

Nora knew that if Victor had the sock it would be in his room. But this was a rather daunting task, for Victor's room was not your typical bedroom. Nora's father had made it a house rule that Victor's door must always remain shut so that the odors would not consume the whole house. Nora's family had named the room the Black Hole.

"Well Toby, if I'm going to pull this off I'm going to have to brave the black hole to do it." Nora said as she began preparing for the task at hand, Toby let out a whimper and put his paws over his head. "I know boy, but it will be worth it, or at least I hope so."

Nora began to devise her plan. She knew that Victor would be leaving the house by nine the next morning to go to his lacrosse workout. His workouts lasted about an hour; add in ten minutes to the school and ten minutes back and that would give Nora just about an hour and twenty minutes to find her sock. An hour and twenty minutes would seem like plenty of time to search a room, but the black hole had not been properly cleaned in years. Nora couldn't even remember the last time she saw the inside of it. Not only would Nora have to deal with a mess that she imagined would make the city dump look like a luxury resort, but Victor likely would have hidden the sock someplace he knew no one would ever look. Nora cringed

at the thought of what she would have to do in the morning.

Nora's alarm went off at 8:30 the next morning, way earlier than Nora typically woke up on days she didn't have school. Nora got up and cracked her door open just enough so that she could peak out into the hall way. She waited until she saw Victor leave his room and head downstairs for breakfast. Nora thought about making her move at that moment, but she worried her brother would return to his room following his cereal. Nora waited until she heard her brother walk out the front door, then she darted across the hall and into Victor's room making sure her parents did not see her. Nora closed the door quickly and carefully behind her. She stood with her back to the door and took a deep exhale followed by a deep breath in, but that was a mistake as she inhaled the horrid stale stench that inhabited the room.

The black hole had lived up to its name and then some. Nora looked around the room and saw dirty laundry scattered throughout, a tower of plates and cups stacked so high that if one more were added they surely would topple to the floor, and a carpet that was once believed to be beige now a brownish green. The room was dark, and it was difficult to see, but turning on the light was not an option at the risk of her parents seeing the light on and busting her. Nora reached into her pocket and pulled out a mini flashlight that she thought she might need for this exact reason. The flashlight did not help all that much, but

enough to navigate through the room without falling in something disgusting. Nora started on the dresser drawers. She pulled everything out frantically knowing time was not on her side. No sign of her sock anywhere in the dresser, Nora continued to look elsewhere.

"If I were Victor where would I hide something I didn't want anyone to find." Nora murmured quietly to herself. Nora came up with two places, under Victor's bed or in Victor's closet. Nora decided to start under the bed. She got down onto the ground, feeling the sticky grimy carpet on her hands was almost enough to make Nora's skin crawl. "Do it for Derek." she said trying to encourage herself to press on.

As Nora finally got her head under the bed, it was much worse than what she had seen already. More dishes and laundry were tossed about. Along with the dishes there was food scattered everywhere, including a half-eaten sandwich which was now covered in moldy green fuzz. There was a pair of dirty sneakers that Victor had not worn in two years, because Victor decided they were "getting a little ripe", which may have been the understatement of the century. The odor that came from the sneakers was enough to make Nora second guess her plan. She took a moment to encourage herself again before continuing on, moving around the laundry, dishes, food, and even the rancid sneakers. Nora reached out to pull some laundry out of her way when she felt something slimy brush up against her leg. Nora jerked back in a panic and banged

her head on the bottom of the bed. "Ahhh." Nora let out a quiet yelp of pain.

Nora got out from underneath the bed deciding that not even Victor would be that desperate to hide the sock that well. Nora looked at her watch; she still had about forty minutes left. She then walked over to the closet and slowly turned the handle. As the door began to open, Nora quickly pushed back, there was a lot of pressure on the other side from everything that was jammed inside. Nora tried as hard as she could to close the door but it was no use, the door swung open and an avalanche of trash and dirty laundry poured out swallowing Nora up in the process. Nora started to pull herself out from the rubble when she heard her parents talking downstairs.

"Did you hear that?" Nora's mom asked Nora's dad.

"Nope." Nora's dad replied.

"Phil! It sounded like something crashed upstairs." Nora's mom shouted back at her dad clearly annoyed by her husband's disregard.

"Fine, I'll go see what it was." Nora's dad replied begrudgingly.

Nora could hear both of her parents coming up the stairs, getting closer and closer. Nora stood there frozen, not knowing what to do. She could now see the shadow of her parents from the crack underneath the door.

"I think it came from in there." Nora's mom said.

"I am not going in there." Nora's dad responded firmly.

"And I am?" Nora's mom asked.

"Let's just do ourselves a favor and walk downstairs and pretend we heard nothing. Victor will be home soon and he can deal with it." Nora's dad said in his usual calm voice.

Nora's mom must have agreed because the two shadows disappeared, and she heard her parents head back down the stairs.

"Phew! That was a close one." Nora said to herself.

Nora began going through everything that had spilled onto the floor from the closet. She found a bunch of socks; just none of them were hers. She kept tossing things back into the closet as she went through them. As Nora continued sorting through the mess she had made, she heard the front door slam. "What's up Familia!" it was Victor!

"Well, you're home early." Nora's mom said to her son

"Workout got cut short, Brian puked all over the gym, it was pretty sweet. Danny gave me a lift home." Victor replied.

"Sounded like something crashed in your room, maybe it was your pet fungus getting out again." Nora's dad cracked.

"HA HA, I'll go check it out." Victor answered in a dry tone, clearly not finding his father's joke to be all that funny.

Nora heard her brother heading up the stairs. Nora knew she could not stay frozen this time, she had to disappear and quick. Nora dove head first into the biggest pile of laundry she could find. The door opened and Victor walked in.

"What in the world happened here?" Victor asked himself. "My room is trashed."

Nora wondered what Victor considered it before.

"I'll clean it up later." Victor said nonchalantly as he slung his gym bag onto his bed then grabbed his headphones and sat at his desk and started listening to music.

"How long am I going to have to stay in here?" Nora muttered to herself.

The clothes Nora was hiding under had a stale odor to them and it was starting to make her stomach churn. Finally, Victor got up from his desk and sang "its shower time, its shower time, its shower time." In his off-key tune.

As soon as Victor left the room Nora sprang out of the laundry pile gasping for air. She then headed toward the

door. Nora opened the door very carefully, peaking out to make sure the coast was clear. Nora slipped out of the room and quietly shut the door behind her, as she turned to sneak back to her room, there Victor stood right in front of her.

"What do you think you are doing?" Victor asked in an agitated tone.

"I heard you were home so I wanted to say hi." Nora said not sure if her brother would buy this explanation.

"So you're the reason my room is a disaster." Victor said as if he just figured out a major mystery.

"Fine, it was me. I'm sorry I went into your room Vic, but I know you took my sock. I just need it back, please Victor. PLEEASSSEE." Nora begged her brother.

"Your sock? Why would I ever want your sock?" Victor asked.

"Because you knew that Mom said if I lost any of my new socks there would be consequences, so you decided to torture me by making sure I didn't make it to Friday without missing at least one. I get it; you like bullying me, but this time you've gone too far. Mom isn't letting me go to camp without that sock and this is supposed to be my first year as a junior camp counselor. All my friends are going to be there an-" Before Nora could finish, Victor interrupted her.

"Listen half-pint, me taking your sock and preventing you from going to camp makes no sense." Victor responded while putting his arm around Nora to comfort her.

"It doesn't?" Nora asked as she fought back tears.

"No way sis! I may give you a hard time some times, but I would never do something like this to you. I know how much camp means to you. I would never try to take that from you." Victor said trying to console his little sister.

"You mean it?" Nora asked wiping her tears away.

"Of course Nor, besides I love summer camp too. No annoying little sister for three weeks? Come on it's a vacation for me! Why would I ever try to ruin that?" Victor said with a big grin on his face as he tousled his sister's hair.

Nora thought about what her brother said for a moment and he was right. No way would Victor ruin Nora's summer at the cost of ruining his as well. It made no sense. If it wasn't Victor who stole her sock, then who could it have been? Nora thought long and hard about who would care enough to keep her home from summer camp. Then Nora came up with a new suspect.

Nora's mom always made a big deal about her going to camp every year, always crying when she dropped her off and sobbing, "My baby is growing up so fast." It would make sense that her Mother would be the one who took

the sock, especially the summer before Nora went off to high school. Nora's mom was now the primary suspect.

Nora went down the stairs and approached her mother who was in the kitchen doing the dishes.

"Hello Mother." Nora said as she approached her mom.

"Good morning sweetheart." Nora's mom responded in a kind voice.

"I can't believe that sock went missing, it's like as if someone wanted to make sure it disappeared." Nora stated acting as if her mom was not the new target of Nora's investigation.

"I can, you have gone through more socks this year, than I have in my entire life." Nora's mom responded while wiping a smudge off one of the glass plates.

"I just think it is strange that after all of the times I have lost my socks, it was this time that caused a consequence. It is also convenient that the consequence was the one thing you hated most about summer every year, your baby girl going away for three weeks!" Nora exclaimed in an accusatory voice.

"Excuse me?" Nora's Mother responded, confused by the allegation.

"Yes Mother, I think it was you who stole the sock because you hated me leaving for camp. Especially since this is my

last summer before high school. Admit it, you wanted one last summer with your baby girl and this was the only way you could have that!" Nora said as her voice grew louder and more firm.

Nora's mom took a deep breath. "Nora, I do miss my baby girl. I wish you did not have to grow up so fast, but how many times have I warned you about misplacing things. It's not just about the sock; it's a lesson of responsibility. It pains me that I had to take away camp knowing how much you love it, but I know it is the only way to get your attention." Nora's mother responded in a stunningly calm voice. "Besides, your father and I put money aside every year for you to go to that camp, it is not cheap. If I wanted to keep you home I would have just told you that we could not afford it this year and that would have been that. Instead, we have already paid for a camp that you will not be attending, but we believe the lesson you will learn from this will be worth far more than what we have already spent."

As much as Nora did not want to believe her mother, she knew that she was telling the truth. Another suspect off the list, and Nora was still no closer to finding out who took the sock.

Nora went back upstairs into her room to continue thinking about who it could have been. Dad was out of the question. He had no reason to prevent Nora from going to camp, especially since he had already paid for it and he

was real tight with money. The only one left in the house that could have taken the sock had been sitting right under Nora's nose the whole time, Toby!

"Hey boy." Nora said approaching Toby. "Did you take my sock, boy?" Nora asked as if she thought she would get an answer. "This is useless. You probably ate it which means it's gone forever." Nora then thought about that for a moment, if Toby ate the sock he would have had to of eaten it yesterday. Which means the sock could still be in Toby. If it was still in Toby then it could still come out. "Come on boy, time to go outside." Nora said with a hint of disgust in her voice.

Nora grabbed a pair of rubber gloves and walked through the kitchen where her parents and Victor were all talking.

"What are you doing hun?" Nora's mom asked noticing the rubber gloves on Nora's hands.

"We're going to see if we can find that sock." Nora replied as she walked out the door, leaving her family standing in the kitchen looking at each other with confusion.

"Is she going to do what I think she is going to do?" Nora's dad asked aloud.

"I think so." Nora's mom replied with a disgusted look on her face.

"I got to see this." Victor said jumping up from the kitchen table and rushing over to the window.

Nora sat outside with Toby for hours, but no sock was found. Nora entered the house hanging her head. Toby ran up the stairs, while Nora just shuffled her feet slowly from step to step.

"That's it Toby, no camp for me this year." Nora said defeated. "I wish there was a magic sock fairy that just refilled these drawers like mom said, that way she could just give me the exact same sock and I could replace it without anyone ever knowing." Then a new idea entered into Nora's head. "What if I did replace it? I could buy the exact same socks and tell mother I found the old one. Then she would have to let me go to camp!"

Nora ran over to her dresser and grabbed some money out of her piggy bank, she then ran downstairs and flew right by her family.

"I'll be back in a bit!" Nora said in a rush. Nora shot out the door and headed into town.

Nora went to five different stores looking for the exact same socks that had gone missing, but had no luck. Nora came to the conclusion that her dad must have stopped at a cheap discount store out of town. The feeling of hope Nora had experienced was now replaced with another feeling of defeat. As she began her walk home, Nora

noticed an odd looking book store. Nora had seen the store before but never went in.

"Might as well get a book to keep me occupied this summer." Nora said as she entered the run down building. "Hello?" Nora shouted as she walked into the seemingly vacant store.

"Oh, a customer! Come in come in." a voice in the back shouted. An old hunched over woman with messy gray hair and a long crooked nose approached Nora. "How can we help you this fine evening?"

"Just looking for a book that will take me all summer to read." Nora said with disappointment.

"You seem troubled child, what is on your mind?"

Nora went on to tell the old woman about all she had gone through, and why she was going to miss out on her summer plans. The old woman seemed unusually intrigued by the story of the missing sock, but Nora thought maybe she was just happy to finally have some company. After all the store was covered in dust, and Nora had never seen anyone go inside before.

"My dear you did not lose those socks, they were taken from you." The old woman said in a serious tone after Nora had concluded her story.

"I thought that too, but I looked into everyone who lives in my house."

"Who said anything about anyone who lives in your house?" The woman asked.

"What do you mean?" Nora inquired confused by the old woman.

The old woman paused for a moment, seeming to try and create some type of suspense, then she leaned in and looked right into Nora's eyes and uttered the words "Sock trolls."

"Sock trolls?" Nora asked with a grin on her face, thinking the old woman was joking.

"Sock trolls are no laughing matter young one, they wait until we are sleeping and then take whatever they can get their grubby little hands on. Sock trolls live off us like parasites. Once they know they can take from you they will never stop!"

"Um okay, thanks for that." Nora said backing up slowly towards the door.

"You don't believe me that is fine, but if you want any chance of having the summer you wished for you will take my words seriously."

Nora stopped backing up and thought for a second. Though sock trolls seemed like a farfetched idea, maybe

this old woman knew something. Besides what else did she have to lose at this point? Nora was already going to miss camp if she didn't find that sock, so it couldn't hurt to at least hear the old woman out.

"How do I stop them?" Nora asked.

"You must set a trap and catch them in the act. Once the troll is captured you recite this to them." The old woman started scribbling something down on a piece of paper, and then handed it to Nora.

"Sock troll, sock troll, leave me be and return what you have taken from me." Nora read from the paper aloud.

"Once you read that the troll will be forced to go back to where they came from and give back everything they have taken from you." The old woman said after Nora finished reading.

"So how do I catch them?" Nora asked.

"That is up to you my dear, but I would hurry before they come again tonight." The old woman replied.

Nora left the old woman and headed to a nearby corner store to gather supplies. This was Nora's last chance. If the old woman was wrong about the sock trolls, Nora knew that there would be no camp. She raced up and down the aisles looking for anything she could use as a trap. She grabbed some fishing line, a butterfly net, some

glue traps, and a pair of thick athletic socks for bait. "Try to resist these bad boys." Nora said looking at the socks

Nora looked up from the socks and noticed the bewildered faces staring back at her from the customers and store employees around her.

"You okay kid?" An employee asked.

"YUP!" Nora exclaimed loudly unable to control the volume of her voice from the embarrassment she was feeling. "Just really excited about these socks, my feet surely won't be able to resist them...."

"Okay then, um let me know if you need anything else." The employee said as he returned to stocking the shelves

When Nora got home she told her family she was going to bed early. She kissed her mom and dad goodnight and ran up to her room to devise a plan.

Nora planned to plant the socks in the middle of the laundry room hoping that they would be too good for the troll to pass up. She then would line the floor around the socks with the glue traps. Next, she would tie the fishing line all around the perimeter of the room to trip the troll, causing it to fall onto the traps. If all of that failed and the troll was still able to escape, Nora would use the butterfly net to finish the job.

Nora lay in her bed but would not sleep. She heard her dad snoring downstairs. She heard Victor tell their parents good night and head off to bed. Then she heard her mom trying to wake Nora's dad, but when that proved unsuccessful she went off to bed by herself. About twenty minutes after Nora's mom went to bed, Nora's dad let out a thunderous snore that woke him up. After some grunting and moaning, Nora's dad trudged up the stairs and into his room. The downstairs was finally clear, and Nora could start setting her trap.