



Place Your Ear on My Ribs by Tim Lepczyk

It was a compulsion. Each month Richard printed the ad in the Sunday edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Each month, for the last year, under the Pets section, he submitted the heading, "Lost," along with the following line, "Eyes of a Blue Dog," and his phone number.

The first time, it was for his wife, a humorous I love you, for her to discover, while she worked in New York. He imagined her waking up in the hotel, newspaper like a welcome mat outside her door, sifting the pages, her fingers gathering ink, taking in the detritus of their city. She might have brought the paper down to breakfast, the steam from her coffee diffusing into the sounds of conversations, keyboard clicks, the clink of carafes containing orange juice or ice water. Richard liked to imagine she saw it.

After September 11th, after buildings and people fell, and ribbons and flags went up, after days without a word from Miriam, not a call, nor an email, Richard withdrew. His co-workers at the insurance firm noticed the distance building, but preferred to talk of TV shows, holiday plans, the Bears surprise season. Friends left messages. There were conversations, but these meandered quickly into hard silences with Richard unaware and the other person stuck, trying to figure out how to shift toward a topic that wouldn't hurt Richard, or remind him of his loss.

What Richard thought of was that ad. He didn't believe in coincidences or karma, but then again, he hadn't believed terrorists would crash 747's into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, a scratch of field in rural Pennsylvania. In Richard's mind, Miriam's smile, her hair lightening to a blinding white in the sun, book propped open on the beaches of Lake Michigan, blended with the couple from the story, meeting in their hushed dreams. He dreamt of Miriam, dreamt she was there with him. Felt her absence when he awoke.

On their last vacation, Miriam had laid her book across her chest. She'd read a novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez for book club, and now had a collection of his short stories. Richard was drifting toward a nap on the sand, when she asked, you'd never forget me if we lost each other, would you? The sun was warm as Richard turned his head. He indulged her. Of course not, he said, how could I forget you?

The newspapers lay across the city, in places like coffee shops, waiting rooms, or trains speeding above ground. Richard left them open for people to notice, the ad for Miriam, so lonely on the page. There was no grave. No body. Instead, there was her bureau as she left it, recipes trapped on the kitchen counter, mail gathering inside their door. Her home waited. And Richard shuffled along the streets, leaving a trail as tenuous as breadcrumbs for her to follow.