
Lost and Found

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LOST: Bubble eye

Abraham only lived with me in my dorm room for two weeks before he started swimming upside down. He was my pet goldfish, so named after the fish that Arnold Jackson had on the TV show "Diff'rent Strokes." Abraham was an awkward black fish with shiny silver scales on his belly, and oversized pea-shaped eyes placed conspicuously on top of his head. His aquarium was made to look like a candy apple red bubble gum machine, and instead of the usual little flakes of gravel that cover the bottom of fish tanks, Abraham had possession of twenty or thirty small, round rainbow colored plastic beads. They were probably toxic, but at least they looked like gumballs. Immediately after I discovered Abraham's penchant for swimming upside down, I realized that it wasn't the sign of a healthy fish. I thought that maybe if I changed his water, he would regain his sense of gravity. But when I scooped him out of the water, he flipped out of the bright green mesh net and bounced onto the sink with a sickening slappy noise. When he hit the white ceramic, the pressure of the counter against his diseased gills caused his left eye to fall out. It just blew out of his eye socket, completely intact, like a misfired pellet from a B.B. gun.

FOUND: The Peanut Song

As I scuffed my untied royal blue Nike along the white chalk line that separated the forbidden goalie box from the rest of the playing field, I spotted Heather peering out from the goal's netting. Even though she was a girl, the boys had reluctantly decided to let her play the goalie position because she was the tallest kid in school. Turning to me, she began to belt out these words to the tune of "Clementine":

Found a peanut, found a peanut,
Found a peanut last night.
Last night I found a peanut,
Found a peanut last night."

When she was finished, we both shook with laughter, and hardly paid any attention when Arron Vaugn (who was earlier spotted in a controversial playground make-out session near the sandpit tire swing with Lorrie Lennon) slammed the ball into the weather-worn netting behind the goal.

LOST: Lopped off at the knuckle

I could hear the girl who lived across the hall from me in Schwitzer Hall giggling and screeching, toying with her boyfriend by trying to slam her bedroom door in his face before he could get inside. She must have accidentally slipped her finger into the crack near the hinge, because when her boyfriend finally wrenched the door open, she wasn't laughing anymore. The heavy wooden door snapped effortlessly open, and sheared off the top third of her pinkie with it. It came off cleanly, right at the knuckle.

FOUND: Hard bone against soft wheat

Inching down the rickety wooden steps that led into my great-grandmother's basement, I felt my way along the cool cement walls until I reached the metal door of the storm cellar. Darting inside, I blindly felt around in the blackness above me for the string that would turn on the overhead light bulb. Grasping it with my thumb and forefinger, I clicked on the soft yellow light. Instantly, my eyes fell on a dusty beige plastic object lying atop the middle shelf. It was a prosthetic arm, complete with a rusted metal hook and a rod used for grasping. I ran upstairs, forgetting to bring up the jar of strawberry preserves that I had been sent to retrieve. Laughing at my wide-eyes and gasping breaths, my great-grandmother rested her doughy hand on my shoulder and explained that it had belonged to my great-grandfather who had lost his upper arm in an accident with one of the farm's threshing machines.

LOST: Amidst the angels

When we were freshmen, my friend Mike and I were borderline binge drinkers, hooked on Southern Comfort. One night, as he was walking me home from an evening filled with bitter "So-Co" and cokes, we collapsed on the grass in front of Ross Hall. Laughing, we ran our bare arms in the dew-moist grass, and moved our legs in crisp scissor motions, as if we were makingsnow angels. They were grass angels. Green grass

angels. The next morning, Mike told me that he lost his watch back on the lawn where we had been flailing around.

FOUND: The jig is up

The gentle creaking of the wooden staircase outside my bedroom warned me that my father was on his way upstairs to kiss me goodnight. Dreading the moment that he would crouch on the edge of the bed and singe my forehead with the heat of his lips, I entered into my nightly ritual of avoidance. With lightening quickness, I scooped the books off of my bed, scrambled to flick off the lamp, and wound my frilly lavender comforter around my head. Despite the pounding of my heart, I made an effort to make my breathing appear deep and even. My father swung open the door to my bedroom and stood rigidly in the darkness that swam around the doorway staring at me until I could feel his eyes pressing into my back.

"I know you're not asleep," he whispered calmly. "I always know."

FOUND: There's coal in them thar hills

The floor of the woods was canvassed with gray-green mosses that sprouted up silken green tendrils towards the bleak midwestern sky. The creek (or, "crick", as my grandmother called it) stretched endlessly past the trees, and wandered down the muddy slopes with nowhere in particular to go. Above the creek was a twisted gravel road that connected the nearby highway with a cornfield of dried parchment leaves that touched the outskirts of the trees. I walked down this road almost every day. There was always something new to see: the giant brown slug-like mushroom that was attached to the trunk of my favorite silver oak tree (we affectionately referred to it as "The Humongus Fungus"), the family of red-eyed salamanders that lived inside the drainage pipe near the creek, more cat-o-nine tails than the eye could see. Once, instead of looking around me, I looked down at my feet. Interspersed with the chalking chunks of gravel were jagged pieces of black coal, almost the size of my thumbnail. After I found that first piece of coal, it became a habit of mine to kick around the dusty gravel, trying to overturn pieces of coal from their hiding places.

LOST: Runaway

The entire inside cavity of my body felt hollow, like a Halloween pumpkin, scraped raw and made ready for carving. I knew something was about to happen. I could see it in the deep and angry lines that furrowed my father's forehead.

"You forgot to fasten the dog's chain this morning," he said. "Muffin's probably gone for good this time."

I bit my lip and tasted blood.

FOUND: A budgie suicide

My brother's friend Doug Strickwerda gave us his pet parakeet when he moved away to Wisconsin. The bird was a sickly yellow-green color, and always squawked and tried to peck me whenever I attempted to get close to it. His name was Cisco. We kept him in a metal cage on a windowsill in the back room of the house, because nobody really wanted to be around him. I was the one who found Cisco when he died. It was my turn to change the newspapers at the bottom of his cage, so I crept quietly up to the windowsill with a ragged issue of *The Vidsdette Messenger* in my hand. I even held my breath so that the bird wouldn't wake up and try to peck the flesh off the bones in my hand. I didn't have anything to worry about, though. Cisco had hung himself by flying through the rope that connected his slice of dull ivory cuttlebone to the cage.

LOST: Hand me downs

After polishing off my second piece of marble fudge cake on my sixteenth birthday, my mother pulled me aside with tears welling up in her soft brown eyes. Gently fingering the hem of her silky blouse, she shyly handed me a small purple velvet box. I snapped it open to reveal a gold ring with a rectangular black stone that had a tornado embossed on it. "It's my high school class ring," my mother explained proudly. "I've waited a long time to give this to you." The ring fit loosely around my right index finger. I wore it proudly until I lost it the next week while playing Field Hockey in my seventh period gym class.

FOUND: Basement indiscretions

The colors of the painting were the bright hues of summer: fireblaze orange, lemon yellow, azure blue, and the vibrant green of fieldgrass. They stood out in the uncharacteristically drab basement like unexpected wildflowers creeping out of

cracks in patches of caked, parched earth. Tugging on my mother's manicured hand, I pulled her down the smooth, dark steps to the storage room. My bare feet slapped noisily against the moist floor as I drug her over to the dusty corner of the basement where the painting had lain.

"See, mom? Here it is. I told you there was good stuff down here." My mother narrowed her eyes and examined the painting. The yellows, blues, oranges, and greens were brushed on in small fierce strokes, representing different colored leaves on an autumn tree. She raised her arm and gently touched the frame of the painting.

"Your uncle Billy painted this when he was about your age. That was the year before he died." With that, she abruptly dropped the painting, manipulating it so that the bright canvas faced the patchy gray wall. "I don't think you should show that to your grandmother."

LOST: An absentee father

Every summer when I was young, my family would take a trip across the country to visit relatives in Iowa. That year, my father didn't go with us because he said he was too busy with work at the office. He was a chiropractor. He was always busy. After the sweaty, sticky, uneasy ten hour drive to Storm Lake, Iowa, my brother and I tried to relax by swinging back and forth on my Aunt Teresa's splintery front porch swing. We drug our feet and drank grape Kool-Aid from A&W Root Beer mugs, while my mother answered a phone call from my father. He told her that he was sorry, but he didn't love her anymore and that by the time we drove back from Iowa, he'd be moved out. We cut our two week vacation a little bit short that year.

FOUND: A peanut

It took six hours for the girl who lived across from me in the freshman dorm to get the stump where the top third of her pinkie used to be sewn shut. Once she finally made it back to the dorm, her roommate glanced in the corner of their room and saw the severed pinkie lying discarded in the center of a pile of dustbunnies near the front door. Later, she told me that it looked a little bit like a circus peanut.

FOUND: The Muffin Man

Looking down at the smeary wooden table between us, my mother began to speak softly while tracing the pattern of the wood grain with her index finger.

"I don't know if I should be telling you this, but I think you need to know the truth," she sighed. "When your father told you that Muffin ran away... Well, that isn't quite the way it happened. He went to the pound, honey. Dad drove him there himself."

LOST: The games people play

My great-grandmother Miser always wanted to play Chinese Checkers with me. But try as I might, I never could stomach watching her play the game. It took so much of her concentration to decide which of the marbles to scoot across the board, that her expression would twist into a sort of doughy grimace. Her hands were knotted with age, and it took a great deal of effort for her to pick up the slick marbles. As she grasped the tiny brightly-colored spheres between her thumb and forefinger, her hand would shake with the force of her concentrated effort. And she was never able to lower the marble into its slot on the board. She always dropped it, causing it to make a hollow ping as it landed in its metal compartment. One evening before she had a chance to mention the upcoming game, I snuck into my great-grandmother's closet and grabbed the Chinese Checker board. Looking over my shoulder to make sure that no one was watching, I carefully slid the box under a floral print sofa in a forgotten back room. Later, when my great-grandmother started to rummage around in the closet for the game, she confusedly turned to me and apologized, not understanding how she could have possibly lost her checker set.

LOST: The taste of home

My brother and I stood motionless, frozen in time as the jumbo family economy-size jar of Prego spaghetti sauce rolled slowly off the precipice at the edge of our beige mini-van's open hatchback. It fell to the ground with the shattering of glass and a sickeningly wet "thwack." My mother, who had witnessed the whole scene, threw the bag of groceries that she had been carrying onto the lawn.

"Why weren't you paying attention? We don't have the money to throw away food like that! Who do you think

pays for all this? Your father? No. I do. I do!"

Her eyes, glassy with thick tears of frustration, snapped closed. Without another word, she regained her composure and walked straight into the house. My brother and I were struck paralyzed. The heavy scent of garlic and fresh peppers filled the air. Unable to move, I looked down at my new white tennis shoes and noticed a tiny stain of tomato sauce near the right big toe.