

Buried

I'm searching for sand dollars. Perfect circles, pristine, no chips. I have a collection. And that's when I see a shiny straight line in the sand. Black. I dig it out. A cell phone. Buried vertically. I think, some poor sucker's lost his phone. But then I think, if a cell phone just falls out of a backpack, you'd expect it to land flat. So it's almost like the person buried it. But why would he do that?

I take a lens cleaner from my backpack and clean it off, then click the button on the side. The screen lights up with a telephone number. I try to call it. No service at the beach.

By the time I get back to the group home, the battery's dead. I try my charger cord, but the port doesn't fit. Good thing I have a photographic memory. I use *my* cell to call the number I memorized from the buried phone.

"Who's this?" It's a woman's voice.

"Did you lose your cell phone?" I ask.

"Who's this?"

"I found a cell phone and it had your number on it."

"Is it a Samsung?"

"An old one," I say.

"Oh God. It has to be Freddie. I've been calling him. He must have tried to call me. You didn't see him, did you?" Her voice is getting screechy.

"No. I was looking for sand dollars and found this cell phone buried in the sand at North Beach."

"North Beach? Where's that?"

"Marin County."

"Oh God. How did he get to Marin County? You might have seen him. He's about sixty, has gray hair, real thin."

"I didn't see him."

"He's like, disappeared. We've been calling everybody."

"I didn't see him."

* * *

I've got to call my sister. That's it. I'll call her. But, where is it? I had it in my pocket. She gave me the phone so I wouldn't get lost. So I could call her if I got lost. Or I could call Barry or Gene or Helen. She put the numbers in my phone next to their names so I could call them. I need to do that.

*My phone's not in my pocket. It was there, and now it's not.
There are dogs on the beach. There are some people standing in a bunch.
I try to ask them to help me call my sister, but they get on the bus. So I do too.
I try to ask them, but they just look at me.*

* * *

She calls back the next morning.
"Have you gotten the phone to work?" she asks.
"I told you. It's dead. My charger doesn't fit."
"Can you take it to Verizon?"
"Why would I do that?"
"To get it working. They can get it working."
"What good would that do?"
"He might call it." She sounds so irritated. "And there are numbers in there. I could call them to see if they've heard from him."
"Why don't you call them?"
"I don't have the numbers. They're his friends. Look, take it to Verizon. Get them to charge it. I'll pay."
"If I have time."
"Look, if it's too much trouble, mail it to me. I'll take care of it."
I write down her address. It's in Los Angeles.

* * *

"Do you know my sister?"
The street is full of people.
"I don't believe I do." The man is wearing a suit. "What's her name?"
"Becky."
"What's her last name?"
"Benton," I say but then I remember that was her name. She now has a different name and I can't remember it.
The man shakes his head. "Where does she live?"
"Los Angeles."
"I wouldn't know her then. This is San Rafael."
"Well, do you know Barry or Gene?"
"I'm afraid not." And he walks away.

* * *

I plan to take the cell phone to Verizon. But I put it off. Becky, that's the sister, calls me every other hour. She annoys me.
"I'm going to do it," I tell her. "I'm just really busy right now." I'm a groundskeeper at Golden Gate Park.
"Why don't you mail it?"
"I'll go to Verizon," I say. "Just hold your horses."
I go to the Verizon place. They say the phone's too old. There aren't any chargers that fit it. They even try to sell me a new phone.

Nancy Bourne

That cell phone's no use. I was right. And I've had it with the sister. I could mail her the phone, but what's the use? She can't get it to work. And I'm really busy.

On the way back to the car I drop the phone in the garbage.

* * *

I'm very tired. I'll lie down. For just a minute. Then I'll call my sister. I'll figure it out.

* * *

She keeps calling. All the time. But I don't pick up anymore. I see her number and I don't pick up anymore.