

The Door

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ISSUE



Barney the Purple Dinosaur looked at himself in the mirror as he struggled to scrub the blood off the cardboard white walls of his top and bottom wraparound tooth. It wasn't easy. His hand was shaped like a mitten. A purple mitten. A useless purple mitten.

The toothbrush slipped out of his grasp, spinning into the sink. It clattered. This was too much for Barney.

He swayed, an American hero on the verge of toppling. The familiar imbecilic chortle, so readily available in the past, lay dormant amongst the loose strands of his vocal chords. It wouldn't come. His throat worked like the bladder of a bagpipe, yet the junky glottal babbling and clucking remained absent.

Throat as bladder; bladder

expanding; frustration building; volcano erupting. A sudden roar. Barney roared. Like a real dinosaur. He struck the mirror via clenched mitten. It barely even cracked. He crumpled in pain.

A bellow of agony. Barney thrashing wildly, running, clip-clopping berserkly through the playhouse on fur-covered clogs. His clawed toes couldn't even touch the ground, but hung suspended like the vestigial

remains of a once-useful exoskeleton; like dangling physiological participles.

Oh Barney! My Barney!

Och! Mein Beastic! What ails thee? What event has tortured thy soul? Whence and wherefore?

It came back to him in a flash — a flashback, so to speak. It had been a normal day on the *Barney & Friends* set. Everything was true and good; all "I love you; you love me."

Barney had just told his racially blended television kids that "sometimes being in the dark is fun" and that "most shadows can't hurt us." He omitted to mention the other shadows — the ones that can hurt us very badly — the ones inside. Perhaps he didn't know about them ... or believe in them.

Darkness. Shadow. Somehow the images lit the fuse of a long-dormant powder keg of primal instinct within Barney. It was the old bloodlust. Rich, red, dark.

The fuse burned jerkily, throwing off sparks, and Barney jerked with it.

Barney Agonistes

by Darrel Spent

"Barney?" the kids said. They had never seen Barney act goofy in this particular manner before. "We love you — do you love us?"

"Oh, yes," said Barney, chortling, "but with a little salt, perhaps."

"Wha-a-at?" said the kids, somewhat unsure of their spiritual mentor at this juncture.

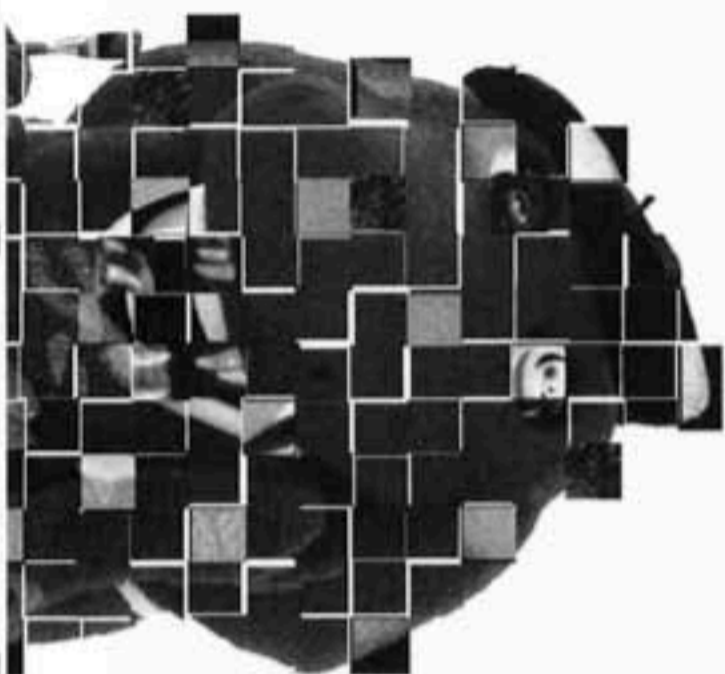
Barney knew he had to get away. He had to save the children from his

original nature; to save them from a severe pasteboard gumming from the fleshy-headed jaws of a seven-foot synthetic saurian polymorph.

No longer was it "I love you; you love me" sung to the tune of "This Old Man," but rather, "I love you, I eat you; your tender limbs I long to chew."

"Barney — where are you going?" the children asked politely, as he had taught them. But Barney's eyes were red as he backed away.

"I should tell you that giant New Age reptiles aren't always the most harmless playmates, kids," he said. He exited into the adjacent studio where a competing kids' show was being taped.



Unbeknownst to himself, feelings had been building within him for some time against the lead character of this rival televisual offering.

Barney sensed prey. He turned; he saw; he pounced — well, a sort of stumbling-forward pounce.

A brief struggle ensued; a glimpse of snowy curls against the vast, purple bulk.

"—but whoiy—?" An irritating voice muffled by predatory foam was briefly heard.

Then silence.

Everyone stared, speechless, at Barney. A tableau of horror; there was no denying the truth.

Barney had eaten Lamb Chop.
He fled.

"What have I done?" thought Barney. His fit was over. For the moment, the bloodlust was gone. He paced. "Poor Lamb Chop ..." he murmured.

He was sickened by what he had done; sickened by the evil within; sickened by the Lamb Chop within. He moaned.

His world — the cardboard world of kids' television with its trite sayings and lack of moral absolutes — filled him with revulsion and self-loathing. Oh, the empty, meaningless streams of words he had spewed! "Oh!" and "Oh!" again! "Ugh!" as well!

But perhaps escape was still possible. He could flee from his world; flee from himself; flee from the law.

He ran to nature. The forest embraced him. He threw himself to the ground, cleaving to Mother

for days, looking around, wondering. Barney wondered as he wandered.

"God?" he said. "God?" God seemed so close. And then God *did* speak to him in the way He does to all those who seek Him.

"Barney?" God said. "Repent!"

"Yes, Lord."

"Barney," God said, "you are not a forest-dweller."

"No, Lord."

"Barney?" God said. "Go!"

"Yes, Lord."

It had become obvious to Barney that he was not fit to survive in that environment. His mittens could not grasp. His teeth could not rip neither could they tear. He had no speed and got no respect from the woodland creatures. A brief and hideous mauling by a black bear cub only proved to underscore the point.

Barney's eyes were red as he backed away. "I should tell you that giant New Age reptiles aren't always the most harmless playmates, kids," he said.

Nature in a fit of Dostoyevskian passion, seeking to reunite with the natural world. But Mother Nature didn't recognize him and was tempted to enroll him in some kind of daycare program.

Barney, due to his shape, found himself unable to get up. He rolled around. Pine needles stuck to him like velcro. Eventually, he levered his tail under him and, by dint of desperate bouncing, managed to regain his "feet."

The forest was a revelation to Barney. Its depths resonated with primordial truth. Shafts of light slanted in across the gloom through the massive wooden columns whose distant tops Barney couldn't even make out as he leaned back on his tail to look up. His neck could not bend or swivel. His body was a single unit.

This cathedral of nature witnessed to him powerfully. He wandered in it

Barney returned to civilization where there was no doubt he was a wanted dinosaur. His picture was plastered everywhere; huge head crowding out the words, "WANTED — BARNEY, for consumption of Lamb Chop," and underneath: "Suspect is considered unarmed, purple, and morally ambiguous."

But Barney was no longer the same dinosaur. He had understanding and purpose. He turned himself in to the nearest authorities. He needed and wanted to pay for his crime.

And as he was led away in shame through the hysterical crowds, blinded by photoflashes, shackled, and trailing foam from numerous bear cub gashes, a funny thing happened — something he had never experienced before in all his purple life: he tasted freedom. True freedom.

Barney laughed like a horse. ■