

A Newt Note

Brian Doyle

One time, years ago, I was shuffling with my children through the vast wet moist dripping enormous thicketed webbed muddy epic forest on the Oregon coast, which is a forest from a million years ago, the forest that hatched the biggest creatures that ever lived on this bruised blessed Earth, all due respect to California and its redwood trees but our cedars and firs made them redwoods look like toothpicks, and my kids and I were in a biggest-creature mood, because we had found slugs waaay longer than bananas, and footprints of elk that must have been gobbling steroids, and a friend had just told us of finding a bear print the size of a dinner plate, and all of us had seen whales in the sea that very morning, and all of us had seen pelicans too which look like flying pup tents, and how *do* they know to all hit cruise control at the same time, does the leader give a hand signal? as my son said, and one of us had seen the two ginormous young eagles who lived somewhere in this forest, so when we found the biggest stump in the history of the world, as my daughter called it, we were not exactly surprised, it was basically totally understandable that suddenly there would be a stump so enormous that it was like someone had dropped a dance floor into the forest, that's the sort of thing that *happens* in this forest, and my kids of course immediately leaped up on it and started shaking their groove thangs, and danc-

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ing themselves silly, and I was snorting with laughter until one kid, the goofiest, why we did not name this kid Goofy when we had the chance in those first few dewy minutes of life I will never know, well, this kid of course shimmed over to the edge and fell off head over teakettle, vanishing into a mat of fern nearly as tall as me, but the reason I tell you this story is that while we were all down in the moist velvet dark of the roots of the ferns, trying to be solicitous about Goofy and see if he was busted anywhere serious but also trying not to laugh and whisper the word “doofus,” one of us found a newt! O my god! dad! check it *out!*

Of course the newt, rattled at the attention, peed on the kid who held it, and of course that led to screeching and hilarity, and of course on the way home we saw damselflies mating, which also led to screeching and hilarity, but the point of this story isn't pee or lust, however excellent a story about pee or lust would be. It's that one day when my kids and I were shuffling through the vast wet moist forest we saw so many wonders and miracles that not one of us ever forgot any of the wonders and miracles we saw, even though we saw only tiny shreds and shards of the ones that are there, and what kind of greedy criminal thug thieves would we be as a people and a species if we didn't spend every iota of our cash and creativity to protect and preserve a world in which kids wander around gaping in wonder and hoping nothing else rubbery and astonishing will pee on them? You know what I mean?