

Triggering Tina

by David Allen Hampton

The insistent buzzing failed to accomplish its purpose; however, the faint scream *answer the damned doorbell* from a distant part of the house jettisoned Tina's impressive bulk from the low spot on the couch to the front door. She peeked through a dusty sidelight to discover her friend Martha on the front porch jabbing at a cracked button that no longer emitted light, but made up for it in noise. Tina opened the door and Martha pushed through and deposited herself on a faded velour easy chair in the living room. "About time," she griped.

As Tina eased back into the crater in the middle of the couch Martha noticed purple mottling around her left eye. "Jeez Tina! Not again? When are you going to have that bastard arrested?"

Tina raised a hand self-consciously to her face, lowered her head and mumbled, "He apologized."

"He apologizes every time he knocks the crap outta you!"

Tina's face worked feebly to organize a defiant attitude as she turned to face Martha. "It's different this time."

"It's always different, damn it!"

"This time I told Arnie after he smacked me that I was leavin' him. He begged me to stay, said he deserves at least one last shot at makin' things right. He said he loved me and wouldn't hit me no more."

"Of course he would say that. You're the only one with a job to support his Harley habit," Martha smirked. A reflective glint under a pillow on the couch caught her eye and she pointed a finger. "What's that?"

"What's what?"

Martha moved to the couch and raised the pillow revealing a shiny revolver underneath. "What the...?" She picked up the gun and resumed her position on the easy chair as she drilled a silent question at Tina with her beady eyes.

"No, I wasn't gonna off myself," Tina said dismissively.

"Then what the hell were you doing with it?"

"Loadin' it."

Martha expertly flipped open the cylinder of the 38 special. "There's only one bullet in here, one shot." She looked accusingly at Tina as she carefully closed the cylinder. "You weren't gonna do that Russian roulette thing were you?"

Tina leaned over, grabbed the pistol and put it back by the pillow. "Okay, okay, it crossed my mind for a minute, but I decided not to. Probably miss my head anyway," she grouched.

"You gotta do something about this, honey," Martha pleaded. "Next time I may not get here in time."

"But, he's so sweet when he apologizes. I really love him," Tina moaned.

"Tina! You caught him in bed with your sister at Christmas for shit sakes," Martha hissed.

"Gina's a bitch," Tina responded angrily. "She always took my toys when we were growing up. Arnie didn't stand a chance against her. Wasn't his fault."

"He gave you the crabs three times!"

"He got 'em from the showers at the gym. He said he was gonna move his membership to keep it from happening again," Tina said defensively.

"Arnie murdered your cat last week!"

"I told Bitsy to stay away from his bike. Arnie said he *accidentally* dropped the carburetor on his head."

"He smashed your brand new big screen with a beer bottle," Martha challenged.

"Well, the Chiefs *did* blow it. Arnie had fifty bucks on that game. Pissed me off too!"

"He knocked your front tooth out last year, remember?"

Tina smiled like a Cheshire cat and pointed to her incisors. "That tooth was crooked you know. See how much better this false one looks?"

Martha shook her head in frustration as she counted off incidents on her fingers. "C'mon Tina! You miscarried right after you guys got married when he kicked you in the gut."

"He didn't mean to kick me that hard. I burned his dinner you know, so he had a good reason. Didn't really wanna have kids anyhow," Tina muttered.

"You told me last month he hocked that ring your mama left you after she passed on."

Tina shook her head condescendingly. "Martha, Martha, you need to understand. Arnie has been bustin' his butt for over a year tryin' to find a job where he can work in an office instead of outside in the weather. He can't find nobody who will hire him even though he's a really smart guy. Kinda like that fella on Oprah who had the same problem. His esteem as a male has been screwed up. He needed the money for a new custom paint job for the Fat Boy so he could stand out at the bike rallies. Mama would have approved...I just know it."

Martha thrust her arms up in exasperation. "Jeez Louise Tina! How long are you gonna defend that prick? What about your daffodils?"

Tina turned to Martha with a puzzled expression. "What *about* my daffodils?"

“Well after all, you worked so hard to plant those bulbs by the driveway last fall I thought you'd be concerned about them since they had just started blooming.”

Tina's face lit up like a neon sign as she attempted to rise from the couch. "I gotta go see, I been waiting like forever for 'em to bloom."

"Sit down girl, you can't."

"Whadya mean I can't?" Tina complained as she plopped back down.

"I thought you knew," Martha replied. "Arnie mowed 'em down with his zero-turn yesterday."

"Arnie mowed down my flowers?"

"Sorry girlfriend."

Tina's face screwed up in abject despair. "Arnie mowed down my daffies?"

Martha nodded solemnly in affirmation. But then, the wail from Tina took her by surprise and she jerked back in the chair. Tina leaped to her feet—as best she could—and stormed out of the room. Martha murmured to herself *what now?* She stood with the intention of going after Tina when she heard what sounded like a muffled explosion from the other end of the house. Martha rushed toward the sound and met Tina entering the kitchen from the garage.

"What happened?" Martha asked breathlessly.

Tina calmly laid the 38 on the kitchen counter and smiled at her friend. "Arnie was right all along."

"What? What do you mean?"

"He really did deserve that one last shot.”