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The Lost Thing

By Shaun Tan

So you want to hear a story?
Well, I used to know a whole
lot of really interesting ones.
Some of them so funny you
would laugh yourself unconscious.
Others so terrible, you would
never want to repeat them.
Now I can't remember any of those.
So maybe I'll just tell you about
the time I found that lost thing.
This all happened many summers ago,
down on the beach.
I was as usual working tirelessly
on my bottle top collection.
At least until I saw the thing.
It sure wasn't doing much.
It just sat there with a really
weird look about it.
You know, a sad, lost sort of look.
Nobody else seemed to notice it was there.
They were all too busy
doing other stuff I guess.
Hello?
It turned out to be really friendly.
I played with the thing for most
of the afternoon.
It was great fun!
But the whole time I couldn't help feeling
that something wasn't quite right.
As the hours slouched by it seemed less and less
likely that anyone was coming to take the thing home.
And soon there was no denying
the unhappy truth.
It was lost.
I asked a few people if they knew
anything about it.
I took the lost thing over to Pete's place.
Pete has an opinion on just
about everything.
"Cool," he said.
Pete didn't know what
the thing was exactly.
But he said what he always does, that all physical
manifestations could be identified empirically.

through careful observation, calibrated measurement,
and controlled experimentation.

In the end, Pete just shrugged.

He didn't think the lost thing came from anywhere.

It didn't belong anywhere either.

Some things in life are like that,
he said.

They're just plain lost.

There was nothing left to do but
take the thing home with me.

As for my parents...

I already knew that Mum would be concerned
about how filthy its feet were.

That Dad would be worried about all
sorts of strange diseases.

They both just wanted me to take it
back to where I found it.

"But it's lost!" I said.

Not that that made any difference.

I decided to hide the thing
in our back shed.

At least until I could figure out
what to do next.

I mean, I couldn't just leave it
wandering the streets.

The Lost thing seemed happy there.

But I sure couldn't keep it in the shed forever.

Mum and Dad would eventually notice
when they came out looking for a hammer or something.

It was a real dilemma.

Are you finding that the order of day to day life

Is unexpectedly disrupted?

Do you suffer from

unclaimed property?

Objects without name?

Troublesome artifacts of

unknown origin?

Things that just don't belong?

Don't panic!

We've got a pigeon hole

to stick it in.

The Federal Department of

Odds and Ends.

The next morning we caught a

tram all the way into the city.
We arrived at a tall gray
building with no windows.
It smelled like disinfectant.
I have a lost thing...
I called for the receptionist.
"Fill in the forms" - she sighed.
I was looking around for a desk,
when I suddenly felt something touch my elbow.
and then there was a tiny voice.
If you really care about that thing
you shouldn't leave it here.
This is a place for forgetting.
Leaving behind.
Here, take this.
"Cheers" - I said.
You shouldn't leave it here...
It was some kind of sign, I guess.
Not very important looking.
But it did seem to point somewhere.
Eventually we found what
seemed to be the right place.
In a dark little gap of some
anonymous little street.
The kind of place you would never know existed
unless you were actually looking for it.
I still think about that lost thing
from time to time.
Especially when I see something out of the corner
of my eye that doesn't quite fit.
You know, something with
a weird, sad, lost sort of look.
I see that kind of thing less
and less these days.
Maybe there aren't many lost
things around anymore.
Or maybe...maybe
I've just stopped noticing them.
Too busy doing other stuff I guess.