

## All the King's Men

By Diane Birnbaumer

It could have been the smirk  
Or perhaps it was the stained 'No Fat Chicks' T-shirt  
Or the meth-rotted teeth in his twenty-something face  
Or the way he leaned against the door jamb,  
Picking at his cuticles,  
His lidded eyes watching the resuscitation  
\*\*

Without a doubt, it was the one too many hand-shaped bruises  
The one too many cigarette burns  
The one too many broken hymens  
The one too many damaged children  
The one to many who had crossed my path  
\*\*

It was definitely futile  
The infant's misshapen head told us so  
The occiput flattened like a deflated volleyball  
The skull like a shattered light bulb encased in skin  
Humpty Dumpty, never to be put back together again  
\*\*

The mother, keening, slid along the wall, becoming a puddle on the floor  
Her eyes riveted to the tiny, still form on the gurney  
Kept at a distance by law – it was now a coroner's case  
\*\*

And there, as he stood next to her, on the boyfriend's face: that smirk  
He shrugged at our stares  
Muttered something about a fall off a changing table  
And with that, I broke  
\*\*

I twisted his smelly T-shirt in my fist  
I slammed his body against the wall  
I crushed his trachea in my grip  
I watched his eyes bulge and his lips turn the color of slate  
\*\*

I did none of those things  
I blinked once, then twice  
I removed my gloves and tugged off my yellow gown  
I walked to the woman and that man  
I offered them my condolences  
I introduced them to the social worker  
Who led them to the family room  
I called the police and the coroner  
And then I died a little more

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**Bio: bold face – Times New Roman 10pt**

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