



Beastly's Tale

by

Bronwyn Mills

I have already said how I have gone one hundred and seven leagues in a straight line from west to east along the seashore of the island Juana, and as a result of that voyage, I can say that this island is larger than England and Scotland together, for, beyond these one hundred and seven leagues, there remain to the westward two provinces to which I have not gone. One of these provinces they call "Avan", and there the people are born with tails..

- *Primer Viaje de Colón*, letter to King Ferdinand and Qu. Isabella from Cristobal Colón, 1492

Mother Of Twins Has Baby With Tail

(The Baltimore Sun)

BALTIMORE, Md., April 1, 1930 At 5:04 This morning, a young Frenchwoman gave birth to a baby girl with a complete tail, The child weighs 8 pounds, and measures 14.2 inches long. The press was unable to secure the exact dimensions of the tail. However, one member of the cleaning staff, who declined to be identified, guessed the tail to be approximately 8 inches long. "It has silver down--baby fur, I guess--all over it."

The child's father, an American, refused all interviews. Representatives of Johns Hopkins University Hospital confirmed the birth, but stressed that the couple, already parents of two sets of twins, need their privacy.

Refusing to give out any names, including the name of the family doctor, Joseph Lyden, M.D. the head of Obstetrics at Johns Hopkins stated, "We have examined the child and have ascertained that she is healthy, vigorous, and fortunately born to two parents who love her."

At a rather heated press conference, our Sun reporter asked if the child would be kept at home. Dr. Lyden was adamant: "Of course!" he said. "I see no reason why this child cannot lead a normal life. To institutionalize her would be criminal!" When another reporter quizzically remarked upon the date of birth, Dr. Lyden reprimanded him: "This is not a joke."

It's not so bad! Mama said optimistically, sipping *café au lait* at breakfast with my father and peering at my—ahem—from a distance— And *regard!* a sweet milkweed fluff at the end!

—Oh, yes. Not 'bad' at all! Why some parents might be thrilled: think of the money we could make if we just put our daughter in a circus! My father snarled, his face grew red and a bit of tan-colored foam clung to one corner of his mouth. He dragged mother to the doorway where they could see me happily playing in the next room— Oh yes! Not bad! *Le regard!* (My father's French was ever *mal*.) Why it's even *prehensile!*

There, with the object of my father's rage, I was balancing a column of lettered blocks while using both hands to set down a final yellow 'Q'.

Of course my parents would never, *never* have let me earn my living by exhibiting myself in front of a gaping crowd, and I am convinced that THAT particular incident made me unconsciously *untrain l'addition,*¹ as we sometimes called it, for such a task. I let the 'bill' become purely esthetic — art for art's sake!

¹ Addition, sum, bill. With *Par —de—*by the addition of. Also, *additif* is relevant--additional clause, rider, supplemental budget. (See *Larousse* for more, oh you monoglot!)

My dreams, though, are different. As far back as I can remember, I have dreamt a whole sequence of dreams set at night. I am on the high seas, and, Captain of my fate, I ride the indigo waves with the Pole Star above me, the wind ruffling my hair and my clothes, and my 'insignia' fluttering in the breeze. I wrap it around the tiller of a small sailing ship—a smack—adjust my course by sextant, and steer into the Horse Latitudes. Heave Ho! I swing up in the rigging and check the lashing on the topsails, swing down, check the play of the boom, and scurry to the bow to see the fill of each jib. Wild nights I lash myself to the mainmast with her—

Oh yes! in the deep of my dreams, she was always prehensile, even when I would not wake to find her so.