

## DELI CUSTOMER

*Vincent Bell*

Both the old timers and even the newer deli clerks were upset that he hadn't been in for several days. He came in like clockwork on a daily basis to get cold cuts and other stuff. But no one had seen him for a while, at least for several days. The same fears were troubling Double D and the liquor store. Besides he always told them when he was going away. Finally the head deli guy sent a kid to check his driveway. He found his newspapers piling up. Now that he wasn't there anymore they realized that they knew almost nothing about him other than he always bought ham, bologna and Swiss cheese. Since he made his own sandwiches, they didn't know if he used mayo, mustard or butter. He always smiled and was polite even to the crabbiest employees. Finally they asked the checkout folks who also said they hadn't seen him. So they concluded that he must be dead.

## NEVERLAND QUESTIONS

*Michelle S. Thomas*

Hello there.

Can I ask you a question?

Why do you think lost things are found  
when you stop looking for them?

I think it's because lost things get  
jealous.

Hey, can I ask you another question?

What happens to the things that aren't  
found

even if you do stop looking?

Where are they?

did they even exist in the first place?

Sorry. . .

That's a lot of questions, right?

But, since you're here,

One more . . .

please?

The place, where the lost things go?

The caretakers must be really nice.

At least, they must be, since so many  
things end up there.

Your right sock from the dryer

Your keys

The pen you just had in your hand . . .

# t17

People end up there, too.  
Old people with Alzheimer's  
Young people who are sad  
It doesn't matter.  
There here one day and then go  
missing.  
Gone.  
Lost.

What?  
The question?  
Oh, right.  
Sorry.  
Here's my question:

That place, where the lost end up?  
What happens when the caretakers  
don't want to give back what they've  
found?

I sincerely hope  
that you can answer this question.  
Because you see-  
The answer?  
I feel I've lost it.

*Dean Gallea*

Sunny summer Sunday, East Hampton beach picnic with a friend, parking spot found! Who could ask for more? Time for a dip in the sudsy surf. Leaping over the waves, traversing the shoreline, over rocky outcrops. Air puffs up my swim trunks at each plunge. What's that flapping at my side? Inverted pockets? Oh-oh! Did I really forget my car key-fob was in one? Friend says yes. Mad search everywhere, impossible to see under the surf, trying to feel all along the shore. No chance. Car stranded, no way to even unlock. Picnic foreshortened. Three-hour lift back to Tarrytown for spare. Metro North to NYC, Hampton Jitney bus back. Call another friend there for a midnight lift to rescue my car. Lesson learned? Maybe not: last week, spotted spare key again on bottom of pool!

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*Brianna Staudt*

I met her in April. She was late, and then all of sudden she couldn't wait any longer to arrive. I held her in my arms for the first time at 9:08 a.m. I swear I have never felt anything as soft as her skin in those first hours. Or seen such white sunshine as flooded the delivery room when the sun rose.

Rose. That is her middle name.

I let water run down my face for a few seconds. The water was warm, but the tears on my face were hot. I couldn't shake how foreign it felt to take a shower with the intent of leaving for a work day. I turned off the water, and there they were, her familiar gurgles and shrieks. Brian must be trying to dress her.

But her sounds — they were muffled. I was too far away. The steam of the shower, the bathroom door, the slowly building panic— all separated me from her. I turned to the mirror and waited for red, puffy eyes to materialize from the fog. Her eyes.

I threw open the door, no towel. I couldn't see. I couldn't see.

“I can't do it,” I sobbed.

## THIS IS WHERE I LOST IT

*Rebecca Chianese*

The ladies bathroom in Grand Central was small cramped and dirty. Not the station-master's area behind glass doors and etched lettering, but the one underground where the homeless or naïve tourists went.

I finished my whore's bath in the sink, washing my armpits, face, teeth, and my feet, lifting one awkwardly into the meager flow of the water spigot.

I'd watched the last train pull out along with any hope I had of making the party on time.

Maybe, I told myself, as I scrubbed the black grime from my soles with a rough paper towel, it was a blessing. Save me from asking my sister, or her husband, or her kids for money for a train ticket home. Both of us pretending it was unusual for me to need it, for me to ask.

Looking in the pitted mirror, I imagined all the faces before me. All of us searching for something, smudged mascara, an errant eyebrow hair, residue of a meal in our teeth, a shred of dignity. Turning away I touched the one-way ticket in my pocket, wondering if I could return it. Or sell it for one more hit.