**On Currency and Good Luck Charms: How to Coin a Life-Saver**

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i first learned of susan b. anthony about the same time i learned about the birds and the bees. and that bees sting and birds steal seed. and that bodies are as much currency as dollars and cents. pennies not always traded for thoughts or quarters. puffy stickers not always worth more than pecks on cheeks. susan b. was the topic of a grade school history assignment. also, a lesson in civics and classroom politics. one consumed while i sat to the left of timmy and two rows in front of bobbie. both had bad breath. neither of them was a friend. neither of them was friendly. the teacher, whose name i can’t recall, lectured - if we each had a penny for every speech she gave, he said, we’d all be rich. some kid in the backrow called out, isn’t anthony a boy’s name? timmy and bobbie both thought the question was a hoot, but i knew even then that the kid in the back was just plain dull. i’d like to think he was joking - the teacher, but for susan b. the value of a vote was no joke. i scribbled notes on her life in wide loop-filled letters - arrested for voting / 1872 / tried then fined $100 / her act a crime. i put my cursive skills and my safety to the test. filled my trapper-keeper’s wide-ruled paper with politics, pacts, and pac-man sketches. all taunts tracked. i viewed susan b. as much a popstar as madonna. royalty like prince. data points collected like cabbage patch dolls and rubik’s cubes. birth year - 1820. partners - elizabeth cady stanton / frederick douglass. friends - anna / rachel / avery. at night i’d fill my diary of susan b’s accomplishments and acts of resistance - president / suffragist / vote seeker / arrestee - along with dismal updates on my own conquests. mostly tales of schoolyard tricks and traitors. timmy and bobbie both persistent pests. us kids would trade scratch n sniff stickers and archie collections at recess. collectibles always at play. maybe i wasn’t so unlike anthony, afterall. her middle initial - the b - was just as much a response to elementary school crazes as any other. soon, everyone wanted a dollar coin. susan b. was suddenly everyone’s star of the day. i kept my coin close. always tucked in my denim overall front pocket. it was a birthday gift. a rarely granted wish. traded coins at a birthday dinner. i pulled three quarters, four nickels and five pennies out of my hello kitty purse. an odd exchange for a susan b. and a cherry lollipop - a dum dum. that’s what the boy to my right - timmy - would call me. i pocketed the coin, smiled, and promised to always resist. class was no less trying than recess. bobbie - the boy, three rows back, would toss crumpled pieces of paper at my back as the teacher watered a series of aloe plants on the windowsill. months later, i’d use the aloe to treat a burn. not mine. a cracked coffee pot had spilled on my seat -- soaked the fabric of grime and grains - while i fed quarters to a pac man machine. the coin my lucky charm. the crumpled paper was the boy’s way of not calling but asking me out. trade the coin for a kiss, he’d write. mostly what he meant was would i go with him to the valentine’s day dance. all the cool kids had dates. to ride in the back of his mother’s station wagon then dance when the music slowed. in between cups of hawaiian punch, hallway punches, and jokes about bases. dance partners and saving face also at a premium. at the time, i knew I needed an out. later, he’d corner me on the kickball field or at games of wallball. bodies lined up like soldiers against the hard brick. all in fear of a strike. rubber never kind to bare skin. the asphalt and the stakes as hot as the susan b. anthony golden dollar. i longed to throw the wad out the window but responded in typical form. always eager to avoid the repercussions of a miscalculation. no interest in trading recess for detention. too high a cost. the principal’s office worse than the wall. then recalled that susan b. was born on the fifteenth of february. smart. she always a reason to decline a valentine’s day invite. *regrets, i’m predisposed, previously occupied*. i could hear her response to the boys with bad breath and wandering eyes. anthony believed everyone was equal under the eyes of God. I wanted to believe her. but was targeted. forced to pay a price for being me - the rubber ball, wads of crumpled paper, wandering eyes. my fingers traced the text. i read that susan b. never paid her $100 fine. and i decided then not to pay either. paused to wonder if the authorities would persist then plucked one wad of crumpled paper and stuffed it in the back corner of my desk. i stomped then squashed another on the floor. shook my head no then answered yes when the teacher asked if everything was okay. i was no longer fearful of the price. a newly minted susan b. remained tucked in my back pocket. next to a pack of spearmint lifesavers. one for good breath, the other for good luck.

*twelve (plus) ways to coin a lifesaver*

1.     Revolutions and resistance take many forms.

2.     Votes and vetoes need not be validated to be voices of expression.

3.     Not all punishments are executed. Not all executions are punishments.

4.     Don’t depend on coin-operated voting or vending machines for survival.

5.     Avoid attire that might generate confusion with identity.

6.     Never confuse similarity with self-worth.

7.     Birds don’t always get along with bees.

8.     A dollar is not always a bill. A bill is not always currency.

9.     A quarter is not always four times less valuable than a dollar.

10.  Gold is more valuable than silver.

11.  Fresh breath is a powerful motivator. Only the possible persist.

12.  Levels can be leveled. Even pac-man and men in packs can be beat.

- Legacies linger. Failure is impossible. (Susan B. Anthony)