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Stolen Memories

by Talaria Haast

I was eight when I first tried my hand at deception (actually thievery, to be more specific). I was raised in a house with very strict food regulations. That sounds like it was terrible, but actually it was rather healthy. While other children ate Lunchables™ and cookies, my packed lunch usually consisted of tofu, carrots and a sandwich on whole-wheat bread. This brought about issues from my classmates. While other kids were busy making sure their homework was complete and their uniforms were pristine every morning before school, I would carpool into school anticipating how my classmates were going to wrest the lettuce from my whole-wheat sandwich to give to the class turtle. Seriously, I will never own a turtle. I regard them with a general suspicion and truly believe them to be selfish creatures that are only out to please their own hedonistic qualities. Not gonna lie; don't like the hollow, snappy faced little things. They're sneaky.

Anyway, while I digested organic edible flowers and my mother steamed broccoli, the kids in my class plotted the demise of my carefully constructed diet. Wanting to fit in, I began to rebel. I began requesting "fruit leather" (the healthy alternative to fruit rollups) and refusing to eat my usual lunch items. I never traded, because, honestly, who would want to, but I always hoped someone would offer. I don't think that ever actually panned out, but with the hopeful expectation of youth, I never gave up.

At the beginning of third grade, my luck changed. No one wanted my lunch (still), but I was taken out of school for a while. I had a tutor, but I was free from the oppressive grasp of elementary school. However, I was placed in a situation where I was soon met with temptation, and even before I had reached double digits, would loose that battle.

I was one of several children in a cast of around forty adults at a prominent Los Angeles theatre. In the play there were only three children's roles, so although there were five of us, we alternated nights. In Hollywood, where fame and fortune often run hand in hand with lies, drugs and addiction for so many young actors, I was lucky to avoid any serious trouble. On the downside, however, at the moment of discovery there was a feeling of pure pain; I felt that I had completely disappointed my mother and would never again regain her trust.

My addiction was not drugs, nor was it alcohol. It was benign in comparison: it was sugar. The problem I realized that I was going to be forced to deal with was restraint, but even before opening night I knew I was in trouble. There was a craft service table next to the make-up room that was action-packed with every sort of candy imaginable. Seriously, it was like Halloween on steroids.

So I did what any other candy-deprived eight year old would do: I used a huge purse that my grandmother had given me and convinced one of the other girls (who had a similar situation at home) to join me in my plot to make up for all the sweets I felt I had missed. We took everything we could; Twizzlers, SnoCaps, M&Ms, Skittles, Junior Mints, Tootsie Rolls...you name it. We packed it all in my purse (a green wicker bag that looked like it belonged in a cartoon) and stashed it under the make-up table in our dressing room. Since all of the cast members had their own dressing rooms, or shared with a few others, so there was no worry that the purse would ever be found...or so we thought.

If it hadn't been for the third girl in the cast, we would have been safe. She was attempting to exact revenge and would stop at nothing to emerge victorious. Actually, she was fine until opening night; the night the director came to our dressing room and told me to go onstage instead of her. I was terrified and she was enraged. I didn't know though because I was concentrating on the fact that I was going to have to sing even though I couldn't find my voice to even speak. So while I had about thirty minutes to get over my fright of a solo in front of a couple of thousand people, this girl decided to bring me down. She didn't succeed until about a week later, however, when I went to grab a quick snack and was seized with the horror that the purse was missing.

The parents of the kids were not allowed backstage, but did have their own waiting room about ten feet from the backstage threshold. Across the floor was a piece of tape reading: "PARENTS: CROSS THIS LINE AT THE RISK OF YOUR CHILD'S CAREER." My friend and I never thought of that tape until the moment we both were summoned by an understudy to go see our parental figures. We knew we were busted. It took all courage that the two of us could muster to keep walking down that hallway. The white walls and red floor passed faster than we anticipated as we were trying to slow our pace to negative speed. As we approached the line, we both seemed to realize that we should have loved that piece of tape with that dire warning. It was separation in a legal way, designated by the producer (who was far more powerful than our parents, not to mention a more formidable word on the Scrabble board). The two of us stopped at the tape, and with a deep breath and downcast eyes, timidly stepped past the border of our safety zone.

The other girl immediately greeted us; smug and smiling, she skipped over to her father and flounced next to him on the sofa. He, meanwhile, had the purse open at his feet and was currently stuffing his face with our hard work. I suddenly despised him and was very upset that he seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly. My annoyance turned to chagrin as soon as I met my mother's eyes. I just remember her looking so disappointed. I had let her down; her little girl had been deceiving everyone and doing so in a technically unhealthy way. I don't even think she said anything, but my friend and I immediately launched into this outlandish improvisational skit about how we were going to use the candy to put on a show for the parents and now we couldn't continue with our rehearsals, because it was a surprise and they messed it up. And no, we didn't eat any of the candy, goodness, were they crazy? We merely used the sweets as props, as was the logical conclusion that they all should have come to.

We were stretching. We were lying. We were desperate.

They weren't biting.

Fast forward fourteen years: I was turning twenty-two, and had never spoken of that incident for fear of seeing that dejected, betrayed look on my mother's face as she remembered how I had deceived her. During the festivities, I just did not want to bring up any moments of "Hey, remember when I lied to you?" As it was, however, my birthday, my dad had given me several bottles of Silver Oak. Now, I am not a big drinker, but with a bunch of friends and family there, the wine rapidly disappeared and we all ended up sitting around my living room talking about embarrassing moments. Don't ask me how we got on that subject; my family seems quite gifted in the area of awkward moments.

Whether or not I was feeling bold, or I had had a few too many sips of wine, I heard myself forging on and talking about the stolen candy incident. I was including everybody, smiling and laughing through my queasy feeling. I figured that if I treated it like it was no big deal, my mom would forgive me. You know, I was acting like it was just a funny thing that happened in the folly of my youth and not the moment that broke my heart and decimated my faith in my ability to make my mom proud of me. But I continued on with my story, meeting everyone's eyes save for one person; my mom. I still couldn't bring myself to look at her. Swallowing my last bit of wine, I finally looked in her direction. She was laughing too, but looked perplexed.

"Mom?" By this time I had decided to confront this head on. I felt enough years had passed that she would possibly be able to look past my horrible behavior and allow me back into her classification of "good" people. But she looked odd...she hadn't been drinking all that much, so I automatically thought that she was internalizing some anger. Not wanting to ruin the day, but obstinate enough to push on, I began telling her a few things: how old I was, who was there, where we were, what happened. But all of my information was met with furrowed brows and pursed lips.

"I don't...remember that *at all*."

And that was it. She didn't know what I was talking about, and honestly did not remember the incident in which I thought I had lost her respect forever. I was free. All those years I feared to talk about the candy mishap could have been avoided, because she obviously didn't consider it a huge deal. I had blown it all out of proportion and felt guilt for years all for nothing.

So I did what any other guilt-free twenty-two year old would do; I poured another glass of wine and asked my mom if she wanted any candy.