



Belly Button Reset

Joshua Hale Fialkov

Published: 2009

Categorie(s): Fiction, Science Fiction

Tag(s): "science fiction" romance children birth mating satire vonnegut fialkov

Belly Button Reset

by Joshua Hale Fialkov

Her reset button was inside her belly button. If ever it were pushed, it was almost certain to kill the daughter instantly. But how do you convince a child not to stick their finger in their belly button? How do you instill the appropriate sense of fear needed for that child to fiercely defend that most pokable of body parts? The mother told her that if someone stuck their finger in her belly button, she would never be able to have a baby.

As the child's skin was less than watertight at anything more than a few inches, her mother also used pregnancy as a threat to keep her out of swimming pools.

"If you swim in a pool where boys have swam, you'll have a baby, and then you can't be a little girl anymore, because you'd have to be a mommy."

Clearly, her mother had mixed feelings about pregnancy in general. She'd wanted a baby more than anything, but, as often is the case in stories like this, she was barren. Her husband, who was quite wealthy at the time, had offered to pay for any type of artificial birth procedure imaginable, but, the mother felt that this would be cheating. She had an alarming sense of fair play when it came to the reproductive olympics.

We should take a second to note that these are figurative reproductive olympics, not literal ones. The actual Reproductive Olympics would not be held for several hundred years, once biologically natural birth had been more or less eradicated as the primitive, dangerous, smelly anachronism it was. No, the event she is describing is the rampant competition raging between the mother and all of her friends on Foxwood Drive, in Monroeville, which sat due east of Pittsburgh in the western part of Pennsylvania in the country called the United States of North America, on the planet called Earth by it's inhabitants, or Terra by those who came to visit.

It was one of these visitors who first forced the mother to face her own reproductive shortcomings and offer her a possible reprieve. Interstellar lifeforms had been a known entity for a dozen or so years, since the Mars

probe accidentally missed its mark and ended up somewhere in Alpha Centauri, smacking a bug eyed monster square in the jaw. It was less known that there had been less stereotypical aliens living among us and studying us for years. One of these visitors had been vigorously fornicating with the mother for the past six months.

He had confessed his non-Homo Superiority to her at some point in the third week. She had laughed, and said that a guy as kind and tender as he would have to be an alien. He smiled warmly at that. She confessed her own secret to him around the same time, although for a less noble reason. Condoms gave her a rash, and she told him it was unnecessary, as she was barren as a corn field in Arizona.

Their talk turned to the need to reproduce, and the alien told her about his own world. A place where the children were built from the cells and waste products of the parents rather than born. Made from plasticine and alloys, imbued with the combined consciousness of the parents, and made into a new entity. The progeny were the perfect combination of the best parts of the parents, guaranteeing the survival and domination of the species in a way that two teenagers humping in the back of a Ford Pickup Truck couldn't.

The best part of the whole process the alien told the mother, was that because they were all made this way, by actually donating pieces of themselves into the children, they, essentially, would live forever. The mother thought that was a literal, but nice, way for a species to be. Then they returned to fucking, and she forgot all about it.

Until her husband caught them the following month. Of course he went utterly insane, throwing things, swinging his golf clubs, the sheer cliché of his actions were overwhelming. So much so, that he instantly calmed down, gave her three hours to get out, and went back to the golf course to hit another nine holes.

The alien offered his own home to the mother, and she packed her clothes, leaving behind her jewelry and anything of real value that the husband had given her.

The alien's home was more or less like any of the cookie cutter houses up and down Foxwood Drive on the outside. It was vaguely Spanish style with a sort of faux-adobe rather than the faux-aluminium most of the houses had for siding. The porch had been molded into archways, but, even through the fancy, you could see that it was the same design as the house not three doors down.

Inside, however, the comparative alienness of the alien's house was clear. The kitchen had been turned into storage, and the bathrooms

locked tight. Every inch of wall space was covered in charts and diagrams, many of which, had the mother looked closer she would have realized, were about the mother herself. The Alien, she would never quite realize, had been sent to find out the mating potential with the human species, and as such, was doing full biological scans every time he copulated with the mother. Or, rather, every time until he started to fall in love with her. Then it was more like fifty-fifty. Leaving the charts out was a mistake on the alien's part, but, being distraught, the mother did not notice. She also didn't notice when, as she was settling into the master bedroom, the alien removed all of it from the walls.

The neighbors, particularly the ugly woman with the curly hair and the extra three hundred pounds gawked at them as they went about their new lives together. Sometimes, the mother would forget that the staring was because she had left her husband for the alien, and thought that it was because they knew he was an alien. It was silly, as, the alien fit in just fine in public.

At home his alien mannerisms were a bit more eccentric, or so the mother would point out. Eating food is a big part of the human experience, and the alien did not need to, nor did he ever attempt to. As he did not eat, going to the bathroom, another key portion of any human's day to day existence, was not an issue either. He had to take the time to explain to the mother that instead of eating, he absorbed particles from the air, and used them to repair, reconstruct, and enhance himself. Waste particles were simply shed back in the air, in the form of dust.

The mother was intrigued and found it romantic that, in effect, she'd been breathing her beloved for months. She'd often felt, after he'd left, before her husband found out, he was always there with her. Knowing that it was true seemed to be quite comforting.

What she found less comforting was the subtle changes to her body over the following few weeks. She attributed the regular sex and lack of stress from her husband with making her feel younger, at first. But then she woke up and found her small toe, which she had lost in a lawnmower accident as a teenager, had mysteriously grown back. Naturally, she began to panic.

The alien explained to her that in effect, by breathing his waste cells, she'd bonded with him, and his cells had started to become one with her cells. She was no longer human, strictly speaking. While the thought of being younger and more vibrant and retrieving the toe she once felt lost would seem like a positive, she did not take it as so. In fact, she packed a suitcase and went to the Super 8 Motel on Route 48.

It was while there that she got the next surprise.

Her abdomen began to stretch in a matter of hours, and, her feet began to swell, and she found herself with a craving for the most disgusting of foods. By the next day, she was stretched almost to bursting, so, she called an ambulance and was examined.

"Congratulations," the Doctor had said, "It's a little girl." The mother decided to keep the forty eight hour reproduction process under wraps, and instead claimed to have been seeing a doctor in the next town over to keep her soon to be ex-husband from finding out.

The baby was too large to be allowed to cook any longer, and it was decided to remove it post-haste. Seventy two hours after first showing symptoms of pregnancy, the mother who couldn't be a mother was finally a mother. The baby girl suckled at her breasts, and cooed appropriately for a human baby, and the mother was allowed to take her home to the Super 8.

She considered calling the alien or perhaps even her soon to be ex-husband, but decided against it. This child was hers and hers alone. At first the child was completely normal, eating, pooping, and sleeping at regular intervals. The mother quickly learned the craft of child rearing and she was quite proud of herself.

The baby developed quickly. Not as quickly as the pregnancy, but, within six months, by which time the mother had rented an apartment down the road from the Eat N' Park where she worked the late shift, the child appeared to be approximately five years of age. Nobody seemed to notice, though, as the mother kept almost entirely to herself, and the growth was uniform enough that people who saw her over time merely mistook it for a growth spurt. The only person the mother feared was on to her was Mrs. Smith who lived next door and would check in on the girl in the night as the mother was busy pushing Superburgers and Smiley Cookies.

It was at the Eat N' Park one night wherein the mother ran into the alien once more. He had another human woman with him, who was pretty and hadn't had her body destroyed by a seventy two hour pregnancy and six months of subsisting on well less than the minimum wage. Although, it should be noted that, perhaps thanks to her new alien-filled genetic makeup, the mother was actually looking pretty alright. The mother smiled, and made small talk, as the alien looked sideways at her.

She took their order and walked away to enter it in the computer. The alien followed her.

"You've had a child. My child."

She could barely face him.

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Somewhere safe."

"I should be allowed to see my daughter."

"Yes, you should."

Again, one may attribute it to the alien DNA interlaced with hers, but, she took a very practical stance on the whole matter. Plans were made, a time and day set, and the mother delivered a Superburger Combo with fries and slaw to the Alien's date, and a bowl of their world famous chicken noodle soup to the Alien who pretended to eat it, but, in reality was probably eating the nicotine in the air wafting over from the smoking section.

The next day the alien arrived at the apartment building, and sensing his offspring nearby wandered into the correct entrance, and knocked on the correct apartment door. The child knew that this man was her father. The alien picked her up and spun her around.

"She's growing too quickly," said the mother.

"Yes, they'll do that if they're not taught." He then proceeded to discuss aging with the child, and that for the sake of normality she must develop only so much each day, otherwise, it'll confuse everyone around her. He also explained to her that judging by her combined anatomy, she could eat and excrete as either a human or an alien, but, for the sake of those around her, he recommended sticking to the human way.

The daughter seemed to download the information from her father rather than understand it. She understood it as fact, and therefore saw no reason to question it. The alien looked his child up and down, and then excused himself and the mother to have a private talk.

It was here that he began to explain the rules of his alien kind and what he suspected would be true for his offspring as well. First was that the skin was only watertight up to a few feet. She could bathe and shower, but swimming was out of the question. The water would seep through her pores and cause her infrastructure permanent damage.

Secondly, was the matter of the reset button. In his homeworld, whenever tragedy would strike and destroy one's loved one, they would mourn appropriately, and then press their reset buttons. Once reset, they could find a new mate without any of the baggage of having lost a spouse. The same could be done in case of the loss of children, or, for those particularly delicate, pets. How that reset button would function on a half human half alien would be unpredictable and possibly

catastrophic. It would be the equivalent of taking away half of an engine, and hoping that the other half can somehow still do zero to sixty in five seconds.

Finally, he presented the mother with a folder of paperwork. Having completed his objectives here on earth, as evidenced by the child, he was to return to his planet post haste. He'd requested that all of his assets be transferred into the mother's name, thus making sure she could devote herself to raising her child, and not have to worry about bear claws and salad bars anymore.

He kissed the mother gently, turned, picked up his daughter in his arms and whispered a few words to her as he hugged her, and, then head out the door.

That would be the last time the daughter, the mother, and the alien would all see each other.

And so, with the daughter controlling her growth, and the mother once again back in the life of a kept(ish) woman, it was time to send the daughter to school. She was sent to attend Ramsey Elementary School with the aforementioned restrictions involving swimming and belly button pushing, as well as out of control growth spurting repeatedly to her daily. She made friends well, enjoyed her classmates both in school and out, and was by all accounts a completely normal little girl.

There were several incidents which at first worried the mother about the daughter. First was an incident wherein a small boy named John Angeles impersonated an orangutang with such zeal that the daughter wet herself from laughing. The mother had never heard of this happening to a six year old child, but her neighbors all assured her that it was very normal, and considering the child must be adopted (a white lie to explain the sudden presence of the adolescent) and had obviously been through a lot, it all made sense.

The second incident involved a boy who was tripped on the playground, and broke his arm. The daughter had seen it happen, apparently, had walked to the boy and placed her hand on his broken arm, and suddenly it wasn't broken any more. The story, of course, was not presented to her that way. She was told how kind and gentle her daughter had been when one of her classmates had been roughly thrown to the ground, and that it had looked like he'd broken his arm, but it had in fact been okay.

It was the daughter herself who had explained that she had mended his arm, and that she liked him, and thought that someday they could

make babies together. The mother wasn't sure which part of the story she should address as inappropriate first. She chose the sexual issues.

The final event, which as you may have guessed by where this story started, involves both the belly button and a swimming pool. The children were required by state law to be given basic swim instruction. The mother had begged and pleaded with the school representatives, but it was hopeless. She instead chose to make the girl stay home from school every day that there was a swim class.

The daughter's teacher caught on fairly quickly, and reported the incident to the school Principal. The Principal took it upon himself to sit down with the mother. He explained his situation, involving the state and guidelines and federal funding and so on. He then asked the mother to explain. She said that the daughter had a medical condition that precluded her from swimming. The principal requested a doctor's note.

The mother had made a point to not take the girl to the doctor as she wasn't strictly human, which any half way cognizant medical professional would definitely notice, and secondly, she healed herself more efficiently than modern science allows, making the whole process pointless. Therefore, she could not present a doctor's note.

She pleaded with the principal, and finally he gave in. The girl would not have to swim. This year. Next year, however, she must learn, it's far too dangerous for her not to know, he insisted.

Word had gotten around that for some reason the girl would not swim. Some of the children began to torment her. Her response was solemn and, she thought, honest.

"If I swim in a pool, I'll get pregnant, and I don't want to have babies with any of you, even with Evan, who I like as a friend, but, my mom says, not in an inappropriate sexual way. Despite this, I would at some point like to have a baby, so I need to ensure nobody sticks their finger in my belly button."

The tormenting escalated as boys and girls alike took to picking on her and chasing her around with an extended digit trying to insert it into her belly button. Many days found the mother in the principal's office holding her crying daughter and driving her home. Every morning when it was time for the child to go to school, she would find herself violently nauseous, begging her mom not to make her go. But the mother knew that if the child missed more school she would be reported to child welfare, which again would open a whole can of worms.

So, she forced her to go, only, she gave her something to help. A small metal plate with straps on either side which wrapped around her waist

and blocked access to her belly button. This did not go well. While in gym class, the daughter did a tumble roll, and exposed the plate, leading to even more torment. This poor, bright, beautiful half human half alien girl was being torn apart.

The daughter begged the mother to please explain why the other kids were so mean. The mother could only say that some kids came out rotten, and some kids came out wonderful, like the daughter had.

"I don't ever want to have rotten children."

"Then all you can do is try hard to make your kids as wonderful as you are, darling. Or, don't have kids at all."

The daughter thought about what her mother said, and before her mother could stop her, she inserted her finger into her belly button.

"I don't ever want to have kids!" were the last words she said before her system reset itself.

The mother ran to her, catching her as she fell to the ground. She held her there on the floor of the kitchen, waiting patiently for her daughter's alien components to restart themselves, and for her daughter to come magically back to life.

This did not happen. As the alien had predicted, the unique combination of human and alien physiology had indeed killed the girl.

When the girl did not return to school, an investigation was started, which finally led to the police finding the surprisingly un-decomposed body of the young girl in the back yard of the mother's house. The mother was arrested, tried, and jailed, all without much of a fight.

She was sentenced to life in prison for what was deemed a murder, considering both the circumstances of the girl's death, the mother's attempts to hide the body, and, the bizarre disappearance of the body from the coroner's office.

Law enforcement had heard whispers that some sort of strange men in black types from the government had shown up and confiscated the body. This was not entirely true. The men in black who took the body were not government types at all, but, were from the alien's homeworld. They took the little girl's body back to their planet, where she was reunited with her father.

He allowed for their molecules to mingle, and for life to return to the dead body of his daughter. She was not dead, you see, merely waiting for a jump start.

The cells he used to restart her life were the cells he'd absorbed from the mother.

Had the mother known any of this she may not have hung herself in her cell on the third day of her sentence.

In her final moments, the mother reflected on her life and loves, and how despite how she'd made the thought of pregnancy sound like a punishment to her daughter, in fact, her child had given her most of the joy she'd felt in life. She thought for a moment and realized that despite the grief of the loss, and the untenable situation she now found herself in, there was virtually nothing she would have done differently.

Except for lying about the belly button.

About the author

Joshua Hale Fialkov is the Harvey Award Nominated creator of the graphic novels *Elk's Run* and *Tumor*, as well as co-creator of *Punks the Comic*. He has worked on comics for Marvel, DC, Top Cow, and Dark Horse Comics. He was also the Executive Producer of *lg15:the resistance*, and a co-writer of the Emmy-Award Nominated *Afro Samurai: Resurrection*. Much of his catalog is available in local comic book shops or on Amazon. His first novel should appear in 2010.

More information can be found at www.thefialkov.com

Copyright © 2009 Joshua Hale Fialkov

From the same author on Feedbacks

Half a Person (2009)

Steve Albertson awakens one morning with a mysterious illness that one by one robs him of his senses. With only his long suffering wife keeping him sane, the end is fast approaching.

If you've enjoyed this book, please post a review either here or over on Amazon.com to say thank you!

Joshua Hale Fialkov is the Harvey Award Nominated creator of the graphic novels Elk's Run and Tumor, as well as co-creator of Punks the Comic. He has worked on comics for Marvel, DC, Top Cow, and Dark Horse Comics. He was also the Executive Producer of lg15:the resistance, and a co-writer of the Emmy-Award Nominated Afro Samurai: Resurrection. Much of his catalog is available in local comic book shops or on Amazon. His first novel should appear in 2010.



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind