

## **“Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush – Revisited by Christi Gervasi**

Here we sit, my wife and I, in the same restaurant where we have celebrated most special occasions in our nearly twenty-year marriage. I am proud that I can afford to bring her here for these celebratory dinners. I still find her quite pretty, but I worry that she is hiding behind that “big hat” that she wears. I doubt that people are taking much notice of us, and I’m glad as I am almost certain she has some “surprise” in store for me.

Oh no! Here comes the headwaiter carrying a “small but glossy birthday cake, with one pink candle burning in the center.” As he places the cake before me and the orchestra plays, “Happy Birthday to [Me],” I see the joy in my wife’s eyes. I’ll never let her know that I suspected something – that would ruin it for her. I wish the rest of the restaurant’s patrons would stop clapping; I feel myself turning red with embarrassment – such a terrible thing that I can’t control this blushing. She always says the flush makes me look angry. I do feel the need to remain dignified as I quietly thank her for her thoughtfulness.

I wonder why that woman at the next table is staring at me. She almost looks as if she is scolding me for some reason. Now that we are no longer the center of attention, I must let my wife know how special this was for me... Oh, please don’t cry, dear. I know you love me. Thank you for your thoughtfulness. How I love your tender heart.

## **“The Birthday Party” retold by Nicky Moore**

I came upon the realization quite suddenly, quite sadly, quite profoundly. It was a little narrow restaurant where the tables are all too close together and the man in the hat and the mustache noticed us, and smiled. I was wearing the hat I bought for today, and I dipped my head so you wouldn't notice me meet his eyes. You would never like that.

The realization that you'd never like surprise came when the waiter placed the cake the table and winked at me. You caught the second-long glance and the “knowing” smile, the secret we shared and you disapproved. The knowing had meant he and I had spoken in secret, had planned. You always tell me this is the worst thing a woman could do. The name you call me hurts much worse than the first time, and it lingers and it stings. The little mustached man frowns, looks down and tries to avoid looking at me. But I am too ashamed of myself to hide my tears behind the gay big brim of my hat.

*\*Apologies to Katharine Brush for altering her story.*

“The Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush  
Retold from the Point of View of the Cake

The amber lights bounce off my glossy magenta fondant as the waiter carries me out. More and more eyes begin to stare at me as the waiter's calm footsteps walk across the room. Today, I am the star, all the hours in the scorching oven, the days spent in the deafening silence of the display case, all leading up to my show. I feel uneasy each step the waiter takes, a creeping anxiety takes hold of me. Finally, the waiter sets me down in a careful, controlled manner, he lights the candle. I face a round, well groomed man who looks at me with a puzzled expression, he glances at his wife, she wears a large big brimmed hat that casts a shadow over me. She seems to be excited, with a nervous smile cracking as a boom of applause begins to break out, I feel butterflies moving around my frosting as the orchestra plays their piece.

The man blankly looks down at me in disbelief, his fists clenched and his face red as a tomato. He keeps quiet as the music dies down and the applause scatters. He now faces his wife, whose smile has now faded. Her eyes fall upon me. The man mumbles under his breath: “You know I hate cake Margaret”. I look at him in disbelief. Me? Hated? What kind of man is like that? He was like that. I look back at the woman as her eyes begin to mist, she silently cries as her tears drip onto my beautiful fondant and extinguishes my candle.

My show is ruined.

## **For the World War Two Dead:**

by Tom Grayson Colonnese

I never should have agreed, I know that now, but I wanted to make Kay happy and I know I have to put the war behind me and learn again to live in this world. So I agreed to this “little occasion,” as she put it. We would celebrate my birthday together for the first time in four years. We would go to a small, quiet restaurant near our apartment on 38th Street. I had agreed, but as we sat there together - me with my frozen rictus - I wondered if I was happy, and for what? Happy to be alive? Happy to have my limbs, my head, my life? “I should be happy,” I thought. But no feeling of joy filled me; no word of conversation entered my head and the beautiful woman across from me, my wife, seemed a stranger. I thought, “How can I possibly explain?” How can I explain that last year, on my birthday, I was in the Hurtgen Forest and the German artillery tore us apart before we could dig in. How can I explain how the tree bursts turned living men into limbless, headless lumps of dead flesh.

In the midst of this thinking on my part, the headwaiter plopped down a damn cupcake in front of me, a cake with a pathetic pink candle on it. And the little violin and piano combo launched into “Happy Birthday to you,” happy damn birthday to you. And, Kay, I know you wanted me to be happy and you were smiling at me and the people at the restaurant were clapping for me, but I wasn’t happy and I turned to you and said, “Christ, Kay. Jesus Christ.” And your smile evaporated and tears welled up in your eyes and I had to look down. And I wished ... I just wished.

And when I finally did look up, a little woman was glaring angrily and judgmentally at me from her nearby banquette, and I thought to myself, “Come on now, don’t be like that. Please don’t be like that.” But they are like that, aren’t they, every damn one of them who never saw a forest explode. And my wife is still crying: quietly and heartbrokenly and hopelessly.

A Reflection on “Birthday Party” by Katharine Brush