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Loss

by Barbara F. Lefcowitz

"I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail."

Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*

All three of Thoreau's losses symbolize the upper class pursuits he scorned, but may still have subliminally craved: the hound a reference to hunting, the bay horse to a fancy show breed, the turtle-dove to sentimentalized love, the sort embodied in chocolate hearts on Valentine's Day.

Many of my own losses are more literal. When a kid, I lost more than one roller skate key on a Brooklyn sidewalk. One of a pair of matched earrings, pair of shoes, pair of gloves. More recently, someone stole my wallet on a crowded Paris Metro ; far worse than the loss of cash was the loss of my credit cards—the absence of which forced me to refrain from all but essential spending.

So perhaps some losses are to the good, like the excision of minor body parts: a diseased appendix, inflamed tonsils, infected teeth, various moles and other body-weeds. Less tangible: old obsessions, angers, crushes on long ago baseball players.

But my catalogue of less tangible losses is doubtless full of holes--themselves losses-- like the gap in a stocking called an *ozcke* ("stocking eye") in Polish, so the threads that remain become fringe around a skeleton's hollow sockets.

Virginity—i.e., literal virginity-- lost only once, but often I have lost my way in the far flung cities and towns I have visited, and have forgotten even the map of the neighborhood where I have lived many years.

Indeed, the forgotten itself is a close kin of loss, Uncountable the number of ideas, words, ambitions and goals once deemed essential to my existence, uncountable the dreams and old desires. Games, of course. Bets. Muscle tone, visual acuity, shed cells. And in the semi-foreign country of high tech, a plethora of pins and passwords.

Like most people my age, I have lost family and friends, not only to death but divergence of interests and geographic locations. And unlike Proust, I have discovered no Madeleine, except perhaps occasional smells, whether scents or stinks. Or some random music stuck in my brain's jukebox, revived at least once by an old nickel I had forgotten to spend.

Barbara F. Lefcowitz has published nine poetry collections. Her most recent, "The Blue Train to America," appeared in 2007. Her fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in more than 500 journals. She has won writing fellowships and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others. An ex-pat New Yorker, she lives now in Bethesda, MD, and is also a visual artist. Recently she has begun to write one-act plays.

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