



Iowa Writes

EVA SCHULTZ
The Mommy Purse

Tom came in the back door and hurled his keys at the kitchen table. They hit something soft—Cindy's purse. The "Mommy purse," she called it, a red plaid thing that he joked was as big as a duffel bag. She never left the house without it.

It didn't matter if she was going on a ten-minute errand; if Cindy went, the purse went. It had seen its share of wear over six years and three kids, but she cheerfully refused to replace it. "The Mommy purse is magic," she always told him. "It's got room for everything."

And if it was at home, Tom reasoned with an electric shock of hope—then she must be.

He started to call out to her, but the night's images choked away her name: the twisted heap of their car; the faces of the ER staff; her shrouded form.

Tom sat and wrapped his arms around the purse. Soon it would be morning, and his mom would bring the kids back home from what should have been a fun overnighter at Grandma's. Then he would have to explain to six-year-old Bailey, three-year-old Emma, and 13-month-old Garrett that Mommy wasn't ever coming home.

He opened the purse. There was a folded page just inside—she had printed out directions to the restaurant he had taken her to last night. She must have meant to have it with her as backup. The Mommy purse's job was to have answers to everything.

He found her wallet, removed the rubber band, and pushed the explosion of coupons aimlessly around the table. He was still seeing her, pinned in the passenger seat by the remains of the truck that hit them, looking to him for help that he couldn't give. All he could do was scoop one of Garrett's toys—a little plush purple dolphin—off the floor near her feet and put it in her bloody hands. She was still holding it when the trauma

About Iowa Writes

Since 2006, Iowa Writes has featured the work of Iowa-identified writers (whether they have Iowa roots or live here now) and work published by Iowa journals and publishers on The Daily Palette. Iowa Writes features poetry, fiction, or nonfiction twice a week on the Palette.

In November of 2008, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Iowa City, Iowa, the world's third City of Literature, making the community part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Iowa City has joined Edinburgh, Scotland and Melbourne, Australia as UNESCO Cities of Literature.

Find out more about submitting by contacting iowa-writes@uiowa.edu

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nurse brought him in after it was all over, to say goodbye. He had left it with her, thinking crazily that this way, she wouldn't be alone.

Tom swept the coupons onto the floor and fished in the purse. He came up with a spare diaper and a paperback mystery novel, two protein bars, and the lid of a sippy cup. He reached into the purse like he was reaching for Cindy—grab her hand, pull and pull, and she would land on her feet in the kitchen beside him, laugh and shake out her hair. The Mommy purse saves the day again.

His hand brushed something soft, and he pulled it out: the purple dolphin. The room flashed in time with his heartbeat. He turned it over and found the familiar tear along the fin, where the stuffing poked out.

Now he remembered: she hadn't left the purse home last night. She was rummaging through it for a roll of mints just as he saw the truck coming at them. The crash. . . the purse's contents scattered on the car floor. . . the dolphin against her foot, waiting. It never came home, and neither did the purse that he held in his limp hands.

"Tom, are you ready to go?" Cindy came into the kitchen in the green velvet dress she had been wearing when they left for dinner. She stopped trying to clasp her necklace, regarded the purse's contents strewn across the table, and rolled her eyes.

"What is this, a sneak attack on the Mommy purse? I told you, I'm never getting rid of it."

Tom stared at her. Then he leapt up and embraced her. "Let's just stay in tonight, okay? Can we do that?"

Cindy regarded him. "As in, 'no kids at home, so let's make the most of it'?"

Tom stroked her face. "We'll go out another time." He kissed her. "Just not tonight. Okay?"

"Well. . . are you going to tell me what you were doing to my purse?" She was trying to sound mad, but her eyes were dancing.

Tom gazed at her. "I love that purse," he said. "It's got room for everything."

[back](#)