

[I FOUND]

When I was younger I found lots of things, and one thing I found was Sarah. I found her in a white tee shirt that was too big for her. The collar was all stretched out. Her neck was thin and pale. Her hair was short and blonde. Her eyes were round and blue. She was sitting on a dirty carpet. She had ashes on her cheeks—thumb-smudged, a game. She was drunk, young, and laughing. She was surrounded by summertime friends.

I was surrounded by summertime friends, too. We were all looking for something: drinks, laughter, things to love, things to lose. I may not have been looking for Sarah, but I found her or she found me. Sometimes it's hard to know the difference. Sometimes it's hard to know anything, but we can try.

Everyone was drinking and laughing. Everyone was young and drinking and laughing, and when we're young and

PG 200 ««««

*Maybe
someone will
help me...*

drinking and laughing, we think we have time, and maybe we do. We were all young and in college, too, and when we're young and in college we look forward to summer because summer holds the magic. Summer brings together what otherwise might not come together. Like us.

Summer is good like that. Summer is Cupid with its July arrows and August hearts. Cupid can be kind. I think it's important to be kind.

I was drinking and laughing. Sarah was drinking and laughing. We were all drinking cans of Bud Light and laughing. Sarah made eyes at me, and I made eyes back. She went outside and I followed her.

We sat on the curb in the dark. Our knees touched; our feet traced nervous circles in the gravel.

Sarah said, "I've seen you before," and I said, "Yes, I've seen you, too."

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*We spoke of
things...*

We spoke of things we thought important, like how we missed people and how quickly things change. Like bodies. Like feelings. Like lives.

Sarah missed her friends out west. I missed my friends out west, too. After high school, many of our friends moved out west for

college. We stayed behind, though, deciding to keep close to everything we (thought we) knew and loved.

We spoke of time and distance, the two things around us that had been drawn to the pinhole in which we now sat, crowded, warm.

I said, "It's easy to forget things sometimes," and she said, "Yes."

We spoke as if we knew things. We thought we were wise but we were young.

Later, we kissed on the curb and it was good. Her lips were warm and soft. We ate each other with our mouths. We ate each other with our eyes, too, because that's how it starts—with the eyes. Sarah ran back into the house and I ran after her, barefoot and tumbling.

We spent the summer that way: drinking and laughing and eating each other in the dark. When September came and the air turned cool, we went our separate ways.



I found Sarah again a year later. She was wearing a white bra and panties. She was thin and pale. She was on that same dirty carpet, only she wasn't sitting: she was

recumbent, drunk, and laughing. She was surrounded by hazy friends.

I was surrounded by hazy friends, too. We were still looking for something, but maybe that something was a little bit different. Maybe we were a little bit different, too. We were all growing older. I could tell by the gray hairs in my sideburns, and by the way my memories were stretching out, making it harder to see them as clearly as I used to. We were all finding things and carrying things even if we didn't know what they were yet. Summer filled the pockets of our faded jeans, the folds of our thin dresses. Summer is kind like that.

That was the summer I found I was drawn to pretty things, small things, things that smelled of sleep. Like cats on blankets. Or girls on blankets. Later, women on blankets. Essentially, I was drawn to anything on a blanket and it didn't necessarily have to be sleeping. Just on a blanket, carpet, bed or couch. Prone. In a prone position. Recumbent like Sarah was the second time I found her. It made me want to be close.

Everyone went to sleep and I lay on the floor with Sarah. Beck's *Mellow Gold* played quietly on a dusty stereo in the corner. I touched Sarah's stomach. She touched my stomach. Her fingers were cold, but her

palms were warm. We were both carrying things, even if we didn't know what they were. Our hands knew. Our hands sensed what was inside, what was sloshing around with the alcohol inside our stomachs. Sarah and I whispered about time and distance, about how we missed people and how quickly things change. We slept together on the dirty carpet. We were small and pretty.

Another summer of warmth and magic and drinking and eating.

Another summer.

We ate with our eyes, hands, mouths. We hopped fences, floated on pools and lakes, kissed and smiled at the stars. We laughed because we were wise. We laughed because we didn't know we weren't.

We're still not wise and the laughing has become harder. But it's still there.

We still do it.

We laugh.

It's harder, though.

When September came and the water cooled, we drifted our separate ways.



I found Sarah again a year later. She sat on the grass, surrounded by darkness. I was surrounded by darkness, too. She wore tight jeans. Her hair was long, smooth, and blonde. She was growing quickly into a woman, a *real* woman no longer a girl. Her blue eyes were hard. They told stories. And her skull was soft. Like a baby's skull. Sarah wasn't a baby, though.

She'd been attacked, beaten. It had left her skull soft. I'd heard about it over the factory noise, the chunk and punch of the machines, the damp heat, the smell of candles. She was beaten by a man, my friend Mark had told me. She was beaten by *less* than a man, I told myself. A man who stalked her at the restaurant where she worked and then slid beneath the door of her bathroom stall when she was getting ready to go home. He smashed her head onto the floor, over and over and over, until someone came to help.

My stomach fell to my ankles when I heard the story. My hands crushed candles.

Sitting on the grass, Sarah seemed smaller than she was, smaller than I'd ever known her. But she was there, and we kissed and tried to laugh and maybe we did laugh. I didn't know what to say and so maybe I didn't say anything. We held each other

and I could feel her, small in my arms, but she was gone and I was gone, too, or maybe we were going.

We didn't swim or drink or eat that summer because she went to sleep and I went to sleep and the world around us raged while we slept and starved. When September came we turned to shadows.



The last time I found Sarah was on the computer. I was sitting in the basement. Ten years had passed. I sent her a message and she wrote back.

She wrote she was working and sleeping. I wrote I was working and sleeping, too. I added I was doing laundry because I thought it was important to let someone I hadn't seen in ten years know that I was doing laundry.

She was impressed. I could tell by the way she included a smiley face in her response.

She came to visit one afternoon in the summertime. I wore a beard and a thin shirt with a collar. I felt strong from all the cutting and lifting and working in the lumber yard. My cheeks were red and my hair was heavy with gray.

She got out of her car. She was pressed and pretty. She was smiling and freckled. She was ten years later and so was I.

The horizon ate the sun. We sat on the back porch in plastic chairs. We drank Blue Moon from bottles. We looked at each other and then out to the darkness and then back again. We knew each other in the darkness.

“You look skinny,” she said, and I said, “Yes.”

A candle kept the mosquitoes away. Then it started raining so we sat beneath an umbrella. My roommate Bob peeked out the window. He waved and smiled. He remembered her and me from before. His smile told me he was happy to see me eating again because I’d stopped eating for a long time. Or I’d tried to stop eating because I was scared of what I’d swallow.

When I found Sarah, though, my plate filled. I ate with my everything. I try not to be sloppy when I eat, but sometimes I can’t help myself. Especially if I’m hungry or if my skins smells of sleep, a waning hibernation.



For three months Sarah and I found each

other again. We ate each other in both sunlight and darkness, something we'd never done before. I chewed her blonde hair. She chewed my whiskers. We talked about how we'd been carrying each other for years and how it was good to have someone to share the load. When we slept in the same bed, I rubbed her stomach and she whispered, "I feel safe with you."

»»»PG 206
*Maybe she
felt...*

She told me her story. I listened.

She told me how she'd screamed so hard she tore her esophagus. She told me of the nightmares. She told me of the trial, and the tears. She told me how her life had changed and how she missed people. She told me how she'd only wanted to go home.

I still didn't know what to say, so I just listened and breathed her in. She smelled of sleep and strength. She smelled of years carried.

She asked me to write about it. I asked her how much I should tell. She said, "I don't know."

Then we fell asleep in the dark. We always knew each other best in the darkness—summertime fireflies with purpose, eating.

»»»PG 70
*Sometimes
it's easy...*

But after three months we became full, so we stopped eating.

*Pg 31 «««
My mother
also used to
say...*

Because we were scared.

Because we didn't know.

Because we still weren't wise.

Because we stood together in the sunlight too long.

Because we didn't understand what the prize was at the bottom of the bowl.

When September came and the air turned cool, we kept what we needed and went our separate ways.

So I lost Sarah again. Just like that. But it was okay.

Because I didn't really lose her this time. I can call her right now if I want to. I know where she is and she knows where I am. We're still carrying each other, and we're doing a better job now than when we were younger, so maybe we're growing wiser. It's hard to know.



I found lots of things over time, not just people. I found places, too: Colorado, Arizona, Oregon, California, Florida, Ohio, South Carolina. When I find places they find me, too, and we sit down and chat.

“Hello, Arizona. I like your desert. I even like those crazy cacti that jump at you.”

“Hello, California. You’re very big and warm.”

“Hello, Ohio....Hello.”

“Hello, Colorado. You take my breath away. Literally. My biochemistry needs to adjust.”

“Hello, Oregon. You have cool rocks along your coast. I heard the Goonies was filmed on you.”

“Hello, South Carolina. You’re in slow motion, and easily confused by the speed of my northern inflection. I just want to order a donut.”

“Hello, Florida. It’s good to see you again. I like what you’ve done with your hair.”

When I find new places I always try to run in them because when I run I often discover things.

Like ideas.

Or rhythms.

Or money.

Although I don’t find money very often.

PG 134«««
*Sometimes
 I'd hide...*

But when I do it's fun. In over twenty years of running, I've found maybe thirty dollars.

I will never grow rich by running.



When I was a kid, I found out I had to go to school. I didn't like that so I hid in places. Closets seemed like a good idea at the time, but closets are always the first place people look. Beneath the bed is the second place. Third is the attic.

My mother would grow angry with me when I didn't want to go to school. This made me feel all empty inside. When I hid she'd find me, and that made me feel even worse—the finding. Because some people don't want to be found. Though some people *do* want to be found so they can feel bad.

I'm not sure what I wanted to feel then. Maybe I wanted to feel bad because I thought that's what I deserved.

I think when I find people who are hiding it means they want something. They want something more than to be found, though. They want me to look for them. They want me to give. Maybe they're empty because I'm not carrying them around as much as I should. Maybe people who hide are sad. Or

ashamed. Maybe they're ashamed because someone told them they should be.

My parents never told me I should feel ashamed, but I used to hide anyway. Because I didn't want to find people. And I didn't want people to find *me*, either. I had my parents and they were enough. I had my sister and she was enough. Sometimes my sister was too much. She used to call me names and we'd fight a lot. Then when I grew bigger and stronger she didn't call me as many names and we fought less and less until we didn't fight at all.

I found friends when I grew older, too, because I eventually went to school. I still hid sometimes but it was because I was scared I might lose what I'd found. So I hid myself and the things I'd found inside of me. The people. The places. I kept them for myself because I thought that if I let people find me they would take away everything I'd found.

Some children are selfish and don't know how to share. Some grownups can be this way, too. It's not cool, but sometimes it's hard to know any better. We can only know worse. Until someone finds us cramped in a cupboard and smacks us on the head with a wooden spoon.



When I was a teenager I had a girlfriend named Anne. I found her once in bed eating chicken. She wasn't hiding but she didn't know I was coming over. She was sitting in bed wearing a tee shirt that was all stretched out at the collar. It had chicken grease on the front of it because her hands were covered in grease and she was wiping her hands down her shirt.

I crept up the stairs and found her. Her eyes were big. She had big brown eyes anyway but they were bigger when she saw me.

"Hey," she said, and her mouth was full of chicken so it sounded funny.

"Hey," I said.

She was very surprised to see me, but she was even *more* surprised that I'd found her in bed eating chicken. I didn't want her to feel ashamed, though, so I didn't say "you should feel ashamed of yourself."

I kissed her instead.

Then we lay down together on the blanket.



People.

People are always the best things to find because when we find people we find ourselves, too. And the world is big and it's easy to get lost so it's good to look for people because they can help us find our way home.

»»»PG 209
I loved...

