

The Tale of the Donut and the Éclair

by Nick Seagers

Taped to my bedroom door is an aerial photo of Vernon, ME. It's one of Taff's flyers from the Society of Concerned Citizens to Thwart Evil. In black marker over the tree line, it says, "We need to talk, Albert." She must have been watching those anti-drug commercials like that time she kept frying all those eggs and made the house smell like farts for two weeks. That was when Michael and I decided that our folks were cracked.

So I try to track her down so I can get whatever this is going to be over with. It took several years, but I had finally mastered the art of talking with Taff and Dow. The key was to pay close attention to tone. The words themselves were usually trivial and confusing — even awkward — watching them trip over the easy subjects and plow through the rough ones. When the tone of the conversation goes up, you start nodding, with your head tilted just so. When the tone gets low, drop your head to the table and stare at the grain of the wood until the voices stop altogether. Then say, "I know. You're right. I'll try to work on that."

God knows what Taff wanted to talk about this time. *Let it be something simple, like she finally wants to tell me she and Dow really are going to pay for college and I shouldn't worry anymore. Then a pat on the head, or a hug or something and I can go to Chip's party and get messed up.*

Taff was in the dining room, heels up on the table, finishing up a call. "Sounds good to me. Great, great. Okay, Thomas, I've got to go. We'll speak soon." Her legs swing down to the floor. She smiles when she looks at me, only it's the same way she smiles at a prospective client. "Okay, Thomas," she says into the phone. "Have a nice day." She hangs up. On the table she has her laptop and folders and flyers and pamphlets and a box of pastries for

her next rally. I had nabbed the only jelly earlier. *She pulled me down here because I stole a donut?*

"Albert. Good morning." Her palm makes a slow turn off to the side.

"Morning."

And she smiles again, this one a little too forced. In the other room you can hear the host of a fake talk show talk about a book that shows how to make compost in fourteen days, guaranteed or your money back. Dow must be asleep or otherwise sedated.

"I know this may be a little late, but your dad and I talked about it. We want to do it. We —" Taff turns and yells into the other room, "Dow! I said we need to do this together. *As a family.*" Her words are tight and clipped, then soft again. "I scheduled some time today to talk to you about something...something important. Since you're going on with your life, leaving everything you've known so far, you're going to need some information about sex."

Oh, God. "Sex?"

"Yes. Intercourse. Conception. Contraception. Overpopulation."

"Yeah, um, I know it all. They teach it in school. I'm all set. They do the whole guy stuff and girl stuff and how they fit together and all that"

"You don't say?" Taff turns to face the living room.

"Dow! In here now, please!" She turns. "I swear your father has selective hearing." Taff is an expert about judging tone.

Dow slumps into the room, remote still in his hand. He moves it to the breast pocket of his pajamas and sits down, hands in his lap. "Yeah? We're doing this now?" His eyes are still glazed over from staring at the screen. Toll-free numbers are written in different colors on his right hand up to the wrist.

Taff takes a deep breath. "Now, I know you guys, you teenagers, are running around, excited," Dow laughs, "and I want you to know that if you have anything you ever need to talk about, I'm here. Your father is here. We will listen."

"Thanks," I say, about to get up.

She opens the box of pastries, and takes out a powdered donut and an éclair. "For our purposes, today, the éclair represents a man's penis, and the donut represents a woman's vagina. Ok?"

My eyes close. This can't really be happening. At least they aren't doing it in public. Jesus. At some fundraiser or down at the diner, that's when I would have prayed for execution.

"Now," Dow clears his throat and jabbers on. "When a man and a woman are in love and get married and have been married for many, many years, they are allowed to have sexual intercourse."

"Many years?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Wasn't Michael already born when you two got married?"

Taff ignores me. "Now, the éclair is placed inside of the donut repeatedly, in a thrusting motion." She's trying to fit the éclair into the tiny hole of the donut, but she's only succeeding in getting powdered sugar all over the business end of it.

"Please don't say thrusting," I beg.

"Sorry, dear," she says. "Okay, now, when stimulation has reached its desired effect, called climax or orgasm, the éclair will shoot its vanilla cream into the middle of the donut and this is how babies are made."

From where I can't see, Dow pulls out a condom and starts opening it.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. What's going on here?" I ask. More blood rushes to my head than during my last kegstand.

"We just wanted to be sure you understood how safe sex can help to extend your life," Dow says. "Remember, Albert, safe sex isn't just up to the girl. Whether your chosen partner is on the pill, the patch or trusting the day-after thing, it's still your responsibility to wear a condom."

Dow's hands are covered in chocolate and the vanilla filling of the éclair, none of it fitting into the condom. He gives up and starts to knock the smashed pastry against the too-small hole of

the donut, sprinkling powdered sugar all over Taff's literature. "This is how—"

"Please. Stop," I said. "I'll clean. I'll re-shingle the roof. Anything." My eyes were nailed shut so that when the nightmares of this embarrassment came, there would only be audio. But they pop open anyway.

"Now, there are many options for birth control. I think it's important you know all the options. Getting a sexually transmitted disease is like having your neighborhood taken from you. If you do the proper research and take precautions, the odds are drastically decreased." Taff pulls a list from her pocket. "There's abstinence, of course. Most effective. A woman can use the shot or patch or pill or diaphragm. Think about sterilization. The ways your father and I used," she looks across the table, "Dow, do you remember how naïve we were? We used the big three before having — well, children. There was the rhythm method, *coitus interruptus*, and we even tried non-vaginal sex."

Toss me into a lava bath and burn it all away.

Taff takes the smashed éclair penis from Dow and bites the head off, chewing and smiling. "So. I know that's a lot of information to toss at you all at once, but I'm sure it will sink in. Any questions?"

Can't move. Can't speak. Praying for blindness so I never again have to see anything like that. Dow has retreated back to the glow of the television, and Taff's back on the phone, talking to Mr. Detmer about speaking at the rally as a local merchant. What she calls 'voice of the community.' Trying to save this hell we call life.

Making a mental note of what I need for tonight, I get up from the table. Taff smiles and waves and smiles again and my stomach twists a little and I duck around the corner fast in case some donut comes up.

