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Slightly Insane

by Vera Gajic

Mothers are all slightly insane, that's what my grandmother told me when I was small and Mum was being more than slightly insane, Grandma didn't want to be disloyal. Mum was particularly bad after my baby brother Chuck was born. She didn't get out of bed for months and she got smellier and smellier. The smell used to seep under the door and spread across the house, nothing would keep it out. The thought of it can still make me retch but we lived with it for months. Amazing how much odour a human body can emit.

Dad was away, I think, who knows where, it is so long ago now but I don't remember him being around for what felt like years, maybe he couldn't take the smell. Grandma came everyday and did her best, cleaning wasn't her thing but she kept us fed, potatoes mainly. She tried hard to make Mum breast feed Chuck, screaming miserable Chuck, poor kid, he was probably starving. Grandma had to give him mashed potatoes mixed with water, we didn't have much milk at home. Probably why he ended up so thick.

A few weeks after Chuck was born Grandma moved in and never left. Grandad disappeared around then, I never did find out what happened to him, Grandma wouldn't say but at least it meant she didn't have to go home and leave us to cook for him .

Mum did get nearly better by the time Chuck could walk and had stopped screaming, but I don't think she was the same, Grandma said she wasn't and missed the daughter she used to be. I told her everyone changes but maybe not that much. I didn't know, I was only five when it happened.

I loved grandmother more than anyone else, she was my real Mum, I don't care what anyone says. She hadn't gone a little bit insane, maybe because she only had one child, maybe the second one sends you insane. Whatever, I knew I would never have a child. I wouldn't risk it, why would you? I had warning.

Another of Grandma's pearls of wisdom was "*Make sure you marry someone who laughs at the same things you do.*" I asked her if Grandad laughed at the same things she did, but she said no-one had given her that advice when she was young so she didn't check when she married Grandad they didn't laugh together much, but that was OK because her and Mum found the same things funny, until she went a little bit insane that was. Her sense of humour never came back, another reason not to have kids.

I left as soon as I could after Grandma died, no reason to stay, got myself a job keeping house for Mr Radly upstate, didn't last long, but long enough to get me out of there and finally to New York, an exciting place in the seventies so I was told but I didn't see much of it, worked my socks off waiting tables. I didn't find a man who laughed at the same things as me, though I kept trying. Fred was the nearest but he wanted kids so that was that. I've been happy enough on my own.

Got back too late to see Mum before she died so I took the flowers to the cemetery, there she is next to Grandma, but who wants flowers when they're dead? Nobody.