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## The Couch

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## The Couch

By Luke Jungermann

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His wallet was next.

Sam reached his car before realizing it was gone. His hands went to his back pockets, then the front ones, then to the back ones again. Going back inside his tiny apartment, he found the pants he wore the previous day and went through those pockets as well, back, then front. Next were the dresser drawers where he pulled out every sock and pair of underwear and carefully removed the small black jewelry box, placing it on his bed, and mentally pictured where he last had it, before moving onto the next drawer. Three more drawers and a closet later, still no wallet. He put everything back to where it was before, making sure he put the engagement ring in his pocket where he could always know where it was.

His watch read seven thirty. He was supposed to have picked up Lilly twenty minutes ago. She'd be angry, but she'd smile again in a few minutes in that perfect expression. He went to his neighbor's door and knocked once, then again, then again. Ms. Valerie came to her door on the fourth knock, and Sam asked to use her telephone again. His phone had been gone for a month now, and he had to learn of his father's illness from Lilly. After making the pitiful S.O.S. phone call, he thanked Ms. Valerie and went back to his apartment, sitting down on his old grey couch.

The couch itself was ugly as hell, but oddly enough, it was the centerpiece of the room. His dirty kitchen was to the right of the door with a sink filled with grimy dishes from the night before and a refrigerator loud enough to be heard from two floors above. He'd gotten complaints. In-between the kitchen and the sad excuse for a living room was a small table with



two chairs and couple of candles. He and Lilly had bought it together from a Walmart for ten dollars because Lilly was tired of having dinner on that musty couch in front of the television. He knew she hated his place, but she was too perfect to say so. Instead, they talked about their future and one day buying a house together. Sam sighed and leaned back into the couch, sinking and sinking and relaxing.

Lilly arrived ten minutes later in her yellow Volkswagen, wearing a blue dress and a white, sympathetic smile. When she saw him, she wrapped her arms around him, and he buried his face into her warm neck.

“What am I going to do with you?” She wasn’t angry or frustrated, and Sam loved her for that.

“Looks like you’re paying tonight.”

She ruffled his hair and smiled, and they drove off in her car.

\* \* \*

Sam always kept an old rabbit’s foot on his car keys. His father had given it to him before Sam went off to college, saying that with it, he’d ace all his classes, graduate in four years, and maybe meet the right girl along the way. He’d only been right about the last bit. Sam rubbed his thumb up and down the rabbit’s foot once again, this time in his living room wearing a black suit, waiting for Lilly to pick him up on the way to the cemetery. She’d promised to come all the way up to his apartment to get him so that she’d be with him the whole way. So he wouldn’t be alone. But right now, he was alone. And all he could think of was his old, dirty couch. Putting his keys back in his pocket, he shuffled over to it and plopped down onto its soft cushions.

Sam could still remember eight years ago when

It was even softer then and lacked the many stains that now littered the fabric. His father had bought it for Sam to use at college so he’d have some place to relax and unwind. Of course, Sam had taken that to mean a place to sit back, be lazy, and forget about classes.

There was a knock on the door. Lilly came in, and she held his hand all the way to the car. The funeral was long and dreary. Dark rain clouds filled half the sky but were quickly replaced by the sharp blue tint of open air. Sam was disappointed. He liked the clouds. They reminded him of the camping trips he and his dad would take when Sam was younger. They always planned to spend their day outside, fishing or hunting, but every time there was some sort of rain storm that forced them into their tents to spend the day reading, joking, and laughing. Sam liked those trips much more than the clear ones.

The service ended abruptly, and people began to wander away. Lilly stayed with him, her hand still firmly in his.

“We can stay as long as you want, honey,” he heard her say.

He looked down at the fresh rectangle of dirt then up at the now clear sky. The dark clouds were gone. Sam reached into his pocket for the rabbit’s foot, to rub it one more time and then lay it to rest with his father, but it was gone. And so were his keys.

\* \* \*

Sam was silent the whole way home. Lilly apologized multiple times and promised to help him search for the foot. Sam remained quiet and still, deep in thought, coming to grips with the decision that would change his life, a change his father would approve and be proud of.

When they got to the apartment, Sam sat down with Lilly on that worn couch. He took her hand into his and looked into her eyes.

“Lilly.” She already started to smile. “I’ve been thinking about my life lately. I’ve been...thinking about the future. Our future. You’re the only thing I’ve got left in this world, and I’d like nothing more than to spend our future together. I want to leave everything else behind.”

She wiped a tear from her cheek.

“So...I’ve got a question to ask you...”

Slowly, his hand moved into his pocket to pull out...nothing.

“No,” he whispered under his breath.

He checked his other pocket. Nothing.

“No. No. No.”

He checked his back pockets, then his jacket pockets. Still nothing.

“No!”

Tears rolled out from his eyes like a trickling stream until he leaned forward and hung his head in his hands. It was his fault. It was all his fault. Everything was gone: his phone, his wallet, his keys, his ring. His father. He hated his apartment. He hated his low-paying job. He hated his television. He hated his couch. And he hated himself.

Softly, like a warm breeze on a spring day, Sam felt Lilly’s hand on his shoulder, then her other hand, then her head. Hugging him, she uttered the only word that felt right: “yes.”

He lifted his head and saw her smiling her perfect smile. He didn’t hate her. He loved her, and after that, nothing else seemed to matter. He’d sell his apartment. He’d sell his television. He’d sell his couch. They’d start a new life together. A new day.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later, Sam sold his beat-up couch to a couple of college kids across town. He gave them a good bargain for it. Thirty dollars for the whole thing, including everything they’d later find inside: a cell phone, a wallet, a set of keys with a rabbit’s foot, and a diamond engagement ring still in the box.



*THE FIELDS WHERE WE GREW UP*  
WATERCOLOR  
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