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# The Cake

## Nancy

“No, I said 300 flyers and *then* we can print out more if we need more,” I spoke into the phone pressed to my ear as I picked the cake up from the counter. “No, it's fine, but you have to figure this out– I have Olivia's graduation party today. Bye.”

I left behind the sweet smells and stress of my bakery and hopped in my car, placing the cake carefully in the passenger seat. I went through a checklist of everything I had to do today: balloons- check; pizza- check; decorations- check, and last, but most importantly, three-layered, buttercream icing, vanilla, delicately decorated rosebuds cake- check. The AC blasted so the icing wouldn't melt; I had chosen the longest but safest route, and I was 40 minutes early in case of traffic. *Nothing* could go wrong. Olivia's graduation party was the most important thing to me. Bill and I wanted to give our daughter the best.

In fact, nothing went wrong the entire drive. The worst that happened was I stopped more abruptly than I would have liked at a red light. The cake slid and wobbled but remained pretty and ready to mark the special day. But it was when I was out of the car that everything went downhill. Maybe I can blame it on my hyper-alertness or my never-dull motherly instincts, but whatever it was, I made a big mistake while getting out of the car. Like a waiter holding only the

finest food, I balanced the cake on my left hand, while closing the door with my right. I heard a child screaming and quickly turned my head.

In slow motion, I watched aghast as the cake slid out of its container onto the sidewalk, the icing smearing in my freshly done hair. All that I could do was look at the smooshed pile of icing and pray Olivia wouldn't kill me. On the sidewalk lay a pile of off once delicate, now blob-like roses, and there, like a bird, flew away my dream for the party. By the time I thought to grab the part of the cake that wasn't on the ground, flies had attacked what was left of my hope. I opened the door to my car and sat for just a second to breathe, to digest. I felt like Bill and Olivia didn't understand the daily stress I went through trying to open a bakery. And yet, I should *never* be too busy to give my daughter a special day. All I wanted was to give her one last good memory before she left. Defeated, I sucked the sugary icing out of my hair– the last of Olivia's cake. Finally, I called Bill.

## Bill

“Oh no,” I mumbled while picking up the phone. Nancy seldom called and when she did it wasn't because of something good.

“Hey, honey, what's wrong?”

“I dropped the cake. It's mush and dead. Olivia is going to kill me, and I don't know what to do,” Nancy said, her voice sounding closer and closer to a stressed chihuahua.

“Well,” I said, looking at the clock. “I’m sure other bakers in town can make a cake– not as good as yours, of course.” Then again, I thought to myself, how hard can it be to stir flour and bake a cake?

“But this is Olivia’s favorite, and you have to order at least five days in advance and...”

“Hey, I’ll figure it out. You just worry about decorations or something.”

“Ok,”

I poured myself a cup of stale coffee, the bitterness burning my tongue. Now I needed to think fast. I already had multiple pizzas in the oven. I quickly googled the nearest bakery and called them. After waiting on hold for seven minutes I called all the other bakeries and each said the same thing– too short notice. As a last resort, I ran to the nearest bakery. I pleaded with them for a cake, a bunch of cupcakes, a pile of cookies. They couldn’t do anything in less than a few hours. I walked home slowly.

I had disappointed myself, not only myself but Nancy and Olivia who I had promised a cake. Olivia deserved the world. Even though she could be demanding that's only because we were never able to give her the attention she needed. This party was supposed to be the attention she deserved, and now it was ruined. To be fair, I tried to do the impossible. Nancy and Olivia simply didn’t understand how busy I was. Even while working at home, I still had a time-consuming job I needed to do before I made entire meals from scratch.

I took a sip of my old coffee and then let the feeling of frustration and disappointment wash over me as I flopped down on the couch. I felt like I was slowly sinking into the cushions and drawing in my stress. I closed my eyes and let myself wash away, hoping I would find a secret solution in the depths of this water. I quickly opened my eyes and grabbed my phone.

# Olivia

I couldn't believe my eyes. This week I had worked my butt off just to have the evening. To celebrate with my family. Yet instead of being showered with balloons and overwhelmed with the smell of pizza, I was consumed in smoke and the smell of something burning— the result of my dad cooking too many things at once.

I opened the oven to find a smoldering, dying pizza and started to clean up my dad's mess. Honestly, I was not surprised anymore. This was what I expected. I mean, my parents were a week late for my fifteenth birthday party and they didn't even acknowledge that. They were just too busy, but who knows; maybe they just forgot. I didn't even care that I had to clean up their mess; it's that I put so much effort into this, for my family to not even try.

I saw my dad slowly rise from the couch.

“Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. We were going to surprise you. Is the pizza ok?”

“No, no you're fine, but the pizzas aren't. Where's mom?”

“I think she's still at work,” my dad said through a yawn. “We'll just get takeout and celebrate with her tomorrow.”

“No, I've got plans tomorrow, and can we not do takeout?”

“How about leftovers? I don't know; I think your mom is only free tomorrow. Can you cancel?”

“No. I made these plans with Emily a while ago, and I’m sticking to them because *I* care about her. Besides, what’s holding mom up anyway. She said she would be here. And if mom’s not here, who has the cake?”

“Well, her workday got busy and we didn’t have time to get a cake.”

“Not even while you were taking your nap, or burning the pizzas?”

“Olivia, I don’t think you understand how difficult it is to be an adult with responsibilities; some things come first.”

“Then why didn’t I come first?! Before mom’s work, or your nap? Am I not as important to you as those things?!”

“No, but we have jobs. So, we have to do so we can buy stuff like cakes and pizza for you!”

“You know what? I’m not doing this today,” I said, holding back tears, and picking up my backpack. “I’m going to Emily’s.” I slammed the door and walked to the nearest park.

Sitting on a bench, feeling sorry for myself, the wind snatched what was left of my warmth. I pulled out my forgotten lunchtime sandwich, now soggy with dripping tomato. This was surely no graduation party. My parents had let me down again.

Eventually, seeking distraction, I walked over to Emily’s house. The nice thing about her house was that someone was always home. There were usually some baked goods in the oven and an overall comforting, casual feeling about her home.

I walked through the gate to her backyard just as everyone yelled,

“Surprise!!!” I was so startled that I fell with a big thump.

“Oh my god, you guys,” I said while getting up, “This is great!” My mom hugged me hello while my friends crowded around me.

“We figured what’s better than a party with your family but a party with your family and friends!” My dad said, “We hope you like it.”

“I thought you burned the pizza, and couldn’t get the cake.”

“Thankfully, Emily is such a wonderful baker; she made the cake last minute and we just got the pizza from the place around the corner.” My mom chimed in. “We hope you like it.”

“I love it, thank you so much!” I replied. All I could think about was how wonderful this moment was, and how I could always count on my family.

# Artist's Statement

My story, *The Cake*, depicts the family struggles of Nancy, Bill, and their daughter Olivia. The story is told from the individual characters' perspectives as the parents prepare for Olivia's graduation party. Even with their misunderstandings, mishaps, and frustrations, their love for each other is evident, speaking to the essential question of what it means to be a family.

At the beginning of the story, Nancy drops the cake. I chose to write this as a snapshot because Nancy dropping the cake is the key moment that sets the story in motion, and I wanted to emphasize this through the use of detailed description. While I found that I wrote the snapshot with ease, writing the thoughtshots proved to be more difficult. I struggled to enter the internal worlds of these characters. Both Nancy and Bill share a feeling of remorse for the lack of attention they have given their daughter. They both feel stressed and overwhelmed about their work and daily pressures and think their daughter suffered because of this. Olivia's thoughtshot reveals her sense of resentment towards her parents and her disappointment that they put work before her. Imagining her feelings was difficult for me as the writer. If I was in her position I wouldn't even know where to begin. Should I feel guilty that I'm mad at my parents who are trying their best, or upset that their best still wasn't enough? The plot progressed with the heated dialogue between Olivia and Bill. This exchange is the most emotionally raw and truthful moment of the story. Writing dialogue is challenging for me, so when writing I tried to be as concise with the dialogue as possible and let the characters' thoughts better describe the moment.

I enjoyed playing with dramatic irony the most. I created dramatic irony by using the idea that each character thought that they worked harder than the others and repeating that idea in every chapter. Finally, I used food as a motif to better show the characters' feelings. To eat stale coffee,

a soggy sandwich, and eventually, a sweet cake all have different tastes and experiences to show the characters' feelings without telling the reader. These writing techniques, though difficult some more difficult than others proved valuable in bringing this story to life.