

Diversions & Distractions is a collection of 13 disturbing and unsettling stories by William Boston, filled with remorse, revenge, deceit, betrayal, greed, loss, hate, regrettable decisions and unspeakable evil.

Diversions & Distractions

By William Boston

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DIVERSIONS & DISTRACTIONS



A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

WILLIAM BOSTON

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Perpetual Toddler

“Good night, buddy.” I looked down at my son, already near sleep in his bed, and forced a smile. I stroked his hair, struggling not to cry. “I love you.”

“Love you.” He smiled at his mother standing behind me and reached out his arms.

I bent in for a hug and tried to kiss him. He turned his head, and I kissed his cheek. Only four...and he no longer likes it. I understood. It usually didn't bother me, but that night it did. I kissed his cheek anyway, without complaint. “Love you, champ.” I tussled his hair one last time. Or at least, I thought it would be the last. “Good night, buddy.”

“Night.” He smiled back at me, but he was already looking at his mom. He knew the routine.

She approached the bed and leaned down to him, arms outstretched. “Good night, my little munchkin.” She hugged him, a little longer than usual it seemed. “Mommy loves you.”

“Love you.” He smiled and reached for one more hug.

She gave it to him. “Did you have a nice birthday?”

I wiped a tear from my eye and watched as my son nodded, unaware he would never have another one.

“Yeah.” He yawned. “Nemo.”

“You're tired, little munchkin.” My wife stroked his cheek. “Get some sleep. You had a big day.”

“Kay.” He rolled over and brought his sippy cup to his mouth and hugged his blanket closer to his chest.

My wife left the room, touching me briefly on the shoulder. I saw a tear slide down her cheek and she wiped it away. “I'm gonna take a shower,” she whispered.

I nodded back at her and followed her out of the room. I stayed in the hall, just outside his door, watching her walk away to the other end of the house, to our room. Once she closed the bedroom door, I leaned against the wall outside my son's room and wiped my eyes. I could hear the slurps from his sippy cup grow fainter and fainter. I closed my eyes and whispered, “I love you, Ricky.”

I stayed there, silently mourning, until I began to hear snores instead of slurps.

Once I did, I rubbed my eyes dry and walked back to our bedroom.

She was already in the shower when I got there. She left the bathroom door open a bit and I could hear the water running.

I walked in quietly, feeling the steam in the air, and leaned against the sink. She was singing. It was a song I had not heard in several years. But it sounded different coming from her that night. Slower and more melancholy than intended.

“I’m not sure I like this anymore.” I interrupted the chorus.

She stopped singing. “I know,” she said, “but there’s really nothing else we can do.”

“Why not? Why not stop this?”

“You remember what they said. This is how it works. Everyone feels this way when it’s time.”

“So then, he just dies again, huh? Again?” I bit my lip and tried not to cry. “And there’s nothing we can do about it?”

“I don’t think that’s up to us.”

“This isn’t right.” I watched her silhouette through the glass of the shower. She was applying conditioner to her hair. “And you fucking know it.”

“Why are you getting mad?”

“Damn it Ellen, why aren’t you mad?” I hit the sink with the palm of my hand and felt pain shoot through my arm. At least it was a relief from the sorrow. “That boy in the room is going to be dead tomorrow morning. How can you be so cavalier about all of this?”

“I’m not being cavalier.” She paused while she rinsed her hair. “I’m just not being dramatic, is all.”

“I don’t think I’m being dramatic.”

“Really?” She turned off the water. “Then what would you call it? How many times have we been through this?”

“That isn’t the point.”

“How many times?” She grabbed the towel over the shower door.

“This is the third.” I sighed. “You know that just as much as I do.”

“And you know this is what happens.” She stepped out of the shower, drying her body. “We both just have different ways of dealing with it.”

“I’m tired of dealing with it.”

“So...what then?” She wrapped the towel in her hair and put on a robe. “We stop? No more Ricky? No more son at all?”

I didn’t say anything.

“I’m not doing that. I need this. I need him. Do you really just want to cancel everything and get rid of what little we have left of our son?”

“I’m not saying that. You know I love that boy.”

“Then enjoy the two years we have with him.”

“It’s 26 months.” I felt myself beginning to cry and didn’t want her to see that. “He comes here at a year and ten months. He dies at four. That’s 26 months.”

“I know.” She nodded and began brushing her hair. “I know this, Ted. You don’t have to remind me.”

“So, it bothers you too?”

“Of course, it does.” She continued brushing her hair.

“It sure as hell doesn’t seem like it with the brushing and the singing.”

She slammed her brush on the sink. “What would you have me do?”

“I don’t know.” I shrugged my shoulders and huffed. “Maybe give a shit about what’s about to happen?”

“You don’t think I do?” She began crying. “Do you think you have a monopoly on grief? I’ve just been trying to hide it. I’ve been trying to hide it all day, so our little munchkin can have a good day. And I think I’ve been doing a really damn good job of it, thank you.”

“Okay. You’re right.” I wiped a tear from my eye. “I’m sorry.”

“Jesus, Ted.” She placed her hand on mine. “Don’t you think I feel as bad as you? Or even worse?”

“I just heard you singing is all. It made me feel like you didn’t care.”

“You heard that?” She paused and squeezed my hand. “I’m sorry. I thought I was being quiet.”

“You were. But I still heard it.” I sighed. “It just seemed...I don’t know...wrong.”

“Sorry.” She rubbed my hand. “I was just thinking about him, and I just started singing his favorite song.”

“No, you were singing that old song from like a decade ago. That one about turning back time.”

“Yeah.” She frowned and dropped her hand by her side. “That one.”

I shook my head and pointed to the other side of the house. “He’s never heard that song.”

“I wasn’t talking about him.” She sobbed as tears rolled down her cheeks. “I was talking about Ricky. Our Ricky.”

“Oh.” *How did I forget that? He did love that song. It was so funny hearing him sing along with it...or trying to, at least.* I rubbed my eyes. “I forgot about that.”

She nodded. “It’s been a long time.”

“It has.” I nodded. “Almost seven years.” *And three replacements.*

“78 months.” She wiped her eyes and turned back to the mirror. “But I have to get ready for bed. It’s going to be a long day tomorrow.”

She picked up the brush and returned to her hair.

“Isn’t there some way we can stop this from happening?”

“Ted, we’ve been over this.”

“But I love him so much.” I began to sob again.

“Which is why there’s this, or there’s no Ricky.” She bit her lip as she ran the brush through her hair. Another tear spilt from her eye. “No Ricky at all.”

“But I’m tired of losing him.”

“I’m sorry.” She put down the brush and hugged me. “I’m so sorry I did this to us.”

Ricky Collins was born on June 2, 2014.

He died on April 3, 2016.

It was a traffic accident. A fairly minor one, really. But he was a precocious and curious child, who had already learned how to get out of his car seat. He had done this again on the morning of April 3rd, so many years ago, and with a mischievous grin on his face, showed his mother – who happened to be driving the car.

While his mother was distracted, telling him to get back into his car seat, her vehicle slowly careened into the other lane, hitting a passing pickup truck. The truck struck the passenger side front fender at about 55 miles per hour. Airbags in the car exploded in a fury of noise and power, including the ones in the back seat.

The car spun uncontrollably in traffic and was struck again from the rear by a small Honda Civic that may or may not have been tailgating.

Ellen did her best to keep the car under control, but it seemed to her she was just at the mercy of physics and other drivers. She stomped the brakes, held the wheel steady, and despite the shock and panic she felt – and the airbags obscuring her vision – managed to bring the car to a stop without flipping or doing any more damage.

Once the car finally came to a stop, Ellen was aware of two things.

Her head was bleeding.

And she did not hear her son.

“Ricky?” She wiped the blood from her brow and undid her seatbelt, fretting every passing moment he didn’t respond. “Ricky!?”

She scrambled to the back seat, scurrying over the center console and semi-inflated air bags. “Ricky?” She found him lying face down on the floor

behind the passenger seat, his small legs bent upward behind him, resting on the seat. "You're okay."

"You're okay." It was all she could say as she picked him up and brought his limp body to her chest. "You're okay. You're okay."

She rocked him in her arms in the backseat, holding him close to her, afraid to do anything. "You're okay." She wiped her hands through his hair, hoping for some response, and saw the blood coming from his ears. She began to cry and hugged him tighter.

"You're okay." She said it over and over again through her tears, each time sounding more and more like a prayer.

The paramedics arrived quickly and did everything they could possibly do, but he was pronounced dead before even reaching the hospital.

The following days were filled with misery.

Finding a mortuary. Planning a funeral. The decision to bury instead of cremation. Purchasing a coffin and a cemetery plot. Picking out a headstone. Seeing his name engraved on it. Every step being more and more gut wrenchingly painful than the last.

Ellen was near comatose with grief and guilt through the entire process. I can't say I was much better. Most of the questions asked of us were answered with quiet whispers or wounded shrugs.

It was the day before the burial, outside Wilson's Funeral Home, when we were met with another horrible decision.

We were walking to the car, shuffling our feet slowly along a sidewalk paved through a garden, back to the parking lot and away from our deceased son. It would have been the last time we saw Ricky before he was lowered into the earth.

Would have been.

I saw him as we approached our car. He was sitting on a bench in the garden, legs crossed, looking down at the cell phone in his hands. He was a younger man, probably in his late twenties. He was dressed in a dark gray suit and wore a black fedora over his short brown hair. He glanced up at us as we neared and slowly stood.

"Mr. and Mrs. Collins?"

I stopped. I could feel Ellen pulling me wearily with the arm that was tucked into mine. She just wanted to go. So did I, but still I stopped. "Yes?"

"My condolences for your loss." He took off his hat and held it to his chest. "Sincerely."

“Thank you.” Just saying it made me feel tired. I was so sick of that word. *Condolences*. What did anyone know that said such things? As if one word was supposed to relieve us of the utter grief and hopelessness that now filled our miserable lives. And he probably only wore that damn hat so he could take it off and show his so-called *sincerity*. “Do I know you?”

“No sir.” He slid his cellphone into his suit pocket and gestured to the bench. “But if you would sit with me for a couple of minutes, I might be able to offer you something more than a simple and useless condolence.”

“My wife and I aren’t really in the mood for company.”

“Of course, you’re not.” He gestured again to the bench and smiled. “I assure you...I won’t take too much of your time.”

“What’s this about, mister...” Ellen tugged again at my arm, a little stronger this time.

“Barnes. Edward Barnes.” He took a business card from his shirt pocket and extended it to me. “I work for a company called Geno-Tech.”

I took the business card from his hand, much to Ellen’s nudging disapproval, and stared down at it. It gave no indication of what they did or sold. It simply read:

Geno-Tech
Providing comfort to grieving parents since 2012

Edward Barnes
District Sales Representative

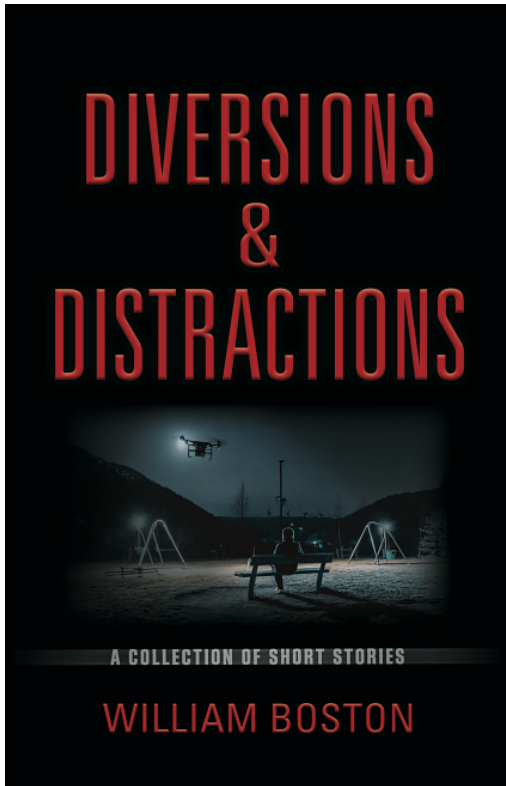
“Whatever you’re selling, I’m not interested.” I thought about handing the card back to him, but Ellen tugged at my arm again, and it was easier to just put it in my pocket.

“And now really isn’t the most appropriate of times for solicitations.” Ellen whispered and shook her head by my side.

“Trust me, I know.” He nodded. “And I’m sorry for the intrusion on your privacy. Especially during this time of mourning. But unfortunately, tomorrow will be too late.”

“Too late?” I still felt my wife tugging at my arm. “Too late for what?”

He smiled and gestured once more to the bench. “To have your son back.”



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