

Hills like Golden Arches  
by Dale Bridges

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In the parking lot outside the clinic, Jane, flushed, red-eyed, looking a bit like Courtney Love on a bender, tells me she wants to go to the pet store.

“I want a cat,” she says.

“What? Now?” I try to sound surprised, although I am not.

“You owe me,” Jane points out, her Giorgio Armani mascara starting to slide down her pale cheeks, her nose ring twitching.

“Are you sure you want a cat? How about one of those super-cool iguanas? They’re very retro right now.”

“What’s wrong with a cat?”

“Nothing, babe. There’s nothing wrong with cats, per se. It’s just that we’re not cat people.”

She arches one of her pierced eyebrows and gives me her famous pseudo-incredulous glare. “And why is that, Danny? Please explain why we are not the type of people who would own a feline. Bestow your infinite cat-people wisdom upon me.”

“I don’t know, babe. Have you seen the type of people who have cats? They’re just not very cool. Trust me, babe, cats are not in right now. Cockatoos? Yes. Albino snakes? Definitely. Small, ugly dogs that you keep in your purse? Of course. But cats? I don’t think so. That means we have to wear sweater vests and purchase refrigerator magnets and rent Meg Ryan movies. It’s all just so...*domestic*.”

Jane shrugs. “I like Meg Ryan. She’s spunky.”

“That’s hardly the point.”

Jane holds up her hand to demonstrate that this discussion is over and I have lost.

“Does it have to be a cat?” I ask.

Jane nods. “A black one.”

So we go to the pet store. It’s one of those corporate stores that seems like a supermarket, except that all the vegetables are furry and loud. The employees wear red aprons and they have nametags with their pictures on them and they smile too much and they smell tangy. I try to talk some sense into Jane, but she’s sort of freaking out and she won’t listen to reason. She barely even looks at the exotic box turtles, red-bellied tree frogs, South African angelfish, lesbian sand lizards, or Columbian trap door spiders. She stops momentarily in front of a birdcage to watch an endangered parrot with a tuft of red on its chest that looks like a bullet wound. Someone has taught it to sing “Stop! In the Name of Love” by the Supremes. It sounds exactly like Diana Ross.

The dogs and cats are in glass cages, like the kind used to hold Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs*. Hello, Clarice. When we walk by, the dogs go ape-shit. They’re puppies, all puppies. No one wants to purchase a full-grown dog that’s been screwed up by someone else; you want the chance to screw up your own dog. Anyhow, canine pandemonium. Bark bark barkety bark. I am suddenly very glad we are not getting a dog.

The cats are more mellow. Obviously. They're cats. There are a lot of kittens but I am surprised to see some adult cats as well. One of them looks like an obese midget dressed in a feline suit. It is lying on its side, panting, its distended belly rising and falling to the exact rhythm of the Phil Collins song playing on the sound system. Jane points at it, rather unkindly it seems.

"I want that one."

"What? The one that's the size of Danny DeVito?"

"That one."

"Can't we talk this over?"

"That one."

Guess what—we get that one. We also get a handsome carrying case and a scratching post and a collar with a nametag on it (Whiskers, what a shocker) and a toy that looks like a tiny fishing pole and a ten-pound bucket of kitty litter and a lifetime supply of fish-flavored cat food. All of this goes into the backseat of Jane's canary-yellow BMW.

"There," I say. "Now do you feel better?"

And that's when Jane starts to cry.

Six days ago, while sipping a double mocha latte at Starbucks, after stealing the new My Chemical Romance CD from Virgin Records, Jane told me she was pregnant. I had just smoked a joint and I think I might have taken some Percocet, so I didn't really understand what she was talking about at first. I made her say it again.

"What do you mean exactly when you say 'pregnant'?" I said, trying to make eye contact with the girl behind the counter. She looked familiar, kind of like Gwen Steffani but with shorter hair and bigger tits. It was possible I had dated her, or her sister, or purchased Ecstasy from her, or all of the above, at one point in time.

"What do you think I mean?" said Jane. "Through the act of coitus, your sperm penetrated my egg and formed a new genetic organism that shares our combined DNA."

"Huh?"

Jane rolled her eyes and sighed. "You shoved your wiener in my cunt and we made a baby."

I bit the end off a biscotti and glanced at the girl behind the counter, who was practically staring at me. "That's kind of, like, gross, you know."

"Tell me about it."

"Let me get this straight," I said. "There's like...um...like a little...um...*thing* inside of you right now?"

"That's right, Danny. I have a little *thing* inside me."

"Wow, that's pretty intense, babe."

"Well, it's going to get even more intense."

"Right," I said. I looked at my reflection in the store window, pulled up the collar on my polo shirt, put it back down, fixed my hair. "I see what you mean."

The new U2 album was playing on the sound system and I remembered that I read an article in *Rolling Stone* that said Bono was like the neo-Elvis, which meant that Jack White was the neo-John Lennon and Mos Def was the neo-Otis Redding. It was a lot to take in and I just didn't have the energy to process it. Furthermore, there was a new M. Night Shamalan movie coming out and I had to decide whether I was going to see it in

the theater or wait to put it in my Netflix queue. Either way, it promised to be a really suspenseful movie with a disappointing ending. Which was exactly why I wanted to watch it in the first place.

“Well, what do you think?” Jane finally asked.

“About what?”

“About the plight of the Jews in Israel,” she said, then flicked her straw at me. “About me being pregnant, asshole.”

“I don’t think it’s cool to make fun of Israel right now,” I replied. I paused to consider this. “Or the Jews, for that matter.”

“Shut up, Danny.”

“I’m just saying—”

“*Shut up, Danny!*”

“I’m just saying—”

“I swear to Jennifer Anniston, if you don’t shut your face, I’ll scream.”

I put my hands in the air, cops-and-robbers style. “Okay, babe. Chill.”

“And don’t call me babe.”

“Alright, baby, but chill, okay? I don’t think this is such a big deal. I mean, we can always get it fixed, right? I mean, we’re not...like...like...Republicans. We’re cool. Everything’s copasetic.”

Jane looked away, at the Hot Topic across the street. “I know,” she said. “It’s a minor operation, right? They just let the air in.”

“Air? What air, babe?”

“Hey,” she said, pointing at the McDonald’s behind me, “don’t those hills look like golden arches?”

I turned around. “What hills? What the hell are you talking about?”

She shrugged. “Nothing. I’ll make an appointment for next week.”

That’s when Jane got up and went to the bathroom and the girl behind the counter came over and said she met me on MySpace and then she asked me for my cell phone number and I said that I was between companies at the moment but I told her to check me out on Facebook or Twitter or Blogspot and that I’d text her as soon as possible. But I forgot.

I’m no expert, but it has occurred to me, although there is no way to prove this with absolute certainty, that Jane’s cat is evil incarnate. And pseudo-retarded.

It just lies around the apartment all day, staring at me in a very Mommy Dearest kind of way. Jen says it’s just my imagination, but it’s not. This is not something that I would ever imagine, ever. The only time it moves at all is when I leave the room. If I go to the kitchen, the cat goes to the kitchen. If I go to the bedroom, the cat goes to the bedroom. If I lock myself in the bathroom, the cat waits outside the door until I emerge, and then it continues with the whole staring routine. It’s so monotonous I could scream. It doesn’t make any noise, it doesn’t play—it just watches me. At night, I can feel its stupid eyes looking at me. I can’t sleep. I smoke more pot, take more Valium, but it’s no use.

Jane has also become a major freak. She hasn’t cried once since we were at the pet store. I think she might have, like, post-traumatic stress disorder or something. I read in *Entertainment Weekly* that Jennifer Lopez had that while she was shooting *The Cell*.

Or maybe it was *Vanity Fair*. There's also a chance—but it is very small—that it could have been in *People*, but I really doubt it, because I don't read *People* anymore since they did that interview that trashed Kevin Bacon.

Jane doesn't smoke pot with me anymore. She takes classes at the community college and reads all these books about psychology and yoga and the art of breathing. She's learning how to cook Thai food. She's gardening. She's listening to Tori Amos. She says she's going to counsel troubled teens when she graduates. I asked her what was troubling these hypothetical teens, because it seems to me that all the teens I know have it pretty good, aside from the acne and the peer pressure and the kids showing up at school dressed in trench coats and shooting cheerleaders, but Jane just ignored me and continued reading her Oprah book. She doesn't want to talk about the issues, not really.

I have suggested that we get rid of the cat on several occasions, but Jane says she likes it. I don't know how this is possible. It doesn't do anything, it just sits in the corner of the room and stares at me while I try to watch VH1 or read Chomsky or play *Street Fighter*. I don't know what it wants. It is a fat, ugly, disgusting black creature that won't leave me alone. I dream about killing it. Sometimes, when Jane is in class, I pick up a kitchen knife and point it at the cat and scream "Get out of my life!" over and over again. It only stares back at me.

I put the knife away. I take another Valium. I turn on the television.