

Fostered Longing

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Sandra used to sew. He knew that much about her at least. In every picture he has of her, a pair of long tailors' shears are placed between her fingers as delicate as a cigarette as she works.

Sev was given a few of the blankets and dress shirts she worked on throughout the years, wrinkled and faded in the sad cardboard box, but they never seemed to matter to him. He didn't have any pictures of her making the clothes, bent over a machine as the checkered fabric gilded through her fingers. Logically he knew that they were hers, that the hours that went into making them, into each seam and pocket intricately stitched to combat wear and tear were her hours, but even then, he wasn't there for any of that. What he does have, is a pair of tailor shears, dull green handles, faded in certain places with the impression of warm, careful hands.

It took him two years to open the cardboard box that his caseworker left for him. At the time he thought about how nice it was that she got a hold of it for him, but between then and now, having opened the box and unpacked its secrets, he almost wished she hadn't bothered. What do you do with a box of secrets that were never meant for you to hear? The garments had lived a life and so had he but the aged weariness they shared bonded them. The worn clothes taught him more about dated fabric trends than they did of his mother but within the stitches and pulling threads he can invent ideas of this woman, a fading fable of his childhood. He can take this placeholder of a person and borrow her for the small boy in the care home who still believed someone would come back for him. Sandra didn't set the clothes aside labelled for him, nor did she set aside pieces of her life in pictures with stories just for him to hear. She did not intend for him to hold these fragments yet the pieces of her weigh heavily on him.

He still talks to some of the boys from the home, some of whom got boxes much like his own. They told him about the letters addressed to them, or the family pictures they don't remember being in. For Sev, the box lacked any sort of memory or home, it was just stuff. He kept everything nonetheless, the back of his mind telling him he would regret tossing it, but it went back into hiding under the bed in the spare room. Besides the sewing and the shears, the box contained pictures telling stories he could only begin to understand, like looking at a scene through murky tides, disjointed and out of focus. Every new picture pulled him further from the surface, choking childhood loneliness with images of a stranger who in another life, might have wanted him.

In one still, Sandra sits at on stool in front of the bathroom mirror grinning widely around coke bottle lenses as she holds the shears to her forehead, cutting thick, uneven bangs. In another she's on the couch, a man's head in her lap as she uses the scissors as a bottle opener, lips stretched in a wide laugh at a joke Sev will never hear. The last picture in the stack shows Sandra sitting at the kitchen table, shears beside her as she looks over piles of mail. The last one was always his least favourite, blurry and over lit only showing the back of her head, but still, it seemed to show her in a way that the unknown cameraman never seemed to catch before. The stress and nerves evident in the dim-lit room, her glasses perched on her head making her hair into knotted horns at the hinges. That picture made him believe she really did exist and wasn't just a character in someone else's life.

He never knew Sandra, but as a kid, he imagined what she would have looked like. In his imagination, she worked in an office and drove one of the sleek cars he saw parked outside of the home. He pictured her at family gatherings, laughing and watching the children play. As he got older, he decided that that couldn't be it. That woman never would have given him up.

The scissors are heavy in his hands as he opens the mail, when he opens packages of frozen vegetables or chicken, and when he needs to pry staples out of paper. The blades are too thick to be of much use but still, they sit in the tin on his counter full of utensils, sticking out noticeably. It was unsettling how much they didn't belong, yet they fit into his life, into his hand as his fingertips worried the same impression hers once did. They were so obviously borrowed, clashing with the stainless-steel utensils and appliances, their dull fading surface an eyesore in comparison to the clean, modern space. He wanted so badly to shove them away into the box and ignore it along with the rest of Sandra's hand-me-downs, but the sheers were relentless. Maybe he kept them for the small boy so desperate for the kind of home they might belong in. Maybe he kept them to remind himself of how far he had come from that naive child. Or maybe the sheers were just sheers, unassuming and convenient in their newfound spot on his countertop.

He asked his caseworker if she had put aside the box for him, a lasting shred of hope that she cared about him at all. She looked away and after a beat, she said simply "She never made a will... there wasn't anyone she wanted to leave anything to". His caseworker told him that near the end she wouldn't have been able to do much of anything by herself. He wondered why there were no pictures from the end in the box. Maybe she didn't have anyone left to take them.