

Clown Eggs Jay Lake

The spring tide rolled across Momus Beach, tossing the flaccid corpses of clowns like so many torn balloons. Weathered to a dispirited pallor, they twisted in the foamy surf with the eternally surprised expressions of the dead.

The Grand Causeway linking the great coastal cities of Port Gacy and Pogoville flirted with the ocean along Momus Beach. The roadway rose above the sand on quarried granite piers carved with friezes of great moments in humor, visible only to the tiny-minded predators that lurked in the dune grasses in pursuit of their mindless prey. An isolated cluster of clown eggs bobbed from one of the piers, webbed with silly string to a stunning bas-relief of the Rhinodectomy of Claudius.

The encroaching tide threatened the cache even as the first egg distended, wobbling against the silly string and displacing its neighbors. Salt spume spattered the egg cluster as a tiny, red-lipped mouth broke free, a single, long egg tooth tearing at its enclosing sac. The hatchling clown struggled against fear of the rushing waters to emerge, wrapped in runny white albumin, to cling to Claudius' left foot.

"*Potrzenie!*" it squeaked in *Lingua Joculara*, the inbred ceremonial tongue of clowns, then coughed more albumin free of its tiny throat. "*Etaoin shrdlu!*"

The slap of bright blue size forty-eights against damp sand caught the hatchling clown's undivided attention. It could see long, thin feet scrambling down the embankment adjacent to the pier, their owner cursing the swirling tide for a bad lot of greasepaint.

"*Nanu,*" it hissed, swarming up the stonework of the pier to cower among the guano-coated nests of coastal swifts. The damp reek would mask the little clown's distinctive odor of albumin and fresh rubber, and conceal its bright red and white markings.

"C'm'ere ya' little beggars," grumbled the intruder, an old bull clown badly in need of a shave. His eyes drooped to rheumy ruin halfway down his cheeks, his fright wig was as gray as the ocean waves. "Uncle Smarmy needs 'is fix, yeah. Baby clowns to make an old clown young again." He hawked and spat a rainbow loogie that trailed sparkles as it splattered into the foaming tide race.

The hatchling clown pulled itself tighter into its damp, stinking corner, suppressing a squeak of fright. Below it, the bull clown examined the egg cluster, poking at the vacated egg sac with a puffy, varicose finger. He leered slyly, then peered around.

"I knows y'er out 'ere. Come t'Uncle Smarmy, little wee clown." The bull clown made a kissing noise, more like the final belch of a quicksand pool, then added in a voice of forced bonhomie, "*Ooo eee, ooo ah ah ting tang.*"

At the sound of *Lingua Joculara*, the hatchling clown's instincts betrayed it. It squeaked the inborn response to the canny old bull clown's call, "*Walla walla bing bang!*" A palsied four-fingered hand shot up into the darkness to snatch the hatchling clown.

It was like a doll in Uncle Smarmy's hand. The bull clown's great thumb pressed against the back of the hatchling clown's little head, while the other three fingers lay like soft, puffy lead across its chest and groin.

"No, no, *Ticonderoga,*" said the little clown.

"What's'at, little feller?" Uncle Smarmy's prehensile tongue shot out to lick the sweat of fear from the

hatchling clown's bright face. The tide swirled around his feet, covering his long blue shoes.

The hatchling clown tried again, picking up memes and morphemes from the old clown's spittle, inheriting some of his guile. "Go, go, there goes Tokyo."

The bull clown shook his prize up and down. "Sure y'er a hatchling? Seem pretty smart for a little feller."

"No go eat Joe," the hatchling clown pled.

"Now *there's* a good idea." Uncle Smarmy chuckled. "Glad I thought of it." The fingers of his other hand reached out to snap off the little cherry nub of the hatchling clown's nose.

The hatchling clown screamed like escaping helium as the bull clown ate the little nose, a thin dribble of pink juice trailing out of one side of his mouth. Then it bit into Uncle Smarmy's thumb with ferocious anger, driving the single egg tooth deep into the puffy white flesh.

"Yaargh!" screamed the bull clown, snapping his hand back and forth and dancing around knee-deep in the racing tide. "Get 'im off me, the little beggar!"

The hatchling clown kept its arms wrapped tight around Uncle Smarmy's fingers, digging the sharp points of its tiny shoes into his hand even as it tore the flesh of his thumb with its egg tooth. The taste of the old clown's blood brought sharp lessons, a lifetime of pain and experience flooding into the hatchling.

Uncle Smarmy bent to shove his hand into the seawater, trying to drown his vicious little opponent. The hatchling jumped off the old clown's hand and landed on its baggy crotch to renew its attack. Uncle Smarmy lost his balance and tumbled backward into the running water as the hatchling took its full revenge for the loss of its nose. His screams quickly burbled away as he choked on the tide-borne husk of a dead clown.

The hatchling struggled against the water to regain the Causeway pier. It climbed through the spray to perch above the almost-flooded cluster of eggs. Another sac wobbled, threatening to tear free, but this hatchling had the advantage. First to hatch from the egg, already blooded in the ways of clownkind, it would kill the next hatchling, and the next, and the next, feasting to quickly grow large and strong and much, much smarter than Uncle Smarmy.