

RICH RICH RICH RICH

Phone rings as I am washing the dishes for the 900,000th time. Daughter runs for the phone. Daughter is twelve years old and addicted to phone. Not me- I hate the phone.

I yell *Don't answer it!*

She answers it.

She brings me the phone. My arms are soap to the elbows. I prepare to snarl but I see her face and I dry my hands and take the phone.

It's my old friend Danno who always makes me laugh. Not this time. This time he is calling from the hospital where his daughter is dying. She got hit by a truck and broke everything you can break and just received the last rites.

She's twenty-two years old. She just graduated from college. She just had a baby boy. The boy is two months old.

I remember when this boy's mama was two months old. She slept in the top drawer of a rickety bureau. Her folks had about seven cents when she was born. All these years later they don't have much more than seven cents but they had three more children after Julie and my friend Dan would say, grinning, *we are rich rich rich*, and he meant it, too, even though they were never a hint of rich, and his wife's been sick for years, and the black dog has chased through their clan, and one child once had a fever so virulent and savage that it sent the boy into a wheelchair for a while, and my friend has worked so hard and so long and at so many jobs at once to support his family that his hair went bone white before he was thirty, and a piece of his back broke once and he wept himself to sleep every night for a year, but all through his ocean of pain he has grinned and laughed and sang, and never have I met a man which such a heart, and I love him dearly, and I tell him that on the phone, and he says I love you too you mangy mule, and I chant the names of all of his old girlfriends to make him laugh, which he does, I can hear him laughing in the hallway of the hospital far away, and then he says *I hafta go, pray for Jules*, and we hang up and I pray helplessly into the sink, into the bubbles and apple peels.

I pray for my friend and his family to be rich rich rich rich and not rich rich rich.

I pray down into the cups and forks, the crusts of pizza my children refuse to eat, which drives me nuts, but I say aloud to the softy crusts *rich rich rich rich*, which makes me cry, and I wash off the crusts and dry them and carry them out to the grass for the crows to eat for some reason I don't understand that has everything to do with praying for Julie.

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Brian Doyle, Editor

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Editor's note: Julie didn't die. All prayers welcome.