

A Child is Born

by Jim Harrington

I came out of the Quick Stop and found her in the back seat of my ten-year-old Camry. I don't know who she is, or why she chose my car. I do know she's having a baby any minute now based on the size of her belly and the sounds emanating from her. Note to self: in the future, remember to lock car doors, or give up cigarettes, or both.

I ask her name. She says it, I think. It's buried in one long scream and a lot of huffing.

She's pretty and has a slim body—or will have once the baby comes out—and nice legs. Blonds interest me. For that matter, so do redheads and brunettes. I'm not so excited by the lavender lipstick or neon, multicolored fingernails. Still, in other circumstances, if I wasn't so afraid of talking to girls and making a fool of myself, I might ask her out.

I agree to drive her to the hospital. She thought she had time to walk there. Obviously, that didn't work out so well.

Traffic comes to a halt when we're three blocks away. The honking of stopped cars due to an accident at the intersection tells me it might as well be three miles ahead.

"This isn't good," I say.

"At least my water broke before I got in the car."

"Your what what?" I feel light-headed.

I consider driving down the sidewalk, but there are too many Christmas shoppers. And it's dark. I might hit someone paying more attention to their phone screen than where they're walking. Maybe

that's what happened up ahead. Texting is just as dangerous when walking as when driving.

A scream from the back seat engulfs all the other sounds. I peek over my shoulder. She's lying on the seat, knees up, legs spread, skirt bunched near her waist. "It's coming," she says.

"NO," I respond. I want to run, but my legs won't let me. They seem to have other ideas as to how I should spend my next few minutes. Another note to self: when finally at home, chop off legs for insubordination.

I jump out of the car and look around. "Somebody help. She's having a baby!" Everyone stares straight ahead. "She's your wife," a nearby cabbie yells through the window. "Man up."

"She isn't. I don't —"

A second scream interrupts me.

"It's coming now. Get in here."

I look around for help once more. A young woman walks by. I open my mouth, hands waving over my head. She gives me the finger.

"Aaaagh." I open the back door. Look inside. Notice she's not a natural blond. Avert my eyes.

"Oh, come on. You've seen a pussy before," she says.

Actually, this is my first.

"Okay, just breathe. . .or relax. . .or whatever it is you're supposed to do," I say.

“I am, you idiot. Now get your hands in there and get ready.”

I put my hands between her legs and close my eyes. Two more grunts and I feel something wet in my hands. I think it's a head. I still can't look. Then there's more. A body. I sense the mother slumping into the seat. I look down and see a healthy baby boy in my hands. His chest rising and falling with each breath. The umbilical cord keeps him tethered to his mother. I try my best to not throw up.

“What's your name?” she asks.

“Joseph. What's yours?”

“Mary,” she replies. Laughing and holding her stomach with both hands, she says, “What do you think we should name the baby?”

