



LOST IN THE
MOMENT
AND
FOUND

“One of the most
extraordinary stories
I've ever read.”

—V. E. SCHWAB on
Every Heart a Doorway

SEANAN
MCGUIRE

HUGO AND NEBULA AWARD WINNING SERIES

**LOST IN
THE MOMENT
AND FOUND**

**SEANAN
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***FOR THE CHILD I WAS.
I WILL SPEND MY ENTIRE LIFE
TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR THE
FACT THAT WHEN I WAS YOU, I DIDN'T RUN SOON ENOUGH.
I'M SORRY.***

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While all the Wayward Children books have dealt with heavy themes and childhood traumas, this one addresses an all-too-familiar monster: the one that lives in your own home. Themes of grooming and adult gaslighting are present in the early text. As a survivor of something very similar, I would not want to be surprised by these elements where I didn't expect them.

I just want to offer you this reassurance: Antsy runs. Before anything can actually happen, Antsy runs.

*Street penny sacrament; what are you looking for?
Lost in the moment and found,
I am the God of Lost Things, and I will take care of you.
Foundling and fallen, not where it ought to be,
Mislaid and moved around.
I am the God of Lost Things, and I will take care of you.

I will take care of you.*

—“The God of Lost Things,” Talis Kimberley

PART I

**SOMETIMES THINGS GET
LOST**

1

FALLING BETWEEN THE CRACKS

THE FIRST THING ANTOINETTE Ricci ever lost was her father, but she was so young when it happened that she never really felt like she could be held responsible. She was only five years old, made of wiggles and giggles and still enough smaller than her name that no one ever called her anything other than “Antsy,” not even her parents. She had never been hungry for longer than it took to tell an adult, never been hurt worse than a skinned knee or banged elbow, never truly been afraid.

It was a daddy-daughter day, something Antsy still viewed as a special treat, even though she knew that it was really to give her mother a few hours of peace after a long week of raising her hyperactive child. Mommy was going to go back to work as soon as Antsy started first grade, but until then, it was just the two of them all day while Daddy was at work, and that meant Saturdays were for Daddy and Antsy, Antsy and Daddy, just the two of them out in the world.

That was normal. That was right. That was the way things were supposed to be. And one minute he was there, watching indulgently from the end of the aisle as she ran wild and gleeful past ranks of Disney princesses and their jewel-toned plastic accessories, and then he wasn't there anymore. Antsy stopped running right in the middle of the aisle, too confused to move. Her parents *never* left her alone when they were at Target. That was one of their first and firmest rules; she could be allowed to free-range through the toys as long as she could see them, but she couldn't let them slip out of sight, not ever, because the world was full of people who wanted to snatch up pretty little girls and walk away with them.

But her father—her tall, strong, broad-shouldered father with the hair as bright a red as hers—wasn't there anymore. He should have been right there at the end of the aisle, watching her with the little smile on his face that he reserved for what he called her “feral child moments,” what he called the times when she ran wild and free and unfettered by the expectations of a world that was inevitably going to come crashing down on her soon enough.

Instead of her father, there was a pair of scuffed brown shoes that stuck out just past the edge of the aisle. They looked familiar. She'd seen them at home, in the hall. Suddenly gripped by the cold hand of caution, Antsy crept closer. Why were her father's shoes on the floor? Where was her father? Grownups didn't lay down on the floor the way kids sometimes did. They were too tall. When they did get down on the floor to look at something neat, they complained the whole time, saying things that didn't make any sense, like “ow, my back” and “when's the last time we vacuumed this carpet?” So her father couldn't be wearing his shoes anymore, because he wouldn't lay down like that, but the toes were pointed at the ceiling, and shoes only did that when there were feet inside them.

She slowed down before she reached the shoes, before she could see the person—not her father, it couldn't be her father—who was wearing them. Something was very wrong. If he'd been playing hide-seek without telling her, he would already have popped back out to give her a chance to find him, and if he wasn't, he'd never have left her alone like this. She didn't want to reach the end of the aisle. She was suddenly gripped by the unkind conviction that if she did, everything was going to change, and she didn't want it to. She didn't want it to change at all. She had everything she wanted.

She had a nice room with a bunk bed that was just for her, and walls painted her favorite shade of green, with yellow daisies stenciled all around the baseboards. She'd helped with the daisies, and her handprint was pressed next to the doorframe, smaller than her hands were now, but still enough to make it clear that the room was *hers*, the space belonged to *her*, and no one was welcome there unless she wanted them to be.

She had a pretty mother with long dark hair and a laugh like watermelon on a hot summer afternoon, sweet and good and oddly sticky in its own way. Her mother's laughter *stuck* to you, and it made everything better for hours and hours, even after it was over. And she had the best father in the world, with red hair like her own, although he had a lot less of it—he'd started losing his hair before she was born, and when she'd seen pictures of him from the wedding and before, where his whole shiny skull was covered up by untamed red frizzes, she'd been scared of losing her own hair for more than a week, until her mother told her that because her hair was curly like Aunt Sally's and not straight like Daddy's, it wasn't going to happen. Her father didn't laugh as good as her mother did, but he knew the best games, and he was always happy to play them with her. He didn't mind mud or mess or spending hours at Target while she ran around and looked at all the toys.

She loved both her parents, and she loved her life, and she didn't want to lose any of it. She had the vague feeling that sometimes good things were only as good as they were because all the pieces had managed to line up *just so*, and if you took any of them away, it wouldn't be good anymore. Maybe not good at all.

So she stood frozen a few feet from the end of the aisle, staring at her father's shoes and trying to fight back the panic that threatened to rise up and overwhelm her. Something was wrong.

The feeling that something was wrong only grew when an unfamiliar adult voice asked, sharp and interrogative, "Sir? Sir, are you all right? Do you need me to call for—oh my God. *Someone call 911!*"

Not entirely sure what was happening, only that she was scared and alone and wanted her father, Antsy finally rushed forward the last few steps, until she could see, and stopped again, eyes going so wide that it hurt. She couldn't close them. She couldn't look away.

There were her father's shoes, toes pointed at the ceiling because they were still on her father's feet, and there was her father, flat on his back on the cold linoleum, staring up at the ceiling the way he always said *she* shouldn't do, because the lights would hurt her eyes. There was a woman she didn't know kneeling next to him and yelling, her fingers pressed

against the side of his neck. Antsy's stomach seized up like a fist. She didn't think it was okay for this lady to be touching her father.

But he wasn't smacking the lady's hand away or telling her it was rude to touch people without permission. He wasn't doing anything. He wasn't even blinking.

People needed to blink. Blinking was *important*. Antsy sniffled.

The woman hadn't noticed her yet. She was looking over her shoulder and shouting something Antsy couldn't quite hear. There was a weird ringing sound in her ears, getting louder and louder the longer she looked at her father, still and silent and staring at the lights, unmoving on the Target floor.

She didn't even notice when her own throat hitched and she started keening, the sound high and horrible and inhuman. The woman's head snapped back around, taking in the crying child and the fact that her hair matched the dead man's in an instant, before she got to her feet and moved to put herself between the little girl and the body. "Oh, sweetheart," she said. "Don't look at that. No, no, don't look at that. Sweetheart, look at me."

Antsy tried to duck around the woman, who grabbed her by the shoulders and stopped her before she could complete the motion. "My name isn't *sweetheart* I don't *know* you you're not allowed to *touch* me I want my daddy!" Her voice peaked in a wail so high and sharp that it made the people in earshot wince.

And there were more of them than there had been only a few seconds before. People were pouring into their location, other shoppers and staffers in their familiar red Target vests. Antsy recognized one of them, the nice man who always restocked the Barbies when they'd been picked over. She'd asked him before if he knew where a specific toy was, and he had always been willing to help her find what she needed.

Wrenching herself away from the woman, she flung herself at the man and wrapped her arms around his leg, holding on tightly as she wailed. The man looked around helplessly, holding his hands up and well away from her.

“I didn’t touch her,” he said, voice gone defensive. “She grabbed on to me.”

“Make Daddy wake up!” demanded Antsy, as if being an employee of Target gave him some sort of secret superpower.

“I can’t, sweetheart, I’m sorry,” he said. “I just stock the toys, I don’t raise the—I’m sorry.”

Antsy sniffled and wiped her face on the leg of his pants. He patted her on the head like she was a puppy, tentative and still clearly half-afraid to touch her.

“M Antsy,” she said.

“David,” he replied. “Is my name.”

The woman who’d originally found her father was now talking earnestly to two men dressed as store security, gesturing alternately to the body and the child. Things got very hectic after that.

Someone pried Antsy off the man’s leg. She started wailing again, and only wailed louder as EMTs and police officers arrived and loaded her father onto a gurney, wheeling him away. She tried to run after them, and a policewoman in a blue uniform stepped in front of her, kneeling down to look her in the eye.

“Where is your mother?” asked the policewoman.

Antsy sniffled, surprised enough to momentarily stop wailing and focus on the woman in front of her. “She says Target is daddy-daughter time,” she said, voice thick with tears and snot, sounding younger than her five years. “Where are they taking my daddy?”

The policewoman’s expression didn’t change, remaining placid and a little sad. “Do you know your mother’s phone number?” she asked. “We can call her together, if you know.”

Antsy was still too young for a phone of her own, and so had been drilled on both her parents’ numbers, in case they were ever separated. She sniffled, nodded, and recited the number she had never had cause to use like this before, even after all her mother’s dire warnings.

The rest of that day was a blur, bright and terrible and unbearable, and the only mercy it held was that so little of it would stay in her memory,

which seemed to have been blasted into shards by the image of her father's open eyes staring at the lights.

After that, whenever it was time for shopping, if shopping meant Target, Antsy would refuse to go inside. She would throw tantrums a toddler would be proud of, would scream and bite and kick and, once, even wet herself rather than be dragged through the doors. It didn't matter. She couldn't go inside, couldn't go under those lights, couldn't enter the air-conditioned aisles. It wasn't possible.

That was the day she lost her father. It would be years before she realized losing him had taken something less tangible and less provably important away at the same time: the feeling of safety and security in the world, like it was a kind place.

Memory came back in time for the funeral. They lowered him into the ground, and she stood next to her mother in a black dress—she'd never been allowed to have a black dress before, not even when she asked for it, black dresses were for sad people and she was supposed to be a happy little girl, and she couldn't even feel special and pretty, because her father wasn't there, he wasn't there, he was never going to be there again—and she didn't cry. All her tears had been spilled first in the toy aisles of Target and then the lobby of the police station where she'd been taken to wait for her mother, and as she got older, she would come to think that the ability to cry was the third thing she'd lost in a single day.

One thing could happen to anyone. Two things was a tragedy. Three things felt like carelessness. And for the rest of her life, she would remember that black dress and that solemn graveside, and going home after to put on jeans and a T-shirt and run around the backyard trying to pretend her father would be there when she went back inside the house, and her mother wouldn't look so sad, and her grandmother wouldn't be sitting on the couch crying like she had to make up for every tear Antsy herself couldn't shed.

After a week had passed, Antsy went back to school, finding herself suddenly a member of a small, involuntarily exclusive club for children with dead parents. People who had always been friendly toward her treated her like she had something contagious, like she had become an entirely

different person over the span of a week and a half. Like a father having a massive heart attack in the toy section of Target was somehow catching.

Life went back to normal. Bit by bit, the color came back into the world, and Antoinette resumed living up to her nickname, always in motion, a little moving missile of red curls and laughter, full of fuss and bother. They called her “Antsy” not just because it was shorter than her given name, and not just because there was a girl in her class named “Anne” but because she was never still for more than a few seconds. Her tendency to squirm during class had gotten her into trouble more than once, and her teacher felt bad for having appreciated her stillness during the days right after her father’s funeral.

Life not only went back to normal: life went on. New things happened, things her father had never been a part of, and shortly after Antsy’s sixth birthday, the new thing that happened was a man in her living room, a man named Tyler who held her mother’s hand and watched Antsy with heavy-lidded eyes, studying her in a way that made her feel like she was something he was thinking about buying from the store and not a little girl in her own home, with a mother who loved her and a father who was lost, but not on purpose.

Antsy didn’t like him. She didn’t like to be alone with him, but she couldn’t say the right reasons why, couldn’t find them in her lists of good reasons not to like or want or enjoy a thing. It wasn’t that he was a man who wasn’t related to her—only the fact that she liked David from the toy aisle as much as she did had let her try going back to Target with her mother the first time, and that was the only time she’d been able to make it past the doors before she fled to the parking lot in tears, pursued by her worried, mortified mother. And it wasn’t that the man was in her house. Lots of people had been in her house since her father died, relatives she didn’t really know and neighbors with casseroles and condolences. She couldn’t say *why* she didn’t like him, only that she didn’t, not one little bit, and it didn’t matter, because her mother didn’t seem to see it. He came around more and more often, first every other weekend and then every single one, and then during the week, too, so that sometimes she’d come home from school and he’d be there already.

Then one day she came home and he was there and her mother wasn't, and they were alone together for the very first time. Antsy froze, going still in a way her teachers would never have believed she was capable of, and stared at him in solemn-eyed silence until he frowned and left the living room for the kitchen, leaving her alone. She fled for her bedroom immediately, shutting the door as hard as she could and throwing herself onto the bottom bunk of her bed, not sure *why* she was so upset, only that she was.

There was so much she didn't seem to know. It was like her father had taken all the answers with him when he left, and now she had to live in a world that didn't have any answers in it at all.

She lay on her bed and shivered until she heard her mother's car in the driveway. Only then did she relax enough to fall asleep, and when her mother woke her for dinner, Tyler was still there. He sat at their table in the place where her father was supposed to be, and he put the potatoes on her plate like they were a gift, like the meal her mother had cooked in their very own kitchen was something he had the power and authority to bestow. Antsy ate in silence, and if her mother thought that was strange at all, she didn't say so.

The next day, when Antsy got home, Tyler wasn't there, but her mother was there, waiting for her. She took Antsy by the hand and led her to the couch, and then she talked to her the way adults talked to children when they wanted them to agree to something that wasn't ever a question, not really. She said words like "lonely" and "difficult" and "without your father," and Antsy listened in frozen silence that felt too big to break, and when her mother finished on a question, she didn't hear it at first. It was too much: it was too big. She couldn't force it down.

Her mother frowned and squeezed her hand. "Sweetheart, did you hear me? Were you listening?"

The woman at Target had called her "sweetheart," too, called her "sweetheart" while standing to block the shape of Antsy's father's body, and that word felt like poison in her ears. She flinched away, suddenly scowling.

"I was listening," she said. "I'm sorry. Can I go to my room?"

“I need you to answer me, please, and then you can go and play.”

Antsy didn't want to go and play, and she didn't know what her mother had asked. The ringing in her ears was back, taking all the sound in the world away. So she just looked at her mother, trying to understand the movement of her lips as she looked Antsy gravely in the eye and repeated her question:

“Tyler has asked me to marry him, and I told him I can't unless you say it's all right. So is it all right, Antoinette? May I marry the man who loves me?”

This time the words got through, despite the veil of static. Antsy swallowed hard, forcing fear and revulsion away, and looked her mother dead in the eye as she said, “I don't like him.”

“He's not trying to replace your father, baby girl. No one's ever going to do that. But it's hard to be a parent all by myself, and I'm lonely. He'll be your friend, if you'll let him.”

Antsy still didn't know why she didn't like the man who seemed to make her mother so happy—happy enough that she'd do this, happy enough that she'd change the shape of their family this way. So she bit her lip, and held her silence long enough that her mother started to look anxious and unhappy, and finally said, “If you want to marry him, I guess it's okay.”

Her mother laughed and smiled and put her arms around her, gathering her into a hug. “Thank you, baby. Thank you so much. You're not going be sorry about this, you're not.”

But Antsy, who was already sorry about her answer, said nothing.