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Gold Dust

Rachel L. Martinelli

Gettysburg College, martra01@gettysburg.edu

Class of 2015

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Author Bio

Rachel Martinelli is a Theater Arts major and a Writing minor. She is part of the Class of 2015.

Gold Dust

Rachel Martinelli

Molly spotted the gold coin as she exited the elementary school bus. The polished surface glinted in the sun, reflecting beams of light into her round, hazel eyes. She reached down, picked up the coin, and nestled it in the palm of her hand, eyes fixated on the burnished gold glimmering against her olive skin. The front was imprinted with the image of a young woman carrying a sleeping child in a bundle against her shoulders; proud eyes atop prominent cheekbones gazed out over her right shoulder. Molly glanced at the reverse side: a bald eagle, wings spread mid-flight amidst a circle of tiny stars. She had never seen such a coin before, thought they only existed in pirate movies. Gold doubloons came from treasure chests buried in the bottom of the ocean—it had to be worth millions.

Mama would know.

Dry leaves and stray wrappers crunched beneath her mud-crusted sneakers as she sprinted down the uneven concrete, dark hair flying behind her, hands clasped in front of her, as if in prayer. She stumbled once or twice—eyes too focused on her precious cargo—but otherwise maintained her brisk pace until she reached the mint-green house at the end of the street. She stopped in front of the mailbox marked 8166 and peered inside its open mouth (the door had rusted off long ago).

Empty: Mama was home.

She glanced over at the makeshift gravel driveway.

Empty: Dave was not.

Molly pushed past the wire gate and walked up to the white columns that framed the porch. The years had rotted the wood and dulled the paint so that, even in the glow of the mid-day sun, the lively colors looked muted. She took the key from beneath the empty flowerpot and gingerly opened the door. Her mother often slept after early-morning shifts, so Molly locked the door behind her and tiptoed down the dim hallway: past the kitchen, past the living room, past Mama and Dave's room, and through the door to her bedroom.

The space was small and the furniture sparse (just a bed and a dresser). She tossed her Disney Princess backpack onto her bed and headed towards the lone window, plopping down in front of it. She lay completely still, staring intently at the ceiling even as coarse carpeting prickled the back of her neck. The room had been a uniform white when it

was first installed, but time had grayed the carpet's fibers and water damage had stained the ceiling, creating an array of yellow splotches that (Molly thought) looked like the hide of a sick cow.

She raised the gold coin above her head, stroking it between her thumb and index finger. Mama would wake soon, and Molly nearly vibrated with excitement. The many ways they could spend the money flashed through her mind. Mama could get a new sewing machine. Molly could get a hamster, or dog, or horse. They could move into a larger house, one with lots of rooms and three floors and a pool in the backyard, one that was theirs, not Dave's.

The sun gleamed through the window, encasing the coin in iridescent light. Molly could see the thousands of illuminated particles drifting through her fingertips. The dust had bothered her when she first moved into this room, but Mama told her that they were just tiny fairies floating through the air, ones that could only be seen in the sunlight, and that made it better. As her eyes drooped, and sleep slowly overcame her, Molly imagined that the luminous coin was a floor for the dust fairies to dance upon—a ballroom to laugh and sing and waltz across all through the night. These images lingered on her mind as she slowly fell into a deep sleep.

Light emanated from the intricately beaded diamonds sewn to the skirt of her ball gown. Molly spun around and laughed as the rays refracted, completely entranced with the cascading rainbows. Figures began to join her. Faceless forms with translucent, butterfly wings circled her, dim light pulsing from their chests. One held out its hand.

“Alice! What the fuck is this?”

Molly took the offered arm and was guided away from the crowd. The fairy took her in its arms and led her into a waltz. Her feet knew the steps. She giggled with delight, captivated by the fluidity in her partner's movement.

“Don't you start yelling at me, Dave. I'm not in the mood.”

Molly glanced down at the floor and realized that a face was looking back: the woman with proud eyes: they were currently dancing across her upper lip.

“Explain this three hundred dollar charge on my card.”

They danced across nose, cheekbone, forehead, and finally down sleek, golden hair. Molly let go of her partner, laughing and gasping for breath. The winged being drifted back into the crowd, and another figure came forward. It was Mama.

“That's from the antibiotics Molly needed. The insurance wouldn't cover it.”

Mama's thick, brown hair was pulled up into an elaborate bun with a

few loose ringlets to frame her face. She wore a gown like Molly's: all diamonds and rainbows. She smiled, her hazel eyes beckoning their copies.

"I don't wanna be payin' for some other asshole's kid."

"I'll cover the 300 dollars."

"You should just send her to your mom."

"I said I'll pay you back!"

The light grew brighter. Everything was getting hot. Molly rushed towards Mama.

"When?"

"When I can."

"Well, I need the money now."

"Well, too fuckin' bad!"

Searing light filled every corner of the room. It was too intense. Mama disappeared.

"What did you say to me?"

"You'll just drink it all away!"

"Don't you disrespect me, you bitch!"

"Don't—"

It was burning her eyes.

"This is my house!"

"Stop! Please!"

Burning her skin.

"DON'T—STOP!"

Blinding, white light.

Molly woke. Above her was the crazed face of Mama: hair wild, blood dripping from her lip

"We're leaving, Honey. Okay? Don't ask any questions. Just stay quiet."

Molly was lifted into her Mama's arms, limp with fright. She didn't understand, so she stayed silent. Mama carried her away, unaware of the golden treasure left behind in the dark.