



■ John Joe Kane

THE BIRTH

Emily's water broke a little after dark on Friday night. She was laying on the couch and working on a quilt. It came out in a little squirt at first, like she had pissed herself. She'd been pissing a little whenever she sneezed anyway, but it was a day past the due-date, and she kept leaking, so we called the midwife. Emily stood in the corner of the cabin talking to her on the phone and more amniotic fluid came out. The midwife said, —“Sounds good, get some rest.”

We looked down at Emily's feet and there was a little puddle on the kitchen floor. She said,

—“It's starting.”

I went outside to breathe the cold air and stare at the sky for a moment. I texted Marissa. I wrote:

—“Emily's water broke.”

I looked in the window and Emily was doing dishes. The radio was going. I came in and said,

—“Baby, stop doin' the dishes.” She said,

—“I just want it to be nice when the baby comes home.”

We rolled a joint and smoked it and paced around the cabin, talking. We laid in bed and held each other. Emily told me what she was feeling in her body. She said it was a tightening. *New Sensations*. My mind traveled far into the future. We fell asleep. In the night the contractions really started. She was getting up every ten minutes and walking around with her hands on the small of her back, breathing hard. She left me sleeping so she could be with herself, her body, her brain, her baby. I was snoring. She lit candles and put them all over the cabin and gripped the top of the stool in our kitchen, bent

over, moving her hips in a figure-eight. Swimming through the waves. I woke up and said, “Are you alright?”

—“Yeah, I can't do this in bed.”

—“You take the bed, I'll sleep on the couch.”

She slept for a few more hours and woke up at seven when the light was pink. Waves were coming hard now. I got up and we stood in the kitchen making coffee.

—“I guess we should go,” she said.

We were having the baby at their Godmother Marissa's in Bearsville. We don't have running water at our place, and it's way up a dirt road. I finished packing the car. We had a trunk full of birthing gear. Towels, tub liners, a mattress protector, chuck pads, ointments, adult diapers. Baby diapers. The *Willow Moses Basket*, a sheepskin. We drove to town to buy film and to take \$500 in cash out of an ATM for the midwife's assistant, which I had to do in two transactions (remaining balance \$159.19). We arrived at Marissa's as she was leaving for work.

—“I'll be back in a few hours, babe,” she said.

We settled into the couch and watched some TV. Snuggled in our last moments together alone. Funny what you want in certain times.

Marissa came back with two bottles of red wine (Malbec, \$18.99) and two bottles of nice champagne. Alex showed up shortly after with a baguette and salted butter. Marissa poured glasses of wine for everyone. We smoked some joints. Marissa and I made a lasagna while Alex played solitaire and Emily got

up and swayed her hips, exhaling in big long billowing breaths that sounded like they came off the tops of tall mountains. We lit candles and listened to Peruvian flute music. Emily would get on her hands and knees and breathe hard. She'd stand up and walk around the room. I'd look up at her as she walked past and take her hand and say,

—“Are you alright?” and she'd say,

—“I'm wonderful.” It was a real nice time.

The light turned thin and blue. Waves were coming hard and fast now. Emily had been laboring for hours and she wanted some action. We thought walking might get it going. We walked to the end of the road where the creek turned and watched the water curl around the riverstones. We didn't say much and went back after awhile. At the house Emily lay down and fell asleep. Marissa, Alex and I stayed up and played rummy. Everyone went to bed. Emily got up in the middle of the night, moaning. I followed her around as she'd move through the rooms, *ooh-ing* in otherworldly tones. I wondered what Marissa and Alex were thinking upstairs in bed and I wondered at myself wondering. Around 5 am Emily said,

—“I think I want to call the doula,” so we did.

The doula arrived in a beat up Subaru with one headlight out. I thought, “boy, she's gonna get pulled over.”

She came into the house and immediately started rubbing Emily's lower back, the same way Emily showed me how to do, but better. Sometimes I think my hands are no good for gentle tasks. Emily was bent over a yoga ball. Her nightgown was hiked up and her butt was sticking out. The doula was rubbing coconut oil on it. Emily's moans were becoming more guttural, like an animal, she was an animal like we're all animals, she was a natural human howling to the rafters and shaking them. I called the midwife and told her what was going on. Emily was gripped hard onto the coffee table. The waves were coming every couple of minutes. When they crashed Emily was unreachable, in another place. The midwife said,

—“Ok I'm heading over.”

I looked up and big fat flakes of snow were starting to come down.

Meanwhile, Marissa and Alex were peeking their heads down from the top of the stairs. They looked like little kids, biting their nails. It was getting light out and the pine boughs were bent to the ground. Emily got sucked under another wave and gripped my arm hard. The midwife came in and kicked snow off her boots. She handed me a pump and said, “Set up the birthing tub.” When I came out Emily was on the floor and the midwife had a doppler and some other instruments on her stomach, the doula was rubbing her feet while the assistant rubbed her back. Emily said,

—“Oh this is great.”

Marissa crept down and started to make soup (*Pozole*). Alex sat at the top of the stairs sucking their finger.

Emily labored for another twelve hours. It was Sunday now and she'd been going for 36. She moved from room to room, naked now, with the entourage of midwife, assistant, doula, friends, rubbing, handing her drinks, tinctures. Someone

would hold a glass of water with a straw to her face and she would find the straw with her mouth and take gulps in a daze, like a boxer. I was able to stay with her close, whispering encouragement and admiration, love, into her ear, while she pushed, pushed hard and she would howl, howls that had the whole of all human existence in them, howls of ancient bolts of lightning striking shallow ponds in the pink fattening dawns of Earth eternal. She'd squeeze and release, then fall back wherever she was, limp and sweaty, exhausted, her hair hanging in wet strands that stuck to her face.

She was on the toilet and the snow was coming hard. I thought, —“We're going to have this baby in a toilet. John Bug! born into this world in the toilet, what a story, *Whoop-ee!*” but the midwife said,

—“I know that it might not feel right but let's move to the bed and lay you on your back.”

We guided her to the bed, where she lay back and instinctually pulled her legs up to her body, holding her knees with her hands. The midwife said,

—“Yes! You're a natural! Now push!” and Emily's body tensed up hard like one big muscle and she was slick and warm and she pushed and wailed and said,

—“Please come, John Bug, Please come,”

and tears rolled down her face like horses and I said,

—“Please baby, please come, please come to your mother,” and Emily would squeeze and wail, and the midwife finally said, —“It's the head!”

I looked and Emily's vagina was open and red and from it was a mushed brown ball with hair, river, cry, and Emily pushed, and a thin stream of wine red blood popped a wild wave and the head came out fuzzy and sticky and I howled

—“He's here our boy is here!”

Alex and Marissa ran into the room and Emily screamed screamed screamed and everyone went “Oh!” and in the majesty and grandeur of the Earth and the cosmos itself like God's Eye opening in the center, the head appeared whole and then the body, in one pop slid onto the bed yellow and slick and fishlike and the baby coughed and filled with air, pink, fattening like the dawn and Emily wept and I wept and the room settled into a calm.

Emily lay back, and took her baby in her arms. “That wasn't so bad,” she said. We laughed. Oh, the human body! The feminine miracles! The joy and wonder of the Earth and the Cosmos all one! Long live the Old Ways! Long live Poetry! Long live Humanity! Long live Love!

John Bug Wayne Theobald-Kane was born in Bearsville, New York at 8:52 pm on December 11th, 2022: 21 inches 7 lb 5 oz.

■ John Joe Kanes forthcoming book with 1080PRESS is titled *Magic Book*. He is also the author of *Tonshi Mtn. Diary* (Paperback Johnny's 2022)