

Detachment

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I've never been to Paris. Or really anywhere outside of this state. When I turned 16, I moved out of my mom's house because I couldn't stand the way it smelled. I'm 22 now and I'm still in the same apartment that I moved into at 16—it's a little studio inside of what used to be a Victorian style home. It's not a lot, but I had a sense of false pride in it.

My friends said I'd never make it on my own. They said I'd end up broke and back at my mom's house or living off of some dude. They said it behind my back but I knew. I never let it bother me anyways. But I've got a plan. I think, anyways. I want to go to Europe. I'll never have enough money, but see if I just go somewhere different for a little while, I'll feel different. And that's all the change that matters. Some days, I just really need to leave.

I make more money than any of the people I surround myself with (my friends, I guess that's what they're called, but I don't trust anyone). I laugh about it because they do hard, hard labor. Me? I'm just a waitress. It's much more complex than anybody thinks, but if you can keep up with the pace and put on a good smile then you'll be drowning in bills at the end of your shift. I think stripping is equally degrading, but society doesn't see it that way so I can skip the judgements and lectures about "losing my dignity." I can make \$300 in a night. I work five nights a week, that's \$1,500. On my slowest week, I've made \$800 and I average about \$3,500 a month. I live in such a small town, the cost of living is cheap. My rent is only \$300 a month.

I have to live poor though. It's mandatory. If you live poor, then people feel real sorry. Especially the regulars. And then your friends don't know you have any money at all, so they'll never ask for money. And if they do, when you tell them no enough times, they eventually stop asking. You feel less guilty about your old class mate overdosing on meth because you know that the money for the drugs never came from you. I'm guilt free.

I get one day off per week. It's not a whole lot of free time but

Detachment

it gives me enough to keep my house clean and to focus on myself. I like to study different things. One day I looked up the movie plots to every single *Fast and Furious* movie. I wasn't impressed. Another day I went to the zoo. I dreamed of living with the lions, but I realized I already do. We're both caged in, in a way. Stuck in places we don't belong.

My boyfriend tells me I'm too smart for the way I live. We've been dating for three months and he walks the way I dream. He says that I could accomplish anything if I set my mind to it. He wants me to go to college and become a scientist because I'm so analytical. I told him it's impossible and that even if I became a scientist there would be no point, because I could make more money as a waitress. It's a lot of money to pour into my education just so I can be back where I was meant to be. Besides, I rent a lot of books from the library—that's education enough for me. I taught myself calculus. I memorized some of the problems from the book I had. I do them in my head for fun. I don't know what any of them mean or how it relates to my life, but it makes me happy that it exists. They're like never-ending puzzles.

My boyfriend is nice. His name is Frank. I think I love him but I cannot be sure. I am never sure of anything. He's only stayed the night once and it was when we got drunk off of Tequila when I got off late one night. We made love until the small hours of the morning and he fell asleep in my bed. I was so afraid to sleep with him that I made my way to the couch. In the morning he left freshly made coffee, a note, and a kiss on my forehead. It was pleasant but I remind myself that it's dangerous to get too close.

My mom died last week. I hadn't spoken to her in over a year. I find it hard to talk sometimes. I think things would be better if I could live somewhere different. I heard from the doctor that she committed suicide. She left no notes and didn't have a will. Now I'm left to sort out her legal things. All of her affairs, all of her life's collections, when I haven't even talked to her in years.

I'm afraid to. Instead, I just go to her house and somehow it smells even funnier than I remember it being. I go there and I sit and cry while surrounded by all of her things. My boyfriend doesn't know what's happening—but oh god how could I tell him about this? I put on one of her old baggy t-shirts. I sit in her favorite spot on the couch

and I imagine being here alone every day of my life.

My phone rings and it's strange because I feel displaced and home at the same time. It's Frank. He dropped by the restaurant to say hi. He's worried because my boss is unhappy and hasn't seen me for a couple of days.

"I can't talk," I tell him.

"Why the mystery, Sunny? Why is it always a damn mystery?"

Through tears once again I say, "I can't talk."

My hands shake and I hang up the phone. There's nothing here for him. I have to call my brother and let him know.

"Teddy—it's Sunny," I say when I hear his phone on the other line.

"Sunny? What the hell are you calling me for? What's going on?"

Oh God. This was a mistake. He doesn't care about her. He never cared about her. She was alone. I'll always be alone just like her. Why are these words so hard to form?

"Why can't I talk, Ted? Why can't I say it?" I gasp through sobs. I'm silent for a long minute and I barely hear him on the other line but he's screaming the way I want to.

"What's going on? Are you okay? What about mom?" he asks.

I pick the phone back up, "You let them run all over her! You had too—didn't you? You never stood up for a damn thing that happened. You were the man of this house. You and dad and you fucking let them run over her like she was a deer in the goddamn street!" I let myself scream. For the first time I let my voice be heard. My real voice, not the silly anecdotes and stories I tell to keep customers and friends and even Frank.

"Sunny—what the fuck is going on?"

"She's dead, Teddy. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead! A bullet through her 2 blue eyes, her manicured hands pulled that goddamn trigger as well as every man you let enter this house."

Now we're both silent and I can hear him whisper "shit" under his breath. He tells me he's coming, and he'll be there soon.

An hour later he marches through the door and finds me asleep with dried tears on my face. He wakes me up and I fill him in on

all of the details.

“I don’t know what to do,” I tell him.

“Shit, Sunny, like I do?”

“I didn’t think you would. You’ve never been one for strong leadership.” I scoff at what I feel to be indifference. I keep thinking about how I should have left a long time ago.

“Look—maybe things went bad, alright. Men were coming in and out and it was Dad’s fault. She should’ve taken us away from that son of a bitch a long time ago. I didn’t know what to do, Sun. I really didn’t. I tried talking to her. Every time I did, dad would beat the shit out of me. I’m sorry I pushed you away. I was afraid they’d let those men take you the same way they’d take mom. I pushed you away to protect you. It’s all fucked up and I hope you can forgive me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive. It wasn’t your fault. I just can’t...” I broke out into a sob. “I can’t deal with the fact that she died alone.”

He pulls me in and I am thankful for his comfort. We look over her things and I hand everything over to him. “I don’t know how these things work. Can you please handle it?”

He agrees and he asks me to meet him for lunch as I’m leaving. I tell him maybe after I get back from Paris. He laughs because he thinks I’m joking.

I leave the house and look for Frank. I didn’t mean to leave him in the condition I did. I go to his apartment and he answers immediately. His expression shows relief. He pulls me instantly into his arms.

“I love you, you know that?” he whispers in my ear.

For the first time in years, I say those three words out loud, “I love you.” I do not feel afraid. I do not feel anxious. I believe him and I know that in this moment, no matter what happens, he truly loves me. And for an instant I believe that I can and should be happy.