

Karen Atherton
katherton@cox.net

HAPPY BIRTH DAY, BABY

"Etta has been waiting eight years to have a baby because Douglas isn't ready. Adrien, on The Other Side, chooses them as parents."

On The Other Side the Akashic Council, Mundy, Lulu and Pius, meets. They discuss the next lifetime of Adrien whose last two incarnations were female in horrific circumstances. This time Adrien wishes to come as a male and experience the love of a family. And he wants to ski. He appears before them and they show him three possible families.

One of the families is Douglas and Etta who've been putting off having a child for eight years because Douglas isn't ready. Against her Catholic beliefs Etta's been taking birth control pills. She attends confession and admits to Father Christopher she's still taking them. He tells her the church isn't going to change and gives her another penance. Douglas suggests they get a dog. Etta looks at him and snaps, "Is that instead of a child?"

Etta owns a bread shop, "Daily Bread", and one of her employees, Annie, gets pregnant. Annie's considering abortion but Etta talks her out of it saying she and Douglas will take the child. When she tells Douglas he is shocked. "I want a family," she tells him. "I am your family," he says. "A real family has children," she replies.

Meanwhile, on The Other Side, Adrien chooses Douglas and Etta as his parents. He's drawn to Etta's loving nature. He's told Douglas could be an obstacle, but that overcoming an obstacle strengthens.

Annie has the baby. Etta, carrying a large panda, visits her in the hospital. When she sees Annie and the baby, she realizes Annie loves the baby. She says, "That's the way it should be, Annie," and leaves holding onto the panda. She tells Douglas. "Good!" he says. She says her body is telling her it's ready to have a baby. Now! He tries to finagle more time, but she is firm. He relents, and they flush her birth control pills down the toilet.

Etta becomes pregnant and is full of joy. Her bread has never risen higher. Adrien has a going away party on The Other Side with his friends, and they tell him not to forget them and "the still small voice" that will always guide him.

Etta, three weeks overdue, finally has the first contraction, and Douglas drives to the hospital through a Chicago blizzard. Labor stalls at twenty-three hours and Douglas steps out for some coffee. When he returns to the room he spots a "film" of a man against the wall: Adrien.

"What is it?" he asks. "You can see me?" Adrien asks. Douglas nods and asks, "What are you?" Adrien tells him, "I haven't entered yet." "Entered what?" "The baby." Douglas doesn't understand. Adrien explains that he's the baby or supposed to be. But he doesn't know whether he's going in. There's a problem: half of the baby's arm is missing. "He wouldn't be a normal boy," Douglas says.

Douglas talks about things the baby, they planned to name Ben, wouldn't be able to do: canoe, golf, ski, sail. Adrien tells him what the baby could do: run and bike. Douglas asks him what happens if he doesn't enter. "Miscarriage." "Etta would be devastated." Douglas softens toward Adrien and finally tells him, "We would love you anyway." "I don't want to be loved anyway," Adrien says. He moves to Etta, places his hand on her stomach, and as labor starts again, he turns and immediately whisks out of the room.

Etta is devastated at the death of her baby. She loses interest in living and Douglas fears he's going to lose her. Contrary to his beliefs he goes to Father Christopher and asks him what to do. The priest tells him, "You have great love for your wife. Put her well-being first, above your own." "First?" Douglas asks. Father Christopher remains silent.

Douglas speaks to Etta about having another child. She is horrified. "I want us to have a baby, Etta." "You never wanted one before." "I know, but I'm ready, really ready." He suggests she could pray and see what God wants. This surprises and confuses her.

Etta becomes pregnant and she and Douglas prepare for the baby. Douglas has called out to Ben that it's okay however he comes. Etta gives birth and the doctor tells him Etta is fine. "And how is my son?" Douglas asks. "Your son?" Oh, no, Douglas, you have a daughter." Douglas is in shock.

Etta, radiant, holds the baby and smiles at Douglas. She senses something's wrong. Douglas starts to tell her what he expected and then stops. She asks him if he wants to hold the baby? Reluctantly he picks her up and stares at her. She stares back. Douglas whispers, "Ben, Ben?" The baby smiles a long, slow smile as she looks directly at Douglas. He knows who it is.

(scenes to follow)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BABY

By Karen Atherton

Karen Atherton
katherton@cox.net

© 2011 Karen Atherton All Rights Reserved

FADE IN:

EXT. THE OTHER SIDE - A MEADOW - DAY

Three shimmering souls sit in large white wicker chairs on emerald green grass: MUNDY, 55, male, in blue silk overalls and barefoot; LULU, female, 120, with a beautifully weathered face in golden robes; and PIUS, 34, androgynous, in a shining yellow tunic.

Baobab trees of radiant brown surround them and reach root-like branches to the satiny blue sky. At the edge of the grass is a turquoise pond with fishes of orange, chartreuse, purple, red and rainbow.

ADAMA, 23, male, in green jeans and a glistening black tee, hurries in. He stands before the council and looks to LULU who sits in the center.

LULU

Welcome, Adama.

Lulu looks from side to side. She flows her hand in front of her, making the INFINITY SIGN, a horizontal eight.

LULU

The Akashic Council is now in session.

Everyone sits up.

LULU

We're here to discuss the next lifetime of... what does the soul call itself?

ADAMA

Adrien.

PIUS

Hmmm, Adrien. Hmmm.

LULU

How soon will Adrien be ready to incarnate?

ADAMA

He only awaits the right family.

Mundy watches an Ibis fly overhead.

LULU

What does he wish to accomplish
this incarnation?

ADAMA

He has certain ideas, Lulu, but
he'd like guidance, says his isn't
always reliable.

Mundy laughs.

MUNDY

I like the ones who actually seek
guidance.

He rises and wades into the pond. He pushes a blue fish with
his toes.

PIUS

Yes, Mundy, if they only followed
it.

LULU

Go back for another lifetime,
Pius, see how easy that is. Once
the heavy Earth energy, racial
mind, status quo take over...
well you know. Did you take
guidance?

PIUS

Now that you remind me... Don't
remind me, I can still feel it.

LULU

Is he brave, Adama? Steadfast?
That determines the level of
challenge we can offer.

PIUS

Serious?

MUNDY

Strong?

ADAMA

Eager. Enthusiastic. A young soul.
First incarnation 1550. Earth.

LULU

Enthusiasm can take one far.

Mundy splashes in the water.

MUNDY

His *preceedents*?

ADAMA

The first - a Minstrel. He played
the crumhorn.

Lulu sits up with a nostalgic look.

LULU

Ah... how it pierced the air.

Three peacocks majestically walk among the Baobabs.

PIUS

Next?

ADAMA

Violin maker for the Stradivari
family.

MUNDY

Drawn to music.

ADAMA

Then a copyist for Ludwig van
Beethoven.

Adama laughs. Mundy joins him.

ADAMA

He told me how rude Ludwig was,
and a skinflint. One day while he
was copying Ludwig boxed his ear.
He ran away. Whenever Ludwig saw
him on the street, he yelled
'traitor'.

Everyone laughs.

MUNDY

Ludwig's had a few lessons to learn, hasn't he?

LULU

More than a few.

A fawn approaches the pond and drinks. Mundy pets it.

LULU

Were there female lifetimes?

ADAMA

North America Georgia. Cherokee.
She walked the Trail of Tears and
died along the way.

Mundy bows his head.

MUNDY

I also was there.

LULU

And the last lifetime?

ADAMA

A Jew in Adolf Hitler's Germany.
She entered Dachau pregnant; they
'impeded' the birth.

MUNDY

Did she fare?

ADAMA

She lived through it--

MUNDY

A strong soul, yes.

ADAMA

--but died a few years after the
war.

LULU

Suicide?

ADAMA

Memories.

LULU
Unfinished business.

Pius rises and stands behind his chair.

PIUS
And this soul is ready to return?
So soon?

ADAMA
He's made up his mind.

LULU
He does sound brave. I like that.
Too many wait for life to happen.

PIUS
And it rarely does. The way they
wish.

ADAMA
He prefers to go as a man.

Adama hesitates.

ADAMA
To spend an athletic incarnation.

They all stare at him.

A flock of bluebirds flies across the sky.

LULU
Why not as a female?

ADAMA
Complications from childbearing he
said.

LULU
Oh.

PIUS

Oh-oh.

LULU
It seems he hasn't overcome the last
incarnation.

MUNDY
Or... is he trivial?

ADAMA
I wouldn't say so. After Dachau...
he seems to have substantial goals.

PIUS
Such as.

ADAMA
'Grandmother Earth', as he calls
her, suffers. Air, water, trees
all hurt. Birds, fishes, animals
die.

LULU
And humans too.

ADAMA
He wants to help his
'Grandmother'.

MUNDY
As a Cherokee?

ADAMA
An outsider.

LULU
And on a personal level?

Mundy walks out of the water and sits in his chair. A green
garter snake slithers across his bare foot, and Mundy nudges
it with his toes.

ADAMA
He wishes to experience the love
of a family.

LULU
Love - the hardest lesson.

MUNDY
And in a family. Where it all
begins.

PIUS

Or doesn't.

Pius glances at Adama.

PIUS

Except for some it came so early,
so easy.

ADAMA

Still remembering the incarnation
we shared?

Lulu smiles. Pius ignores him.

LULU

You don't look back far enough or
fair enough, Pius.

PIUS

You think not?

Lulu shakes her head.

LULU

So, we must seek a family with the
correct balance of love and
challenge.

MUNDY

So his soul can learn and expand.

LULU

Anything else, Adama?

ADAMA

One more thing.

He walks back and forth.

PIUS

Yes?

ADAMA

He wants to ski.

Pius laughs out loud.

MUNDY

What are we - the Sears Catalog?

Lulu watches two squirrels chase each other up a Baobab.

LULU

He knows what he wants.

MUNDY

Family. Snow. Brrrrrr. I remember
Siberia.

ADAMA

Not that cold or brutal.

Pius gets a far-away look.

PIUS

Sometimes what's best for a soul
is least desired. Or expected.

Lulu looks at Pius and shakes her head.

LULU

You're going to complicate things.

PIUS

Did I say so?

LULU

I know that look.

ADAMA

As I do.

PIUS

So be it.

EXT. MUSIC BOX THEATRE - CHICAGO - NIGHT

A line of bundled up PEOPLE waits in the bitter winter.

The marquee reads: "'Pride and Prejudice', Colin Firth"

DOUGLAS, 33, athletic, and ETTA, 31, pretty and petite, like
Edith Piaf, stand in line. They stamp their feet to keep
warm.

DOUGLAS

The longer we wait, the less I want to see this.

ETTA

Because it's my turn. You never did want to see it, did you?

DOUGLAS

It's three hours.

ETTA

We sat through "Seven Samurai". Two and a half.

DOUGLAS

Okay, I'm excited and happy we're here.

Etta laughs. Douglas kisses her.

A WOMAN, 20, jeans, hatless and gloveless, walks into the line. She holds a six-month old BABY, bundled up in a blue snowsuit.

Douglas spots her and shakes his head.

DOUGLAS

Oh, just what we need.

Etta looks over and sees the Mother and Child. A wistful look comes over her face.

DOUGLAS

It'll probably start crying right after the opening credits and stop just before the final credits.

Etta looks up at him, hurt.

ETTA

She just wants to see the movie. She probably loves how Elizabeth Bennet takes on Mr. Darcy.

Douglas looks tolerant.

ETTA

Who doesn't?

Etta turns to the Woman again and notices her left hand has no wedding band.

ETTA

Maybe she's all alone. She might not have anyone to babysit.

DOUGLAS

She shouldn't come to a crowded theatre with a baby.

Etta turns away from him and watches the Woman rub noses with her Baby. The Woman laughs, the Baby laughs and Etta laughs. The Woman kisses it.

Douglas looks at the Woman and Baby.

DOUGLAS

I just hope she doesn't sit near us.

Etta whips around to him.

ETTA

What is the matter with you, Douglas? A mother and child?

Douglas looks at Etta and realizes what's going on.

DOUGLAS

I'm sorry, Etta.

He turns away and shuts up. The line begins to move into the theatre. Douglas looks at Etta; she avoids his eyes.

EXT. SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Etta approaches STATUES of the robed brothers, St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who stand on the lawn. St. Cyril holds a rosary, and St. Methodius's hand reaches out. She leans her head against St. Methodius's robes.

Three BIRDS, Brown Thrashers, with brown backs, tails and spotted breasts, fly around the Brothers and perch on their heads and shoulders.

ETTA

Show me the way.

THE BIRDS
Pull-it-up! Pull-it-up!

Etta looks at them.

ETTA
I wish I could.

St. Methodius seems to lift his hand.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Etta sits in a pew. She kneels on a prayer bench and bows her head.

She rises, lights a candle and silently prays.

She looks up as a MAN emerges from the Confessional. She looks past him at it, shakes her head and exits.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Etta walks. Ahead a MOTHER approaches pushing a stroller with a GIRL, 2, bundled up. The Girl waves to Etta. Etta waves back. The Girl bounces on her seat and waves with both hands. The Mother nods at Etta as they pass.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Etta sits, her eyes closed, praying the Rosary. An embroidery frame with material sits in her lap. She mouths "The Lord's Prayer" as tears slide down her face.

Douglas quietly enters the house and sees her praying. He watches a moment, shakes his head, and silently backs out. A moment later a door SLAMS.

Etta jerks and opens her eyes. She wipes them and drops the Rosary. She picks up the embroidery, pushes auburn curls back from her forehead and embroiders.

Douglas stands in the doorway. He kisses the top of her head.

DOUGLAS
What is it?

She opens the embroidery frame and shakes out an apron with a partly-finished LOAF OF BREAD embroidered.

ETTA
Maybe we'll sell them.

DOUGLAS
Entrepreneur!

ETTA
What would you think about me
making Annie a partner?

DOUGLAS
Why?

ETTA
She's a good store manager, and
she loves "Daily Bread".

DOUGLAS
So does Kay. Why do you want to
share ownership?

ETTA
Have you noticed how she decorated
the window? Her displays make you
want to eat bread.

Douglas stares at her as she replaces the apron in the frame.

ETTA
I want more time for myself.

DOUGLAS
Yeah?

Etta embroiders.

ETTA
I might volunteer at the
Children's' Hospital.

He gives her a look.

DOUGLAS
Doing what?

ETTA
They need helpers to hold the
newborns... and the sick ones.

DOUGLAS

Why can't the parents hold them.

ETTA

They can't be there all the time.

Douglas studies her a moment then moves to kiss her.

DOUGLAS

Etta?

She embroiders.

DOUGLAS

Etta, I'd like us to get a dog.

Etta scrunches up her face.

ETTA

Dog? I don't want a dog.

DOUGLAS

Well, I'd like one.

ETTA

Since when? You've never talked about a dog.

DOUGLAS

It sort of just came to me.

Anger crosses her face as she embroiders faster.

DOUGLAS

I just thought... it would be nice
... to have...

Etta shakes her head.

DOUGLAS

He could run with me. I'd make
sure he got exercise.

Etta looks up.

ETTA

Oh?

Douglas sees encouragement.

DOUGLAS
A yellow lab, like Barry's. They
love to run.

ETTA
Until they smell something.
They're great sniffers, you know.

DOUGLAS
So it's okay?

He smiles at her.

ETTA
I didn't say that.

She looks hard at him.

ETTA
Is a dog supposed to be 'instead
of'?

Douglas looks at her deflated.

DOUGLAS
I just want a dog.

He shrugs.

DOUGLAS
I don't think so.

He looks away. She closes her eyes.

ETTA
Am I being selfish?

DOUGLAS
You? You could never be selfish,
Etta. Let's forget about a dog for
now.

He kisses her.

DOUGLAS
I'm going for a run.

INT. "DAILY BREAD" BAKERY - DAY

A large space with floor to ceiling windows in front and ovens in the back. Three large, high wooden tables, cooling racks, baking pans and trays and stacked bags of flours and grains fill the bakery. A huge metal mixing bowl for bread dough sits on a platform on the floor.

A large open arch in the side wall leads to the "DAILY BREAD" STORE.

All three BAKERS wear white aprons and scarves around their hair.

GREG, 22, with a skull scarf, mixes bread dough in the huge bowl with a large wooden paddle

KAY, 37, with a Betty Boop scarf and tee, at a table, mixes oatmeal and raisins into a bowl of cookie dough.

Etta, with a yellow Sponge Bob scarf, at a table, sprinkles flour onto it. She picks up a bowl of risen dough and drops the dough onto the floured table. As she punches it down to a smaller size, her punches become angry.

Greg watches her and whistles "The Boxer".

Etta looks at the dough. It resembles a head. She punches it down again.

KAY

What'd Douglas do now?

Etta begins to knead the dough.

KAY

This is about having a baby, isn't it?

Etta pounds the dough

Greg whistles louder.

ETTA

Eight years. Birth control pills.
Damn pills. Wish they'd never been
invented.

KAY

What are you saying? When I worked as a nurse, I saw women come into the emergency room after they'd tried to abort with the fetus hanging, dead. And some of them died.

Greg slaps dough with the paddle.

Etta raises her head, her eyes wide open.

ETTA

Oh.

GREG

(sarcastically)

If we put birth control pills into the bread, maybe we could kill a lot more babies.

KAY

Greg!

ETTA

Douglas insisted I take them. I wonder how many of my babies have died. I wonder how many more of my babies are going to die.

KAY

And the fetus is only potential human life. It doesn't have as much value as life already in existence, the woman's.

GREG

Who says that?

KAY

It comes right from the Talmud.

GREG

That's not what I learned. "It's a human at inception. The sanctity of life has to be preserved. 'Thou shalt not kill.'" At least that's what they said in the seminary.

KAY

Well we all have different ideas.

ETTA

I don't care about any of that. I
just want a baby.

She looks at Kay and shakes her head. Kay raises her eyebrows
and mixes the cookie batter.

A COUPLE with a baby stands outside the window and watches
the bakers work.

Etta looks out the window. The MAN gives her a thumbs-up.
Etta gives a floured thumbs-up back.

ANNIE, 30, tall and slender, wearing a green apron, pops her
head in from the Store.

ANNIE

(mouths to Kay)

I took the test.

Kay's eyes go to Etta. Annie stops talking.

ETTA

What test.

ANNIE

Oh, nothing.

Annie returns to the Store.

Etta questions Kay with her eyes.

(continued)