



Ryan Markel

101 REASONS
NOT TO HAVE
CHILDREN

My oldest friends may remember me asking them for a month or so during my mid-early twenties for reasons they wanted to have children. Those of them who eventually wanted to have them. Hetero and homosexual and whatever else, alike, I asked them. I wanted to hear an answer that sounded unselfish to me, although I was sure none like that would come. As it is, I don't recall a single answer of theirs. No matter, for feeling different as one who definitely does not want children, I suppose I was looking to find myself better for not wanting them. I do not pose this question to my new friends, at all, or to my old friends, any longer. It is obvious to me, now, that that particular desire is dictated by something beyond personal taste or even choice. The selfish, the selfless, the competent, the incapable (biologically), the hetero, the homosexual—people want kids. Not me.

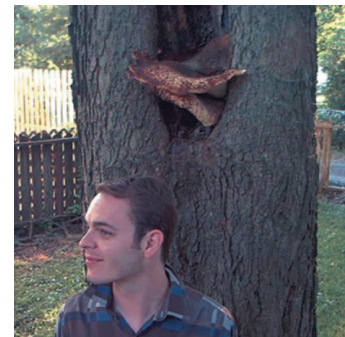
Last summer, I recall, I had a lunch party to introduce some old and new friends. Molly made a light soup of Chilean bass and vegetables. Maggie and David helped me put out cheese and fruit. Kelly and Sebastian brought over a few bottles of Pinot Grigio. We listened to Edith Frost albums. It was all very nice. Danny, however, had brought with him, as a party-prop, a clipping from the local paper for that day. The article was about successful donations collected around town for a local girl in severe



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Ryan Markel can balance a cigarette on his tongue but is, himself, horribly imbalanced. He lives in Santa Barbara with his wife and his two dogs, Sarah and Aaron.



what was out, who was in—but the tableau was just too rules they seemed to play by—how many hits equal a death, other with Styrofoam swords. I tried to get a feel for the plastic, medieval costumes, swarting and poking at each from a sad 13 to a pathetic 21, running around in cheap, picnic table, cynically watching a group of kids, ranging smoking pro-digestive cigarettes, we mostly sat around the ago to have lunch in the sun. Aside from eating and then laughing. A faction of us ended up in a park some months dancing or standing around somewhere, drinking and called Balmorhea. Our gang-activity involves sitting or a large group of friends of this, and we've started one that you should probably be in a gang. I've convinced I'm in a border town, as I do, it is my contention

with a face like hers, or a mind like his? I can't say I didn't laugh. But, I would like to pose a question of my own, here: Would you rather have a child look like a super hero?"

Danny decided to pass this around the party as we sat down to eat and said, with a shit-eating grin, "Doesn't she no chin to speak of. She was born this way."

eight-year-old-girl as she was. Her right eye sat high up on her missshapen forehead, and her left eye hung atop her slacked check. Her nose was a mess and just under it her tiny mouth was filled with huge, indecisive teeth. She had

embarrassing to study. I turned to a couple in our crowd, Monster and Heavy, and warned them, "You better hope your kid doesn't come from school some day to tell you he's signed up for Amp Guard."

Quick with a reply, Heavy remarked, "God, I'd rather my kid have a sick obsession with the Ouija board."

I believe, when she was little, Heavy haunted and aggrieved her own poor Catholic mother with just that sort of fixation.

It is easy to fool children. It is simple to play on their gullibility. In the role of a parent, I don't think I would be able to resist that fact. No chance. Too easy.

"Baby Jesus came from a crane," I can see myself telling my six-year-old around Christmas time. "One special morning, down by the river, a crane gently lowered baby Jesus to the ground and the people found him and the people loved him. That's why we have Christmas."

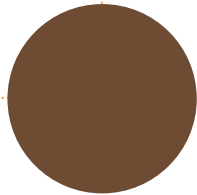
Then, I would instruct my child, with crayons and paper, to draw for me the miraculous delivery of the Christ child. The kid, of course, would hand the scribbling over for inspection and I'd look over what I'm sure would be a globular baby and a crude machine with a long, hoisting arm.

"No, no, no," I'd say. "A crane is a tall, addling bird! Baby Jesus came down to Earth off the wings of a bird! How could you think I would tell you something so dumb

on her decisions alone. Often times, that has seemed true enough to me, too, in some cases. But, if that's your angle, why did you call me?

I know you well enough to know that you won't give it up for adoption, which is good for me to know. If I could have some say, I would say all or nothing. To keep it or to get rid of it entirely, are the options that fit into those categories. They are those categories. All or nothing.

We'll talk again, soon, and you may or may not be in a calmer mood. You may or may not ask for my advice or opinions. I won't show you these words, but I will tell you this: I can vaguely imagine loving someone that way, but I cannot, at this stage, imagine loving someone that much. I can't decide for you. In the end, you have the power to decide for me. You will. Either way, I suppose I should start looking for a job. Get back into school. Some good, I guess.



my pants up. But it was too late.

"This was a stupid idea."

"No shit, and it was yours." I spat.

"Find your own ride home. I'm leaving."

After you slammed the door, I smoked a cigarette and waited for my hard-on to slacken entirely. I walked out the door, calmly, and Boner stopped me in the hall.

Concerned, he asked, "What's going on with Jenny?"

"Oh, she's just paranoid about something on her drugs. I don't know exactly what."

Boner nodded, knowing, and I asked him for a ride home.

You're moving to San Diego in a month, you've been saving all year. You're only twenty, that's what twenty-year-olds do. You called me this morning to tell me you're pregnant. You called me. That's what twenty-year-olds do.

San Diego's still in your plan—your best friend is out there waiting for you. Your life is supposed to begin out there. You sounded as if you still don't know what to do about the baby. You sounded as though you wanted me to ascertain from your tone that I have no place in the decision. I can understand that. (You don't really know me, Jenny.) So many girls I've known have left the guy in the lurch—out of anger and out of fear, or out of a staunch belief that the child will always be much better off leaning

You and I arrived at the house having had a beer each, clear in your voice.

suggested, with the exasperation of the extra two miles “Well, then, why don’t I just come get you?” you “Not just yet.”

“Do you have a ride?”

the Kern neighborhood. I did. **A**bout a month ago, you called me on a Friday night, making sure I knew about the party going on up in

this phone call, this morning.

the most rational thing for me to do is to go back to the event, the behavior, that brought you, that brought us, to me. I want to e-mail you every word I’ve just written but I don’t know why I’m thinking of fun, at all. I’m thinking of all this, anyway, for the phone call you just placed to

something. Surely, that would be some of the fun of it. cigarettes. If not, I buy the kid a surprise pack of Nerds, or the names straight for two months, I get an extra pack of Percy, one week, say, and Pizza, the next. If I can keep me, too. I could change the kids name every week or so. anti-boredom, right there. And there would be games for To think of all the stupid possible pranks! Endless Just to see how he or she would respond. like a baby came from an industrial vehicle? Huh?”

on the way. As we walked into the living room, we saw Barefoot passed out on the couch. It was only 9:30pm.

“Oh, he looks just like an angel.” you observed sarcastically.

“An angel with Down’s Syndrome.” I agreed.

The Shins were blaring on a stereo for the sixtieth time this year. I spotted La Giggles and Twinkie (Balmorhea! represent) in the dining room, so we shouted and walked over. Twinkie, who works as a mortician, began to tick off the highlights of her workday. I was terribly interested but your obnoxious disgust and juvenile fear of death led us away. In a hallway, I stopped you.

“Speaking of angels with Down’s, take a look at these.”

On the left wall, there were five abstract pastels in browns, oranges, and olives, and blacks with smatterings of neon-blue Krylon sort of drip-spayed on top.

“These are Barefoot’s latest,” I informed you. “He calls this series Venereal Diseases of the Old Testament. I can’t tell if I really like them or if I just really like the name.”

“They look more like miscarriages to me.” you said. “Figuratively.”

You proceeded to the kitchen where you thought you’d find more like quiet. More like chill. On one of the counters a small television set blared a Spurs game. On the counter in front of the TV was a pile of cocaine and

you stepped aside, huffing, watching me regroup and pull You heaved backwards so I fell into the shower and you elbowed me.

“No, you didn’t.” I said smartly, but truthfully, and “I told you to pull out, asshole!”

customarily comes out the hole at the end of my dick!” “Well,” I yelled, “it’s white and sticky and it exactly, are you trying to assert?”

You shot over your shoulder, hair flying, “Just what, and obviously more so than you were used to .”

offer, screwing you more violently than is my usual way below the sink. I was taking true advantage of your strange knees knocked resoundingly on the wooden cabinet doors accustomed, I began working you way over and your and peeled up your skirt. Minutes after making myself I had my back to the shower as you bent over the sink

“Fucking fine, then.”

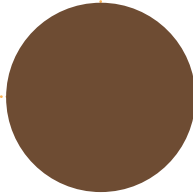
only plastic I use is a Visa, thank you!” “The Instantly infuriated by the rubber, I screamed, “The on.”

get that b.s. out of your system, got it? Here, put this instructed, “I’m going to bend over and you are going to

I was still shaking as you dug through your purse and out with Loner, now.”

watched the truth semi-sink in. “And, anyway, Ari’s going doesn’t care for you in that way, at all.” you told me and

“You’re acting so stupid! Pull that shit together. Ari



in front of that pile was our German friend. He was glass-eyed and chanted, “Catherine Zeta-Jones sells cell phones by the sea shore,” over and over. I wondered if it was some senseless evocative ploy he was spewing, in favor of the poor Pistons, but I didn’t get a chance to ask before you dragged me to the back yard, beyond the screen door.

There, a good number of our friends stood around with wine bottles in their hands, flip flops on their feet, and cigarettes poking in and out of their smiles. For an hour, we chatted around and bantered between ourselves until we were approached by Ari (who’s been bluing my balls for a year, now) and Loner. My hands began to shake more than usual, my knees weakened, and I became uncharacteristically tight-lipped. It was so embarrassingly demonstrative of me and, apparently, even more humiliating for you. After minutes of some invisible force pushing me suddenly near and then pulling me immediately back from Ari (my heart colored all over my face), and you trying to hold down conversation, you grabbed my wrist.

“Excuse us,” you spoke to them with your anger for me.

You pulled me, dramatically weaving through the crowd, back into the house and into a back bathroom, slamming the door.

“Control yourself!” your voice echoed off the tiles.

I hung my head and muttered, “It’s beyond me.”