Boxes

by Alex Aro

His voice isn't familiar but his words are. He says he knows we haven't spoken in years and apologizes for it. I can hear him pacing on the other end of the line, tapping things and then a shriek of glass shattering. Really, I tell him, no need to be sorry. Give me the address and I'll come by.

On the way over I think of the painting he gave me when we were younger. A small acrylic on canvas, the colors fierce but the approach still amateur. It was of a woman underwater, maybe floating or maybe drowning. Her facial expression wasn't happy or sad, it just was. I remember him pointing at the painting and then at me when he said it's a painting of you. This is your softness, your sensitivity floating away. You're like a stone.

A stone? Please. When he left I put the painting where it belonged, in the trash.

I arrive and knock and he beckons me in. His room is not really a room, but a series of boxes. He tells me I still look the same and to sit down.

Where? There are no *seats*.

He throws his hands in the air and says pick a box and sit. He is at the far end of the room, nude in a box filled with water, his body curled like an eel.

I try and sit in the box closest to me but it is filled with broken glass, presumably the same glass I heard over the phone. I step out and trip into another box covered in spikes.

He laughs. You haven't changed.

My hand is bleeding from the spikes. I look around for a normal box, any box where I can just sit and hear where he has been these last six years. There aren't any. One box chatters with mice and cockroaches, the box by the window is impaled by swords and the last box is made entirely of ice. His room spins around me, the spikes bore through my hands, the mice and cockroaches gnaw at my feet, the swords stab my stomach, the glass screams and

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shatters in my eyes and I grab at my heart as an icy glaze forms around it.

My friend, he says. Learn to let the world comfort you. Let go.