

VINYED

IN HIS SECRET
HEART

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Flash & Shorts Collection # 3

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In his secret heart

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Vinyed

Flash & Shorts Collection # 3

A collection of short and ultra-short stories with an unexpected twist (Twisted Tales). Imaginative, surprising, and terrifying. In this issue you will find the following seven stories:

-A New Beginning

Stolen babies. A mom's worst nightmare. When a young mother finds her newborn has been kidnapped, she is devastated. Determined to get her baby back, she reveals the truth behind a strange series of missing newborns. Babies just like her's.

-Delivery

New job; first day. Garrick is glad that his first day as a taxi driver is over. But just before he wants to go home, one more passenger is waiting for him. A special passenger with a special story.

-In His Secret Heart

Some secrets are kept a lifetime. So is this.

-Breaking Up

Falling in love is no problem; breaking up requires a whole new set of skills. How is Arthur Sturrock going to tell her?

-Moon Spell

Exploration of the universe has been commercialized. Want to go to the moon? Look for the best offer; sign in and enjoy your flight. Everybody can be an astronaut nowadays. The question is: does everybody want to be?

-Ameizan

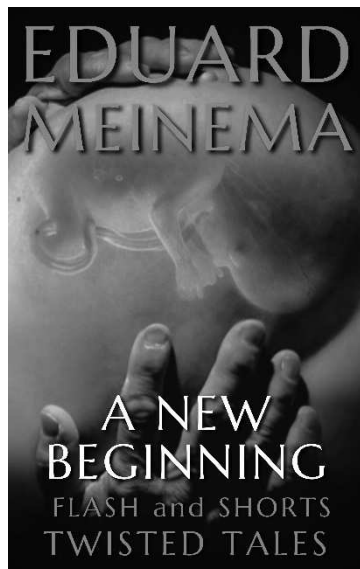
A boy's dream. And apparently a girl's dream too. Travelling into space to be the first to explore new worlds. When scientists find mysterious rings around a new discovered star and intercept communication; it is a given fact. These are the first true signs of intelligent life. A discovery of unknown alien life offering many talented people the chance of a lifetime. Go wide young man! But be prepared; things may go wrong. Murphy that!

-Ratify

The City of Paris is infested by rats. There are so many of them, they even don't care for hiding during the daylight. Luckily there are exterminators, working day and night to control the plague.

Are you ready for the unexpected? Start reading!

1. A New Beginning



Stolen babies. A mom's worst nightmare. When a young mother finds her newborn has been kidnapped, she is devastated. Determined to get her baby back, she reveals the truth behind a strange series of missing newborns. Babies just like her's.

1.1

“Are you the father?” the nurse asked.

“No, I told you before; I’m the brother. I mean her brother... from the mother; not the baby.” Fred Osborn was going out of his mind. Why did it have to take so long?

“So, you are the uncle?”

“No...Yes, the baby’s unc...Oh, for heaven’s sake woman. Hurry up, will you? Go and get the baby. What kind of hospital is this...? Losing a baby...?”

“I’m sure there’s no reason to panic Mister Osborn. We’ve never lost a baby. I guess one of the nurses is working with your niece.”

“Fred?” Jessica called for her brother. “What’s keeping you so long?”

“I’ll be right there sis,” he answered. Then he continued speaking, soft but angry, to the nurse: “Find her!”

*

“There you are!” Jessica smiled. She was sitting in her bed. “Uncle Fred!” she teased her brother.

“Hello Sweetie,” he kissed her on her forehead. “The nurses told me all went well. You have delivered a beautiful, healthy baby girl.”

“Yes,” Jessica smiled proud. “Did you see her?”

Fred tried to neglect her question. “Have you decided on a name yet?”

With twinkling eyes she said: “Yes...I will name her Freddie, after you!”

“Silly girl.”

She took his hand. “Did you see her? Why didn’t you bring her with you? I want to hold her in my arms. I only saw her a few minutes; she is gorgeous Fred!”

“You know, these nurses... they won’t let me...”

“They won’t let you? And you listen to them? Oh my; there really is a first time for everything. Or is there more...?”

“Hmm, they told me they will...”

“You are not trying to fix a date with one of the nurses, are you?”

“No. No sis, they told me they will bring the baby...”

“Freddie!”

“...right. They will bring Freddie in here. And I promise you I will not leave before I have held her in my arms.”

“You’d better!”

Suddenly a man showed up in the doorway. “Mister and Mrs. Osborn?” he asked.

“Yes?” Fred said.

“Can I have a word with you?”

Jessica scared up. “Oh no! Is there something wrong with Freddie? Doctor?”

“No, no...That is...” The doctor waited for another staff member to join him. “This is my colleague Janet Scribner from administration, and I am Doctor Haley. We wanted to have a

word with you as...we have got a problem.” He closed the door and walked closer to Jessica’s bed.

Jessica looked at her brother, then to the doctor. “What’s wrong?”

“Your baby...I’m really sorry to tell you Mrs. Osborn... your baby is missing.”

“What? How do you mean, she’s missing?” Jessica shouted upset. “This is a small hospital. How can you lose a baby in here? There are not that many babies are there?”

“Only three.”

“Then one of the other mothers accidently got Freddie. My baby girl.” Jessica tried to sit up and get out of bed. If she had to, she was going to look for Freddie herself.

“No, please Mrs. Osborn...” the doctor tried to calm her.

“It’s Miss,” Jessica told him mordacious.

“I’m sorry Miss Osborn,” said Doctor Haley, meanwhile trying to keep an eye on Mister Osborn as well. “We have checked on all of the newborns and their mothers. Everyone is alright.”

“Everyone is alright? You are missing my baby, but you still want me to believe everything is alright!” Jessica was outrageous.

“Please Miss Osborn..., please. We are doing all we can to find out what happened to your baby. For now, we are sure the only child missing is yours. And Mister Osborn of course.”

“I am not the father!” Fred cried out. “I’m the brother. Jessica’s brother!”

The doctor tried to calm them both. “Please Mister Osborn; Miss... This does not help us to find your baby.”

“Freddie,” Jessica mumbled.

A knock on the door made them all look around.

“Police, may I come in?” a woman asked.

Jessica’s eyes became big and wild. “Why did you call the police?”

Doctor Haley opened the door. “Please come in,” he said to the female officer; pleasantly surprised to see the woman with the curly red hair. He closed the door again and continued his conversation with Jessica and Fred. “Miss Osborn, we have checked all possibilities. First, we have checked the other mothers and their newborns. To convince ourselves that your baby is the only one missing. Then we checked the videotapes from the nursery and...Well, it looks like someone took the baby. Not one of our staff members. That’s why we thought it was better to inform the police.”

“Why?” Jessica now started crying.

“Yes, why?” said Fred. “Did you see the perpetrator on tape? Has Freddie been kidnapped?”

“Fred,” said Jessica. “Don’t be ridiculous, why would anyone steal Freddie?”

“Actually Miss Osborn,” the doctor said. “That is the reason we had to inform the police.” He looked at the female officer he had invited into the room.

“Detective Hannah Sturm,” she said. “Pleased to meet you.”

Fred grumbled.

“I know,” she said. “Bad choice of words. Sorry.” She looked at the doctor and his silent companion. “May I have a moment in private with mister and Mrs. Osborn?” she asked kindly.

1.2

When Doctor Haley and Janet Scribner had left the room, Jessica said: “It’s Miss; not Mrs.”

Detective Sturm looked at Fred.

“No, I’m not the father. I am Jessica’s brother. Is that a problem, officer?”

“Not at all,” she answered polite and well aware both Jessica and Fred were stressed. “But I do want to know who the father is.”

“There is no father,’ Jessica said.

“I’m sorry,” said detective Sturm, “I know this may be delicate, but I really need to know the name of the father. Or the possible father, if you are not certain who... Anyway, you must realize in cases like this it often is the father...”

“You mean baby kidnapers often are the father of the missing child?” said Fred.

“I didn’t want to put it as bluntly as this,” Sturm apologized.

“There is no father,” Jessica interfered.

“With all respect Miss Osborn, it would really help...”

“Are you deaf?” Fred yelled. “She said: there - is - no - father!”

“No need to get upset mister Osborn.”

“Fred!” said Jessica. “Can you leave us? Please? Get yourself a cup of coffee or anything to calm down, okay?”

“Coffee to calm down? With all the caffeine? That’s new to me.”

“Then go to the hospital’s pharmacy and steal the goddamned supply of morphine or whatever it takes you to calm down Fred; but leave us alone, will you?”

Growling Fred went out of the room.

“Guess you are his little sister,” said Hannah Sturm when he had left. “I know how these guys work. Got one of my own...”

“He’s a sweetie, but a little bit rebellious since he knows.”

“About the kidnapping?”

“No, about me having a baby. All alone.”

“He’s protective. A noble emotion. But that’s not why you want to talk to me in private, is it?”

“No, it isn’t. I want to explain you why there is no father.”

Fifteen minutes later detective Sturm ended her interview. A conversation leaving her with more questions than answers. At least she had a lead now. Only one. A strange one too. But at least it was something worth to investigate.

The next week detective Sturm received Jessica Osborn at her office.

“Must have been a hard week,” she welcomed Jessica.

“Couldn’t be worse,” she answered with a trembling voice. “Did you check out the things I told you about?”

“That’s the reason I invited you over here. There are some things I want to show to you,” said Sturm. She used both hands to keep her long, red hair out of her face. “First of all, I owe you

an apology. I was surprized by the things you have told me and I had my doubts. But once I checked it, I realized you were right. The chance of self-fertilizing in women; hermaphroditism as it is officially called, is one in a million. Apparently, you are one of those exceptions. You are the one in a million. And so is your baby girl.”

“Thank you,” Jessica said. “So, you understand why I was so sure there really is no father. And also why Fred got upset.”

“Guess he wanted to blame some guy and make him pay for it, right?”

Jessica smiled. “He is very protective, as we discussed before. But tell me, I’m very curious. What did you want to show me? The videotape of the kidnapper?”

“I will show you that tape later on. Although I don’t expect you to recognize anyone. Or anything. Whoever it is, he is well aware of what he is doing.”

“Or she...”

“That’s right, or she.”

“Then what will you show me?”

Sturm turned the monitor of her desktop computer into Jessica’s direction. Have a look at these photos and tell me if you recognize any of these women? Take your time.”

Carefully Jessica studied the pictures Sturm showed her.

“None of them?” Sturm asked a few minutes later.

“No, sorry,” said Jessica. “No familiar faces, why do you ask?”

Disappointed Sturm ended the photo session. “All of these women have the same two problems you have.”

“I didn’t realize I had two problems?”

“Wrong choice of words; sorry,” detective Sturm said. “You all have two things in common.”

Jessica looked up at the detective, eager to find out what Sturm was talking about.

“All of these women are hermaphrodites,” Sturm said to Jessica’s surprise. “All of them delivered a baby after they had fertilized themselves.”

“I see.”

“And the second thing...”

“You already explained two things.”

“Did I?”

“You said all of these women are hermaphroditic and they all delivered a baby.”

“I see, well, the way I look at it delivering a baby after self-fertilizing is one, how shall I put this, characteristic? Yes, the first shared characteristic.”

“Alright. And the second one?”

Hannah wasn’t sure if she should tell Jessica. Evidently there was no way back. “All of these babies are missing.”

“What?”

“Crazy, isn’t it? I mean, what are the odds?”

“So... there is a serial kidnapper? I even don’t know if that’s a real word.”

“Well, it is now Jessica. I think you have helped this investigation into the right direction.”

“As much as I appreciate your compliment; the only thing I’m interested in is finding my baby.”

“That’s why I was hoping you would recognize any of the other women. I thought somehow you might know each other.”

“Like a club of hermaphrodites?”

“Yes,” Sturm laughed. “Crazy, isn’t it? Anyway, I thought, if you knew each other it would explain how the kidnapper knows where to find his victims.”

Jessica took some time to think it over. “There are always certain ways; possibilities, to search through the files of midwives.”

“What for?”

“Pregnant women fill in a form to declare any diseases.”

“Is hermaphroditism considered a disease?”

“I don’t know. It’s not what I meant to say. You also indicate the name of the father. If you want to. Or if you feel it is appropriate to do so. Or if there is a medical reason why there is no father.”

“Seems logic.”

“That’s what I thought. But searching through all those files? That seems hardly possible.”

“Hardly. Right. Never underestimate the dedication of a serial murderer...”

Jessica’s breath almost stopped. “You think Freddie is dead. My baby girl is murdered?”

“No, no. Oh no, sorry love. I’m just not used to the word serial kidnapper. Sorry, I’ve made a mistake. No, whoever it is, he..., or she, desperately wants a baby. That’s the case in most of the situations when a...,” Sturm was struggling to find non