



Skelezine

"If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton,
you may as well make it dance."

George Bernard Shaw

Never, Ever There

I'm a miracle child. Although not because my mom had any particular problem getting pregnant. Quite the opposite, I hear, but I promised not to tell. Still, in the end, there are only two of us—my sister and me.

My sister Jammy (pronounced Jamie, but more on that later) was born from the throes of mom's early-twenties passions with a psychopath boyfriend. She didn't know that he was psycho at the time, of course. It wasn't until he started beating her while Jammy was resting snugly in her belly, frowning in the womb at the interruptions, that mom realized they weren't safe. So she left him, running back home to live with her mom and take night classes. The boyfriend, well, he killed his next girlfriend on "accident" and now he lives between bars for however many heartbeats he has left.

While our mom was going through nursing school and working night shifts to get ahead in the medical world, my sister stayed with our grandparents, attending schools in their residential bracket rather than the ones near moms apartment. They lived in separate worlds entirely, mother and daughter. By the time my parents met, ten years later, my mom was working the day shift in the Emergency Room. Any responsibility she felt for Jammy was set-aside for another day, an easier day.

When I was young, I didn't realize that moms could have more than one child. On the weekends when I visited my grandparents, I would see Jammy. I knew she was my sister. I just didn't know what that meant. I would come charging into our grandparent's house, all energy and attention-hog and "love-me", exclaiming how *my* mom had done this with

me and *my* mom had bought me that. Finally, Jammy pointed it out.

"Your mom, huh?" she asked, coy.

"Well, duh, who else would she be?" I replied.

"*Our* mom?" she proposed with a raised eyebrow, just so. She was entertained.

I tried out the idea, tossing it over and testing it out, my forehead drawing together in concentration. But in the end, my five-year-old self just couldn't share. I spit out the idea. Not mom. I didn't see her enough as it was. "How can she be your mom, if she's *my* mom?"

"She can't." She replied straight-faced, but I expect that there was a hurt there that I couldn't see. "She must just be *your* mom."

And there it was. My sister would spend the next two decades calling her *your mother*. I'd have given anything for it

to be our mother. Jammy never had a mom. And she never knew her dad. At school functions, her parents were dead. It was just easier that way, I guess.

My dad wasn't a psychopath, so that's in my favor. He was a lawyer. And an excellent liar. I suppose the two go hand-in-hand. I think the latter was hereditary, too, which pisses my mom off. Dad was married to a Chinese woman in another town, who he has been "in the middle of a divorce" with for the last twenty-six years. I'm twenty-four. That's where most infidelity stops, at two lovers. But my dad, he was an over-achiever. While my mom thought he was in a relationship with her, he was also fooling around with another girlfriend who lived more than a few towns over. The idiot bought them all the same exact necklace.

It's an odd thing, the connection we have to our parents. I hate the man who made my mom cry with such all-consuming anguish. It was there with her, always. She would scream, in her mind, and I could see it, even if I didn't hear it. I really hate *that* man. But I love my dad. They are separate. Always separate.

Even when he lived with us, I didn't see my dad often. He was always gone to work, or traveling for business, or camping on the beach with his "Army buddies." Except camping meant fucking and it wasn't the army buddies, it was the Dragon Lady, but I didn't know that until I was old enough to smoke. I just thought my dad liked the beach, and wondered why we couldn't all go. I loved the beach. I loved my dad. It made no sense.

I don't know the Dragon Lady's real name. That's just what my mom called her. I know the English translation of her Chinese name is Michelle. I know that once when I was three, while mom was at work, dad took me to lunch and brought her along. We sat silently, studying each other across the booth, while dad went to the order counter. That's when she pulled me under the table and kicked me, hard, in the abdomen. When dad returned with the food, he found me still on the floor with a sour look on my face. I must have told mom about what happened, because that's when she started calling her the Dragon Lady. I had no idea it was racist. I thought we made it up.

It was she and I against the world. Until one day, I realized, it was just me.

My mother buried herself into her work after they split; I think to keep the loneliness at bay. She left the hospital for a day job at an insurance company around the time I started first grade. When the last bell rang, I watched with envy as the other kids were picked up by their parents. I had to take the bus to one of those after-school programs with no real supervision. Sometimes, I would forget the bus, on purpose, so that my teacher would drive me there in his faded red sedan. Looking back, I don't know why he did. I'm sure he knew I was manipulating him. I wonder if he could have got in trouble. But it was different back then. My mom didn't think he was creepy, and neither did I. Instead, it was recognized that he was just an elementary school teacher who was worried about a student. Back then, it was okay to care.

Every afternoon as soon as I checked in with the front desk, I would leave out the side door. My friends and I would

walk across the grass of the park and meet by the library. We'd explore books, climb trees, and buy things from the ice cream man with our lunch money. We didn't know the time, but we could tell by how bright it was outside when we needed to sneak back before our parents came to pick us up. It frightened them when they tried to check us out, our names ringing over the loud speaker, and we didn't show up. It frightened us when they finally found us. So usually, we came back a little earlier than we thought we had to.

I was always one of the last names called over the loudspeaker, when it was dark out and too late to make dinner. So we would swing by some fast food joint, wrappers crinkling in the car because we didn't want to wait for the dining room table. That poor table. All it ever serviced was the evening mail, tossed into piles that weren't organized until they started spilling onto the floor.

Only three hours down the highway, and I still only saw him three times a year: My birthday, Christmas, and Father's Day. Each time, he was late. Two hours, on the nose. Mom and I would joke about it, although she did her best not to say bad things about him. After a few years, when I was old enough to get mad but still young enough to not understand the weight of words, I confessed to her that I hated him. But it was a question, and I was asking her. *Should* I hate him? She was my mom, and I trusted her.

She bent down, resting her hands softly on my shoulders, and looked into my eyes with so much love. Love for me, but a remnant of love for my father, too, I think. "No you don't, honey. You love him, because he's your dad. It's okay to love him."

It was the kindest thing my mother has ever done for me. For him, too, but he'll never even know it happened, because he wasn't there.

Three Names My Sister Calls Me

1. Miss Piggy
2. Smelly
3. *You.*

Two Things My Sister Calls Herself

1. My Worst Nightmare
2. Miss America

That One Time My Sister Left Me At An Orphanage...

Once, while babysitting me when I was six, Jammy said I couldn't have a cookie. But I snuck one, anyways, when she wasn't looking. I was rebellious like that. When she found the traitorous crumbs resting on my lips, she wrestled me off to her forest-green Durango, and buckled me up without a word. After a few minutes of driving, so slowed down in front of a building I didn't recognize, made me get out and sit on the steps, told me "*your mother*doesn't love you", and drove away. When she didn't come back right away, I read the sign above the steps. I had only cried for a few minutes before she drove back around the block. "Get in."

Thanksgiving

I'm full like Thanksgiving Dinner.

Turkey to start.

I pick up the dark meat,

But I don't have a preference.

I mix my mashed potatoes and stuffing,

And devour them both at once.

Next is green bean casserole,

I can never get enough at first,

But now I've had too much-- I always do.

And soon, I'm over it.

And last, well...

Now I'm *savoring* that apple pie,

My grandma told me the secret of pie:

Some people just whip it up, prepackaged,

And you might not be able to tell,

If you've never had the real thing.

But its only perfect if it comes straight from the heart.

A little sprinkle of love has to fall in.

Thing is?

The turkey is a guy.

The mashed potatoes are our memories.

The stuffing is emotion.

The green bean casserole is love.

The apple pie is conversation.

And I've never had a real thanksgiving before.



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