

a penny's  
worth



nancy de rosa

# A Penny's Worth

## NANCY DEROSA



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This work is dedicated to my brother Steve  
whose worth is immeasurable.

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# Chapter 1

Penny Marins knew early on that her mom had named her after a small amount of change. She also figured out her mother's reason. From the moment Penny entered the world, Dolores had decided that her daughter would never amount to much. So far, Penny truly felt, her mother had been proven right.

Penny was approaching forty, had never married, and didn't have a wide circle of friends. Not only did she feel that her name was short-changed, she also felt the same could be said for her love life. She was ashamed that she only experienced passion a few times throughout her life, and that had been with the three men she'd been with. It suddenly occurred to her one day that each relationship with Joe, Edmond, and David had lasted barely a year. The other thirty-five years of her life had been as sexy as an afternoon in a dry desert with an old weary camel

Penny despised social gatherings. As of late she'd found herself withdrawing from people more than ever. She began to ponder becoming a total recluse just as the phone rang.

"And who could this be?" she mumbled to her cat, stepping gingerly over him to grab the phone. She knew it was her mother. Very rarely did anyone else call her. "Hello," she said as she began to rub her forehead furiously. She quickly felt a headache coming on.

"Penny is that you?" her mother yelled into the phone.

"No Mom, it's not me. I'm someone else entirely, I just happen to sound like your daughter."

Dolores huffed and replied, "What is happening to you lately? I'm getting tired of all this sarcasm."

"A lot of things make me tired too Mom. I guess that's just part of life," Penny dead-panned right back at her. She felt a knot form in the pit of her stomach. She wanted to be pleasant but she couldn't. She leaned down to pet her cat Bob as he rubbed up against her ankles.

"Well maybe if you attempted to make your life a little more lively," Dolores replied in a self satisfied tone, "you'd have a bit more energy now wouldn't you?"

Penny snapped back, "You make everything sound so easy Mom. Gee, why don't I just go out and make a fun plan? Hey, I know, maybe I'll call up one of my friends and go ice-skating."

"What friends?"

Penny stopped petting Bob and stood up. She tightly gripped the edge of the kitchen counter. "Is there a specific reason why you called me?"

"Yes there is Penny. I'm calling to remind you of Cousin Charlene's son's Communion Party. I know how easy it would be for you to conveniently forget, it's this weekend you know."

"I would rather have all four of my wisdom teeth pulled out with no painkillers than go to that."

"Now Penny," Dolores scolded. "It sounds to me like you harbor a bit of resentment toward Charlene, come on now."

"What did you say?" Penny gasped. "Resentment, are you kidding? No Mom, what I'm harboring is anger. Do you care that I was nice enough to baby-sit for Charlene and..."

Dolores abruptly cut her off, "You needed extra money for that fancy car of yours. You can't blame her for that."

"Right, my four year old blue Honda Civic, I make such a statement when I drive down the street. You didn't let me finish," Penny explained in a steely voice.

"Charlene is a perfectly nice girl and—"

"Oh, she's just perfect. The last time I babysat for Charlene, she had the audacity to ask me to iron her suit. Perky, perfect Charlene had a social event the next day and didn't have time, poor thing, but I guess you don't care that she treats your daughter like shit."

Dolores' petulant voice crackled down the phone line. "You're going a bit too far with the shit thing Penny. You're family, and she asked a favor is all."

Penny knew her mother would stick up for Charlene. It was what her mother did, stand by everyone but her. Penny wished she could get used to it already and accept what was, but never could.

Slumping on the couch Penny decided on a new tactic. "Look mom, whatever, I want to see my niece and nephews, so I will be there. I really have to go now."

"Go? Where do you have to go?"

Penny answered slowly, "I am going to get something to eat, bye Mom."

She examined her reflection in the hallway mirror: her fair skin, brown eyes, and really long eyelashes. Her light brown hair fell to her shoulders in soft waves. She was no waif, but not fat either. Strictly middling, she admonished herself, that's me alright.

But her face was pretty and there was a gentle kindness shining in her eyes.

Staring at her reflection, she said out loud, "I should quit my mother like a bad habit." Yet her family, and that sense of belonging, was all she had. Loneliness would always rule and chase her down the street right back into her childhood home.

Lately though, a little spark was beginning to ignite in Penny. She

longed to know who she was and what she could be. It was why she was cranky, it was why she was sarcastic, and it was why as of late, dealing with her mother was worse than the over-whelming loneliness. Penny was restless.

Before she turned away from the mirror she pointed a finger at her reflection and said, "I am worth so much more than that."

## Chapter 2

Flat on her back in bed, Penny laid a wet towel on her head. Jeez, what an awful day. As much as she didn't want to revisit the events that had just transpired she could not help herself.

Penny had attended Charlene's son's Communion party and the moment she had entered Charlene's home, she had a premonition that events were going to turn iffy.

Even in the crowded hallway she spotted her brothers immediately. Louis, and Amber, stood in a corner with their twin boys, Paul and Alex. Her older brother Steve, his wife Theo, and their two year old daughter Carrie stood against the far wall next to them. They were having a lively conversation.

Penny loved her niece and nephews and always enjoyed spending time with them. But both her sisters-in-law lacked social graces. Being in their company was just plain uncomfortable, though she did her best to get along with them.

Attempting a smile, Penny walked toward her brothers. They both waved hello.

"How's it going?" she offered lightly.

Smiling, Louis put an arm around his sister, "Hey beautiful. Good to see you."

Penny cringed as her sisters-in-law looked her over. She could tell by their expressions that they didn't think she looked beautiful at all.

Penny spitefully pointed to Amber's bag, "Nice pocketbook. Wow, bet that must have put you back a tidy sum." She gave a low whistle for emphasis.

Looking down at his wife's bag with narrowed eyes, Louis asked, "Why? What? Was that expensive Amber?"

Amber fixed Penny with a cold stare. "Not at all Louis, I got it on sale."

Shrugging, Penny asked with a smirk, "Gucci on sale? That's amazingly unusual."

Theo jumped into the conversation: "And where did you find a Gucci pocketbook on sale? I want one."

Bending down, Penny hugged Carrie; but before they locked arms, she couldn't resist saying, "Of course you do Theo."

"I need another drink," Amber exclaimed. "Anyone care for one?" She pointedly did not look at Penny.

Penny was used to not being included, even when Amber wasn't

annoyed with her. Amber and Theo seemed to think she was invisible. They had decided long ago that Penny didn't have the same needs and desires as them. For some reason, on this day, being ignored invoked a quick bolt of anger within her.

Penny looked Amber straight in the eye and said, "Yeah, I would just love a gin and tonic. Mind getting me one?"

Startled, Amber took a silent step back.

Louis quickly intervened. "I'll get everyone a drink. Steve, come with me."

At the corner of her eye, Penny spotted her mother hustling busily toward the group. The moment she saw Dolores, she felt a nervous flutter in her chest.

Dolores now stood before them in a navy blue suit and numerous strands of pearls hung heavily from her neck. The pearls seemed to overpower her thin frame but still, Penny instinctively took a step back from her mother's intimidating presence. She looked past Dolores's shoulder into the growing crowd of people to locate her father Ron. He was nowhere to be found.

Looking at Penny, Dolores stated coldly, "I'm glad you could make it."

Penny replied, "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

Kissing Dolores's cheek, Theo looked quickly at Amber and said, "Mom, we went over to Delaney's steak house last night and I have to tell you, it was as good as you said it would be, just absolutely yummy." She licked her lips.

Penny inwardly cringed at the word yummy. She hated that word. Theo used it for just about everything she ate. Even a lunch of carrots and cottage cheese was yummy. Give me a break, she thought.

Stepping in close with a frantic look upon her face Amber asked, "You went there last night? I wanted to go, but we had to go out with Louis' friends from college." Rolling her eyes, she put up her hands in a pleading gesture. "How boring it was," she shook her head. "I can't even tell you."

"My night was so fun," Theo gushed with a huge grin on her face.

"My friends the Rowlings, where there, you didn't happen to see them did you?" Amber asked.

"See them? More than that, we had dinner with them." Putting her right hand up, Theo added nonchalantly, "Mutual friends, you know how it is. Such a small world, who would have known that our good friends the Randolfs have been friends with your friends for years? What wonderful people Amber, we had an instant connection," Theo put a hand on Amber's shoulder and emphasized the words, "with your friends. They were a blast to be with. Why, I think the six of us should go out together."

Penny could not help but watch in amusement. Amber's face

became red at the prospect of Theo besting her. Social climbing had always been Amber's sport and it was obvious she had no wish for Theo to be in her arena.

Before the conversation could get interesting, Charlene walked toward them.

"Hello my family, and thanks a bunch for coming," she greeted them in her nasal singsong voice. Her blond bob was shining as much as her peach lip gloss. She hugged Dolores, looked over at Penny and exclaimed, "Penny, why I haven't seen you in ages, so glad you could make it. I hope you've been keeping yourself busy."

It was Penny's turn to feel her face get red. "Yes, as a matter of fact I have."

Dolores huffed and interjected, "She keeps busy with those animals of hers, like they're children they are."

It was now time for Amber to seek revenge, "Well, Mom, you know they're just like her little babies, right Penny? That's what animals become to people who don't have little ones running throughout the house."

Penny felt trapped. She was suffocating.

She leaned against the wall behind her to gain composure. If she retaliated, Amber would know how well her words had stung. She would never give her the satisfaction, but she had a strong urge to yank Amber's hair very hard.

Putting an arm around Charlene, Dolores said, "None of us are animal lovers in the family but our Penny here. Leave it to her to go against the grain."

Charlene joined Dolores in laughter and Penny felt as if she had shrunk down to the size of a pebble. She didn't know if she had it in her to stay for the duration of the day.

Smiling as if she was in on the joke, she abruptly excused herself. Pushing past the throngs of people, she hoped no-one would stop her to talk. Finally, she made it to the bathroom and closed the door. Locking it, she heaved a huge sigh of relief.

Overheating, she splashed cold water on her face. Once again, staring at her reflection in the mirror, she wondered how many other normal-looking people were walking around on the earth as broken up inside as she was. She held on to the belief that there had to be a whole bunch, but they managed to hide their pain just as well as she did. Penny had respect for others like her, who bravely faced each day able to successfully conceal the physic limbs that were missing. She felt barely able to limp along at all.

She re-emerged into the party feeling numb. She laughed at the appropriate times and acted interested in everyone's stories. All along, she prayed that the day would soon end.

As Penny looked up at the ceiling in her bedroom and revisited the day, she knew in her heart that she could no longer live this life

of hers.

It was time for a change.

She pulled the towel off her forehead and wondered out loud,  
“How the hell do I go about doing that?”

## Chapter 3

Driving to work the next day, Penny was still thinking about how she could change her life. Many years ago, Dolores had talked her daughter into taking the nurse position at the same elementary school that Penny had attended as a young girl. "If you don't take this job, you'll live to regret it Penny." Her mother's famous words rang in her head. Words she had used often to immobilize Penny with fear. She had always succeeded.

"But Mom," Penny had protested when she finished nursing school. "I thought maybe I would look for work in the city. They really need nurses. "It could be..."

"Oh, please Penny, what are you a bleeding heart liberal now? Do you think a job like this comes along every day? Don't be crazy or foolish, just take the job at Fernfair."

She took the job, and lamentably was still there. The mantra that Dolores had drummed in her head was: don't be, don't go, don't do. Penny's brothers never had boundaries put before them and that pissed Penny off something awful.

She saw children she had cared for over the years grow up, get married, have kids, and buy vacation homes and she still standing in the same spot she had stood in since grade school.

Penny tried to stay optimistic, but Dolores always slapped her down swiftly. "Don't always look at the bright side Penny," she'd say. "Life is not bright, and it's certainly not cheery. You're setting yourself up for disappointment."

Deep into her thoughts, she didn't notice a red jeep cutting her off at the intersection. She swerved toward the curb just in time to avoid hitting the car in front.

"You big stupid idiot," Penny screamed out of her window. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I'm an idiot?" a burly man with dark hair bellowed back, "Stop sleep-walking behind the wheel, lady."

At yet another injustice in her life, her pent-up frustrations boiled over, and she lost control. "Me sleep walking? You're delusional," she screamed even louder. Almost half of her body was hanging out the window ready to pounce, "You're the one who almost caused a three car accident, so don't you dare blame me. Get some glasses mister."

"Another woman driver," the man said shaking his head.

"You're an asshole," Penny yelled. Out of the corner of her eye

she saw that people who were walking on the sidewalk had stopped to stare. She was too close to her school and didn't need to have any mothers see her like this. She fixed an awkward smile at the onlookers, pulled her body back in and drove off.

Driving the rest of the way to work, Penny felt shame washing over her. Panic took hold. Taking in big gulps of air, she realized she had begun to lose control. She could see herself in a few years, a mean and nasty old lady, all alone, buying canned soups at the grocery store in an old tattered sweater. She shuddered at the image.

She parked carefully, hit her fists on the steering wheel, and wiped tears out of her eyes with the tip of her sleeve. Putting her head in her hands she breathed deeply. Gain control... gain control...

She pictured Cousin Charlene in her beautiful silk pinstriped wrap dress and fancy pink shoes. She remembered watching Charlene put her head back and laugh with as much happiness as she could muster. If someone as shallow and mean as Cousin Charlene can have all the good that life has to offer, then of course, without a doubt, Penny could make it happen too.

She was startled back to reality to find a mother standing by her passenger window staring in at her. She opened the window and looked up at the woman, knowing she looked a fright.

Without introducing herself, the lady said in an officious manner, "Listen, you're the nurse right? Could you do me a favor and take this?" The woman shoved something through the half opened window. "My Johnny is still having accidents." She leaned in and whispered, "You know the type of accidents I'm talking about right? Anyway, here's four sets of sweatpants and underwear, you know, just in case." She looked at her watch, waved, and ran off.

Once again Penny was caught holding the bag.

## Chapter 4

Every morning, promptly at seven thirty, Penny waited for her neighbor Sarah in the front of her apartment building. Pulling at his leash, Penny's Beagle Winston darted back and forth as he tried in vain to dodge the wind.

She smiled down at Winston. "Who loves you little guy?"

Sarah Bentley trudged toward Penny. Sarah was a strange agent, and she always looked as if she had just tumbled out of bed. Each morning, her black and white mutt Brutus tried to force her, unsuccessfully, to quicken her pace. Penny would rather walk Winston alone, but since they both came out at the same time before work, she had long since made peace with the fact she was stuck with Sarah for the rest of her life.

Each day she mentally braced herself when she spotted Sarah. The woman was insanely obsessed with reality TV. She had to endure Sarah's never ending descriptions about what people on various shows did, or said, as if she were on intimate terms with all of them.

Standing before her, Sarah looked with wide eyes and exclaimed, "Okay, we gotta talk about this. Did you see what went on last night between Heather and Matt?"

"No," Penny replied slowly. "I have no idea who Heather and Matt are."

"What? How could you not know? Don't you watch TV at all? You know why she did it don't you? Heather slept with Matt so she could get an edge on the competition because, you know, all the other girls want him too. Every lady on that show wants to marry Matt, the competition is fierce."

She felt the sarcasm seep out. "I didn't know that, so thanks for filling me in." Penny looked down just in time to watch Brutus take a huge dump. She didn't think she could get through another day of her neighbor's ramblings. Perhaps this was one piece of her life she could change... if she had the nerve.

Strolling down the street next to her, Sarah was already out of breath. She had on her usual black pants, black boots, black coat, and black scarf—all covered in black and white dog hair.

"Only two more bachelorettes left," Sarah said between breaths. "That's it, Mindy and Becky. What do think of that? I could have sworn Mindy was going to get kicked off two weeks ago," she snapped her fingers, "and she's still going strong. The one booted

off last week was so much prettier and—”

“Can you do me a favor?” Penny asked with more of an edge to her voice then intended.

Sarah looked at her in surprise. “Depends on what it is.”

She lowered her voice. “Look Sarah, could you stop talking about TV shows? It’s just that, well, to tell you the truth, I don’t much care about those people. I only care about what I’m doing, which granted isn’t much, but still, I have no desire to hear about the trials and tribulations of people I don’t know and will never know. Let’s talk about something else, or at least, let’s shoot the breeze about people we do know.” She realized they didn’t have one person in common to talk about.

Looking at Penny with a hurt expression, Sarah said in a sharp tone, “Okay, so give me some people, or topics, why don’t you start the conversation for once.”

She thought for a moment, but knew she was stumped. She looked down at Winston and shrugged. “I don’t know, there’s got to be something.” She snapped her fingers. “I know, let’s talk about, let’s see,” she scratched her head. “Okay, what are your plans for the holidays?” She smiled brightly for she did find a good topic and had triumphed. “Where are you going for Thanksgiving?”

Sarah replied curtly, “We just finished with summer so I don’t know, and I don’t care. My mother lives far away and I don’t feel like driving to her house. Plus my old room doesn’t have a TV and most importantly, my parents won’t let me bring Brutus. Next subject.”

“What kind of music do you like?”

Sarah glanced down at her watch. “I can’t think offhand.” She clasped her hand to her forehead. “I almost forgot, I must go to work early today, pretty much every day this week as a matter of fact. Do you mind if we cut this short?”

“Not at all,” Penny replied truthfully.

“I’ll catch up with you later then. Have a great day. Come on Brutus.” Sarah turned abruptly, almost snapping Brutus’ poor neck as she dragged him along with her.

Winston whined softly as he watched his friend depart. Penny could swear Winston knew the visit with his buddy had been cut short and he sensed he would never see him again. “I’m sorry baby,” she whispered softly, “If Brutus doesn’t show up tomorrow we’ll find some new friends. I promise.”

After her walk, Penny found Bob waiting for her at the front foyer. “Missed me baby?” She leaned down to stroke him behind his left ear. It was then she spotted the huge pile of cat crap that was piled on her recently washed kitchen floor. She sighed again and straightened up. “When are you going to get this?” she pointed to the poop as she scolded Bob. “You’re supposed to do that in the

kitty litter box. You're not a dog you know, cats aren't supposed to have accidents."

Blinking slowly, Bob turned around. With his orange tail up in the air he walked into the bedroom. Penny knew this was Bob's revenge for not being brought along on the walk.

"You're spiteful," she yelled out crossly as she grabbed paper towels from the kitchen cabinet. "I'll clean up your cat crap, but shit," she said to no one in particular. "My life seems to be full of it lately."

Penny cleaned up the mess. She fed Winston. Then, suddenly, she felt exhausted. She plopped down heavily onto the couch. It was Tuesday morning and she had the day off for superintendent's day.

Taking in the pokey apartment as if with new eyes, she wished more sun filtered in there.

The doorbell rang, startling Penny out of her misery. Jumping up, she called, "Who is it?"

"You know who it is."

Running to the door, she flung it open. Standing there was Dolores' sister Bess. "Aunt Bess," Penny cried. "I thought you were still in Florida."

Stepping inside, Aunt Bess shook her head sadly. "I had to come in for yet another funeral. Another one kicked the bucket. No-one you know, but they're dropping like flies now."

"I'm sorry." She wrapped her arms around her beloved aunt. "How did you know I was home?"

Looking at Penny with a smirk, Aunt Bess said, "I was a teacher once remember? I know all the holidays."

She smiled as she watched her aunt drop into her couch. She was so delighted to see her.

"It smells like cat shit in here."

Laughing, Penny asked, "Tea?"

"Yup, so what's been shaking with you? I hear you're giving your Mom a hard time. Good for you. I was wondering when you would rebel. You're only about 25 years too late, but what the hell."

Whirling around midway to the kitchen, Penny looked at Aunt Bess in astonishment. "Are you sticking up for me?"

"I've always stuck up for you since the day you were born."

She walked back and sat down opposite her. "Something weird is happening to me."

"Weird can be good, go on."

Leaning her elbows on her thighs, Penny put her chin in her hands. "I don't want to be on the sidelines watching everyone else have a life." Tears formed in her eyes. "I want friends, Aunt Bess. I want to fall in love, I want a backyard to put mulch in, and I want a job that makes me feel good about myself."

"So, what's stopping you?" She waved her hands in the air. "Get

up off your ass and do something about it.”

“It’s not that easy. I even tried to have a holiday get-together last year. I’m sure my mother filled you in.”

Penny remembered every detail of that humiliating event. She had invited three neighbors over for a holiday cocktail party and they had all turned her down in quick succession.

“You need to try harder to make friends,” an exasperated Dolores had told her. “I feel like you’re still four. For God’s sake, doesn’t anything change? I had to push you toward the kids in the playground when you were little. Stop being so shy. That’s why people don’t gravitate to you.”

As she relayed this exchange to her aunt, Penny still felt the awful and familiar sting of her mother’s words. They always felt the same; like a hundred angry bees stinging her all at once.

At the time, Penny had inwardly winced. She’d retorted that she did have friends, two to be exact. Dolores had gleefully pointed out in painstaking detail how friendless she really was.

“You haven’t seen these girls for years, Christmas cards don’t count,” Dolores had scoffed. “So scratch them off your buddy list.” Dolores had looked at Penny with pity in her eyes and announced that childhood friends move on, and so the hell should you.

After sharing this last bit of the exchange with Aunt Bess, Penny heaved a sigh of despair. “You see what I have to contend with?”

Sitting back, Aunt Bess folded her hands in her lap. “When was the last time you had sex?”

“What?” Penny asked, leaping to her feet.

“You heard me, when was it?”

She glared at the floor. “It’s been so long, I can’t even remember.”

“Well hell, that’s part of your problem, get out there and strut your stuff.” She pointed to Penny’s chest. “Show your boobs for God’s sake. You have nice boobs and you always have them stored away under those stupid high shirts you wear.”

“I can’t believe this.” Her eyes were wide in astonishment.

“Oh come on Penny, you have to live life to have a life. Stop whining and move forward. You’re the one who chooses to deal with your Mother. No-one’s forcing you.”

She shook her head slowly. “You don’t understand.” She paused as a shadow crossed her face. “Sometimes I don’t even know if my Mother loves me.”

“At this stage of your life who cares? I don’t even think Dolores knows if she loves herself, but that’s not your problem, it’s hers.” She jabbed a finger in Penny’s direction. “Don’t give her any more of your air space. It’s time to move along.”

As Penny’s brain registered Aunt Bess’ wisdom, all she could do was stand there and blink.

“So where’s my tea?”

## Chapter 5

She fell asleep early that evening and woke up depressed. Clambering laboriously out of bed, she hobbled into the bathroom and turned on the shower. I feel like shit, she thought as she stepped gingerly into the cold spray of water.

She tried to shake away the cobwebs still sticking to her brain. The water splashed off her face as she recounted all the things her Aunt had said to her the night before. She thought about what it was she really wanted to do. The answer remained annoyingly elusive.

After the quick, cold shower, she got ready for work. With a deep sigh, she pulled her hair back with a barrette and felt ready to face the day.

Just one problem though: the day wasn't ready to face her. Just as she got into her car, huge raindrops started to spatter against the windshield. In the damp grey haze, the traffic was soon bumper to bumper.

Arriving at work late, a loud siren jarred her as if someone was smashing cymbals an inch from her ear. Mr Adams, the dour-faced principal, was standing by the main doors holding a big black umbrella. He hollered, "Fire drill, everyone out."

Oh great, Penny thought, some jerk in the office decided to hold a fire drill in a rainstorm, just brilliant.

Standing in the pouring rain with no umbrella, as she waited for the front doors to open, a third grader, Joseph Simms sidled up next to her.

"Miss Marins, I don't feel so well."

Engrossed in watching for the doors to open, she barely paid any attention to him. "What?" she asked, struggling to pull her sopping wet hair back into the barrette.

"I said, I don't feel well, my stomach hurts."

Penny realized she needed to lean down to soothe Joseph the moment Joseph realized he needed to lean down and puke all over her wet black pumps.

It was an odd moment of calm. She looked down in abstract fascination as the rainwater carved little channels through the vomit on her shoes. The realization dawned on her that it was finally time to look for a new job. Looking over at Mr Adams, she observed him yawning loudly. He scratched his head. One of the first grade teachers walked by, barely acknowledging her presence.

The decision to look for employment came to Penny as clear as a lake on a crisp spring day.

Yes, I have to leave here, she told herself firmly. There is no reason to stay anymore. It's time to get a move on.

## Chapter 6

Penny arrived home after work feeling restless and lonely. Against her better judgment she decided to visit her parents.

The scent of fall was in the air and Penny could not help thinking that the holiday season was just around the corner. Christmas reminded her of all the things she didn't have in her life. When she saw the sappy commercials with the dewy eyed children dressed in their holiday splendor, she felt a pang of emptiness. She had no-one to dress up and make a fuss over.

With that dismal thought she leashed up Winston, and stepped back outside. Before she left the apartment she looked down at Winston and said, "I could put you two in holiday outfits." That thought made her all the more depressed.

"Come on, let's go visit grandma." Scooping up the little pooch, she looked down at Bob and said, "Bob, we'll have our special time later, you know that. If you make in the house tonight, I will put you in a crate from here on end."

She arrived at her mother's house. At first it seemed that no-one was home; then she noticed her brother Louis' Mercedes parked in the driveway. Usually, Penny's parents had every light on throughout the whole downstairs of the house. They were obsessed with lights, to the point where someone could easily land a small plane in the driveway. But on this night only the kitchen and front porch lights were lit.

The door flew open, startling her. There stood her mother.

"I have a goddamn partial blackout can you believe?" Dolores announced, distinctly agitated as she impatiently motioned Penny to come in. "I hate when this stuff happens. I called Con Ed and they told me they couldn't take care of this for hours. What kind of business are they running anyway?"

"Can't think of a worse family for this to happen to. You usually have the house lit up like a Christmas tree." She walked inside.

"Don't be such a smart ass," Dolores retorted. "I've never been robbed, not even once since we've lived here and all the lights are the reason. Even your father thinks so."

Penny didn't want to tell her mother that Ron agreed with everything she said just to have peace in his life. Instead she went with: "Whatever you say." She was in no mood to get into a debate with her mother.

Dolores was small and wiry with shoulder length chestnut brown