

Vacation

.....
Hanna Chau | Short Story

Derek had a special place no one knew about. At night, when his parents were asleep, he'd crawl through the dusty and dark attic until he reached the farthest point, the place where light from an unseen source poured through and revealed the thousands of cardboard boxes, stacked on each other, some sealed and others half opened, its contents sprawled on the shiny floor.

Derek would walk by each box, peeking in, sometimes he would open them but most times he left them sealed up. Until one horrible afternoon. This particular day, he came home from soccer practice and heard his parents yelling, screaming at each other and his mother on the verge of tears; this happened quite often but Derek could tell this time it was different. This time they didn't even notice him come home and tell him to go outside and play for a bit like they usually do. He didn't know what else to do other than hide on the steps.

“You fucking bastard! Don't you lie to me. I saw you fucking her! It was our car.”

“Don't you dare speak to me in that way. You're the only whore in this household so don't you fucking dare. And even if I did sleep with her, what would you do about it, huh? Tell your mother again?”

Tears. Hysterical crying. Almost choking. “You're a monster! Why are you even here? I'm done, I'm fucking done. I should've listened to my mother.”

“What the fuck's that spose to mean?”

“I'm done, Richard! I'm taking Der with me and we're leaving tonight. Enough is enough!”

More crying and Derek can't listen anymore. He ran to his room and quietly shut the door – even so, he could hear everything. His mother's crying, crying, crying then suddenly two bangs, like someone slamming their body to a door, one hushed whisper, and then silence. White noise. Nothing.

Derek locked his door, climbed into bed, and gradually fell asleep.

Now he is awake and he listens very closely for his mother's usual loud snores but only the bare, empty silence responds. He creeps down the steps finding nobody there, so he approaches the window and notices their car is gone. So Derek decides to go to his secret place.

He crawls on all fours with tears streaming down his face (though he can't exactly figure out why), until he reaches the multitude of boxes. This time, Derek knows exactly what to do. He opens the first sealed box and finds a glimmering image of a grey cat. It looks almost real but when he tries to pet it, his hand goes right through. He moves on to the next unopened box. Inside, there is his dirty soccer uniform with the tag

still on. No luck.

Derek searches and searches, going through memories of soccer games, birthdays, and visits with grandma until finally he finds what he is looking for. Derek feels the pain rising in his throat, the tears tickling his eyes before he even opens it.

He sees it before it is shown. Inside, there are his parents – his father standing on the opposite side of the kitchen island, his hands on his head and his face obscured. Then his mother. His poor, lovely mother lying on the ground on the opposite side, a pool of red dancing, shimmering right by her forehead. Instinctively, he touches her face and it goes right through.

Suddenly, Derek is on his feet. He grabs the box, shutting the folds back and brings it back with him to the house. At first, it is light as if there is nothing inside but as he drags it further down in front of him, into that crawl space, it becomes heavier and heavier, like thousands of tiny rocks or parts of a decaying body. It takes him hours until finally he opens the door to the attic and finds himself at home. He calls out to see if anyone is there but only the same, unnatural silence prevails. Derek goes into his parent's bedroom, empty, and grabs his father's baseball bat he knows he keeps in the closet. Derek is crying again, silently, but he is not sad, he's angry, raging, fuming, smashing the box over and over until it is just a flattened piece of cardboard he throws out the window.

While waiting for his parents to come home, Derek falls asleep on the couch.

“Wake up. Hey, wake up buddy.” It's morning and his father's face is inches away from Derek's.

“Daddy?” His father smiles and pats him on the head gently. Derek feels strange and distorted, as if he is dreaming or had just woken up from one.

“Yeah, bud. Listen, how does a nice little vacation sound, huh? I know you've got soccer and school but you're such a good kid, you deserve a break.”

Derek is still a little bit fuzzy and confused, but slowly nods his head in response. His father tells him he already packed their bags and all he needs to do is put on his shoes.

“Okay, Daddy. Where are we doing?”

“Who knows? Nebraska, New York, the Netherlands. And those are just the N's. We've a whole adventure ahead of us. Just you and me, bud.”

Derek feels like he is forgetting something but can't figure out what. His father doesn't remind him, so there they go, the windows rolled down, the radio blasted up, a whole new life ahead. Just the two of them.