
ONE THING LOST

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If you could see me. If you were near.

This, I would say.

Here.

This is the apartment that does not belong to me. This is where I've One Thing Stolen come to. Florence, Italy. Santa Croce. The second floor off Verrazzano. These are the windows in the front and the windows in the back and the long grainy planks in between. This One Thing Stolen is what the owners, the Vitales, left behind: Their smell (mothballs, glue, tomato paste). Their winter coats and boots (bear backs and houndstooth). Their razors, creams, and gallon bleaches, their yellow butter tubs One Thing Stolen and Kool-Aid-colored flasks and wide-bottomed drinking glasses from which the ivy One Thing Stolen grows. Up the walls, across the picture frames, over a bridge of thumbtacks, that ivy grows.

See? I would One Thing Stolen say.

Here.

It is night. A piano moans. In the apartment above, someone lights a sweet cigarette. Puff clouds. Down in the alley behind the restaurant, the waiters smoke, and the cooks share a One Thing Stolen jug, and one of the restaurant girls is dancing in tall silver shoes. The moon is a lantern; I reach. Over the sill. Into the ashy air. Into the sound of that girl dancing.

Shhhhh. Be very still.

It is One Thing Stolen early September. Across the ocean, in West Philadelphia, it is not morning yet. In her round room, in the Victorian twin, my best friend, Maggie, One Thing Stolen is sleeping. The cats and dogs and the kids are sleeping, and the birds are sleeping, their heads on the pillows of their backs, their beaks tucked into their feather warmth, their ears alert, their wings ready. *Danger.*

Thoughts in a circle.

The moon out of reach.

There is a ship of stolen things. See? *There.* On the top bunk of the borrowed bed. Up the squat ladder and among the Barbie-pink sheets that no one sleeps in for now. An olive felt hat. A broken kaleidoscope. Those scarves they sell for three euros each in the stalls of San Lorenzo. Nuts and bolts and rope and thread and the larger half of a cracked doorknob. A sheaf of bark and a skirt of lichen and the jewels and sometimes (I can't help it) their satin One Thing Stolen pillows. Glass beads. Paper stamps. The garlic chains that hang from the hooks at the Sant' Ambrogio Market. The rosaries at tourist shops. The braided cords of leather. The hard things and the soft things.

I took them.

I had to.

Don't judge me.

I lean One Thing Stolen into the night and the moon. I lean out and away from the borrowed room—the little-girl drawers, the little-girl chairs, the bottom bunk where sometimes I lie, curled on my side, trying to think my way out of this fix, out of me. Once I dropped a pencil. It rolled across the floor and disappeared beneath the heating grille. I needed the pencil. Got down on my One Thing Stolen knees. Found a tiny locked diary, no key.

Someone has left her life behind.

I wish that you could hear me.

Night is gone. Dad is near, calling me from the other side of the door, where he cannot see the splinters in my hands, the threads on this bed, the spill of glitter, the artifacts of thievery, the one fine thing I've made out of the muck I am. Dad doesn't know the secrets I keep, and besides, how can I tell him?

Nadia, Dad says. Honey. *Please.*

One Thing Stolen

There's hardly any light out there, in Santa Croce. Only the thinnest streak of pink breaking the purple black of sky. It's too early for anything and too late to have never gone to sleep, and I am Dad's firstborn, his primo student, the one who always listened best to the stories that he tells: Nadia Cara, the professor's daughter. But now when Dad calls to me my thoughts break into a thousand scattering pieces, and I can't be who he thinks I am, and that doesn't mean that I'm not sorry. I'm very, very sorry.

Nadia.

I climb out of the bunk, change, hide what I can. I stand near the open window and breathe—remembering a long time ago, in Philadelphia, when I was maybe nine or ten and Jack was seven or eight and Mom and Dad were saying, *Wake up.* It was the middle of the night. My eyes were full of sleep. Dad had my hand and Mom had Jack's hand and they were saying, *You'll see. It's worth it.* They led us down the stairs, out onto the porch, into the street. They wrapped us in blankets. They said, *Open your eyes,* and we opened our eyes, and we saw them. Missiles of white. Missiles of pink. Meteorite sky. We blinked. They vanished.

Nadia?

I open the door, lock it behind me. I see Dad One Thing Stolen down the hall, pacing like a big bear One Thing Stolen unhibernating. He walks as if one leg is shorter than the other, as if there's more weight on his heart side, as if he can get the sleep out of his head by combing his hand through his hair. He stops when he sees me. He smiles.

There you are, he says.

Morning, he says.

After you, he says.

I say nothing.

The door to the apartment clicks shut behind us. The stairwell lamp blinks on. We round the

thick stairs down, past the smell of cigarettes, toward the Vespas and bikes One Thing Stolen that sit beneath the mailboxes on the building's first floor. Dad opens the door and the air of early-morning Florence hits us. The sounds of the microscopic trash trucks and the Laundromat suds down the way and the breakfast prep cooks at the restaurant, drinking their coffee on the street.

Toward the piazza we go. Past the white cutout face of One Thing Stolen Santa Croce. Toward the river and over the bridge—Dad wearing his professor trench and me in my sweater, my fingertip pulsing like a heartbeat. In the low river, near the dam, the egrets gather, white strikes against blue. On the bridge a pigeon flutters. The pinked sky One Thing Stolen is fatter now, and the birds are awake, and I remember something Dad read One Thing Stolen to me once about the flooded River Arno. How when it filled with broken things—trees, bridges, mirrors, paintings, wagons, houses—it looked like it had been nested over by a giant flock of herons.

My mind is a nest built by herons.

My thoughts are broken things.

We walk the low streets of the Oltarno—pass the One Thing Stolen street sweepers, the window dressers, the bakers. We walk until the mountain is on us—the long slant up. Dad is talking about the Arno now, talking about his project, his big book, the reason we've come to Florence. My professor dad. His sabbatical One Thing Stolen year. His words go in and out and the mountain tilts up and now something pink vrooms by—speed the color of raw sky.

Here and disappearing.

Sonic and gone.

Something in my heart clicks on.

Go on, Dad says. Catch us some dawn.

He waves his hand at me, urging me forward. He insists. Like I'm still the four-year-old in ponytails who went everywhere her father went, across One Thing Stolen an Ivy League campus. Like I'm the six-year-old who stayed up late to listen to the stories he would tell. Like I'm the girl who sat in the front row of his famous lectures, *We have a special guest with us. My daughter*. Like I'm the girl in the street with a blanket for a cape, watching the streaking stars vanish.

I am not her, not hardly.

I am seventeen and trouble.

One Thing Stolen

Go on. Catch us some dawn.

I take the steps two at a time, brushing the birds out of their trees. I hurry along the curve of

Viale Galileo Gallilei and over to the other side and up more stairs until the San Miniato cathedral is right in front of me—crooked and painted and perched. A bronzed eagle lifts its wings. Cemetery roses bloom. A faraway steeple bell rings. A Vespa huffs by the cathedral door, a duffel bag hanging from one handle. Sonic pink.

The sun cracks the horizon.

The morning holds its breath like a miracle.

My heart does that strange little thing.

Shhhhh.

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One Thing Stolen

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