

## Like Mother Used To Make

There were not enough wine glasses for a proper dinner party. Three stem-less goblets (originally four, but one had an incident with a pot in the sink), plus two errant champagne flutes, party favors, that were tackily printed with the name of a Swiss watch company and never used.

Aeriel fretted in front of the kitchen cabinet. The jelly jars would have to do.

Short and octagonal with Bonne Maman in script across the side, the little glasses were like a slightly fancier version of a mason jar, and quite functional as wine glasses. If only they had six of them. Aeriel made a mental note to start eating more jelly.

She brought the three real glasses and three jelly jars to the coffeetable where Lauren was straightening the cheese plate and bowls of mixed nuts.

“What time is it?” her roommate asked.

Aeriel glanced at her thin gold watch. “Almost seven. They’ll be here soonish.”

“Is everything set in the kitchen?”

“Yep.” The kale salad was massaged and tossed, the quinoa patties ready to pan-fry, mango chutney chilling in the fridge (admittedly store-bought). They even shelled out for those nice, thick paper napkins. “Should we take the wine out of the fridge?” Aeriel asked.

“Nah, it’ll get warm. Let’s just leave it in the fridge, we can fill everyone’s glasses.”

“Alright.” Aeriel nodded. “Man, it looks like adulthood in here! I’m gonna have a glass to toast. You want?”

“I’ll wait until everyone’s here.” Lauren replied.

Aeriel took a jelly jar and padded over to the kitchen. The fancy boxed rosé—not white zinfandel and most assuredly better than Franzia, the man at the wine store had promised—should be chilled by now. She popped the nozzle out and twisted, a crystalline pink stream flowing into the little jar. She filled it four fingers full and took a sip. Dry and crisp, only the slightest hint of sweet. Good. Very good. Definitely not like Franzia. Aeriel loved the slightly acidic way that first sip of wine settled in the stomach. She topped off her glass and padded back to the bedroom to finish getting ready.

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They never had much money, growing up. Aerial never knew that her new clothes came from the discount store. Hand-me-downs from family friends were treated like gifts. Aerial's mom, Charlene, spent Sunday morning clipping coupons. Aerial helped. It was like a craft project.

Charlene was a big proponent of recycling. She rinsed and scrubbed every metal or glass jar they used and took them to the curb in a big blue bin from the city every Thursday. A lot of them she kept—tupperwares cost money, she always said. The nails in the garage were in old coffee cans. A big former mayonnaise jar held errant buttons—Aerial loved to dump them all out on the carpet and sort them by color, thinking about whose piece of clothing they might have belonged to.

Aerial's designated drinking glasses were jelly jars with endangered animals printed on them—Welches had partnered with the World Wildlife Foundation for a limited-time-only collection of jars painted with pandas, elephants, giraffes, orangutans, and more. They didn't collect them all, as Aerial had begged, but Charlene did manage to score quite a few. When the jelly ran out, Charlene cleaned them thoroughly and placed them on their own shelf in the cabinets, where little Aerial could reach with the stepstool. Juice seemed so much more fun to drink when there was a panda on the glass.

Sometimes Charlene would use them, too. Aerial didn't mind. It was cool that Mom liked her glasses. On the weekends, Aerial would get a glass for both of them when they ate lunch. Charlene had her own special white grape juice, from the grown-ups juice box, which Aerial wasn't allowed to drink. She wished her juice came in such big boxes with a cool spout.

In fact, Charlene seemed to like the novelty glasses more than Aerial did. When Aerial got older and was allowed to sit in the front seat of the car, she noticed Charlene drove with her juice. There was always a jelly jar in the cupholder when she picked Aerial up from school.

In her high school years, Aerial would come home from a dinner or from hanging out with friends to find Charlene asleep in front of the TV, an empty jelly jar on the floor. She always woke her mother up gently. Charlene would ask her if she was hungry, maybe make her a sandwich, and then kiss her goodnight, fill the jelly jar, and go to bed.

Aerial's senior year of high school, Charlene crashed their car. Right in their neighborhood, too. Wasn't paying attention and rolled through a stop sign. A man T-boned their old blue Honda Civic. Aerial was about to go see a movie with her

boyfriend when she got the phone call. Charlene was crying so hard. Aerial's boyfriend drove them there—Aerial didn't have her own car.

The Civic was totaled. Charlene was still crying. She couldn't speak very clearly. Aerial spoke to the police officers and the tow truck company for her. The insurance would cover it. They had to clean the car of all possessions as it went to the shop for repairs. Aerial put the CDs and glove compartment manuals in her backpack. There was an empty jelly jar in the front seat. Aerial wanted to leave it behind, but she was afraid it would get Charlene in trouble. No jelly smelled like Pinot Grigio.

Charlene and Aerial never discussed it. Problems like that you just didn't talk about with your children. But at Thanksgiving that year, Aerial overheard Aunt Cindy talking to Charlene in the kitchen at Grandpa Joe's house. Cindy said *Don't you think you've had enough* and Charlene snapped *I'm fine thank you I know my limits* and Cindy said *Do you?* Aerial heard liquid splash into a glass and Charlene say *Don't you judge me* and Cindy said *Not judging just concerned, darling, this is what some people call a problem. Well not us people* Charlene said.

On the night before Aerial left for college, Charlene cooked her favorite dinner—catfish and cornbread with coleslaw, and strawberry ice cream for dessert. Charlene said *You can have a glass of wine, sweetie, if you'd like.* Aerial replied *I don't like Pinot Grigio. How do you know?* Charlene asked. Aerial said *I just don't.*

Whenever Aerial visited her mother during the holidays, she saw the jelly jars around the house. By this time, though, she really didn't find them that cute anymore.

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Aerial slipped into her heels and took a sip of her rosé. She hurried around the apartment, picking last minute lint off the couch and straightening the already straight bookshelf. The girls would be here any minute. Another sip, then lipstick and brush teeth. *Oops*, she thought, realizing her glass was empty. *That went quickly.*

The apartment bell rang.

"Can you get that?" Lauren called.

Aerial buzzed in whoever it was, and snuck to the fridge to refill her jelly jar. She let the wine run, the color deepening from blush to almost cranberry as it filled. Lauren wouldn't even know she'd already finished a glass. She took a deep drink, feeling the tingle already.

"Oh, the jelly jars look cute!" Lauren said, walking into the kitchen. "Good thinking."

"I've seen it done before." Aeriell said, and took another sip.