

The Great Laundry Mystery
copyright 2008, Sparrow F. Alden

The apartment where Mom and I lived had been home as long as I could remember, and I liked my room and striped curtains. It was just five running steps from my bed, out the door, across the hall, into Mom's room and into the big bed on Saturday morning. I never actually counted the steps on other mornings.

But moving was going to be OK, since we were moving to a house with a yard and a climbing tree and a little brother and a Mamma and best of all Gwen would share a room with me. We voted to have one room for sleeping and one for a play room instead of one room for each, even though at the beginning we didn't know each other very well. Guests could sleep in the play room on the fold out couch and if the sharing-a-room thing ever doesn't work out, I can always change rooms. Which would be fun, too. I like changing things around.

Even the packing part was kind of fun. When I scooped up the stuff in the top right drawer and dropped them into a printer paper box, I found the beads of my broken flower necklace so I stuffed them in my front pocket.

I was under strict orders to label all the boxes I packed. Very serious strict orders. I grabbed a crayon from my back pocket and wrote "DRAWER" on the box lid. Mission accomplished. I galloped through the kitchen, grabbed an apple, "Bye, Mom, I'm going to Gwen's!" and vamoosed out the door.

Down the stairs, out the big door, down more steps, down the street, round the corner, round the next corner, feel the air change on the tree-lined street, and three doors down to the maroon door on the big grey house. In the back, "Hi, Almost-Mamma," and up the stairs to Gwen's room. Bite the apple.

Gwen was leaning over a pile of folded clothes.

"What'cha counting?" I asked.

"Shirts," Gwen replied. "How many do you have?"

"A drawerful. Plus what's in the laundry. How 'bout you?"

Gwen wrote with a pencil on a clipboard. "Ten, plus three that are too small and four that are too big. Or that's what there's supposed to be. One of the small ones is gone."

"Then that's not a problem, so do you want to build a swing for the tree?"

"But where did it go?"

"Where did what go?"

"Karen!" sighed Gwen. "This is a big deal! After the wedding, we're going to share a room, and share a house, and even share a brother! I want things to be completely organized and you're moving in tomorrow!"

This sounded like one of those meeting-in-the-middle things that Mom and Almost-Mamma had talked about in Family Meeting. This was important to Gwen, so I decided to do my best to go with it.

"OK!" I thought hard. "Gotta tell you, Gwen, laundry is boring. But mysteries are awesome!"

Gwen's face went from frown to a huge smile. "You'll help me?!"

"Sure thing!" I said, "That's what Almost-Sisters do. Have you searched for clues?"

I looked around at Gwen's room. The blue carpet showed vacuum cleaner paths. The dresser top held nothing but a white little tablecloth thingy and a clear brush and mirror. The bed was pushed up against one wall to make room for my bed coming in, and there was nothing under her bed but slippers. A clue wouldn't have a prayer.

She was staring at me. "No clues, no problem," I said. "What we need next is a witness." I turned to gallop down the stairs.

"Wait!" called Gwen. "Whom do we ask?" She said things like that. Whom.

Meeting in the middle. “Got your clipboard?” I asked. She nodded. “Great!” I reached for it and used the little mechanical pencil and wrote “EVERYBODY” in big letters and handed it back to her and down the stairs and out the door and over to Almost-Granny’s.

Almost-Granny lived next door to Gwen in the tiny house called the Honeymoon Cottage. She was sitting in the warm sunshine knitting on our wedding shawls. I loved the softness of the white yarn and imagining what it would feel like when Gwen and I wore them at the wedding. Gwen loved the evenness of the rows and the lacy pattern of stitches and the fact that Almost-Granny was knitting them side-by-side on the same needles.

“Did you see any laundry burglars?” I asked her. Gwen explained more slowly.

“Your blue flowered shirt?” Almost-Granny asked. Gwen nodded. Almost-Granny had made it herself for Gwen to wear in the chorus concert a year ago. She nodded. “I suspect you girls will find it if you look long enough,” she said.

Well, that was no help. So we kept asking people if they had seen a laundry burglar. They said the strangest things. Almost-Mamma said that her African dress with the spangles was gone, too. We galloped back to my apartment and Mom said that her purple scrubs, the ones she wore to sew people up in, was gone. And neither of them was worried! There was some kind of international laundry burglar loose in the neighborhood and all they could do was pack boxes!

Thank goodness for supper, being a detective is exhausting. We all - me and Mom and Gwen and Mikey and Almost-Mamma - cooked out in the back yard together before the whole wedding weekend madness thing began. That night, I slept in my room for the last time, but I didn’t sleep much because I was looking for laundry burglars, but then I remembered that laundry is boring so I didn’t actually care if it got burgled.

All the next day uncles and aunts and cousins and grands and Mom’s old friends arrived and helped move us out of the apartment. I watched to see if anyone was weird about the laundry. Other than Gwen counting it all, I mean.

Well, thank goodness for supper again, because being a detective who’s moving out of her apartment is double-exhausting. Mom says that eating pizza the night after moving is an ancient tradition, and so is having a Rehearsal Dinner the night before a wedding, so we had a Rehearsal Pizza Party in the back yard, which makes no sense because nobody rehearsed anything, but Mom’s friend Reverend Bruce was there having ideas about the wedding the next day.

Gwen and I (and Mikey) got to have a sleepover at Almost-Granny’s that night and the grown up relatives ate pizza until way after bedtime. And in the morning, it was all we could do to eat breakfast and have our showers before racing back to the big house to get dressed for the wedding. We had the beautiful shawls (Almost-Granny finished them after our bedtime) and showed them off and raced up to our room to get dressed.

Gwen stopped short in the doorway. I crashed into her.

My bed was all set up, side-by-side with hers. And there were the blue flowered shirt and the purple scrubs and the sparkly African dress and my butterfly skirt that I didn’t know was missing. They had been all cut up and sewn back together, I mean *together*-together. Into quilts. Two gorgeous quilts on our beds. With all those colors and sparkles and flowers and butterflies, side by side.

And in two hours, I had a brand new Mamma, and a Granny, and a sister and a brother. And the wedding pictures look just like my quilt.