

Creative Wrong Memory - Alison Farmer

What I remember: Having a party. Cousins and Uncle being there. My Dad and Uncle sitting in front of the living room window. A boy I liked, Richard, turned up with his mum before the party started to deliver a present. Remember the present being a purse. Richard never stayed for the party.

What I don't remember: Any details of the party. Any other people there. What the purse looked like, what Richard looked like, anything about him or even seeing him at school before or after the party.

This was my first ever birthday party and if I had known at the time it was going to be my only childhood party, I may have paid more attention. It was the last time I saw my Uncle well and happy. He would be dead within a year.

I was so excited. It was a bright, bouncy, busy Saturday morning in November and the day of my party. I had turned six earlier in the week, but my celebration was today. That morning I had put on my favorite dress, the one I only wore on special occasions. It was lilac with a braid of scalloped lace stitched on the front. The horse shoe of white cradled the line of tiny white buttons that ran down my chest. Friends from school were invited to my party and my cousins were coming too. It was my cousins who arrived first, Uncle Harry brought them. He was so tall. There was no sign of Debbie, but she was much older than me and we did not have much in common. Ross and Greg were here though and I always had great fun with them. Ross is a couple of yrs older than me and the same age as my sister Janet. Greg is 9 months younger than me and we were christened together in Singapore as babies.

My Dad and my Uncle Harry placed themselves upon the two chairs flanking a small table in the bay window of the living room. Their two dark silhouettes broke the bright Autumn sunlight streaming in from the outside world. Their bodies gave me another lucky horseshoe

for my day as they sat with crossed legs pointing towards me in the center of the room. Each had an arm resting on the small central table as they conversed over pipes and adult drink. They were relaxed and laughing, hanging out like Sherlock Holmes and Watson without their hats on. I feel sure they were talking about everything but children. Both were military men and child rearing was thought of at a provisory level not a participatory one. I was not really quite sure why they were both there, but the happy image felt like it was being imprinted on me forever.

I was hopping and skipping around not being at all useful, when my Dad shouted that a car was arriving. I knew it was a little early for people to start arriving as I had been asking what the time was every 5 minutes , so I ran to the window with unexpected excitement. I could see it was Richard. Richard was a quiet, shy boy who sat near me in class. He was so nice and I really liked him. His hair was short, mousey brown and very thick. It often stuck up in a cute way. It told tales of how he slept and how he would sit in class holding his head in his hand, lounging in a dreamy fashion as the lessons washed over him. I loved this about him. He never talked much but he always looked like he was having fantastic and magical adventures in faraway lands far outside the classroom. Most days he wore a fawn tank top over a checkered shirt. He reminded me of Rupert Bear and all the anthropomorphic character that goes with him. Richard was the only boy I had invited to my party that day apart from my cousins. I was so pleased he had arrived.

The car stopped a few doors down from our house and eagerly I ran outside to greet him. As my sprint brought the car closer, I saw a women getting out of it. She turned towards

me as I approached and said she was Richards mum. "Hello you must be Alison. I'm afraid Richard has to be somewhere else today, but he wanted to drop by with your present". I could see Richard sitting in the back of the car, but he did not look up. His mother handed me a small package wrapped in blue paper. It felt soft and flexible, moving to the cup of my hand. Time suddenly stopped. One minute Richard was here and now he was going. I felt forlorn and longed to see Richard lift his head and smile at me, tell me he could stay. I knew this was unlikely to happen, Richard rarely looked at anyone or spoke. I had never seen him smile or lift his head apart from the times he gazed out of the classroom window. As I looked down at the gift my heart sank along with my own eyes. Richards mother got back in the car and they drove away into the large low sun, vanishing forever.

I began to walk very slowly back to my house, only remembering the gift when the feeling came back to my hand. Gently I pulled the paper open. It was a finely beaded purse, beautiful and exquisite in its every detail. It somehow reminded me of Richard with its overall blondness checkered with a rainbow of multi colored beads. Each bead so individual and special, the whole purse incredible. The sunlight caught the many dimensions reflected off each tiny circle. The colors danced and changed as the purse morphed with the movement of my hand. The purse was on a magical adventure and I was with it, sailing on great oceans, riding on carpets. I could fly as a bird and watch from above, dive as a dolphin and watch from below. I smiled at the wonderful gift. It was personal and thoughtful and I knew it had been chosen for especially for me. My heart lifted, my eyes shined and my body skipped all the way home to my party.