

I'll Be Mother

By

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A dusty mantelpiece is covered with framed family snaps (Birthdays, Christmases, etc.). ROSE, in her 70s-a sourpuss of an old dragon-runs her index finger along it, examining the dust.

**ROSE**

I guess you weren't expecting me.

Several cardboard boxes marked "**Keep**," "**Charity**," and "**Rubbish**" cover the floor.

CLAIRE (late 30s) weaves around the messy kitchen with her mobile glued to her ear and a box under her arm.

**CLAIRE**

(on phone)

Darling, put your dad on the phone.

Claire sets the box on the table next to a roll of black bin bags and turns on the kettle.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

(on phone)

What's going on?

Rose watches her daughter argue on the phone. She touches a framed holiday picture of Claire, happy and laughing with her daughters KATE and MOLLY. She glances again at her daughter-tired, drained, nothing like the girl in the photograph.

The kettle hisses violently. Claire crooks her phone under her chin.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

(on phone)

Of course they're going to act up.

She grabs the kettle and pours water into a chipped "Best mum in the world" mug.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

(on phone)

Well, they're your kids too.

She looks at the mug, regretting her words the moment they came out. She turns and meets her mother's gaze.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

*(on phone)*

Look, I can't do this right now.

Claire hangs up and plonks the mug on the counter. Rose notices a tea bag floating in it.

**ROSE**

Leaves, darling. Never bags.

Claire grabs the mug, marches to the sink, and pours the tea away. She shoves the tea bags into the cupboard, slamming the door.

Rose wanders around the room, catches herself in a mirror, and fiddles with her dress.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

I don't know why you put me in this.

Rose notices her daughter's drab outfit.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

Never one for fashion, were you, dear?

Rose eyes her reflection, pulling back the loose skin on her neck.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

I guess it doesn't really matter, in the end.

Rose approaches a pile of unwanted clothes hidden in the corner. She picks up a '60s-style day dress, holds it briefly, then places it over the back of a chair.

Claire pours hot water into the teapot-but loses her grip. The kettle falls, burning her hand.

**CLAIRE**

Shi-sugar!

**ROSE**

Just one lump, dear.

Claire grabs her throbbing hand and rushes to the sink.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

Let me see.

Rose stands behind Claire and examines the burn.

Uncomfortable with the closeness, Claire steps aside.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

You used to have such lovely hands.  
Mind you, you never looked after them...

As Rose rambles, Claire massages her hand under running water, her eyes fixed on the faint tan line from a missing wedding band.

**ROSE**

Where are the girls?  
(*nods at Claire's hand*)  
With him, I suppose.

Rose admires a wall full of photos of Claire's daughters.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

I haven't seen them for a while.

Claire pours tea into the mug.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

You know, the last time I saw Molly, I thought she'd put on weight. She's a growing girl, dear, but she shouldn't be growing in both directions.

Claire mouths "*growing in both directions*" as if she's heard it a thousand times before.

**ROSE (CONT'D)**

And Kate... such a dreamer, that one...  
just like your father.

Claire's eyes drift to a picture of her dad.

**CLAIRE**

Enough.

Claire clenches her fists.

**ROSE**

Never did anything wrong in your eyes.  
Always the daddy's girl.

Claire knocks a box off the table, sending the mug crashing to the floor.

**CLAIRE**

I said, ENOUGH.

Claire glares at the clutter. She picks up items and throws them down.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

The... picking... the... controlling!

Her face crumples in despair, and she kicks the box.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

It stops now. You hear me?

Claire finds herself alone in an empty kitchen. She stares at the broken mug, upset. She falls to the floor and picks up shards of it, sobbing.

Surrounded by mess, Claire finds a SMALL PHOTOGRAPH of a mother and baby. She turns it over and reads, "My Beautiful Girl." She flips it back and stares at the image of a loving mother she never knew.

The phone rings. Claire wipes her eyes and stands.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

*(on phone)*

Hey munchkins, having fun?

She leaves the kitchen, passing the dress on the chair.

**CLAIRE (CONT'D)**

I miss you too. You did? Oh, I'm so proud.

She picks up the dress.

**EXT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - LATER**

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Claire, now wearing her mother's dress, carries several filled rubbish bags to the bins. A car pulls into the drive. Claire's girls burst out and run to her. She greets them with a huge, bear hug.

**INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE, OPEN-PLAN KITCHEN - DAY**

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The kitchen is spotless. Claire and the children can be heard laughing offscreen. Rose's photo now sits proudly on the polished mantelpiece alongside the other photos.

**END**