

Tori Bond

Mom, Please Don't Do That

Scraping roadkill off streets for Kyle's dinner became more time consuming the bigger he grew. He preferred his meals live and squirming but strays and wild turkeys were sparse, squirrels and birds were dainty bites and the paranoid neighbors were keeping their cats and dogs close to home. I wanted to tell Mom I was lonely, but I could never figure out how. She was very busy genetically engineering spare body parts. She got even busier when Parts Unlimited Inc. started the Exotic Bodies™, a line of tails, whiskers, horse genitalia, cat ears, marsupial pouches. She even managed to cultivate a human brain on the back of a dolphin, although the whole transplant thing remained a messy conundrum. Kyle was her pet project.

I knew her work was very important, she told me every time I called her at work. Mom's a genius. She gives birth to amazing ideas. The downside is she thinks she's too smart to ever be wrong. When she decided to bring her work home, I begged her not to do it. Kyle was conceived in my bathtub, a gene-spliced T-Rex implanted into a Komodo dragon. Komodos are nasty when pregnant. One bite from their bacterial-laden mouths and you're dead. Cohabiting with mama Komodo made me twitch but the idea of baby T-Rex made me hyperventilate. Mom slapped me and assured that her dwarfing technology was foolproof, insisting Kyle would only grow to the size of a wallaby.

"A wallaby with flesh-tearing tiger teeth," I said.

Mom grounded me for a week for talking back. The Komodo didn't last long, split open by the growing egg. Mom turned my bathtub into a makeshift reptile womb, the quilt from my bed, kept wet and warm with heat lamps. The stench made me puke, which made Mom mad. She installed small palm trees and tropical bird sounds played on its own iPod, previously mine. She enhanced the jungle ambiance with a live Toucan but Kyle ate it when he was about a month old. Mom blamed me for letting it go. Not even the colorful feathers stuck to Kyle's bloody teeth could convince her that Kyle was a savage. She always took Kyle's side.

Anytime I complained, Mom accused me of sibling rivalry. I accused her of loving Kyle more. She deemed me stupid anytime we disagreed. How could I argue? She'd announce her 166 IQ-score as proof that she was right. Dad hated that most. How long can you be stupid in front of your wife and daughter before you disintegrate? I just wanted to go out to lunch or get our nails done but she had no time for frivolous things. My pleas for her to come home, inspired lectures about the contributions to mankind she made, resurrecting extinct monsters. Kyle was the name she picked out for her last three failed pregnancies.

Kyle outgrew his dwarf technology about the time he outgrew the bathroom. Mom lined my bedroom with straw for Kyle, deeming it a valuable bonding experience. He slept with his glowing yellow eyes open. I slept in the bathtub. Mom obsessed about family unity, a broken concept evidenced by Dad's running away to an artist colony that disavowed technology and electricity. He'd yell in haikus for her to come home. She'd

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yell that she was standing right in front of him. It was like watching a Russian and a dog scream at each other. Dad spoke in poetic verse, a language too dense with beauty and pain for Mom to decipher with her scientific axioms and absolutes. She marginalized his lack of salary even though he raised me from birth. He'd yell: You live in your mind / I need a bed, not a head / There's no room for me.

There was no room in Mom's left hemisphere for me either. I curled up in a small compartment in her right brain. It was a lonely place. My bathtub dreams overflowed with growling toothy animals chasing me. I'd wake up and realize I'd never fallen asleep. I tried to tell Mom that Kyle scared me but she lost her mind screaming in broken blunt prose, "Selfish... I didn't understand. .. Pets have healing effects on humans."

I murmured, "except when they eat their owners."

She heard me and turned inside-out with rage.

I stopped talking. It was safer.

My grades were dropping as fast as my weight. Mom kept telling me it was teenage rebellion. I kept telling her there was never anything to eat.

"What happened to the 10-pound roast, 25-pound turkey, and 2 hams I bought last week?"

"Kyle ate it, a bedtime snack." But she never listened.

I was too tired to drag home a fresh deer carcass so I suggested we let Kyle do his own hunting; at seven feet tall I figured he must be a teenager. I called it a rite of passage, codifying my language so Mom didn't think I was hating on her pet. Mom refused, afraid he'd run away or get hurt, like that would be a bad thing.

I came home from school one day and found my stash of roadkill and strays depleted. I tried feeding eggs fortified with tofu to Kyle but he flung it against the wall, a surprising feat for his tiny arms. I called Mom at work and begged her to come home. She sloughed me off saying she'd pick something up. I locked Mom's door, cocooning myself in her bed. I wrote a note hoping to get through to Dad.

Danger, Kyle's hungry

Dad, come home I need your help

Mom's working, no food

Hope all's well with you

Kyle sends love, bites, and kisses

I love you, I do

I strapped the haiku to a pigeon's leg. Before I could fling it out the window, Kyle's head crashed through the door, teeth drooling.

I texted Mom, "miss u."