

Uninspired

by Kyle G

Let's just get the characterization out of the way. Barbara was a 30-something white-collar emotional-mess-on-the-inside pretend-it's-all-cool-on-the-outside passive-aggressive type of woman. She put her hair in a bun and wore glasses to work in hopes that her male coworkers might fantasize about her while screwing their wives but in reality wasn't really pretty enough for anyone to catch that she was trying to look sexy. They just thought she was lazy. She wanted to have an eating disorder, but she liked food too much to stop eating it and hated the taste of vomit mixed with tooth paste. She loved talking to her friends about her ideas for a start-up business because it made her feel a little better about the fact that she would never quit her job or try something new. See, wasn't that quicker than trying to cleverly work her description into a slowly-advancing plot line?

So here's the scene. She's standing in her house, which is a pretty impressive four-bedroom home that she and her husband bought recently. Oh, and she's married. Maybe not happily married — more like luke-warm. But don't worry; her husband isn't important to this part of the story. Well, indirectly, because one of her kids will enter later, and scientifically speaking, she couldn't have had kids without him. But for now it's just her. So Barbara is in the kitchen drinking her coffee and reading the paper on her island. She breezes through it, but not because she's a quick reader; it's because she only reads enough of each story to get a general idea of what's going on in the world. She would hate to look unintelligent in front of her friends and coworkers. She sighs out loud a couple of times, as if waiting for the non-existent person in the room to ask her what's wrong so she could break down and spill everything. She probably also does a few other things to give you the impression that she's living a lonely, depressing life but won't admit it to herself or to anyone else around her, but it's easier just to tell you that rather than explaining everything she does in the

morning (looking longingly outside, spilling something on herself and saying "just my luck," etc.) and lead you to the same conclusion.

Now let's get to the actual story. Her daughter walks in the kitchen. (No characterization needed here as she's an archetypical child; bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, innocent, pure, and four feet tall, or however tall third graders are. You know, the usual.) "Hi mommy," she said upon entering, and then sits down on a stool by the island. She glances over at the paper her mom is staring at, and then asks, "Do you like the new dress daddy bought me for the first day of school?" which clearly shows that not only does she need her mom's approval (that's going to be important later), but that Barbara didn't take any interest in her child's first day of school. This should probably reinforce what you already know about Barbara. Anyway, she finally looks up from the paper to glance at her daughter. "It looks nice, honey. You're not going to spill anything on it, are you?" "No mommy." "Good girl. Now eat your breakfast. We don't want you to be late for your first day." Barbara turns away from the island in the kitchen to start packing up her briefcase, which is sitting on the nearby table. At this point, you might make the connection that the island is sort of a reoccurring metaphor — it's like an emotional "island" because the characters that are around it are so isolated, even when there are other characters in the same room. Well, maybe that's a bit of a stretch.

"Mommy, can I try out to be in the school play this year?" She looks over at her mom, who barely looks up when her daughter asks this question. "Well sure you can, honey, but is that what you really want to do?" "Lucy told me that this year it's going to be about a princess, and the girl that gets picked for the main part gets to wear a princess costume with a big dress and everything." "Well that's great honey, but do you really think they'd pick you out of all the girls in your grade? Remember last year? You didn't even make the first cut." Her daughter paused and tried not to look hurt. Her mom had told her not to cry after she found out that she didn't even make the first cut. She had wanted to be in one of the plays so much that she had practiced by watching all of the movies she

owned in her room and repeated every line, trying to mimic the way the actor had said them exactly. She closed the door when she did this because she was too embarrassed to let her mom or dad see her. After a few seconds, she quietly said, "Maybe I'll do better this year." "Honey, you can't be something you're not." Her mom stopped to place a smile on her face, which only makes what she says next come across as even bitchier: "You can try out if you want, but then you'll have to deal with being rejected all over again. Is that really something you want?" Her daughter just sat there, feeling dumb for watching all those movies and practicing all those lines. "No." Barbara should have noticed that her daughter didn't say anything for the next few minutes. Or that she didn't look up from her cereal once until it was finished. But Barbara was like a poorly-written simile haphazardly stuck in a random sentence: she didn't care to try.

But get this. Finally, Barbara saw that her daughter was sitting on a stool silently, swirling around her milk without enthusiasm. "Well honey, you can't get emotional every time things don't go exactly like you want them to. I just want you to be realistic. Would you rather memorize a bunch of words, which your dad or I will probably have to help you with for the next two weeks, audition in front of the whole school, get cut just like last year, and be sad for the rest of the year? Or would you rather take all that time you would have wasted and do something productive with it, something you're good at, like school or piano?" Looking up from her cereal for the first time, Barbara's daughter tried to be agreeable (remember the whole thing about needing her mother's acceptance), "I guess you're right. Thanks mommy." She then stepped down from her stool and walked out of the room. This was a day that would subconsciously be with her for the rest of her life. But for Barbara, it was just another five minutes in a life that was too mediocre to merit further reflection.

—