

Tortoise

by Hobie Anthony

Seven black and orange Tortoise-shell kittens nursed in a crate the day Sue returned from rehab, to her parent's Atlanta home. Ten days of detox followed by thirty days of intensive therapy to cure ten years of crack, booze, H, and godknowswhat. The kittens had opened their eyes that very day and were a crawling, squirming mass swarming their mother's teats. Sugar, their mother, purred and purred when Sue scratched her behind the ear.

"New life," Sue said, beaming at her parents. "Sorta like me, right?"

Sue looked for a job all that week. She got a job working at Target in the grocery department and within a month was sleeping with a guy in electronics.

"He goes to church and everything, he says my problem is that I didn't embrace the Lord."

She moved in with the guy the first week of her second month out of rehab. She didn't want to be a burden on her parents, she said; she had a grip on staying sober, she said; she had this thing licked, she said. She was in love for the first time in her life. She would never mess that up.

"Don't worry, Papa," is what she'd said.

The kittens weaned and began scampering around the house. Her father's mini daschund loved the new playmates and chased them around the house at breakneck speed, they ran under sofas and hid behind ottomans. Sugar was nowhere to be found for days at a time.

Sue started hanging around the pharmacy at work and started carrying hand sanitizer in her purse. She got into a fight with her boyfriend and threw a skillet at him. He took her to see their preacher who said the devil was still in her. She prayed with her boyfriend and did what he said when he figured out what the hand sanitizer was for, that it contained ethyl alcohol. She stopped carrying it in her purse.

She wasn't sure how she got there, but Sue thought it was okay that day to go driving through Atlanta's Old 4th Ward. Reminisce. She saw the same old faces on the streets. Girls selling it, boys selling it. Stop the car for an old friend, give a ride to the Trap. In the Trap, just a taste, just one more, just loan the car, sell the watch, just, just, just... more and never enough...

Her parents put an ad in the church bulletin and found homes for all of the kittens, except for the runt, whose eyes sat like black pearls in a sea of orange.

