

THANKSGIVING DRAMA

What's a holiday meal without a little drama? My family is far from a quiet bunch and I can still hear some of the arguments of years past ringing in my ears. One particular memory from my childhood is on an annual loop, the dialogue still fresh and crisp as if it were spoken in the next room...

The dining room becomes noisy as silverware clinks against plates, crystal glasses Nana bought on sale at Gimbels fill with cheap red wine, and loud conversations go back and forth and sideways.

"Did you hear Sadie and Carl are splitting?"

"Pass the noodle pudding, please."

"No kidding? They've been married 25 years, what happened?"

"Can I be excused?"

"He took up with his secretary, go figure."

"No! Sit down...Now!"

"That's so Bourgeois"

"Mom, great bird this year."

"Well, at least he's leaving Sadie with a nice pile of cash."

"You don't think it's too dry?"

"What is it with these guys, they get a little money and they think they're Cary Grant?"

"Barry's kicking me!"

"Not the dark meat. Maybe the white, but just a little."

"I bet she'll find someone new, if not for love, at least for

revenge.”

”Cut it out!”

”It’s so hard getting a big bird to cook evenly. I think the oven is off a bit.”

”She’s not like that.”

”That’s enough!”

”But your stuffing is out of this world, as always.”

Nana surveys the table noting that everyone is just about finishing up. “Karen, please help me clear the table.”

She leans down and whispers in my ear, “Hold on with both hands.”

Dad hands Nana his plate. “You know I only married Barbara to get to you, just to insure I’d get a good meal once in a while,” Dad says, continuing to tease Nana.

Nana smiles. Mom doesn’t. Although there’s still a lot of loud talk, it doesn’t feel as mean-spirited as when we’re at Dad’s parents’ house. I don’t know what Grandma and Grandpa do for Thanksgiving. They’re never invited.

Like clockwork, my Uncle Allen pats his full stomach and says what he always says after a big meal: “Now, what’s for dinner?”

I pull the plate away from my brother Barry before he’s finished. He pulls it back, spilling some of the gravy on his shirt and yells, “You klutz!”

”I didn’t do anything!”

”Okay, okay, that’s enough out of you two,” Dad barks. He notices I’m about to cry. “Hold off on the waterworks for once, sissy Mary.”

I race out of the room, my face starting to flush red, almost dropping all the plates, but not.

"Do your parents know?" Aunt Toby says to Mom, just loud enough so Granddad can hear.

"Know what?" Granddad asks.

"Oh. Barbara's taking art classes. She wants to be a painter."

"Since when?"

"Oh Lou, don't you remember that painting she did in grade school of the house on 34th Street? I still have it," Nana says trying to remind him of better days.

"I don't remember that. No, there was no painting."

"But Lou..."

"But nothing. Who's supposed to keep an eye on the kids? I'm not going to drive you 20 minutes back and forth everyday to Barbara's house to look after them."

"Relax Lou," Dad butts in. "It's only a couple of days a week, and Barbara will be home before the kids get home from school."

"And you can afford this, Mr. Rockefeller?"

"Yeah. Business is good. Stop worrying."

Granddad turns to Mom. "You know, ever since you were a little girl, we all wondered where you came from. You were always a dreamer."

"If I didn't have my dreams," Mom says, "I would kill myself."

"Well, if you ask me, it's a waste of time," Granddad announces loudly.

"I didn't ask you," Mom whispers.

"What did you say?"

"I. DIDN'T. ASK. YOU!"

"Ugh, I think I'm getting a migraine," moans Nana.

Throwing down her napkin, Mom gets up to help Nana out of the room. "Dad, now look what you've done!"

Silence.

No matter how many ways Mom might try to explain her desire to paint, Granddad would think it's a dumb idea, Dad would be focused on the stuffing, and Nana would still remember Mom's first childhood painting. I get it. Nobody wants Mom to do anything more than be a mom – except Mom. But do you think it's bad that I just don't care that much because all I'm thinking about is when Nana is going to bring out her apple pie?