he couldn't remember but Ellie got it from the guy Bonnie fucked, the guy took off when he heard about the kid. So he moved into the house with the two of them, bringing his pick-up truck and everything he owned, some clothes, a boombox, a little television set. Things were bad at the start but got worse. There was no way to live with the woman, even before she burned him, but then, get this, then they had the balls to tell *him* to stay away.

Were they kidding? They think he was nuts? They think he was out of his fucking mind? Nobody had to tell him to stay away from a bitch like that, he had enough of her long ago, enough for a lifetime. But doesn't that tell you how it works? She could do all that, burn him and all, and still they line up on her side. Women run the fucking world, that's all there is to it. So they got his stuff, put it in his truck and had it out back when they let him out. They counted the time spent in jail against him, telling him again he better stay away, telling him too he better show up at the clinic and talk to the shrink and he better go to these meetings for people who were fucked up like him. Did he get it? Yeah, yeah, he got it. Better say yes than spend another goddamn day in that cell. Thinking he was too stupid to figure it out, saying if he missed two meetings he was going straight to Harrisonville for a year-and-a-day and they meant a year-and-a-day of hard time, not some goddamn vacation. Trying to scare him, the black cop telling him turn around, yeah, that's right, there in your cell. Stand the fuck up and turn around. Laughing as he turned slowly in the cell. Sure enough, the cop said, first time you hit the showers, you'll take it in the ass. Hole in one. Ha ha. Everybody laughing at his skinny little ass

and pot belly and the dark wedge on his face as he turned in a circle.

Okay, he got it. He got it the first time. So exactly how long does he have to go to these meetings? They said they'd let him know. Their blank faces looking like bars of a cage.

The bastards had him by the balls and knew it.

So this guy Mitch shows up at the Big Boy to look him over before the meeting. Mitch is a winner, all right. His haircut looks like that prick on the news, he's wearing a suit so expensive-looking Peter asked him where he got it. Mitch not even batting an eye, saying he buys his clothes in Hong Kong. Oh yeah? says Peter. Why's that? Cheaper, the guy says. Telling him this with a straight face, sitting over coffee in a corner booth, the sky in the window behind him dark and cold, night coming on, a few flakes in the air in the streetlight, Peter in jeans and his windbreaker and a black t-shirt, Mitch sitting there smoking and having a cup of coffee and telling him by the time you buy five or six suits, you've paid for your plane ticket. Then he looks at the waitress, lifting his eyebrows, and the woman rushes over; Peter could have hollered and stomped, she wouldn't have fucking moved, Peter behind a big open menu, thinking he might as well order a special and let this rich prick pick up the check, he can fly to Hong Kong and buy clothes, he can buy him fucking dinner. The waitress wants to know what he wants. OK, he'll have, let's see, he'll have T-bone steak with fries, yeah, the big one, onion rings, rolls and butter, soup first, no salad, and a piece of that chocolate pie up there in the case. And more coffee, OK?

Mitch orders a cup of soup. He's through telling Peter about his clothes, telling him he works in a bank downtown, he won't say which one or what he does, he doesn't want Peter to show up some afternoon looking for his buddy Mitch. Peter keeps looking at the Lexus out at the curb under the streetlight, snow blowing through the light and coating the car. Mitch looks around at other people in the Big Boy, the usual crowd of losers, an old couple eating early, and all of a sudden he tells him he has two kids from his first marriage, a boy and a girl, but doesn't know where they are; his first wife took the kids and disappeared. Some kind of underground railroad got them out of town. For all Mitch knows she's in another country, raising his kids with a different name. The second wife, he knows where she is, but he goes anywhere near the woman, they'll pick him up. Peter wondering, why is he saying all this? Peter hasn't got a wife and no intention of getting one. Peter asks him, why does he even give a shit where they are? The guy stops looking around and looks at Peter and says, well, they are his kids, and he's thinking now after

all these years he might want to get married again, making Peter spit out his soup, coughing and wiping his face with a napkin. You fucking nuts? You been burned twice and you haven't learned? Hey, I got a bridge I'd like to show you. Peter grinning but the guy doesn't smile. He says real quiet, no, Peter, he's not nuts, not any more. He knows, he says, he knows now why they left. Getting serious, looking through his reflection in the window at the snow really coming down now, people hustling from the bus-stop, heads down, holding their coats closed at the collar.

Peter pushes through his meal like he hasn't eaten in a week. Mitch is doing all the talking, telling him things he did to his kids, why his wife left. Peter keeps on nodding and eating, letting the guy talk. The guy jumps from one thing to another, Peter trying to keep the wives straight, the guy talking about trips to Bangkok, things he did there. When the waitress brings the check, Mitch says he'll get it this time, making Peter laugh, like next time it's his turn, steaks all around.

Mitch pays and they leave the restaurant, hunching in the cold.

The meeting was in the basement of a church. Mitch told everybody, here's a new guy, Peter. Then the meeting started. Peter sat there, learning the ropes. Learning to say, I'm Peter and I'm a goddamn batterer. Everybody saying, hi Peter! like that was the prize. Listening to guys talk about their shitty lives. So what else is new? He has to sit on a metal chair in a cold basement with ten other guys and listen to this shit. They talked about their parents. Shit, he could hardly remember what his mother looked like. When it came his turn, he tried, but it felt like someone was rubbing sandpaper inside. He tasted something bitter metallic in his throat and turned to the guy beside him, saying, was he fucking finished now? Could he go out now and have a smoke? They taught him to say, instead of that, *I pass*. Then another guy talked, and he drifted into some vague dark waiting place, waiting for the meeting to finish, thinking of a beach.

This one young guy Judd was in the middle of talking when Peter heard him say his mother had left, what an asshole his father was, and Peter sat up. "Hey, wait a minute. What is this bullshit?" They all looked at him, Judd stopping talking. Peter gave him a stare. "Who told you about me? Huh?"

Somebody laughed and Peter came out of his chair ready to fight but they pushed him back down. Judd said, "Take it easy, Jesus. Take it easy. I'm talking about me, Peter, not you." Peter said, "Oh yeah, well, bullshit, because that's my father you're talking about and my mother."

Mitch said, "Peter, nobody knows you. Nobody met you before. How does it sound like you?"

So Peter told them about his old man and his sisters, his old man knocking his mother around, when suddenly he remembered his mother making a cake and handing him a wooden spoon with batter on it. He remembered licking the batter off the spoon. He remembered looking up at her face at the bright light diffused through her hair and her hair glowing like an autumn fire, making her look like an angel. Then he was back in the room, noticing how quiet it was. They were sitting in a circle, the bright fluorescent light on their faces. Something tried to come out that he didn't know how to say and they sat there waiting. Instead he shouted, "You sons-of-bitches! If I knew what the fuck it was I'd say it!" Then turned toward the wall so he wouldn't have to look at their stupid moron faces.

Peter shivered but shivered from more than cold. Something was awake inside him. It felt like an alien inside his chest, looking for something to eat. Whatever he had put together inside over the years was a falling-down house getting ready to collapse. He thought of the house he grew up in. He remembered holding himself when it got cold. The furnace was in the basement. He thought if he went to the basement, it might be warm. He remembered going down and stopping on the stairs. It was so dark, he couldn't see anything at all. He felt like he was walking a plank. He felt if he kept walking down into the darkness he would die.

In his mind there appeared a faint image of his mother's face. Her face still shone in the kitchen light but instead of hair, snakes coiled and hissed in a tangled mass on her head.

He stood up, ready to run. The men in their chairs surrounded him like a noose. To make it to the door, he would have to slip between that fat guy and Mitch. The door was right there. All he had to do was get the fuck out now while he still had a chance. He looked frantically from face to face. They waited for him to fall. They might as well have all been standing under a tree chanting "let go, let go" while he clung like a child to the trunk.

The door was unlocked. Beyond the door was a hallway and then a flight of stairs.

In the darkness, the heads of the snakes were illuminated by the light of his mother's countenance. Their tongues flickered in and out of their mouths. There were millions of them, writhing and hissing, waiting for his next move.

#

St. Pauli Girl

Pamela West

Nazi Occupied Poland---August 1942

Ena Lang closed her eyes as the stiff, warm breeze vibrated against her soft, pale skin. Alfred still hadn't told her where they were going; only that it was an urgent mission, so as the Police Battalion Commander, he had to be there.

"Please, I want you with me," he cajoled her out of their honeymoon bed, and into the back of his Benz staff car, for a pre-dawn, top-down ride through the countryside.

She sighed. "*If I must.*" But later, as she slid into the leather back seat, she said, "No sitting in a school gymnasium like last time. I didn't come to Poland to watch you berate locals for not cooperating with the Reich."

"I promise, I promise," he said, holding his hands up in mock surrender before closing the car door.

So off they flew in the wine red and black convertible, but only after she made him promise that his car would lead the way. The last time he took her out on an *urgent*

mission, his car was at the rear of the convoy, and she got sick on petrol fumes spewing from the police transport trucks that lumbered ahead of them. *What was he thinking?* The last thing she needed right now was to breathe gas emissions.

She sighed, thinking: *At least, there's a morning breeze. And really, anything's better than sweating and waiting for Alfred's triumphant return from a day at the office. Some honeymoon.* But what could she do? He couldn't take another leave. He'd already taken one to woo her in the spring, then again for their quick June wedding. No, there was no choice. If she wanted a honeymoon, she had to come to him, and it had to be in Poland.

Poland, she thought, *Who the hell honeymoons in Poland? You do, that's who.* This wasn't the way her new life was supposed to begin. Then again, why should her new life be any different from her old life? *Stop it!* She quieted the thoughts in her head. *Because it is different; Alfred's different.*

She pushed away the strawberry hair strands and opened her eyes just as the sun's yellow-orange halo peered over the horizon. She had seen so many sunrises lately that her body clock was now fine-tuned to the event. Suddenly, she saw tree branches thrusting out of the gray-darkness pursuing

the new light, the way a ravenous baby groped for his mother's breast. She shuddered, and her eyes grew big. Her face became hot, as she felt the butterfly twirl in her stomach. It seemed the butterfly's body clock was finely tuned as well. She let out a nervous giggle, grabbing her stomach.

Alfred reached for her hand, "What is it?"

She turned away, "Nothing."

He turned toward her, moving in close. "Don't lie. I know what my St. Pauli girl is thinking," he whispered in her ear, while rubbing her hand softly with his fingers.

She pushed his hand away, while whispering her scold. "Never call me that. Besides," she motioned her eyes toward the front of the car, "the driver is watching us." Immediately, the driver cut his eyes away from the rearview mirror and toward the road.

Alfred laughed, trying to rub her hand once more. "It's ok. He knows we're on our honeymoon."

Ena pushed his hand away once more. "Stop it." She folded her arms across her stomach and turned away from him feigning disgust.

He continued to laugh, but she knew he would leave her alone now. She took a deep breath, trying to relax, hoping the butterfly would go back to sleep. She hadn't let him feel the flutters yet. He knew about it; he said he was glad. That's why he wanted to marry so quickly, that, and the fact, the Reich look favorably upon young officers who repopulated the Fatherland. But she hadn't let him feel it twirl and whirl about in her stomach. She knew that would make it too real for him, and he would start seeing her as a mother, not his bride.

No, there was time enough for that reality later. Not now, not on their honeymoon, not when she still wanted him and needed him to woo her and touch her the way he always had; the way a man touches his bride so that she burns, quivers and sighs. No, she thought, men only touch brides like that, never mothers or St. Pauli girls.

The sun had climbed halfway out of its hiding hole, and she could see the fir and beech trees more clearly now. They were swollen with lush, wet green leaves. The long grass that bordered both sides of the road was thick and stiff, but not an unruly, tangled mess; intermixed with the long blades were purple and yellow wildflowers. She smiled, surprised by the quiet beauty of country side and wondered why she hadn't noticed before.

Then, just as quickly as it came, her smile vanished, as she chided herself for being surprised. *Why wouldn't Poland be beautiful? Because Papa said*

it wouldn't. Remember, the Polocks and Jews destroyed it after the first Great War. Of course, they did. He wouldn't lie. Because, if anyone knew desolate, barren ugliness, it was Papa.

Ena wished she could dismiss her father's ignorance by saying he'd seen too many of Goebbels' films, but he didn't watch his films or anyone's films for that matter.

Just like he didn't read books or magazines or even listen to music. No, No, she thought, *that's not true. He listened to music: whiskey soaked piano bar concertos that reverberated from the cabarets and whorehouses on Reeperbahn Street.*

Ena swallowed. *That music.* She hated that music. Every hour on the hour, every day of the week, except on Sunday mornings when the bars closed for church services, the pianos belted out ragtime operas. And she hated how she could still hear it playing so clearly: if she was six-years-old standing on the back porch of her St. Pauli district, brown brick, fish market home.

"Dance, Ena, dance," her Papa Gunter had clapped. "Faster, faster."

Ena twisted and stomped to the piano clatter while her mama flayed the day's catch just brought home by Papa. She moved carefully in and out of the fish baskets. The last time he made her dance, she knocked one over, and he smacked her on the leg, leaving a huge palm print. "*Clumsy clods never dance in the cabaret.*"

The morning sun had been a fully exposed throbbing, pungent orange. Sweat trickled down her face, while her dress fluttered in the warm, sticky wind as she spun.

Papa's blue fishing cap bobbed up and down on his bald head as he clapped. "Yes, that's it. Keep it up, keep it up."

She was so hot; her checks felt like fiery cherries. "Mama, please, can't I stop?"

Her mom pounded the cleaver against the flopping fish. *Thud!* Then, she threw the fish head into a bucket, sloshing bloody fish guts on the porch. "Come on Gunter, can't you see the poor child's tired?"

Her father smoked his pipe and ignored their pleas, "Faster, I said, faster, my little St. Pauli girl."

She hated him for always making her dance. She didn't want to be in the cabaret, and she never wanted to be his little St. Pauli girl.

Ena's world was a dizzy patchwork of sweat stinging, blue, white and cracked brown images. Suddenly, she became nauseous and closed her eyes so she wouldn't vomit, but the hot, salty perspiration burned too much and

she had to open them again. *God, she wanted to scratch her eyes out, scratch out the pain and make the spinning world stop forever.*

A hot gust of wind whipped across the back porch, stirring up curdled, dead fish. The odor blasted into her nose, making her more nauseated. She stumbled about like a drunkard, splashing into the bloody puddles on the back porch and staining her bare legs a putrid pink.

As the cool water doused her legs, her queasiness subsided. Her senses were awake once more, and she realized the music and her father's laughter had merged and twisted in the hot morning wind, keeping time with her pounding heart and fading in and out of her ears. In between beats, she heard a bird chirping, and she knew what she must do: spin faster, faster than the world, so fast that her fluttering dress would catch the wind and lift her into the air, turning her into a bird. Then, she would fly far away where Papa would never see or torment her again.

Her heart pounded louder, as she spun faster and faster, drowning out the music, Papa, everything. The world became a slow motion blur. She knew her plan was working because she felt lighter, somehow, and believed at any moment she would be air born and free.

As she prepared for liftoff, another wind gust came up from under the porch boards, blowing her dress up, over her head. Startled, Ena fell backward and knocked over a fish bucket. She slipped in the slosh and hit the porch with a horrid thud, covered in fish guts, a grounded, wounded bird.

Instantly, she heard Papa's rage, as he stomped up the porch stairs. "Stupid, clumsy whore," he said, boxing her about the head before pulling down the dress to hide her stained legs and bloomers. "Do you want the neighbors to see?"

"Gunter," her mother yelled, as she came to Ena. "What's wrong with you? The child fell for God shake."

He backhanded her mother across the mouth, knocking her down the stairs. "*Clean up this filth. We have a market to open.*"

Her mother waited for the screen door to slam before she ran to her. "Baby, you know how he is."

She pushed her mother away, got up and straightened her dress. "You heard him. We have to clean up the mess."

Yes, Mama, we both knew how he was. We both knew, and you couldn't protect me. Ena swallowed hard and quickly flicked the tears away; she could feel herself slipping into despair. *Enough*, she had to silence the

fears. *You escaped, and he can't ever hurt you again.*

"Ena, Ena," Alfred lightly squeezed her shoulder. "What is it, my pet?"

His soft voice and gentle touch brought her back to reality. She turned toward her husband; his soft blue eyes made her feel safe once more. "Nothing," she let the words escape before she could think of anything else to say.

"Oh, Ena, you're crying." He put his arm around her shoulder, pulled her close, then rubbed away the remaining tears from her bright pink cheeks. "Don't cry now. I can't stand it when your pretty blue eyes are all red streaked." He kissed her left eye, then her right. "It's this war, this damned war. It's not fair you should have to honeymoon like this." He kissed her forehead, then said softly. "It's just--you're so beautiful that I always want you with me."

Ena laid her head against his chest. "And I always want to be with you. I'm just tired, that's all."

Alfred held her close. "Not much farther now. Mi?dzyrzec is just a few more kilometers, and when we've done what we must, you and I will fly home for a candlelight dinner," he paused, lowering his voice to a wanton whisper, "for two. Maybe, we'll dance? You like to dance, uh?"

Ena smiled, "Maybe."

The sun had finally escaped the horizon, losing its orange tint and emerging a vivid, creamy yellow. She rested against Alfred, content once more. Somehow, he always knew what to say and what to do. *This is why you married him*, she thought, *even when Mama warned you not to.*

"You're too smart for this," her mother said, as she placed the cup of tea down in front of Ena. "You've got a good job at the library. You haven't been there a year, and you're already night manger. For heaven's sake, you're only twenty. What's the rush?"

Ena flipped the gold teaspoon in and out of her fingers as she watched the steam twist and curl from teacup toward the kitchen ceiling. The off-white porcelain teacup set and gold teaspoons were the finest things her mother owned. She kept them in a wicker picnic basket hidden under the steps and only brought them out for their secret tea parties when Papa was gone. "You see," she always told Ena, as she sipped tea with her pinkie fully extended, "they're an heirloom, the only link I have to my Grand-Mama Greta from Bavaria." Then, they'd giggle, pretending to have tea with a Duchess.

That's how they spent her childhood, keeping secrets and pretending.

“Ena, are you listening?”

Ena took a slow sip of tea, then said. “Yes, Mama. I heard you.” It was remarkable how her mother seemed so small to her now, so old, shriveled and gray. What had she been afraid of? She took another sip, then said coolly. “I’m not asking for your advice or permission. I’m telling you that Alfred and I are getting married.”

“Child, you’re not thinking. He’s-”

“I’m not a child anymore.”

Her mother shot back. “Then quit acting like one. For Christ’s sake, you’re running off with the first uniform that comes along, and he’s not even a real Captain. He’s a Police Captain stationed in Poland. Poland! Once the war’s over, then what? He comes back to Hamburg to walk a beat, directing traffic. You’ve worked too hard and been through too much to settle for a policeman. *You don’t have to marry him!*” Suddenly, her mother’s tone became softer as she sat down next to her, gently touching her hand. “You deserve better.”

Ena snatched her hand away and stood up, knocking her cup over as she did. Tea ran down the side of the table, forming a puddle on the floor as her voice shook with rage. “I do have to marry him, Mama, just like you had to marry Papa. And *we both* deserve better. Only, you don’t believe it, so you stay, even after everything Papa did to us, *to me*, you stay. Well, I won’t stay another minute. I’m escaping, because I know I deserve better.”

Now, four huge troop transports sped ahead of the Benz, kicking up road dust exhaust and exhaust fumes.

Ena quickly covered her nose and mouth with her shirt collar. “Alfred, you promised.”

He smiled. “I’m sorry my pet, but we must hurry now. You know the *damn, drunken Hiwis*. Why the Reich ever bothered recruiting these Ukrainian fools? Well,” he patted her arm, “You know. If I’m not there to supervise, there’s no telling.”

After a few moments the dust settled, and Ena could see the flaps on the back of the last truck waving back and forth as it lumbered down the dirt road. Every so often she saw the soldiers bouncing up and down in the back like green and brown specters. *Poor Bastards*, she thought, *what a God-awful ride*.

Alfred pounded the driver on the shoulder. “*Sich Beeilen!*”

The car quickly sped up, turning the light airy, breeze into a hard, raw wind that pounded against Ena’s face and mangled her hair. She felt her cheeks flush and knew they’d look like beets by the time they reached town.

She pushed the hair from her eyes just in time to see a huge flock of Red Breasted Flycatchers scatter to the west just above the tree lines; their shrill *creeps* made Ena shiver, as goose pimples prickled over her arms.

Before she could catch her breath, the Benz had bounced and jerked its way across a rock bridge and down the hill toward Mi?dzyrzec. She saw cottages dotting the countryside, then the brown brick row buildings lining the Town Square. Police and troop transport trucks bordered the both sides of the road leading into town. Ena had never seen this many transports before.

As soon as the Benz reached the bottom of the hill, it entered the transport truck tunnel and headed for the Square. She saw Alfred's police squad popping out of the back of the trucks like grasshoppers, swarming toward the masses gathered. Then, she heard the *pop, pop* of shots and understood Alfred and his men were here to do much more than berate the locals.

The Benz driver took a sharp turn to the left, sliding the rear of the car and jarring them. The tires skidded while grinding and spitting out rocks as the car spun in a complete circle before shuddering to a stop.

Dazed, Ena clawed through the matted hair about her face to find she was alone. Alfred and the driver were already out of the car. Trembling and dizzy, she stumbled out of the Benz, trying to regain her bearings.

Smoke hung in the air, turning the brilliant morning sky into a choking, thick gray canopy. The Mi?dzyrzec Square below was littered with rummaged suitcases and discarded clothing. The hoard, a ragged patchwork of blues, browns, greens and faded yellow stars, moved slowly, ever so slowly to the crackling sounds of *The Fairies* blaring from a phonograph on the back of transport truck and gun fire.

POP!

Ena turned to find Alfred standing over an old man, lying on the ground, flailing helplessly about. Her husband's hand went *POP! POP!* And the old man's jerking body went limp, and Ena watched, as the red puddle next to his head gradually grew bigger and stained his soft white beard. Her heart pounded. Then, the wind changed directions, whipping from the west, and she smelled sweat and blood, and before she could stop herself, Ena was on her knees vomiting breakfast on the dark, red dirt.

Now, above the broken, music and moans, she heard Alfred yelling, *Zum Zug!* She wiped her mouth and looked up to find her husband pointing toward the thick gray smoke funneling above the rail station in the eastern part of town. *Alle Juden zum zug!*

A sudden wind gust picked up a dingy white handkerchief, swirling it quickly about her head before dropping it like a stone at beside her. She slumped against the Benz, sobbing, clutching her stomach. The butterfly danced as the little St. Pauli Girl watched Alfred calmly direct traffic. A chill shivered up her spine, making her shake, and she wondered how she would protect her child from the Fatherland.

CRAPS!

G.A. Scheinoha

Why can't I write?, he asks himself over and over. It would be so simple to just do it as the Nike commercial says and yet. . . yet he can't. What's causing this block now he asks himself on the screen as the words spill out blue on green background and no answers are forthcoming.

Who am I fooling he thinks aloud, or in print. A local columnist is all I'll ever be and he dreads in those words the fate of his mentor, a columnist for the same newspaper who touched so many lives and still, never found the greatness so many writers seek but few attain.

All day he pounds out cheese on the line at the plant and daydreams himself into a life, any other than this one. He shouldn't be petty. It pays well, especially now that he's progressed to a member of the regular work force and not just a temp anymore. It's put him in an almost new car, the little Ford spins his body if not mind to the job every day. But he seeks to be anywhere but here.

This is boring and he loses his best, most productive years as a writer in this drab factory life. Churning up all kinds of potential material for those same stories but somehow always a little farther away from reaching the dream.

So here he stands, dreaming once more visualizing himself into the goal of columnist turned Hollywood wunderkind, scriptwriter cum actor playing a minor role on one of his ancient world shows into a career on the big screen as a modern day villain and back to the tube as hero of an action series he's written, played out across too many years. Hey, if you're gonna dream, do it in style, dare to dream big. Go for broke, lay it all on the line for that one roll. . .

What to Say

Victoria Turner

I fling the front door open and barrel outside like a prisoner on the run. I don't lock it; hell, I don't even think of it until I'm already down the street. I begin to sprint like some damn fool on a mission—

Wait. I'm not like some fool. I am some fool.

As my shoes pound the pavement, I think what I'll say to George. But nothing clever, nothing smooth, nothing remotely casual comes to mind. I can't even come up with an opening.

I pump my arms beside me, as I fly down the street. With every long stride my heart thumps faster. The sultry summer evening makes thick beads of sweat drip down my face and chest, and I gasp big gulps of air.

I guess I could start by saying, hey, George, remember that one night a couple months ago . . .

No, no, no. That's too abrupt. We're still in a fight.

I suppose I could start by saying I'm sorry. One of us has to apologize eventually anyway. If nothing had happened, I'd still be sitting at home scowling, but ready to begrudgingly accept any apology you had to offer. Of course, I wouldn't accept it right away. I'd have made you sweat a bit, then forgive you for your idiotic male tendencies.

But I won't tell you all that. You'll never show any remorse again if I let you know that.

I sprint down the block, throat parched beyond belief. The muscles in my legs bulge and scream in pain from lack of use, but I keep running, keep thinking about what I should say.

I guess I'll start by telling you how much I love you, how much you mean to me. I could give up my pride for that, couldn't I? But I won't actually apologize. I mean, you know how much you mean to me . . .

Don't you?

Okay, okay, so I should probably say it a little more often, but then again, so should you. I guess we're both not really the let's-talk-about-our-feelings type, but that's not really working in our relationship.

Or do we even still have one?

No, we have to. I put on some speed and ignore the stabbing pain in my calves. I take a short, jagged breath, and the scent of barbecued ribs fills my nostrils. I turn my head to see a backyard full of people under a large yellow tent standing around with paper plates and bottled beer in hand. It looks like a good time and a lot more relaxing than this damn dilemma and I wonder

if I should stop by the barbecue and ask the people for a plate to take on the go. I can almost taste the warm, buttery kernels of corn on the cob. Oh hell, I'm already past the house, and anyway, their Doberman is barking its brains out over me running on its damn sidewalk and all that, so I probably won't receive such a warm welcome if I barge in on their gathering.

I race through the surprisingly lush green neighborhood. It's such a pretty town. As I run, I pass a brick house with ivy weaving around the windows, a yellow house with white shutters, and a green one with one large window that takes up more than half the front of the house. None of them are particularly what I would want my house to look like, but that's okay. I don't have to live there.

I run as fast as I can, which isn't that fast anymore. My legs and arms curse my mind for even thinking that they could sustain such a pace. My heart beats violently in my chest, my lungs scream for air. Sweat pours off of me in a steady stream and I shake my head in disgust. Why didn't I take the damn car?

There's a sprinkler going off in front of a small red house ahead, and I dash around to avoid getting wet, but then think, hey, free cooling and hydration, and I switch directions before my body can keep up with my mind. As a result, my legs tangle together and my feet fall out underneath me.

Damn, damn, damn, here we go. My body tilts forward and my mind screams to fall back. My body and mind argue and I topple forward. My arms fly out in front of me and my hands, seconds too late, try to break my fall. I plummet belly down on the gravel sidewalk.

Pain sears through my body and I let out a strangled cry. My palms and knees burn with raw, stinging pain and tears prick my eyes. Blood seeps in my mouth, warm and gushing, but it doesn't end there.

And, oh, the pain in my stomach. A gut-wrenching cramp explodes in my womb and this time I do shriek in pain. I clutch my stomach and curl into the fetal position. Tears spring out of my eyes faster than the sprinkler that showers me with cool comfort that I'm too scared and afraid to enjoy. Oh, please, no. Not that. Another wave of jolting pain courses through my abdomen. I choke and gasp and cry there for what feels like hours. The water rinses away the blood from my wounds, forming a small, pink pool around me.

After awhile of lying in my dumbfounded anguish, my breathing steadies. I try to stand, but it takes several minutes of my mind persuading my body. Shaking, my arms and legs force me to my feet, and I stand up. Agonizing pain sears through my bones to the marrow. I can't even think a coherent sentence. It's like my mind has temporarily left the building. Blood

pulsates to my joints in waves of torment and I slowly stagger my way down the block, limbs not bending. I wipe my nose with the back of my hand and spit blood on the sidewalk.

I still don't know what I'm going to tell George. I have two houses to go before I reach his. I curse under my breath. Blearily I gaze at his small, gray house. Closing my eyes, I sway back and forth.

So what should I tell you, George? How should I start it, anyway? Maybe I'll get lucky and you'll speak first. But if you don't, I'll just have to fly by the seat of my pants. I just don't know. And now I open my eyes and see you standing on your velvety green lawn, your blue eyes squinting, bleach blond hair falling in your disbelieving face. It's like you don't recognize me. But then again, I'm usually not coming over to your house covered in blood, sweat and tears. I see you take a slow step forward, daring yourself to believe that it's really me. Then your eyes widen and realize that this mangled girl and the one you love are one and the same. Then you run over to me, the way I've been running to you. And now I really don't know what to say. The reason I came running over here to talk to you might not even be of any matter anymore.



Old Italian playing Bocce Ball, Aquatic Park, San Francisco 2002, art by A. D. Winans

By Any Other Name

Randy Vicknair Jr.

The rose smelled the way Jeff imagined heaven looked. It was so overwhelming. He just couldn't put his finger on why. All Jeff knew was that the smell of the rose brought him euphoria. It came in waves that started in his nostrils and spread to the outermost extremities of his body. The smell was ecstasy.

He put the rose on the pillow next to him on the bed and rolled over to turn off his alarm clock. Every morning was the same for Jeff. Every night when Hope was away, he would always put a rose on her pillow so he could wake up to the smell of one of them. Then, at least, he didn't focus on the cold side of the bed where she slept. He could wake up to something as beautiful as she was. Roses were her favorite flower. Ever since Jeff could remember, Hope spent at least an hour a day out in the garden doing nothing but tending to her roses. When she first started growing them a year and a half ago, they looked nothing like they did now.

People often asked what their secret was, Jeff always told anyone that asked to ask his wife. Everyone that came to their home in the past six months marveled at the roses' vibrant coloring, size and smell. Jeff used to think that maybe all roses really smelled the same and that he was just imagining that Hope's roses smelled differently because they were, in a way, a part of her. But it was more than that. Everyone that smelled them remarked on the exceptional quality of their smell. Even the objective judges at the local rose competition couldn't help but smile as they sampled one of Hope's roses expressly for the purpose of rating them according to smell, among other criteria. He watched judges sample smells from all of the other contestants' entries. At the last contest, not a single one of them lost their blank face for any other rose but hers. The roses weren't just big, they were surreal when compared to the roses Jeff saw in the stores or in others peoples' gardens.

The roses were all Jeff really loved in the world aside Hope. They had a dog for a few months. It was a Labrador retriever. Jeff named it, "Nosy" because it would always dig through the garbage. He was quite fond of the dog, but he gave it away when it tried to dig up the garden. It was a horrible choice to make, but he made it and without the help of Hope, who always teased him about how indecisive he was.

Day after day was the same without her. Jeff went to work at the hardware store's rental section answering the same stupid questions to different moronic customers every day. If a person rented a power tool without asking Jeff a dumb question, he'd give them a twenty percent discount. But he rarely gave that discount. Instead, he'd answer peoples inquiries over the telephone when they got the tools home because they were either too lazy to read the instructions on the side of the tool in question or they were just plain illiterate. As a result of this, Jeff often popped aspirin like candy at work. He'd take two aspirin when he got to work in the morning and around lunchtime, but the headache would come right back so he'd take two more aspirin.

After work, he'd watch his favorite television show in his living room. It was all about forensic evidence that led to the capture of a murderer who had almost committed the perfect crime. In college, before he flunked out, forensic pathology had been Jeff's passion. He had always found detective work infinitely interesting. He loved coming up with hypothetical situations to explain events. Hope always thought his passion was morbid.

On Sundays, Jeff and Hope would go to church. He loved the ritual of a good catholic mass. He loved to sing the hymns. He never put any money in the collection plate, though. He figured that Gods' work would be better accomplished if Jeff just used the money he could put in that plate to help people out in random good Samaritan acts. He was always willing to go out of his way for anyone that seemed to be in need of help or money. That's what made him feel warm and tingly inside, doing good deeds and the smell of Hope's roses. He never went to the confessional either. He figured that if something was really weighing on his conscience, he did not need a translator to give God his big, heart-felt apology.

Every Saturday, he'd undertake some new project in his back yard. He had put up the perfect white picket fence Hope had always wanted which he secretly thought was the corniest and most over used cliché in the modern American dream. But, for Hope, he spent an entire months worth of Saturdays making the perfect white picket fence all around their yard.

Around the trees in both the front and the back yard were little gardens extending out exactly four feet from each trunk. All the gardens ended in perfectly aligned red bricks laying on their side that didn't have the little holes for the mortar. Those little holes inevitably filled up with little weeds. Each garden contained the same four varieties of plants in the following order: Hyacinth, Oleander, Petunia and Eucalyptus. There

were four trees in the back yard and two in the front. All of them were weeping willows. Every tiny garden had approximately one hundred tiny green toy soldiers in them in a war Jeff created which would never end. Most people did not notice them. This is probably due to the fact that Jeff had hidden each of them meticulously.

Each tree had a tiny bird feeder hanging from its' sturdiest branch. When the starlings came around in the spring Jeff would put a sheer tent over the roses or else the little black birds would defile them with shit. He even started shooting them one by one with a pellet gun one spring until his neighbor started giving him stern looks in perfect time with the death cackles of the dying starlings.

The garden in the front of the house was immaculate. Jeff and Hope were proud of it. This garden extended six feet out from the house and was ended with landscaping timbers. It did not contain the varieties of plants that the smaller gardens around the trees did. This garden contained nothing but roses and trellises. There were no tiny soldiers in this garden. There was no war in this garden. This garden was a sanctuary. It was Eden. There were two angel statues on either side of the garden with outspread wings holding harps made of cement. One of the angels had gone missing recently. It was probably the neighbor's kids. Those kids were always doing terrible little things to Jeff and Hope. Just last Saturday, for instance, there were only ninety-three tiny green toy soldiers in the small garden next to the tree closest to the fence in the back yard which marked where the neighbors yard ended and his began.

Every night, Jeff drank a case of beer in front of his television before he went to sleep. And Jeff hated to sleep. Every night he had the same dream. In the dream, Jeff and Hope are arguing. The dog is there. He doesn't remember what it is they are arguing about. But he does remember that the dog is acting very strange. He yells something at Hope as she runs out of the living room. As he goes to follow her, the dog attacks him. It bites him on the leg. So he kicks it so hard that it flies across the room and thuds against the wall, yelping. Hope is sobbing in the bedroom sobbing loudly. He goes to ask her why she is crying. When he goes to open the door it is locked and he stands there screaming for her to open it. After what seems like an eternity, she does open it. But not to let him in, she has suitcases that were bulging with her belongings. As she walks past him with the heavy baggage, she intentionally shoves him into the wall so roughly that he almost falls over. She is running for the door. Jeff regains his balance and chases after her. Her car is running outside in the

driveway. And the gate of the little white picket fence he had built just for her is opened for her to pull out. As she goes to slam the door on his face, he catches it and shoves back as hard as he could. That's when he hears it. The noise is a wet crunching sound. Hope stops screaming. He thinks to himself that maybe she has come to her senses and is ready to talk, so he opens the door the rest of the way. Jeff sees that Hope has been flung off the porch when he pushed back on the door. He runs to her, asking if she was hurt. She had fallen headfirst onto one of the pointed angel wings. She had fallen so that the wing was about six inches into her left eye socket and blood was soaking into the concrete down the contour of the left side of the angel. He pulls her head off of the wing and sees the remnants of Hopes' left eye dripping with the blood down her face. Her right eye is staring straight at him. Her whole body is twitching in spasms. She is dead. He has killed her. If he calls the paramedics, he'll go to jail for life. So he does the only thing that he could think to do. Calmly picking her up, he carried her inside the house and into the bathroom. He places her still warm body in the bathtub after stripping her naked. He shaves off all of her hair and throws her clothes and hair into the fireplace as the dog licks the blood from his hands and forearms. Jeff uses a pair of pliers to yank out each of her teeth and the nails of her hands and feet. He puts all of these things into the sink. He smashes the teeth with a hammer and ground up the nails in a food processor. He dumps all this down the drain, then goes back into the bathroom and cleans himself up before hopping into Hope's running car and driving to the hardware store he works at to take the wood-chipper. The store is dark and deserted as he expects. He uses the key the owner had given him and the proper codes for the security system he had to know for all of the times that he was the first one to get to the store in the mornings. Then, Jeff drives back to his house. He digs up all the rose bushes in the front garden. He sets up the chipper so that it grinds almost silently. Then, he feeds Hopes body into it slowly, feet first, making sure that every little particle lands in the holes for the roses. Her head is still warm as he shoves it through the chipper using a little stick to force the very top of her skull through so he doesn't lose his hand. Then he puts all the roses back exactly as they were before and cleans out the wood-chipper with bleach and then muriatic acid and returned it well before the store opened.

He stands in the front yard after bringing back the wood-chipper and stares at the rose bushes. He's not sure how, but they start looking more vibrant. Jeff smashes the blood stained angel with the same hammer he

used for the teeth. He puts all the little chunks of broken cement into a paper bag and throws it into the trashcan next to the gate of the perfect white picket fence.

That's only a part of the dream that makes Jeff not want to sleep. In the dream, he goes to sleep and wakes up with Hope alive and well in bed next to him. Jeff wakes up. The dog is nudging him with its' cold wet snout, wanting to play. Nosy is holding something in his mouth. Upon closer inspection, Jeff noticed what that something was. It was a piece of a rotten finger with a jagged bone and dirt clinging to the twisted metal of hopes' wedding ring. All the diamonds are covered in dirt. The smell coming from the segment of finger is musty and makes Jeff nauseous. He screams at the dog so fiercely that it drops the ring out of its' mouth before retreating out of the bedroom. He turns and looks back at Hope. But, she's not there anymore. On her pillow is a perfect rose.

Every morning, Jeff sits straight up in bed, gasping frantically for breath, covered in cold sweat, with hot tears streaming down his face, looks over to where Hope used to sleep and sees it. Once in a while, Jeff forgets to put the rose on her pillow right before he goes to sleep and at some point in the night, Jeff thinks, one must just snip its' own stem and float through the locked front door, down the hallway and onto Hopes' pillow all by itself. But it has crossed his mind that it could be Hope not letting him forget what he did to her no matter how many tiny toy soldiers he makes fight imaginary wars in perfect little gardens next to Weeping Willow trees. Not letting him forget, no matter how much beer he drinks every night to try to wreck his brain or how many times he tells God how sorry he is. And, every morning, right before he smells the rose on Hopes' pillow, he whispers to himself, "A rose by any other name..."

Bio: Randy Vicknair Jr. attended Southeastern Louisiana University where he studied under Dr. Norman German, Jack Bedell and Dr. Tim Geatreux. As a life-long resident of Louisiana, he is tired of descriptions of moss and the architecture of the French Quarter.

Letting Go

A short story by...Patricia Cardoza and John Eddy

I had almost reached her office when the building roared and shuddered under my feet. It was the loudest sound I'd ever heard, seeming to come from everywhere at once. The shock wave blew out the window behind me and a solitary scream echoed from down the hall as the lights flickered and I was suddenly plunged into darkness.

Instinctively, I dropped to my knees. My heart pounded in my ears as thoughts jumbled in my brain. *Earthquake? No, I've felt those before. An explosion? Oh god, it's so dark, I can't see anything.* The broken window behind me was so small and the thick fog obscured almost all light from nearby buildings. I stretched out my arms, feeling desperately for the smooth walls. I crawled forward, slowly, my bare knees scraping against the well worn carpet. I swore as I jammed my finger tips against the wall. The building spoke, creaking and yawning, as metal protested, plaster crumbled, and glass rained down. Pressing my palms flat against the wall, I rose, slowly, and continued my awkward journey, nearly falling over as the wall disappeared at her doorway.

"Sara!" I called softly through the darkness, "where are you?" I held my breath, straining for any sound in the room, but all I heard was the incessant pounding of my own heart. "Please, honey, say something." Hot tears sprang to my eyes as I shuffled forward slowly, my arms outstretched, fingers searching desperately for something, anything. I had to find her. "Shit!" I whispered tensely, as my foot caught on something hard. Reaching down, I made out the corner of a desk. Running my hands slowly over the edge, I felt the smooth warmth of the leather blotter, the hard plastic of the computer monitor, the spongy coiled rubber of the telephone cord. My fingers curled around the handset, and I lifted it to my ear. Silence. The phones were dead. My heart quickened, and the pounding in my ears grew louder.

"Sara!" I was sobbing now, desperate to find her. I bit my bottom lip, tasted the harsh coppery taste of my own blood. I'd heard her scream. Then a crash. Where was she? Why hadn't I just swallowed my own pride and apologized earlier? We'd have left together and we wouldn't be in this horrible mess right now. We'd be sitting at Tony's Bar, having Lemon Drop martinis and laughing as random men tried, unsuccessfully, to pick

us up. Instead, we were trapped, stuck on the tenth floor of the San Francisco Merchant's Bank, hoping to god that whatever had rocked the building, plunging it into darkness, wasn't the last thing we'd ever know.

I heard movement from somewhere to my right. Slowly, my feet barely leaving the ground, I shuffled towards the sound. As I approached, I heard a soft sob, a gasp of pain, and I crouched down, feeling desperately with my hands. The wiry carpet scraped my skin until suddenly, I felt warm silk. "Sara!" The silk flinched, and moved under my hand.

"Teresa?" Sara started to whimper, her voice sounded like it was a hundred miles away. "Oh god, help me, honey. There's something heavy... on my arm... I can't move."

I ran my hands up the soft line of her leg, over her hip. The silky smoothness of her pants gave way to the soft lace of her blouse, and my fingers skimmed over her breast, to her shoulder. I gasped as the sticky warmth of blood oozed between my fingers, and suddenly there was cool metal. Up, over a corner, down the other side, a handle! I ran both my hands around the great mass until I found the bottom corners. I wiped my bloody hand on my skirt before sliding my fingers under the small space afforded by her arm. I groaned, pushing, then pulling with all my might, but the cabinet didn't move. "It's a file cabinet, honey. It's big," My voice trembled, she was pinned, it was pitch dark in the windowless room, and we were trapped. *Shit, why didn't I swallow my goddamned pride and apologize sooner?* "Sara, I don't have my cell phone. Do you have yours?"

"It's in my desk drawer." Her voice was trembling, she was losing blood, I could smell it, thick and metallic. I squeezed her shoulder, it was cold.

"I'm going to get it. Just hang on, okay?" I prayed. Harder than I ever had before. *God please, please help us!* As I pushed myself to my feet I gasped as her free hand found my ankle.

"Teresa?" She was crying, but her grip on my ankle was strong. "Don't leave me, please."

"Sara, baby, I have to get the cell phone. You're bleeding. It's bad." I crouched down again, feeling tentatively until my fingers found the soft curls that framed her face. I cupped her cheeks, her tears cool on my palms. I bent my head until my lips pressed against her clammy forehead. "I'll be right back. Just keep talking to me, okay?"

"I'll... try." Her voice trembled, her breath warm on my neck, her skin icy under my lips.

I rose, my fingers shaking as they reached desperately for her desk. Even though it was only a few feet away, it felt like an eternity before I

found it again. Sara's voice was like an anchor, keeping me sane, focused, if not completely terrified. She was babbling, talking about the trip we were planning to Monterey.

"We'll go... to the beach... look... for seashells... walk... by the water..."

"I'm at your desk, honey. Just hang on." My fingers traveled lightly over the cheap pine, grazing over pens and paper clips as I felt for the narrow line of drawers down the left side. Closing my hand around the wooden handle, I pulled the drawer open slowly, hearing the smooth hiss of casters and the subtle shuffle of the contents. *I can't see anything. God, why did I have to leave my phone in the car?* I thrust both my hands into the drawer, feeling desperately for the phone. I didn't even notice that Sara had fallen silent. *Where's the phone?* I felt smooth plastic dividers, cool metal pens, a pack of gum, a bottle of something. Finally my fingers closed over something small, cool, almost metallic. Buttons, an antenna, the phone! "Sara, I've got it!" I listened. Silence. *God.* "Sara!" Nothing. "Sara, talk to me!" Silence. I sprang up, the phone clutched tightly in my fist, and hurried as fast as I could towards her.

"Teresa... help... me." Her whispered plea sent chills down my spine as my toe found the soft flesh of her leg.

"I'm right here, baby. Squeeze my hand."

As I gripped her free hand, I started to shake. Her fingers were icy, and barely responded to my gentle pressure. I flipped open her phone with my other hand and a dull blue light suddenly blinded me. It was several seconds before my eyes adjusted and I angled the phone to her face. Her eyes were closed, her jaw slack, her cheeks soaked with tears. "Sara, open your eyes. Now!" At my shout, her lashes fluttered, and she opened her eyes to look at me. I knew. She knew. Only one of us would live through the night. "Oh baby, please," I sobbed, flinching as a few of my tears plopped onto her cheeks. "Please, please fight."

"Can't... hurts... cold." Every word was a struggle. I could see her fight to even breathe. I flung my body down, stretching out to cover as much of her as I possibly could. I wrapped my arm around her waist, the blood soaked carpet abrading my soft skin. I tucked my head next to hers, kissing her wet cheeks, her clammy forehead, her soft, cool lips.

"Sara... oh god, Sara don't leave me!" I pressed my cheek to hers. Our tears mixed, though she'd nearly stopped crying, her breathing slowing, becoming increasingly shallow.

"Sorry... love you... always."

She was gone. I felt her go, felt her body shudder once as she gave up

her last breath. I screamed, so loud and so long that I thought my heart might explode. She was the best thing that ever happened to me. She'd found me in the deepest, darkest depression when even breathing tore at my soul. She'd found me, with a bottle of sleeping pills, in the corner suite of my college dorm, when she'd come looking for my roommate, Angie. When she'd pushed open the door, interrupting what was to be my final desperate act, everything had changed in an instant. Our eyes had locked, and though we'd never even seen each other before, she knew instantly what I was planning. She'd knocked the pills from my hand, wrapping me in her warm embrace, gently rocking me as I cried. She'd kissed me, my neck, my cheeks, my lips, and I'd shared my pain, feeling her drink it in, siphoning it off until I could breathe, could feel, could once again hope.

"Oh Sara," I whimpered, "I can't go on without you!" The cell phone had fallen, forgotten, from my hand, the blue light long gone. I closed my eyes, breathing in the last of her perfume, the last of her shampoo, the final, horrendous scent of her death.

They found me like that, twelve hours later, my head tucked into her neck, my arm covered in her drying blood, my body pressed desperately to hers. They thought I was dead. I might as well have been. When they tried to roll me away, I screamed, the feral screech of a wounded animal, and tightened my vice grip on Sara's lifeless body. I wouldn't let go, I couldn't, finding strength I never knew to hold myself tightly to her, and finally when they lifted the filing cabinet from its fatal resting place, I pulled her on top of me, wailing, moaning her name.

Five days pass, I'm standing in front of my full length mirror, in the bedroom we shared for six years. The black dress I'm wearing is starting to fade now; I've been to so many funerals this week. The explosion claimed sixteen lives. Sara is the last one. My eyes are red-rimmed and swollen. I don't even notice them burning any more. As I look around the room, at the pictures of us, at her things, my tears fall again, streaming down my pale cheeks. I wonder, how many tears can one person cry? The phone rings, I ignore it. It's just Sara's parents again. They hate me. Hate what we were... together. Not a day goes by that they don't call to yell at me. They blame me. Why shouldn't they? After all, it's my fault.

The answering machine picks up. I listen to them rant and rave again. They're angry. They wanted Sara to have a proper Lutheran funeral. They don't seem to care that her will stated a simple graveside service.

They don't care that she hadn't been to church in ten years. I cradle the pewter picture frame in my hands, staring at her lovely face. "Oh Sara, I can't let go." Dissolving in tears again I sink to the floor, clutching the picture to my heart. My heart pounds in my ears, an incessant drumbeat I can't ignore. Finally I realize there's another sound – the doorbell. It's time to go. Time to let go. I can't. I don't know how. Her picture falls from my hand and I grab her black wool coat. I need her scent around me. Maybe then I can keep going. Maybe. My sister leads me out to the car, drives me to the cemetery, and hands me tissue after tissue from the unending supply in her purse. She doesn't follow me to the grave, she knows I need to be alone.

But I'm not alone. Sara's parents are there. Their cold stares seem to pierce right through me. Her mother hisses as she recognizes Sara's coat. "Take it off you little bitch! You have no right!" She starts towards me, but the preacher steps between us.

I shrink back, quickly stepping to the other side of the closed casket. She's in there. My Sara. My love. My life. *I can't let go.* The preacher's speaking now, but I can't understand what he's saying. Does it matter? I hear the ocean in my ears. Monterey. Our trip to Monterey. I can see it. We're walking along the beach, holding hands, stopping to pick up seashells. She smiles at me. I hear her. "Let me go, Teresa. It's all right." *No! I can't let go.* My heart pounds in my ears.

I can't hear, but I know the preacher's stopped talking. He's looking at me. He's asking me to do something. What? I look down at the rose in my hands. I'm supposed to lay it over her coffin. *No! I can't let go.* I shake my head. Her parents are staring. They're angry. I feel my cheeks burning, my hands trembling. I squeeze the rose, the thorns pierce my skin. I barely notice. The incessant drumbeat thunders in my ears. My chest tightens. I can't breathe. My heart is cracking into a million tiny pieces. I see the coffin glistening in the sun. Glistening through my tears. It's sinking into the ground. My hopes, my dreams, my life, all sinking down. I take one step back, try to take another. I want to run. Far enough, fast enough, and I'll find her. But I can't run. My legs are rooted to the ground. My eyes are fixed on the sinking coffin. Suddenly I'm sinking too. The pounding in my head is relentless. I scream so loud, so long, I can't breathe. I stop sinking. The grass is wet, cool, under my cheek. The pounding stops. My breath leaves me. I feel her. *Sara. I can't let go....* I close my eyes. I know now. It's possible to die from a broken heart. Darkness. Silence. I let go.

El Escorial

Daniel Yazlovitsky

“A thousand oxen carried the materials, and one hundred omens, in the form of storms, bloody accidents, and a howling, haunted dog, hung over the building as it was erected. Finally, on the great day, the corpses of all of Philip’s ancestor’s rumbled into El Escorial from everywhere in Spain.”

– The Broken Mirror, Carlos Fuentes

My friend and I who I have not seen for some time were sitting at an upscale café in downtown Madrid. His antiquated suit and mannerisms seemed like a far cry from the loud and colorful world around us. He had grown haggard since our last meeting. His name was Vasquez and he came from the house of Ramos, a noble family that at one time claimed large tracks of the more fertile lands of Spain. But the vicissitudes of fate have slowly pulled down this house and family from the highest ranks of honor to the lowest rungs. There is even a mention at the church of La Sagrada Amelia of someone with the lofty name of Ramos getting married and dying in a suburb of Segovia; a robust farmer of the dusty La Salceda valley.

Since the degradation of his family, this line has gone through alterations. From proud prominent men and studied heirs they have devolved into speculators and ghosts of their former selves. It was my privilege to meet my friend during our childhood at the academy and later we proceeded together to attend La Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. I had always found him to be an adventuresome and entertaining colleague, even if somewhat on the wild side. His nature was one of excess and debauchery, a walking void that could never be filled. He was always plagued by the memory in his bones and ancient soul, of the antique times when his line practiced in grandeur and decadence those same debaucheries with Princes and Ministers of State.

Today, his face was lined more than ever with the effects of the sleepless lifestyle. His skin tightly pulled over his skull—the Roman nose of the aristocrat and high cheek bones. His look was one to inspire but his purpose was only one of corruption. Usually he would speak of bets on

local football matches or of real estate speculation, but today his manner was much more intense than usual—as much as his appearance seemed more desperate.

“Lorca once said”, he whispered to me, “that the Escorial is the sad place from which all the cold rains in the Earth come. Did you know for example that El Escorial covers 50 miles with it’s halls and rooms—frigid passages and alcoves. But they all look the same, miles after miles of granite architecture. The very arcade that we sit at now was made from the same stones.

“Perhaps you do not know that I recently lost two family members. I never liked them much anyway so I didn’t tell you and only went to their funerals out of Catholic devotion. A retelling of my family history would be like a page from Garcia Marquez but I am not here to talk about ancient history. The stories of sacrifice, torture and madness which are present in all of this country’s so-called noble blood we shall leave where they belong—in the library of El Escorial—let the monks keep those dusty tombs.

“I want to tell you about the death of my brother. I have never told anyone this before but I was with him when he died. Yes, it’s true that he plunged off the edge of the A-7 en route between Malaga and Cartageña. If only superstitious Spain were more interested in good road conditions than having a shrine every few hundred meters. But I’m digressing...yes I was speaking to him on his cell phone at the time. He was feeling good, I think, excited about his recent acquisition of the new Aston Martin. Then all of a sudden a mood fell upon him like a dark cloud for the briefest of moments and he said quite audibly and with detachment, ‘that’s strange.’ I heard the terrible sounds of shrieking metal and bending steel. But no screaming. One would think it wasn’t out of place to scream at a time like this?

“So much for my brother. Not long ago I suffered the loss of another family member. Only a baby, an 11-year old girl. She was riding upon a horse, a very calm black Arabian. Some thing startled the little girl. Her name was Andaluza by the way. She began to shriek and jabber about someone pointing to a clump of old trees. The horse uncharacteristically threw her off, killing the child instantly.

“Now this is where the story gets interesting,” his eyes lit into mine. “Andaluza had recently gotten a present. A broken heart pendent made of gold. Guess who was in possession of this relic up until recently...Yes my brother. And guess who possesses the other half? Myself! You are

probably wondering why I am telling you this. So let me get to the point. I have a buyer lined up who has specified that he wants the completed pendent. What powers both halves have together I will not speculate on. But judging from the power of the one-half, it must be enormous if not wholly of the purest strength. Anyhow, my poor departed sister has recently made her journey into El Escorial; rumbled home as they say. The accursed broken heart has gone with her. I wish to God that I had ripped it off her neck during the funeral. At any rate, I am asking you, my old friend, to accompany me to the necropolis and retrieve the amulet.”

We made an appointment to meet on the south-eastern slope of the Sierra Guadarrama at midnight. On one side, the savage looking mountains tower threateningly above the place and on the other, is a dreary waste of sand and rocks—lava beds of old volcanoes. I had brought gloves and an overcoat, but the minute I entered past the palatial façade, a death-like chill pierced through my sweater to the very bones. The frost of our breath rose even though it was late summer outside. Everything inside is stone—the dread place is a giant cooler shaped like a medieval torture device. Every minute we spent walking sent shivers up my spine. I could almost see and feel figures peering at me from behind arches. And the monotony! All 11,000 windows are barricaded—One for each virgin whose bones lie at Cologne. No sounds but the empty echo of our steps. “The laughter of ghosts,” Ramos joked.

I began to feel the hand of insanity reaching out to me; even the indomitable Ramos looked subdued. I longed for the night to be over but here we only approached the center of the gridiron—the burial place of kings and nobles. Their gilded coffins are lined with porphyry, jasper, and agate. But this chill...The temperature of the corridors seems less chill now compared to this; the stillness is positively arctic. I shine the light around. I become aware of a soft sound that sends the hair of my neck prickling. Was Ramos not hearing it? No...probably not...he was busy looking for his sister’s name. I felt the Noseless One’s fingers upon my spine.

Ramos, without hesitation, began to pry open the smallish coffin. And as he did, I caught a flash of bright eyes from my flashlight. Small eyes, cold and hard as the stones that oppressed us all around. I shined the light in that direction but it was merely two onyx stones side by side. The heavy lid was thrown back with an echoing boom but the coffin...dear God! was empty and the gentle rustling I had heard earlier held it’s breath.

THE DOG

Sandy Waldron

John bought Lady for himself, desiring nothing more than to make a good watchdog out of the black, keen-eyed German shepherd. But his wife, Gloria, wasted no time in stealing Lady's affections. Once again, she laid claim to something that should have been his. Instantly, she had taken Lady to the kitchen and fed her his T-bone.

John shrugged and let the matter go, wanting the dog to feel welcome in her new home. He was miffed about the steak, though.

In two short days, Lady was following Gloria around the house as though there wasn't anyone else in the world. If John so much as tried to pet the dog, she would curl that upper black lip and let him know she wanted nothing to do with him. What really took the cake, so to speak, was when he tried to make love to Gloria—Lady's head suddenly popped up over the side of their bed—his side—and growled with all the viciousness of a trained killer.

"Good God!" he yelled and tumbled out of bed.

"What is it, dear?"

"What the hell have you done to her, Gloria? She hates me."

Gloria rolled over and patted Lady on her fine head. "It's okay, Lady. John didn't mean any harm." Then she giggled, seeming to find it all amusing.

He was outraged. "Why are you laughing? Why are you consoling her? What about me?" He realized then something he should have known all along. Gloria really didn't care about him. Like his mother had told him a thousand times, Gloria married him for his money. It hurt to admit it. He'd always loved her so much. Now, it was plain to see—she cared more for Lady than she did him.

He spent the following week pouting, and he no longer tried to be friends with the dog. Useless. And the more he watched Gloria with Lady, the more he loathed the dog. Lady was taking what little attention he did get from his wife away. He would get even! He would show that mutt. Yes he would. He would get even!

That evening he purchased rat poison from the nearest feed store. All the way home, he thought how easy it would be to slip crushed pills into the dog's supper. That'd be it. She would be gone—forever! Life would

return to normal. He smiled.

Gloria, with Lady at the foot of her recliner, watched the evening news. Unknown to her, John took the deadly pills and mashed them to a fine powder with a rolling pin. Gloria had informed him earlier that the ground chuck thawing in the refrigerator was for Lady's supper. They were having the rest of Sunday's stew. "Stew!" he hissed. He neatly folded the rat poison into the moist red meat and stuck the meat back in its wrapper.

If that didn't kill the dog, nothing would.

Pleased with himself, he went to take a shower. He sang and whistled and sang ... and whistled some more, lathered here, lathered there, scrubbed his scalp, then bent over and washed in between his long toes; he felt good. When he heard Gloria in the kitchen cooking Lady's supper, he sang even louder and heartier. Ha! He thought to himself, she takes more pains with that dog's meals than she does our own.

"Shower make you feel good, John?" Gloria asked, as he came out of the bathroom.

He finished dabbing his face dry with the thick, light-green towel. "Yeah—"

"What's wrong, honey? You look as though you've seen a ghost."

"You're ... You're eating a hamburger!" His eyes darted over to Lady in the corner noisily lapping away at her stew. "But I thought—"

Gloria flipped her hand in the air. "Oh ... she wouldn't have any part of the ground chuck. She stood on her hind legs and begged for the stew.

I thought ... what the heck. We haven't had hamburgers in a while."

He tried to tell her the meat was poisoned, but his voice wouldn't cooperate, all that came out was a gurgle and gasp. He stood in horror, helplessly watching her wolf down the last of her hamburger. Suddenly, the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. There was a deep, vicious growling right behind him.

Ten Minutes (in Norwegian) Ti Minutter

Jeg vokter en karikatur
hvor en gutt fanget shoplifting
han stjal et spill for seg
og han laget opp til hans mamma for det
ved å få et bilde av seg i en ramme inn
og hans mamma var slik stolt

og all som jeg tenker på
var at jeg stjal noe en gang
og mine foreldre fått meg til meg som helvete for det
og jeg fikk ikke et spill for meg selv
Jeg fikk dem Jul presanger
alle fått meg til meg
som om jeg bruker
som mye pengene som alle ellers
og alle hatt ellers en jobb
og var en voksen
og jeg var en kid
og jeg var tolv
og jeg hatt femten folk kjøpe presanger for

men jeg fikk DEM overrekker
fordi de fått meg til meg
som jeg er mere enn en voksen
konkurrere med dem
konkurrere for dem
og det vunnet aldri
og jeg vunnet aldri
og jeg er enda ikke vinnende

Det er også denne delen av hvorfor jeg er derfor messed opp?
det er også dette hvorfor jeg er en overachiever
det er også dette hvorfor jeg gjør det mye
det er også dette hvorfor jeg føler behovet
Alltid lykkes?

Jeg gjør alltid,
Men er det alltid på mine kostnader?

Ten Minutes (in Dutch)

Tien Minuten

Ik keek een karikatuur
Waar een jongen stelen gevangen werd
Hij stal een spel voor zichzelf
En hij maakte op aan zijn mamma voor het
Door krijgen van een afbeelding van zichzelf in een omlijsting
En zijn mamma was zo trots

En alle, die ik zou kunnen denken aan
Was dat ik iets eenmaal stal
En mijn ouders maakten mij voel zoals hel voor het
En ik kreeg geen spel voor mezelf
Ik kreeg hen Kerstmis geschenken
Iedereen maakte mij voel
Alsof ik uitgeven moest
Even veel geld als iedereen anders
En iedereen had anders een baan
En anadult was en ik was een kind
En ik was twaalf
En ik had vijftien mensen om geschenken voor te kopen

Maar ik voorstellen HEN kreeg
Omdat zij mij maakten voel
Zoals ik meer dan een volwassene zijn moest
Om met hen te wedijveren
Om voor hen te wedijveren
En het won nooit
En ik won nooit
En ik win nog niet

Bijgevolg is deze deel van waarom ik zo messed op ben?
Bijgevolg deze waarom ik is een overachiever ben
Bijgevolg deze waarom ik is zo doe veel
Bijgevolg deze waarom ik is, voel de nood
Altijd te slagen?

Ik doe altijd,
Maar is het altijd aan mijn kosten?

Ten Minutes

Alexandria Rand

I watched a cartoon
where a boy was caught shoplifting
he stole a game for himself
and he made up to his mom for it
by getting a picture of himself in a frame
and his mom was so proud

and all I could think of
was that I stole something once
and my parents made me feel like hell for it
and I wasn't getting a game for myself
I was getting them Christmas presents
everyone made me feel
as if I had to spend
as much money as everyone else
and everyone else had a job
and was an adult
and I was a kid
and I was twelve
and I had fifteen people to buy presents for

but I was getting THEM presents
because they made me feel
like I had to be more than an adult
to compete with them
to compete for them
and it never won
and I never won
and I'm still not winning

so is this part of why I'm so messed up?
so is this why I'm an overachiever
so is this why I do so much
so is this why I feel the need
to always succeed?

I always do,
but is it always at my cost?

Down in the DirtAlexandria Rand, editor
Scars Publications and DesignAlexRand@scars.tv
829 Brian Court
Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USAhttp://scars.tv

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