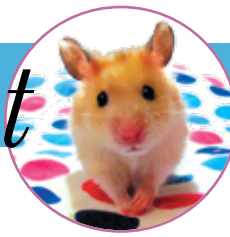


Batman's Secret

By Pat Fream



“Mom, come quick! Batman had babies!”

I was savouring the last few seconds of my morning shower – my mind blissfully gliding through a fantasy of selling everything and moving to Maui. We’d bid a tearful farewell to dear old Alberta, give our winter coats to charity, and then gleefully depart to that place where ‘snow’ is what you get on your TV screen when the reception is bad.

“He what? Batman what?” the words penetrated the steamy enclosure but my brain refused to compute. “Don’t mess with me Ben, I’m not in the mood!”

It was minus 27°C and Calgary was expecting 25 centimeters of snow before the afternoon rush. My daughter’s school bus had stalled en route to school, so my day had started with abruptly with calling parents and rescuing stranded elementary students. What more did I have to endure before 9 a.m.?

“I mean it mom, come take a look!” If this was a prank, Ben’s five-year-old face gave nothing away.

“You better be serious!” I growled, snatching a towel and marching toward my son’s hamster cage.

“Oh my... Batman, what have you done!” My body gave an involuntary shiver that triggered a rush of goose bumps. Dripping wet and suddenly nauseous, I took in the tiny, naked pink things squiggled around in a mountain of wood shavings. Batman got up on his hind legs and peered hard at me, then spun around in circles like a wind-up toy.

Ben shifted anxiously, his expression a mix of alarm and astonishment. “Yikes!” He quipped.

“Well, well, well,” I managed, realizing reassurance was in order. “I guess Batman is really BatGIRL, and SHE had a little secret.”

I knelt down to confront Batman at her level and willed the beady black eyes to divulge a rational explanation. None came. The rodent would be no help in quelling our confusion; she had big troubles of her own.

“Boy-oh-boy Batman, how are you going to take care of all those little ones?”

I murmured. A flood of maternal compassion threatened to derail my tenuous grip of the situation, but one look at the miniature aliens brought me back to my senses.

Ben giggled nervously. “What are we going to do with Bat- - er, I mean, that Hamster Woman...?”

“Mmmm, let me see,” I said thoughtfully, pretending the answer was within easy reach. How does one explain how Batman managed to change genders, and multiply over night, while the rest of us merely slept?

“I know!” I surprised myself. “Let’s call the pet store and ask them for help.” Ben shot up like a rocket and rushed off in search of the cordless phone. Batman jumped on her exercise wheel and began running like a fiend. This was no mother; this was a crazed felon trying to escape a gruesome crime scene.

“Here’s the thing,” said the hamster expert, “hamsters sometimes eat their babies, so if you want to save your children from witnessing that, it might be wise to separate the mother from her litter right away.”

“She what?... Oh my God...” I turned away from Ben’s eager face and looked out the window just on time to see the wind hurl a sheet of icy snow against the back of our house. “I’m having a really bad day...” I muttered, dialing my husband’s work number. “Something horrible has happened; I need you to come home right away.”

At that point, I pronounced it ‘a pancake day’, and persuaded Ben to watch ‘Clifford’ – the dog who was implausibly big and red, but otherwise a trustworthy creature. I moved the hamster cage to my bedroom, closed the door tightly, and prayed we wouldn’t have to explain cannibalism to our children before they learned to skip rope.

During the weeks that followed, our family spent countless hours peering into the Batman family nest, watching miniature lives unfold. The experience sparked compassion and tenderness in each of us, and spawned many colourful discussions about conception, birth and the won-

ders of life. Thankfully, we were spared the unthinkable; Batman maintained a steady diet of seeds and broccoli, and her six little offspring grew and flourished.

When the time came to empty the nest, we found homes for every hamster and bid farewell to them with unexpected sad reservation.

Looking back, I view the whole Batman ‘ordeal’ with a certain amount of nostalgia and even gratitude. For the kids, it provided hours of entertainment, while gently unraveling the mysteries of new life. For us parents, Batman modeled amazing stamina (single parenting no less!), and the art of taking parenthood in stride.

What’s more, a practice run at emptying the nest can only be beneficial; a confidence builder for the days ahead when our own offspring make a break for the big world. ■



The Sacred Journey to *Motherhood*

*She comes to the world
A tiny tender being...
No guilt, no shame, no fear, no name
And even if her form is slightly marred,
ears curled... fingers wrinkled...
In fact she is flawless
Pure and Worthy*

*And for a single moment...
A defining moment
A moment, and then a lifetime
Everything changes
The world is suddenly unrecognizable
Brilliant and Complete*

*There is Pain and Fear
Pride and Jubilation
Anguish and Awe
And Love too colossal for words*

*A new day beckons...
Two new spirits Dance
A Baby
And a Mother
Are Born*

