

HOUSEKEEPING

By Lauren D. Yee

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Note: This a monologue, meant for a single actor. The characters of Astrid and Father should be played with appropriate voice and posture.

ELLEN: Every once in a while I get a phone call from some company doing surveys. Richard, he's my husband, tells me to hang up, but really it doesn't seem polite. I like answering their questions, giving them something to write down. It gives you the feeling you're wanted, even if it's only by someone doing surveys. So sometimes I answer their questions. **(turns to phone)** What was your question? Married, yes, twenty-three years. Oh, yes, I'm a full-time housewife. I have two children. There's Emmeline and Ralph, he's... what... satisfaction...with my life? Happy? Of course, I'm happy! **(laughs nervously)** Achieved all I ever dreamed of? Well, content? Content would be a better word for it. So, yes, I'm content. **(hangs up phone)** Sometimes those telemarketers can be rather silly - asking me if I'm happy. When I go out I don't even have to worry if the mayonnaise I'm buying is on sale or not. Clothing, shelter, expensive mayonnaise - that's happiness, isn't it? Richard would agree. Richard, that's my husband, has a good job and brings home lots of money, more than I could ever make. Richard says that all I'd be good at is filing and that's if I didn't mix anything up. **(laughs at herself)** But I'm good at shopping he tells me. I do grocery shopping, mostly; there isn't much else to do when you're at home all day except to do laundry or watch soap operas. Richard tells me not to watch so many soap operas; they give me an overactive imagination... but sometimes I watch them anyway. I mean, they're more interesting than my life could ever be, and I can't help wondering why it can't be my life that's on TV and everyone else that's watching. But, usually, I just go shopping. There's always a lot of groceries to buy; my children eat a lot of snacks, even now that they're in college. Well, the colleges are nearby and they always come home for the weekends. When they come they want food. Chips, cookies, ice cream - mostly food my mother would have never bought me. But it's what they like and why shouldn't they get it just because I didn't? My children don't eat enough at the dinner table as it is and they're happy when I come home with my bags of Doritos and Dreyer's Ice Cream. **(pause)** Except when I buy the wrong ice

cream... or forget the organic brands Emmeline always eats. I'll apologize and sneak into the kitchen while they play video games or watch TV or whatever teenagers do nowadays. Maybe I'm not so good at grocery shopping; I try, but sometimes that's not good enough for them. After I put the groceries away, I'll notice the dishes in the sink. Even now that my children are old enough to take care of themselves, the dishes still pile up fast. I'll shift through the piles of chipped china and neon plastic silverware. Bowls dripping in ice cream, half-finished cups of soda, plates still dirty with Richard's midnight snacks. That's another thing about Richard; he never washes his own dishes either. He's just like the kids, or rather, they're like him. Always letting me wash the dishes. I mean, I don't mind washing them - it makes me feel useful, but it's always like this. Always watching them pile up, plate on top of plate, because I know that I'm the only one in this house who cleans up, who reaches for the rag when someone spills their soup or eats cookies without a plate. And I know it'll always be like this, because... that's just the way it is. And since I don't mind it, I don't see why it should bother me. But I've been talking too long. I hear the phone ringing and I need to answer it. You'll excuse me. **(picks up phone)** It's not the telemarketer this time; it's Astrid. Astrid's my best friend from high school. We used to hang around town dreaming about what we'd do once we got out of this silly little town, but she's moved since then and now it's just me dreaming. She lives in London now and in Italy in the summer. She's been divorced twice, married thrice, and now just dates whoever comes along. **(to ASTRID)** Hello? Astrid?

ASTRID: **(on phone)** Ellen, darling! How are you? You're sounding fainter by the minute! Speak up, dear! The airport's hideously noisy! How's the kids? Grown up, I assume. And how's that husband of yours or shouldn't I ask? **(flashes smile)**

ELLEN: Oh, he's at work. He won't be back until eight. He never is.

ASTRID: Eight, eh? That bad, is it? **(pause)** Never thought you'd marry Richard, darling. He didn't seem at all like the dashing type that would carry you away on a foggy night. Remember how we planned it? We'd go to college near Hollywood, after which we'd get hitched to some famous actors and buy matching houses. Remember that? You should have gone to college, though. You were smart enough for it - and these colleges, they would have taken you. They took me. Why didn't you go to college anyway?

ELLEN: Circumstances, really.

ASTRID: Maybe. **(pause)** Are you all right, Ellen? You don't sound quite like your mousy little self. Are you happy? **(looks away)** Oh, drat! The plane's going without me! Gotta jet! Call you from New York, darling!

ELLEN: Astrid hangs up before I can tell her anything. It's just like her. Why does everyone have to keep asking that? Of course I'm happy! Does it look like I'm wallowing in misery? I have every reason to be happy! **(pause)** Then I realize I never answered her question about college. College... sure, I would have loved to go to college. It's not that I didn't apply either. Oh, I applied to plenty of them. It's just that I didn't go... well, *Daddy* didn't let me go. I remember he called me into his study and I said... **(pause)** Father, you... wanted to see me?

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