

LOST AND FOUND

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Water ran down his back, down his legs, pooling on the floor beneath his shoes as Phillip struggled with whether it would be better to shake his umbrella out or just toss it on the floor. The day had been a failure, and he was beginning to feel like his life had been one as well.

He punched the button on his answering machine, dreading what the flashing number one would mean.

“Phil, it’s Steven. I need you to come in an hour early tomorrow. It’s this damn Gunderson sale. We need to circle the wagons and figure out how we’re going to handle it before they get here at ten. See you then.”

Phillip dropped his umbrella, the decision now an easy one as he no longer cared, and groaned. He sent his wet shoes sailing into the corner and trudged into the kitchen, his wet socks leaving a glistening trail on the linoleum.

He had only been in the apartment for a month. He hated it, but it was all he could afford on his salary. Commissions were few and far between with idiots like Steven getting in the way. He pulled a beer from the refrigerator and drained half of it in one swig.

“The Gunderson sale,” he spat to the room. “I’ve only been working on them for a month, but now Steven will swoop in and take half the commission, the asshole!”

Every day working at that place was an exercise in futility. Each time he thought he was going to come out on top, everything crumbled. Now he was alone, in a strange city, with no girlfriend, no money, and a job that drained the life out of him.

He chugged the rest of the beer and stripped off in the kitchen, leaving his wet clothes lying wherever they fell. He walked into the living room and stared at his naked form reflected off of the balcony windows.

“Useless,” he muttered as he tried to suck in his gut and realized it was futile. “Out of shape, half bald, and totally useless.”

He fell back into the chair and closed his eyes, wishing the day away and dreading the one that would come. He felt the mild buzz from the beer clouding his thoughts and realized that he hadn’t eaten dinner yet. Then he realized he didn’t care as he fell into sleep.

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He was walking briskly, afraid he would miss the show. The tickets had been hard to come by, and there was no chance in hell he was going to miss a second of it.

The people in the street jostled him as he hurried past. He couldn’t make out their faces, but he knew they must have them. People had to have faces. He could see that they had feet, and the collective slapping of shoes on the sidewalk sounded like sporadic applause. Phillip wondered briefly what he had done to deserve praise, then remembered the show.

The theater was enormous, and he saw it from blocks away. The foot traffic he was immersed in moved smoothly toward it, with some drifting away from the sidewalk to walk on the beach, or climb the mountain. Those who stayed with him fell into step, and he found himself most comfortable when his feet matched the rhythm.

He didn’t remember giving the ticket to anyone, but he must have. He was in the lobby, and each person who walked past bumped the bag he was carrying. He was protective of his bag. It had all of his things in it.

There was no time for a drink, and he had no money for popcorn or candy floss. He clutched his bag in front of him and joined the line, filing into the main theater. The screen was

two stories tall and as the lights dimmed it suddenly glowed with a brightness that hurt his eyes. He sat down in the closest seat and set his bag down in the seat next to him.

The show began, and Phillip stopped rubbing his eyes and stared, enthralled.

The show was over. He didn't remember what had happened, but he knew he enjoyed it. Everyone did. As a group the other people in the theater, their faces indistinct, rose and filed out. Phillip rose to join them and reached down to pick up his bag.

Panic overwhelmed him. The seat next to him sat empty, his possessions, his everything, gone. He raced up the aisle, shoving past laughing patrons in irritation as he sought out the telltale flashlights of the ushers.

"Please, you have to help me," he cried, grabbing the lapels of the teenage boy with the glowing beacon. The boy's face was there, but it failed to change expression.

"What can I do for you, Sir?" he asked, his lips not moving. He waved the flashlight back and forth to guide the flow of people.

"My bag! I've lost my bag! Please help me!" begged Phillip.

"Lost and found," said the boy simply. His waving light floated down the hallway, beckoning.

Phillip raced after it, losing sight of everything but the light. It flitted up and down, back and forth, left and right. He tried and failed to grab ahold of it, to force it to show him where to go. As it picked up speed he ran and felt his heart pounding in his chest.

"Ladies, Gentlemen, and Other, the theater will be closing in five minutes. Please collect your things and exit the building before it collapses," said a calm voice over the intercom. The panic had never left him, but now it intensified. The light seemed to be teasing him, leading him on a pointless journey. He screamed at it and it stopped.

Its glow illuminated a plaque on a doorway which read, "Found and Lost and Found." Phillip stared at the words, unclear as to whether they were correct. He noticed the hallway getting shorter and quickly slipped into the room.

"Can I help you, Sir?" asked a girl. She wore the same uniform as the usher and spoke through an equally paralyzed face.

"My bag. I've lost my bag," complained Phillip.

"We have some bags here," she said. She gestured to a shelf with two bags sitting askew.

"Neither of those is mine," he said.

"The theater is closing, Sir," she responded. "Do you want a bag or not?"

Phillip felt the sweat run down his back. "But neither of those is mine!" he yelled.

The girl shrugged.

Phillip noticed the ceiling was slowly creeping downward.

"Do you want a bag, Sir?" she asked.

"But..."

As the ceiling began a suddenly rapid descent Phillip grabbed one of the bags and ran.

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Pippa woke with a start, staring around the room in confusion as the fog of dreams slowly crept in and took away any memory of where she had been.

"Ah, somebody's finally awake," teased Josh from the kitchen.

"Sorry, I must have drifted off," she said. "I had the strangest dream."

Josh walked over and put Andrew in her arms. She smiled down at the sleeping infant, loving the way his little lips moved while he slept like he was already trying to whistle.

“Well, this little boy must be having a doozy of a dream, because he’s been out cold,” laughed Josh.

Pippa stared down at the baby and her heart felt full. The awful feeling she had felt on waking faded away as the Andrew’s eyes slowly crept open.

“Don’t forget, the Gundersons are coming to dinner,” said Josh from the kitchen. She could hear the wonderful sounds of his chef skills at work.

She poked Andrew in his little nose and sighed.