

Jacquelyn Benoit

about 800 words

jpenelopebaker@gmail.com

“Plastic Cup”

by J. Penelope Baker

Miranda strode over to the mini fridge sitting beneath the small television provided by the hotel. Grabbing the small bottle of red, she emptied it into one of the small plastic cups sitting next to the ice bucket. She turned, set the wine on the nightstand, and rummaged through her duffel, searching for pajamas. She was interrupted by the low, rumbling sound of the sliding glass door.

Her father walked in and eyed the wine sitting next to Miranda. “Ah,” he said, “glad to see you unwinding a bit.” The sour stench of tobacco drifted from his mouth as he spoke. “You’ve been far too tense. You need to loosen up.”

Miranda stopped rustling in her bag and stared at her father. His suit was still perfectly pressed, a far cry from Miranda’s dress, now rumpled and marked from the many tear-filled hugs she had both given and received. She met his clear, unswollen eyes, and said, “I need to loosen up? The day of my mother’s funeral? Just four days after her death? I need to *unwind*?”

Her father took a step back, seeing the crumpled dress and dark crescent moons Miranda currently sported. “Well,” he stammered, “I just meant... I figured that... You know, that...”

“Why are you even here, Dad?”

“I thought you could use some support! You know, since you had to do all the planning and everything, I thought that you needed someone here to help you.”

“Tell me, *Dad*, how exactly have you supported me today?” Miranda said, releasing the frustration and anger that had built up throughout the day.

Her father opened his mouth to defend himself, and then closed it when he realized he had no answer.

“All you’ve done today is add to the list of things I had to deal with,” she said. “First, you forgot to book a hotel room, so I had to swap my single king-size room for a double twin. Then, you decided *during the service* that you needed to speak, so I had to bump someone else from the lineup to keep everything on schedule.”

She saw her father inhale, as though preparing some defense, but she continued her tirade before he could say anything. “You thought that politics was a good topic of discussion at the post-service dinner, when you *know* that most of Mom’s family hold different views than you. And now,” she said, her voice breaking into a sob that she pushed back down, “you think that *I have to loosen up?*”

“Miranda—” her father started, but she cut him off.

“All I wanted was a quiet night. But I tried, Dad, I tried to give you the space to grieve, even though everyone *told* me it was weird for you to come. I mean,” Miranda said, letting out a strangled laugh, “who goes to their estranged ex-girlfriend’s funeral? You hadn’t even talked to her since my 6th birthday!”

She paused, trying to calm her racing heart and jagged breaths. While she took deep breaths, her father spoke, and all her calming efforts were wasted.

“I just wanted to help. I didn’t mean to upset you. We can talk about her if you’d like. I’ll just sit here and listen.”

She could see the spindly olive branch he was extending, but she wanted no part of it. Miranda was exhausted— held up by no more than puppet strings, her whole-body hollow and useless. She spoke through the next sob as it heaved its way through her chest. “I just wanted a quiet night. I wanted to put on a movie that Mom and I liked watched together, think about her, cry a lot, and drink wine in the hope of falling asleep. And you can’t even give me that.”

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” her father repeated.

Miranda wiped furiously at her eyes, and then tugged the zipper on her duffel. “I know you didn’t. That’s the problem,” she said, grabbing her flats and tugging them on. “You never *mean* to upset me, but you somehow always do.” She took a deep, shaky breath, and grabbed her bag. “Well, I’m done. I can’t handle this right now. I don’t want to be here. I’m going home. You can stay here, do whatever, but I’m taking my car, and leaving.” She marched out the door, letting it swing shut behind her.

Her father just stood there, casting long shadows across the room in the weak light of dusk. The sky had faded from orange to peach, and the remaining sunlight was just strong enough to illuminate the two made-up beds, and the cup of red wine sitting on the nightstand, untouched.