

## Mummy, Please Put Me In A Home

Once the washing machine had finally stopped spinning, Ann placed the clothes in the laundry basket before going to the back garden to hang them out to air. Although there was a drier built in to the washing machine, when she was young her mother had drummed in to her that, "it was best to let the fresh air go through your clothes".

As she was growing up, when Ann helped her mum hang the laundry up outside, she had been mortified at the worn out looking clothes pegged up on the washing line. Whenever she'd tried to hang a garment up in a certain way in attempt to hide a very obvious torn bit in the material her mother would ask her impatiently, "What on earth are you doing Ann"? When Ann attempted to explain that she was trying to hide a tear in a school blouse or a hole in a sock her mum would predictably respond, "so long as they're clean they're fit to be seen"! Her mother would purposely bellow this out as loud as she could, for any neighbours, real or imaginary who so happened to be at their windows curtain twitching to hear. As a child, it seemed to Ann that the whole world had heard, and when her mother raised the clothes high up in to the air with the wooden washing pole, it seemed to Ann as though the whole world could see the still grubby looking torn garments swaying in the wind.

Ann had made sure there were no holes or tears in the laundry she was just about to hang out in her shared, but well kept garden, which had a large drying area in the middle and a beautiful assortment of flowers in the border. Ann placed her basket of immaculately clean laundry down on the short blades of grass, and as she bent down she welcomed the scent off the flowers which greatly contrasted with the lingering smell of washing powder as she hung up the clothes. Since she had two days off her work and the weather was beautiful, Ann suddenly had the idea of going through to Glasgow, and maybe catching up with her mother at the same time, as that way she would kill two birds with one stone. "Strange saying that", Ann thought to herself, "I wonder if any one has ever killed two birds with one stone...."

Ann had been relieved when her mother had sounded reasonably amicable over the phone. After a few social niceties, they arranged to meet outside British Home Stores. "The Sauchiehall Street entrance" they'd both said in unison before putting the phone down. On at least one occasion, one had been waiting at the Bath St entrance whilst the other had been waiting at the Sauchiehall St entrance, each cursing the other for being late!

Although she sometimes felt sorry for her mother, who was in her late sixties and lived alone, Ann didn't see her often due to the difficult relationship she had with her. On the rare occasions they did meet up, Ann had learned to make up some excuse in order to make the outing as short as possible. When she'd heard her friends recounting stories about holidays or nights out they'd gone on with their parents, Ann had often listened on with envy wondering what such an experience was like, since the very concept was alien to her.

The journey on the number 900 bus to Glasgow from Edinburgh had, thankfully, been uneventful. No drunks telling their life story, no loud mouths sitting behind her talking incessantly about themselves and no one eating apples or crisps irritatingly loud. Ann felt excited as the bus drew into Buchanan St bus station, it made her feel at home again. Although Ann loved staying in Edinburgh, since her roots were in Glasgow she still felt an affinity with her home town which Edinburgh had never quite replaced. Ann laughed to herself as she thought, "you can take the girl out of Glasgow, but you can't take Glasgow out of the....."!

As Ann got near BHS she tensed up when she recognised her mother's gait ahead of her. Ann braced herself as she rehearsed in her head how she would tell her mother about her promotion. She had no idea what kind of response she was likely to get, since to describe her mother as "unpredictable", was being extremely kind. "Your turning into an Edinburgh snob" or "that's great, you can give your wee maw some money after all I did for you when you were growing up, " were only two of the possible responses. Just then, her mother turned round and caught sight of her. "Is that you Ann, hen? My God, you look smashin' hen. Why did you no shout on me? Did you no see me hen?" As her mother put her face towards hers, Ann obligingly gave her a kiss on the cheek, catching a hint of cheap perfume and hairspray as she did so.

Once they reached British Home Stores, Ann's mother led them towards the ladies room which was just at the entrance of the restaurant. As she looked around, Ann could see that the seats were filling up quickly. Knowing from experience that her mother often spoke in a loud voice when she got excitable, Ann suggested they went to the toilet one at a time to allow her to look for a table as far away from other diners as possible. Having managed to get a table in a quiet corner, when she saw her mother coming out the toilet Ann waved her over, before taking her turn to go to the loo. When she sat down beside her mother a few minutes later, Ann asked if she had decided what she wanted for lunch. Instead of answering, her mother sprung up from her seat, before doing a pirouette, as she asked Ann if she liked her bright orange and pink dress. When she sat back down she rummaged in her bag, before bringing out a packet of brightly coloured hair clasps that she'd bought from Poundland. After removing the clasps from their cellophane wrapper, she pulled them off the cardboard one by one, before placing them randomly in her hair. Totally mortified, Ann hurriedly got up and walked over to the menu board, "Macaroni cheese, fish, chips and peas, Scotch Pie and beans. Macaroni cheese.... ", Ann read over and over again. When she returned to the table, Ann noticed her mother had put a bright pink headband round her hair, which along with the randomly placed clasps, made her look like a female version of Keith Richards!

Once they'd finished eating, Ann made an excuse to return to Edinburgh early. Although she'd intended to tell her mother about her promotion, she decided not to share her news after all. When they got up from the table, Ann couldn't help but notice that the hard pieces of fish and chips her mother had difficulty chewing, were scattered on the floor. Feeling sorry for the person who had to clean them up, Ann took two pound coins from her purse and left them on the table.

After walking her mother to the bus stop, Ann waved her goodbye as the number forty five bus to Carnwadric sped off down Union St. When she'd set out from Edinburgh earlier in the day Ann had intended going round some of her favourite shops in Glasgow, but somehow that didn't seem so appealing now. After checking the time on her watch, when she looked up Ann noticed a woman taking a huge bite out of her doughnut, as though she hadn't seen food for a year. Laughing to herself, Ann decided to go Bradford the Bakers to get some treats to take back for Pete and Ian. When she got to Bradfords, Ann was pleased when she saw there was only one person ahead of her in the queue. As she waited to be served, Ann stared at the vast array of cakes and sweets behind the counter, trying to make up her mind what to buy. When the assistant had finished putting pies and sausage rolls in a bag for the lady in front of her, she turned to Ann and asked, "What can I get for you, hen?" Pointing at the cakes, Ann replied, "One lemon and one fruit cake please". After Ann had paid for the cakes, the assistant smiled at her and wished her a good day. What a breath of fresh air speaking to someone normal, if only to buy some cakes, Ann thought to herself. Still trying to shake off the two hours she'd spent with her mother, Ann walked slowly towards Buchanan bus station where she got on the four o'clock bus back to Edinburgh, hoping to miss the tea time rush.

As much as she tried, Ann couldn't stop thinking about her mother on the bus journey home. She had tried to forgive her for the cruel things she had said to her when she was growing up, since she knew her mother had a difficult life. Ann could remember, as though it had only happened yesterday, when they'd moved into their new house in Carnwadric. Her older sister Isobel and her mum had scrubbed for what seemed like months, as they tried to get rid of the dirt the previous tenants had left behind. When they could eventually afford a new carpet, Ann had read bits of the old yellow newspaper they'd found underneath the linoleum they'd pulled up from the sitting room floor. She remembered being amazed at the photos of the Queens coronation, and how she'd dreamt that one day she might meet a prince and become a princess.

When the bus drew to a sudden stop, Ann realised the driver was letting passengers off at Harthill, a village not far from Glasgow. When the rhythm of the bus engine started up again, Ann's mind travelled back to Carnwadric again. She could remember her mother going to the front door of the house on a Monday morning as soon as she heard the sound of the postman's footsteps. Her mother would frantically scan the floor below the letter box looking for the brown envelope in which her father would post the weekly maintenance cheque. Depending upon her mother's reaction, even from the other side of the house, Ann could tell if the maintenance cheque had arrived or not. "That bastard" her mother would shout if there was no sign of the brown envelope, followed by a tirade of "he's living it up with his fancy woman while I'm stuck here bringing up five children single handedly ..... I should've put you all in a home...." By the time Ann got back from school her mother had usually calmed down, and somehow had managed to muster something up for their dinner, despite having no maintenance cheque. Since Ann had eaten her free school dinner, she usually wasn't that hungry anyway.

Ann sometimes thought she saw what looked like tears in her mum's blood shot eyes. There was one time she'd got up during the night to go to the toilet, when she'd thought she'd heard her mum crying. She'd heard a wailing noise coming from the direction of the sitting room where her mum slept on the bed settee, but when she'd tried to push the door open, her mum had shouted out in a stern voice "get back to bed, you've school to get up for in the morning". Ann didn't dare enter the room for fear of being the cause of one of her mother's tirades, so had scuttled back to bed wondering if her mum had been crying or not?

When Ann looked out the window of the bus, she noticed that they were now on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Although it was only the last week in September, she saw a large notice on the window of a Chinese Restaurant informing customers that they were taking bookings for Christmas and New Year. Ann's first memory of Christmas as a child was the Christmas the year before they moved to the house in Carnwadric. Their father had written to their mother telling her to send them to the bottom of the street at seven o'clock on Christmas eve, where he would be waiting in his car with their presents. When Christmas eve came their mother reluctantly sent them to get their presents, having very little choice, since their fathers' were the only gifts they would receive.

Once they went to the bottom of the street, their father told them to come over to the car window one at a time to collect their presents. Her older brother Jonathan so detested his father that he wouldn't go to the car. He had made it clear that he was only accompanying them as the oldest in the family, to make sure they were safe in the cold dark night. First to the car went Ann's older sister Isobel, who returned about half an hour later grinning from ear to ear, as she carried an enormous present wrapped in beautiful gold paper, with a red bow attached. Next went Alan, who was exactly one year, one month and one day older than Ann. Nearly 25 minutes later Alan returned with a huge Christmas bag which was so heavy that, even although he was a sturdy eight year old, he struggled to carry his present. When her turn came, Ann walked nervously towards the car, unsure of what to say to either her dad or his "fancy woman," who had never actually looked that fancy to Ann, with her bright red lipstick, and dyed blonde hair which framed her pudgy face.

As she finally took her place at the window of the car, Ann realised that she needn't have worried about what to say. She'd no sooner got to the car when her father revved the engine, letting out a cloud of exhaust fumes as he did so. Before he wound up the window, her father thrust a small parcel into her hand as he told her they were in a hurry, before they sped off into the distance. Coughing from the fumes, Ann returned to where her older brother Jonathan had been standing waiting for her, wishing that she hadn't bothered to go to the car either.

During her tirades Anne's mother often shouted "your father hated you and your brother Jonathan, he only ever wanted Alan and Isobel". Although Ann's father had only asked for custody of Alan and Isobel, Ann had nonetheless thought her mother had shouted such things out of spite. However, years later when Ann plucked up the courage to phone her estranged father, when she told him it was his daughter

Ann on the phone, after a few minutes silence, her father asked after Alan and Isobel. Once Ann told him they were both fine, she then asked her father why he wasn't asking about her or Jonathan. When he told her he wasn't interested in them, Ann banged the phone down so hard that she nearly broke the receiver!

Ann's train of thought was interrupted when the passenger sitting beside her squeezed past to get off the bus at Shandwick Place. Once the bus had gone through several sets of lights, as it slowly navigated its way through the busy traffic that had built up in Princess St, Ann noticed some customers coming out of M&S with rolls of Christmas paper. Surely not, she thought, we've still got three months to go before Christmas is upon us. Ann thought back to when she'd opened the small green parcel her father had given her the last night she'd ever seen him. There was no fancy gold wrapping paper and no bow, only cheap paper which tore easily as she pulled the sellotape off. As she unwrapped the parcel, a small plastic doll fell out on to the floor. As Ann picked the doll up she noticed its eyes opened and closed, and when she moved the doll slowly one eye opened while the other remained shut, causing her much fun and delight.

For many years, the cheap plastic doll was the most expensive Christmas present Ann got, until her older brother Jonathan started working when he left school. For most of her childhood, all Ann got at Christmas was an apple, orange and a banana which her mum put in a sock at the end of their beds on Christmas eve. When Ann went to school and shared with the other children what she'd got for Christmas, she had to make up fibs. Imagine what the other children would have said if she'd told them the truth? "I got an apple and an orange for my Christmas, and eh, a banana too." Ann couldn't help but notice that the children who came from the nearby Children's Home always had nice new clothes when they came back to school after Christmas, and also had brand new shiny Bibles with coloured pictures of Jesus in them. Ann also noticed that her friends from the Children's Home always had bags of sweets, and much better scraps than she had when they swapped scraps at play time.

Sometimes when Ann's mum shouted during her tirades that she was going to put them all in a home, Ann would quietly think to herself, "Mummy, please put me in a home".