

THE MAYOR AND HIS GIRLFRIEND
By Paul Lambrecht

Before the men in white coats wielding butterfly nets came for the mayor, he had an argument with his girlfriend. He was done, he was through, fed up.

He had shared with her a secret, and she had blabbed it to everyone. She might as well have taken out a full page ad in the Hurricane Alley Herald Tribune. What was secret and what was not was blurred in that zone of trust which she had just thrust open like the doors of a storm

cellar after a twister. And there in the open air, surrounded by fluttering butterflies, tweeting birds, and beamed on by the disinfecting rays of the sun, basked the Mayor's secret.

The Mayor's girlfriend rigidly denied all wrong-doing. "No comment," she said, trying to get out ahead of the gossip rags. "I honestly don't know what he's so upset about."

"Look," she said, grabbing the young man by his necktie. He was afraid she'd snap his neck and watch him run around like a dead chicken. "He's obviously very sensitive."

She let go of his tie, and clammed up again. There, she'd gone and said too much again.

The reporter smiled. He had his story.

The Mayor's secret revolved around an inconvenient state of affairs which might befall any Midwestern politician with firm ties to the land, fields, crops, etc. He set down the phone in its cradle. He and his girlfriend were going to try and work this out later over dinner at the *Sizzler*.

He continued scrawling in his loose spidery script a letter to one of his constituents. "Madam..." it began. "I read with great interest your opinion on teaching sex ed in

schools. It would be very hard for a grandmother with the responsibility of raising her grand-daughter to put the genie back in the bottle, as you mentioned. I am in agreement to, that it would take a pervert from Iowa City to broach this topic with pre-teens. On a quite separate note, I am very excited to try this recipe for chocolate coconut macaroons you sent. I'm sure they turned out very well. Unfortunately your sample melted in the envelope rendering much of your letter and recipe unreadable. Perhaps I can track down the *Reader's Digest* you got it from in the library..."

This would not be possible. Mrs. Pubert had ripped the recipe from the library's communal copy of the *Digest* that month.

The phone rang again as the Mayor signed his spidery name. "Yes," he said, then softer, in a desperate sigh, "What?"

The Mayor's girlfriend was cooing into the phone now. She was feeling quite contrite.

"Yes, don't worry, I'm not mad. I'm not mad. I'm not mad," he said in a crescendo of seeming madness.

"All right, bye," she said all sweetness and light.

"I fell for it," thought the Mayor. "Now I'm really mad."

He brought out the yellow legal pad which he used for the following purpose. Drafting letters to imaginary constituents. The legality of the pad added credibility to the diffuse pursuit. The Mayor scratched his scalp with the lidded end of the pen.

"Dearest Madam..." he began. "I beg a thousand pardons. It has been long since I wrote to you, but only a blink of the eye since I yearned for you."

He paused again, flummoxed and ashamed by the forbidden joy he found in erotic apostrophe.

"I wept myself when I saw how your tears had blotted out the letters you wrote when you declared your unending love for me..."

He nodded with satisfaction at this last. Now that he had reopened her fresh wounds, it was time to rub medicine in them.

"My love, we will be together soon. Until then, know that I ache for you. And please believe that *she* means nothing to me. I would not care even if she was dead..."

He folded the letter neatly twice, deposited it into a letter affixed with a pre-made label for an undeliverable address, and ran it through the shredder.

He now stood from his desk chair and grabbed his coat, hat, and umbrella from the cloak-stand. Outside, as he

walked from the Town Hall along the sidewalks to the *Sizzler* steakhouse, he passed many of his constituents. They greeted him with friendly nods and strained smiles. The Mayor scowled. They must know his secret.

The wooden double doors of the entrance to the *Sizzler* had portholes in them. The décor must have been part of a kit. It would have been hard to pick up some of these nautical items in any antique store which Iowa had to offer. He sat in their usual table under the glistening plastic marlin.

His girlfriend arrived with her trademark punctuality.

"Hi, hon," she said.

Damned if he knew what made her tick. What made any of them tick. Perhaps they didn't even tick. Maybe they were more like a digital watch, contorting their various segments into a dead-accurate semblance of the time. The Mayor ticked. He was flippin' ticked off.

"Hey," he said.

She looked up from her menu quizzically. Why'd she even look at the stupid menu? They both knew she was getting a grilled salmon salad and a Diet Coke.

"Are you still mad?" she asked in a throaty whisper, more mouthing the words so no one around them would hear.

Deference to his inarguable celebrity and obvious prominence in public, no doubt.

He rustled his head back and forth in denial. "Fine, fine," he said, hoping that would be the end of that.

"Fine," she said, hoping that would be the end of the end of that.

His secret which she had spilled dangled over them like a veritable marlin tusk. He looked deeply into her always slightly drugged eyes. She cleared a strand of hair from her forehead and tried to meet his gaze. She found his mayoral intensity often to be a tad unnerving. Her eyes bulged defensively.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said.

Her shoulders drooped in exasperation. His body language seemed to be indicating that this arrangement was no longer working.

"Don't you love me anymore?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said honestly.

"Because I told your fucking secret?"

"Look, it was my fucking secret. Who said you could tell anyone?"

He was angry now. She was looking around uncomfortably. What could she do? He was heaping great

big piles of nuts on their usual meager diet of trail mix. She turned on him harshly and tried to shoosh him.

"Look, if you never want to see me again, that's fine. Just don't make a scene. Or else you'll never see me again."

He raised his voice, and his throat towards the ceiling, broadcasting off the marlin like a microphone.

"How could I never see you again? This town has 700 people. I should know, I'm the mayor."

This caused an isolated blip of applause from a table across the dining area. The Mayor recognized this lone applauder as Tim the Taxidermist. He was sitting under a stuffed tuna. The Mayor assumed Tim was applauding him and not his own handiwork on the fish hovering above him.

"Run again, 2010," shouted Tim.

The Mayor flashed him a thumbs-up. His girlfriend was not impressed. She was upset. She didn't know whether to storm out, stay and get dumped, or just pout and hope for the best. It was a cutting and offensive pout though. She looked as if she'd been the one who was completely and devastatingly wronged.

That was it, thought the Mayor.

He bent over the table to her. "Tell me a secret of yours, then," he said.

At that moment, the waitress showed up with their habitual coconut shrimp appetizer. She gathered up their menus without asking them what they wanted. The Mayor's girlfriend thanked her for the Diet Coke.

She leaned her head over to him now.

"What secret?" she said.

"I don't know. Something embarrassing," he said.

She smiled. Check and mate.

"Well, you know those letters you used to write to me when we started dating?"

The Mayor nodded.

"Well, my ex-husband opened them up and read them before I did."

"And?"

"And he came up with a name for you."

"Yeah?" asked the Mayor, beadlets of sweat bubbling to the surface of his brow. Dread.

"Pencil-dick."

The Mayor breathed a sigh of relief, which caught his girlfriend off guard.

"Pencil-dick?" he asked. "What, because I like to write letters to my female constituents? Guilty as charged."

His girlfriend rolled her eyes.

"We read through those letters and laughed at you."

The Mayor remembered Donald. He'd moved to Idaho and remarried and had a couple kids. He looked at his girlfriend. She seemed on the verge of tears.

He measured out his next statement carefully. He pretended that he was dictating a letter to someone who may or may not be real. Someone to the left of and behind his girlfriend's moist dewy eyes.

He felt as if he had something far more delicate than a pen in his hand, though. It was like a vividly painted eggshell. The half facing him was ornately inlaid with his golden secret. The half facing his girlfriend was this tissuey membrane which she nurtured close to her heart.

The Mayor sighed again. His secret actually should have been obvious to a child. Perhaps that's why his girlfriend hadn't balked at disclosing it to everyone. But she should have known better. He took a sip from the crisp bitter beer which the waitress had left for him.

"Look," he said, pantomiming laying a fragile egg between them on the table. His girlfriend nodded numbly, putty in his crazy hands.

This had to meet the threshold of legal emotional abuse, she thought, or attempted mind control or something.

The Mayor smiled quirkily. He took his pen from his shirt pocket and started scribbling on a napkin from the impartial napkin boat between them. He shoddily sketched a being with a wide forehead, looking above him at the marlin, and then over at Tim's tuna for inspiration. The being with the wide forehead had large banana shaped eyes.

"That's what they looked like, I tell you," he told his girlfriend with deadly earnestness.

She shook her head disconsolately, as if from a vast distance.

"I know, dear."

"They come in through the window. They must have perfected anti-gravity technology, dear."

"I know, dear."

"They've been probing me, too. My prostate must look like old shoe leather by now," he said.

She shook her head sadly again, now.

"I know, dear."

"They're obviously grooming me for some important liaison position, once they've made their presence known to everyone," he said under his breath, no longer caring if he was heard or not, his laser-focused eyes and gritted teeth beaming at her across the table.

She felt like the wood-paneled *Sizzler* was closing in around her. This obviously was not an elaborate practical joke.

He was in fact, at that moment, composing in his mind another letter to a constituent with an undeliverable address. This time she lived in another spoke of the Milky Way galaxy.

He realized with alarm that he had drawn much too revealing a portrait of one of his late-night suitors on the napkin. He jammed it in his pocket, and screwed up his face in a veneer of sanity. He could not conceal his anxiety to rejoin his shredder back in the office.

The waitress brought the bill out to the Mayor.

His girlfriend grabbed for it, shaking off her sorrow and disappointment like a dog coming in out of the rain. She shot him a sardonic grin.

"This one's on me," she said.

END.