

# ◇ Defenestration ◇

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**Baby Dedication**  
by  
**Boyd Garriott**

When Jonathan was born, I knew that something inevitable was coming. It was something that I dreaded more than anything else. It was something so sinister, so evil, so clearly designed to oblige a parent to act against their will just to fit in. It was the baby dedication.

I wanted my baby to walk this earth with Jesus by his side; don't get me wrong. But I didn't want to have to tell everyone in the church because quite frankly, it gets boring hearing all of these people wish the same thing for their kids. However, I wrote the dedication, and I gave it in front of the congregation with the pastor standing by my side. It was all for the sake of baby Jonathan.

However, I refused to be one of the goody-two-shoes parents. This wasn't going to be a generic baby dedication meant to impress everyone else. Oh no. My child was going to get something special. Something unlike anyone had ever seen before. This is what I delivered.

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My hope is that Jonathan's life will be one that is centered on Jesus. I hope that he accepts the Lord into his heart by his own will. I hope that his walk with the Lord is both fulfilling for himself and for the other people of this Earth.

I also hope he becomes a cage fighter. He doesn't have to win the championship. That's not a demand that I would place upon you God; however, I would love to see him in a finals round. At least once! However, if you see fit, God, being the father of a champion would be nice. It would be wonderful even.

I also hope Jonathan is a real stud. I hope all the ladies love him. I want them to love him not just for his cage fighting skills but also his heart and mind.

While on the subject of his mind, I want Jonathan to be unreasonably smart. I want him to be able to do the Rubik's Cube in less than ten seconds. I want him to be a doctor and a lawyer. He should be able to speak ten languages fluently. Then he will be able to boast about his cage fighting exploits in a hundred countries.

However, don't let him boast too much. I want him to be humble. I want him to be more humble than Mohandas Ghandi. I want him to be so humble that people won't even know who he is until they see a poster of his cage fighting alias: *The Crimson Clock*.

I hope he owns a pocket watch. A pocket watch is a sign of power. It's both practical and showy. Also, a cage fighter named *The Crimson Clock* needs to carry a pocket watch. Not only would it suit his character, but he would also never be late to a fight or a meeting with the Rubik's Cube people in case they offered him a position as their spokesman.

I want Johnathan to be blessed with a helicopter license. There is no better way to make an entrance than in a helicopter.

I hope that Jonathan would be blessed with some kind of supernatural ability. But I beg you Lord to please not make him suffer a spider bite or some kind of radioactive accident. Please, just let him be born with the powers. Let him use them for good, not evil, unless being evil is for the good of the people. Let him be able to make that sacrifice and shoulder the blame to help his fellow man. Let him shrug off the shame as he casually glances down at his pocket watch.

I hope Jonathan becomes good friends with a celebrity. I've always wanted to be on the set of a movie. Having Jonathan be a celebrity would be too much of a hassle. I don't want him constantly running from the paparazzi. If he was just friends with a celebrity, we could get all the perks of being celebrities without all the cameras.

Most of all though, I just want Jonathan to follow the path that you set out for him, Lord. I just hope he is able to follow that path in a helicopter.

\*\*\*

Jonathan and I now attend a different church.

**Xujaa, Guerrera, T'Qnna**  
or  
**My Name is Too Mellifluous for Me**  
by  
**Autumn Hayes**

I want an X in my name  
or a Q with no U, followed by Z  
or maybe K

Not a snaggle-toothed-stepsister name, though,  
simply smiling, six warts on its nose  
a chipped, rusty ax behind its back  
six scraggly-fine strands of hair on its head, dotted  
with liver spots; no.

I want a name that sticks craws,  
slays lions as handily as Romans,  
clangs down throats,  
a name that kicks teeth in  
with invincible language so long dead  
only ghosts know  
to tremble:

a hoodoo-click-clack-war-whoop name  
that evokes squawking parrots,  
dances, drenches substitute teachers in apprehension  
as if they were sloshing  
through rainforest gator-water,  
up to the thighs in anticipating eyes,  
slightly battered, wiping away a sweat-silt crust,  
armed with naught but a rawhide whip  
and a little green water bottle,  
and they just heard the holler  
of the wild  
ominous-death-knell-swooping-to-fall  
in teeth and claws and fur flying and vines tightening—

and it was my name.

**House Arrest**  
by  
**Elizabeth Alexander**

*"The king ordered that his son be imprisoned in the Tower for Rebellious Princes, which had not been used for about 200 years because there had not been any."*

---Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy

*"200 years? What were those princes thinking?!"*

---Anon

Although Alison eventually made her debut at the Idlewild Ball, she was not to the castle born; moreover, when Dr. Grum called Alison his "little princess," we<sup>1</sup> thought of Elinor Donahue on *Father Knows Best*, who made us gag. We were not particularly rebellious, but we were savagely curious, and curiosity killed the cat.

In the Grums' cloak closet, behind a formidable coat rod, lay a clearing about five feet high and the width of four discarded sofa cushions, stacked in pairs. The cushions were upholstered in dull brown post-war cotton with faintly sinister jungle birds and vines embroidered in purple and green. Alison and I sat opposite each other on the cushions, our legs stretched out in parallel, hers on the coats' side. We had provisions: barbecue potato chips, Dr. Pepper, a camp flashlight and extra batteries, a transistor radio, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and *The Magician's Nephew*.<sup>2</sup> Frodo Baggins was mired in the Council of Elrond, and our Dr. Pepper supply was seriously waning on the cataclysmic afternoon when Mrs. Grum breached into our hideaway.

The transistor radio had warned us repeatedly against KBOX, in whose sonic labyrinth even grown women could get lost. That afternoon, faking congestion, the radio spewed static when we turned the dial to 100.3 FM. We shook the noble radio and pulled roughly on its antenna until, mesmerized by Big Brother and the Holding Company, it lifted itself on edge and twirled ecstatically. Pounding our thighs with our fists, we sang along. "I want you to *come on, come on, come on, come on* and Take it! [whup] Take *another* little piece of my heart now, *baby!*"

If only we had turned the radio off when the news came on, or if KBOX's Jack West had not announced the date: November 27, 1967.

"Caroline's birthday," Alison whispered.

How could we have forgotten?

When Alison and I were six years old, Caroline Kennedy moved into the White House, and we (for the first time) were allowed to watch TV news and read *Life Magazine*. We loved Caroline: her blunt-cut hair pulled back in a bandeau or to one side in a barrette; her Shetland pony, Macaroni, a gift from Vice President Johnson who had been our governor;

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1 Alison Florimond Grum and myself, Cate Douceline Rameau, best friends and worst enemies, 1958-1967

2 The cloak closet became our wardrobe, with the witch on the home side.

the way her daddy held her, one arm around her waist, one hand in hers, like he loved her so much.

When the President was killed we cried mainly for Caroline, and four years later we still felt horrible when we thought of her and John-John in their matching blue coats and how she reached her hand under the flag to touch the coffin.

\*\*\*

Mrs. Grum was as beautiful as Mrs. Kennedy, but in a different way. She had eyes the deep dark blue of a mountain gentian; naturally curly blond hair, with honey-brown highlights; and a dainty nose that tanned more easily than it burned. At 5' 9" tall, she towered over the other mothers—but not menacingly, since her bones were small and her power veiled (to them) by a fixed half-smile.

But she spoke to maids and children in a voice harsh as a beagle bray, and the looks that she fixed on Alison were snarling and hungry, and we never knew why.<sup>3</sup>

We called her Jadis of Charn.

\*\*\*

When Jack West's program ended, we lowered the volume on the radio, but not enough to detect the clip-clip-clip of high heels on a hardwood floor. If only we had been prudent! Instead, confident that the coast was clear (Mrs. Grum had a standing appointment at the beauty parlor on Monday afternoons), we tiptoed down the back hall to the kitchen.

I remember the smooth maplewood of the magazine rack, built into an enclave opposite the cloak closet, and how a bright green magazine thrust itself under my left arm like a newspaper. I remember the cool tile floor against my stocking feet as I stood guard while Alison sneaked the last two bottles of Dr. Pepper from the refrigerator.

\*\*\*

At approximately 3:20, we returned to the closet and, scrunching potato chip crumbs into the upholstery, ensconced ourselves on the cushions. We found the radio in a high good humor.

"Set me free, why *don't* cha babe?" it played. "Get out my life, why *don't* cha babe?"

I opened the bright green magazine.

"Cause you don't really *love* me: You just *keep me hangin* on!"

Alison pointed her Dr. Pepper in my direction. "What you got there?" she asked.

"The American Journal of Ob-STE-tricks and GUY-ne-cull—"

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3 We considered the following hypotheses: Mrs. Grum had a brain tumor; Alison was adopted; Dr. and Mrs. Grum had lost a baby like Patrick Kennedy.

"Gynecology, stupid."

Dr. Grum was an ob-gyn man.<sup>4</sup>

Alison scooted close to look at the pictures, which put us in mind of the Dallas Aquarium. There was a mermaid's cave, veiled by a fine silver web, with a deep pink flagstone walkway. There was a translucent sphere set like a crystal ball in a watery cleft with a rose-colored fish to the side.

If only we had not puzzled out the captions! The silver web was made of pubic hair, and the pink flagstones were an infection. The sphere was a hoochie hole, and the rose-colored fish was a disease that had to be cut out. Although we could hardly bear to keep looking, neither could we bring ourselves to close the magazine which, in its naissance (we learned from the inside cover), had been called the *American Journal of Diseases of Women and Children*.

"Diseases of Women and Children," Alison mused. "Remember that girl at the fair?"

"The thalidomide baby," I nodded slowly.

\*\*\*

To think that Fair Day had begun so well! First Dr. Grum shepherded us through the midway, where we rode the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Flight to Mars and ate two corn dogs each. Then he took us to the Livestock Show, where we petted a Dutch rabbit with a tattoo in one ear and got an autograph from a 4H girl whose pink swine won the Junior Grand Championship.

"What next?" Dr. Grum asked. "Who wants cotton candy?"

Alison and I exchanged a Look.

"No one wants cotton candy?" Dr. Grum put his palms on our foreheads. He smelled of clean white dress shirts with the cardboard still in place.

We wanted to see the transparent man and transparent woman in the Children's Medical Center pavilion. We liked looking through their skin and pushing red and blue buttons to make their arteries and veins light up.<sup>5</sup>

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"Alright then." Dr. Grum reached for our hands and, marveling that we didn't waver in the food court, led us into the pavilion. Above the entryway hung a banner for an exhibit called *Shield and Defender: Your Federal Drug Administration*.

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4 A brilliant clinician, Dr. Grum had gone to Harvard Medical School and completed two post-graduate fellowships (one at Pritzker and one at Yale), but he didn't act like it.

5 We were, moreover, curious about their different levels of anatomical detail. The transparent woman had bosoms as big as Barbie's, but the transparent man had only the suggestion of a weenie.

That's where we saw the thalidomide baby—not a real one but a photograph, and not an actual baby but a girl about six years old. She had light blond hair in two shoulder-length braids and turquoise eyes.

She had no arms.

She had no legs.

"Astrid Däubler," the caption read. "Born 1959. Bremerhaven."<sup>6</sup>

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Ordinarily, Mrs. Grum returned from the beauty parlor around 4:00 and found Alison and me doing our homework at the breakfastroom table. When we heard the back door close, we would cross ourselves like in church. When we heard the swish of her petticoat, we would say something like, "3 is the base, and 2 is the exponent" or "Skim milk, please. Punch only adds calories."

On this Monday, however, time had become for Alison and me as it was for Penny Robinson in the first episode of *Lost in Space*, when she was frozen in suspended animation for the 98 year-long flight to Alpha Centauri. We were deaf to the bell chimes of the grandfather clock; utterly forgetful that radio host Chuck ("Round Mound of Sound") Dunaway came on-air at 4:00. "Live in concert, Paraphernalia Clothing presents the *Association!*" he announced. "Tickets are on sale *now* at Memorial Auditorium *Box Office.*"

"And then *along* comes Mar-Y!"<sup>7</sup> the radio played.

Alison lowered the volume. I looked at her like, "Huh?"

She crossed her arms over her chest, stared at my nose, and whispered: "One one hundred, two one hundreds, three one hundreds,"—through ten one hundreds.<sup>8</sup>

At five one-hundreds, I crossed my arms over my chest and whispered along.

I remember a daddy long-legs stopping in its tracks and playing dead as, in one fell swoop, Alison slid onto her back and raised her dark green skirt. I remember her marvelous red-and-white striped bikini underwear.<sup>9</sup>

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6 Anticipating some questions that we had and many that we did not, Dr. Grum explained that a lady doctor named Frances Kelsey (who worked for the FDA) knew that thalidomide had not been tested enough in Germany, so she would not allow it to be sold in the United States. He said that Caroline's father, the President, awarded a gold medal to Dr. Kelsey. Dr. Grum looked like he was about to cry. He said he should have known better than to take us to the hospital pavilion and that he wished we had not seen that poor little girl. But we *had* seen.

7 Our favorite song which, despite the extended metaphor, Mrs. Grum approved after hearing Leonard Bernstein cite it (as an exemplar of the Dorian mode) on a Young People's Concert

8 This was our signal that one of us Meant Business and that the other one could not ever tell what happened next.

9 I still wore dumb ruffled panties that came to my waist.



\*\*\*

Alison inhaled spectacularly. "I have a disease of women and children," she announced.

"Nuh *uh*."

"Get the flashlight," Alison commanded.

If only I had refused! Instead, overcome by curiosity I clicked the flashlight *on-off, on-off, on-off*, while Alison wiggled out of her undies.

"Beam the light here," she said, holding herself apart and indicating with a forefinger the area I should examine.

There *was* a little something just left of the slit; however, that little something did not look like a reproductive disease. It looked like an acne pimple. I leaned in, to see if we could pop it.

"You are killing your father!"

Mrs. Grum lurched upon us. She reeked of incompatible scents. I covered my nose against the assault of Je Reviens and Adorn.

"*Killing your father*," Mrs. Grum repeated. Her blue eyes frothed oceanically, like the mouth of a rabid dog.

Alison sprang to a crouch in the southeast corner of the closet, her fists raised with the insane determination of Smokin' Joe Frazier after Oscar Bonavena had already floored him twice. I took the northwest corner.

Mrs. Grum made a surprise retreat through the coats to the door.

We heard uneven clicks, like a safe being cracked, as she fumbled with the doorknob.

"Shit!" Mrs. Grum hissed.

The cloak closet locked only from inside. To lock us in would be to imprison herself as well.

\*\*\*

"Doo. Doo. Doo *doo doo doo*."

We would know that sprightly tune<sup>10</sup> anywhere.

"Doo doo doo *doo*. Doo doo doo *doo*," we mouthed along as Dr. Grum (alive and whistling) opened the closet, catapulting Mrs. Grum onto the door.

"Uh oh," Alison said.

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<sup>10</sup>Peter's theme, from "Peter and the Wolf"

"Doo . . . doo. Doo *doo*. . ." Dr. Grum's whistling halted inelegantly, like a song from a wind-up music box. His soft green eyes looked warily from Mrs. Grum to Alison to me.

"Who wants to tell me what is going on?" he asked.

"I don't think anyone does," I replied.

"Don't you *dare* back talk, you little pervert," Mrs. Grum sputtered.

"Sunbeam—" Dr. Grum began.

"—Don't 'Sunbeam' me. I *warned* you, Karl."

Alison raised her hand. "Daddy?"

"Ye-sss?" Dr. Grum's left eyebrow rose expectantly.

"I have a disease of women and children," Alison said.

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Three days later, a dermatologist confirmed my diagnosis. He lanced and drained the pimple, told Alison to eat more fruits and vegetables and fewer Milky Ways and Fritos, drink plenty of water and no Dr. Pepper, wear sensible underwear,<sup>11</sup> and wash with benzoyl peroxide.

Mrs. Grum banished me forever, but "forever" lasted only five weeks. On the sixth day of Christmas, she checked herself into The Willowbend, a luxury spa in Nagadoches, where she remained indefinitely. Our Monday afternoons were less deliciously terrifying without Mrs. Grum, but, as Dr. Grum explained, what we lacked in drama and intrigue we gained in peace and quiet.

To preserve the latter, he filed for divorce.

And we all lived happily ever after.

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11 Meaning horrible cotton panties like mine

**Appendicitis**  
**by**  
**Mason Johnson**

We walk down the street  
hand in hand  
on our mediocre date  
when you explain that  
not one, not two, but three!  
of your friends have recently had appendicitis,  
their organ bursting inside of them.

This is when I stop listening to you.  
I start to worry about my own appendix,  
realizing it could go  
at any fuckin' moment.  
And this might be a good thing.

On a perfect date a street thug might run past us  
snatching your purse with ease  
and yeah, that sucks, but wait for the glorious part:  
I whip out a Swiss Army Knife  
and use it to cut open my left  
no, my right  
no, my left side,  
taking out my appendix, a pathetic little pink thing,  
and launching it in front of our down-on-his-luck-mugger,  
where it lands on the concrete and explodes into a million little bits  
of raw, bacon-like pieces,  
knocking him off his feet.  
Saving the day.

When I come back to our mediocre date you ask me if I was listening to what you were  
saying.  
I lie and say yes and we continue on our walk, content to just be in one another's company

## **The Shopping Cart Museum** by **Kate LaDew**

The shopping cart museum was interesting, to say the most. In that it wasn't that interesting. Percival wasn't sure why he'd ever started it. Just because his dad had specified the money was to be spent on shopping carts, didn't mean it had to be spent on shopping carts. Percival knew his dad was crazy. Everyone knew Percival's dad was crazy. But you were supposed to listen to dad, right? Wasn't that what you were supposed to do? He'd read that somewhere.

So here he was, surrounded by shopping carts, trying to make a buck so he could somehow offset the ridiculous amount of money he spent on a shopping cart museum. Who knew? Who knew shopping carts were expensive? Who knew shopping carts cost anything at all? Someone had to make them, yeah. They didn't just pop out of the sky fully formed. Someone had to weld all their little parts together. Percival felt sorry for that someone. He felt sorry for that someone but not as sorry as he felt for himself. That someone got to leave the shopping carts behind. Percival got to look at them every day, just sitting there being metal and doing nothing. The only interesting thing he'd ever heard about a shopping cart was that the first one had been made out of rocks. Just a pile of rocks. Percival's dad told him that. Percival's dad was crazy. Just before he died, he had taken Percival out to the backyard and shown him a pile of rocks.

"That's the first shopping cart," his dad said.

"That pile of rocks?"

"Yeah."

Cavemen had used shopping carts. That's what Percival's dad said.

"Cavemen used shopping carts."

"For what?"

"For putting things in."

"What?"

"Stuff they had."

"Where did they get the stuff?"

"Nowhere at first."

"Nowhere?"

"Until they had stores."

"Cavemen had stores?"

"Cavemen always did things the wrong way around."

"Always?"

"Yeah."

So Percival had moved the pile of rocks and put them in the corner of the museum near the historical section next to cardboard cutouts of cavemen.

"What's that pile of rocks over there?" some kid asked.

"That's the first shopping cart," Percival said.

"Looks like a pile of rocks."

"Well, it's the first shopping cart."

"Well, it looks like a pile of rocks."

"Why don't you get the hell out of here," Percival said.

**A Stinking Rose by Any Other Name**  
by  
**Lawrence Barker**

**Fiasco, Part the First:** "It's them lousy Sasquatches," Vinnie grumbled as he emptied the trash into the dumpster behind Gatlinburg's Bigfoot Inn. "They get the breaks. We don't get nothing. Nothing, I tell you." He flicked away a banana peel that had stuck to his long, orangish fur. "Just look at that "People Used to Deny Cryptids' Existence" exhibit at *Ripley's Believe It or Not* Museum. Bigfoot takes up half, and half the rest goes to them attention-whores Nessie and Jersey Devil. They get everything. Why, this stinking town's got three stinking shops that don't sell nothing but knitted Sasquatch hair."

Phil sat down the trash can he carried. "Your own words drive to the heart of the matter—stinking. Our name and nature both oppose us. There is little that we can do to alter that state."

"And, making things even worse," Vinnie said, continuing his rant, "there's a half-dozen 'Have your picture taken with Bigfoot' joints." He nodded knowingly, snorting through his flattened nostrils. "Now *those* guys have it easy. Just sit and have folks snap touristy photos."

Phil stepped into the building's shadow, allowing his orange eyes' natural glow to show. His brother Vinnie's words sounded like the prelude to disaster. "Surely you do not propose that we follow the Sasquatches' formidable footsteps?"

"Imagine." Vinnie squatted in the posture that, before everyone went public, his kind had used to vanish behind palmetto and hide in the shadows of swampy forests. "Just sit. Look cuddly when tourist types want you to. Snarl when they want you to look fierce." He gestured at the garbage cans. "Don't getting pictures taken sound better than janitoring?"

"We had jobs that let us 'just sit' before you decided that Smoky Mountain bear wrangling was the life for you." Phil reflected wistfully on the days of working with a telephone instead of a broom.

"I'm just saying. That's all." A dreamy look filled Vinnie's eyes.

"Were we to undertake the endeavor that you implicitly propose, failure would be the inevitable outcome." Phil's hairy hand gestured, indicating a street on the motel's other side. "Who, among those visitors who pass through this town, would stop to 'Have your picture taken with Skunk Ape?'"

Vinnie snapped his fingers. "Phil, you're a genius." Vinnie slapped Phil's hairy back.

Phil sighed in relief. "I have shown you the dubious wisdom in your ruminations about our current state?"

"Nah," Vinnie answered.

Phil cringed.

"You hit the nail on the head when you said nobody ain't stopping at a 'Have your picture taken with Skunk Ape' joint." Vinnie's prehensile lips pursed. His yellow eyes glittered. "So we stop being Skunk Apes."

For an instant, Phil considered distancing himself from whatever notion had coagulated in Vinnie's bullet-shaped head. But the last time Phil had balked at a Vinnie scheme, he had wound up hoofing it from Sarasota to Knoxville to extricate his brother from the mess into which he had gotten himself. That's how they had wound up being Gatlinburg janitors instead of remaining telemarketers in Sarasota. Phil groaned. One of his frequent headaches was starting.

"How would we manage not being Skunk Apes?" Phil asked, not really wanting to hear the answer.

**Fiasco, Part the Second:** Phil sniffed. He had never thought that their own natural reek, a mixture of decaying garlic and fermenting feet, was so bad. The lilac and lavender perfume with which Vinnie had doused them? That was truly vile.

"I am less than certain that we have set ourselves on an optimal path," Phil muttered. The purple and orange plastic aquarium plants Vinnie had glued to their heads for antennae itched worse than Florida's famed red bugs. The crimson contact lenses Vinnie had found rendered them one step from being blind. Maybe that was for the best. Phil had little desire to see the faux wings that Vinnie had moussed their newly washed and blow-dried fur into.

"It'll be great," Vinnie replied, standing back to observe his newly painted 'Have your picture taken with Mothman: \$5' sign. "Anybody with smarts—which leaves out 99% of the G-Burg tourists—knows there ain't no real Mothman. You know what that means?"

"That we, in addition to looking ridiculous, are pathological liars?"

Vinnie's nose wrinkled. "It means we ain't got diddly-squat for competition. And the tourists will love it."

Much to Phil's surprise, Vinnie's words proved prophetic. The tourist trade grew from a trickle to a small river. By the end of the third week, the line stretched from their simple booth to the Museum of Salt and Pepper Shakers.

Perhaps a few bratty kids pulled Phil's fur. Perhaps a few cryptid fetishists pinched his behind. Perhaps an occasional retired couple would reminisce, swearing that Phil was the very Mothman that had swooped over their car on that deserted West Virginia highway in 1978. Phil could tolerate the occasional bump in the road. The work was easier than janitorial employment, and the money rolled in.

It was late on a Thursday afternoon when things fell apart.

**Fiasco, Part the Third:** The two newcomers floated from the dark clouds. Their pale blue wings reminded Phil of a cross between a hang glider and an oddly colored luna moth. They circled Phil and Vinnie's booth twice, then landed, ignoring the frustrated tourists' calls of "Wait your turn in line!"

Phil looked them over. One stood a good eight feet tall, well beyond Phil's modest 5'1". Fine blue threads that resembled, but clearly were not, fur covered it. Its red eyes glowed with a hot coal shimmer. Its arms ended in three stubby fingers with two joints each, instead of the three shared by human and Skunk Ape. The second, perhaps two feet shorter, was similar in appearance but was silvery in color and its exterior was metallic in texture. In addition, one of its hands clutched a extra-extra large swirly twister lollipop. It repeatedly brought the lollipop to its tiny mouth, resting in the center of its swollen head, and rasped at the tip with a serpentine tongue that resembled a hungry lamprey.

Phil swallowed hard. The realization that Mothman, not imaginary after all, had simply chosen to eschew the other cryptids' mass coming-out, would have been substantially more valuable had it occurred sooner. "Mothmen, I presume?" Phil asked, making every effort to look friendly.

"Are," Blue screeched in a voice that sounded like fingernails rubbing on a blackboard rubbing on yet another blackboard. At that screech, the tourists scattered.

Silver, apparently unimpressed by either the brothers or the departing tourists, kept rasping the lollipop.

"You got this all wrong," Vinnie sputtered. "We ain't trying to pass ourselves off as Mothmen or nothing." Vinnie shook his head, setting his aquarium antennae jiggling. "That would be wrong, and we ain't frauds or nothing. Are we Phil?"

Phil nudged Vinnie. "Cease your prattling, before you send us further up the proverbial paddleless unsanitary tributary," he whispered. Putting on his biggest smile, he turned to the newcomers. "I am certain that, whatever impression my sibling has given, any difficulties between us can be resolved in a civilized manner." Phil warily extended a hand.

Blue took it. "Gertrude," Blue chirped.

"Samantha," Silver added, with a nod of her antennae head and another scrape at her twirled lollipop.

"Gertrude and Samantha," Phil repeated, taking his hand back. His fingers felt as though he had worn a glove lined with fine-grade sandpaper. "I am Philippe, and my brother here is Vincent."

"Our kind few," Gertrude burred. "Look long. Now find two."

Phil cleared his throat. "You see, we aren't really Mothmen. My brother and I engaged in a miniscule masquerade. Our harmless shenanigans have purely been for entertainment purposes. No mischief or aspersions were intended."

Gertrude gestured in a northeasterly direction. "With us. Fly."

"I believe you might have misinterpreted my meaning," Phil continued. "We are no more capable of unassisted aerial acrobatics than we are of singing starring tenor roles at the Metropolitan Opera." To emphasize his point, Phil hummed a few bars of "*Di Quella Pira*," his favorite aria from *Il Trovatore*. "Our bodies are simply not constructed to complete these tasks."



"Like he said," Vinnie blurted. His stubby fingers clawed at his moussed faux wings, reducing them to a tangle of coarse Skunk Ape fur. "We can't fly because we ain't got no wings."

"No wings?" Gertrude turned her head. Reading that alien face was difficult, but Phil would have sworn that he saw sympathy.

"No wings! Can't fly!" For emphasis, Vinnie jumped up and down, beating his arms as though they were wings.

"Help you," Gertrude replied.

Before Phil could speak, Gertrude had Vinnie in the air. Her altitude increased by the second. "You misunderstand!" Phil called.

It did no good. In moments, Vinnie and Gertrude disappeared into the clouds.

"But we're Skunk Apes," Phil moaned.

"Knew from first," Samantha answered.

Phil removed the itchy antennae. "Then why didn't you say something?"

"No point." Samantha's very peculiar shoulders did what Phil thought was a shrug. "Sister no think. Sister do. Try to stop, just fail."

Phil cringed. Her words had an eerily familiar ring. "Where is she taking him?"

"Mothman Mating Mountain."

Phil stood up straighter. "Could you possibly lend me a hand in extricating my brother from the situation into which he has placed himself?" He raised his arms in a half-hearted imitation of Vinnie's demonstration of his inability to fly.

"Could. Why should I?"

"Out of kindness. Out of compassion. Out of consideration for a fellow outcast from the greater society."

Samantha's red eyes blazed with nameless emotions.

"All you would have to do," Phil continued, "is carry me to the location your sister is taking my brother. Judging by the small strain her flight appeared to involve, such an effort should negligibly trouble you."

Samantha turned away. Her wings flared, as though she intended to fly away.

Panic welled up inside Phil. He glanced at the cash box, containing all of the day's receipts. He stuck the box under her... well, whatever served for a 'nose'. "Here. Take it." Bribery worked with humans. Why not Mothmen?

Samantha stopped. She turned back toward Phil. "Cash. What good to me?"

"You can buy things."

"Name thing need and not have."

Phil's eyes darted about. What might a Mothwoman want? Designed clothing didn't come in her size. If she desired a Caribbean vacation, she could simply fly there. She certainly didn't seem the type to long for an evening out at a place like Knoxville's Orangery. Then the answer hit him.

"Those extra-extra large swirly twister lollipops cost about \$3.95 a piece," he said, pointing at her brightly colored confection. "There's enough here to buy scores. Maybe hundreds."

With those words, Samantha scooped up the cash box, and then Phil. They rose into the air. Phil closed his eyes, not wanting to watch Gatlinburg fade into a postage stamp below. Cold wind whistled in Phil's ears. Fog pelted his face, suggesting passage through the clouds. In what might have been minutes, hours, or days (those who have ever tried to judge time while flying with a lollipop-loving Mothwoman will understand why), Phil felt her release him. He felt himself falling.

He opened his eyes to see a mountain, its top bare except for the bluish slime that covered it, rising to meet him. Phil wrapped himself into a ball, again closing his eyes. He crashed into what felt like melted ice cream and warm glue. After a moment of assuring himself that he continued to breathe and was essentially intact, Phil opened his eyes. The tree line began perhaps thirty feet down the mountain. By the topography, Phil guessed he was somewhere in West Virginia.

Phil, looking around, saw no sign of Gertrude or Samantha. He saw only the sticky blue muck washing over everything, forming indiscriminant lumps that reminded Phil, save for their size, of the worst mashed potatoes that he had ever had the misfortune of encountering. No Vinnie. This residue was what marked this as Mothman Mating Mountain? Phil preferred not to think about it.

"Vinnie?" Phil tentatively called. "You here?"

A blue lump sat up. A pair muck-covered hands cleared a pair of yellow eyes. "Hey Phil," Vinnie's familiar voice said.

"You're alive!" Phil shook himself as clean as he could manage.

"Sure I'm alive," Vinnie enthused. He wiped the blue gunk from his face. His lips formed a vapid grin. "And you know what? That wasn't half bad."

Phil suddenly developed a very bad headache. He wanted to sit down, but, having slightly unblued himself, felt reluctance about undoing his work.

"What to we do now?" Phil moaned. He suspected it involved finding yet another line of employment, probably in the city whose skyline he could just make out in the distance. Based on the history of a generally declining life-style since leaving Florida, he was uncertain he really wanted to know.

**Fiasco, Epilogue:** "We never get no respect from nobody," Vinnie muttered as he emerged from the manhole, the words 'Wheeling WV Department of Sanitation' emblazoned on the gray-green coveralls that he had somehow stuffed him broad form into.

Phil followed him up out of the sewer. "At least we have honest and honorable, although odiferous, employment. You might reconsider your grievances."

"But look at them guys," Vinnie grumbled. He nodded toward a trio of hairless, red-eyed, spiny backed Chupacabras. As the Chupacabras ambled down the sidewalk, passersby averted their eyes to escape the Chupacabras' gaze. In fact, most gave the Chupacabras a wide berth. "Them Chupacabras get the good clothes, the fancy cars, the hot dames. What do we get?" Vinnie gestured at himself. "Sewer jobs."

Phil sighed. "We also are free of both enemies and the need to constantly watch our backs, something no local Chupacabra can claim." He leaned closer. "As you might recall, Chupacabras run Wheeling's organized crime syndicate," he whispered.

Vinnie squatted in the posture that, once, his kind had used to hide in Florida swamps. "I was just thinking that if we shaved our fur, wore red contacts, and glued upright shingles to our backs, no one could tell us from Chupacabras."

A skull-splitting headache struck Phil. He had a bad feeling about this... a very, very bad feeling indeed.

**Riddled**  
**by**  
**Marit Ericson**

Jan and I went to a masque as each other.  
We swapped interiorities, bandied psyches  
about. Hell has indeed frozen over: I'm nice  
for once, said Jan-as-me. I grinned, Janly.  
I will hereby objectify my Other to place in  
my shadow box, we thought, simultaneously.  
Each of us was placed in a shadow box. Monks  
put flowers outside us, played piano, screamed,  
and we forgot our shells. Minutes passed. Jan  
wrote this because she loves me, I feared. No  
shit. She was a future, and I had ghosts.

## **When Professionals Carry Diaper Bags** by **Kimberly Emilia**

When the tiny plastic tube, ironically resembling a tampon, shows a pink plus sign, I know that I have gotten the job. Urine talks and mine says, "*CONGRAT-U-HADSEXWITHSOMEONERECENTLY-LATIONS.*"

Now begins a journey. Now begins the transition into motherhood.

Unfortunately, I am nowhere near ready for this train ride. *All aboard, my ass!* I think to myself. While I'm using a train analogy, I may as well admit that a caboose is what got me into this mess in the first place. When I say caboose, I mean, the finest, sweetest, most delicious ass I have ever seen in my life. Who knew I was an ass-girl? Not me. I guess I figured it out when I met Mark.

Before I develop any misconceptions for anyone, you should know that Mark is my husband. I have been wildly attracted to him since we first met, five years ago. I'm pretty sure that even then, it was the ass that spoke to me. People want to know all the time, 'how can you keep the fire alive in your marriage?' The answer for me is simple: marry a man with a fabulous caboose. It will easily get you from station to station without issues, and it will last through the years. Well, it will last as long as he keeps up those squat routines and aerobic workouts.

I know it's not politically correct. It is not only Mark's caboose that made me fall for him. His huge lower level tenant plays a part as well. I'm just kidding. Well, sort of.

But back to the caboose. That's what got me in trouble. The man is irresistible. One thing led to another, and without any warning, we suddenly arrive in Pregnancy-ville. I'm praying that it's a population 1 kind of place. But my mind wanders, and now that the pregnancy has been confirmed by not four but five pee sticks, I am starting to worry about twins, triplets, and that Octo-mom maniac I saw on the news a few years ago.

I realize that Mark and I are married, so having children is a completely natural thing. But I have a fabulous job, which means a lot to a workaholic who becomes a danger to herself and others when she's not thinking, reading, writing, and working. Having a child was not something on my 'to-do' list this week. The fear of taking on more work is not only daunting; it terrifies me enough to have helped me pee my pants, and collect some piss on the little pregnancy stick. What am I going to do now?

"You're resourceful. You're a fucking pro at everything. I feel like pregnancy will look good on you," my best friend, Noreen tells me. She is a nurse from New York, and she is my best friend because she assumedly knows what she is talking about. There's something that I love about cocky self-assurance in a person. But today, her words are not helpful.

"Pregnancy will look good on me? It's not a vintage Chanel suit I just pulled out of a clearance bin at the local consignment shop. It's pregnancy! Motherhood doesn't look good on a 4' 10" ginger," I shout. My voice carries louder than intended. Ugh oh. Hormones. They are racing faster than the steroid-chomping dogs at a white-trash OBT bar.

"I am supposed to be a professional, attacking the world by storm. I can't become a waddling whale of emotion. And how am I supposed to coordinate an outfit with a diaper bag? How am I going to keep up with my own life if I'm too huge and tired and overwhelmed to merchandise my outfits?"

"You're a professional *diva*, Kim. That's the job you're best at. Just *relax*."

After knowing about my pregnancy for a few short minutes, I am already exactly what I fear. Not the whale part—that comes later. I am a big blubbering, babbling ball of emotion, shouting at my biggest supporter. I am a shitty best friend. *Hold it together. Hold it together.* I am repeating a mantra that nearly never works, but since the Dali Lama believes in finding peace immediately through mantra citation, I'm trying it.

"Relax. Don't you want a family? I know you do. You love looking at baby clothes and all that crap. This will be fun."

Noreen is so relaxed that it pisses me off. She has nothing to worry about. She isn't married. She is living the life in New York, partying her pants off, making tons of money, and effectively using her birth control. She is successfully living the life I can see passing through my fingertips.

"*You're* the spontaneous one, Nor. I always thought you'd get knocked up before me!"

"God is clearly punishing you for trying to plan out your life too much. He's throwing you a curve ball and laughing with a martini in his right hand. You know, next to where Jesus is," she mocks me.

"Ahhhhh! I completely forgot that pregnancy means no more drinking! Oh geeze. What the hell am I going to do????"

The fact that Noreen's voice is so calm pisses me off even more. She has no idea how this feels. I need the martini that is no longer an option. AT ALL. For at least 9 months. *Maybe I'll deliver sooner than nice months, or get a C section or something, and be drinking again by Christmas*, I muse. Ugh. *Am I really this much of an alcoholic? Who knew?* My rapid thoughts are teaching me all kinds of things I never expected.

My mind reverts suddenly, and I am wondering how non-drinkers deal with stress. I have no idea what those boring people do. Chew gum? Jog? Beat their wives? I have no idea.

"Ok. Do you want me to come down?" she asks.

Mark and I live in Pennsylvania, a short 2 ½ hours from Noreen. Her offer is appealing, but I need to find a way to tell Mark. I'm too preoccupied for a houseguest.

"No. I'll be fine. I just need—something. What do non-drinkers do to unwind?" I ask.

"Pray."

\*\*\*

I hate it when movie directors show a character's anxiety by zooming in on that character's fingers as they tap fiercely on a desk. I don't often see real world people who do this

anxious tapping. It's usually the foot tapping or a twitchy eye that indicates fear, concern, or unease. For me, my husband can sense my angst when I wander aimlessly around the house. I complain about how dirty, disorganized, or cluttered the house is. I alternate between rooms, picking items up, hiding things in drawers, or ripping apart closets and desk spaces.

The sound that always gives away my cleaning spree is that of the black garbage bag. It's an industrial sized bag. I carry it fondly from room to room like a childhood blanket.

But my fingers never tap or twitch.

"We should be on the show *Hoarders*," I tell Mark.

He shrugs his shoulders, hearing things he has heard before.

"We should invite the film crew out to the house. We can show them your fishing bait collection, the piles of middle school paperwork you insist on keeping, and ask them to bring a dump truck for half of this crap."

"I love you, honey bee," he calls from the living room.

"Don't avoid the issue. Help me clean up this junk."

I shuffle through old magazines in the back of our office closet. I have strategically placed the black garbage bag at my feet, and shovel in items quickly so that Mark won't realize that I am only throwing out *his* junk.

"Just wait. One day, guests won't want to come here because there will be too much crap everywhere. There won't be any space for other people."

"Kimberly, what are you talking about? There is plenty of room in this house."

*There is no room for rattles and booties and bottles.*

"Do you want to relax? I'll go hook up the boat, and we can go take an evening cruise. You get the water bottles," Mark offers.

The boat always soothes me. But all I can think of is the future. No more evening boat trips after our 9 months have passed. No more random date nights. No more energy to focus on work. No more time for snuggling on the couch. Instead I will be cooking meals, doing laundry, cleaning closets, and burping my baby.

I leave the black bag in the office and tell Mark that we need milk. I am going to take a quick drive to the grocery store while he hooks up the boat. I throw my matted, unkempt hair into a bun of messy ringlets and skip out the back door of the house. I start the car, cell phone in hand, and dial my ambitious, overzealous girlfriend, Victoria. She is still at the office, but glad to take a break before an evening networking event she has to attend.

"I am feeling a little crazed," I start off.

"A few months ago, Mark and I tried to map out the next few years. I really want to finish my master's degree and start on a doctoral program. I think that I want to become a

college professor. I also want to continue working full-time because I like being on the move, constantly thinking. I like my job. How in the hell am I supposed to fit kids into this equation one day?" I ask.

"Are you kidding me? I don't want kids until I'm 40. I need time to establish myself in my career. Who the hell is going to take me seriously if I leave work now? If I get 3-5 solid years in at this company and leave, how can I get back into a job without having to go right back to entry level?"

"It's a doggie-dog world, isn't it," I quip.

"It's a dog-eat-dog world, Kimmie," Victoria corrects.

"Yea, but doggie-dog world makes it sound less discouraging."

Victoria validates my feelings and reminds me why I am so scared shitless about this whole baby thing. Why do women have it so much harder? Why don't men need to put their careers on hold? Why don't they have to deal with guilt over wanting to work?

Even though women have established themselves as independent, intelligent competitors in the work world, we are still expected to stay home with our children for some time. We have breasts, so we are expected to hang a baby off of them. And that simply can't happen in a professional workspace.

I hang up the phone feeling discouraged. Maybe a call to my mom will help. Wait. Terrible idea. Mom's hormones are worse than mine. If the two of us talk or see each other while I am in this heightened state of emotions, one of us might get hurt.

I buy the milk that we don't really need from the store, and drive back home wondering how or when I am going to break this news to Mark. When I get back into the car, I feel something in my eye and pull down the driver's side mirror to check it out. I notice my hair.

In my frantic upheaval, I had failed to notice that my hair had not successfully been made into a neat bun. Instead, there is a huge chunk of hair sitting terribly out of place, somewhat resembling a dorsal fin on top of my head. Great.

I ask myself, *Did anyone at the grocery store warn others of an impending shark attack?*

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My mother was a stay-at-home-mom for seven years. Then, as she put it, "being a mom was not enough... so I went back to work." My little sister, Lauren, and I were independent and adventurous, born with a zest for life. We were exactly what our mother wanted us to become, until we didn't need her anymore.

I resign to get in touch with her a few days following my random house cleaning event. I hope that she will somehow remove my newly acquired shroud of guilt. I don't want to become a stay-at-home-mom, but I also don't want to become oblivious to the life of my child. I need to find a balance *before* I bring a kid into this world. I send Mom an email to check if she's free to talk later in the afternoon.



When she calls me later that evening, Mom's droning voice drifts in and out of my ear as she tells me how busy her work week has been.

"Did you get my email?" I interrupt.

"Yes, and I emailed you back," she insists.

"Did you send a Harry Potter invisi-email? Because I didn't get anything."

Although my comment is somewhat snide, Mom laughs heartily. She never takes me too seriously and can always tell when I'm joking.

"Or did you forward my email to your new assistant Mimie?" I ask.

Mimie is my mother's third child, also known as a Cockapoo (a cocker spaniel/poodle mix). Mimie's very existence is hilarious to me because her name is comprised of two different words for fecal matter. Furthermore, I spend most days wondering if Mom loves Mimie more than she loves my younger sister and I. This is likely the truth. Mimie doesn't talk back, spend money, or refuse hugs. Mimie provides an endless show of affection. Mimie also never made Mom feel like she needed to rejoin the workforce.

"Mimie hasn't learned to type yet. So she probably didn't get the email," Mom retorts. I can hear her smile on the other end of the phone. She is proud to have cracked a joke.

I am pacing on my back porch, enjoying some sunlight as I listen to Mom. I want to take off my slippers to feel the warm wood on my feet, but the recently deposited coat of pollen makes me weary. I don't want pollen to stick to my toes and powder itself through my house when I go inside later. The sun feels good, and I am remembering what summer is like after a long winter.

"I think I have to start working out more," Mom tells me.

"That sounds great. I should go for a run, too."

"Running? I didn't say anything about running. I just think I'll go for a walk."

"If you want to burn calories and feel good, you need to work up a sweat. Walking doesn't make you sweat, does it?" I ask.

"No. But I hate sweating."

"You won't hate it when you lose the weight you want to. You don't want to end up like this woman I know at work. Her name is Sarah, and she told me yesterday that if she could be any character from a movie, she would be Jabba-the-Hut."

Mom bursts into laughter and I can hear air push through her nostrils. She makes a familiar snort, and I am glad to hear it. It's been a while. It almost puts my mind at ease, just as the sunlight on my face does.

Try as I may, I can't muster the conversation about motherhood and what the hell I am supposed to do about my job. Thinking about working out and sweating reminds me that *I* will soon become Jabba-the-Hut. I make an excuse to get off of the phone. I think to

myself, *I could make things awkward and ask if she would consider helping me with my new home-waxing kit.* But I don't even know how or when I can have sex now that I'm pregnant. Who needs a wax when the beehive has been shut down?

"Mom, I really need to wash my hair. Catch ya later."

I hang up and crawl up my stairs to take a nap.

\*\*\*

I can tell that my stress level is elevating as the days pass because I am starting to grow tiny pimples inside my nose. I don't know if this happens to anyone else on the planet, but for me, this is a visible mark of stress. Nose pimples. God must be laughing his butt off somewhere. I wonder if he is still nursing that martini from four days earlier.

Mark is busy on a business call in the office. The office that I want to clean out because I need to make room for baby. I can hear his business associates from China. They are asking Mark about accounts and departments and things that are too boring to list.

I still haven't told Mark about my talking pee-stick because I need to become really excited about this in my own time. No expecting mother wants to tell her husband, "I'm pregnant, and the recent vomiting was not brought on by the baby, but by my paranoia." Welcome to the freak show.

I don't hate babies. It's just that I am selfish and obsessed with becoming a successful career woman. I don't want my husband to be the only breadwinner. We are equals in so many ways, and having grown up a princess from the throngs of Long Island, I have a desire to be *woman, hear me roar.* Thanks a lot, Mom. Motherhood somehow appears lack luster to me. Even though it is physically and emotionally demanding, I somehow cannot equate it with my interpreted version of a *real* career. *What the heck is wrong with me?*

Mark ends his call. I am at the kitchen sink, rinsing out my college alumni tea mug. He walks up behind me and places one hand on my shoulder and massages it. His other hand grazes my thigh.

"Remember the last time I really got to work on *you?*" he asks.

"Oh, yeah. You worked me like a 9-5."

Great. He's in the mood, and I'm afraid that a fetus will hear noises and its first words will be, *Yes! Justlikethat!* I attempt to change the subject.

"I tried to explain the phrase 'brush ya shouldas off' to the receptionist at work today."

"What?" Mark is puzzled, but intrigued enough to remove one hand from my thigh.

"Well, I wanted to educate her a little. I made the move, and then realized that she had no idea what I was talking about. So, I tried to explain it, but failed."

"Yea, I mean, 'brush ya shouldas off' is like a state of mind. It's like, an essence. How did you explain it?" Mark asks.

"I mean, I tried to get some second opinions. I asked Maurice how he would explain it."

"And?"

"He said, 'You don't explain it. You just know what it is or you don't.'"

Mark laughs.

"Have you checked your fantasy baseball team yet today? I heard that there were some surprising upsets from the games last night."

I am lying, but hopeful that this will get Mark out of the kitchen and onto his laptop for a few minutes.

"Oh, man, are you serious? I haven't checked yet. Work was nutty today. I've been busy."

He saunters off into the other room to get his iPhone. I let out a nervous sigh, and tell myself, *It's now or never. You have to tell him. Just tell him. This is the most exciting moment in your lives, and he is going to hit the roof with glee!*

I dig through the refrigerator for a tube of Pillsbury Cinna-bun dough. Mark is busying himself and I meticulously unroll the cold dough onto a bake sheet. Screw homemade. I like to bake the old-fashioned way—with recipes that are a million years old, that have been securely recreated by a mass-market distributor.

When Mark comes back into the room, his face lights up.

"Mmmmmm. Honey bee! I love it when we have sweets before dinner!"

"Well....." my voice trails for a moment, but I conjure up courage. Whenever I try to conjure courage, I think of 1990's super actress Lucy Lawless from the TNT Drama, *Xena: Warrior Princess*. I imagine myself in the leather armor with a whip and tell myself that I am brave and strong.

"These aren't the only buns in the oven."

Mark's face remains still. His muscles are frozen except for a blinking motion I notice once every ten seconds.

"Are you with child?" he asks.

"What am I, Mary Magdalene? I'm pretty sure 'knocked up' is a more appropriate term for an individual of my ability and character."

Mark doesn't laugh. He still hasn't moved much.

"Are you pregnant?" he asks.

"Well, I mean, that's what the pee stick said."

He laughs at first. His eyes never leave mine. A smile breaks across his face, and he picks me up, pulling me close to his unshaven face.

"OH MY GOSH!!!!!! THIS IS GREAT!" he shouts. He is jumping up and down with me in his arms.

I start to cry. And I realize that I am not crying tears of sadness or confusion or regret. I am relieved that Mark is so excited. I am at peace, and I am crying tears of joy. Well, who the hell expected that to happen? Not me!

"I love you, Kimberly," he tells me. "I can't wait to love our new baby!"

"Me neither."

Noreen was right. A little prayer goes a long way, and in this very moment, things are starting to feel exciting and wonderful.

Now all I have to pray for is a happy, healthy baby. A precious little baby with 10 fingers, and 10 toes, and it would be awesome if it came out already wearing a tutu.

**Huck Elvis**  
**by**  
**John S. Fields**

Huck—Huck Elvis, I's reck'n you jis tip the raf o've wit dat shak'n.  
Hang it all, Jim.

Dey's sumf'n wrong, dey is, ole Jim git drowneded wid dat shak'n uv  
yo'—

Oh, well, Jim its just shak'n. Some people tap their feet, some  
people snap their fingers, and some people sway back and forth, I just sort  
of do 'em all together.

Jis the de same ole Huck Elvis, you whoop aroun' dey turrible raf  
mos' sholy they be no mo' raf.

Don't criticize what you don't understand, Jim. I ain't no saint, but  
you know...you never walked in that man's shoes.

Well, dog my cats, Huck, we hain't git no sho's.

**Bee Branch does *Ulysses***  
**by**  
**Meg Tuite**

It was their monthly *Ulysses* meeting at Kildare's in Bee Branch, Arkansas. Lisa, Wade and Joe sat behind frosty mugs of Bud with their stained, unabridged copies of the tome in front of them. No one else was going to show up.

Lisa had been the mucilage who worked for over a month to recruit twelve brave or ignorant souls. Some joined to escape screeching kids and spouses for a night. Others hoped it was a single's club or a steamy Danielle Steel novel, when they heard the book had been banned. After they realized, in the first few gatherings, that most of the group were middle-aged, morose, and that meetings consisted of staring blankly at each other over beer, trying to come up with the meaning for all kinds of gibberish, they quit.

Wade and Joe hung in there for the beer and Lisa's company (both had a desolate crush on her) and would chime in while Lisa scoured through her bible-sized dictionary. "*Hyperborean.*" Wade slurred. "Single's night in the church basement. Hyper-borrning," and both men snickered. "*Untonsured.* Yeah, a doctor yanked them out with my adenoids when I was five," said Joe. "*Scrotumtightening sea.* Wasn't that the nickname for your ex, Joe?" Wade tittered.

Lisa looked up from her book at these two plastered devoted half-wits. She wasn't going home yet either. Her husband, Burt, was a respectable load of tedium, who cooked her TV dinners and recorded "Housewives of Orange County" for the two of them to watch later. Lisa was no different than the rest of them, trying to find some way to drag culture into this bee sting of a town. She looked at Wade and Joe with a duplicitous smirk. She wondered what it would be like to have a three-way with these two loyal hounds. "Excuse me, while I head for the '*squirting dug.*' And order me another stout one of you '*poxey bowsy's!*'" Lisa bellowed as the two man howled. Lisa got up, winked and blew them a kiss before she hit the can.

**Two Poems**  
by  
**Kyle Hemmings**

**Can I Borrow Your Laconic Giraffe Because My Laughing Hyena Keeps Stealing My Fruit of the Loom**

I would never compare  
you to a cookie  
falling from the sky  
a pure Oreo  
or a virgin Lorna Doone,  
unbitten, only flaky at the edges,  
me, running to catch you  
before you crumble.

But that's exactly  
what happened last night  
at the Venus Without Furs.  
You downed five Pied Pipers  
& three Lip-Splints  
extra stiff.  
You performed some  
highly personal interpretations  
of the Amnesiac's Lumbago  
& The Stalking Cat.  
Then you went dancing  
barefoot on the tables  
singing two minute  
memoirs of your torrid  
life under Capricorn.  
You kept falling.  
I kept raising my arms.  
We both kept missing  
the chorus.

**Hold Back the Dawn**

It was a 50's sci-fi flick  
about a brain-injured astronaut  
who kept dreaming of having  
sex with aliens in craters  
3 miles deep, the shape of an eye.  
Instead he met a double-headed woman  
at a bar. When he fed her  
his best pick-up line,  
one head said "You're lying."  
The other said "You're cute  
for a single head. But I always

had a thing for the handicapped.”  
He said he felt weightless, pulled towards  
the illogic of mass and density,  
rambled on how humans are like  
all red angry planets. In time,  
they will burst. “The planets?”  
asked the woman's one head. “No,  
the humans,” said the head that  
was more logical.

In bed that night, the astronaut  
and the double-headed woman  
studied the ceiling.  
“There's no stars for us,” he said,  
“people with modular lives would  
mock us. They like their saucers flat  
and their tea cups with handles.”  
The double-headed woman  
turned towards him. “Let them  
eat cake,” said the one head.  
“He doesn't have an illegal  
gram of common sense,” said the other.  
For the rest of the night,  
the two heads fought over the  
astronaut who had a faulty medulla  
who kept saying he wanted  
a double Medea.



**(un)Even Roads Have Feelings**  
by  
**Graham Tugwell**

Out by Feargal Lawlor's!

Down by the pump near Mixie's Well!

Round by the broken crannóg at Loughool!

There it goes—the Ballybothar Road!

Once, the High King Feargus Óg MacAonaidhe, bewitched into a salmon, was shot here by his son!

Once, croppy boys cowered in its mossy ditches, knotting lithe and little lynchropes!

Once, jackbooted seamen, demobbed from the *Thunderchylde*, trooped along it, searching for the warehouse where The McCarthy hid!

Once, Papal Nuncio Fr. Pascal Gather declared it "A grand road altogether!"

And so it goes in lazy oldman loops and shallow long-contented curves—the Ballybothar Road, older than the fields it holds together!

A grand road altogether, all agreed.

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He wore a lovely pair of knickerbocks, spun from bolts of mock-tan serge, and on his wheaty sulphur locks a tip-top tam o'shanter with a puggareel run round (drowned-baby blue) and he ran abouts from bank to bank, along the length of the Ballybothar Road, and he held an alder switch, which he whipped through the air with a whistling whip.

Little Chester Fettingsley, over from Bishop's Stortford, out in the sun with Aunt Bridie on the last day of his holiday—such *fun!* They'd caught eleven pinkeens; they'd stopped to watched Pat Toher gelding; he'd even whacked a cow on the shoulder with a stone from really quite a distance!

Such *fun* indeed—and now down the road to the Creamery for an Ashbourne berry floater!

"Ha ha! Ha ha!" laughed Chester, kicking a bit of tarmac far into the ditch. "I say, Aunt Bridie—do look at the sorry state of this road! Look at all of these potholes— why, one could lose the *HMS Redoubtable* in one of those blighters!" and Chester bounded across, the lip crumbling under his moccasins.

Aunt Bridie sighed, fumbling in her bag for the—for the—

"And that curb! It's a jolly disgrace—why, that grass bank is as unkempt as Cunningham-Smythe's gardener's beard!" And Chester whipped at the recalcitrant foliage—*whish—*

*whish—whish!* “Down, you rotten plants! Make way! Make way—my Uncle is in the Admiralty!”

Flinching, Aunt Bridie reached out— “Come away, Chester, there’s a good man—we’ve to keep going if we’re to have Ashbourne berry floaters at the Creamery. Leave that shrub be—sure, it’s done nothing to you.”

But Chester shrugged loose— “Why does the blasted road go round in all these foolish curves? Why can’t it just bully on through? I ask you; who cares if a hedge or two is ripped out and burned? I want my Ashbourne berry floater—*now!*”

“Calm down, Chester—” cried Aunt Bridie, shielding her face from the whistling alder—“Dr. Proufot said you mustn’t—”

“Oi’m de King of Paddy Road!” screamed Chester, rushing up and down the Ballybothar Road— “Bijaysus! Bijaysus! Do dis! Do dat! Paddy paddy paddy! TAKE OUT DE HEDGE AND BURN IT! BURN IT BIJAYSUS!”

And he dashed to and fro, striking the foliage, kicking the crumbling tarmac, jiggling about the potholes and calling the road every name under the sun— “Prick road! Arse road!”

“Oh come away, Chester,” moaned Aunt Bridie, dabbing her split lip— “Mother of Christ, please come away...”

And an hour later he came away and they went and had their Ashbourne berry floaters but Chester didn’t like his and threw it at a cow—

*“BURN THE COW, BIJAYSUS!”*

\*\*\*

The next morning was bright, and crisp, and cool, and all across the village sleepers woke softly from soft and lovely dreams to stretch, yawning-angled, fist-clenched, in the butterlight warmth between curtains.

And there was no Chester Fettingsley about to bother anyone—no; he’d been safely bundled into the ferry during the night, back to Bishop’s Stortford!

Pfuh!

Good riddance!

And all the villagers out of bed then, to buy rashers and milk and to pick up the newspaper and maybe toddle over to the church for a bit of a prayer and—

Sweet merciful Baby Jesus on the Cross would you look at that?!

The Ballybothar Road is gone!

Gone! The lazy swan-neck curves from vets’ to funeral home; the straight bit by the broken monument; the wonky junction with the Old Stone Road; all gone, and in their place, a swathe of wild and waving grass!

(The steward was right. The ferry *was* riding very low in the water.

Captain John McGovern narrowed his eyes. What could be causing that?

He turned to Dave Crozier.

"Put a few cars over the side, Dave. Anyone asks, they left their handbrake off."

A dozen thunderous splashes in the Irish Sea.)

\*\*\*

"Help," shouted Fat Paddy Flinter. "Sure, I can't get out of my gate! Someone's after taking the road away!" And there he stood at the end of the garden path, gaping at the new grass, his fat mouth flapping uselessly, his belly resting on the unopened, indeed, unopenable gate. "What am I supposed to *do*?" he wailed, "How can I get to the bookies if there's no road?"

He gave the gate a petulant shove.

And down the street there came a voice, raised in anguish. Brave with the drink, Peadar Hynes had ventured out amidst the waving grass, but had soon come a cropper— "Oooh," he moaned, rocking on his back, his hands wrapped around a scuffed shin, "The surface was very, very slightly uneven and—Jaysus—didn't I trip!"

A shocked chorus of "Oh No!" rippled through the gathering crowd and Patsy McGuire ran to the wall outside the chipper. "I'm coming for you Peadar," he shouted, "Try not to move—"

"No—No!" cried Peadar Hynes, "The ground—it's too very slightly uneven all around me—you could fall over, chip a tooth or something. Then there'd be two of us out here in the grass instead of one!"

His voice was barely more than a whisper. "Just go—Forget about me," and he laid his head amongst the sweet, treacherous grass, singing: "*The stars begin to fade...*"

Another shocked chorus of "Oh No!" did the rounds.

"Is no-one going to help me at all?" shouted Fat Paddy Flinter slamming his pudgy impotent hands on his worthless gate. "Jaysus Christ altogether! Why won't no-one pay attention?"

\*\*\*

(Now what's the matter?

Again the sliding door caught on something, made a gritty grinding squeak and jammed in the groove.

*Always something.*

Cursing and sweating, ticket inspector Gordon Stanchild heaved against the door until—suddenly—it flew across and he fell into the carriage.

Stones...?

Grit...?

*Tarmac...?*

*Aiiiiiiii!*

\*\*\*

"That's it!" roared Patsy McGuire punching the air, "If we can't get to him, we'll bring him to us!"

"What?" shouted the crowd.

"A rope!" yelled Patsy McGuire.

So they threw Peader Hynes a rope, and on the third attempt he caught it, tying it awkwardly under his chin and grunting blue with the discomfort. From the wall by the chipper the villagers saw him give a sluggish thumbs up.

"Quickly, everyone," cried Patsy McGuire, "He's turning a strange colour! Heave!"

And working together, they pulled Peader Hynes out of the treacherous grass, although he banged his head something dreadful on the side of Patty Darby's Audi and lost a dozen teeth.

"To hell with the lot of yis," spat Fat Paddy Flinter, and he went inside and had another breakfast.

\*\*\*

(Wurl, wot a foin noight it is! Paradin' arahnd the tahhnn, not a soul abaht, not a sahdn to bovver the `appiness of Bishop's Stortford! Moon shining dahn, ouwls `ootin' in the frees, a bootiful noight, jes' bootiful for perahmbyoolayshuns!

Makes wan `appy to be aloive!

`Old on a—

Strike a light, guv! Izzat? Bloomin' `eck, it is! Where's me whizzul gorn? Oh no—git your `ands orf me—oh no! Fink of moi woif—moi litturl wans! Aaaaaaargh aaaargh no—

Urk)

And the day dragged on and the villagers did their best to cope without the helpful presence of the Ballybothar Road—ropes slung between rooftops; eggs and milk exchanged with the aid of long poles; a small child pulped when a ladder folded wrong.

And they all went to bed thinking:

What happened to our lovely road?

What did we do to make it leave?

Will it... will it ever come back to us?

\*\*\*

(And Dr. Donovan Slane is taken up the stairs, into the child's bedroom.

Chaos—window burst inwards, bed smashed to splinters, tears in the ceiling and the child himself, smashed burgermeat against the wall by a tide of grit and broken stone; the face purple, the gaping mouth filled with gravel, the wheaty sulphur locks thick with clay.

Scratched into the plaster over the pulverized head:

**KIING OF PADY RAOD**

"What is this?" sobs Mrs Fettingsley, "What's all this stuff on my poor little Chester?"

And Dr. Donovan Slane takes the pipe from his mouth, locks grey eyes upon the wretched woman and says—

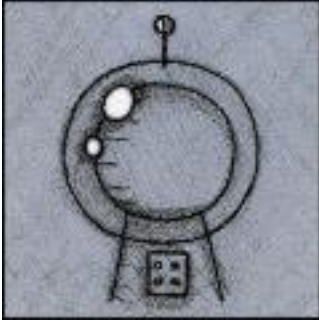
"Madam, your son has learned, to his cost, *that even roads have feelings.*"

He put the pipe back in his mouth.

"Or something."

*\*cough\**)

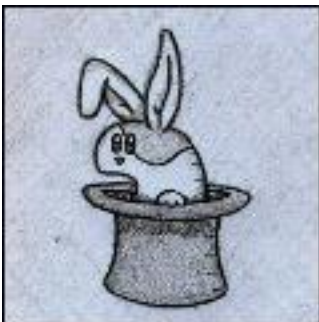
## Contributor Biographies



**Boyd Garrriott** is pretty much awesome. He's tall, he's pale, and he's writing this biography. He has been published previously on the *Cynic Online Magazine* (which is legit) and not been published by dozens of other magazines (which are not legit). He loves writing humor and putting on sunscreen before he swims.



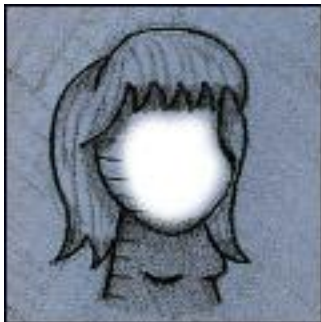
**Autumn Hayes** is a freelance writer, creative writing teacher, and poet; her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Defenestration*, *Southern Women's Review*, *Cuento*, *trapeze magazine*, and *Jersey Devil Press*. Born and raised in Houston, Texas, she has taught reading, writing, public speaking, math, drama, and vocational welding in Los Angeles, Houston, and the Mississippi Delta. She is currently back in her hometown, hard at work on almost everything in her life, especially welding.



**Elizabeth Alexander** spent her formative years being good and seems to be spending the duration overcorrecting. Her work has appeared in *MonkeyBicycle*, *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Anemone Sidecar*, *Archives of Neurology*, and many other places. She lives in Seattle.



**Mason Johnson** has been a sales associate at Claire's Boutique, karate instructor, ghost writer for Stan Lee's ghost writer, and many other things. Currently, he works at CBS writing articles for their Chicago-based news websites. You can find out about his reading series at [www.pissfanatics.net](http://www.pissfanatics.net), which happens the second Sunday of every month in Chicago.



**Kate LaDew** is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She is poor, a fact completely unrelated to her choice of major.



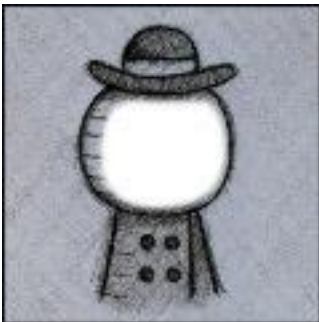
**Lawrence Barker** lives in Atlanta, Georgia. However, he has also lived in Florida (making him very familiar with skunk apes) and in east Tennessee (making him familiar with Gatlinburg, a tourist town that makes skunk apes look positively normal). In addition to writing, Lawrence frequently annoys his neighbors by playing old time banjo.



**Marit Ericson** is a twentysomething, graduate student, and poet, among other things. Her work has lately appeared in various online journals. She begins each day—in dread, at peace, with pancakes—in northcentral New Jersey.



**Kimberly Emilia** has been writing since the age of 12 when she coaxed a best friend to dictate her every last word. Lame, perhaps. But the written word still entices and entralls Kimberly. She writes an educational blog for a university in the suburbs of Philadelphia and hates cats.



**John S. Fields** recently discovered a passion for writing, and has had fiction published in *Full of Crow*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Atticus Review*, *Conceit Magazine*, and *Enigma*. John receives encouragement from his lovely wife, and enjoys playful interruptions from their two rowdy boys.





**Meg Tuite's** writing has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals including *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *34th Parallel*, *Valpairaso Literary Review*, *One, the Journal*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Hawaii Review* and *Boston Literary Magazine*. She is the fiction editor of *The Santa Fe Literary Review* and *Connotation Press*. Her novel "Domestic Apparition" (2011) is now available through San Francisco Bay Press. She has a monthly column "Exquisite Quartet" up at *Used Furniture Review*.



**Kyle Hemmings** lives and works in New Jersey. When drunk, he tells people he's the poet Laureate of the Westfield Train Station.



**Graham Tugwell** is a PhD student with the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, where he teaches Popular and Modernist Fiction. The recipient of the College Green Literary Prize 2010, he has been published by *Anobium*, *Write From Wrong*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *Red Ochre Lit*, *The Quotable*, *Sein und Werden*, *Thoughtsmith*, *THIS Literary Magazine* and *L'Allure Des Mots*. He has work forthcoming in *Kerouac's Dog Magazine*, *Anemone Sidecar*, *Plain Spoke*, *Pyrta*, *Battered Suitcase*, *Lost Souls*, *Rotten Leaves*, *Red Lightbulbs*, and *FuseLit*. He has lived his whole life in the village where his stories take place. His website is [grahamtugwell.com](http://grahamtugwell.com).