

We were running late for school on the day my nephew was born. We'd been late for school all week. My sister Gloria hadn't been feeling well in the mornings. She said it was anxiety. Mother said it was just Gloria trying harder to disappoint everyone. I didn't know who to believe. Gloria was seven years older than me and drove me to school, but Mother was Mother.

Gloria was even slower that day than she had been before. She kept stopping to take deep, slow breaths as she got ready. When we got in the car, she leaned her elbows on the steering wheel and put her head in her hands. Then she said, "No," opened the door, leaned out, and threw up all over the driveway.

Then Gloria said a word that Father would have slapped her for saying in front of me, if Father had been there.

"Look at this, Jake."

"No," I whined. "I'm not looking at your puke."

"Just look. Trust me."

I took off my seatbelt and scooted across the backseat to her side so I could look out from behind her shoulder.

On the asphalt, in the splatter of milk and bile and half-digested Special K, was a tiny blue egg. It was cracked open, and from it emerged a tiny, slimy, hideous baby bird. It was pink and wrinkly. Its skin looked thinner than paper and you could see its bones through it. It didn't look like it had eyes yet—underneath the skin on its head were two big black circles, but there were no openings. Its wings were stubby little things like arms without hands, and its legs were like tiny twigs, and its beak was yellow and shaped kind of like one of those fancy parentheses that nobody uses, like this: }

It was hideous and disgusting.

"That came out of your *stomach*!" I shrieked.

"Shhh." Gloria unbuckled her seatbelt and carefully leaned further out of the car, until she could get two fingers around the bird's little head and pick it up.

"Ew!" I whispered. "Ew ew ew ew!"

"Shut up," she said. "This is my baby."