

My blackout ends with golden things inches from my eyes. A small-caliber bullet, boxing gloves, three names spelled out in diamond-accented gold script, and two obscure symbols introduce my hospital orderly, Charles Baker, his autobiography dangling from his neck. My fascination with his charms on a chain brings Charles to my bedside at the end of his shift, talking a husky streak accompanied by the soft clunk of gold against gold. Stories, a rush of stories hazed by my morphine drip is a tangle I take home from the hospital. A few details endure—Charles was a Golden Gloves champion, bantamweight; his firstborn is deaf.

An old memory comes to mind: things dangling from our necks are thought to be the first jewelry, some forty thousand years back. Pure decoration embellishing the body, that's one function of those ornaments. And infused with symbolic meanings, those same ornaments communicate the wearer's station in life, the elevated value bestowed on certain metals ... as has been the way with jewelry into the present.

Today an ad in the *New York Times* pictures a \$450,000 emerald-cut diamond solitaire ring with the added value of provenance: the ring once belonged to "wealthy philanthropist Eleanor Ashcroft." Its migration from Mrs. Ashcroft's finger to a public auction is jewelry's often-repeated journey initiated by death or changes in fashion or the economic downturn of the owner. A frequent stop on the itinerary of an object separated from its owner is the thrift store, the junk shop, its display cases burdened with masses of pre-owned jewelry. Such a trail of unrecorded human events resides in all those bits of metal and colored stones organized into rings bracelets necklaces brooches—the biography of each object lengthened as it's inherited or resold or donated.

We know this; we know the life of jewelry is long.

And, too, jewelry is made for losing. No one can say that isn't so.

Your case in point may be earrings left on a public bathroom sink. And in any group of five or more people, someone is likely to have experienced the high-emotion loss of their most singular love token. Our engagement rings and wedding bands gone missing insinuate: this relationship is not meant to be, this marriage is doomed. From afar the lost token transmits its disturbing message.

The sudden gone of a thing is a haunting—the vanished ring bracelet necklace gone to the place where lost things go, our lost things falling falling, I wish I had a map to the place where lost things land.

Where are the finders? Won't you step forward, you who found my grandmother's pearls on Houston Street and you who discovered my cousin Dolores's ring at Orly Airport. Her substantial pink diamond set in platinum inherited from our great-aunt left Dolores's finger when she pulled off her glove. Pearls that every Sunday circled a neck from morning church until bedtime, a ring never taken off, that skin-close contact continues to inhabit the thing, the body-to-object commiseration lingering in the subatomic realm. Called thermodynamics, if you like. Or call it nonsense, if you insist there can be no vestigial intimacy lingering in the ring or in pearls separated from their owner.

A friend insists the brooch she wears, a Maltese cross, once belonged to Coco Chanel, and furthermore, in a previous life it belonged to Grand Duke Dmitri, grandson of Tsar Alexander II, first cousin of Nicholas II, a successor to a band of Christian monks, the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, who chose the original cross as their insignia.



- 1432—The Order's mission, to provide for visiting pilgrims, takes on a military identity as of necessity the monks become crusaders in Jerusalem, knights fighting for possession of the Holy Land.
- 1530—The home convent moves to Malta and stays for three centuries until Napoleon disperses them; a large number of refugee knights find shelter in St. Petersburg, becoming a pan-Christian order with hereditary rights, known as the Russian Grand Priory.
- 1917—Dispersed by the revolution, a circle of Russian exiles in Paris reorganize the Russian Grand Priory once they have obtained food and shelter and acclimated to Parisian ways; retaining the original monk's cross to designate the brotherhood. In 1927 Coco says: I accept the medal, Dmitri's insignia intended for sons in succession who have lost their place in the tidy network of royals. Ha! I could be honored in their nation's revolution—the little worker who earns a place in the social system. I know the language, I know the premise: the individual and the social collective are the same. Lenin need not lecture me. Dmitri is lovely good company, I do not swoon over his title, I like it but I do not swoon. Pleasantly dull and so wonderfully undemanding, this well-preserved man always in a state of repose wraps his long fingers around his glass of tea, the same fingers that murdered Rasputin. He gives me jewelry.