

House Warming

Written by

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INT. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

A female hand plunges a sponge into a water filled bucket. KER-PLUNK! Pulling it up, she wrings it out. Droplets fly.

Her other hand reaches for paper towels. Spins the roll neatly, tears off a square - RIPPP.

KATY (65, every year hard-earned) scrubs kitchen tile energetically. Down on all fours, every scuff a concern.

As she takes out frustration on dirt, a remembered phone call echoes in her mind.

Phone numbers dial. BEEP-BEEP. RING.

A male voice (CARL, 32) picks up, bitter hurt in his tone.

CARL (O.S.)

Mom? What do you want now?

KATY (O.S.)

It's what you want, isn't it? That's what it's always about!

Present-day Katy wends her way across the floor. Cleans. Scowls.

Her path intersects entrance to the living room. It's empty, gutted out.

CARL (O.S.)

Do we have to do this song and dance again? If you want to sell the place, go ahead. Use the income for vacations. Knock yourself out!

KATY (O.S.)

No! I don't want to sell to strangers. There's too many memories. Your father and I bought this place to raise a family.

(beat)

Not that I expect you to have children. At least, not now.

CARL (O.S.)

Jesus Christ!

KATY (O.S.)

What? Can you blame me? Having at least one grandkid would be nice.

Katy reaches the end of the floor.

A REFRIGERATOR looms over her. Katy uses the handle to pull herself up. A groan camouflages the crack of old knees.

She peeks inside. Empty. Cracked plastic. A hint of mold.

Her hand fumbles for spray cleaner. Spritzing into the fridge, she tackles scrubbing there, next.

CARL (O.S.)

Ma, we're heading out to dinner. If you care about my appetite, please give the "Why Can't You Be a Norman Rockwell Couple" bit a rest.

Katie grimaces into the fridge. At the memory of the fight, too.

KATY (O.S.)

You know I respect Uncle Steven's... lifestyle. It's not like I'm homophobic.

CARL (O.S.)

I'm not gay, Mom. Can't you get that straight?

(chuckles to himself)

Heh. "Straight."

KATY (O.S.)

But if you were, I'd be defending you. To Sophia, Elaine. My book club, too!

CARL (O.S.)

You don't need to defend me. Or Lucy. Just... try to understand and love her, like I do.

Katy chokes. Finishing, she tries to slam the fridge door. Old hinges make it close extra slow.

She drifts towards a window over the sink.

A plastic CHRISTMAS WREATH lies on the counter. Seasons Greetings, discount style.

Katy ignores it, cleans smudged glass. She stares out at an empty yard. A sprinkle of snow coats the ground.

KATY (O.S.)

I'm supposed to "understand" about "Lucy"? How?

A feminine voice calls to Carl, the words muddled.

CARL (O.S.)
 Mom, I have to go. We've got
 reservations.

KATY (O.S.)
I have "reservations", Carl!

Carl shuffles the phone, about to hang up. Katy's voice switches from grievance to alarm.

KATY (O.S.)
 Stop. Please. Don't go.

Silence from Carl. Katy forges on.

KATY (O.S.)
 I only called to let you know I've
 made up my mind. I want YOU to keep
 the house. In your name only, of
 course.

CARL (O.S.)
 What about Lucy?

KATY (O.S.)
 He can move in. For now.

CARL (O.S.)
 Mom, her pronoun's "she". Show
 respect.

KATY (O.S.)
 You can't ask me to lie for you!

CARL (O.S.)
 It's not lying. It's her - and my -
 truth. Accept that and let's move on.

KATY (O.S.)
 If "She" makes you feel better? Fine.
 "Moving" 's what we're discussing now.
 Accepting; I can't... and won't do.

CARL (O.S.)
 Mom, what do you want me to say?

KATY (O.S.)
 "Yes" and "Thank You" 'd be nice.

CARL (O.S.)
 Lemme tell her. After dinner, I'll
 call back. We'll talk some more.

He shuffles the phone. Katy hustles to get the last word in.

KATY (O.S.)
Consider this an early Christmas
gift. Just give me a few weeks to
clean up!

CLICK.

INT. CARL'S AND LUCY'S APARTMENT - FLASHBACK

A tasteful, frugally decorated space. A CHRISTMAS TREE
blinks in one corner, presents underneath.

Carl hangs up. He sighs at his cell - and life.

LUCY (30s - a beautiful and angular TRANS) steps into his
arms, flashes a rueful grin.

LUCY
So, what pearls of wisdom did Mom
Katy lay on you *this* time?

CARL
Uh - both bad and good news. She's
decided to give us the house!

Lucy's eyes light up. She claps. Realizes Carl's not done,
sags back down.

LUCY
And the bad news? Don't protect me.
Or her.

CARL
Well, she's still adjusting... to
certain things.

LUCY
Lemme guess, she couldn't even bring
herself to say "trans".

CARL
She's working on pronouns. That's a
start!

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Back in the house, Katy continues her cleaning onslaught.
Soon, the kitchen window sparkles.

She stares out at the yard. In her mind, it morphs.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY - FLASHBACK

KID CARL (6) darts across a summer yard, filled with limitless joy - the kind only young kids have.

He scampers into YOUNGER KATY (30's) arms.

Husband HARRY (blue collar, aspiring to middle class) contently lingers at her side.

DRIPS intrude. With them, Katy's vision melts.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING - PRESENT DAY

She frowns down at the dripping sink. It's rusted, stained with water marks. Exhaling a huff, she grabs a sponge.

Tackles that pesky problem, too.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Footsteps tap on floors wet with polish. The sound echoes off bare walls.

Katy props a MOP in one corner, and walks through the empty house - cell phone cradled against her shoulder.

KATY

Sophie, dear? *Of course*, I'm your shopping partner - but I told you this before. I'm cleaning up the old house for Carl. He's moving in with his... fiance next week!

A female voice chews her ear off. The words aren't decipherable, but Katy winces at what she hears.

KATY

I get that. But he's my son! Harry's last wish was for him to inherit the place. As for... that person. Carl might still change his mind. Right?

Katy crosses into...

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

A few furnishings linger: a COMPUTER DESK in one corner. A stripped bed and mattress nearby.

Faded POSTERS cling to dark walls. A teen boy inhabited this space once.

Sophie yammers at Katy through the cell.

KATY

(shrugs)

Listen - looks like we didn't clean out Carl's old room, after all. Neither of us are as sharp as we used to be. Things get forgotten. What can you expect? I'm going to have to call Goodwill for pickup. Brave Macy's on your own. I'll call you later, for juicy details.

Sophie attempts to get a word in edgewise. Katy groans - hangs up.

And plops down on the bed, exhausted. She stares wistfully at the walls. A peeling GIRLY POSTER stares back.

Katy sees it. Rolls her eyes.

KATY

You seemed like such a *normal* boy.
Not like Uncle Steven at all.
(sighs)
Always the handful. Then and now.

In Katy's mind, the posters fade. Replaced with:

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The same room - decorated for the six year old before.

Younger Katy balances on the edge of a *new* bed, decorated with Space-Rocket sheets - and tucks in Kid Carl.

A BAG of cleaning supplies nearly slip off her shoulder.

YOUNG KATY

Sweetie, please! It's 10 PM. Settle down!

But Kid Carl's too full of energy to listen. He sits up, despite Katy's gentle efforts to push him down.

KID CARL

No! You said we're on an adventure!

YOUNG KATY

(sighs)

Yes, that's what moving is. When you're young. But growing boys need to rest. Especially when tomorrow's their first day at a new school!

Mom's got a point. Carl sinks back into bed, but screws up his face to launch one last request.

KID CARL

We've been moving *all day*.

YOUNG KATY

Tell me about it. That's why Mom and Dad are tuckered out. But we still have to finish unpacking the kitchen before we sleep. You want a big, tasty breakfast tomorrow morning, right?

KID CARL

You haven't even read the funnies yet.

Katy rolls her eyes. 'Seriously'? Carl squirms, insistent.

KID CARL

I can't sleep without Calvin and Hobbes. That's not fair!

Checkmate. Katy droops. The kid's won this round.

YOUNG KATY

OK. Just one strip, then light's out!

Fishing a NEWSPAPER out of the cleaning bag, Katy flips to the Sunday Comic section. *Calvin and Hobbes* is the lead.

Katy opens the pages. Mimicking Calvin's voice, she reads.

YOUNG KATY

'You know, sometimes it seems things go by too quickly.'

(chuckles to herself)

That it does. Calvin, you're so profound.

Carl nods eagerly. Urges her on.

YOUNG KATY

(reads more)

'But.. we're so busy watching out for what's just ahead of us that we don't take the time to enjoy where we are.'

KID CARL

Where are we now, Mom?

Katy smiles, smooths her son's hair.

YOUNG KATY

In our forever home. One you'll be exploring for years, like Calvin does. With just as many adventures. And plenty of friends to share them with, too.

KID CARL

Like Hobbes the Tiger?

YOUNG KATY

(shrugs)

Well, Tigers are a bit... different.

KID CARL

Different's fun. And good - right?

Carl's eyes droop. Relieved, Katy watches him fall asleep.

YOUNG KATY

My little trail blazer. Whatever you do will *always* be good!

She kisses Carl's forehead, slips quietly from the room.

INT. KITCHEN - FLASHBACK

Husband Harry awaits. He hands Young Katy a glass of wine.

HARRY

The tornado's finally tuckered out?

(mischievous grin)

Wanna go test out our brand new bedroom, hun?

Katy grabs a box, tears it open. Utensils gleam inside.

HARRY

Wait'll your family sees our house warming spread tomorrow. Rick's promised to get me steaks at cost.

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
 Your mother may not fully appreciate
 her Italian son-in-law yet, but she
 can't deny I love her baby girl - and
 scored her a proper home!

He kisses Katy passionately. Katy reciprocates.

But chores await. Pulling free, she opens a cabinet drawer
 for the utensils.

A dusty FALSE BOTTOM jiggles. Katy grimaces at the dirt,
 snags a dish rag to wipe it down.

YOUNG KATY
 Tomorrow's *got* to be perfect. Give me
 a few hours to clean up!

She and Harry toast. Glasses clink. Memories melt back into-

INT. HOUSE - PRESENT DAY

Exiting the bedroom, present day Katy cradles her cell to
 her ear. Not Sophia this time - Goodwill.

KATY
 So, you'll pick up the furniture 7
 AM? The sooner the better. Great! My
 son's moving in with his.. partner
 next week.

CLICK. Katy wanders back, to the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

In her mind, fantasy plays. She ages as she walks: 10 years.

Carl and Lucy nestle together on a couch.

A TODDLER scampers around the proud parents, a stuffed
 CALVIN AND HOBBS toy under one arm.

The infant runs toward Older Katy. Grandma opens her arms to
 embrace the child.

But before they touch... the toddler vanishes. The rest of
 the tableau does, as well.

Restored to her real age, Katy snorts - travels on.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

She tackles final cleanup with renewed energy. Rips open cabinets, dusts them out.

With every swipe, her frustrations grow. The act of cleaning doesn't cancel *those* out.

KATY

(mutters to herself)
 Don't delude yourself, old fool.
 "Lucy" can't have children. What can
 they do, adopt?!?

More dusting. Spraying.

KATY

If Harry was still around, this would
 kill him. I can't tackle this by
 myself!

She yanks out a cabinet drawer.

A false bottom RATTLES. Katy stops. Squints. Lifts it up...

And spots colorful faded newspaper - makeshift padding. It's the Sunday comic she read from, decades before!

Katy pries the paper up. It sticks. Some tears. She gasps at the date: 1995.

And at the Calvin and Hobbes strip on the front page. Smiling ear to ear, Katy can't help but read:

KATY

(reads for Calvin)
 'Days go by, and we hardly notice
 them. Life becomes a blur.'
 (laughs to herself)
 You may be a cartoon, but you've got
that part right!
 (continues reading)
 'Often it takes some calamity to make
 us live in the present. Then
 suddenly, we wake up and see all the
 mistakes we've made. But it's too
 late to change anything.'
 (beat)
 Oh, Calvin. If only I'd listened to
 you years ago...

Her gaze slips to the next strip: POGO. Porky Pine and Pogo drift down the river on a makeshift raft.

KATY

(reads for both)

'Kinda Christmas you more quiet and thoughtful, than jumpin' and singin'... He Allus says don't take life so serious. It ain't nohow Permanent.'

Katy regards her frowning face in the clean window. Shrugs.

KATY

Pogo, you rustic sage.

Outside, the sun's setting. Katy shivers. Contemplates.

KATY

Can't stay much longer. Con Ed, where's the heat?

She finishes cleaning. The counter gleams. Katy eyes her handiwork. Good as new - she's satisfied.

KATY

Face it, "Mom". Children grow up, and move on. You can give them advice, but the decisions they make are their own.

She starts to fold the newspaper. It crackles, brittle. One last comic catches her eye-

Peanuts. Peppermint Patty sits with Marcie, who opines:

KATY

(reads)

'It's just human nature. We all need someone to kiss goodbye.'

The words sink in. Katy blinks. Memories intrude.

MONTAGE OF FLASHBACKS:

In the bedroom: Katy kisses Carl's head as he sleeps.

YOUNG KATY

My little trail blazer. Whatever you do will always be good!

In the kitchen: Harry kisses Young Katy, too.

HARRY

Your mother may not fully appreciate her Italian son-in-law yet, but she can't deny I love her baby girl!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Back in present day, the phone rings. Katy looks. The ID reads: Carl. She scrambles to pick up - croaks.

KATY
Hello, Sir. I mean... Son.

Carl pauses, confused.

CARL
Mom, is everything OK over there?

KATY
(stammers)
Of course! I, I was just reading.
Catching up on... very old things.

CARL
Is this a bad time? I can call back.

KATY
Nonsense! Your timing's perfect. The
house is almost perfect, too.
Tomorrow, you have to come see how
it's shaping up.

She forces cheer into her voice.

KATY
All ready for its new family. That
means you. Lucy, too.

INT. CARL'S AND LUCY'S APARTMENT

Carl's cell lies on a table, speaker phone activated.

He stares down at the screen. Lucy approaches, shoots a wary look Carl's way.

CARL
(into the phone)
Mom, are you sure? You're handling...
a lot these days. If you're not
comfortable-

KATY
Comfortable? With family? Lucy should
come along. I insist!

Carl and Lucy exchange looks.

CARL
If you say so.

LUCY
(mouths to Carl)
Wow.

She grins at Carl. The two hug. Carl picks up the cell, cradles it between them (*almost like a child.*)

CARL
Mom, thanks so much. Words can't express -

KATY
Sure they can. Merry Christmas - to you both!

She injects mock sternness into her tone.

KATY
I'll see you both tomorrow. And I expect to be invited to the house warming party, of course!

Katy hangs up.

KATY
Whew.

Unsteady on her feet, she toggles her phone - summons Uber. Grabs the wreath off the counter. Beelines for the door.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Stepping out, Katy hangs the decoration over the front. Ever the perfectionist, she fixes the wreath exactly-so.

Whispering to herself, she blinks back tears.

KATY
'We all need someone to kiss goodbye.' Harold, if you were here to see this, after some... adjustment... I'm sure you'd be proud of your trail blazing boy, too.

At the curb, an Uber BEEPS.

Katy takes one last look at her old home. Smiles, hums a Christmas tune and walks away.

FINAL FADE OUT: