

Memories a Stone's Throw Away

My childhood home had aged as I did: wrinkled (from the paint chipping off the walls), sunken (from the rain battering its roof), and faded (from the memories leaving its hold). The city would end its misery soon. In a week, the whole neighborhood was scheduled for demolition to make way for a shiny, new hotel. It was the kind only the rich could afford; it would suffocate old memories by the weight of its gold-lined pillows and couches.

My breath caught as I turned the rusted knob. The thought of seeing the inside bare and exposed was... frightening. I remembered the home by its warm glow, kitchen countertops of spilled cereal, and forever-stained carpet. If I entered, I'd see a house and not a home. Did I dare to overwrite the past?

Still, I turned the knob. The floor creaked against my heels, imitating the way my mom used to walk through the halls. White fabric covered the discarded furniture, and dust sat on top like a thick buttercream. I smiled, remembering days I'd lie about dusting the shelves. My mom knew instantly--sometimes pretending alongside me, sometimes withholding my allowance until I completed the task. "I wish we stayed here," I whispered, "and we could pretend some more." But dust now covered every available surface; no one was left to wipe it away.

I shifted my attention to the cardboard boxes strewn across the floor. Some sentimental part of me wanted to collect my childhood objects before they were destroyed; the move had been messy and disorganized, so there was much left behind. Eventually I approached two boxes side by side: one overturned and severely dented, the other upright with rocks and

leaves perched on top. I blew their grey coating off, and sat on the stiff indent like all those years ago.

...I heard the shuffling of feet as movers surrounded me, lifting the furniture and loading them into trucks of cardboard and bubble wrap. I ignored the chaos; it was only me and my rocks, my sticks, my friends...

A detail in the memory reminded me of something; I bent down, opened a nearby box, and reached inside. "George?" I gasped, "I remember you..."

Among pink pegasus figures, abandoned puzzle pieces, and straw haired dolls, I saw the two lopsided eyes of my forgotten friend: George. He was yellow and rough, his surface speckled with flakes of dried mud and dust. My parents always laughed at how we were inseparable. I think it made them happy. After all, they were the ones who gifted me the rock in the first place.

..."Thank you! Thankyouthankyouthankyou!" I chanted, my blonde pigtails bobbing as I jumped. I clutched a ribboned box in my hands: a geode set. I had watched the kids at recess smashing rocks into gems, and so I had desired a kit of my own. I opened the box, turned over the rocks in my hand, and thought of a genius, amazing idea: I would give them eyes. Once I applied them, I showed my creations to the other kids in my class.

It was ineffective.

The girls simply stared with unimpressed faces framed by colorful, sparkly hair clips and bangs. "Why don't you smash them?" they asked, "they're prettier that way." Then they picked up their rubber hammers and brought them down on the rocks, exposing glittering crystals.

"No!" I cried, "you're hurting them!" I shielded my friends, and the teachers rushed to my side...

"Ah," I said, addressing the rock, "I remember why I kept you, now. Little Ali would have a fit if she knew you would be destroyed for real this time..." I paused. "I suppose I could protect you, you know, if you wanted. You don't have to be smashed for that big resort."

I don't know why I bothered. I was talking to a rock.

...

"A-my?"

I paused.

My eyes slowly drifted to the rock in my hand. I stared, dumbfounded, at the object before me. His misshapen eyes looked back. After a few seconds, I jolted out of my trance, frantically set the rock on the ragged mattress, grabbed the nearest covering, and launched it over top. I ran to the other side of the room, trying to get far, far away from the *creature* on the bed.

I was going crazy. I heard a ROCK. SPEAK.

How the headlines would riot. They'd rescind my writing credentials, my career. I'd be sent to a mental asylum and ruined and all because I couldn't leave my childhood home in the past.

While I thought, my eyes wandered and stalled on a small drawing on the wall. Near the floor, a girl stood beside a messily drawn circle with a crooked smiley face. I remember drawing the image, George and I the only witnesses.

Slowly, I returned to the mattress and removed the flimsy covering. "Let's go," I said, "and let's talk." I took the rock in my hands once again,

walked outside, and placed him in the trunk of my car. Then I turned the key and the car sputtered awake because I haven't been Amy for a long, long time.

Walking around the fossil exhibit, I was surrounded by the dead. Above me the bones of a Pterodactyl froze in eternal flight, and to my left the jaws of a T-rex clamped upon its invisible prey. I walked from room to room and I wandered through time; dinosaurs, sea creatures, and humans existed in one place, an intermixing of the old and the new.

"There are years on display here, George," I muttered, my fingertips grazing on top of glass. Although I tried to be quiet, my voice still echoed in the near-empty room. Most of the visitors had cleared out as it was now past midnight.

"Years?" He asked, panicked. I didn't understand why until he asked, "How long was I in that box?"

I hesitated. Would the answer shock him? Did he even understand the concept of time? Finally, I admitted the answer: "At least forty years."

"Oh... How--How old are you?"

...A hand slammed papers on top of a desk. I looked up into the accusatory eyes of my manager: "You've worked at this company longer than anyone else, but that doesn't permit you to publish these kinds of stories."

"What kind?" I asked, lowering my gaze to his striped tie, his pristine suit, and his golden cufflinks.

"We have bills to pay, same as you, and we earn our money through sponsors. Now you cannot criticize those sponsors, you understand?"

I nodded, took weeks worth of writing in my hands, and threw it in the trash...

"Older than I should be," I said.

As our conversations continued, George asked about his origins, his creation, the big questions that I never thought about, and I glossed over them with dismissive answers.

"Why didn't you smash me?" He asked.

"I just didn't want to."

"But *why*?"

I pictured little Amy and her bouncing pigtails, her face beaming as she opened the geode kit. I watched as her hands gently held rocks, her fingers fitting perfectly in its grooves and ridges. She examined each, and finally pressed her hand against one rock's face. When it left it revealed two lopsided, bulging eyes.

Once again, George asked, "why?"

His words demanded an answer, but I squirmed in my uncomfortable heels. My hair was pinned up too tight; I felt the bobby pins pierce like daggers in my skull. My blazer suffocated me, too, tightening against my body like I was an adult in child's clothes playing dress-up in reverse.

Once again, George asked, "why?"

"It scared me," I revealed at last. And I realized the questions applied to me, too. How long was I in my own self-made box? I cowered in denial, afraid to move on from my childhood home and the past. Forty years. It had been forty years since I left, and forty years since I was Amy.

Amy wouldn't stand idle, staring at the destruction of something she loved. I walked among bones and relics, but I didn't have to become one.

When I exited the museum, I lifted George above my head. "Look above the trees," I told him, "do you see the sun rising?"

"It's beautiful," he announced.

"I know."

Together we watched dawn spread, covering the world in a thick coat of pink. With its hues, it shrouded the past like the thin sheets that encased the tattered furniture in an old, abandoned house. Soon its colors would be carted away by clouds, and any observers would lower their heads with the weight of a new day and a new day's responsibilities.

"It's time," I voiced at last, "to write a new headline."

"For your newspaper and the re...sort?" George's words stumbled over the strange word, remembering it spoken during a night tucked behind the sunrise.

I nodded, already writing a new title in my mind.