

## Lost And Found

His encyclopedia set had been missing the letter R for as long as he could remember. In general day to day activities this usually didn't pose a problem but on that special occasion where a single piece of information became vital, the struggle was all too real. He was Woodrow William Wilmington IV, though everyone called him Woody, and his best friend Tom was in the midst of a search.

"You couldn't have lost some other lesser letter, could you?" Tom exclaimed, disregarding the notion a complete set might never have actually been possessed, an assumption that did not go unnoticed. "I mean, who actually needs Q? Or even K, for that matter?"

His anger, it should be said, was relatively unwarranted. A few moments earlier a wager had been made about the age range of Amish youth during their tradition of Rumspringa but thus far no verifiably correct answer had been found. As had happened many times before, their playfully combative nature would most likely go unresolved.

"Well, if we can't figure this out we'll just have to go double or nothing on something involving coral or vas deferens. Ya know, something you actually have here."

Woody rolled his eyes at the suggestion, as he often did when Tom started to get vulgar. Although no one can claim absolute purity of speech, Woody was about as close as you could come. They poured through the bookshelf in the library of their home until, quite by accident, a tome fell to ground ejecting an old, crinkled piece of paper from its bowels. Woody retrieved it and showed it to Tom. They were both rather puzzled having never come across it before.

“Looks like a map.”

Woody nodded in agreement.

“It’s only a little ways up the road. Wanna have ...”

Tom realized his friend was already out the door and moving at a pace he couldn’t necessarily keep up with. For all the similarities between them there were three glaring differences, third among them was fitness.

Their relationship, though it was a few years ago at this point, had actually gotten off to a rather rocky start. Trust is a hard thing to build and despite the fact that they each needed the other it had taken a bit of time for that confidence, that willingness to set your own life in someone else’s hands, to be gained. When Woody had first come along Tom was in a very difficult spot, emotionally speaking. And, of course, there was also that awful mess about the bathroom. But what they eventually discovered was that if there was an adventure to be had they could always count on the other and thus an unbreakable bond was forged.

As they made their way down the sidewalk, both pondering what they were in store for, sprinkler systems began their automatic regimens, one of which hit Woody square in the neck. He jumped and shook with displeasure as the water soaked in.

“Oh quit your complaining. It’s surprising but it’s still only water.”

Woody was a little less than pleased with Tom’s assessment of the situation but at this point they couldn’t really focus on it. The excitement of the map was starting to build as they entered the appropriate field. They surveyed the scene, oriented themselves, then agreed on which of the ancient weeping willow trees depicted had the giant X next to it.

“I’d say about five paces to the south?”

Woody glanced from Tom to the map and the tree, then gave them all a coy look.

“Maybe ten paces for you. Ha!”

For all the similarities between them there were three glaring differences, second among them was that the two sleuths were of comically different sizes. In their rush out the door, however, both had neglected to bring any sort of equipment for Earth removal, but in this realm Woody had at least some prior experience. In fact, after first moving in he had gotten into a big hubbub with the neighbors about it. The official story goes that he had crossed over the property line and was being “too disruptive”, perhaps a byproduct of Tom’s sleepless nights, and unfortunately he hadn’t the tact to smooth things over without significant help. Ever since there was an uneasy tension that lingered just above the fence that now separated the yards. As long as he was done with the day’s projects at a reasonable hour the trouble was kept to a minimum.

After a solid ten minutes of torrid digging they happened upon a small chest about a foot long and eight inches wide.

“No way!!” Tom declared.

Woody was practically drooling with anticipation.

“I didn’t actually think there’d be anything here! What’s going on?!”

The two locked eyes then looked back at the box as it was slowly opened. Inside there was an envelope set atop a dark blue cloth that was hiding some sort of twisted object. They stared dumbfounded. Tom picked up the envelope and pulled out a note addressed to Woody.

“What?” Tom muttered, more to himself than anyone else. “You can’t even read, how could this be for you?”

Woody cocked his head to one side in confused agreement. Tom began to read aloud:

*Dear Woody,*

*I knew you’d make it here eventually, Tom in tow.*

*I’m sorry I can’t be around anymore to go on our walks through the park. It wasn’t my choice.*

Tears began to fall down Tom’s cheeks as realization set in.

*I know you’re taking care of him as best you can, that’s why I brought you home after all, but I thought I would do something to help. I’ve hidden twelve more of these treats all around town, each containing clues to find the next one. I figure the least I can do under the circumstances would be to give my boys one more adventure. The last one has something special for Tom. See that he gets it, okay? I miss you both so very much.*

*With all the love in the world,*

*Ellen*

Tom pulled back the cloth and showed Woody the bone underneath. He gave it a few sniffs then let out a soft whimper, sadly recognizing the soothing scent they had loved. Gently

taking the bone up in his mouth he walked over to Tom, now sitting against the willow tree, and put his head on his lap. They sat there somberly while the sun began to set in the distance.

“Yeah, I miss her too, buddy. We’ll go visit tomorrow.”

After a while the two companions stood up and started a slow walk back home. Tom took another look into the chest and noticed the rather elaborate set of clues to find the next treat.

“Ha, look at this. R isn’t missing after all. We just have to go find it.”