

HAPPY
MOTHER'S DAY

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HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

"Happy Mother's Day!" Jill called out as she entered her parents' trailer.

Her mother was down at the far end of the bedroom, ironing her father's shirts.

"Can't say that it is, can't say that it ain't," her mother answered, her back towards the door.

"Mom!" Jill admonished her, putting her presents down on the kitchen counter. "Where's Dad?"

"Getting the fixings. Bob went with him. Says I oughtn't do a thing."

"You shouldn't," Jill agreed.

"If it's my day, I should decide what I do and what I don't do," her mother said, her back still towards the door.

"True," Jill conceded. The logic was unassailable.

"Your father said that I oughtn't be ironing his shirts today," she went on. "Even offered to iron them hisself. You ever hear of such foolishness? He don't know the first thing about ironing a shirt."

"You might have taught him."

"You might as well teach a polar bear how to read the Good Book. I got better things to do with my day."

She finished a shirt, hung it on a wire hanger, and hung the hanger on a bungee cord she had stretched from one side of the trailer to the other.

Then she pulled out another shirt from the pile and started ironing it on the tiny tabletop ironing board she had propped up on the built-in bedroom dresser.

"I could do it," Jill offered.

"You're a mother," her mother pointed out.

"Just as much your day as mine. Where's Jack and the kids?"

"Jack's picking Tim up after Little League. He took Rachael to help me out. I thought I'd give you a hand."

"Nothing to give me a hand with. Poppa and Bob's got it all figured out."

"That's nice."

"That's godawful! Now I got to eat their crappy cold cuts and sliced bread on what's supposed to be my day! And wash it down with soda! Never heard of such foolishness! Once a year I got to eat and drink store-bought shit 'cause it's my day. Well, I got a lifetime of putting up with things. Why should Mother's Day be any different?"

"Mom!" Jill admonished her again. "Let them pamper you!"

"When I'm ready for Pampers, I'll let you know," her mother said, her back still towards the door.

Jill came over to her and kissed the back of her neck. The ironing went on.

"Let me hang that for you," Jill said as a shirt was finished. She took a wire hanger from the stack by her mother, slipped it deftly under the smooth, starched white shirt, and hung it on the bungee cord.

"Blessing to have a daughter who knows what's what," her mother said, not turning her head.

"Blessing to have a mother who can teach you what's what," Jill said, tears starting to her eyes.

"I guess the good Lord had a purpose for Mother's Day. He had a purpose for everything else."

"I guess He did," Jill agreed.

"Darned if I can figure it out," her mother went on.

"It's to give me a chance to tell you I love you," Jill said.

"What you need a chance for?" her mother said, her voice rising just a little, as if propped on a bed of tears.

"I guess with all the stupid little things getting in the way of our lives, we need some days to celebrate the things that matter."

"Hogwash!" her mother said. "If it really matters every day, what you need a special day for?"

She kept on ironing, her back towards Jill.

"I don't know," Jill said, taking the next shirt and hanging it on the bungee cord.

"Means more when you don't say it," her mother said.

There was only one shirt left. Jill wondered what her mother would do to avoid her once that was ironed.

"Poppa and Bob's here," her mother announced, watching them pull up beside the trailer's back window.

Jill sighed with both disappointment and relief. She heard the car doors slam, one, two, and then the trailer door open.

"Happy Mother's Day!" her father called out as he stumbled up into the trailer and laid a heavy carton of food on the kitchen counter. "How's my little girl?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her on the cheek. "Jack treating you right?"

"Wonderfully!" she said. "He's picking Tim up at Little League and then he'll be over. He took Rachael so I could help Mom."

"Help Mom what?" her father asked, laughing.

Bob put his carton down on the kitchen counter. "Happy Mother's Day!" he said to Jill.

"Thanks!" Jill said, kissing her brother on the cheek. "What you got there?"

"Cold cuts. Cheese. Rye bread. Pickles. Cole slaw and potato salad."

"Soda and beer," her father added.

"Mmmm!" Jill said.

"Told you I didn't want that crap!" Jill's mother said, making her way towards the trailer door, turned towards them for the first time.

"Told you, you could make yourself an omelet or whatever you wanted," Jill's father answered benignly. "This is so you don't have to make lunch for us."

"It's my pleasure to make lunch for you! Don't you understand? That's what I like to do!"

"Trudy!" Jill's father begged. "Just this one day relax! Let someone else do it!"

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"Sit there and talk to Jill. Me and Bob will get things ready."

Bob gave Jill a commiserating shrug as he picked up a carton and put it down on the floor in front of the refrigerator.

Jill sat with her mother in the little alcove between the kitchen and the bedroom that served as both a living room and dining room.

"Don't fret," she said to her mother. "They mean well."

"Supposed to be my day," she grumbled.
"Mine."

"Let it be different from other days."

"Nothing wrong with other days."

"Nothing wrong with a different day."

Her mother said nothing, and for a long time they listened to the clatter of Jill's father and Bob setting things out on the counter.

Her mother mumbled something.

"What?" Jill asked.

"I love you," her mother said.

Jill smiled and took her mother in her arms. "I love you, too, Mom! Happy Mother's Day!"

"Happy Mother's Day," her mother repeated.
"Now enough of this!"

She got up and pushed past Jill's father to get to the stove. "Want an omelet?" she asked Jill. "Making one for myself, might as well make two."

"I'll go with the cold cuts," Jill said.

"Suit yourself," her mother said.

Again her back was to her, to all of them, as it seemed to Jill she busied herself with something, always something, that time might never stop and wait for her to say what was in her heart.