

FROM

## *Tiny Love*

BY LARRY BROWN



**T**iny was tiny, but he had a wife and he loved her. The love he had for her was a lot bigger than he was. He did it all for her, ate the bologna sandwiches, changed the flats on the side of the road in the cold winter evenings when the rain was coming down, worked in the danger of the factory. Especially the factory, where gigantic presses could smash his hands and crush them, make nubs of his fingers. The machines crashed and pounded, and the huge wheels at the tops of the presses turned, and Tiny slid his little piece of metal under the die and hooked both hands on the buttons, and the presses turned over and came down with unbelievable force and stamped out one part at a time. He hooked the part with a little rubber suction cup on a rod, drew it safely out of the way, and inserted another piece, inhaling the exhaust of the Towmotors while standing on a skid to raise himself up to the level where other men stood.

He smoked constantly, not looking around, always watching his hands and where they were, because he knew Sonny Jones and Duwayne Davis who worked in the stockroom with their nubbed and shortened hands, victims of the same machines he stood before. The young boys drove the forklifts with cigarettes dangling from their lips and threaded the forks of the lifts into the pallets with insolent skill, blue fumes roaring from the grilled exhausts in the back.

Every afternoon Tiny spent his two dollars. Every day he drove by the liquor store, the last one on the way out of town, and picked up a half-pint of Four Roses or Heaven Hill or Old Grand-Dad or any of the other cheap and hangover-producing brands of whiskey, whichever one she had summoned from her bed that morning as he stood with his lunch sack in his

hand at the bedroom door. All day he kept the name of that label in his head and that afternoon he fired up his rusty '71 Ford Fairlane with the busted muffler and drove out of town with a smoke hanging from his lip, winter and summer, good times and bad, and stopped by the little store on the outskirts of town where he was a regular but unknown customer, a place run by college boys whose faces always changed, and there he would shuffle in and pick what she wanted from the shelf and produce his two dollars and change and take his bottle once they'd sacked it and move once again through the coming darkness toward his small house in the country, where he had a little vegetable garden, a car shed, some rusted and warped pianos sitting in the yard in a muddy collection like a neglected group of behemoths.

He would stop the car in the driveway and get out and grab his jacket and go in, pulling on the screen door, and there she would sit on the couch in front of the gray television screen, in her robe and her nightgown, her nicotine-stained fingers trembling, her mouth moving in the first tremblings of a smile, and Tiny would think, Lord, I love her. She would reach for him and the bottle at the same time, and Tiny knew that the hug she had for him was at once a hug for him and a hug for him for bringing the bottle, and he would bend and kiss her quickly and go to the kitchen and fix her a glass of Coke with ice so she could mix her first drink, and then he would sit down and she would begin to tell him about her day.

Men lost their hands in the presses. The presses were thirty feet high and they had wheels that were twelve feet in diameter, and they were made of iron and they weighed hundreds of tons, and a man's hands were a small thing in the face of the quarter-inch thickness of metal parts the presses stamped out without stalling. A man had no power in the face of power like that. The press-department bosses looked sharply in the press department and watched where men put their hands and talked to them and measured small pieces of metal with micrometers and checked blueprints and eyed everything and ordered runs for the presses, and Tiny hooked both his hands on the buttons and watched the die come down and make another part. He hooked it with his little rubber-suction-cup rod and drew it out safely and inserted another piece. He leaned on his machine and thought, Lord, I love her, and the press came down and Tiny, locked in his lifetime's

work, watched his hands and where they were and rehearsed the name of that afternoon's bottle in his mind.

He ate bologna sandwiches every day. It never changed. It was always bologna, and he bought a pound a week, seven slices, where Mr. Carlton Turner sliced it on his machine and where the people who lived in the community with Tiny and his wife knew him and knew that she drank. Tiny would always hang around the store for a while, looking lost, talking about the weather or whatever had just happened, and he would twist the neck of the paper sack that held the bologna tight around the small, cold mound of meat inside there, and he would tell everybody to just come on and go home with him. But nobody ever did. It was just something to say, like people in the country often say.

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978-1-61620-975-9

On Sale November 2019