

FOUND

ALEXANDRA TODAK

On the bottom floor of her apartment, on the door one reaches when walking in, there was a sign that starts off by saying, "I have."

Jaclyn set her bike down, leaned it up against the wall. I have what? Everyone was always losing something: dogs, dungarees left behind at the washing machine, even doves. She recalled one such sign: this dove will die without his mate! How sad. Jaclyn had looked for the dove, had stalked Brooklyn's pigeons for a week. After a week or two she figured the dove dead. And if he died without his mate, wouldn't the mate die too? Two dead doves, what a sad thought. One sad owner, two dead doves, in two different sized shoeboxes. Buried somewhere apart, smelling like stiff leather.

Jaclyn had thought long and hard about the doves. If one got out, why didn't the other? Were they in a fight? Did the dove, now dead, sit by the window and regret that she'd pecked underneath her mate's tail feathers because he'd eaten the last bit of seed? She was so hungry, but now she's dead. They both are. Two dead doves in two shoeboxes. Four shoes on two strangers' feet.

"I have," Jaclyn read from the sign, "one Fizzies, three Hershey's bars, two Good & Plenty, three Red Vines, one Black Licorice Lace. Come to apartment 234 if you are interested. Hurry, they are going fast. 15 cents each."

Jaclyn felt in her pockets, strained to hear a jingle. She was dry. If she wanted any of these candies, which the sign clearly said were

going fast, she would have to run up to her apartment and grab the change. She looked at her bike propped up against the wall; carrying it up the flight of stairs would slow her down. So she lunged, took the stairs two at a time, and clambered into her apartment.

A quick hello to Conor who was dozing on the couch and Mom who was slicing salami. "What're you doing?" one of them asked. Can't talk now!

She went to her room and shook loose the jar of change she hid under her bed and in a boot two sizes too small. She saw three nickels and grabbed them, then slid the rest of the loose change back under her bed with an open palm. She would put it back in the jar, then the jar back in the boot, later.

She knocked at the apartment seconds after she went down the stairs, took a left, which was wrong, and then went back and took a right. After no one had answered, she knocked at the door a second time.

The woman who finally opened the door looked like she was still wearing her pajamas. "I'm here for the—" Jaclyn started, but the woman had already begun to laugh.

"Mikey, come here!" the woman said. "Come here! This girl is here for the candy." She held the door open with her one arm which sagged as a hammock. "Do you have any candy for this girl? She has her fifteen cents!" And then, looking at Jaclyn, "You have your fifteen cents, don't you? I bet it's right there in your palm, sticking to you. Three nickels."

"Well, yes—" Jaclyn said, starting to back away from the door. This wasn't right. This was all wrong. Where were the two Good & Plenty's? The three Red Vines? "The sign said—"

"Ha! I know what the sign said. I wrote the damn thing."

This was wrong, this was all wrong.

"Do you want to come in?" the woman said, and when she laughed her hammock-arms swayed.

Jaclyn most certainly didn't. She backed herself deeper into the hallway before she turned around and sprinted. When she got to the stairs she almost headed up until she remembered her bike.

By the time she got back downstairs she'd lost the fifteen cents. She walked towards the front door, where she'd left the bike.

Of course it was gone. There weren't tire tracks or a trace of any kind. There wasn't a sign that said, "I have: your bike!" or any type of ransom note at all.

Yet there was, in the exact spot where her front tire had just been, a dove. Jaclyn went home, cupping the thing. She had two signs to make.