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Aimee Bender

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The hunchback took in the pregnant girl to hide her from high school until the baby popped out. He was her step-uncle, step-mother's side, lived in a castle with a butler and several spoiled cats. Her parents, disturbed by the predicament, brewed over the problem until her father came up with the brilliant idea: That castle! Your weird brother! Wanting nothing more to do with their daughter, they placed her on a castle-bound train with a suitcase of wide-waisted dresses and a thank-you fern.

Chin brave, the girl ascended the four hundred stairs over the moat and decided she liked the view of the garden from her bedroom. The butler threw out the fern. She held her belly in her arms and bounced with it while the hunchback, a gourmet vegetarian, served her creamy spinach and mashed buttered yams in his cold, stone-walled kitchen.

By her fifth month, they were lovers. He licked her body up, thirsted after her swollen breasts, consumed her comers until she felt she was one cohesive circle.

I never really came with *him*, she whispered one night to the hunchback, pointing to her stomach. Someone once told me that if the woman comes, then the baby will be lucky. Let me tell you, she continued, if that's true, this'll be one cursed child.

The hunchback burst into laughter and held her tightly because just ten minutes before she could hardly *stop* coming from the insistent lappings of his tongue. He said maybe some of our luck is going up, post-conception luck, and she sank into his millions of pillows and let out a breath of satisfaction. When they slept, she spooned him from behind, her extended belly fitting perfectly into the space created beneath the lurch of his hunch.

She dreamed about luck travelling up her inner thighs, sparkling and ticklish, like softened diamonds.

After the baby came, she wouldn't leave. No one called for her, and she wouldn't have gone with them anyway. She wanted to stay, she told him and he nodded. He said Move into my room and she did in two hours, his room with its strange sway-backed chairs and the midnight-blue four-poster bed. She was at his desk one morning, preparing the papers for the baby to be his, for him to be the official father, when she came across medical papers from a plastic surgery clinic. What's this she said out loud but the hunchback was in the rose garden, weeding. She read the papers because she figured This is to

be my baby's father, and she found out that two years previous this ordinary normal man had had a bump added to his back. The doctors had opened up his skin and injected fat globules into his shoulder region, and it had cost him a lot of money but he was really rich. The papers said Warning: overeating will affect the size of this hump which explained to her the way it had swelled on Thanksgiving night; she'd chalked it up to her own imagination.

You mean you're not for real? she screeched, and she ran outside to the weeds while the baby slept and she poked at his back hard until he said You're hurting me and she said You're a fake fake fake! and scooping up the baby she flew down the four hundred stairs. She walked the streets of the city until she found a cheap apartment on the bad side of town. She met a man with no legs. How did you get this way, she asked, and he said My father didn't know I was under the car working on it and she said I'm so sorry and took off her clothes. He was not the lover that the hunchback was, though. She only came every now and then when she allowed herself the remembrance of his hands and his tongue. She quieted and took up nursing. But the baby: she did turn out lucky. She grew up to be a movie star. She headlined movies in silver dresses and everyone watched her huge face on the screen with her long long eyelashes and said This one is Special.

It was so unfortunate that her career ended the way it did. On the set of her fifth movie, the starlet was sitting at her makeup table with her head on her arms feeling inestimably sad. I have beauty and fame and riches and boyfriends, she thought, and yet I am so unhappy. Her mother, a frequent visitor, knocked at the door of the trailer. Sweetheart, she said, opening the door, they—she stopped in mid-sentence. She saw it right away. What's this? she gasped, face falling open, leaning on the door for support. The starlet raised her burdened head and looked at herself in the mirror. She saw the hump rising up on her back like a landscaped hill, and reaching back one tentative hand to touch it, could hardly contain the airborne feeling of relief.