The Onion

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"OH, NO, Joanie, you didn't plant an onion!" Carole's smooth laugh rolled up from her round belly, "You can't have an onion as a houseplant. Oh, wait till I tell Carl. He'll die laughing."

Maybe you will too, I thought, and then said, "Why not, Carole? It already had green stems on it, and. . ."

"Well, because, silly, your whole house will smell like an onion." She was mothering me again in her best condescending tones. "An onion!" She began anew her laughter.

I wish she wouldn't laugh so hard. I mean, her baby's due anytime now, and if anything happened. . . I reached for another cigarette.

Carole dried the tears that had gathered at the corners of her eyes with the bottom of her maternity blouse. She had on the kind of skirt that has an open front, and the sight of her engorged slip sent a funny feeling through my stomach.

I can just see myself in one of those sloppy looking jackets with my skirt hanging unevenly. What a sight; my feet would probably be more swollen than Carole's even. There should be a better way of having children.

"Did I ever tell you that I couldn't smoke the first two months I was p.g.?" She ended her question with a belch, and
screwed up her face as if she were tasting something rotten.

“Well, I was still at Drake, you know, and...”

Yes, I know, Carole. I know because you’ve told me three times before. But, maybe pregnancy makes women forgetful. I wouldn’t know; would I?

“Well, I do wonder when our mailman will get here; he’s always late. Sometimes we don’t get our mail until way in the afternoon.” Carole got up by literally pushing herself out of her chair and then waddled to the door. She looked out the dirty window pane. “No, I don’t see him coming. You know, I really should wash this — well, all the windows sometime soon, but I’ve just been so busy...”

Yes, I can see how busy you’ve been. When was the last time you swept the floor, and aren’t those yesterday’s dishes crusted-over and standing in the sink? I’ll bet the bed isn’t even made yet.

“Mom was always washing the windows at home! I think she had some kind of an obsession about it. Crumb, you could hardly turn around without having to clean something.” Carole lumbered back to her chair. She had to back up to it, grab the arms behind her, and ease herself down. Then she exhaled deeply, and I could see the sweat beginning to gather on her forehead and upper lip.

“Whew, that’s a job,” she breathed. “You’re causing me a lot of work, big boy,” she patted her fat belly.

Carole stuck a new cigarette in her mouth. It flipped up and down as she talked while she hunted for a match on the over-crowded coffee table. “We got another bill from that damn dentist last Thursday; I just don’t know how we’ll ever be able to pay him, but...” she mumbled through puckered lips.

I don’t understand you, Carole. How can you and Carl afford to have a baby with all your other expenses? Bob and I have trouble making ends meet as it is. We certainly wouldn’t think of having a baby if we couldn’t even pay our bills. Besides, what would we do with a baby around the house...?
“But what I really need is a good book. Oh, I’ve read ‘doctor books’ at home before — about having babies —, but you know how they are,” Carole spoke a little louder, then ended her sentence on a sly intimate slide.

“What? Oh, oh, I have one. It’s BECOMING A MOTHER; I don’t know how good it is, but it seems clear, and...” I started.

“Could I borrow it? I’d only want it for a little while.” Carole broke into her rolling laughter again, and her fat cheeks shook.

Damn it. I shouldn’t have mentioned that I had that book. Why did I tell her? I knew she’d want to read it. She wouldn’t hesitate to ask for the use of our check book. In all my twenty-one years I’ve never met such a — a... There you go, Joan, lecturing. You’re as bad as Carole.

“I know— for letting me borrow it, I’ll bring you a real plant!”

“Oh, no, Carole...” No, no, no. I planted my onion and it’s going to grow. I’m going to take care of it. It’s going to live and I don’t care if the house will smell bad; at least it won’t smell like milk and diapers and... babies.

We are Voices, hearing Voices

by R. L. Reid

Hearing the voices (torn from the tomb) that laughed in a distant day, we take a seat in an empty room and act the end of the play.

Our fellow actors are long-since dead — they’ve walked their candled way blind to the lives they’ve humbly led and could not stop or stay

a halting instant. Yet they bled and crumbled to decay — born in the seed, borne in the blood — Our turn now, today.