

“You mean, Iolanda’s kid could still be alive?”

“I don’t know about that.” Wicksley signaled the bartender for another Negra Modelo. “But this is the first time I’ve heard you obsessed with someone other than yourself.”

“Asshole!” Arlo had to laugh. He ordered another for himself.

Wicksley smirked and stared absently across the bar. “Did you ever think that maybe the Flying Dutchman needed to discover ‘true love’ in more than one sense?”

“I don’t think I’m Iolanda’s ‘true love,’ Wicksley.”

“That doesn’t matter. The Dutchman breaks his curse by learning how to *love truly, rapture, risks, and all*. That’s the ‘true love’ meant by the legend.”

Arlo took a swig. “Richard Wagner meets Carl Jung meets Erica Jong. You’ve read too much Joseph Campbell.”

Wicksley ignored the jibe. “Without that ability, he continues to struggle endlessly through blinding storms of willful ego.”

“Thank you, Father Wicksley. Have you taken up the cloth again?” Arlo put his hands together prayerfully.

“Write her a letter.” Wicksley banged down his beer bottle, opened a bar napkin, and spread it out and slid it over to Arlo.

“To Iolanda? Forget it. She won’t even answer a text message.”

“No. To the Tooth Fairy.” Wicksley slid a ballpoint pen from his shirt pocket and clicked it in and out rapidly under Arlo’s nose. “I bet you never thought of writing her a real, low-tech pen-and-paper note delivered by the U.S. Postal Service. It’s romantic, pal.”

“On a Spec’s bar napkin?”

“Why not? If you don’t do it right here and now, you’ll chicken out. I know you.” Wicksley waved the bartender over and asked if he could find them an envelope. The bartender shook his head. A tall, slouchy, stubble-bearded guy scooted over several empty stools, pulled a square white envelope from his jacket, and handed it to Arlo. There was a jokey get-well card inside.

“Don’t you need this?” Arlo held out the card.

“It’s okay.” The man waved it away. “It was for a guy at work, but he died.”

“I got a stamp,” volunteered the bartender.

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The envelope was addressed in neat block letters, no return address. It looked like a party invitation. Iolanda opened it and gingerly removed a bar napkin from Specs. She saw that it was covered with fine ballpoint writing. After a moment, she found this amusing. It broke the ice. She guessed it was from Arlo. “If it starts to bother me, I’ll stop reading,” she told herself, unable to contain her curiosity.

She sat at her kitchen table bathed in the morning light of her south-facing window and read, then reread the note.

“Beached Dutchman, whose ship has sailed, seeks earthy harmonic friendship with enigmatic cellist he can’t do without. If you want a grounded guy who knows the score but will never crowd your music stand call me. We’ll start again, with maybe brunch, but no distracting views, because, as you should know, I only have eyes for you, dear. You know the tune. One, two, three ... Arlo.”

She turned Arlo’s saloon song this way and that on her table, with a slow smile, then felt her own tears as they dropped on the tissue one by one, blurring the ink. After several false starts, she called him, hoping the number still worked.

“Arlo. Hi,” she said softly and had to clear her throat. “It’s me. Come over. Can you, please? We’ll talk.”

Umberto Tosi’s latest book is *Ophelia Rising*, a picaresque historical novel about Shakespeare’s fair maid before and after Hamlet. Other works include *Gunning for the Holy Ghost*, *Our Own Kind*, *My Dog’s Name* and *High Treason*. He is a former editor of *San Francisco Magazine*, *City of San Francisco* and the *Los Angeles Times Sunday magazine*. He is a contributing editor to *Chicago Quarterly Review* and a blogger for Authors Electric.

ALEX KANEVSKY

Night, 2015
Oil on Wood, 18 x 18 in



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