

Lucky Penny

by
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CHARACTERS:

PENNY JONES 11 years old

DANIKA JONES late 30s, housewife, and sometimes maid for hire

TERRY JONES early 50s, elementary school principal

MARK JONES 18 years old, Penny's older brother

CHRIS "ROLLIE" CATANO Mark's friend

MRS. SALES 40s, mother of Matt Sales, and member of the school board

CANDACE the school's head secretary

MARY the school's guidance counselor

SUE the school's nurse

ADMIN. the school's chief gossip

ELOISE HANSON the school's vice principal

SETTING

A bedroom community in Connecticut.

TIME

1994. The first and second day of the school year. Zero Tolerance laws have just gone into effect.

SCENE ONE.

Day. THE JONES' HOUSE. A modest raised ranch in a secluded area. The kitchen dominates the stage. It contains a large butcher block table that matches the blond wood of the cabinets. On the wall is a yellow telephone with a long cord. Aside from a few homey touches, the kitchen is rather plain and institutional, like the teacher's lounge at a public school. There is a door to the outside - the top half of the door is divided into half a dozen or so glass plates.

Behind the kitchen is a hallway. To one side are doors, suggesting bedrooms; to the other side, is a living room (backdrop), but again the furniture looks like it would fit into the lobby of a public building.

It's the afternoon (say 3:30 pm) in early September.

PENNY (11) and MARK (18, dressed in the wigger fashion of the time) run in from down the hall. He is chasing her.

MARK

Prepare to suffer the Rita Repulsa! RAHHHH!!!

PENNY

Noooooooooo! Please! No! Stop! Stop!

Mark catches up to Penny in the kitchen, corners her, and lifts her up over his head. It looks like he's about to throw her down on the floor...

PENNY

Put me down! Put me down!

... When the telephone rings. With Penny still lifted over his head, Mark walks them over to the phone. Penny answers.

PENNY

Hello? No, she's not home yet.

MARK

Who is it?

(stage whisper)

PENNY

Dad.

(cupping hand over the phone)

Mark puts Penny down.

PENNY

Asshole.

(to Mark - hand still over the phone)

(into the phone)

What? I don't know. No, I don't know. I already told you. I'll have her call you when she gets home. I'm not giving you attitude. Fine. Bye.

MARK

What's he want?

PENNY

Fuck if I know. But that's like the seven gajillionth time he's called today.

Mark shrugs it off and goes back into rough-housing mode.

MARK

Rita Repulsa!

PENNY

Nah, dude. Ow! Fucking stop. I'm like wicked starving. What's there to eat? I said stop!

The phone rings again.

MARK

I'll get it. It's probably for me.

Mark picks up the phone while Penny begins to rummage around for food, eventually settling on an apple and peanut butter - she takes out a knife to cut the apple.

MARK

Yello? Oh, hey, Dad. Nah. She's out. I don't know. Grocery shopping or something. What's up? Okay, I'll let her know. Lates.

PENNY

So, what's he want?

MARK

Dunno. Says he

(aping a serious older man's voice)

“has to talk to Mom.”

Mark takes the knife from Penny.

PENNY

Hey!

Mark tosses the knife into the air and catches it.

MARK

Tah-dah.

He does it again. And again.

MARK

Jealous?

PENNY

No. 'Cause I bet I can do that. And I can do it better than you.

MARK

No you can't.

PENNY

Yes I can. Let me see the knife.

MARK

No.

PENNY

Fine.

Penny grabs another knife out of the drawer, and makes an “I'll show you” face at Mark.

She tosses it into the air, but misses the catch - it sticks into the linoleum. The phone rings again. Penny keeps trying.

MARK

Jesus fucking Christ. What is his deal?

PENNY

Don't answer it. He'll figure we went outside or something.

Bored with failing, Penny goes back to preparing her snack. The phone continues to RING.

MARK

Gahhh! I hate that sound. It's, like, boring a hole into my brain.

PENNY

You have a brain?

MARK

I'm gonna answer it, and I'm gonna make him tell me what is so fucking important that he has to call every goddamn second.

PENNY

Be strong, brother. Be strong. Mom'll be home soon.

Just then, DANIKA JONES, their mother comes through the kitchen door looking harried but vigorous. She is carrying a cleaning caddy, and a vacuum cleaner. She's wearing scrubby clothes with her hair held back by a bandana.

PENNY

Told ya.

MARK

Mom! The phone's for you. Pick it up, pick it up!

DANIKA

Will you get it?

The ringing stops. Danika puts down her burdens, and gives her children kisses hello.

DANIKA

Who was calling?

MARK

Dad.

DANIKA

Ah. He'll call back if it's important. So. Tell me. How was school?

MARK

PENNY

Fine.

Fine.

DANIKA

Yeah? Anything exciting happen?

MARK

Nah. School's school. Can I borrow your car? I told Chris I'd come over for dinner.

DANIKA

Oh, you did? And did you remember to tell his parents that this time?

MARK

Don't need to. Mrs. Catano said I can come over for dinner whenever I so please. She called me a "prince."

DANIKA

That you are.

Danika gives him a kiss and the keys.

MARK

Thanks, Mom. Later gaters!

PENNY

In a while, crocodile.

Mark exits.

DANIKA

Hi, Penny.

PENNY

Hi.

DANIKA

And how was your first day back at school?

The phone rings.

PENNY

That's Dad.

Danika answers the phone.

DANIKA

Hi, Terry. How was your da--

Danika listens intently then slowly turns to look at Penny.

DANIKA

She *what*?

There is a long pause while Danika listens to the news coming from the other end of the phone line. She stares at Penny the whole time. Penny looks down the whole time. And it's an excruciatingly long time.

DANIKA

What?

Danika snaps her fingers, beckoning Penny to come over here right this instant.

DANIKA

Well, don't you think you should come home? ...Fine. Dinner is at six.

Danika hangs up the receiver and, in a state of disbelief, turns back to Penny.

DANIKA

You brought a switchblade to school?

PENNY

No.

DANIKA

(warning)

Penny...Your father got a call from a Mrs. Sales. She said you threatened her son Matt on the bus with a switchblade.

PENNY

Well, she's lying.

DANIKA

Why would she lie?

PENNY

He's the one who was harassing me. Why don't you call Dad about him?

Beat.

DANIKA

Where is it?

PENNY

I don't know.

DANIKA

Go get it. Now!

Penny slinks away down the hall. Danika works off some of her frustration by cleaning up the kitchen. Penny returns with something in her hand - she holds it out to Danika.

PENNY

It's not a switchblade.

It's a small pocket knife. Danika takes it.

DANIKA

How could you do this?

No response.

DANIKA

Answer me, Penny! You've got your father on the line having to call me and tell me that his own daughter brought a knife to school and threatened a classmate with it. Now tell me what you were thinking.

PENNY

I wasn't thinking anything! I didn't *do* anything! Matt was being an asshole to me and I told him to shut up. That's it.

DANIKA

Please, Penny. Do not swear when you are angry. It is not going to help your case.

PENNY

So now I'm the bad guy?

DANIKA

Nobody said you were the bad guy.

PENNY

Why do you and Dad hate me so much?

DANIKA

We don't hate you, Penny. Where is all this hostility coming from?

Penny is too upset to respond.

DANIKA

I'm trying to help you, and I need you to believe that I'm on your side.

Penny isn't convinced.

DANIKA

(changing tactics)

Why didn't you tell me you were having trouble with bullies?

PENNY

I told you for years, Mom! But you didn't do a god damn thing. All you and Dad ever said to me was "just ignore them," "just ignore them." Well, I'd like to see you try to ignore people when they're pulling your hair and calling you names, and throwing fucking pennies at you.

DANIKA

Pennies?

PENNY

Pennies!

DANIKA

Oh, my baby. I am so sorry. I honestly don't remember you telling me any of that.

PENNY

No, of course you wouldn't. You don't care.

DANIKA

Again, I'm sorry. I really really am. But there's nothing I or anybody else can do about that now, so let's just try to focus on what we're dealing with now. You said Matt was calling you names and you told him to shut up. That's all that happened?

PENNY

Like you care.

DANIKA

Was he hurting you in any way? With pennies, or anything else?

PENNY

What's it matter?

DANIKA

I'm just trying to get a sense of what was going on.

PENNY

I already told you.

DANIKA

But did you threaten him with a knife?

PENNY

Who cares? I wasn't going to use it.

DANIKA

Oh, Penny. How could you?

PENNY

I didn't --

DANIKA

Please, just stop. I can't handle any more lies from you.

PENNY

Mom, I'm --

No. I'm sorry but I can't look at you right now. Just go to your room. Go.

Penny leaves looking all the more like a victim. Danika is at a loss for a moment. Finally, she goes over to the phone and dials.

DANIKA

Hello? Jane, right? Janice. Yes, hi, this is Danika. Mark's mom. Yeah. He's on his way over there now - I guess he and Chris had plans for tonight or something, but I'm going to need you to send Mark home. Whenever he gets there. No, no. Everything is fine. Terry? He's, well, he's good. Yep. We're all very excited that he's the new principal at Penny's school. Sure. Okay. Thank you.

Danika hangs up. The silence is deafening. Danika considers the knife: she takes out a ruler measures the blade of the knife.

DANIKA

Two inches. I guess that's not that big.

She studies the blade. Then tests it on her own skin. She expects pain, but the blade is too dull to cut. She gingerly puts the knife down.

DANIKA

Well, that's something, right?

Lights down.