Ignatius J. Reilly sat with his mother at their tiny dining table. He hadn’t woken early enough to give her instructions for his preferred breakfast, but the waffles she had prepared were adequate. They went well with his favorite beverage: a can of Dr. Nut.

Ignatius scooped up a forkful of waffle drowned in syrup and chewed thoughtfully.

“Mother, have I ever told you about the time I had to fight off a pterodactyl who was trying to steal my foot-long hot dog?”

Mrs. Reilly sighed. She had not heard this particular tale, but it would have to be a pleasant change from the oft-repeated story of her son’s ill-fated bus trip out of New Orleans. It was the one time he had ventured beyond the city’s limits, and it had resulted in him vomiting from travel sickness.

“No, babe. How did that come about?”

Ignatius took a large gulp of Dr. Nut and attempted to smooth the sides of his unkempt hair. Most of it was inaccessible due to the green hunting cap he always wore.

“I’m surprised I never told you. It was quite an ordeal.”

Mrs. Reilly was used to her son wasting precious hours of her time recounting events in which he supposedly participated, but this one sounded unusually odd.

“How did you find yourself in the company of a pterodactyl?” she asked.

“It was the day after that horrible bus trip. My stomach hadn’t yet fully recovered, and I was feeling very sorry for myself. I passed a hot dog vendor on Canal Street, and it reminded me of something I had read about bread being beneficial after an illness.”

“Lord, honey, I hope you’re going to tell me the pterodactyl won that fight. The bread from them hot dog wagons might be okay, but the weenies would give you the runs even on a good day.”

“No, the pterodactyl did not win,” Ignatius said indignantly. “But he did knock it out of my hand, and it fell into a puddle of filth on the sidewalk.”

Mrs. Reilly clawed anxiously at her chest. “You didn’t still eat it, did you?”

“Of course I didn’t, Mother. The puddle was disgusting, although I may have considered it if other variables had been at play. For example, if the path was dry and the area had recently been swept.”

“I still don’t like the sound of you eating food from the ground. What happened with the pterodactyl?”

“He was like a pickpocket, swooping out of nowhere. I whisked the food from his reach, but the audacious creature followed me. Considering he had a wingspan of thirty feet, I was surprised I was able to keep ahead of him for so long. Still, I knew I needed a permanent solution to evade him, and it occurred to me he wouldn’t fit through the door at Night of Joy – do you remember the time we went there? I ran as fast I could, and I reached the bar before he could steal my hot dog. But he was so spiteful that just as I crossed the threshold, he spread out a wing and slapped the food from my hand.”

“What malicious behavior.”

“I know. I had the same thought. I was tempted to go back and demand financial compensation, but my appetite vanished once I smelled the bar’s interior.”

“What became of the pterodactyl?”

“I don’t know. I stayed for a couple of beers – even though they only had Dixie and Dixie makes me bloat – but I needed something to calm me down. I didn’t leave until after sundown. The chaos of Canal Street’s nightlife must have scared him off, because I didn’t see him again.”

“That’s a relief.”

“Not really. Considering what I’d gone through the day before, I worried the incident was part of a bad luck cycle. And I was right. Don’t you remember that soon after, I lost my wallet? And then a week after that, I stubbed my toe on my bed frame? It still aches at night.”

“But nothing bad has happened since then, has it?”

“It’s too early to tell. The goddess Fortuna might just be playing with me.”

“I’m sure that’s not the case, babe.”

Ignatius stood, leaving his plate for his mother to clean up. He picked up the can of Dr. Nut, collected another from the fridge, and headed for his room.

“Don’t bother me for the next two hours. I’ll be working,” he said.

“Okay, honey.”

Mrs. Reilly didn’t completely understand what her son got up to on his own in that room, but she thought maybe it was better *not* to know.

She cleared the dishes and took them to the kitchen sink.

And then it suddenly occurred to her.

What was a pterodactyl doing in New Orleans?

Surely he would prefer New York.