

# EFFORT

*by* Eric Boyd

Nearly a week went by before I saw Daniel, my father. He never wrote, never got on the phone when my mother and I spoke; when Xmas came, he didn't even sign his own name on the card.

I walked up and knocked on the door. From outside, it looked abandoned. We lived at the top of a dead end hill. The grass was high and brown, the bricks in the driveway were crooked and caved in. Weeds everywhere. The winter was mild; rotten crabapples, half-frozen, lined the end of the road. This was my house.

My mother answered the door. "Fredrick, how are you?"

"Not too bad."

She hugged me. I felt my clothes, several sizes too large now, fold and wrap around me.

"Daniel's taking a crap, I think. Give 'em a minute."

"Okay."

"HEY DANIEL," she shouted. "FREDERICK'S HERE."

"M'alight," I heard, muffled through the bathroom door.

I waited. The living room was changed. It looked clean. Daniel allowed himself to be laid off just before I went away; he'd probably learned how to tidy things up. With nothing else to do, OCD can come on strong. I knew how that was.

"We have pictures from our LA trip," my mother said. "You wanna see?"

"Sure."

"You know, I really wish you could have went," she paused. "I mean, we both did."

"That's fine, really. How did you win the trip, anyway?"

"Daniel called in to DVE and he won two tickets to Ozzfest. He's not really into that kind of stuff, but y'know, he does love Ozzy. So after he won that, they told him that each of the winners of the Ozzfest tickets—because they did a drawing every day that week—they'd have a chance at winning a trip to see Ozzy at the Hard Rock in LA. It was a one-in-five shot, I guess. Daniel didn't go

the station to pick up his tickets for a while, and when he finally did, they told him he won the trip, too.”

“Lucky.”

My mother handed me the pictures. I looked them over. Fun.

“Yeah he always wins that stuff,” she continued with a chuckle. “When he still worked, he'd just turn on the radio and call; they only let you win once a month, so sometimes he'd just call to see if he could win, then he'd hang up.”

I nodded, not knowing what to say.

“He even yelled at me because, now, we just have the cellphones, and he's really convinced that landlines get through to the station easier.”

“That's a lot of effort,” I said.

My mother's eyes shifted. She saw what I was getting at. “Well, everyone handles things differently.”

“Real differently.”

“What did you want from him?”

“Even one visit in nine months would have been okay. Just one. He doesn't like me and I don't like him, but he could have tried. Hell, if he wouldn't have kicked me out, none of this would have happened. None of this bull...”

I heard a flush. The door opened and I saw Daniel come out, wiping his hands on his jeans.

We scanned each other a while. He was fatter and I was thinner. He'd gotten a little older and I'd gotten much. Time was a sonofabitch.

He said, “Hey.”

“Hey.”

“You walk here?”

“Yeah.”

“How's your girl?”

“Good.”

“Find a job?”

What a fucking question, I thought. “No,” I said. “How about you?”

After a moment he said, "No. I worked long enough. Good time to take a break."

"Guess so."

"She show you the pictures?"

"Yes she did."

"We had a good time. It was funny because it only lasted a day. We flew to LA, saw Ozzy—actually I don't remember too much of the show; I got drunk and ended up fighting some fat fucker—and after that we came back. I'd see people, they'd say, 'How was your weekend?' and I'd be like, 'Good, I flew to LA and saw Ozzy Osbourne.' They'd tell me I was full of it and I'd just laugh. It was nice. It's nice to get away from this fucking shitty world sometimes."

I said, "Not all the time."

Daniel pretended he didn't hear me. "So you had enough money and everything, right? I gave her money when I could," he thumbed toward my mother. "You know, for the, uh.."

"Commissary," I said. "That's the word you're looking for. Commissary. It's where I got my extra food and clothes. To live."

Daniel swallowed. My mother began to cry; she wiped her eyes, darted into the bedroom, shuffled around, and came out with a basket of dirty clothes. She went into the kitchen and down to the basement.

We looked at each other. There were no words. Maybe I foolish to think there were, ever had been. I guess I would have appreciated *something* though. He knew that, too.

"Look, I couldn't do it," Daniel finally said. His eyes flickered and focused on the wall just behind me. "I couldn't see you like that. I just fucking couldn't, okay? I wanted to, and a few times I told your mum to wait for me to meet her and we'd both visit you...but I never did. I couldn't."

I looked down at the floor and felt my eyes water; all that time I'd spent becoming hard and dead vanished briefly. The words I wanted I got and now I had nothing to do with them. I blinked fast. Daniel stepped toward me, then stood still. I could hear the sound of the clothes being tossed into the washing machine downstairs. I

looked at Daniel; he reached his arms out, but stopped and nearly winced; he put one arm down and settled on letting the other pat my back. His hand gripped my shoulder for a moment. It was more than I'd expected. He let go.

“Alright, I'm going to the recycle place in Braddock, drop off some cans. I don't have any money.”

“Okay.”

He walked out the door, leaving it open behind him.

