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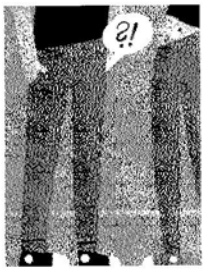
SHOUTS & MURMURS | **JULY 30, 2012 ISSUE**

UNPROTECTED

BY SIMON RICH

I born in factory. They put me in wrapper. They seal me in box. Three of us in box.

ILLUSTRATION BY BENDIK KALTENBORN



In early days, they move us around. From factory to warehouse. From warehouse to truck. From truck to store.

One day in store, boy human sees us on shelf. He grabs us, hides us under shirt. He rushes outside.

He goes to house, runs into bedroom, locks door. He tears open box and takes me out. He puts me in wallet.

I stay in wallet long, long time.

This is story of my life inside wallet.

The first friend I meet in wallet is Student I.D. Jordi Hirschfeld. He is card. He has been around longest, he says. He introduces me to other cards. I meet Learner Permit Jordi Hirschfeld, Blockbuster Video Jordi Hirschfeld, Jamba Juice Value Card, GameStop PowerUp Card Jordi Hirschfeld, Business Card Albert Hirschfeld, D.D.S., Scarsdale Comic Book Explosion Discount Card.

In middle of wallet, there live dollars. I am less close to them, because they are always coming and going. But they are mostly nice. I meet many Ones and Fives, some Tens, a few Twenties. One time, I meet Hundred. He stay for long time. Came from birthday card, he said. Birthday card from an old person.

I also meet photograph of girl human. Very beautiful. Eyes like Blockbuster

Video. Blue, blue, blue.

When I first get to wallet, I am "new guy." But time passes. I stay for so long, I become veteran. When I first arrive, Jamba Juice has just two stamps. Next thing I know, he has five stamps—then six, then seven. When he gets ten stamps, he is gone. One day, Learner Permit disappears. In his place, there is new guy, Driver License. I become worried. Things are changing very fast.

Soon after, I am taken out of wallet. It is night. I am scared. I do not know what is happening. Then I see girl human. She is one from photograph. She looks same in real life, except now she wears no shirt. She is smiling, but when she sees me she becomes angry. There is arguing. I go back inside wallet.

A few days later, picture of girl human is gone.

That summer, I meet two new friends. The first is Student I.D. New York University Jordi Hirschfeld. The second is MetroCard.

MetroCard is from New York City and he never lets you forget it. He has real "attitude." He is yellow and black, with Cirque du Soleil advertisement on back.

When MetroCard meets GameStop PowerUp Card Jordi Hirschfeld, he looks at me and says, No wonder Jordi Hirschfeld not yet use you. I become confused. Use me for what?

That night, MetroCard tells me many strange things about myself. At first, I do not believe what he says. But he insists all is true. When I start to panic, he laughs. He says, What did you think you were for? I am too embarrassed to admit truth, which is that I thought I was balloon.

It is around this time that we move. For more than two years, we had lived inside Velcro Batman. It is nice, comfy. One day, though, without warning, we are inside stiff brown leather. I am very upset—especially when I see that so many friends are gone.

No more GameStop PowerUp Card Jordi Hirschfeld. No more Blockbuster Video Jordi Hirschfeld. No more Scarsdale Comic Book Explosion Discount Card.

Only survivors are MetroCard, Driver License, Student I.D., myself, and a creepy new lady named Visa.

I am angry. What was wrong with Velcro Batman? It had many pockets and was warm. I miss my friends and I am lonely.

A few days later, I meet Film Forum Membership Jordan Hirschfeld.

At this point, I am in "panic mode." What is "Film Forum"? Who is "Jordan Hirschfeld"?

Jordan Hirschfeld is same guy as Jordi Hirschfeld, MetroCard explains. He is just trying to "change his image." I am confused. What is wrong with old image? That night, I poke my head out of wallet and look around pocket. It is dark, but I can see we have new neighbor. He says his name is Cigarettes Gauloises. He is very polite, but I get "weird vibe" from him.

It is about this time that I meet strip of notebook paper. On him is written, "rachelfeingold@nyu.edu."

Now we're getting somewhere, MetroCard says. I have never been more frightened in my life.

That Saturday, five crisp Twenties show up. I assume they will stay long time, like most Twenties. But two hours later they are gone, replaced by receipt La Cucina.

MetroCard looks at receipt La Cucina and laughs. She better put out after that, he says. I am confused and worried.

Later on, I am minding my own business, when Jordi (sorry—"Jordan") shoves his finger into me. I am terrified. What was that? I ask. MetroCard grins. He is checking to make sure you're there, he says. For later.

My friends try to calm me down. One of the dollars, a One, tells me about the time he met Vending Machine Pepsi. He was stuffed in and out, in and out, so many times he almost died. I know he is trying to make me feel better, but I am, like, please stop talking about that.

Eventually, the moment comes. It is like other time. I am taken out of wallet and tossed on bed. It is very dark. I can make out shape of girl.

She picks me up and squints at me for a while. Then she turns on lamp.

I am confused. So is Jordan Hirschfeld.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

His face is like Jamba Juice Value Card. Red, red, red.

"I think," she says, "that this might actually be expired."

There is long silence. And then, all of a sudden, the humans are laughing! And then the girl is hitting Jordan with pillow! And he is hitting her back with pillow! And they are laughing, laughing, laughing.

The girl reaches into her bag.

"Don't worry," she says. "I've got one."

Part of me kind of wants to watch what happens next. But I am quickly covered in pile of clothes.

When I wake up next day, Jordan is dangling me over trash can. I look down into pit. Inside are Cigarettes Gauloises and Film Forum Schedule. They are talking "philosophy." I sigh. I do not really want to move in with them, but what can I do? I figure this is "end of the line" for me.

Suddenly, though, Jordan carries me away—to other side of room. I am placed inside shoebox under his bed.

At first, I am afraid, because it is dark, but as vision adjusts I see I am not alone. There is strip of notebook paper rachelfeingold@nyu.edu. There is receipt La Cucina, on which is now written, "First Date."

I spend long, long time in shoebox.

When I arrive, I am new guy. But as time passes I become veteran. I welcome

many new friends: Birthday card Rachel. Happy Valentine's Day Rachel. And many, many Post-it notes Rachel. I love you, Jordi. Rachel. Good morning, Jordi! Rachel. Everything in here is Rachel.

I do not know how things are in wallet these days. But I am glad to be in shoebox. I feel as if I have "made it." I am happy. I am warm. I am safe. ♦

SIMON RICH