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# THANKSGIVING MOM

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IT SUDDENLY OCCURRED to Rudi that not only was she alone in a strange and empty city, but it was Thanksgiving.

Then, she heard a sound—the sound of crying—and rushed toward it. She rushed until she found a weeping girl of four sitting on a sidewalk, with filthy brown hair and clothes just as filthy.

Rudi sat beside her—and asked what was wrong. But the only response was tears.

“Where your parents?” Rudi continued.

“My mom,” the girl mumbled, “she’s supposed to be here!”

This caused Rudi to remember her own childhood, or lack of one. At the same time, the girl looked at Rudi—in shock.

Rudi smirked, and said, “Guess you’ve never seen someone like me. What’s your name?”

“Vicki.”

“I have a good friend named Vicki.”

Vicki shrugged, before muttering, “Happy Thanksgiving.”

“You, too. You live around here?”

Vicki shook her head, so Rudi glanced around and said, “We better get you cleaned up.”

She then stood the girl up and the two wandered until they came upon a motel. There was no one around, so they went to the nearest room and found its door unlocked.

“I’ll start a bath,” Rudi told Vicki after dropping her backpack onto the bed.

“I don’t need a bath,” barked Vicki.

“You need one.”

WHILE SCRUBBING VICKI, Rudi felt an odd sensation.

She always thought such chores would be joyless, but instead it made her feel warm and alive, and she didn't want this to end.

"I'm all wrinkly," Vicki growled, while showing Rudi her fingers.

"All right," Rudi murmured, before drying the girl off with a towel, which she also wrapped around her. Rudi afterward picked up the clothes and said, "I'm gonna find a washing machine."

WHEN RUDI RETURNED, she saw Vicki putting on makeup taken from the backpack. Much like Rudi, she had on mascara and dark eyeshadow—along with deep-red lipstick.

"I'm glad I didn't have any peroxide with me," Rudi quipped. "Or scissors."

Vicki just continued with the makeup.

"Your mom's gonna freak when she sees you."

The response was terse: "I'm hungry."

THE TWO FOUND an empty restaurant, and stopped inside its open door.

"Anyone here?" Rudi called out, but when no answer came, she looked at Vicki and shrugged.

Undeterred, Vicki rushed toward the kitchen.

"Where you going?" Rudi yelled.

"I'm hungry!" Vicki yelled back.

"You can't just walk into someone's kitchen!"

"Sure I can!"

Rudi chuckled, and followed Vicki into the kitchen—and she saw her staring into a refrigerator. She stared into it as well, before saying, "No turkey."

“I don’t eat meat,” Vicki replied.

“Me, neither,” Rudi mumbled.

“We can make an omelet.”

Vicki then grabbed handfuls of eggs, and, after Rudi got some cheese and onions, the two headed to a grill.

“We can bake a cake, too,” Vicki insisted.

“I don’t know how to bake a cake,” Rudi insisted back.

“There’s a cookbook,” Vicki retorted, while pointing nearby.

“You can read?” Rudi gasped.

“My mom taught me. Said she wanted to give me a leg up, and a couple of arms, too.”

“Your mom sounds wonderful.”

“She’s the best in the whole world!”

“I’M BORED,” VICKI uttered, as the two struggled with the cake.

“Me, too,” Rudi uttered back.

“Let’s sing something.”

“All right,” Rudi agreed, despite never liking children’s songs even when she was a child. “What do you wanna sing?”

“How about ‘Gabba Gabba Hey?’”

“You know the Ramones?” Rudi gasped.

“They’re my favorite,” Vicki declared, before belting out the song as she wildly danced.

Rudi joined in, and, when the song reached its climax, Vicki splashed flour into Rudi’s face—and a food fight ensued, with laughter overwhelming everything.

AFTER DINNER, THE two cleaned up, and Rudi left some money. Then, they exited the restaurant and Vicki began yawning.

"You wanna go back to the motel?" Rudi asked.

"Nah," Vicki answered, before sitting on a sidewalk.

Rudi joined her, and noticed they were sitting in the same spot where they met.

"We really need to find your mother," Rudi muttered.

"We don't have to," Vicki said, with another yawn.

"You're my mother. Or will be."

Shocked, Rudi spun toward Vicki. But she was gone, and Rudi thought it had all been a dream. Until she saw the remnants of food on her shirt and felt the thankfulness—not for what she had, but for what she'd become.

*the end*