



ISSUE 2.29

SCATTERED RUBIES

There are lone, lost rubies, tiny magenta gems, somewhere on a stretch of sidewalk, or buried beneath the plums in the supermarket, or jumbled with dust in the vacuum that cleans the well-worn rug in the women's locker room at the gym. They were mine, jewels so small that no one would notice them, sprinkled in my wake. They have fallen out of my ring, one, then another, then another, and unaware, I have left them behind.

Early in our now 38-year marriage, my husband, Paul, gave me the ring, a slim gold band embedded with seven small rubies. He denies it now, but I think he believed that my birthstone was a ruby, not a topaz. I think he confused it with my nickname, Ruby, taken from my last name, Rubin, way back in 1966, when I was 13 and The Rolling Stones released "Ruby Tuesday." After the ring, Paul bought me a fancy gold bracelet with a row of rubies. I have worn the bracelet only once, but the ring I put on right away and didn't take off.

For decades it hugged my right ring finger and the rubies stayed put. Then, a few years ago, I felt a sharpness as my left hand brushed the ring, and when I looked, I saw a hole where one of the rubies should have been. The ring felt desecrated; I took it off immediately. I brought it to a local jeweler, who assured me the stone would be simple and inexpensive to replace. I waited a few days to get my ring back, to restore order to my hands.

More recently, the gold seemed to weaken. First one ruby fell out, and within weeks of its being replaced, another was gone. I replaced that, and within days, a different one was lost. "Maybe I shouldn't wear it anymore," I said to the jeweler when I brought the ring back again. "Why have it if you aren't going to wear it?" she replied. So I put it back on.

Then, last week, another empty space, and that was it: I put the ring in a velvet box in my dresser. I picture it there in the dark, its surface like a smile with a missing tooth, and I feel its absence on my finger.

I like to imagine my abandoned rubies, each one alone, lying somewhere, imperceptible, obscured. How many people have walked by, never realizing a sliver of gemstone was underfoot? How many might have caught a speck of glistening red or a rosy sparkle in the instant when sunlight hit the jewel and continued on, thinking there was nothing there?

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