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Editor's Note	
Guidelines	<p>She came for Thanksgiving her freshman year, since her folks said it was too expensive for her to fly back home for just a couple of days. This I found hard to believe. Aunt Rose was the type who wouldn't admit that anything was too expensive. Or, even if forced to admit it, she'd go ahead and buy whatever-it-was anyway. Her husband, Herman Yau, was a well-known architect and made big bucks, but not big enough for her spending habits. Meanwhile <i>my</i> mother, Rose's older sister, whose husband washed dishes and checked inventory in the restaurant they owned, had a saint's tolerance for her family members' quirks. Why <i>not</i> let Miranda run off to New York, alone, without a real job? Why <i>shouldn't</i> Rose buy a new car when she never drove the two she already had? (One was always in the shop, she explained, and the other was a stick shift; Rose hated driving stick.) In her late middle age, nothing particularly shocked or perturbed Ma any more, which made my "running off" to New York seem no more daring than a haircut. And yet somehow I'd gained a reputation with Beatrice as being bohemian, free-spirited, the black sheep of the entire clan.</p>
SNR's Writers	<p>Part of that was because of <i>last</i> Thanksgiving, I think. I wasn't trying to be subversive, really I wasn't. I flew to California to visit the Yaus that weekend; my mother was there too, preparing the holiday feast (since Aunt Rose didn't cook), and Beatrice had been admiring Ma's expert culinary skills. She herself couldn't even boil water, she told me with an abashed giggle. So naturally I went out and bought her <i>Easy Basics for Good Cooking</i> for Christmas, so that Beatrice could learn to make spaghetti Bolognese and roast a chicken. I didn't know that my aunt had deliberately refused to teach Beatrice to cook, refused to do any cooking herself, because she thought it was too "low class."</p>
Mail	<p>"Rose is not too happy you give Beatrice the cookbook," my mother informed me a</p>

month later, quickly adding, “But you shouldn’t feel bad. It was a nice thought.”

If Ma said “not too happy,” it probably meant “furious.” “Why is she upset with me for *that*? It’s just a tiny little present. Beatrice can sell it back or give it away if she wants. I thought she could use it, that’s all.”

I could almost hear Ma’s patient shrug over the phone. Rose had always been my mother’s favorite of her five sisters, though I wasn’t sure why. Rose equally favored my mother, but the reasons there were obvious: after she’d been working in America for a number of years, Ma had saved enough to bring Rose over from China and send her to college. My father always said Rose should have been named Lily, as in lily of the field. Out of all the Chao sisters, Rose alone got the fancy education, married rich, did nothing; my mother meanwhile worked her ass off night and day in the steamy confines of the restaurant. Perhaps she liked to see one of her own in the lap of luxury, even if that one scorned the very means of Ma’s own existence. Rose was clearly proud of her inabilities in the kitchen. She wanted Beatrice to be the same way.

What choice did Beatrice have? She did everything her mother said. But she wasn’t simply obedient; there was more to it. Beatrice and Rose together were like sisters, like best friends; they giggled about guys and clothes and movie stars. It gave me the creeps, frankly. It seemed weird, unnatural—unhealthy, really—to be that way with your mother. Mothers were for *not* talking to about all those things, particularly guys, not that my mother would ever scold or punish me for any perceived bad behavior with the opposite sex, the way Beatrice’s did. But therein lay the bigger problem, in my view: Rose was still most definitely the mother, and as such their relationship would always be unequal. They might titter about some boy at Harvard who was hopelessly smitten with Beatrice, but if Rose picked up even the tiniest hint that the boy might be making some inroads, she launched an investigation: who was he, who were his parents, what did they do, what did he aspire to do, was he the right *type* of person, were they, was he in short good enough for BeatriceRose? He never was.

In fact, I found out from Ma that the reason Rose wanted Beatrice to stay with me over the holiday weekend was because some boy at school had invited her to stay with him and his family. The boy, needless to say, was not the right type, and had to be discouraged. My mother and I never talked about my own relationships, or about her problems with my father, but we got plenty of vicarious mileage out of the saga of the Yau women, since Beatrice told Rose everything, and Rose, either bragging or complaining, told Ma. “So what’s so bad about this one?” I asked. “He’s Chinese, right? *And* a Harvard boy. His folks must be rich to afford that ten-digit tuition. So what is it?”

“Too old. Already 21.”

“Beatrice is almost 19!”

“Rose say he drinks too much.”

“He’s 21! That’s what guys *do* at that age. Besides, Rose thinks two beers means too much.”

“Also, biggest thing, he’s major in History. Rose say that means he have no ambition. When he graduates, he doesn’t get a good job.”

“Oh, well why didn’t you *say* so. Heaven forbid she should hook up with one of

those liberal arts types.” My major had been English. My father’s, near as I could figure, had been something to do with city planning, public policy and/or social work. Rose thought we were both losers. I made a mental note to buy my cousin The Norton Anthology of Poetry this year.

Beatrice arrived late Wednesday night and left Sunday afternoon. She looked so fresh-faced waving at me across the train station I felt like sitting down and resting my weary 27-year-old bones. I suddenly realized I had no idea who she really was or what to do with her for four days; I’d only ever thought of her as the poor girl whose mother dominated her. So we saw a Disney movie on Thursday and a show on Friday, went to the museum Saturday and the park Sunday. Beatrice was polite and undemanding; we made pleasant small talk and she thanked me for everything, and at the end of four days I still had no real idea what made my cousin tick.

Of course Beatrice talked to her mother every night, detailing every single guy who made a flirtatious comment to either of us (there were a few—the Parisian in the park who offered to marry her on the spot, the guard at the Met who took our picture then begged us to send him a copy, countless whistlers and winkers and kiss-blowers, mostly for her). Good heavens, I thought, Aunt Rose is going to get the idea that all I did was take her darling daughter to singles bars. She probably thinks I’m that desperate myself, anyway, pushing 30 and still unmarried. (“Grandchildren would be nice,” was as much as my mother ever pressured me, always adding, “But better you be sure he’s right for you.” *Right* for her meant employed and well-mannered and one or two other reasonable things—Ma did have standards after all, though a far cry from Rose’s uncompromising list of future husband requirements.)

I could also tell that Rose was lecturing Beatrice not to think about that boy, the one who’d invited her to meet his family. Beatrice would keep saying things like, “Yes, I understand,” and “We’re just good friends,” never losing her temper, never fibbing or hiding anything, always maintaining that sweet sincerity that had so magnetized the male population of Manhattan. I felt bad for the poor nameless besotted lad up in Cambridge. Between Rose’s iron will and Beatrice’s dimples, he didn’t stand a chance of winning her away.

Afterward, I heard over and over again from my mother how much Beatrice had enjoyed her visit. “She *loves* New York! She have such a good time. She say she wants to live there after she graduates.”

I wasn’t quite sure what to say to that; I’d assumed she’d had a tolerable four days the same way I’d had. “Uh...is that OK with Rose?”

“Oh, Rose likes New York, too.” She chuckled. “Why? Because good shopping! Sacks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale, Tiffany. She like to visit all the time. So she say it’s OK if her daughter goes to live.”

“That’s big of her.”

What had occurred that had left such an impression on Beatrice? I still can’t figure it out. If anything, I felt that the weekend had been rather half-assed. The Disney movie, for example—I couldn’t think of anything else to do, since most things were closed that day even in Manhattan and the weather was too raw to anything outdoorsy. Yes, Beatrice was 18 and not 8; even if I couldn’t take her to bars, I probably could have come up with something better than a cartoon at the Angelica. She could do that anywhere.

And the show? I didn’t take her off-off-Broadway like I probably should have, but instead we went straight to the neon crassness of Times Square like any couple of tourists and saw *Art*. Yes, at least it wasn’t *Cats*, but still, a sure-fire crowd pleaser

featuring popular sitcom actors and a fun, non-challenging premise—I could have tried to be more cutting-edge and original, but hadn't bothered. She enjoyed it, though it couldn't have fired any zeal for theater such that she'd want to move here, could it?

There was the one night, Saturday I think, that we went to dinner with my friends, Charles Tang and Norman Barrows. Charles was 30 and a lawyer; I'd temped at his firm once last year and we hit it off. Norman was 47 and worked at Starbucks; he and Charles had been living together for four years, and I had figured Beatrice would pick up on this last fact without me having to spell it out—and that a multiethnic May-December gay couple couldn't possibly be a shocking thing to her, no matter how sheltered she might be. Whether it was shocking or not, I'll never know, because I could tell she had no idea. Roommates, I could see her assuming. She seemed shyly taken with youthful-looking Charles, as though I'd brought along a nice Chinese boy for her to possibly hook up with. Never mind that he used to be a heroin addict back in his playboy years before he met Norman, before he became clean and sober and born-again Republican. I couldn't wait for him to start talking about the twelve-step. Beatrice might think it was some kind of dance. Oh boy, I thought, wait till Aunt Rose hears about this one.

But Charles didn't tell any of his stories about shooting up in the changing room at Brooks' Brothers. Turned out he and Norman had gone to the same movie we had, and so we mostly talked about that. "The animation was fantastic, but that musical score? Just a few too many sweeping violins for my taste." "Yes, but only think of the absolutely unlimited opportunities to peddle film-related merchandise!" The conversation eventually moved to films in general, and every so often I thought Norman, who used to hang out with theater types and had lots of delicious gossip about them, was surely about to say something ribald or suggestive about a particular actor, but his double entendres that evening were mild, barely discernable even to me and certainly over Beatrice's haloed head.

So it couldn't have been that. What, then? Ordering greasy lo mein at midnight? The block-long line for bagels and coffee at H&H? The fact that my apartment featured a sleeping loft in the living room and a bathtub in the kitchen? But those were such frivolous things. Beatrice might have been young, but she'd already traveled the world with her parents and had a bit more sophistication than the average teen. Perhaps ultimately it had very little to do with me and the things we'd done; it was simply being under the care of someone so unlike her mother that she could finally cut the cord, or at least nick it a little. A wicked idea began forming in the back of my brain: I would corrupt my sweet young cousin. I would drag her away from the chains of respectability, away from the arranged marriage her mother would no doubt foist upon her, away from her mother in general. The two of us would rent a place together in the East Village, or the meat-packing district, or Williamsburg; Beatrice would start shopping at Goodwill, devouring dollar paperbacks from The Strand, jamming to the sitar at cab driver-crammed Indian restaurants. She'd transfer to NYU and major in women's studies; I'd teach her to cook Senegalese food, to quote from *Howl*. We'd pierce body parts, date drummers. Even my mother would start to be mildly concerned ("She doesn't take any of the drugs, does she? Rose would be so upset").

I fully intended to put this plan in action, starting the very first weekend after Beatrice left. Norman had told me about a party in Chelsea, hosted by some set designers, that promised lots of potential for meeting the kinds of people Beatrice and I would surely be hanging out with. It was there, however, that I met Buck Brenner. Very soon thereafter I found myself not going to another such event ever again. It seems that night I'd found that one person with whom to stay home every

Friday night not regretting it. No doubt none of Aunt Rose's criteria would have been met by him: an Irish-American freelance writer, the product of blue collar parents and lifelong public schooling, who made jambalaya our second date and drank at least two beers while we ate it. Perhaps the very fact that he'd fail every Rose requirement only added to his appeal.

Of course, in the early stages it wasn't without typical New York complexity. His apartment was uptown west in the 90s, mine was downtown east in the teens, just about as inconvenient as possible, so we spent the better part of our non-working hours on busses and subways to one or the other's place. Even more frustrating, his job required traveling, while mine meant odd hours and lots of overtime. Whenever we could finally meet, we fairly tore into each other, it always felt like it had been so long.

I hadn't spoken to or about Beatrice in many months, so when she suddenly called, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, asking if she could once again stay with me, I became frantic. I liked my cousin, and I still liked to toy with the idea of liberating her, but Buck and I had so few chances at consecutive moments together; this Thanksgiving would have been the first four-day stretch ever. I thought quickly: Beatrice may have admired my devil-may-care lifestyle, such as it seemed to be, but I didn't think she'd be quite so enamored of the harsh reality—dishes furry with week-old mold stacked in the sink, for example, because I was so sporadically home. They had maid service at Harvard. I'd let things get especially bad lately because I'd been planning on spending the long weekend at Buck's having nonstop sex. Actually, it would be more like four times, max, but the point is that couldn't happen with Beatrice around.

"Um, I've been super busy, Beatrice. The place is a sty. I'm not kidding, it's disgusting. And it's been so incredibly busy at work," which was true, "that I haven't had time to clean," which wasn't, given that my apartment was so small it wouldn't have taken more than a couple of hours. Then I felt guilty; she was family, after all, and it shamed me to think of my mother, so tolerant and understanding of us all. "Look," I said magnanimously, "If you are absolutely stranded up there all by yourself and you've got nowhere else to go, you can stay here."

"Great! Thanks! See you in three days!"

I was still holding the receiver to my ear when it started its deafening "hang up the phone right now, you idiot" beeping. I'd created a monster. Beatrice actually looked forward to sleeping on my slab of a sofa bed, waking to a symphony of garbage trucks and car alarms and dodging airborne roaches in the shower. Why couldn't she lie to her mother this time and stay with her latest beau? Or hell, she had a lot of girl friends, why couldn't she just stay with one of them? (No good; Rose was always suspicious that boys would be involved somehow. I guess since she considered me an old maid, she figured that wouldn't happen in New York, despite the reports Beatrice had given last year.)

In desperation, I called my mother. This was a last resort because it meant admitting to her that I was pretty serious about Buck (and remember what I said about mothers and secrets?). She took the news calmly, though I knew she was silently letting out a long, slow sigh of relief (some of Rose's "old maid" comments must have gotten to her), and I knew that as much as she tried not to pressure me, hints about wedding rings and grandchildren would begin and end every conversation from now on. It was worth it, though, because she promised to do something about Beatrice. "That girl really is spoiled," she said, probably the

harshest thing I've ever heard anyone say about Beatrice. "Just like her mother." (I've heard plenty said about Rose; my father can't stand her either.) "She think she can just come over whenever she want. You don't be worried, Miranda; I will talk to Rose."

She did, though I have no idea what she said, whether she finally pulled rank as older sister and simply told Rose that Beatrice had to find somewhere else to go, or whether she tried a sneakier tactic, suggesting that Miranda's rich, successful boyfriend might propose marriage this weekend and so it was best that they were alone. However she did it, Beatrice ended up staying with a friend in the suburbs of Boston, too far from the city for it to be easily accessible to a couple of unsupervised college girls. Rose was appeased; Buck and I got to be, too. Six times, as it turned out.

I still felt a little glum about what had happened, though. Because of my own selfish desires, I failed the revolution to free Beatrice. I'd chosen sex over sisterhood, and Beatrice was doomed to remain shackled forever. Well, maybe that was a slight exaggeration of my own influence. After all, one more Thanksgiving couldn't possibly have steered her off the course of bourgeois snobbery toward taking a walk on the somewhat-wild side. Besides, had I really been considering doing it for her, or for me? My New York life was so unlike the way I'd thought it would be, the way Beatrice must have seen it. That was OK, though; I may not have had the fast lane, but at least I had something that was mine. Everything Beatrice had, she turned over to Rose.

Then I found out that the real reason Beatrice had wanted to stay with me in New York this time was because there was yet *another* boy, one whose family lived in Queens. The two of them weren't quite serious enough yet for her to be invited to stay over with his family, but they still could have met a few times in the city. "His family—Rose was so angry she found out!—they own a restaurant chain," Ma told me. "Southwest food. Fajitas, nachos, that kind. Chinese people, they make money any way. Plenty of money, that family, but *of course* Rose cannot accept them." Was that actually a hint of sarcasm in Ma's voice? "She forbids Beatrice to even speak to him."

"Then why was Rose going to let her stay with me?"

"Rose didn't know about him."

Stunned silence. "You mean—Beatrice *lied* to her?"

"First time. Can you believe it? Beatrice didn't say anything about the boy. And she say *you* invited *her* to New York."

"But I did—sort of. I mean, she wasn't exactly lying. She asked if she could come over and *then* I invited her. Actually, she was quite clever about it," I said admiringly. Baby-faced Beatrice was taking on a life of her own—go figure.

"Oh, so that's how you do it!" Ma exclaimed, feigning great shock. "That's how you girls lie to your poor mothers. Shameful!" We laughed—rather like sisters sharing a joke. "You tell Buck I say hi. Maybe you two visit soon. Maybe...maybe you have some news for us."

"Yeah, sure, Ma."

I still don't know what's going to happen to Beatrice, whether she'll turn into a

copy of her mother or go off in her own way entirely. I have a feeling it'll be the latter, and I'm almost positive that's a good thing. I do feel bad, though, that I'd unwittingly kept her from a tryst with her boyfriend, possibly even gotten her in trouble over it with her mother. To make up for it, I think I'll buy my cousin a book on auto repair this Christmas. Rose is going to flip.

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