

dispatch two

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Never Enough
Dave Morrison

NEVER ENOUGH
BY DAVE MORRISON

I had just dozed off when the phone rang. Lately sleeping had become like hide-and-go seek. I would hide under the blankets and hope that the coughing spasms wouldn't find me. Because when they did, they dug their rusty fingers into my neck and breathed their dust down my throat. I was actually developing coughing muscles on my stomach and sides.

Of course, I smoke too much - way too much, I'm told - but not smoking makes me tense and anxious, and that makes me cough too, so what kind of choice is that? Sleeping was tentative and anxious; dreams were little dry things, dead leaves. I have friends who smoke a bone before bed and swear by it. My dreams are weird enough without that shit, thank you very much. Drinking doesn't help - I have to get up to pee in the middle of the night, and I wake up with a big thick head.

So, like I said, the phone rang, and chased away the sleep I'd just coaxed in. I had a moment of religion

'Please God, not him...'

There is no God; it was him. I lit a smoke.

"H'lo?"

"Hey, Gina - hey..."

"Jesus, Jimmy, what?" *Cough.*

"Gina, I got something for you, to show-"

"No, Jimmy! It's late-"

"Gina, I'm here..."

"What're you talking about?"

"...look out your window..."

I looked. He was at the payphone across the street. He lit his lighter, and held it up in front of his face. He looked like a solemn Boy Scout in front of a

campfire. I hated that he was doing this.

At that point I would like to have said that I didn't love him...maybe it was true, I don't know. I had loved him a little, once, but I lost my nerve, like a thief that replaces the stolen article before it's missed. Jimmy had not been gentle, but he had tried to be kind. He might have loved me a little. We weren't friends, not really: it was something more and something less.

"Gina, come down! Come out with me... there's something I want to show you."

"Jimmy...I feel like shit, I just fell asleep..." I lit another smoke. I was shivering, wearing just a T-shirt and panties. "Why now, why tonight?"

Silence. I waited. Annoyed, I looked out the window. He stood holding the tiny flame, his face a beautifully scared jack-o-lantern. The payphone receiver swung.

I hung up the phone, cursing. As I pulled on my clothes, I wasn't silly enough to think *last time* or *never again*.

Jimmy had these spells. There was something wrong with his chemistry. He'd be fine for weeks, sometimes a month, and then his blood turned to rainwater. He wouldn't be able to sleep for two days, sometimes three. He would be filled with nameless, crazy dread. He would do crazy things to entertain me, to make me stay with him. Once he dragged an entire room's worth of discarded furniture onto the roof of this old building - couch, chairs, end table, lamp, a magazine rack, even an old television. A dead ficus tree in a pot. He hot-wired the TV to the elevator motor-house. All the TV got was snow, so we watched snow all night long, me holding him. Meaningless patterns of light until morning.

I went with him, because I knew that someday I would need him. I had once already.

Half-asleep, and not exactly pleased, I went down to meet him. We didn't talk, he just pulled me along, turning every few steps to flash me his sad, nervous smile. I didn't keep track of the sidestreets he led me down. We stopped in an alley crowded with broken freight pallets and pails crusted with roofing tar. He pulled himself up to the fire escape and lowered the rusted ladder for me. I followed him to the roof.

He sat me on the edge of the skylight and went to work. From behind a chimney, he pulled out a ball of discarded wrapping paper left behind by the roofers. Then a battered trumpet. I was no longer surprised by the things he scavenged.

"Okay, Okay, ready? Watch..."

He lit the ball of paper with his lighter, and held it until it was almost burning his fingers - then he dropped it down the airshaft between the buildings. He peered

over, waiting, watching...

When the moment was right, he raised the trumpet to his lips and blew. The sound was startling, like a small dissonant boat horn. There was a rustling, a sound like muffled applause. He blew again. The sound grew.

Pigeons.

Maybe fifty of them, disturbed, frightened, taking flight from their perches in the airshaft. Rising, the glow from the fire lit their bellies and the undersides of their wings, as if they were feathered in bronze. They rose, glowing and circling, into the black sky.

Embers in an updraft.

I kneeled on the roof, transfixed, watching the birds disappear.

The paper burned out. Jimmy stopped blowing. After looking intently at the beat-up trumpet, he threw it down the airshaft, turned to me, and shrugged.



Dave Morrison, a high school graduate and above-average guitar player, has published two novels and three collections of poetry. He lives on the coast of Maine.

Visit him at

dave--morrison.com