

## Margaret Adams Birth

### HALLOWEEN AT THE DONUT HUT

The words were still running through my brain when the noise woke me up: “Sleep that knits up the ravel’d sleeve of care,/The death of each day’s life, sore labor’s bath,/ Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,/Chief nourisher in life’s feast.” Yeah, my mind was hurting, and I could use a good eight hours of the balm that Shakespeare wrote about in *Macbeth*. I’d been up until midnight studying for my Tragedies of Shakespeare midterm, in the hope that my grade wouldn’t be such a tragedy. I looked at the face on my glow-in-the-dark digital alarm clock, and it read 2:00 a.m. Good grief! Why couldn’t the university schedule its fire drills for more decent hours—like 2:00 or 3:00 *p.m.*? Sound sleeper though I am, even I could not sleep through this fire alarm. I woke quickly, but remained in a daze until I opened my dorm room door, peered out into the hall, and saw hall-mates running toward the stairwell, mumbling and cussing about the fire alarm.

I donned my winter coat and boots, and joined the disgruntled stampede descending the stairs and then standing in the building’s lobby.

A fire marshal holding a bullhorn began to bellow, “Okay, everybody—outside! Get outside! We’ll call you when you can come back in. Outside, outside!”

We moaned: October in upstate New York is a cold prospect. Five inches of snow were on the ground and the temperature was in the twenties already, in late October. Still, we were hustled out of the building.

I found some friends, and we huddled together in an attempt to block out the cold.

“Do you see any smoke coming from anywhere?”

“No-o-o . . .” Ginny craned her neck, turned her head, took a couple of steps, and looked around some more as she spoke. “No, I don’t see any. Do you?”

“Unh-unh.” Dennis shook his head.

“Well, do you think that the head fire marshal is cruel enough to make us get out of bed in the middle of the night, on the coldest night of the year so far, to hold a fire drill?” Ginny wondered aloud.

“Yes!” the rest of us replied in unison. We laughed sarcastically.

Then someone—a student who had positioned himself near the building—yelled, “Hey, the fire marshal says that there really is a fire!”

A few people clapped, happy that they hadn’t been dragged from their cozy beds for nothing.

The fire marshal then stepped onto the porch, raised his bullhorn with a very official-looking flourish, and announced, “Good evening, students.”

A few students jeered at the greeting.

“Good evening, students.” The fire marshal began his speech again, this time in a sterner tone of voice. “There is a trash chute fire in this multiple-unit domicile, and we are presently striving to contain said incendiary crisis. The containment process will be somewhat protracted, however, due to the sensitive

nature of the—ah—containment. Someone,” he pronounced with more than his usual significance, “appears to have thrown a lit cigarette into the trash chute—by accident, of course.” The “thank you and good night” with which he concluded his speech was drowned out by student cries.

“*Of course,*” yelled one student in reply, “whoever pulled a stunt like that is either an idiot or a pyro!”

“No kidding!” agreed a second student. “Just don’t tell me who the chump is, or I’ll make him blasted pay for getting me out of bed the night before my econ. exam.”

My friend Dennis shook his head. “Testy, testy!”

“No pun intended? . . . I suppose you like standing in five inches of snow at a quarter past two in the a.m.,” Ginny, my roommate, remarked.

“I just want to go back to sleep,” I muttered groggily. Dennis’s roommate, Elton, put an arm around my shoulders and laid my head against his chest.

“She gets grumpy if she doesn’t get enough sleep,” said Ginny. “And you—” She pointed an accusatory finger at Dennis. “Why aren’t you bleary-eyed at this wretched hour?”

Elton replied for his roommate. “Dennis was still wide awake when the alarm went off. Mr. Straight-A here was pulling an all-nighter before his geology exam *mañana*.”

“An all-nighter!” Ginny repeated, incredulous. “What do you need with an all-nighter? I mean, why torture yourself? You already have a four-point-oh, for goodness’ sake!”

“*Not* a four-point-oh—just a three-point-nine-eight,” Dennis corrected her as he contentedly shrugged his shoulders.

Elton snickered. “Oh, *just* a three-point-nine-eight, huh? You know, guy, if I didn’t like you so much, I’d really hate you!” He playfully punched Dennis on the arm.

Ginny changed the subject. “Well, I am tired of standing outside in the snow.”

“Me too,” said Dennis. “Anybody up for doughnuts?”

Ginny and I looked at ourselves, then at each other: We were both wearing nightgowns, bathrobes, winter coats and boots. “Like this?” we chorused.

“Do you have a better suggestion?” countered Elton.

Ginny and I raised, then lowered, our eyebrows, said “why not?” and then climbed into the back seat of Tigger, Dennis’s orange Toyota hatchback.

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Upon entering the Donut Hut, Ginny and I felt right at home: Sitting at the counter were Bonnie and Clyde, Adam and Eve (wearing post-Fall fig leaf garb), and Cyrano de Bergerac. Mae West was taking everyone’s orders. Ginny and I didn’t look one bit odder than these characters did. It was only then that we realized it was Halloween eve or, to be more exact, it was the wee sma’s of Halloween day.

We all sat at the counter, joining everyone else there, and The Schnozzle extended his hand to shake mine—or so I thought—but he kissed it, instead. “Allow me to introduce myself—Cyrano de Bergerac.”

“Yeah . . . Hi there, Cyrano.” As charmed as I was by his formal introduction, I simply couldn’t bring myself to speak in similarly poetic language; I’d had my fill of literary-ese for one day.

With continuing gentility, he queried, “May I inquire as to what brings you and your acquaintances here at this most preposterous hour?”

“Sure,” I said. “Our dormitory’s on fire.”

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” he exclaimed. “Heavens! That is quite a tragedy.”

“Well, it’s just a dorm . . .” Then I thought about all of the possessions I’d left behind, and added, “But it’s home . . . And you . . . What brings you here at this time of night?”

“I cannot sleep,” Cyrano mournfully told me, “until I find my one true love.”

“Oh—your Roxanne.” I nodded, certain that I understood this gentleman’s charade.

But he replied, “My—my what? I know of no Roxanne.”

“The love of your life— Your— Oh, never mind.” I brushed my remark aside with my hand.

“Would that I knew of one with such beauty of heart and flesh, then I would make her mine!” Cyrano cried. Then he murmured, “But I am not aware of this Roxanne of whom you speak, and greater is my sorrow that I should have little likelihood of finding her here and now.” Cyrano slumped on his stool.

I glanced over at my friends to see how they were faring. Mae West was sharing her makeup tips with Ginny; Elton was debating creationism with Adam and Eve; and Dennis had his eyes closed while he was quietly reciting to himself all of the facts, names and figures that he had memorized for his geology exam.

We were all so engaged in ourselves that we didn’t notice anything odd or out-of-the-ordinary—until it happened. With a sudden movement, Bonnie stood, and Clyde stood in front of her. Clyde then pulled a pistol from his jacket and pointed it toward Mae West’s ample cleavage. “Don’t even think of callin’ the cops, lady,” he growled. “This is a stick-up!”

Mae West laughed. “Okay, honey, you can put your little water pistol away. I’ll get you a free refill on your coffee. I’ll even give you some extra sugar, if you know what I mean. But you don’t have to threaten me with that thing.”

“This ain’t no water pistol—and you don’t got to give me no free refill, neither! Coffee ain’t what I’m after—if *you* know what *I* mean . . . Just open that cash register, nice and slow-like, and give me all your money.”

“Oh, woe is us,” cried Adam, “for we have fallen into sin!”

“Waitress, could I please have some more hot mulled apple cider?” asked an oblivious Eve.

“Ah, shut up—both o’ youse!” Clyde sneered.

Adam shot a dirty look in Eve’s direction.

Mae West silently handed Clyde a bag of cash, her lower lip set in a defiant pout.

“Ah, quit lookin’ so sexy!” snapped Clyde. “Don’t try to distract me, ’cause it ain’t gonna work!” Then he began to back out of the Donut Hut, Bonnie still behind him, as he continued to point the gun at Mae West’s heart.

“Okay,” he said, “now I don’t want no funny stuff. You got that? We’re leavin’ now, but I don’t want you callin’ no cops. You hear? Ain’t no one gonna track us down.”

“No one?” Cyrano dreamily asked. “To go where no mortal being could locate you and force you to confront whatever mundane responsibilities you may have fled . . . To venture to a haven where body and soul may find perfect peace . . . That sounds immensely refreshing.” Cyrano perked up. “Pardon me, sir—milady—but would you two consider the accompaniment of a traveling companion? I will never find my true love in this”—he gestured widely—“this backwater town.”

Clyde shifted his gaze to Bonnie. “Who’s he talkin’ to?”

“Us, I think.” She made a cracking noise with the gum that she held in a wad in her cheek. “But he ain’t speakin’ English, I don’t think. Or, at least, I ain’t never heard no one talk so funny-like—you know?”

She nodded her head in Cyrano's direction, and addressed herself to the rest of us, who were sitting wordlessly and without motion, for fear that Clyde would blow off our heads if we made any noise. "Any of you understand what Mr. Fancy-Pants here just said?"

I raised my hand, like the polite student I was. "I—I believe"—I stuttered—"I believe Cyrano wants to go with you. He wants to escape, too."

Excitedly, Cyrano bobbed his head up and down. "Yes! May I? May I go with you?" he pleaded with Bonnie.

Bonnie looked at Clyde, shrugging her shoulders.

"Okay," agreed Clyde nervously. "Whatever you say. Just keep your fancy mouth shut—and get movin'!" As the three of them backed out of the Donut Hut, Clyde remarked, to no one in particular, "It's my tragic flaw, you know: I got a soft heart."

After Bonnie, and Clyde and Cyrano were long gone, we continued to sit still—in stunned silence.

Dennis looked down the counter at Elton, and Ginny and me, and circled one finger in the air next to his head, as if to say "crazy!"

In reply, Elton shrugged his shoulders. "They couldn't have really been serious. Cyrano must have been their accomplice—though, I must admit, that was a rather clever Halloween scheme: None of us would be able to guess their true identities—I mean, in *real* life," he added.

But then Adam turned to Eve. "If you hadn't listened to that old snake—"

She ruefully shook her head. "I know, I know . . . None of this would have happened."

