

Evening News

By Skyler Breeden

The streetlight across the road came on, turning the sidewalk into a bright python curving its body around the flat blackness of the neighborhood's pavement.

"I'm a Tyrannosaurus Rex," declared the little boy as he stood by the window.

"Ok Lizard King, but you're tracking mud on the carpet," replied his babysitter.

"Grarr!" growled the boy and ran towards the stairs.

The babysitter chased after him, herding him up towards the tub. Their tennis shoes flip flapped against the carpeted floor. They hit the hard linoleum of the bathroom at a run and skidded to a stop in the quiet calm of porcelain and tile. The sink's faucet drip dropped.

"Which bubbles?" asked the babysitter.

She sat on the floor and held up a dinosaur headed dispenser next to a boring blue capped one. The boy looked up from the knots in his shoelaces and pointed at the dinosaur. She poured the bubbles into the clean white tub. The thick liquid started creeping it's way towards the drain. She plugged it, rolled up her sleeves and turned the knobs.

Water shot out of the faucet head, crashing into the tub. As the steam rose, the boy pretended he was in the Amazon rainforest. A young native getting his shoes untied by his babysitter. He stripped off his shirt and flung it up into the air. It didn't disappear into the atmosphere like he'd hoped, but landed disappointingly in the sink.

After a struggle his shoes finally came off and he was running around the bathroom with a toilet plunger for a makeshift spear. The babysitter crashed through his makeshift underbrush and took away the plunger, admonishing him to behave while she was gone.

"I'll be right back," she reassured him.

He skulked around the small confines of the bright bathroom. It smelled like antiseptic and looked vaguely like a cage. He wished his bathroom were more exotic.

Outside the door the babysitter, under the pretense of looking for a towel she had already found, wandered into the boy's mother's room. It smelled vaguely like vanilla. There were paintings on the walls surrounding a large bed. Against one wall crouched a couch covered in clothing. The couch was the color of an old alligator skin purse.

A large wooden dresser on the opposite wall held the contents of thirty-seven years. Old mother's day presents lined the back. Long necklaces worn twice, perfume bottles full of strong grandmotherly scents, and handmade presents. Nearer to the front were things the boy's mother actually used, beauty products, hairbrushes, and simple, elegant jewelry.

The babysitter lifted a single string of pearls and held them to her neck. Her neck was neither pale nor swan-like. The pearls draped snugly around the ruddiness of it. She stared at herself in the mirror, turning left to right, trying to decide which hemisphere of her plump face looked best in the soft light of the bedroom.

"Ker-thump!"

She jumped.

"Splash!"

She dropped the pearls and ran towards the bathroom; worried the boy had hurt himself. As she was about to barrel through the door she could hear him giggling.

"What are you doing in here?" she asked, calmly entering the bathroom and standing, hands firmly on her hips.

"Nothing," he said, giggling at her.

He was sitting in waist deep water topped by four inches of bubbles. She turned off the tub's faucet. He splashed water at her and giggled some more.

"What's so funny?" she asked and splashed him back.

"Nothing," he said again.

Exasperated she asked, "Did you wash behind your ears?"

"Yes," he lied.

She checked the crooks of his elbows first. They were clean. He giggled again. She got suspicious and checked his ears. He tried to duck, but got a face full of bubbles instead.

"You didn't clean behind your ears... Looks like you need to get dunked!" she teased.

He giggled again and shook his head. She laughed and lunged towards him, but he jerked away. She turned and pretended to get more soap. Catching him off guard, she pushed his head under water. He came up sputtering and crying.

"I want my mommy!" the boy wailed.

He jumped out of the tub in his wet jeans. The babysitter caught him before he could run. She wrapped him in a towel and hugged him close. Water dripped and pooled on the floor. Quiet sobs caught in the boy's throat like the bubbles clinging to the sides of the slowly draining tub.

"I know you do," she murmured into his ear.

Downstairs the evening news came on. The anchorwoman straightened her jacket and looked into the camera. The teleprompter scrolled.

Gravely she reported, "Rescuers are still searching through the wreckage of TWA flight 400..."

The streetlight outside the window buzzed and flickered off.