

Donna

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By *Derek Michael
Towle*

Thesis Advisor
James Driggers

Donna

A Collection of Short Stories by

Derek Towle

62 Maney Ave #2
Asheville, NC, 28804
919-260-9538
exsweat@gmail.com

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For all those who create their own friends, enemies and lovers

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Dinky

One time, some while ago, I had a pet rat and her name was Dinky. I got her when my church group took a trip to the old closed down Ghost Town amusement park around Maggie Valley. Well the Preacher brought us all out there, oh, ten, twelve years ago. There was a few carnival people that was out of work and was living in a shacks they built under a roller coaster, so we was going to bring them food and things and tell them to come back to Jesus. But them carnival people didn't want nothing to do with Jesus. They started get angry and cussing us. One of them throwed a bottle and I got scared and got away as fast as I could which ain't too fast cause I'm a lady and old too.

How I found Dinky was that she was crawling around that crumbling old roller coaster when I was running away. I stopped cause I was having trouble breathing and she jumped off the roller coaster and landed on my head. I was frightened directly, she was as big as a little cat and I was screaming and all. Then, she crawled down on my shoulder and stroked my face with her skinny little rat hand just like mamma did when I was a child and I was ascared. I looked at her and she had beady rat eyes, but they was

good eyes. She had pretty gray hair even though there was fleas jumping all around on her. I stopped being scared and Dinky tilted her head back and sniffed at my chin. She smiled with all her pointy needle teeth then crawled into my jacket pocket. I reckon I liked the rat and I took her with me.

Well Dinky was real happy with me bringing her back to my house, but I had to hide her on account of we weren't allowed to keep pests in my apartments. See my apartment was a real nice place and we had to be real careful and neat to keep living there. The building was all brick accept for each of our apartments had one window that showed you the courtyard and one that showed you the parking lot. It was all fancy and rose high like about six floors, even though they called it a section eight. Anyway I only had one room and a bathroom in my apartment, but Dinky would sit in my lap and we'd lookout the window at the courtyard, and she liked it, but I would always disguise her with a little baby costume with a pacifier and diaper and a little baby hat so people would know I was keeping pests. She was a big rat so it fit her pretty good I reckon, but her stringy little tail would pop out sometimes. We would just watch the people walk and wheelchair by with their oxygen tanks and tubes and things, and sometimes we'd just watch the little maple tree in the courtyard try to grow a little.

Well Dinky and I was getting along real well and I didn't have nobody to talk since mamma died, so I was real happy to have the company. I reckon she liked me pretty good too. She couldn't talk, but she looked at me in a way that I knew what her face was saying, and it looked like it was saying good things to me. She'd get me my pills and things when I had the pain real bad. I'd scratch her greasy hair with my pinky

and her tail would poke right up cause she was so happy. I'd give her hotdog and egg sandwiches sometimes too, but I reckon she liked the Laura Lynn' Rat Food better. The only problem I ever had with Dinky was when she'd nibble at the walls, but I didn't much care.

Sometimes I left my apartment when someone from the church would come take me to services or to go food shopping and every once in a while to go do some good for Christ. When I did leave I would always hide Dinky away in my purse so she could come with me. Sometimes in church Dinky'd make these funny squealing noises. I'd just sit there laughing and nobody know for what. They'd think I was just troubled and crazy cause they couldn't hear Dinky's jokes. Me and Dinky had a good time of it, and we was both real happy until the day someone found out I was keeping a pests in the building.

Did I tell you that Dinky could do tricks? Well if I didn't I'll tell you. Dinky could do tricks. She could do all kinds of flying and jumping tricks. I didn't have very many things in my apartment, but I had a bed and a microwave and a little bland and white tv. And Dinky would jump from all three of them things doing all kinds of flips and spins and what not. I liked watching her and she like it pretty good when I would clap for her. Whenever she would do a real good one I would clap for her and give her a little piece of white bread pretty she liked it right good.

Well one day Dinky and me was sitting in my room and I had the curtains up. Dinky was doing a real hard trick and her little pink rat tail popped right out. Right then directly a wicked old Black Lady wheeled by our window and saw Dinky's tail flying

through the air. The Black Lady started grinning like a fox with hardly any teeth. She knew that Dinky wasn't no baby, but that she was really a pests. I saw that bad old lady and I knew that she saw Dinky's tail. I bent over and grabbed Dinky's diaper and tried to put it back on, but that old black lady started beating on my door and I had no time to get it on all the way because she beating louder and louder and faster and faster. I picked Dinky up and put her in my pocket to try to hide her, but before I could that old black lady opened the door and wheeled in and caught me.

First she told me that she was going to call the building manager on me and that they was going to get pests control and have Dinky killed. I was real frightened and begged her not to. And that mean old black lady told me that the only way she wouldn't kill Dinky is if I'd give Dinky away to her. I really didn't want to, but I really didn't want nobody to kill Dinky so I said yes.

Dinky poked her little head out of my pocket and I looked at her real sad like. I didn't want to let her go because she was the only good friend that I really liked. I gave her a hug and a kiss and told her that I would come visit. Then I passed her over to the black lady. When the black lady had Dinky in both her hands she told me that I would never see Dinky again because she was going to sell Dinky to the circus and make a lot of money. The black lady squeezed Dinky tight in her fist so that her baby hat and pacifier popped right off, and then she left my room. I reckon I'll never forget the look on Dinky's face then when she was being wheeled away. She was sniffing her nose toward me and her eyes opened wide and scared, but poor Dinky couldn't even move her feet. I just looked there on the floor at her little baby things for hours and hours.

I felt real real lonely for a long time directly. I didn't hear nothing from Dinky and I saw that old black lady wheeling around in a fancy new wheelchair. I didn't have no friends again. I did meet a boy at the doctor office once who said he wanted to be my friend, he was an orderly at the hospital. But when he came to visit he was always in a hurry. He usually just talked about not being able to stay longer or something then he'd go in the bathroom for a while and leave after that.

Nobody ever replaced Dinky. I didn't like anybody that came over from the church they always talked to me about the devil and how God loved the poor and how God loved the cripples, and they said that they loved me, but I didn't ever love them none. I didn't have no friends. I was always running out of medicine so that my pain was real bad. I couldn't do much, but sit and watch that old maple like me and Dinky used to do.

And then one day I saw that the circus was coming to town on the news. The next time one of them people came from the church, I told them that I really wanted to go to the circus and they said that Jesus would bring some light into my life. Anyway, them church people ended up saying that they'd take me and some other church friends to the circus.

Well we went to the circus that day and the whole time I was looking for Dinky. They had the circus in a great big tent out at the fair grounds. It smelled like animal manure, and we sat on some silver tin metal stands they had set up. I didn't know that

she was at this circus, I was juts hoping, and this was the only circus to come around since she was stoled from me. We sat through and watched the lions come out and eat fire and it looked like they swallowed it, and we saw the little midgets running around chasing after cars and things. The clowns came and the trapeze men and I didn't see Dinky anywhere.

Then at the end of the circus, the announcer said that there was going to be one last special performer. The whole tent went dark and they was pounding a big drum slow and then it got faster and faster. Finally when it got real fast a real strong spot light went on and there she was. My dear Dinky, wearing a shiny gold suit, standing on top of a wire with three of her feet put out in the air. She was looking all proud and smiling. Then the spot light showed to the ground and I saw a big old cannon. It was like one of them kinds that you see on one of them old battle ships from around the time of Abraham Lincoln.

I got scared, but I looked up at Dinky and she wasn't scared. She had this look on her face like she wasn't afraid of anything, and like she was real tough. The drums went from real fast to even faster and then that old cannon shot. I saw Dinky jump right on to that cannon ball, but at the same time a big clap of thunder came and the big spotlight went out.

Everybody in the crowd started yelling and screaming and sounding all afraid. People were running left and right. The announcer came over the speaker and said that everybody should exit.

I ain't real smart, but I do know some things, and I knew that this would be a good time to try to get Dinky back. So I rubbed my eyes real hard until I could see almost in the dark I reckon. I walked down to the main floor where they was having all of the circus things happen. I started looking all around for my Dinky, and then I stepped on something soft and it made a squishing sound with a real light little yelp. I bent down and patted around on that dirt through all the manure and then I felt Dinky's long and cold rat-tail. I picked her up and pulled her right on up to my face. She wasn't even breathing at that point right then. I blew the air from my lungs into her little old nose, but it didn't matter none, she didn't come to.

Then I heard someone yell "Fire!" I looked back toward the stands, and it looked like the walls of the tent were on fire. I picked up my little Dinky and ran straight away from the fire as fast as I could. We went right through the walls and into another part of the tent that was on fire too. We were surrounded on all sides by the fire. I tucked Dinky into my coat and went right through the fire.

I got us right through the flames and outside. I was on fire directly, so I kept on running when we was outside the tent. This man who I thought was bad, but turned out to be pretty good grabbed me and threw me on the ground and started rolling me around. The fire on me went out after he rolled me a bit. I lost an eyebrow and a pretty good amount of hair, but I was alright and so was Dinky. After everybody got together so that they could tell that nobody died, the church people took us home.

I was quite fond to have my Dinky back. She was all dirty and cut, so I let her sleep on my pillow hoping she would find her strength again. After three days, she opened her eyes, but she didn't get up. She just looked at me with plain eyes and then fell right back asleep. I was starting to get worried. I didn't want to lose my rat friend again, so I called the rat hospital down on Tunnel road. They put out a helicopter ambulance and they took Dinky away to fix her all up right.

After twelve days, I think, Dinky was allowed to come out of the rat hospital. She had bandages all over her, and she couldn't move too good, but she was a lot better than before. I got out her old baby clothes and put them on. I wanted her to see the outside, but I was fearish that that mean old black lady would come back and take Dinky away again, so I kept the blinds closed.

Dinky got better and better. After a week I took her bandages off and threw 'em out. A little while after that she started doing some little tumbling tricks around the house. I asked Dinky if she liked doing them tricks and she didn't say yes, but her face made a face that showed "yes." She started going up to that window with the curtains down and trying to peek under. I always told her that I was sorry, but I had to pull her away so that no one saw her and would take her away.

The more and more better Dinky felt the more and more tricks she started doing again. After a while she started doing them flipping tricks again. But something was different. Dinky never sat in my lap anymore. She didn't keep going and try to lift up the curtains, but she did always go by them curtains. She didn't ever come and sit in my lap anymore. I would ask her what's wrong when she was at the curtains. She would

never answer or look at me, just sit there staring at the curtains. I'd try to give her crackers and things, but she didn't want them, she'd just look at them curtains. I was always just looking at Dinky, and she was always looking at them curtains.

One day, after Dinky had been home for about two weeks, I got a knock at the door, and it was the law. I was fearish that he'd come for Dinky. I hid Dinky in my jacket pocket and let him in. He started talking about that orderly that worked at the hospital that used to come over and told me that he got arrested. The policeman asked if I ever sold him drugs or if he ever stoled them. I told him that I didn't keep no drugs, just some medicine for my pains and my thinking, but I was right nervous about him finding out about Dinky. Just when he was about to ask another one of his questions, Dinky popped out of my jacket pocket. I got ascared I was going to lose my only friend again.

But, the policemen dropped his pencil. He took a long look at Dinky. Dinky took a long look at him. I was afraid by the way the policeman was looking at Dinky that he was going to take her away to jail. But I was wrong, I reckon he fell in love with her, directly. Not either one of them said one word, but they just went a staring.

After a while, the policeman asked me if this was my rat. I said yes, but that it wasn't no pests, and that it was my Dinky. He told me that he would never think sucha pretty girl to be a pests. Then he told me, 'Ms. Mollsey, I love Dinky, I would never arrest her.' I looked at Dinky. She was smiling and racing back and forth on the window sill, but looking at the policeman the whole time. The police took off his dark glasses and bent down in front of Dinky and just stared at her. Dinky sniffed his chin and smiled like she did when she met me, only her eyes was all lit up now. One time somebody told

me something about love at first sight, and I reckon I didn't understand it directly, but I did now.

Then the policeman asked me if he could marry Dinky. I looked down at the ground to think. I didn't want to lose my friend. I didn't have nobody else. I started to look at the policeman to tell him 'no,' but I saw the way they was looking at each other. Their eyes didn't move at all. Dinky's skinny tail was stuck straight up in the air like one of them radio towers. I hadn't seen her happy like this since she came back home with me. I asked her if she loved the policeman back. She looked at me smiling and nodded her head real slow. I told the policeman they could get married.

He gave Dinky a big kiss like in a movie. The policeman picked up Dinky. He held her against his chest rubbing her real soft like a baby. He told me that Dinky and him would come by and visit all the time so I'd still be able to see her. When they walked out the door Dinky looked back at me over the policeman's shoulder. She put up her little rat hand and waved and smiled. I smiled back even though I wasn't happy. But I didn't never see my sweet little rat look so pretty.

Dinky and that Lawman got married after a few weeks. They sent me an invitation, but I didn't go. I was real busy with going to church and cleaning my house and I just didn't have no time.

Since Dinky left I watched the maple tree grow by myself. Whenever something happened, like a squirrel jumping across a lot of branches or something, I would say something about it like Dinky was still there. After a couple years the building manager

put out a note that they was going to cut that old tree down on account of it was going to fall. When they cut it down I started watching the tv a lot.

A couple times I thought of getting another pet. Once a cockroach run across my toe and woke me up when I was asleep. I tried to make him my pet, but I don't reckon he liked me much. I tried to pet him and things, but he was always trying to run off. And he didn't do no tricks.

I never did see Dinky again. I heard that she had babies, some was rats and some was people, and the family moved to another country where Dinky had a job doing tricks in a show. Some place far off called Las Vegas. I still think about her a lot when I ain't watching the tv. She was a good friend and I wish she never left off. I never did get rid of her baby things. I still keep them right next to the chair in case Dinky'll ever come back.

Danny and the Deathtrain

I have not slept tonight in my hurried preparations to leave. It's taken me longer than I had expected to fit everything important into my bag. I packed mostly clothes. The most difficult task had been deciding which of Mother's things I would bring, and which I would leave behind. I have two large boxes of photographs, jewelry, and little gifts she had given me over the years. I can't place a higher value on one over any other. The music box she gave me on my seventh birthday means as much as the sea shells we collected at the beach when I was thirty. In the end I decided to bring only her grandmother's wedding ring, which she had worn until the day she died, and a picture of her and me on the day I was born.

I wait for Daniel to come thinking of mother. I watch Timmy walk across his stick, unwilling to go to sleep while his mother sits up awake. Mother would be happy for me. She worried what life would be like for her sweet girl (as she called me) after her death. She had wanted me to have a husband and a family. People that cared for me as she did. I hadn't had that, but now Daniel has found me, she can rest without worry. Finally the

sound of the first horn whispers. Daniel's come to take me away from here. Only three days ago he blew his horn sound for me for the first time.

I shifted out of deep sleep into instant alertness as though something heavy had fallen and shattered on the floor. But I was not startled and I own no precious item, such as china or vase, whose destruction would warrant such an awakening. I would have suspected I had a nightmare, but had neither recollection nor feeling of one. I found only complete stillness about my room with no sense signaling commotion.

I sat up in bed surprised at my own calmness. I had the feeling that I was waiting for something pleasant and familiar, yet unknown to my conscious thought. These waiting moments passed without a stir in the silence. I expected to hear the rolled chirps or anxious pacing of Timmy, my cockatoo. Any disturbance usually rouses him and I have to softly speak him back to sleep. But his covered cage remained silent.

Anticipation broke with the sound of a train's horn at the furthest reach of my aged ear. Three times consecutively, it sounded, then paused. Silence reclaimed the night for several minutes, then again, the train. The next three blows were quite clear; loud enough to sustain a strong wind had there been one. The last of these blows receded into the darkness leaving stillness once more.

The rumbling of wheel on track grew out of this quiet period. A common sound in daylight being that the tracks run perpendicular to my dead end street, but I had not heard it before at this time of night. The rumble started faintly as the first series of horns, but gained volume until its vibrations ran through my joints. I stood up, my body jostled

by the train, and struggled toward the window that faced the tracks. The rumbling ceased at the piercing screech of brakes. Then the horn sounded again, like the great trumpet of a terrible king. My calmness drowned in all the noise and I thought well enough to be afraid. My breath and pulse quickened, opening the gates to a flood of adrenaline. I stumbled and gripped the window frame. I pulled myself up. Peering out from the second floor, I could see, in the wake of the last horn blow, the slowly chugging train through the bare limbs of the trees that separated the end of the street from the track. The screeching quieted and the dim light of the locomotive revealed the figure of a man. The moment I took sight of him, he waved in a slow broad motion as if he knew my eyes had found him. I ducked down, but rose again against my fear. He stood facing me across the distance of two houses and the thin row of trees between us. I starred back with unwavering eyes, feeling overtaken by hypnosis. After some time he waved once more, then returned his attentions to the controls. The train accelerated to a cruising pace, continuing on to the south. The rumble began again, but quickly faded into the night.

I returned to bed, my heartbeat and breath sloping back down from fear. I felt like one who investigates a noise in the closet and is startled then relieved as their cat leaps out. Although I thought the experience far from ordinary, I had no questions about it. There was no attempt to figure out if train schedules had changed, or how the conductor could see me from my darkened room. I perplexed myself by the odd sense of normalcy with which I was treating the event. It was as if something in me knew expected this to happen, but my conscious had not been informed. And under the weight of this comfortable ignorance, I relaxed into the call of sleep.

I woke the next morning with a full recollection of what had happened. Timmy roused at the first stirring from downstairs. He sang and squawked like a hungry chick. As I fed him, I wondered how it was that the barely audible footsteps on the first floor could wake him, yet he slept soundly through the raucous of last night. I fed him, then made my way downstairs to take my meds and eat.

I chose not to speak of last night, but rather to slip into another dull day. I do not like my housemates, and make efforts to avoid conversation at all costs. I find some of them quite dimwitted and others just unfriendly. James gave me pills in the kitchen. I put them in my mouth and swallowed. Then I spit them into my hand and slid them into my pocket, as I usually do, on my way to the dining room table.

My roommates had already swarmed the table. They shoveled runny eggs and rubber bacon down their throats at a pace that did not allow conversation. I have to admit I had been somewhat eager to see what they made of last night's irregular disturbance, as insipid as their observations might be. A discussion of this sort would have been a welcome break in the monotony of the mandatory events of the day. But during and after breakfast no one spoke of last night. It seemed to me that their ravenous feeding had led them to forget about it entirely.

I went through the motions of my social part of the day (crafts, group therapy and lunch) without even pretending I was enjoying myself. I decided to spend my free time outside. But that day I wasn't just escaping the house, I was looking for something. I thought I might see the train and its conductor on a return trip. There is a major depot

about 100 miles to south. Often, trains passed here headed toward the depot in the morning and passed back going north during the afternoon.

I spent a couple of hours walking through the neighborhood. I walked up and down the multiple streets that dead ended perpendicular to the train tracks. The first of these being, Woolf Street, where I lived, and the last Farmer Street. Bruce, from my house, followed from a short distance. No one was allowed to leave the house without the permission and company of Bruce or one of the other workers. His company was unwanted, but not terribly intrusive. He spent most of the time on his cell phone instead of bothering me.

Trains periodically ran down the tracks as usual and as usual, they all sped through. Not one hit the breaks or blew the horn. After walking the same route several times over, I decided to venture beyond the neighborhood. There's a foot path across the track from the neighborhood. It runs parallel to the track. Heading north through the wood would break the monotony of the street and keep put me in a good position to see any trains that came by.

At the end of Farmer Street, I entered the woods. To get to the path, I had to get to the other side of the track. That meant climbing the short but steep hill that elevated the track. I lost my footing on my second step, fell on my stomach and slid down to the bottom of the hill. Bruce, who had been distracted by his phone conversation and not noticed my fall at first, now ran over to me. I put my hands underneath me to push myself up. But they are too old and weathered to lift the gross weight I've added to my body. I let my defeated hands slide down the hill. Then, my left hand felt something

cold and smooth under the leaves. I picked it up. It was a box about the same surface size of a man's hand with a plastic back and a metal face. There was a short antennae, what appeared to be a small speaker and two knobs on the front. I could tell that it was a two-way radio of some sort. The simplistic and sharp geometry of its shape dated the radio to a few decades before the present, yet it was untarnished by age. I slid it into my jacket pocket as Bruce had finally made it over to me. He asked me if I was okay. When I told him that I was uninjured he responded by reprimanding me. He told me that I should not have been walking over to the track and that it was time for us to go home. I did not protest. I had long since learned that arguing with Bruce was an endeavor of futility.

When we got back to the house I went into my room, sat on my bed and took the radio out of my pocket. Its pristine condition suggested that it had been put there recently. The elements had not had done their work on it yet. It could have been coincidence, but I had the feeling that it had been put there for me to find. Put there by the conductor. It was as if it was waiting for my hand. I thought that the conductor had put it there for me. I felt like he knew from the trance like gaze I gave to him that I would go down by the track to wait for him. I stopped myself for a moment, realizing that my logic was quite absurd. If in fact this mysterious conductor wanted to contact me there would have to be a more reliable method than tossing a radio off the train and hoping I found it.

I located the power switch on the right side of the radio, and flipped it on. It worked, but I only heard the static scratching over the squealing frequency rising in pitch. I pushed in one of the knobs and said, "Hello."

Before an answer would have had time to get to me, there was a knocking at my door. I flicked the power switch back off and slid the radio under my bed. I looked at the clock. It was 3:30. Time for my appointment. I paused for a moment to collect myself. I looked in the mirror and saw the reflection of a crazy woman. The hair at the front of my scalp stood straight up and my pupils covered most of my blue eyes. The knocking came again and after a couple more deep breaths I opened the door. Bruce stood with his left hand on his hip, waiting to complete his last chore of the day: escorting me to the office to visit with Dr. Goldstein.

From insufferably thin lipsticked lips on a gray short-haired head fastened to a polyester pants suit, she would spew insulting observations and analyses of me, but she'd always coat them in sugar. I dreaded our daily meetings. Bruce led me to the less comfortable of the two chairs in the office, as is the custom, and I waited for the woman to return from wherever she had gone.

She walked back in to the office holding a styrofoam cup of coffee, the breadth of her lying smiling wire lips and the quick efficiency of her nazi-like gait let me know that that day was to be no different than any other. She always did her best to stop me from believing myself. She would tell me that what I knew was nothing more than lies dreamed up in dysfunctional mind, and that my only cure was the cocktail of blue, pink

and yellow pills served up to me twice daily. I have never physically harmed another living being, but if I ever had, it would've been her.

"Good afternoon Donna," she said in her shrill high pitch. "Sorry if I made you wait. I was just getting a little coffee"

I nodded.

"How have you been?" she asked.

"Pretty well."

"Good, good. So what's been going on with you?"

"Nothing unusual," I said.

"Good," she said, "Have you been working on crafts at all?"

I nodded.

"Good. What are you working on now?"

"A stocking," I said.

"Oh," she said, "For Christmas."

"No," I said, "Because they make me. And you make them make me."

Goldstein took a sip of coffee. "Oh Donna," she said, "You know it's good for you. It helps you stay focused. You do something with your time. You stay grounded. Why don't you like it?"

I didn't respond. She sighed and leaned back in her chair. Then she leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees and holding her face in her hands. She sighed again and her breath fell upon my lap. She pressed her lips together so that they disappeared into each other and said, "What have you been seeing, dear?"

I didn't answer still. Dr. Goldstein always asked me what I was seeing. And she always said "seeing" in a tone that expressed her disbelief in what I was actually seeing. To her, anything I "saw" or felt that was in anyway different from what one should normally see was a delusion. I crossed my arms and looked out the window behind Dr. Goldstein. I could see a couple of my roommates outside. They were raking the leaves that had fallen on the lawn. Their eyes were lifeless; the kind that hadn't found anything and didn't care, but weren't capable of looking if they wanted to. Bruce, and the reliever of his duty, David, shared a hearty laugh at the two men. Their rakes scraped the air above the grass and the leaves, missing completely what they were supposed to rake. This is what Goldstein meant by being "grounded."

"Donna? Are you going to speak?" she asked. But I kept watching the men. They didn't appear frustrated. Their faces bore the look of stiff concentration. It seemed that they felt that they were doing a job. To them the leaves were getting raked and piled. But to their spectators it was pure comedy. Just a couple of crazies trying to perform one of the sane man's most simple tasks, and failing.

Dr. Goldstein looked at her watch and then back at me. "Well," she said. "If you're not going to work with me, there's no point in continuing today. But I won't let you get off like this tomorrow. You understand?"

I looked at her and nodded.

"Alright then," she said. We'll talk tomorrow.

That night, once again, I woke suddenly with no apparent cause. The radio was on, and quiet static came from the speaker. All was still and quiet, then the train horn in the distance sounded again. The pattern of events started to repeat itself exactly as it had the night before. I approached the window. Immediately after the second series of the horn, I heard a voice come out of the static. I picked up the radio from the nightstand. The static had returned, but then again, it broke. From the speaker, a voice slowed and rasped by age spoke, "Hello."

He extended the pronunciation of the word to a length I had never heard it reach. This slow utterance was not the result of a low mind, but a diligence with speech. He refused to let any sound in that word leave his tongue until it had reached perfection of tone and pitch. I found myself instantly in awe of this stranger. I pushed in the knob, "Hello," I repeated as the rumbling of the train stole the night.

My own rendition of the word was not at all what his was. I would have been nervous in this situation. There had not been a single time that anyone had gone to the length that he had to talk to me. He had dropped me the radio, and he had slowed down his journeys for me twice now. He was an eloquent speaker, in all aspects more of a gentleman than I had yet to encounter. And I did not feel the appropriate sense of unworthiness in the situation. I, a lonely woman, fat, old and living in this house with such a lower caliber of company. Yet, this man came to me.

"My name is Daniel. It is a pleasure to finally speak with you." Every word he spoke had the same effect as his simple 'hello.' Although the experience was entirely unique, it stirred in me a familiar feeling, which, I had long lost. It took a moment of

reflection then it came to me. Comfort. I had not experienced it in any recognizable form since the last night of Mother's life. I did not search to explain the similarity. The feeling was as undeniable as it was inexplicable.

"I am Donna," I said. The brakes squealed. Out the window I could see the train slowly approaching the end of Woolf Street.

"That is a lovely name," he spoke with the same beauty. "Donna. May I see you?"

"Now? You want me to go to the track?" I said. I feared showing myself to him. I am no beauty to compare to his voice.

"I would enjoy that very much," he said.

I hesitated for a moment, but said, "Yes. I'll be right out." I had to see Daniel's face. Even if he found me grotesque. Even if he never came back again and apologized for making the mistake of contacting me in the first place, I had to see that face at least one time.

I put on bathrobe and crept out of my room. I stepped slowly down the stairs and through the hall. The office door was open. I stopped before I reached the doorway and leaned forward. David was sitting in his chair; his snoring head slumped over. I passed the office, carefully opened the front door and gently shut it behind me. Then I mustered what quickness I had and scurried down the street toward the tracks.

I stopped at the bottom of the hill and turned to the south. The light in the locomotive was growing brighter as the train rolled closer. I could now make out its shape. The brakes had stopped squealing. I felt the low rumble of the train in my chest.

I was paralyzed, watching the train gently roll quiet and carefully as it can taking every measure to treat track like a delicate body. He controlled the heavy black machine as if it were a lover's hand over his beloved's torso. His drove with the same art with which he spoke.

As the time neared when Daniel would become visible to me, the deep slow breaths of the engine mimicked my beating heart. Then I heard his voice on the radio. "Hello Donna."

Finally my eyes were perpendicular to the locomotive and I could see his face. His soft eyes touched me as the train flirted with a complete stop. The ends of his beige lips raised into his loose cheeks. Long and untamed, his white hair framed what has become my favorite picture. Daniel's stare warmed my blood to tingle my body. I stared back up at him like a child would at a wizard. The sluggish crawl of the locomotive eventually made me turn my neck to follow him out of view, and melancholy tinted the last half of this moment of ours. I could see it in his face too. His lips grew heavy from the impending separation. His eyes, still warm and powerful, tried to pull me toward him or him toward me. We gave ourselves to each other over a widening distance.

Then Danny spoke again, "Donna the beautiful." He paused for a moment. I smiled from his words. "I've driven over most of the track man has lain. Never have my eyes stole such a sight as you, my dear. And now they cannot bear to look upon another scene without you in it. Would you, Miss Donna, come away with me?"

The sound, "Yes," came out of my mouth as naturally and involuntarily as lungs draw breath.

"You do me more honor than you can know," he said with a hint of gentle laughter. "Tomorrow, my dear, will you come to the track. I'll pass as the dawn breaks."

"Yes," I said.

"Then tomorrow our lives will start anew," he said, his voice soft like the breeze through the leafless trees, "Until, then my darling, sweet dreams."

The radio went back to static. The rumble of the train died in the distance. I walked back toward the house. The gravity of our plans began to fall on me. I would be gone from this place. A man of unrivaled grace was in love with me. I would be his companion to travel the world with. I thought of these things as I made my cautious reentry to the house.

I successfully made back to my room and laid down in bed. What had just happened was unlike anything I'd experienced before. But I felt like all of this was bound to happen. I had felt a weight on my chest that I couldn't first explain. Then I realized what it meant. It was telling me my course in life was to change. However, the excitement of it all could not prevent sleep from its fast approach. In those moments on the border of consciousness, I felt that weight and its warmth now wrapped around my chest and back. The feeling a child has when it has finally gotten to be Christmas Eve, or a prisoner has on the eve of his release. The moment when fate has finally smiled upon them with favor—the moment when dreams come true.

I woke the next day without concern. I was eager for night to return so I could leave this place with Daniel, but I did not reach the point of impatience. I had the feeling

that it would come in its time. I had spent the last thirteen years in this house waiting for something to break this monotonous cycle. One day was not an obstacle worth fretting over.

I skipped my meds again, but I participated in group activities with a slight amount of enthusiasm and displayed an overall agreeable disposition. I even helped with yard work by raking leaves. This is what was reported to Dr. Goldstein. Our meeting went smoothly. She congratulated me on my progress and my ability to get myself grounded. She asked if it felt good to immerse myself in a concrete activity and I told her that it did. I slid easily through my time with Dr. Goldstein, allaying her brief suspicion that my feelings were less than genuine.

The only obstacle to face was Timmy. I would have to take him with me and I worried about his health. His failure to take notice of Daniel's comings and goings was unusual and I thought it might have been a symptom of disease. I feared the excitement of our departure would be too much for him to take if he were ill. But throughout the morning and the day he flew about and sang his songs as he normally did. I wondered if perhaps Timmy had a higher perception than I had conceived of. Perhaps he had somehow figured that Daniel was to become my companion and he did not approve of it. I wondered if it was possible that Timmy felt betrayed by the prospect that I would have another companion. He had been my only friend for years. I thought it unlikely for a cockatoo to have such a high awareness. It was silly for me to think him capable of jealousy. Regardless of this fact, I made sure to spend my free time expressing my

affections for Timmy. I watched him play and fly around my room. Daniel had brought a new happiness into my life, but I would never take Timmy's loyalty for granted.

I passed the evening alone with Timmy in my room. I had the strong sense that my world was shifting. This feeling was familiar to me on only one previous occasion in my life. The week of my mother's death, thirteen years ago, I had then, a shapeless dark weight on my chest. I could not translate its meaning until the morning that I went to take mother her breakfast and found that she had stopped breathing. But this time, feeling that same weight, it was a sign that something great was happening. Before it had crushed me, but this time it was covering me. That same power was conspiring to help me. Perhaps, offering reparations for the loneliness and captivity they imposed on me with Mother's death. I can't explain it, but it was clear to me. Faith, which I had never had in anything, was superimposing itself on me.

The first light of dawn is beginning to creep into the clear night sky. I gently take Timmy from his stick and place him in my jacket pocket. He struggles as I pull the zipper, but I get it shut most of the way, leaving a little space for air to get in. I pick up the one suitcase I have and the radio and leave the house with stealth. I succeed in getting out the door without incident and scamper to the tracks. The weight of my bag would slow me down, but adrenaline pushes me forward with speed.

I get to the track. I get to the top of the hill and stand near the rail. I can see the light of the train as it separates itself from the deep blue landscape in the distance and rumbles down the track. I feel a tightening of that weight around me. My body is

squeezed tightly in its warmth, so that it feels slightly painful. The moment is coming quickly and my imagination is surrendering itself to reality. I am about to get on the train with Daniel and I will never be lonely again.

"Hello, darling," says Daniel in his mystical voice. It is too pure and soft, too perfect to be real. "I'm almost there."

"I know. I'm ready," I say.

Both the light of day and the light of the locomotive grow brighter. Then, there's a stirring in my pocket. Timmy is prying open the pocket zipper. I drop the radio and try to put my hand over the pocket so that he doesn't fly off, but he struggles and pops his little head out. The train is close. If he gets away I will never find him and he would probably die without me. He struggles hard and pokes the better part of his body out of my pocket. The horn of the train blasts and the brakes squeal, but the train is still approaching quickly. I try to push Timmy back into my pocket and hold my position on the rail at the same time. But Timmy gets out. I have a grasp on his left wing. The train horn blows louder than ever before. Timmy flaps his right wing violently and bites my hand. I lose my grip and my loyal friend. The horn blows even louder. I turn toward the train.

I pick the radio back up. "Daniel, I lost Timmy. Stop the train! I lost Timmy!"

"That will be well," he says.

I am confused by what he says. The train is about fifty feet away and coming fast still through sparking squealing brakes. I look up for Timmy. He's squawking wildly on a branch just off the tracks. The train is coming too fast, and I don't

know how Danny will stop it. A young man with bright red hair comes out of the locomotive and yells something at me. I stare into the oncoming yelling for Daniel into the radio. But all I hear is static and the train's horn. And all I can see is the light of the train until the light itself meets my face and turns everything dark.

Home

There goes that ball bouncing again upstairs. It's making little Timmy squawk and fly around in his cage like he ain't even tame, though he is. And I feel right bad for that poor bird. He's so pretty, green and yellow, and that noise is just rotting away his mind and he don't deserve that. That old lady upstairs is either taking a shower and using all my water or bouncing that ball, or something all the time. She knows it gets at me and my poor bird and she does it cause she don't like me. And she knows I don't like her fooling with cousin Eddie, but she does it anyway. And she's black and always hollering at the television. And that television is loud on them bad channels about people cussing and making fun of preacher and things. I reckon I need to move away from this place.

It's late and I know I shouldn't, but I'm going to have a soda on account of I can't sleep. But I have to leave poor Timmy behind cause he's scared to leave the apartment. I got Timmy right when I started staying here, and he ain't left the apartment since. It's right chilly out in the hallway so I'll put on my jacket. There goes Arlene's dog barking again. Always barking at me cause he don't like me. Well I don't like him. It stinks out

here. Look there! He had the diarrhea all over the carpet and somebody stepped in it. There ain't no cleanliness here. I don't reckon that part of the carpet will ever be pretty green again.

People here don't have no kindness. They's almost all unholy and they mostly don't go to church. They is bouncing balls and not picking up after their dogs and all kinds of things, drinking. They're always drinking. I can hear'em now outside the building. They're laughing and laughing. Rotting away in sin. Going on about all kinds of things they wouldn't never go on about in front of the preacher. Talking about stealing people's food and getting on with people's wives. Just laughing. Like the Devils they / are. Deep cackling devil laughs that always end with a sound like all the air is going out of their soul. I'm scared of these folks, but the preacher always says "don't let the devil know your afraid cause he'll snatch you up. And if he thinks you're scared, tell him you ain't. Because you belongs to God and His hand will move you out of sin."

Finally that old elevator's come down and I can get to getting my soda. I know I shouldn't on account of it will bring all my sugars up, but I can't sleep. My goodness! I didn't get in fast enough and my blouse is stuck in the door. My goodness! What button do I mash? What button? My Goodness! The elevator's going up and I reckon its going to kill me. I scream in my highest sounding voice, "Help me! I'm gonna die!"

But then the elevator makes that dinging sound and the doors open right back up. It must have been some kind of miracle of Jesus or something like that. There was one woman who wasn't so lucky as me before I started staying here. Same thing happened to her and she got right smashed up by that old elevator. I heard her head just crushed to

nothing and you couldn't barely tell it was a person except for the clothes. And they ain't never even made it so it won't do that again. The people that run this building is just as unkindly as the sinning folk that live here. There is too much evil here. I only been staying here just like a place in between since mamma died, but I reckon its been long enough.

Well I figure I better get on to the soda machine being that I made such a fuss and it's getting on to be the middle of the night, 8:57. My goodness, I must of just woke up old Susie. There she's leaning against her walker at her door with all of them curling things in her hair. She's got the prettiest orange hair, but she don't like me and she ain't no good.

"Hello, Donna how are you?"

"Fine thank you." I smile. She can be right nice, but I know she goes on talking about me behind my back. She don't like me none.

"I made some oatmeal cookies, sugar free. Would you like to come in and have some?"

"No thank you. Its late and I better get to getting a soda before they start wondering what I'm doing out so late."

"I don't think any one'11 mind you taking a stroll. But you come by anytime you want okay."

"Yes ma'am. Thank you." I smile and walk away. She don't know I ain't going to be here too much longer. I've only been staying here until I can get a house anyway.

I ain't going to tell any of these people here about that cause if I did they'd try to get me bad before I could.

She can be right nice, but I know she don't like me. She gets to talking with all these other people and carrying on with all them drinking folk. Miss Lenoir lives across the hall from Susie and she's real elderly, but she has so many pictures on her door of that good preacher Billy Graham that I think he's a friend to her. Well, Miss Lenoir is the only good woman left in this building and she told me that old Susie don't even go to the church never.

The soda machine and the mail boxes is right in the middle of the building between side A and side B. My apartment is on side A and we got some drinking folk and that mean old black lady who lives upstairs, but the even worse devils are on side B. They got all kinds of Porta Rickins and men dressing up as women and all kinds of things against the bible. I don't never go on to side B cause the stealing and the drinking and the devil laughing is worse. And I never even go into the middle of the building except to get my mail and to go to church in the rec room on Sundays and once and while get a soda like I'm doing now.

I heard about this lady, Jeanne, who lived on side B. Well she was real old and sick-like and she had to have one of them oxygen tanks to breath with. One time she was going to her house and them Porta Rickins were playing a card game and hollering and drinking. And she told them to stop. They got real angry and one of them lit her on fire with a cigar and pushed her down the stairway. And when the fire got to catching her oxygen tank she exploded right there and died.

I always try to not stay in the middle of the building for too long because I don't want to get pushed down no steps or get exploded or nothing like that. I mostly just try to stay in my apartment with the door locked on account of my fearing these folks. So I go through my pocket pull out the change as fast as I can, but my fingers don't work so good and I drop all my silvers. I start bending over to pick it up, but I do it slow on account of my back don't work so good. Then a big pair of them black shoes, for people whose feet is bad, walks right in front of me. I tilt my head up and see a rough-like, unshaved face. It's Walt. He ain't Porta Rickin', but I heard he carries on with them and I don't like him.

"Let me get that for you." He bends down to pick up the change.

"That's alright. I can get it," I say.

"It's no problem Donna, let me help you." He goes on ahead picking up the change even though I don't want him to. I heard that Walt has a stealing problem real bad and I can't trust him none. I pick up as many of the coins as I can, cause I reckon Walt will just run off with what he can.

"Here you are Miss Donna." Walt gives me seven coins. After I count them I can see he gives me three dimes and four nickels. And I only picked up a quarter and two dimes. I don't even know if I have enough money to buy my soda now. I'm right sure I had more change and Walt's thieving some of it, but I don't want to fuss about it. I'm afraid he'll cut me and I don't want that.

"Getting a soda Donna?"

I nod and smile so he don't think I'm going to snitch him.

"You sure your blood sugar is okay for that?"

I nod again. I reckon he's fixing to try to steal the rest of my money. He's so tall and thin he probly needs money to get food, but he don't need to be stealing. If he would just go to the church, the preacher would help him, but I heard he don't even go to church and that he spends the little money he does have on drinking.

"Well you take care of yourself. And watch that sugar."

"Thank you." I smile so he doesn't think I'm being suspicious. As soon as he is far enough away I put my silvers in the machine as fast as I can. I don't bother to count them on a account of it will slow me down, I just put them all in. I hit the button for my diet coke and it even gives me back a quarter and two dimes, but I still think Walt stole some of my money. That's the kind of people you get mixed up with in this place.

I look at the clock and see that it has gotten to be 9:10. I better get back to my apartment being that it's so late and this is when all the drinking folk start getting angry and fussing with each other. I start heading down the hall, but there's already a group of them out a few doors down. I think that's Tommy and Linda and Marie. I see them at church every Sunday, but I know they ain't know good. They just go to church to try fool me to think they ain't like the rest of them here. That's the only reason any of them go to church. But I ain't fooled.

It looks like they're all getting together and one of them's got a bottle of liquor. I could take the elevator from here, but then I might get trapped by one of them Porta Rickins or one of them men wearing lady's clothes.

I'm scared, but I ain't got no choice, I can't let them know. I just have to walk past them and hope they don't start their fussing at me. I can hear some of that devil laughing coming from behind some of the doors on the hall. There's one door on the left that has all kinds of scratches on it and the devil laughing coming from there is real high pitched and it sounds like a witch is casting spells and things. But I just go right on by.

Tommy and Linda and Marie are all smiling at me. Tommy and Marie are standing up with canes, but Linda is sitting in her wheel chair. She's got the elephant disease and her feet are real big and messed up. Her toes point in all different directions and things. She's holding a bottle that says "diet coke," but I reckon there's liquor inside and they're all drinking on it.

"Hello Donna." Marie speaks to me. She's got a young voice, but her body is real old cause she's got some kind of bone disease.

"Hello." I don't look at them. I don't want them to know I'm scared. The preacher always says that you can't show the devil no fear or he'll snatch you right up.

"Did you hear about Granny dying?" Tommy asks. He's a little man probly almost eighty. I heard he's got the cancer and he's likely to die soon.

"Yes," I say. Granny was the only good lady here. She was about real old and real tiny, but she was a good lady. She never drank and she always told them drinking folk to stop drinking. She died yesterday just from being too old.

"We're going to the rec room and say a few prayers for her," Tommy said.
"Would you like to join us?"

"No thank you. I better get home." They was lying. They ain't really going to say no prayers with this bottle of liquor. And they are being real evil I reckon by acting like they're going to pray for Granny just so they can drink. I ain't going to let them get away with it. I'm going to tell the preacher and get them banned from the church so they can't keep using it for sin. Then I'm going to get out of these apartments. The folks here are no good at all I reckon.

"Are you sure?" Linda asked. "Granny had a special place in her heart for you."

I fear these devil folk, but I'm not gonna let them keep being evil and making me scared and getting on like this without them knowing I'm on to them because they'll just keep thinking I'm not strong enough and that they can take me from God and make me into a devil too. I ain't going to be no devil. I ain't gonna let them do this mess to me no more. I close my eyes and tell them, "You all are Satan's kin and I ain't gonna be any part of it!"

"Stop screaming, dear. Calm down." Linda puts her deviled hand on my wrist, trying to spread the devil's sickness over to me, but I ain't taking it. I pull my hand away and stumble a little, but the will of God keeps me from falling.

"Let go of me devil! I belong to God and I'm not scared of you!" I walk off as fast as I can which ain't that fast on account of my legs don't work so well, but I got some speed on account of God carry me. I keep my head down and don't bother with the laughing devils or the devils saying hello to me.

I get back to that old evil elevator and gets on it quick so it don't have no chance to eat me. Back on my hall it still stinks and that devil dog is still barking. All this sight

and smell of sin is getting to me even though the Lord is with me. I gotta go watch the tape I have of last Sunday's church so I clean my mind of this ungodliness.

I go in my house and try to turn on the television and VCR so I can listen to the good words of the preacher, but it won't work. I can hear the vacuum cleaner growling upstairs. She's vacuuming for the seventh time today. She's using all the electricity so she can keep me from listen to the word of God because she's just wicked. And poor Timmy can't even squawk no more, he's just sit on his stick pecking at nothing. This whole place is just evil and wicked. That's it. I can't take no more. I'm getting out here. I'll find some place else to stay until I have the money to get a house for me and Timmy. Some place where there's good folk who love God and ain't no devils.

A magnet for some taxi people came with the phone book one time and I got it on my fridge. I call their telephone number and a man answers the phone with a mean voice, "Metro Cab."

"Hello this is Donna Odum and I need a taxi cab to pick me up and get me away from here real fast," I say.

"Where from?" he says.

"I live in Oakley," I say.

"Where," he says real loud, "in Oakley ma'am?"

"Like over by the Target where..."

"I need your address. What's your address ma'am?" he says, getting a little meaner.

"It's at the Blue Ridge Helping Home. Number A-17"

"I need you to go to the street in front of the building so the driver can see you. We'll have a car there in forty-five minutes. Thank you." He just hangs up and doesn't even say good bye. I reckon I don't like him, but I guess I don't have to talk to him much when he picks me up.

I go and get my luggage bag out of the closet. I reckon I'll bring only a few things for tonight. I'll get one of my new neighbors to be friends with me and come help me get Timmy and the rest of things tomorrow. Timmy'll miss me, being here by himself tonight, but he's got food and water and he'll be alright. He'd just squawk too much and wake everybody up if I started moving his cage around in the middle of the night like this.

I got a nice orange dress with them pretty shoulders that poof out, and I pack it so I can wear something nice tomorrow. I reckon I should bring some food so I take them pork chops out of the fridge and put them in one of the pockets on my suitcase. And I pack my change purse so I got some money and sugar testing strips too. The whole while, she's still vacuuming upstairs. I can't even think right with all that noise so I don't know what else to pack up, except my bible. I pack it up too and that's it.

I walk outside and there ain't no building person at the door so I can leave with no fussing. My bags is heavy so I drag them behind me. I guess it makes a little commotion, the dragging, but I ain't too scared I just want to get away. The dog's still barking. I can hear the drinking folk devil laughing upstairs. They's probly thinking they're going get me, but I won't let them or the building people or nobody stop me. I'm just going to keep on going til I'm gone right out of here.

It's cold outside, like an early winter with wind and wet ground too. I stop on the walkway for a second cause I'm real out of breath. I turn around and my bag's open and some of my things have failed out. My dress is all damp and dirty and under it is my bible, half in a puddle. I pick it up and brush it off, but it's damaged and in no kinda shape for a bible. Must be that devil doing his bad work trying to get me bad before I can get out.

"Donna. What are you doing sweetie," says old Susie. She must of snuck up behind me. She comes over and reaches down to grab my clothes or my bible.

"Leave me alone. I'm getting out of here," I say and she tops reaching.

"Where you going?" she says.

"I'm leaving."

"Are you coming back?" she says.

I don't answer her.

"Doesn't Timmy need you here, Donna? Why don't you come back inside." she says. Susie puts her devil hand on my shoulder, but I pull away.

"I'll get him Timmy tomorrow, but I can't stay here with all you bad people and that black lady always bouncing the ball around upstairs. And I'm finding a new place for me and Timmy to live."

"No one lives upstairs from you right now," says Susie.

"You lie."

"Why don't you come back inside and talk to your nurse about all this tomorrow," she says. "I know Timmy wouldn't want to spend the night with out you."

I got my breath back now. "Leave now you devil," I scream at her. Susie shakes her head and says, "Oh, I hope you're alright sweetie." Then she walks back inside with her walker. I hope that old taxi comes before she tells the building people on me. I stuff them things back in my bag and move on.

I get to the street and wait for the cab, standing on the sidewalk. My old feet hurt like I walked for an hour, but I turn back to look at the building and its still so close that I can see the big 'B' on the B side of the building. I know they's just doing wicked things in there right about now. It starts to rain a little and them drops hurt my skin cause there so cold. The cars are all going by real fast and splashing me a little. I check my watch and it's, real real late, 10:30 and that cab ain't here. That man on the phone was mean I reckon he's making me wait just to let it rain on me.

Finally, here comes a yellow car and it's my taxi. I open the door and pick up my bag and put it on the backseat, then I get in and sit next to them. The man in the front seat is dark like one of them Indian folk who where the towel hats, but he don't have a towel hat. "Where to?" he says to me, but he don't even look at me.

"Well when I talked to you on the phone I was just wanting to leave here, and I didn't think about where to go, but now I still don't know. So could you just drive me away from here and maybe we'll find some place I can move into. Because my place is real evil and..."

He don't even let me finish what I was saying about the devil folk in my apartment building, "I don't know what you are talking about? Where do I take you?"

"Well the people is real evil and I just need to go before they get me real bad. And there is a bad old black lady that lives up stairs. So I guess I just need to go somewhere to sleep right now then we could take me and I could get a house tomorrow," I say.

"Do you even have any money to pay?" he says.

"Just a minute," I say. I move around the things in my bag so I can find my change purse. I pull it out and start counting the dimes and nickels.

The Indian man says, "Ma'am that will not be enough money."

"But I got some left over from the drink machine too," I say.

"Ma'am what are you doing. Where would you go? You have nowhere to go. You have no money. You need to go back home."

"But it's real evil here and..."

"Ah, she is a crazy one," he says like he's talking about me like I ain't there. Then he looks at me again and says, "Get out of my car and go back to your home."

I drag my bag out of the backseat and he drives off speeding as soon as I close the door. I know he ain't no church man the way he's Indian and all. He's probly part of that devil crowd just trying to do me no good, just like all them drinking folks and Porta Rickins.

I guess these folks is real crafty just like that old Scratch. They must be figuring out how to stop me from leaving. I start walking back to my apartment. I shouldn't be leaving Timmy there all night by himself anyway. Well we'll both leave here in a little

time. It starts to rain a little harder the closer I get to the building. It's like its laughing and spitting on me.

Out from the building walks Davie. He's a big old man. One of them bad building people. "Hey Miss Donna. What you doing out in this rain?" he says. I don't answer him.

He puts his big fat hand on my hands. "Why don't we go back inside now?" I don't pull away cause I'm going back inside anyway, cause Timmy's in there. "I'm leaving here," I say.

"You may be, dear," he says, "You may be. Let's just go inside now." I walk with that big devil holding my hand. My other hand is dragging behind my bag. I look up at that dark building. Most of the lights are off, but a couple up high are still on and they look like fiery eyes. The hallway lights is off as I walk back inside and its like I'm getting ate up by some monster's black mouth.