

Going Home

by

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Mrs. Larney's three children were up bright and early that morning, excited to go to the zoo. But the rain hadn't stopped from the night before, and Mrs. Larney had no choice but to cancel the day trip.

"But you promised, Mother!" Billy said.

"Don't you always say, 'a promise is a promise,' after all?" Jan said.

Mrs. Larney contemplated. Anger slipped over her face momentarily. *Why do I have to deal with this myself? He should be here to help.* She took a long breath and managed a smile when a radio commercial interrupted.

"Boys and girls who come to the zoo *this* weekend will not only win a chance to ride Cecil the Elephant but will also get a FREE Cecil figurine toy. So, don't wait!"

"Mom, I gotta see Cecil. He's only there a few more days," Billy pouted.

"Pleeeeeease, Mom. Can't we just try to go?" said Jan.

"But children," Mrs. Larney began and stopped. *Why do they have to be like this? Can't they see the rain? Can't they see – the damn rain?!* She closed her eyes as she rubbed her temple.

When she opened her eyes, she saw little Stu holding onto his gray elephant stuffed toy and a tear in his eye. *It's all his fault. If he hadn't left us, maybe the children would be happier.* With a small breath and a big sigh, she recanted. She could never remain upset or angered at the children long.

"All right, children, let's all go to the zoo. Maybe we'll be lucky, and the weather will let up before we get there."

As expected, there was a chill in the air and rain was falling when Mrs. Larney exited her house wearing a long black coat with two huge buttons and a pink cloche hat that matched her pink floral print dress. Her hands were shivering as she delicately slipped her hands into a pair of

black gloves. Taking out a white umbrella and gently opening it over head, she walked down the brick walkway to the family's 1954 Buick Skylark.

Once inside, Mrs. Larney put the key into the ignition, and her mind... slowed. Vibrations pulsed through her brain, her body growing numb. Her head lowered as she struggled to push against the force bounding down on her. Her eyes began glistening as the air chilled around her. A crackling of glass echoed in her ears as she strained to hear the muffled and distorted sounds of the children in the backseat. Tears rolled down her cheek as her head quickly slammed into the –

Mrs. Larney was sitting in the driver's seat, having just put the key into the ignition. Whatever had had her was gone, like a flash with no lingering effects. She adjusted the rearview mirror to check her wet face, but her make-up was perfectly applied, fresh. She saw the children in the reflection of the mirror, playing in the backseat, and sighed. She looked at her window, which was solid glass. With a deep breath, she looked forward again, straightened herself, and started the car. Turning on the windshield wipers and putting the gear shift into *drive*, she checked for oncoming traffic and pulled out of her driveway.

Not long into their trip, the windshield fogged. Mrs. Larney switched on the heater and began wiping the window with her gloved hand. Ducking a little under the visor, she peered out the window for a better view.

Schwump-schwump. Schwump-schwump.

The sky was a little darker as the car continued on its way. The pitter-pattering sound on the car roof began getting louder.

Schwump-schwump. Schwump-schwump.

“Children, I’m sorry, but the rain is getting too bad, darlings. I don’t think today is meant for frolic at the zoo.”

“Nooooooo...”

“But you promised, Mother, and you always say that we have to keep our promises.”

“Children, please. Can’t you see...?”

Mrs. Larney’s forehead furrowed.

Billy crossed his arms in front of himself with a huff. Stu hugged his elephant close.

“Fine,” Jan said finally, “but you’ll need to make this up to us, Mother. Especially to Stu. Cecil will only be there this weekend, after all.”

A smile broke across Mrs. Larney’s face. With a deep breath and slow exhale, she straightened her hat and began to search for a way to turn the car around. She continued to wipe the window with her gloved hand, glancing here and there. She drove in the downpour for another mile.

Swchump-Schwump. Schwump-Schwump.

The car began to shake and shimmy. It rattled with deafening noise and gave off a sickening squeal. Mrs. Larney clenched her hands around the steering wheel and bit down hard on her lip. Billy slid into the left back passenger door. Jan was flung forward. Little Stu was thrown to the floor. The car began to skid, left then right, as it clunked to a stop.