

## Lost and Found

by Nancy Wirsig McClure

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*NOTE: This was formatted on a Mac. It may need to have special characters replaced (such as quotes and em-dash).*

It's a relief to leave behind the the noise and brightness of the party, but Lorna finds it somewhat disorienting to come into her workplace's dim lobby. She's not usually around after hours and dusk comes so early in December. Silhouettes loom up against the darkened windows — but they are, of course, the bigger-than-life superhero and wizard sculptures. In daytime it's been fairly easy to ignore them on her way to the finance department, as though she works at a regular business and not a comics publisher.

Tonight she has to give closer attention to reaching the front door by passing between the figures. Some of them produce an uncanny sense of a person's presence. Not Rowdy Rooster, though, a squat shape with an unmistakable bird beak. He's the one character who makes her smile a bit, because his 'books gave InkCognito Comics its start.

Today's festivities have been Lorna's first experience of an InkCognito product launch. She showed up at the party, as they seemed to expect, but now her weekend starts. Before heading out into the rain, she makes sure her bag holds her book for the bus: an old copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. At least her bosses don't expect her to read comic books!

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Lorna's former roommate is online that evening, and they both want to chat.

Lorna: ...They started celebrating before 5, but later it got really silly.

Megan: Isn't "silly" part of the job at InkCognito?

Lorna: I s'pose it is, for the guys on the creative side.

Megan: Hey, your appearance Upheld the Honor of the business side.

Lorna: Yay me. But, frustrating to get a Real Job and still face collegiate humor.

Megan: At least it's publishing! Retail ain't exactly on my career path.

Lorna: But it's Real Life, better than sheltered college.

Megan: RL? I dunno. You work in a fantasy biz. And I hope to.

Lorna: I'm a bookkeeper, not a fantasist.

Megan: What about those Jane Austens?

Lorna: Hmmph. Please. Literature.

Megan: No dreams of a Darcy?

Lorna: O la, ma'am, you put me to the blush!

Megan: Sure. ok. and this party was for...?

Lorna: Some new action-adventure title.

Megan: Such enthusiasm!

Lorna: Well, sales projections look good. I gather there's a movie tie-in.

Megan: Bet it's the revival of Cap'n Fabulous. Down here, billboards galore.

Lorna: From a studio you'd want to submit to?

Megan: No, I'm only sending scripts to smaller studios.

Lorna: Writing tonight?

Megan: Too tired. Big fuss at work today.

Lorna: Oh?

Megan: They caught a shoplifter in action. I saw it.

Lorna: Wow!

Megan: Will be on my blog... post nearly done.

Lorna: About being a crime witness!

Megan: You shoulda heard the perp loudly blaming someone else. So L.A.

Lorna: Well even Portland folks are selfish. On the bus no one gave up their seat to woman w/ baby.

Megan: But I bet \*you\* did....

Lorna: Yep. Righteousness sustained me all the way home. Of course, an umbrella woulda been more useful.

Megan: LOL.

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Lorna had hoped for dry weather for Saturday's plans, but like all Oregon natives, she isn't deterred by a little rain.

At least when Griff shows up he's only twenty minutes late, and driving a U-Haul as promised. Perhaps her big brother is finally becoming an adult! It's always seemed Lorna has had to be the responsible one. She ran the household after their mom died when she was eight and he was 11. And now they need to put the house on the market.

Griff says, "Kim sends her love. I told her we need to do this ourselves."

"Oh, say hi to Kim, too," Lorna says vaguely. The thought of her brother and his girlfriend always makes her feel a bit... sad, maybe? She begins telling him about conversations with the realtor.

The truck is halfway to Northeast when Griff interrupts. "But Lorna, will this be hard for you?"

"You mean, being reminded of Dad?"

"Yeah, you were always closer to him."

"It's been six months."

"I guess we're just not all that devastated," he muses. "Maybe because he was more like a teacher than a parent."

"There was love there!"

She stares out the windshield to hide her tears and ignores his murmur, "Methinks the lady doth protest..." But he reaches out and clasps her hand.

It will be days before she looks back and recognizes that her brother, in some ways, is actually quite grown up.

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By mid-afternoon they're making good progress on emptying the house and filling the truck. When Griff loads boxes of comic books without pausing to gloat over his collection, Lorna is impressed. On impulse, she mentions an InkCognito perk: discounts on back issues.

Griff whoops. "Now I know how to spend my share!" Good thing for him she can

detect a joke.

Later he manhandles something down the attic stairs and calls, “Hey, isn’t this yours?”

It’s a foot locker, painted with amateurish swirls of color. It must’ve been up there for 15 years, forgotten.

Soon she’s sitting on the floor, guiltily taking an unscheduled break. Surrounding her are drifts of drawings. She’d been quite the little artist! There are perceptive if over-colored renderings of families and houses and pets. But most images show a dragon with bright green scales, a yellow belly, and wings spread wide, grinning out of a scene.

Griff pauses in passing when she lifts a coffee can from the trunk. The can is decorated with foil, open on both ends, and densely filled with scrunched plush. Without thinking, she makes a fist and punches up into the can’s open bottom. Out the top flies a plush dragon, green and yellow, with a big grin. To tell the truth, it flops out, wings crumpled.

Lorna catches the dragon and calls his name. “Senssa!” She is swamped with strong echoes of affection.

“Oh, right.” Griff’s tolerant-older-brother voice. “Your dragon. You used to tell me and Mom endless stories about you and him. You were always saving the world together. Um, why is he in a can?”

She’s unaware that her face has become eager and open. “There Will Come a Time when a clever little dragon will make a plan to hide and then leap out....”

As her voice fades, Griff slips away to his tasks. Lorna sits slowly straightening the wires in Senssa’s wings. More fragments of dragon adventures reappear in her mind.

She always told them in future tense. Why? The answer comes in images of old cartoon re-runs on TV. “The Adventures of Tilly Terrific and Her Clever Dragon.” The stories were set in the future. The cartoons were drawn in black and white, but little Lorna always insisted that the dragon, Senssawonda, was green.

How attentive of her parents to have given her a stuffed dragon, a green one. Senssa was her best friend in those days. Sometimes he even licked her hand. That’s more like a puppy than a dragon, but who argues with a kid’s imagination?

Lorna is still sitting by her trunk, stroking dragon hide — er, plush — when she

blurts, “Senssawonda!” and then recites InkCognito’s slogan, “Never lose your sense of wonder.”

She almost blushes for her younger self who didn’t recognize the name’s derivation from a phrase. But now Senssa seems even more precious.

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Sunday morning it’s still raining, and Lorna and Senssa are cuddling on the couch. She’s telling him a new story.

There Will Come a Time when a clever staffer at a publisher makes a suggestion. InkCognito Comics will produce books that revive an old cartoon favorite, featuring a girl and her dragon — grown to adolescence and having new adventures.

The comics will be followed by an animated feature. The script will be written by a first-time scriptwriter, the clever staffer’s college roommate.

InkCognito will have a movie launch party and unveil a new lobby figure: a big wing-spread dragon, made of green plush.

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What Will Come to Pass, no one can say. But it’s likely that two days of rain in Portland are followed by... Monday.

The receptionist at InkCognito is nursing morning coffee and squinting against the sunlight streaming in the lobby windows. Few people have arrived yet. But here comes that buttoned-up bookkeeping assistant, Lorna, in her button-down shirt. An unexpected sight startles the receptionist awake.

Lorna plants a smacking kiss on the beak of Rowdy Rooster. Then she steps lightly down the hall.