

Where the Heart Is

By Brigid Kennedy

INT: UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

MARIA, 19, a young woman in a sleeveless cotton dress, is standing over the bathroom sink in her home. Various CONCEALERS, FOUNDATIONS, and POWDERS are open and scattered everywhere.

MOTHER'S VOICE (O.C.)
Maria, dinner is ready!

MARIA
(yells)
Coming!

Turning her attention back to the sink in front of her, Maria lifts up her wrist--on it, a freshly inked HEART TATTOO resides.

Maria reaches for some concealer. She dabs a little over the tattoo and winces--it is still sore to the touch. She dabs some more. The "concealer" is not concealing very much of anything.

MARIA
Shit.

She reaches for the powder, but it falls off the sink ledge, making a huge clatter.

MOTHER'S VOICE (O.C.)
MARIA! I slaved in the kitchen for hours, come eat your Christmas dinner!

Maria bends down to the floor to clean up.

MARIA
I'm coming!!

Maria gathers up the loose powder and stands up. As she does so, her eyes fall directly on the FRAMED PICTURE of her and her parents hanging next to the sink. Engraved on the frame are the words "Our Little Angel." Maria freezes.

MARIA
They're going to kill me.

INT: DINING ROOM - DINNER TIME

John, 50, and Ellen, 47, are conversing at the dinner table and filling up their plates as they wait for their daughter to come downstairs.

John wears a festive white turtleneck and a permanent grin. Ellen is wearing her red gingham apron with pearl earrings and her hair in a french twist. They look like mannequins for white suburbia.

ELLEN

I don't know, I know there isn't a parents weekend next semester, but I really want to try and make a trip up. I hated not seeing our little girl for so long. I just want to make sure she's doing alright.

JOHN

We can talk to her about it. I'm sure she will agree, especially after her B in Accounting. I think she *needs* us to check on her.

ELLEN

What a stressful semester for her...Barely had time for friends or fun, it seemed. Freshman year can be rough.

John spots a dirty area in the middle of the table near the ornate centerpiece. He stands up and, using his napkin, begins to clean the splotch.

JOHN

Well, a 4.0 isn't supposed to be easy, is it?

He chuckles to himself, then keeps cleaning the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Gee whiz, I thought I cleaned all of this like you asked me to. By the way, excellent job on the decorations, sweet pea.

Ellen looks around to admire her work on the room and the house.

(CONTINUED)

ELLEN

Thanks, hun! I actually like how I moved all of the family photos to that wall, I might leave it like that even after the holidays.

The room, by the way, looks like a winter wonderland-right out of a Pottery Barn catalogue. The floor is so clean it is shining. No surface has been spared of holiday decor.

The wall Ellen is talking about is *covered* with family photos that date as far back as Maria's first birthday. The family wears matching outfits in each. Maria always in the front, Ellen on her left and John on her right. Hovering over her.

Suddenly, Maria hurriedly enters the dining room while pulling a SWEATER on over her dress in a futile attempt at hiding her tattoo and takes her seat at the table.

MARIA

Hi hi hi, sorry I took so long!
Mom, this looks amazing!

ELLEN

Thank you, love. Here, take some potatoes. Your favorite.

Ellen hands Maria the dish. Maria moves to grab it, and as she does so, her sweater comes up, revealing just a bit of her tattoo. She immediately retracts her hand. Ellen falters with the dish.

MARIA

Oh! Uh, sorry I just...my leg got really itchy. Sorry. I'm fine without potatoes right now. Really.

ELLEN

Well, alright if you say so..John would you care for any?

John reaches for the dish.

JOHN

Thanks, hun. Would love some!

John begins dishing potatoes onto his plate.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Did you see Sarah Galley's daughter at the community center the other day? Talk about a troubled child.

(CONTINUED)

MARIA

What do you mean, dad?

JOHN

I mean, she looks like an entirely different person. Chopped her hair off, dyed it too. Threw in a couple of piercings. All I can say is that's the end result of some pretty bad parenting right there.

Maria is thrown..If her parents are judging someone for hair dye, what will they think of her *permanent tattoo*?!

MARIA

Wait..what?

ELLEN

Oh, that's such a shame.

MARIA

Guys, hold on. What's such a shame, that she dyed her hair?

ELLEN

No, that she disrespected her parents enough to taint what they spent so long raising. Your generation is just so..

(Beat)

..liberated. It's unnerving.

If Maria was worried before, now she's just plain petrified.

MARIA

I don't know, I don't really see the problem...

JOHN

Well, you wouldn't understand it really. No problem, though. You're you-our little angel-and that's all that matters!

Maria wants to vomit.

MARIA

I mean, nobody's perfect, right?

JOHN

(under his breath)

Yeah, your mother knows a lot about that...

(CONTINUED)

Ellen's head snaps up.

MARIA

What?

Ellen kicks John under the table. Hard enough that everyone's plates move.

ELLEN

(loudly and awkwardly
laughing)

Oh nothing HAHHAHA! John, you're-

Each of the following words is punctuated with another kick under the table.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

SUCH! A! JOKESTER!

John grimaces at the pain of the kicks then concedes.

JOHN

Okayyy, let's say grace, shall we?

Maria nearly chokes on her sip of water. If they all hold hands...

ELLEN

Maria, do you want to lead? For old
times sake?

Actually, Maria would rather die. She makes one last ditch effort at saving herself.

MARIA

Oh, pssh, dad can do it, right? I
know you love saying grace, dad!

JOHN

Aw, that's sweet of you, angel, but
I want you to have the opportunity.
Just hurry up, your old man is
starving!

Ironically, Maria says a quick prayer in her head, then out loud:

MARIA

Okay.

The family lifts their arms and holds hands for their prayer. As Maria raises her shoulder, the sleeve of her sweater comes up. You can see the tattoo. Gulp. So it begins.

(CONTINUED)

MARIA (CONT'D)
Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy
gifts...

So far, so good.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Which we are about to receive...

Halfway there.

MARIA (CONT'D)
From thy bounty...

Maria is on the homestretch. John hasn't looked up from his
lap. Ellen is staring straight ahead.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Through Christ, our Lord...

It's only a matter of time now.

ELLEN
Maria...what's on your wrist?

Busted.

MARIA
(quietly)
Amen.

ELLEN
Is that a tattoo?

John's head snaps up in disbelief.

JOHN
I'm sorry, what did you just say?

ELLEN
I asked our daughter if that is a
TATTOO on her wrist.

Maria says nothing.

JOHN
Well?

ELLEN
WELL?

MARIA
...it's...temporary?

Ellen and John look at one another. A beat passes. They have an entire conversation with their eyes. Ellen gives John the smallest nod of her head. John understands. They're doing this.

Without breaking eye contact with Ellen, John launches into their unspokenly agreed-to tirade.

JOHN
THIS IS AN OUTRAGE, MARIA.

ELLEN
Oh my G-O-DDDDDDDDDDDD

JOHN
What will our friends say?!
WHAT WILL THE COMMUNITY
SAY?!

ELLEN
Do you have any idea how
this makes me feel? Any
idea at all?

JOHN
Hair dye over this any day.
ANY DAY!

ELLEN
Pass me the pumpkin pie. I
need comfort food. I NEED
CARBOHYDRATES.

John pauses quickly. The yelling stops.

JOHN
(gently, casually)
Oh yeah sure babe, here. Take the
pie dish.

ELLEN
(grabbing the dish of pie)
Oh awesome, babe thank you.

JOHN
Do you want some whipped cream too,
babe?

ELLEN
That'd be great! Thank you! So
sweet!

JOHN
Yeah, yeah of course.

A beat passes. And it begins again.

JOHN
Are you trying to prove a
point or something?

ELLEN
(with her mouth full;
says as she eats)
I'm crying. There are *tears*
in my eyes, Maria, TEARS.

JOHN
I AM OVERHEATING I AM SO
ANGRY. WOW, SOMEBODY TURNED
UP THE GOD DAMN HEAT IN
HERE, DIDN'T THEY?

ELLEN
I NEED MORE PIE!

JOHN
WE HAVE NEVER MADE MISTAKES
WE ARE PERFECT PEOPLE WHY
AREN'T YOU PERFECT, TOO?

ELLEN
I HAVE NEVER DONE THINGS I
REGRET, I AM FLAWLESS!

Oh my god, they're psychotic. Maria has had enough. She
stands up out of her chair.

MARIA
SHUT UP! BOTH OF YOU, SHUT UP!
You're acting like I murdered
someone, not put some ink in my
skin, which by the way is MINE.

JOHN
Oh, don't give me that act Maria. I
knew sending you to that liberal
arts college was a bad idea. We
should have just stuck with Saint
Mary's. This NEVER would have
happened there.

MARIA
Are you serious right now? You
really think that's true?

ELLEN
(with pie on her fork)
Honey, you're absolutely right.
Abso-LUTELY. Maria, you're
transferring. I don't want anymore
of this angsty art "discovering
myself" bull crap out of you. The
nuns will whip you into shape.

Hold up. Transferring? Maria doesn't want to transfer!
She's..she's..she's spellbound, she's frozen, she doesn't
know how to respond! She's been kicked in the stomach.

MARIA

...what?

JOHN

We'll drive up on Friday to grab your things. We have no reason to let you stay. You got a tattoo. That's unacceptable in my book.

Suddenly, a switch flips in Maria's brain. It's time to tell her helicopter parents how she really feels.

MARIA

I don't care! I don't care what's acceptable and unacceptable in your book! You both have your heads so far up my butt that I'm surprised you even have the time to formulate an opinion on the matter! I'm sick of this! Sick of being your "angel", terrified of making any sort of mistake. Do you know how horrible that feels? Like you can't screw up? Like there is no margin for error because your parents are PSYCHOTIC?!

John and Ellen are frozen, Ellen with her fork halfway to her mouth and John with his hands on his hips (to fan out his pit stains).

ELLEN

You don't mean that.

MARIA

Yes, I do! Every word! It's taken me 19 years and a few months at a liberal arts college--yeah, I said it, dad--but I finally got the nerve. I am going back. What will it take for you to let me go back?

JOHN

We're not changing our minds, Maria.

Maria is livid. She moves to storm out of the room, but bumps the table in the process. Ellen's pie falls on the ground and the dish shatters.

ELLEN

Maria, look at what you just did!
Dear lord in heaven...

(CONTINUED)

Ellen stands up then bends down to pick up the pie remnants. As she does so, her pants fall down just a bit too low and her shirt comes up just a bit too high.

What's hiding on the skin of her lower back takes Maria's breath away.

Right above Ellen's pant line is a butterfly tattoo, or, as most would refer to it as--a tramp stamp.

MARIA

Oh. My. God.

Ellen knows immediately what happened. She looks at John. John looks at Ellen.

JOHN

This is *your* fault. You HAD to get it. Just remember you said you HAD to get it!

ELLEN

Oh shut up, would you? At least I didn't cry then back out at the last minute like you did!!

Ellen gasps, then covers her mouth. She can't believe she said that. She told John she'd never bring up the most embarrassing moment of his life, especially not in front of his daughter.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Oh my god...I'm sorry. I just...I tried to get it removed, okay?!

Maria smiles, like a contestant on a game show that's confident they just won the grand prize despite having one question left. She's invincible now, so she might as well tell them...

MARIA

Oh, by the way, I'm a poetry major now. I didn't like finance.

She sits back down at the table, dishes some potatoes out onto her plate, and begins to eat.

FADE TO BLACK.