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# ONE

“I’M MARLA. I’m almost four years old, and I live at 6543 Arcola in Garden City, Michigan.” *It’s shaped like a mitten*, I thought. I’d seen a picture of it in a big book of maps that showed all the states. There were fifty. That’s a lot. But not as many as a hundred billion, which is how many stars Daddy told me are in the Milky Way. The galaxy, not the candy bar.

“And our phone number?”

“Our phone number is Garfield, G-A-2-468—”

“Nine.”

I felt my eyes begin to tear. Mommy had been making me say my name, our address, and phone number for the last long time. I was bored. I wanted her to read to me. *Tubby Turtle* is my favorite. Tubby is sad because he’s slower than all his forest friends. But one day he saves Squirrel and Rabbit from drowning and becomes a hero.

“Say it again, honey, from the start.”

“Mommy, but why?”

“Because if you should get lost you need to be able to tell whoever finds you who you are and where you live.”

“Why?” I didn’t understand. Lost is what happened to pennies when you can’t find them, or a sock, and then you do, between the cushions of the sofa or in the dryer. Nothing is ever really lost. You just need to find them.

“I just told you.”

“Why would I get lost?”

Mommy breathed deep. She did that when I made her mad.

“I’m sorry, Mommy, I’m sorry.”

“For what, Marla?”

“For making you mad.”

Mommy took my face between her hands, which always makes me feel happy and safe. “I’m not mad, honey. It’s just...”

“What, Mommy?”

“I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“Why would anything happen to me?”

Mommy hugged me. After a moment she pulled back, holding me by my shoulders.

“Remember yesterday when we went to Hudson’s?”

“Oh, yes!” It was a grand adventure: a bus ride downtown, all the pretty clothes and shoes and perfume—and the toys! All the toys on the twelfth floor!

“Remember when we got separated?”

I nodded. “Is that what it means, getting lost?”

“Yes.”

“But you found me.”

“Yes, I did. But what if I hadn’t? What would you have done?”

“I—” It suddenly occurred to me I had no idea what I would have done had Mommy not found me.

“That’s why you need to know your address and phone number. So you can tell someone if I can’t find you. So they can tell me where to find you. Understand?”

I wasn’t sure I did. But if Mommy thought it was important, then it must be, and I wanted to make Mommy happy.

“I guess so,” I said.

“Good. Now tell me again, your name, where we live, and our phone number.”

And so it went for the next long time, until I got it right enough times to make Mommy happy, and she knew I wouldn’t ever forget.

And then she read *Tubby Turtle* to me.