

Sampling Reality

Era: Early 1990s

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"So you're in trouble with your mom again?" I asked Charlie. "Your report card is going to be pretty raunchy?"

Charlie was sitting next to me on the couch, her long teenage legs spread across the coffee table. "Mom. I told mom not to expect too much, but I think I should've shut my mouth. Report cards aren't out 'til the end of January. I could've had another month of peace. Now I'm grounded."

"So how come she let you come over here." I rested my chin on the top of Charlie's head - glistening orange highlights in brown.

"Mom let me come over because I said I'd do my homework with you. She doesn't trust me though. With good reason I suppose. That's why she phoned you. To let you know I have homework to do."

"Well, you better get at it."

She nuzzled deeper into the crook of my arm. "Mom gets so tiresome. She's always telling me that things aren't the way they seem, food doesn't just plop itself on the table and someday I'm going to have to do some work. That's what she tells me."

"Humm."

"I tell her I'll grow a garden."

"And is growing a garden easier than doing your homework?"

Charlie thought about that for a minute. "I don't know. I've never tried it. Gardening I mean. I don't even swipe carrots anymore. Course if I was really hungry, I would."

"Yes I suppose most of us would. But I've found it works better for me if I think ahead and don't put myself in the position were I HAVE to swipe carrots - figuratively speaking."

"Tell me a Christmas story, Auntie Lois, before I do my homework - just a short one."

"Okay." I settled back on the couch and wrapped my other arm around her thin shoulders. Ornamental lights winked at us from a bowl on the coffee table. "I'm not sure this is a Christmas story but it's something that happened to me around Christmas a couple of years ago."

Charlie squiggled back and forth, ensconcing herself more completely then giggled with anticipation. "Go ahead Auntie Lois."

"Well, don't get your hopes up, sweetheart. This is a SHORT story. You have to do your homework. It happened one afternoon while I was out doing my Christmas shopping."

"We like that... Christmas shopping."

"Actually, stop to think of it, I wasn't Christmas shopping. It was a boring trip. I was just picking up some groceries. Beautiful day, perky white clouds, bright blue sky, crunchy sounds when you walked."

"We like those kinds of days, don't we Auntie Lois."

"Right on. So I parked my car and was walking toward the Safeway when I noticed this woman, doubled over her steering wheel."

"Was she sick?"

"Exactly what I was asking myself. Actually, I thought maybe she'd had a heart attack because all I could see was a head of curly white hair."

"So what did you do, Auntie Lois? Did you rush into the store to phone emergency?"

"No. I walked over to her car window and tapped on it."

"Was she okay?"

"I still wasn't sure, even when she raised her head and looked at me -seemed like there were tears rolling down her cheeks. She knew I was concerned so she rolled down her car window and nodded when I asked if she was alright. 'Sorry,' she finally blurted out, 'I can't help it.' Then gales of laughter flooded out her car window."

Charlie nodded attentively.

"So I just stood there, leaning toward her window, waiting patiently. I realized she'd talk to me when she had things together. And I still wasn't convinced she was okay. It took her a couple of minutes. Eventually, after she rubbed her eyes, she tried to explain.

'You won't believe this.' She dabbed at her wrinkled cheeks. "I have a doctor's appointment in a few minutes. I haven't been feeling too well. And I knew he was going to ask me for a urine sample.'

She broke into laughter again. Her body shook.

'I hate having to go to the bathroom on demand,' she finally continued, 'so before I left the house I caught a urine stream in a bottle. Then I stopped here to pick up some coffee.' She patted the passenger seat beside her. 'I left the sample right here on the seat, and while I was in the store, somebody swiped it.' She pointed at the lock on the door. 'The car was even locked.'

'Why in the world would somebody swipe a urine sample?' I was totally mystified and couldn't understand why she was laughing so hard.

The woman looked at me with bright crinkly eyes, then she pressed her back into the car seat, her arms into the steering wheel, and heaved a relaxing breath. 'You see,' she told me 'the only bottle I could find around the house was an old whiskey bottle.'"

Charlie scrunched up her nose in disgust. "Oh, Auntie Lois, that's a gross story."

"You think so? I thought it was kind of cute."

"Yeh well..." She paused and thought about it for a minute. "Maybe doing homework isn't so bad." She untangled her legs and rose from the couch. "Will you think up another story while I'm working?"



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