

Gerald's Dead

On Tuesday at 4:10pm, all of Gerald's dead came back.

The first was a frog. Flattened disc quick dried by disaster, it laid in the curb at his feet. He picked it up by the rubbery edges and began to bring his wrist back ready to throw, then he noticed the leg. Sticking out like the handle on a ping pong paddle, the leg shook at him. Then he saw it was his hand shaking. He dropped the frog. It hit the cement and skidded off the curb.

There was a yell behind him. A spongy thud. Moans. Reluctantly he turned to look at the house of his birth. A young boy came running out the front door followed out by swear words and the sound of shattering china. He saw it was himself coming down the walk towards him. About eight a voice in his mind estimated. The rest of his mind froze into slush. He waited. The boy was rubbing his left eye, blackened, bleeding, crying just like his right. The boy rushed to the curb. He stood next to the boy, the boy stood next to him. He wasn't sure which one he was.

Now there was a scream from the house. Then silence. They stood there with hunched shoulders staring at the street, reluctant to look back. Sirens, an ambulance wail. They turned to watch as the men rushed into the house. They watched as the men came out of the house with their mother on a stretcher. The men were shaking their heads, the cop following them shrugged his shoulders. The cop looked down briefly at the boy. When he saw the black eye he grimaced and tried to put a hand on the boy's shoulder. The boy slipped silently away. They all drove away, cop car, ambulance, his Dad backing out of the drive to follow.

With a swift motion the boy reached down and grabbed a frog which had hopped up from the street. Holding the frog by one stretched out leg, he swung the frog round and round. He let go as his Dad's Buick began to turn into the street. His Dad didn't even pause at the thud under his wheels.

Gerald stared at the flattened frog which had skidded next to the curb. He turned and the boy was gone. Shuddering he quickly glanced across the street and was reassured when he saw the fifteen year old apartment complex still there. The frog pond was gone, sold by his Aunt when he was fifteen. The dead frog was still there, in the street.

He hurried up the walk to the front door of his home. About ready to call Sally as he put the key in the lock, he stopped. On the dirty white windowsill right next to the front door, there was a pile of dead flies. The boy came around the corner of the house carrying a jar. He looked closely at himself as a boy. The boy didn't look back. The boy carefully opened the jar and took out the half dead flies, one by one. Slowly he pulled all the wings off and put them in one pile. Next he pulled off all the legs and put them in another pile. Some of the flies still struggled. Most were dead by now. From behind the window he heard the sobbing lullaby and the creak of the rocker. He stepped closer to the window and tried to peer beyond the yellowed curtains. His Father came up to the door as he stepped away from it. He didn't notice the flies, or the boy. The boy stood there shaking and began to squish each fly one

by one under his thumb. As his Father entered, he heard his Mother continue to sing. Through demands for dinner and a cuff across the face he could barely see through the faded curtain, she continued to sing. Then silence as his Father took the dead baby from Mother's lap. The police, the ambulance, finally the hearse, one by one they came and went.

He took a step back over to the door. The curtains were gone. Blinds hung in the window. The boy was gone. The pile of dead flies remained.

Sweating he quickly put the key in the keyhole and managed to get the door open without dropping it. Shutting it behind him, he took a deep breath and leaned on the door. Then he noticed the trail of blood going down the hall from the front door to the kitchen. He tried to stay put and hold onto the door handle. This time the boy took a step out from behind the kitchen door and looked down the hall straight at him. He began to walk forward. The boy, now five years older and no longer a boy, turned away. A teenager with shoulder length hair stringy with sweat running down his bare back, he stood with his back to him. As he came closer to the kitchen door, he could smell it. Dog piss, shit, metallic blood, rich with death the ripe smell floated out of the kitchen.

The teen moved out of his way and he saw the table. His Aunt Lena's dog was spread out on the table. Suddenly he remembered throwing the bone into the street. Watching Lena's large bulldog which had been trying to bite him, run into the street after it. The truck plowing into the dog. Stripping off the polyester shirt the dog had torn. Bringing the dog into the kitchen.

He turned quickly away from the kitchen as the teen went out the back door. He didn't want to see his Aunt find the dog. He hadn't wanted to the first time at thirteen either.

He stumbled into the bathroom and took a deep breath. He almost called Sally from there but he was afraid his wife would see the dead dog in the kitchen. He was also afraid she wouldn't. Then he saw the bloody knife in the sink.

With a groan he put his head in his hands. All those years, all those psychiatrists and psychologists and counselors. He had never remembered any of this before. They all existed in the black out part of his brain. None of the drugs had helped him recall anything. They found out he couldn't be hypnotized. Still the black out rages happened. He would tell them about torn clothes, wrecked cars, missed appointments. He never told them about finding blood on his hands, oil on his fingers, mud on his boots. He was smart enough to want to stay out of jail. He was desperate enough to try anything.

He reached into his pant's pocket and pulled out the silver watch on a chain hooked to his belt hoop. The gypsy who read hands and healed his coworker's kidney problem, had said not to open it. She had said to carry it with him everywhere. She had promised before he offered to pay her that it would stop the blackouts now that he had found love and love had found him. He still loved Sally and knew he always would. He had always doubted how long she could care for him. He opened it. The hands of the watch were spinning faster and faster. He closed it and tried to remember a prayer. It had been so long since his Mother tried to take

him to church that he couldn't think of a single one. He felt that any prayer he made up wouldn't carry any weight, so he gave it up.

Clutching the open watch in his hand so tightly he began to feel blood trickling down his palm, he left the bathroom. The door to the guest bedroom across the hall was open. The teen who was himself stood in the door holding a knife dripping blood. He rushed up to see if the knife was the same one in the bathroom and found himself slipping into the teen. He looked up from the knife in his hand and saw his Aunt's body on the bed. At fifteen he had finally killed her. After five years of being told he was a criminal like his Father, that he shouldn't have been born, that he should have died instead of his sweet baby sister, that he would wind up dead just like his parents and come to no good in a violent manner, that he didn't deserve any of the money from his Father's business, he didn't deserve any of the money from selling the frog pond property, he finally broke. He could feel the blackout rage still upon him. The adrenaline enriched anger pulsing through his throbbing head, down his swollen hands where veins stood out against the streaks of blood. She wasn't locking him up into any military academy, no matter what the judge had said she could do. The money she had waved at him telling him with a thin smile how much it cost and how his precious frog pond was going to help pay for the next three years of his imprisonment, was strewn all over the floor. At the first knife thrust she had accused him of killing her dog. He never bothered to answer her.

He tried to step back and with a sucking sound backed out of himself. As he stood there breathing heavily with the new memory surging through his head, the teen moved forward and began to pick up all the money. With a horrible fascination, he watched the teen pile all the money on top of his Aunt before wrapping his Aunt and the money up in the blanket. The cops had grilled him over and over when they found out his Aunt was missing. They kept asking him where the money she took out of the family account was. He didn't know what to tell them at the time. They finally concluded his Aunt had run off with the large sum of money. He never mentioned the blood stains he found on his shoes. Part of him was terrified when he first noticed them, the rest of him didn't seem surprised at all. He spent all night scrubbing his shoes and searching the house for any other blood stains, any other clues. He never found any.

The teen was carrying his Aunt down the hall to the kitchen. The dog was still dead, still on the table. The door to the basement was open and the teen took his Aunt down it. Hesitantly he followed, only remembering the killing so far. Down four steps he noticed the noises. Halfway down he caught sight of legs, activity. His head finally cleared the cement walls near the bottom. He began to count the number of people in the room who were him. Eleven.

He sat down stunned and watched the teen bury his Aunt, the money, the knife, all his clothes. He watched an older teen version of himself choking Brian, the eighteen year old who had raped his girlfriend, as he pulled him tied up out of a canvas bag. Another version of himself in his twenties was burying his boss who by the way he was dumped on the dirt floor, had a broken neck. A biker was being beaten in the far corner. The neighbor who poisoned his dog was having a container of bleach poured into his throat. The woman who wiped out his checking account and laughed at his performance in bed was over there. He looked

away from himself and her body, sick to his stomach. A hitchhiker who pulled a gun on him had a gun rammed into the gunshot hole in his chest. Over and over the bodies were being buried along with all evidence, guns, clothes, money. The council member who tried to rezone his house so a highway offshoot could come through and make the council member rich, was being buried right next to the mailman he caught assaulting the little girl down the street. The gas station owner who didn't seal the connections to his gas pumps so he had been temporarily blinded for four months was having his burnt body tucked into another canvas bag. The memories came in a jumbled rush and he looked wildly around the room as he clutched his spinning head, feeling the watch he hadn't yet let go of pressed against his temple.

Then he spotted the smallest version of himself sitting next to the gypsy. The gypsy was the only one staring straight at him. She took the young boy, who looked around ten, by the hand and carefully made her way to him.

"I didn't kill you."

"No." Her low voice was sad, her white peasant's blouse and gay skirt of reds, yellows and blues looked dim and grayish in the basement light.

"I killed all those people didn't I." His hoarse voice was hesitant as he asked her.

"Yes, you did, although the conscious you never remembered it until now."

"The watch broke." He held it out to her. She glanced at it and then grabbed it from him.

"It hasn't stopped yet. Hurry upstairs, run, RUN!!!" She physically pushed him around and gave him a shove which started him going upstairs so he wouldn't fall. Then he began to understand a little and began to run. Just as she had told him to, still holding the spinning watch.

He ran by the dead dog in the kitchen and down the hall. Taking the steps two and sometimes three at a time he went up the main stairs and into the hall of the second floor. He grabbed the top of the banister and began to turn down the hall when he saw the ten year old boy again standing in his bedroom doorway. With a cry he launched himself at the boy yelling no. This time he fell and slid into the corner of the doorway. Instead of his pregnant wife in their bed, he saw his Father on the bed beating his Mother.

For the first and only time in the ten years he lived with his parents, he spoke up and yelled at his Father.

"Leave her alone you bastard!"

"No Gerald, go away, you'll only make it worse. Please, Gerald, leave before you make him madder." His Mother turned her head to look at him out of the one eye that wasn't swollen shut. Blood came trickling out of her mouth as she pleaded with him.

With a yell of rage, his Father grabbed the paring knife yellowed with

what looked like orange pulp from off the night stand next to the bed. His Mother must have been using it down in the kitchen before she had been dragged up here. He watched stunned both as a thirty year old and a ten year old as his Father stabbed his Mother over and over and over again until the only twitching she did was from the violence of the stabs themselves. Then without a word, his Father dropped the paring knife, got off the bed, went over to the bedroom window, took down the curtain sash, stood on the stuffed chair, made a noose, tied the noose to the hook in the ceiling which used to hold a lamp, and hung himself. With sobs the boy ran away, Gerald scooted backwards and slammed the door shut. Then the gypsy was hurrying down the hall to him.

"Open the door back up. That was only a memory. Open it, quickly!"

He stood up and yanked the door open. His wife moved weakly on their bed. Blood was spreading out from between her thighs and a baby, still attached by the cord, was on her naked belly.

As he hurried over to her, he saw she was trying to speak. He bent over her and put his ear close to her mouth.

"Something went wrong." Her voice was just a thin thread. "The baby came out in less than a half an hour and I can't seem to stop bleeding. I can't feel my legs, I couldn't reach the phone...."

"...Hush, it's okay, I'm here, it'll be okay."

He ran over to the phone and dialed 911; yelled his wife was dying at the operator and rushed back to his wife, leaving the phone off the hook.

His wife was trying to speak again. He bent down over her again, noticing that the baby was still struggling weakly also.

"You have to cut the cord Gerald, get the baby breathing."

"We'll wait for the paramedics Sally, they'll be here soon."

"No, it's been too long since he came out, I don't think I'm going to make it...."

"...Don't talk like that, you'll make it and our baby will have you to love him."

She began to try to talk again and a small trickle of blood started to come out of her mouth.

"Sally, hold on. I'll cut the cord, just hold on." He looked around and saw his pocket knife in the bowl of keys, and coins on the bed stand. As he cut the cord he kept talking to his wife.

"It's a boy Sally, a big strapping boy. I hope this isn't hurting him. Here I'm trying to pat his back and get him to breath." His wife's eyes began to flutter closed and he yelled. "Sally! SALLY! Don't black out on me now." Desperate he quit tapping his son's bare bottom and gave it a good smack so he could get back to his precious wife and try to help her hold on. The baby boy opened his mouth, took a deep breath and wailed.

Sally's eyes cracked back open and she smiled. He grabbed a thin blanket off the chair next to the bed stand and wrapped up the baby.

"Look Sally, we have a son!" He held his son close to Sally, hoping she would reach out for him, wake up more. Instead she tried to speak to him again, arching her head slightly towards him. He kneeled next to her holding the wrapped up baby.

"Name him Gerald the Second. Tell him I loved him and always loved you." Her eyes closed and her mouth gaped open.

"No, no Sally, you tell him, you'll be here, you'll have to be here." He began to sob again as he had a few minutes earlier when he watched his parents die. Sally didn't move. He bowed his head but quickly brought his head back up when he realized that his baby was still crying. Standing up, he turned towards the door holding the tiny newborn, and saw the Gypsy still standing in the doorway. She now held the watch. It had finally stopped.

"I'm sorry. The watch won't work anymore. I'm so sorry."

"But you said the watch would work as long as I loved and was loved." He began to rock the baby slightly trying to quiet down his cries.

"No, I didn't. I said the watch would work as long as your love was alive. I did not anticipate this. I can do no more for you."

"The blackout rages will come back, won't they."

"Yes, only now you will probably remember them."

Silently he turned away from her, picked up the knife and moved over to sit in the rocking chair on the other side of the bed.

"You aren't going to kill the little baby, are you?" The panic in her voice was evident as she cautiously began to come into the room.

"No." He heard the sirens finally coming down the street. Getting back up out of the rocking chair, he kissed his son on his forehead and carefully placed him on the bed next to his dead wife. "It's for me." He went back to the rocking chair, sat down, and slit his throat.