Indentations and Other Stories

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I know you thought you’d heard all there was to know about my wife by now, but I’m here to give you the inside scoop. My wife was a typical New York divorced woman well before we were divorced. She jumped from career to career like a frog on a mating spree. First she ran the famous Alfred E. Packer Student Union Grill at New York University, named after the only man ever convicted of cannibalism in the United States. Those were the good days. She even let me quote her in my first interview, which I published in a local leaflet. “Our grill,” she said, “has consistently striven to attain the high standards exemplified by the life of Mr. Packer. Plus we’re cheap.”

Then things went sour. The FDA shut down the grill and she became a topless cellist, then produced a Marcel Marceau album, then gave brandy rubdowns and set that old man on fire—which you probably heard about—and generally she got into that whole New York spontaneous cult Darryl Hannah Legal Eagles Doonesbury esoteric environmental art thing. You
know. Every week she had a new display of atrocities for her upcoming environmental art party. A one-act play in our living room called for me to club her with Buford Pussor’s bat. I did it, but with chagrin. Finally, it got to the point where I just couldn’t take it anymore. The last straw was Hitler’s actual toilet seat, purchased at an auction, that she did a Hiroshima thing with. She hung the seat from a wooden fishing pole stuck into the toilet bowl, and somehow caused an explosion in the toilet with cleaning fluid, which set the pole on fire, then she dropped a big, breakable balloon full of baby powder in the middle of the bathroom floor, and as the dust settled everybody clapped and cried.

When she was finally arrested by the Fire Marshal, I moved out of the apartment and tried to publish a human interest piece about her as a cult figure, but the campus newspaper turned it down. “That woman,” the Fire Marshal said to me, “has one leg in this world and one leg on the moon, and between these two legs she’s got nothing to stand on.”

So she got religion. And I got famous. As you might recall, she gave birth to our son Joshua a few months later. She went on Geraldo, and that was the first time she publicly insisted that I wasn’t responsible for Joshua’s birth.

“No, no, there was no conception,” she told everyone. “It was divine intervention. Joshua is the new Messiah, and my husband is simply the vessel through which Joshua will attend school.”

“We hear that your husband is quite a writer,” Geraldo said.

“He is nothing like Joshua,” she said. “Joshua came from the atmosphere, from the thing the astronauts see from the
space shuttle and have to fight against when they leave the earth."

Oprah started dropping by my new place with questions, slipped me some money so she’d have an inside track on my wife, and my writing became famous. Mr. Downey called. I smiled a lot.

Then my wife put in a bid on the PTL Club and the real scandal began. Carlos Pepe Garcia, a Spanish religious fanatic who claimed that he could walk on water, also wanted to buy the PTL. Carlos called a special press conference to debate whether or not Joshua was the true new Messiah, hoping to publicly denounce my wife and Joshua at the same time. By this time, I was, of course, her ex-husband, and one among a cluster of reporters scribbling notes with fascination.

"Let them behold the truth," Carlos said loudly to my wife, sweeping his arm at my sea of colleagues and me. "Tell them of the son Joshua wetting the sheets. He lies in bed with distress. Tell them it."

"Joshua is God’s child," she countered calmly. "His urine represents mortality. It comes from the stars. Your jealousy leers its ugly head because you’re often immersed in wetness yourself but not as famous as Joshua."

"Quiet the woman," said Carlos, flailing his arms for the cameras, "she befoils my name."

"Every year," my wife explained to us, "Carlos Pepe Garcia sinks in the ocean with a surprised look on his face."

"The son is a bedwetter and he stutters the words," Carlos cursed.

"Every year," my wife insisted, drinking in our attention, "Carlos says he will walk on water and he is fished from the sea like a dead sheep. He pays reporters to come and write about

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the miracle of his fat body sinking under the surface. Five years in a row now."

"It is the fault of the press!" Carlos said, causing a stir among us. "They refuse to record the history in proper form and I lose concentration. It is the flashbulbs! They are like weights to my feet."

"They won't shut up about my son Joshua either," my wife said, smiling slyly for the camera.

"For me, next year will be noted," said Carlos, snatching back the spotlight. "I will hover over the ocean waters. I meditate and diet each day. Men will be awed."

"I believe you will make it!" I shouted, drawing a protest from the other reporters.

"Shut up," said Carlos. "The reporter cares nothing of religion. To you religion is a puppet to use as ridicule for the believers. You know nothing of the symbol. To you a fish is for eating only. You write of the fisherman who is choked by the jumping fish off the hook, but you miss its symbolic story."

"Listen well to him," my wife said. "He is our authority on fish, since he spends so much time with them. A whale has adopted him."

"Silence the woman," said Carlos, pointing dramatically. "She makes filthy the symbol. She seeks only the printed words."

The remainder of the conference is a blur to me. I stopped taking notes and basked in the wealth of my wife's wonder. She was pure and contemporary and newsworthy, embodying all that I ever dreamed of writing about. I was in love.