

children
churches
& daddies

Singular
Memories

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by Janet Kuypers

penny dreadful press

More Than Stories

your grandchildren come over now
my nieces, nephews
excited to see grandma

you give them a treat
before they leave
candies, cookies

they're not pickles
but they remind me
of my grandmother

the stories i'd hear
about how good she was

i love her now
without ever seeing her face

but you see,
these kids
claire, marshall, joel, edward
your grandchildren

they get to see you
they get to spend time with you
they have more than
stories

they know your face
they know your voice

they love you now

but remember
they'll always love you
they'll always remember

they'll always love you



to my mother

Cocktail Hour

I remember when I was little when dad would come home from work, mom would always have two gin martinis ready for them. She'd put the glasses in the freezer, with ice cubes in them, an hour before he was due home. That was their time to sit together, talk about their day.

Sometimes they'd joke, is it cocktail hour yet?, and they'd look at the time, 4:55, close enough.

So little vermouth that sometimes they'd pour a capful of vermouth in, swirl it around in the glass with the ice cubes, then pour the extra vermouth out.

I never liked gin; the smell is too strong. But I always think of the end of the day when I smell a martini.

And at restaurants, too, dad would always order for them. two dry martinis, on the rocks, with a twist. You know, some things just flow off your tongue when you've heard them said enough. two dry martinis, on the rocks, with a twist.

Changing The Locks

and the children
got older, borrowed the car
or got picked up by friends
to go out

and when one was leaving
mom would joke around
and say

she was going to change
the locks
or mom and dad were going
to move away
and leave no
forwarding address

they never did that, though
they were always there

H ave a P arty

if there was ever a time
when all the kids were
going to be out for the
evening, and dad was going
somewhere, too, and mom
would end up alone in the
house for a while, she
would say that she was
going to have a party while
everyone was gone, and
she'd smile

E specially A t
B reakfast

mom was always cooking things, eating the
strangest things, especially at breakfast.
some mornings, felling especially groggy, i'd
walk down the stairs to find mom eating a
plate of cold pigs' feet. only my mother.

Cry For Me

she never like to see her daughter cry
it would make her cry too

“you go in there, talk to her”
she would say to another daughter

i remember once
crying at my father
and running upstairs to my bedroom
i was laying on my bed in the dark

my sister tried to come in
i told her to leave me alone

then my mother knocked
and i couldn't tell her to go away

she came in, sat on the bed
started crying
“you see, i always turn into a mess”

but it was nice
to see you cry
for me

Decorating The Palm Trees (continued)

the year after,
more than half the houses

then she bought
ornaments for her tree,
big, round,
foot-wide
ornaments

next year,
a few more houses
had ornaments

the year after,
more than half the houses

my mother
was always the first

Decorating The Palm Trees

my mother
always started trends
in our neighborhood

take christmas,
for example:

one christmas
in addition to decorating
the tree we had inside,
she took italian lights

and strung them along
each branch of the
palm tree in front of
our house

dad even put me in the
bucket of the tractor
so i could reach

next year,
a few more houses with
palm trees decorated

continued

Let's Go

One summer day in August, I was sixteen at the time, Sandy and I were in the house, it was an average Thursday, mom was out golfing, dad was at Bob's form yard, doing something man-like, cutting wood or something. The cleaning lady was at the house, I was getting ready for a summer job interview that morning. The phone rings, I answer it, suddenly there's this strange voice on the other line talking, asking, "Is your mother there?" and my first instinct was that it was Greg on the other line, a friend of dad's, he always liked to put on a fake voice and try to fool the kids. So I put on my most cordial voice and said, "No she's not, may I take a message?" and then the voice starts going on about how he's cut his finger and he has to go to the hospital, and then it finally occurs to me that it's my father, and he was in so much pain that he could barely speak. So he hangs up the phone and Sandy and I try to call the golf course, hoping to catch mom, but she already left, and while we waited for her to come home

continued

Let's Go (continued)

dad came home to get us and
bring us to the hospital with him.
His hand was wrapped in a shirt,
half-soaked in blood. Sandy got
in the wagon, but she told me
to wait at home for mom. So dad
whipped the car out of the drive-
way and down the road, And I stood
in the driveway, watching him
drive away.

I was so distraught, I started to
cry, but I had to keep myself
together, because I didn't want
to make it sound serious when I
told her and make her more nervous.

I didn't want her to cry, he cut
his finger, he'd need stitches,
but he wasn't going to die.

So I waited at the front window,
and when I saw her car drive down
the road I went to the garage.

When she pulled in I hopped in
the passenger side before she
turned off the engine. "Come on,
let's go," I said, with a smile on
my face.

I tried to preface the story with
"Let me just say, that everything
is fine," but you just know when
bad news is coming up. But I tried
to make it sound funny, like dad
the klutz cut his hand.

I hope I did a good job. For eleven
blocks I was the one that had to
make sure that everything was
okay. I hope I did a good job.

Musical

she never wanted to sing,
dad was the one that was more musical,
i guess, she always said she
sounded just awful, and dad even
agreed. he'd make a humorous threat,
like, be careful, or i'll make mom sing.
but one thing mom was always
musical at was yawning,
i think she could hum a song while
she yawned. usually, though, she
would just start her yawn with a
high pitch, then change key by key
for five or six notes. the most unique
yawn i've ever heard. sometimes
we'd all just be quiet watching
television and out would come one
of mother's original scores. it would
always make one of us smile.

P icking M y F riends (C ontinued)

I had to make my own decisions about which friends I had, and besides, if she told me I couldn't see Kim, I'd just want to see her more anyway.

And yes, I learned, and I ended the friendship soon after the trouble began.

Well, I know I'm not supposed to know about that, but I've always wanted to thank her for the trust, for letting me make my own decisions. Just to thank her.

P erfect

once when i was in florida
visiting mom and dad
(i think it was a sunday)
mom asked me,
"what do you want for dinner
tuesday?"

and i thought,
i don't know what i want
for dinner
tonight, or even if i want
to eat, much less
what i want for dinner
two days from now

i wanted to tell her
to relax,
not to worry about me,
and i thought,
there she goes again
making sure
everything is perfect

Poker Face

every once in a while
mom would play cards with us
but her poker face is just awful

she'd draw a card,
one she evidently wanted

look at it down her bifocals
raise her eyebrows

"ooh, ooh, ooh!!"
she'd say

we all knew then
we should fold

Picking My Friends

I had a friend while I was in high school, her name was Kim, she was a bit... progressive, shall we say, a bit outspoken. She was the type that followed rock bands with hopes to get a photograph or sleep with them. She had bright red hair in a mohawk, wore dark make-up. I remember once she came over and dad looked at her and said, are you going to sue your hairdresser for what they did to you?

Well, anyway, I spent a lot of time with her while I was in high school, and while I didn't chop all of my hair off (I was too insecure to make a statement with no meaning at fifteen), our friendship had an effect on my well-being. She was often ill-tempered, and I found myself getting into arguments with her, feeling stressed because of her. And mom saw this, and long after the fact Sandy told me that mom considered telling me I couldn't see my friend anymore.

But she decided not to, thinking

continued

The Missing Onion (continued)

frantically for an onion mom misplaced this morning. Well, mom finally gave up and left the search party because she had to bring the salad outside, with or without the beloved tear-jerker, and so she starts to toss the salad, but something is heavy on the bottom. "Oh, silly me," she says, and pulls the aluminum foil-laden vegetable out from the bottom of the bowl.

To this day, whenever we remember something, we say, "It's coming to me," and laugh.

Squid

once i was sitting in the living room, i just got home from school, and i said i need to go wash my hands. so i walked upstairs, went over to the kitchen sink. mom, sitting in the living room, didn't mention that the sink was half-full of raw squid for her dinner. I shriek. mom laughs. "are their beady little eyes looking up at you?" she asked. the little devil. i'm upstairs, in the kitchen, shrieking, and she's laughing. it is kind of funny, looking back.

Tuesday Nights

tuesday nights were the nights dad went out with the boys in the builders tee club and it was just the girls at home. i remember a story of when mom and dad were younger and dad would come home late on tuesdays, drunk, and one time mom decided to scotch tape the front door lock, and dad tried and tried to use his key but just couldn't get in the front door. well for me tuesday nights were spaghetti nights, because dad hated spaghetti but we loved it. there was no meat in it, i could hear him saying. but when i was younger, i remember thinking that my favorite day of the week was not saturday or sunday, free from school, but tuesday, when we had spaghetti or elbow noodles in a milk and butter sauce and it was the girl's night together.

The Missing Onion

Every Fourth of July mom and dad would have a party for all of their friends. Sandy and I at night would get a ladder and climb to our rooftop so we could see the fireworks from neighboring towns. Well one year, at the party, mom was getting all the food together, she always made so much food for everyone, and she was finishing the salad, but she realized that she was missing the onions. "I know I cut an onion for the salad," she said. "Help me look for it." So Sandy and mom and I were walking around the kitchen looking for an onion, cut up. Frantically searching. Not on the counter, not in the refrigerator. "It's coming to me!" mom yelled out during the search, and we all stopped for a clue toward finding the prized minced onion. "It's... it's in tin foil." Okay, so now we're looking for a smelly ball of wrinkled metal, this is a good lead. And we're all just laughing so hard because we're looking

continued

Watching People Play

mom and dad's home in florida is right across the street from a pool and a pair of tennis courts. in the mornings, if mom was already out of the house when i woke up, i'd get dressed, maybe a swimsuit, maybe shorts and a t-shirt, and walk outside, down the driveway, across the street, through the fence and past the pool to the rows of brown bleachers that faced the courts. dad might be playing, or maybe there's a tournament with our neighbors and friends. and i'd sit next to mom, both of us with our feet up on the fence around the tennis courts, just sitting in the sun. that's how we spent our mornings, watching people play.

Wouldn't Have To

whenever i hurt myself playing when i was little, roller skating or bicycling in the driveway, mom would usually do one of two things: she'd either try to make me laugh by asking, "did you crack the cement?", or say she'd cry for me, or get mad for me, and then she'd pout, so I wouldn't have to

You'll Like Them

mom was always cooking things, eating the strangest things, and trying to convince us to try them. just because she likes hot peppers or pickled beets or pigs' feet or oysters doesn't mean we do. so once mom cooked some garbanzo beans, wanted me to try them. "you'll like them, they're low in fat." no, thank you, mom, i'm not hungry. "but they taste just like peanuts." no, thanks, mom, i'm really not hungry.

"they taste just like peanuts."

sandy and i start a conversation.

"just like peanuts," we hear her say again from the kitchen. i start to laugh. she's still in there, trying to convince me to eat these things, and she just keeps repeating that they taste just like peanuts, in that cute little high-pitched squeak of hers. "just like peanuts."

"do they taste just like peanuts?" i asked. they were soft and mushy. nothing like peanuts. nothing at all.

That Dress

both years i went to prom
you made me my dress
the first, pink and mauve

i looked like a parade float,
i think

the next year,
something a bit more
dramatic
i wanted black with a touch of ivory,
you convinced me to have
ivory with a touch of black

you made a dress
with a fitted jacket

i could take the jacket off
wear a pair of long dress gloves

you know,
you never liked having
your picture taken
mom

but i'll always keep
the photo taken just before
my prom night
of the two of us

i'm leaning my head
on your shoulder

i loved that dress