

In a Box

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Reflection from the author

I wrote this poem during a time when lack of sleep played with my emotions, and therefore made it hard to control my subconscious that I would normally keep at bay. Laced with out-of-the-box metaphors, the poem brings the reader along a self-reflective journey about hiding from one's own identity. I wanted to describe how even though I believed I had valid excuses that I gave the identity in the box, such as promises of returning, putting off one's identity for however long is still hiding from it. This was a difficult thing for me to come to understand, and I had felt the repercussions in the form of the identity retaliating in full force and showing up despite my best efforts. I took inspiration from Shane Koyczan's writing style and used it to issue a warning, partly to the reader but mostly to myself, that hiding from one's identity is difficult, but the first step is acknowledging the fact that it might be there in the first place. It is important to note this poem does not follow conventional formatting or grammar rules. It is meant to be read with the 'abnormal' spacing as pauses. The longer the space, the longer a pause to take while reading.

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About the author:

Kiera Collins is a senior majoring in Social Work. After completing her bachelor's, Kiera plans on attending UIUC in the MSW program, concentrating in the mental health field. She hopes to work with those who are deaf and/or hard of hearing along with clients who are experiencing disordered eating.

In a Box

I know it was only because I didn't sleep well, but I found myself sitting alone with my thoughts for a little longer than I usually let myself. I don't do it because honestly, I'm not sure what I'll find.

But last night I crept toward the edges of my mind where I knew I'd only find some creepy crawly thing, or at least a long-lost bit of information I'd forgotten I had to even remember. My lack of sleep urged me on though. Of course, wanting to be obedient, I went. I know the journey was only because I was too sleep deprived to ignore that overgrown path, but the excursion still felt like agony to me. It all began days earlier when I stepped into a boxing ring with my shame. I was hoping I could come out on top David and Goliath style. However, my shame had won the last round and every round before it. But it's looking at me like I've got a glass jaw and just finished insulting its mother. So, its consolation prize was that I canceled my date. I'll admit I got scared; I wanted to be brave. I wanted to grab onto the rule that held my hurt, my shame, and my isolation. The rule that was forced upon me by someone else's religion for something I cannot control. I thought if I could manage to hold it so tight in front of me, then I could snuff out its light. I hoped I would become the victor and the rule couldn't hurt me anymore.

I wanted to meet that little broken shadow that followed me. The one who lost the fight against my venoms shame. And I wanted to claim it as mine. I wanted to be proud of what the world told me to keep hidden. I wanted to hold onto this missing part of me that I had been denying myself. For a long time, something in me hoped that if I closed my eyes and pretended it wasn't there, it would be easy to ignore. I thought it would be okay hidden away until I was ready to finally open my eyes.

But no.

Even though I put that missing part in a box, on a high shelf, in a dark room, it did not wait patiently for me - because it did not know I would come back for it soon! Instead, it metastasized. It grew impatient and hurt that I had been ignoring it- but it didn't know that I hadn't! It did not know that I would come back for it... someday.

I did not leave it up there to be forgotten like it thought I had. I kept a close eye on it, even though it thought I wasn't watching, I was. Like a parent with eyes in the back of their head, I always knew where it stood. I kept it out of trouble like it was about to throw sand in some other kid's eyes on the playground, but I put a hand on its shoulder just to remind it to stay in check.

I did not leave it out for the wolves. I glanced back every now and then, just slyly and quietly enough so I could hide the fact (even from myself) that I was holding onto something so important, so needy.

Yeah, I was upset about that. Upset that I caught a glimpse of something I knew I should love and cherish, because everyone has been lined up to tell me what I've been missing out on. Like a growing ticket line full of people who don't know the Taylor Swift Eras concert has been sold out for days. But they refuse to pack up their tents off the sidewalk because they just figured out a way to turn their eagerness into energy to charge their portable space heaters. So, they are determined to get to the front of the line and buy a ticket just to stand in front of me to tell me I've been missing a part of myself I didn't even know existed!

But really? When I close my eyes, curl into a ball, cover my ears, stop breathing, and start to hum, I can drown out all the voices of the world just barely, and only for a second or two, long enough to admit that...

I know what is missing.

And it happens to be in a box, on a high shelf, in a dark room. But I ran out of quarters to feed the silencing meter on the angry mob outside! Maybe I do know what is missing... but thanks to my asthmatic lungs, I can't hold my breath long enough to figure out why it is so important to me and what it feels like to pretend to make myself whole. Because I've been giving this box the side eye, and I'll admit I'm afraid to look at it straight in the face. Let alone open it. I wish it was only my fear of spiders that keeps me at bay. But it has been sitting on that shelf for so long that it has cobwebs on top of cobwebs on top of cobwebs, and I know what is in that box scares me more than any daddy long legs, black widow, or tarantula could do. Maybe I'm crazy, but I'd take a box overflowing with long-legged creatures any day before I admit to what is actually in that box. I'm nervous about what it will do to me if I give it too much attention or look at it the wrong way.

But I guess if I'm so determined to watch from a distance, I should've put my glasses on because what I didn't see was it growing. It is surprisingly resilient. It would not stand for my aloof attitude! As much as I hate to admit it, it knows me better than that, and it also knows it has a right to be here! And it will SHOUT! AND SCREAM! AND GET UP IN MY FACE! Because it has a voice that deserves to be heard GOD DAMMIT!

It will NOT leave until I LISTEN!

It just did not know that I would come back for it... eventually.

And I was crying angry, hot tears not understanding who or what would be so cruel to tell me to put the box up there in the first place. I just don't understand it. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy, so I'm not sure what I did in my past life to deserve this, but it must have been bad.

Or someone is just really, really mad that I took the last donut in the break room, which still doesn't seem fair for what I have endured- unless it was a Boston Cream, and in that case, I guess I can understand where they're coming from. But that still doesn't change the fact that it hurts like a metal bat to the chest. Because in the end, I did not snuff out shame's light. Instead, it grew and engulfed me until my whole being was aflame. And so, I kept crying, cursing the world- the shelf- the box- the light- the donut- and myself, thinking fuck!

I wish I would've just slept better.