

Storylandia

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Table of Contents

Celebrity Sperm Bank Paulette Gaudet	1
Prince Charming Rides in from Brooklyn on a Bike Sarah Rasher	22
The Family Jewels Kathryn L. Ramage	34
The Glint Patrick Stacher	67
The Ferocious Night Julie Travis	75

Paulette Gaudet

Celebrity Sperm Bank

I am *so* sick of this shit. They should rearrange their letters like I do and call it USuCk. I mean, who do they think they are? They don't even know who *I* am, 'cos when I said, "Do you know who I am?" they were all like, "We know you're about to fail this semester," and I was like, "Whatever," and they just told me I'd have to take it up with my professor. So, here I am in Debussy's office when I could be, like, anywhere else and not soiling my skirt on this sticky, splintery-ass, pseudo-interrogation chair in front of his desk.

He's got a beard like he's from the nineteenth-century and goes, "Hello Cecille, it's nice to finally meet you," like he's never seen me before. Which, okay—I guess there's a chance he hasn't noticed me in the twelve-thousand people in his American Lit class. And, I guess I've never raised my hand, or even been there that often, but *still...*

"What can I do for you?" he says.

"Not fail me," I say.

He kind of laughs and looks through my file. He flips right over the first page, the most important one, where it says I'm a half-Clooney. "It looks like you're actually doing well in my class, compared to your others this semester."

“I’m a freshman, I’m new to all this,” I say.

“Yes, but one would think some portion of your time here would register in your file, and that doesn’t seem to be the case. You have incompletes upon F’s upon sustained absences.”

Jesus, can’t this school afford air-conditioning for what I’m paying? My freaking lingerie is fusing with this chair. “I’ve been busy,” I say.

Debussy nods. “Well, it’s good to know your mind has been active somewhere.”

What the *fuck*? “Excuse me?” I say.

“You’re failing because I have no submitted work of yours to go on,” he says.

Submitted work? What is this, like the second week of class? Okay, no—there was that dance for the start of winter semester, but that wasn’t so long ago, was it? Or was that the Valentine’s Day dance—shit—it’s like, *March*.

“Don’t I have time to make up the work?” I ask.

“Have you read *Moby Dick*, which I assigned?” Debussy asks.

I shake my head. I haven’t even seen the movie.

“Then you have a bit of work to do in the next three weeks before mid-term grades are assessed. Especially since the class has already read—and submitted papers on—*The Scarlet Letter* and *Ethan Frome*,” says Debussy.

I’m silent because my mind can’t even form profanities. Just tell him, I think; *tell* him you’re all legaced and shit from the one time your mother thought ahead and used her go-go money or whatever to buy George Clooney’s sperm. I look around Debussy’s office to see a desk fan on the windowsill behind him (which is ridiculously not turned on), and a framed old-time photo of Herman Melville on the wall. There’s an abacus on top of a wooden file cabinet, and that

right there kind of tells me Debussy won't care about anything other than me reading *Moby Dick*. I still can't speak, so my lips close and part several times, which sounds like the dry shuffling of paper.

Debussy pushes a metal tin toward me on his desk. "Would you like an Altoid?"

I go out to the parking lot, which is usually the only place I remember being on campus. I have a primo spot—right next to the half-Pivens and half-Craigs. A little farther down is where the half-Thorntons have tailgates almost daily, and I can smell skewers of free-range chicken and prosciutto. I just ate like eighteen hours ago, but go over to grab an ironic Chinette paper plate and stand in line.

Cesario Thornton drops a skewer on my plate. "Haven't seen you here much this year. What gives, Berensoni—your trainer out of town?"

I shrug, and my Chloé tank-blouse sticks to my shoulders. "Heard your skewers rule, had to confirm."

He draws back his lips into what passes for a smile around here, then tilts his head toward a pot of rice. "Want some?"

I totally grimace. "Not if I want to wear this skirt again."

People push in line behind me, but I manage to stay in front of Cesario.

"How're classes going?" he asks.

My eyebrows swirl into this little knot. "They'd go a lot better if my last name was different."

Cesario shakes his head. "Your mom's got class, what can you do?"

I roll my eyes and move to a sad little patch of grass edging the parking lot. I have no idea how to eat this humungous skewer of meat in public without a fork but it smells *so* good, I end up just gnawing on it until

Sarah Rasher

Prince Charming Rides in from Brooklyn on a Bike

Tonight you're the one making the booty call. Your logic is flawless: you want to get laid, Grindr scares you, you're too lazy to make yourself pretty for going out, and it's going to be four hours until anyone interesting goes near a bar anyway. In the past—and by “past,” we are talking three times, four if you count the night you met—in the past, he has called—and by “called,” we mean texted, this is the modern age—he has called you. Still, you don't believe this is a faux pas, and if it is, you do not want to be fuck-buddying a guy who's put off at being the called rather than the caller.

He texts that he will be right over. You primp expediently.

His name is Ethan. You met him at a party thrown by a girl you don't know who is friends with your friend's boyfriend. There was punch: two parts pineapple juice, two parts grenadine, eighteen parts tequila. You fooled around in the bathtub and, thank you Jesus and blue agave, immediately friended each other on Facebook. He used this information three weeks later to invite you over. You have never seen him sober.

You buzz him in. He asks if you think his bike will be okay locked to the No Parking sign, and your instinct is probably not, so you help him carry his bike

into your lobby and lock it to the banister. He smells like he has biked across the Williamsburg Bridge to get to you. It's a delicious smell.

In your apartment, he takes his clothes off. He has a body like a guy who regularly bikes across the Williamsburg Bridge to get to things. He has big hands, and a small tattoo on his chest and a big one on his left bicep, a sprawling sleeve that you have not had time to parse. Cowlicked hair that he neglects and a short beard that he maintains impeccably. A trail of clues to who he is, which you've never followed.

You are naked, and he is looking at you, and you don't know what it means. You sit on your bed. Since you're the one who called, is it your job to make the first move?

He sits down next to you like your bed is a porch swing. He kisses you. A thing he does, like he doesn't realize it's just on the edge of uncool behavior, to start out kissing. You think he does it because he likes to, but you haven't asked. You like his beard leaving rug burns on your face. You like his clean mouth. You can tell a lot by kissing; people would make fewer mistakes if they kissed each other more. That's why you avoid kissing. It's an early warning system, and it would have saved you from many nights of bad sex that you're glad to have endured.

You get your head and he gets his. He's very effective. It's why you don't mind getting on the L train when he calls.

He doesn't leave the room but doesn't touch you. You run your hands down his chest and almost fall off the bed.

"Don't get me started laughing," he says as you recover gracelessly from your pratfall. "I won't stop." He gets up and turns around as you scramble onto your

knees, under control. He leans in and touches your face and freezes. You didn't know the color of his eyes before. They're like strong coffee, a few shades north of black.

"So," you say. "Got any plans for later?" You're not suggesting anything, just making noise.

"This was more than I expected. I'm tired on Fridays." He stretches and almost hits you. He's still on your bed and not dressed, and you're not sure why. "I was going to order a pizza and watch this zombie show my buddy's been yelling at me to watch."

"The Walking Dead? I heard that's good."

"No, this other one." Still naked. Still on your bed. "This British one. I don't know."

"Cool. Let me know how it is." After you leave. Please leave.

He gets up. You let out half a sigh of relief before you realize he's still carrying on this conversation. "You look different when I'm not drunk," he says.

You laugh, and he laughs back. He has another tattoo you hadn't noticed before, on his back, at tramp stamp height but off to the left. It's Underdog, the cartoon character, flying through the air with a smile on his face. "I'm not staring at your ass, I'm looking at Underdog," you say.

"I used to pretend to be him when I was a little kid. I literally wanted to be a flying dog when I grew up. Like, when you're little enough to think that's possible."

"I was going to be a dentist," you say. "Really. I had a crush on my dentist when I was five. Only woman I've ever loved."

"How'd that work out for you?" He sits back down. So much for progress.

"I'm a personal assistant for an event planner."

"That sounds more fun than dentistry." He is

Kathryn L. Ramage

The Family Jewels

A mystery set in the 1920s, continuing the adventures of Frederick Babington.

1

It was a beautiful, crisp, and colorful autumn afternoon. Frederick Babington, who was visiting his aunt in the Suffolk village of Abbotshill, decided to take a walk. Though the injuries he'd received during the Great War had taken a long time to heal, he was beginning to feel truly well again. His leg no longer pained him and he'd discarded his cane.

Billy Watkins, Freddie's manservant who had saved his life during the war and looked after him diligently since, insisted that he take a coat in case the evening grew chilly and not tire himself by going too far. Freddie promised to be back in time for dinner and grabbed his tweed coat down from the rack by the front door on his way out.

He had a delightful time wandering the country lanes around Abbotshill, climbing the green hills and kicking up piles of golden and russet leaves that had fallen under the trees. At dusk, he headed back toward his aunt's house by way of the Rose and Crown pub; a pint of the local beer seemed just the thing to complete his outing.

The taproom was crowded, but the girl at the bar smiled when she saw him. “We’ve been hearing some talk about you tonight, Mr. Freddie,” she told him as she filled a mug from the tap. Freddie didn’t understand this remark, until she lifted her chin to indicate a table in the corner behind him. “Bill’s been here near an hour, telling everybody what a fine detective you are. Our constable was interested in particular.”

Freddie turned to look over his shoulder and located Billy seated with the village constable, Rob Cochrane. The two were deep in conversation and hadn’t noticed his entrance. Curious as to what they were saying, Freddie picked up his mug and made his way toward their table.

As he approached, a familiar voice could be heard through the chatter of the crowd: “I tell you, Mr. Freddie’s awfully clever. He’s solved plenty of mysteries, private-like for his family, you understand, but he likes a puzzle even if it’s nothing to do with murder. If anybody can figure out this one of yours, Rob, Mr. Freddie can.”

Freddie was deeply touched by the recommendation. There was an old saying: No man is a hero to his valet—but Billy evidently thought well enough of him to sing his praises in public.

“So you think he’ll see me?” asked Rob.

“If I ask him to, he will,” Billy assured his friend. “Whyn’t you come up to Abbot House with me? We’ll put it before Mr. Freddie and see what he thinks.” It was then he realized that Freddie was standing behind him; Billy’s face colored, his mouth opened and shut, and he ducked his head.

Freddie beamed at him affectionately. “Ask me what, Billy?”

“It’s Rob here—he’s got a puzzle as needs working out.” Billy waved to indicate his friend.

“Bill says I ought to come to you, Mr. Babington, ‘bout this matter I was called to look into,” Rob explained. “There’s been no crime as such, but it’s an odd thing. Billy was telling me you like to investigate odd things. I thought as you might want to have a look at it yourself.”

“What is it?”

Rob made as if to rise—he thought it disrespectful to be seated before a gentleman—but Freddie gestured for him to stay where he was. Rob remained seated, but sat up a little straighter in his chair as he reported, “There was a cottage broken into this afternoon on the far side of Abbotshill—not burgled, Mr. Babington, as I say. Nothing’s been taken. But here’s the curious thing: the furniture’s been shifted about.”

“Shifted about?” echoed Freddie. “You mean someone came in and rearranged their furniture?”

“Not so much ‘rearranged,’ more like pulled out of place. I’ve been constable in these parts for three years now, and it’s the most peculiar bit of mischief I’ve ever seen! Can you tell me why anybody’d want to do such a thing?”

The next morning, they accompanied Rob to visit the young couple who lived in the cottage, Florence and Gerald Fairchild. Mr. Fairchild was a sturdy young man near Freddie’s own age, and his wife was a pretty girl with fair hair cropped in the latest fashion. They looked a little confused when the constable returned to their door with two strangers.

“Hello. Are you a police inspector?” Mr. Fairchild asked Freddie, but he looked rather doubtful; Freddie obviously had the appearance of a gentleman.

“This is Mr. Frederick Babington,” Rob introduced him. “He’s a private investigator. My friend, Bill Watkins

Patrick Satcher

The Glint

Why do things have to be so complicated, he thought while watching the boy cry. Old man Johnson, the veterinarian, had come down from the pavilion where both men had seen the race and the accident. Dr. Johnson had administered the shot that made the horse's spasms stop forever. The boy didn't stop crying until the tractor came with a chain to drag the carcass down to the far end of the arena. Even then he stood watching the boy.

A glint from the movement brought him back to his place in the stands. Tobacco spittle had sprinkled his white shirt with various shapes of browns. Flecks of sputum had made concentric circles of shadings. Splashes and stains. He must have been mumbling to himself he thought. Then he heard the hurried conversations re-creating the accident.

“Broke one foreleg and I'll be goddamned if he...”

“You see that jockey? That old boy sure enough must have broke his back.”

“When's the next race?”

“And then the other leg tried to catch all the weight and she just busted into a heap.”

“Too bad. What are you drinking anyway?”

Jo Jetta had been the horse's name. It was named after his daughter, Jo Donna. He and the boy had studded her parents one morning in the paddock. He thought that showing the boy how horses mated might help the boy, without showing the boy the whole complex explanation. The intensity of the mount was a graphic display of procreation. Christ, he figured, who wouldn't understand after seeing this.

In the years since his daughter's birth, quarter horse racing had fevered his blood more than ever before. He could feel it grow. The boy trained the horse throughout the Indian summer crossing into the barren winter. Gaiking her. Running her. The clear sleekness of her Rhone coat glistened in the early sunrises. He helped break her to certain weights. Curried her. Bathed her. Measured her with his hands each month. Braided her tail when the mood set in. Now the spring had come. Her hide showed the muscles in her broad chest. Her broad rump was full. At three strides she'd be running forty-five or fifty. Maybe. Her eyes caught the panorama. When her ears lay back, there wasn't much that was going to catch her. The boy had done fine with Jo Jetta. Keeping her watered and hot walked through the circuit was about all that was needed now. She was a fine thing. A real creation. Two years later she lay dead.

The boy stared at the rivets in the soft dirt that showed her last attempts to steady herself. Long streaks. Tears. The boy toed and nudged the scars. Clumps of dirt were sketched in the symmetry on the track. Rivulets of churned energy skittered about from the other horses passing her during the moment of death. The boy lowered the brim on his hat covering his forehead looking nowhere in particular. He walked. Slow until a

surety seemed to set him into a pace toward where the tractor had gone.

He should have fired the boy sooner. It would have been easier and less complicated. His daughter, Jo Donna, had become fond of having the boy around. They both liked each other. That was fine. She'd be leaving for school soon enough. Besides, his insurance business was slow and everything would be consolidated toward retirement. He'd give the boy money and point him in the right direction. Easier. He wasn't much of a cowboy, but he did what he was told and kept his anger to himself. He should have fired him sooner, spitting juice on the stadium floor. Before the circuit ever began.

This would be the last of the racing circuit for him. People looked and talked fairly much the same at each of the events. They said howdy and how's she doing? They mingled in and through each other. Some carried plastic cups with beer. Others bought wine. Sometimes a bottle of harder liquor could be seen passed along the backside of the bleachers. Even after the accident, people seemed to right themselves back into the flow of things. Tractors smoothed the track making the scars disappear. The starting gates were brought to the distance of the race. Word of mouth was passed through the crowd. Heads shifted. Men kept their voices low and close to the other men's faces.

“You mightn't be careful 'o her, that old boy ain't too steady with his training.”

“He looks a little light in the rear.”

“I was talking to him over at the corral and....”

When horses were brought in you could hear words spread in waves of OH's and AH's. Horses pranced in

Julie Travis

The Ferocious Night

“La mort, c’est le commencement de quelque chose.”
(“Death is the beginning of something.”)—Edith Piaf

The end: when had it begun?

In Geoff’s opinion it had started with the body they’d found washed up on the beach. He was mistaken—a story, a final chapter, does not begin from nowhere, in the fiftieth year of a man’s life; it simply continues—but he was convinced that had they not found the body, he would still be alive.

The storms had thrown a multitude of items onto the beach; piles of seaweed, sections of fishing nets, driftwood, a scattering of stones, many of them big enough to cause injury should a person be struck by one. They were not unusual, but this time the sea had cast up something else. It was not immediately identifiable, just a light coloured shape on the sand. As they approached it, two crows hopped into sight, pecking at whatever it was. It was then that Geoff suspected it was a body. Ever the protective father, he warned Lillian to stay away, but ever the headstrong daughter, she ignored him.

They studied the body.

“What is it?” asked Lillian.

It was a white mass, tapered at one end, about three feet in length. Geoff guessed that its girth was

almost as much. It was covered in thick, white fur. The underside was shaggy and dotted with sand. Geoff was almost tempted to stroke it. The top was different. The fur here was unattractive; assimilating, it seemed, with the white stickiness underneath.

“It’s a seal pup. Or, rather, it *was* a seal pup,” said Geoff.

The head and a portion of the body were missing. Geoff was relieved in one respect—a cute face, decomposing or disfigured, would have been distressing for both of them to see—but he could only feel disgust at the mass of fat, the thing that the seal pup had become. Lillian reached out to touch the fur, a look of real sadness on her face, and he pushed her hand away, claiming the thing might be germ-ridden.

But it was not germs he was afraid of. The salt sea—where the body had surely been for some time—would have cleaned the pup quite effectively. There was certainly no smell around it. Geoff was not a superstitious man but the thought of his daughter touching the body was suddenly repellent to him. It was a strange notion but it would be too much like associating with the dead.

And that, for him, was where it began.

It was not the first time Geoff had seen a dead animal. Road kill—rabbits mostly, and seagulls—was common, but most were crushed so hard into the tarmac that just a streak of blood and fur or feathers remained, and he had never really associated such things with living creatures. He had also found dead animals on the beach. The guillemot that he’d come across a few years before, rolling in the surf, was a cheerless sight but it had been undamaged and he had reported it to the local Wildlife Trust and left it alone. Unlike the hare he and his brother had found, decades before, on an otherwise empty beach on a family holiday. The creature had lost

its eyes and the tragedy of it had made him cry. The brothers had buried it deep in the sand, much to the approval of their parents, their father using one of their plastic spades to pick it up and place it in its grave. Geoff had seen many dead animals before but this was the first time he had been aware of the life that had ended, the changes death brought about. The seal pup could no longer be called a seal pup; its transformation into another thing was well under way.

This time he was able to contact the Wildlife Trust from the luxury of his mobile phone, instead of hunting for a telephone box as he had done when he had found the guillemot. He gave the location and what details he had of the body's condition. Had he been alone, he would have reluctantly stayed with the body to keep people away from it. A dog was already showing an interest in it, sniffing at the corpse and rolling on the sand next to its fur in what looked like affection. It was distasteful. Geoff shouted to scare it away. Lillian stopped him.

"It's long since stopped feeling anything, dad. And it's too cold to wait for the Trust. It might be hours before someone can get here."

They moved on. It was a relief to get away from the awful sight. By the time they got back home Lillian seemed to have forgotten the incident, but Geoff found himself unable to stop thinking about it. After dinner, a meal he'd cooked but was barely able to eat, he fell briefly asleep. At least, he assumed it was briefly—he could still hear Lillian washing up, and the clock had moved on only a few minutes—but he'd dreamt that years, decades had passed. He was standing *beside* the world, away from it, looking longingly at it but no longer a part of it. The world turned and turned, the seasons came and went with no thought of him, no

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