

The Prodigal, part 2

by Donald Schmidt

Scripture reference: Luke 15:11b–32

Allison: (AD LIBBING The story of the prodigal in the Bible is about fathers and sons, but I'd like to hear it told from the perspective of mothers and daughters.

PERSON DOING "MOM" SHOULD REVIEW HOW SHE'S GOING TO DO THE ASIDES, TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN TALKING TO HERSELF, TO THE AUDIENCE, OR TO DAUGHTER.

Mom: I knew the call would come, I just didn't know when. I wasn't prepared when it did.

"We have your daughter"—quick: is she dead or alive? "and we think you'd better come down. She was picked up for soliciting."

Was I allowed to feel relieved that she wasn't dead? Was I allowed to feel glad that she had been found? Was I allowed to feel all of the anger and frustration of three years that we had not heard from her?

I got in the car and drove through the fear of the night. It was late. It took two hours. That

strange mix of adrenalin, pain, anger, fear, joy, and love propelled me down the road.

What would I say to her? What would she say to me?

It was far more awkward than I had imagined. There were no words. She looked like a walking cliché of cheap tart, painted and drugged, eyes hollowed by despair into glimpses of nothingness. My daughter.

Our hug was uncomfortable, forced. She seemed too scared to let herself go into my arms, and so it was business-like, strangely appropriate.

My questions were buried under an avalanche of silence. I couldn't ask them. Not yet. Maybe never.

I wanted to know, and I didn't want to know. I was probably as scared as she was.

They kept her—there was a fog of technicalities about jurisdiction and stuff that I couldn't understand.

The drive home took much longer.

We were allowed to visit her twice a week, and so we did. Drove two hours there, and two hours back, for one hour in a room full of a bunch of nervous people. All the way there we would convince ourselves it was better than nothing; on the way home we didn't talk much.

It became less uncomfortable over time. She began to look a bit better. Each week her smile dared to come back a little more. We found we could joke about a few things.

We still didn't ask all of the questions we wanted, but they somehow got answered little by little as heart threads reconnected.

One night we got home late, and I went into the kitchen to make myself a sandwich. Our other daughter Susan was just coming in from an evening out.

"How was your day?" I asked.

Susan: Fine. As if you care."

Mom: What do you mean? Of course I care."

(ASIDE TO HERSELF) Check: did I sound too defensive?

Susan: Yeah, right. You're never here."

Mom: (ASIDE TO HERSELF) Calm.

Be calm.

Don't yell. Don't let all of that tension out. She doesn't deserve it.

I breathed.

"I..."

Susan: You spend all your time off visiting that little slut.

Mom: I wanted to yell. But by the grace of God, I didn't, and in that microsecond, Susan started to cry.

Susan: It's not fair.

Mom: I know. But she's your sister, and I love her."

(ASIDE) Suddenly the air in the kitchen felt heavy.

"And I love you, too. For the last three years I've had the privilege of watching you become a

woman. I've gone to your basketball games and cheered like an idiot. I drove you to school when you missed the bus. I watched the fashion show when you bought all those clothes with your first paycheck. I've been worried when you stayed out late, and relieved when you came in, knowing you were safe and had been laughing with your friends.

“All of this, Susan, and I've loved every minute of it. But I never knew where your sister was. I imagined the worst, had to love her from a distance, not knowing if she were alive or dead...”

My tears were hot.

Susan hugged me.

Susan: It's okay, mom,” she said. “I love you.”

