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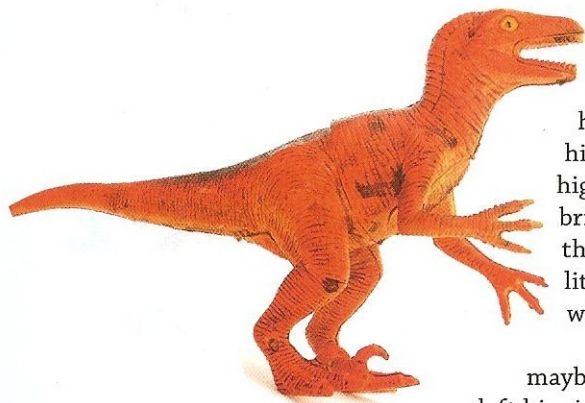
## O NE PERFECT FALL DAY

I was raking leaves with my husband and four-year-old daughter in our two-acre backyard. The sky above us was the blue of robins' eggs and Wedgwood plates. Ruddy leaves from the 100-year-old maples that towered around our house crackled in drifts a foot deep beneath our feet.

Suddenly, this idyllic scene was pierced by the shriek of our frantic toddler. "Sausage! I've lost Sausage!" My daughter's face was streaked with tears as she feverishly hunted through the piles at her feet.

My heart sank. Sausage, a tiny plastic Tyrannosaurus Rex, was one of her favorite possessions. He was so beloved and worn from being carried tightly in her grasp that the color had almost worn off his pebbly lizard-like shape. He was three inches high and speckled in a color somewhere between bright orange and rusty red—a perfect match to the fall leaves piled all around us. Somehow our little girl had tucked him into the pocket of her windbreaker without our knowledge.

I tried to comfort her by telling her that maybe he was not really lost—that perhaps she had left him in the house or on the porch. She insisted she





# vine Comedy

CHARITY VOGEL



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had felt Sausage in her pocket until just a short time ago. How short a time? A few minutes or maybe ten or maybe an hour? Asking a four-year-old to quantify time is like nailing gelatin to a wall.

After poking around in the leaves at her feet, my husband and I looked at each other in silent agreement. Finding the dinosaur was going to

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be an impossible task. We had been raking mountains of leaves onto huge builder's tarps, then dragging them down the hill and dumping them in the forest on our property. There was no way without sifting through thousands of leaves that we had any hope of finding her beloved companion.

But we had to try—we had to find Sausage. So my husband trudged into the woods and began prodding at the compost piles with the end of his rake. I straightened up, brushed off my hands, and began to pray. "OK, God," I said out loud. "I know you're busy with far more important things right now. I know you have a long, long list, and I know it's all serious stuff. But if you want to do one very small, seemingly unimportant thing that would make a four-year-old very happy—then please help us find Sausage."

I paused, feeling a slight bit of guilt about my request. After all, this was not a life-or-death situation; it was a plastic T-Rex. But it was Sausage, and

it would break our little girl's heart if we could not find him.

Then, while I was still exhaling the breath of my prayer, a small miracle occurred. I heard a shout from the woods and saw my husband raise his arm victoriously in the air. In his work glove was a small item that I could tell, even from a hundred yards away, was a small orange and brown dinosaur.

"Wow!" I murmured. "Thanks, really..." Then I started laughing, and somehow I knew I wasn't laughing alone.

### True Humor

I shouldn't have been surprised that God had answered my prayer. It's happened a few times now, but every time it does, I find myself startled into laughter. These moments are not so much a confirmation of my faith as they are reminders that God has a sense of humor. It's something I forget all too easily in this violent, pain-wracked, busy world.

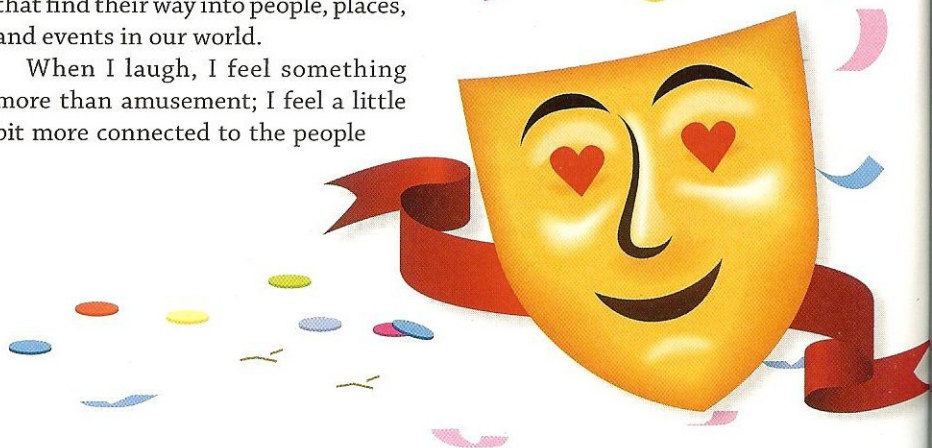
It should not be so hard to remember. After all, we humans have a sense of humor, and if we're people of faith, we know we did not create ourselves. If we realize that our attributes find their source in the Divine, then it follows that all true humor represents only tiny fragments of the source of the quality itself. I like to think God's humor was once contained in a giant crystal vase and then cosmically smashed into microscopic fragments that find their way into people, places, and events in our world.

When I laugh, I feel something more than amusement; I feel a little bit more connected to the people

around me, especially those with whom I share the laughter. In turn, I feel a little more connected with the One who is the source of our humor. That is why humor is such a great stress reliever. It doesn't just relax our stomach muscles for a while; it momentarily allows us to escape to an entirely different stratum of being. Humor is a plane-shifter, not a mood-lifter.

Notice that I said "true humor," for a lot of humor is not true. Mean-spirited, sarcastic, or impure remarks about any topic might produce laughter, but it won't leave us feeling clean, refreshed, or revitalized. We can probably all think of examples of this kind of humor—the kind that leaves an unsatisfying taste in our mouth at someone's expense. But divine comedy—humor that heals, helps

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us grow in faith, and brings people together rather than bringing about shame—that is *true* humor.

Telling a joke is not easy, as anyone who tells jokes for entertainment quickly discovers. I once attended the performance of a college friend who had decided he wanted to try his hand at stand-up comedy. I made sure to compliment both his attitude and his material. I learned that, like cooking, carpentry, or sports, comedy is a labor of love and preparation that is a lot harder than it looks—a great deal harder.

This is why I find it especially funny when God pulls back the curtain, if only for a moment, to allow a bit of celestial humor to come into the world. I have found that this brings me comfort. If this is a glimpse of the promised afterlife, then that's the kind of heaven I can get excited about.

### **Divine Coincidence or Divine Comedy?**

When I was still dating my husband, we went to a Buffalo Bills game with some friends at the hometown stadium. It was enormous and wild with the activity of 80,000 fans, the team on the field, music, lights, and the high energy of competition.

During halftime, the screaming crowd was entertained by tiny scraps of thin paper, a quarter-inch wide and an inch long, being blasted all over the

people in the stands by giant blowers. An announcer's voice enthusiastically boomed that thousands and thousands of old telephone books had been shredded to make the confetti blizzard that rained down on us.

My date raised his gloved hand into the air and closed his fist around one of the tiny strips of paper. As he opened his palm, bent closer, and

squinted to read the tiny letters on the small white scrap, he started to laugh. Then he handed me the paper, which contained a single listing that read "Vogel, C."—and today I'm Charity Vogel.

Divine coincidence or divine comedy? I choose the latter. The gift of laughter brings joy, a gift of the Spirit. And that's my kind of heaven. ●

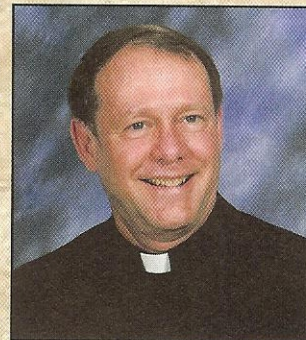


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