

An Orange Something

The dress she wore was deep mustard. Two years ago, she would have said that it was one of the ugliest colors in the world, on the same level as puke green or rust. Styles changed though, and she had changed – it was now her favorite dress. The dress was cut simply, without any tucks in the bodice or at the waist. Its skirt was pleated and as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other, the skirt’s crisp yellow folds slid with her.

“Where the eff is it?” she asked.

Gisli was looking for something, but her hunt wasn’t going very well. As she shuffled through the papers on the floor and sorted through the clothes draped over her chair and dresser, she called, “Mom, have you seen my.... thing?”

“Your *what?*”

Gisli ran out of her room and hung over the stairs. “You know, my thing. It’s... ah.... orange?”

Her mother stared at her blankly.

“I need it. For... reasons.” Even to her own ears, Gisli’s argument made no sense whatsoever. “You know what, never mind. Forget about it.”

Gisli gravitated back to her room. It has to be here somewhere, she thought. She flopped onto the floor, legs in fourth position with both legs bent to the left and her right foot on her left knee. She began to sort through the piles of computer chips and half-fixed e-readers on her floor, but then reconsidered her search. If she couldn’t even remember what she was looking for, why

should she continue to seek it? Besides, she reasoned, she'd promised her mother that she would go skating with Keppa.

Pushing her piles of stuff to the side, Gisli walked down the hall to her sister's room.

"Keppa, we should leave. Like, now. Let's go."

Keppa was lying on her bed, her head hanging off the side and her comm in one hand, texting with her thumb. She glanced at Gisli but then looked back at her comm.

"I still don't get how you can do that. Text with one finger, I mean. Anyway, we need to go."

Keppa shook her head, making the bed bounce. Her eyes were still glued to her comm.

"Sorry, Gees, I can't. I'm doing homework."

Gisli made a face. "You are not. You're texting Becca or Belynn or whoever you're still talking to this week."

Keppa finally met Gisli's eyes. "Well, yeah, but that's not what Dad thinks I'm doing. So go away. Tell Mom that I have too much homework this week for sister-bonding, 'kay?" She rolled over, held her comm over her head and kept texting. When she flipped, her shirt rolled up, exposing her winter-pale stomach and a brand new bellybutton piercing.

Gisli gasped. "Does Mom know you have that? She made me wait until I turned seventeen to get mine."

Keppa dropped her comm to pull her shirt down with both hands. “No, she doesn’t, and she won’t. That is, if you don’t tell her. Come on, Gees, I only have a few more months. I’ll just surprise her with it after my birthday.”

Gisli’s face stayed serious, and Keppa started to worry that she’d tell. She actually sat up to speak. “Besides, we have to go now. If you tell her, there’s no way she’ll let us go out of the house, and it’s sibling bonding day!” With her elbows close to her sides, Keppa did jazz hands. When Gisli’s lips started to curve into a smirk, Keppa sprang to her feet.

Gisli sighed. “Alright, I won’t tell. But I don’t want to go skating; we’re going to the Carnival. There’s something...” She broke off.

“What?” Keppa asked, cocking her head.

“I think there’s something there I lost a few days ago. Something, uh, orange.”

Keppa shrugged. “Whatever. Let’s go.”

Gisli grabbed her comm, hollered that she and Keppa were leaving, and together the sisters walked to the corner teleporter. Keppa went first. She walked into the booth, swiped her comm, and typed in her destination. After she disappeared, the door popped open, and Gisli did the same.

She plugged in her code, and then waited for the transport to start. She really hated teleporters. Sure, they were quick, and she was glad her town had enough money to install them, but she always felt all tingly and out of sorts for nearly half an hour after she arrived. It was like

it made her entire body fall asleep and then wake up in a millisecond. It did save time, though. The Carnival was an hour away by bus, but teleporting only took a few seconds.

When she stepped out of the booth, Keppa immediately started to complain. “What took you so long? I could have walked home and back in the time it took you to teleport.”

“I had to wait for your big butt to transport before I could get in,” Gisli teased. “It takes longer when you have secrets hiding in your ears.” She pulled Keppa’s earlobe.

Keppa darted away and held her earlobe protectively with two fingers. “Bug off.” She glared up at Gisli and then started walking toward the center of the event. “Since we’re not going skating, I get to choose what we do first. I want to ride the Ferris wheel.”

Gisli followed her. “Fine. But keep an eye out for orange things. I can’t remember what exactly I’m looking for.”

“That’s precious,” Keppa snarked, her arms crossed and shoulders back. “You drag me all the way out here to look for something, and you don’t even know what it is.”

“I’ll know it when I see it.” Gisli maintained, hoping what she’d said was true.

“Look, that’s orange.” Keppa pointed to one man’s cheese shaped hat. “Is that it?”

“No.”

“What about those?” Keppa said. “I could definitely be looking for some sweet potato fries right now.”

“No! I’ll race you to the Ferris wheel. Ready, set, go!” Gisli set off at a sprint toward their destination. She knew she wouldn’t win – Keppa actually exercised, while Gisli did not – but she didn’t want to be made fun of every time Keppa saw something that was some shade of tangelo or peach. If Keppa’s taunting continued, she might be forced to go back on her promise and tell their mother about Keppa’s piercing.

Sure enough, Keppa soon overtook her despite Gisli’s head start. “See you, sucker!” Keppa called over her shoulder as she passed. Gisli allowed herself to slow to a trot, then a jog, and finally, a slow walk. She’d catch up to Keppa eventually, and in the meantime, she had a minute to herself.

Keppa wasn’t so bad as little sisters went. She never left dirty clothes in the bathroom, and she’d help Gisli B.S. her projects for her visual arts class every so often. At the same time, though, they didn’t really click. Gisli liked tinkering with outdated tech, but Keppa preferred inventing bizarre smoothie recipes for her vlog. Keppa preferred to do twenty billion things at the same time, while Gisli made lists to keep everything straight. That was why it was so weird that Gisli’d lost the orange thing – normally she was organized.

Soon, she caught sight of Keppa. She was chatting with the Ferris wheel operator, a teen who looked a year or two younger than Gisli – about Keppa’s age. Keppa leaned forward as she spoke to him, twirling her hair between her fingers. “Hey, who’s this?” Gisli asked.

“Oh, this is Cred. I know he’s ginger, but he’s not the orange you’re looking for. I asked.” She turned to the guy. “Can we ride this thing?” She handed him her comm so he could swipe it.

Gisli rolled her eyes, but reluctantly handed him her comm, too. After he slid it through the reader, Cred led them to a basket, made sure the girls were settled, and then went off to start the ride. As the ride jerked into motion, she remembered. She sat up straighter, glanced from side to side nervously, and then took a deep breath. “Keppa, we’ve got to get off this ride. I remember what it was. It’s a pumpkin-colored ticket, in a locket. He gave it to me. It’s super important.”

Keppa's face made it clear she had no idea what Gisli was talking about.

“The orange thing! It’s a game ticket with his comm number on it! It’s in a locket and I left it with the lady at the rollercoaster booth so that it wouldn’t fall out of my pocket. We need to get off this ride.”

“We can’t just do that, Gisli, honestly. Wait ten minutes – we’ll be off the ride by then. We’ll find your dumb number, don’t worry.”

“Can’t you text Cred? He could stop the ride.”

“No, he can’t. It wouldn’t be safe. Just wait.”

Gisli sat, her eyes darting from side to side. Unconsciously, her leg started to bounce up and down, making her skirt flutter.

“Stop it, Gees. Chill. Just play a game on your comm or something.”

By the time the ride was over, Gisli had tried and failed to remember her comm password twenty times. She’d be locked out from texting for at least an hour. She grabbed Keppa’s hand.

“Hurry!”

They ran to the roller coaster, to the lost and found, and then back again to check if the locket was hidden in a cubby somewhere. Gisli couldn't find her locket or the orange ticket anywhere.

"I guess we're not going to find it, huh?" Gisli said.

"Nope." Keppa paused. "Why didn't you just put his number in your comm?"

"You know how some of the rides and games here don't have comm readers and just accept tickets? Well, it was our last ticket. Since we couldn't go on a ride together, he wrote his number on it and then told me to keep it. It was really sweet." Gisli's face fell and she slumped forward. "He was nice, Keppa. I really liked him." She shoved her hands into her dresses pockets. Her fingertips met with something cold and smooth. "Did you borrow this dress?"

"No," Keppa scoffed, fiddling with a piece of her hair. "I hate that color. Besides, you just wore it a few days ago – I didn't have a chance."

"Then I last wore this dress when I lost the locket..." Gisli pulled the whatever-it-was out of her pocket. "I can't look. Is this it?"

Keppa opened Gisli's palm and peered at the metal object there. "You dork." She gently punched Gisli's shoulder. "It was in your pocket the entire time."

Gisli smiled, biting her lip.

"Now put his number in your comm before you lose it again. Text him now. No, I'll text him for you!" Keppa grabbed the necklace and the comm from Gisli and started to type something. "Dear Orange Ticket Boy, I'm in looove with you."

Gisli grabbed it back from her. “No, I got it. Let’s go home.”