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Moving

by Z.Z. Boone

I go with my mom since she's afraid to go alone. It's not the threat of anything physical happening; she's more worried that what she calls "the verbal shit" will kick up again. She and my dad have been divorced seven months now, and so far so good. She and I moved into a two-bedroom apartment twenty-five minutes away, while he stayed at the house.

A couple of weeks ago the news came down that the house had sold. Yesterday my dad checked into the Ramada on Old State Road while movers came in and took almost everything to Sir Store-A-Lot, one of those complexes of metal sheds you see from the highway. The stuff will sit in there until my parents can agree—something they're not known for—on what to do with it.

But other stuff was left behind—valuable, breakable, sentimental—as per my father's instructions. He and my mom have agreed to meet here on a symbolically icy Saturday afternoon in January to divvy it up.

It's close to 3:30 when we finally arrive. We were supposed to be here by three. My father's Sentra is in the driveway, so my mother parks our Civic CRV at the curb. It's what they did when we lived here; both of them hating that feeling of being "blocked in." My father is in the living room—he's brought a slew of empty cardboard boxes with him—and the first thing he says is, "Nice of you to show up on time."

"Hi, Dad," I say.

"I hope you have room for some of this crap," he says, still addressing my mother.

"I'm fine," my mother says sarcastically, as we peel off our coats. "Thanks so much for asking."

"Can we put the knives away and just do this?" he says.

"All I want," my mom tells him, "is my mother's sewing machine, her silverware, the Peter Max *Hair* poster, and a few books."

I can't get over how creepy this whole thing is. This house I've grown up in, the only home I've really known, stripped practically to its bare walls, any familiar traces of life picked up and carried away.

"It's freezing in here," I say.

"Hey, Zoe," my Dad says as if noticing me for the first time. "I hope you're

ready for next weekend.”

“I want to talk to you about that,” my mom tells him. “We have this mother/daughter book group on Sunday, so I was hoping maybe you could take her the weekend after.”

“Sorry, Diane,” he says. “I’ve already got concert tickets.”

“For what?” she asks.

“It’s this music thing. The Naked Brothers Band.”

“Dad, I’m sixteen,” I remind him. “Naked Brothers Band is for ten-year olds.”

“Come on. We’ll have a great time,” he says, sounding like a man who knows he’s going to hate it.

“Can we at least discuss this?” my mother asks.

“Can we at least clear this place out first like we planned to do?” my father says.

“Can we at least turn up the heat?” I say.

They both turn their attention on me. It’s a trick I learned to do back when the fighting started. Sometimes it worked, most times not.

“We’ll be out of here in two shakes,” my dad says, meaning the heat stays where it is.

I help my mom maneuver the sewing machine, the size of an end table, down the slippery sidewalk and into the back of the CRV. Inside the house, my father sorts books into separate boxes.

“God forbid he helps us,” she says as she folds down the back seats.

For over an hour, everything goes smoothly. We’re almost done—it’s just about dark outside—when the lights flicker and then go out entirely.

“Oh, great,” I hear my dad say. I look out the front door and notice the entire block is out.

“Must be ice on the wires,” my mom says. “Should I call the electric company?”

“What for?” my dad says. “We’re out of here.”

My mother picks up a table lamp she’s wrapped in newspaper and decided to keep while my father hefts the last box of books.

“Lock it up when you leave,” he tells me as I hold the front door open for

him and he kisses my forehead.

“What about switching weekends?” she calls.

“Fine,” he calls back. “Whatever.”

“Grab your coat,” my mom tells me. “We can pick up a pizza on the way back.”

That’s when I hear it. A muffled thud. Like softened snow sliding from a tin roof and hitting the ground below.

“FUCK!” I hear my father shout from outside.

When I reopen the door I can just make out his prone silhouette, halfway down the walkway, surrounded by spilled books.

My mom and I, penguin-walking on the slick flagstone, reach him simultaneously.

“Andrew?” my mother says cautiously, as if the man is capable of springing up and grabbing her by the throat.

“My back,” he mutters pathetically.

This is a man who—despite yoga classes, physical therapy, and even spinal fusion surgery—has always had back problems. He collected heating pads like other people collect compact disks, and he even stockpiled Bengay in the basement in case of a nuclear attack.

Ignoring his protests, we somehow get him on his feet and back into the house. We lay him on the bare wooden floor as gently as we can.

“I’ll call 911,” my mother says, fishing in her tote bag for a cell phone.

“I’ll be okay,” my dad says.

“Zoe,” my mom says, “check in the freezer and see if there’s ice.”

“No ice,” my dad says. “Ice caused this.”

“Check the upstairs bathroom,” she tells me. “Bottom drawer on the right. Where we kept the flashlights. Maybe the movers left one behind.”

“My balls,” my dad says.

“What?” my mom says.

“Get my balls,” he says. There’s silence for a moment before he adds, “My gravity balls. In the glove compartment.”

My mother goes out to the Sentra while I go up the stairs two-by-two. I make a left and pass through my old bedroom, through my father’s ex-

office, and into the windowless bathroom. It's black, but I know every twist and turn of this house by heart. I search everywhere, but the movers have done their job thoroughly.

When I get back downstairs, I can barely make them out in the muted light from the front window. My father lies on the floor, two balls the size of grapefruit under each cheek of his butt. My mom has folded a blanket she keeps in the car and placed it under his head like a pillow. She stands not that far away, facing him.

“No flashlights,” I report.

“I just need a little breather,” my dad says to one of us.

My mom laughs.

“Enjoy this, do you?” my father asks her.

“It's just that when you said ‘my balls,’ I thought...”

She laughs again. He makes a noise somewhere between a giggle and a groan, and just as quickly they both fall silent.

I sit on the floor where the sofa used to be and I watch them. They are close enough to touch, together in the only house they've ever owned. *It might have been like this their first night, I think to myself. Two people, in love, without even enough money to have the electricity turned on. Soon she will lie down next to him. He will take the blanket from behind his head, unfold it, and cover them both. At this point their phantom daughter—not yet born—will smile and turn her head and close her eyes and think of couples ice skating hand-in-hand on Topstone Lake.*

“I have to get going,” my father says before too long.

“I can give you a ride,” my mom tells him. “You can pick your car up tomorrow.”

“No can do,” he says. “Believe it or not, I actually have a date tonight and she expects me to pick her up.”

“A good old-fashioned girl,” my mom says.

“Well I guess we'll find out,” he says.

Stiffly, he makes it to his feet and out to the Sentra. I gather the spilled books, put them into the back seat. My mother, table lamp in one hand, blanket draped over the other, stares at him seated behind the steering wheel, his car door still opened.

“You sure?” she asks.

“I'll see you,” he nods.

He waits in his car until my mom and I are safely in the CRV. Headlights

on, engines running, no one moves for a moment. Like two teenagers on the phone, neither wanting to be the first to hang up.

My mom pulls partially into the driveway, backs out, makes a U-turn. My father backs out behind her. I think for a second she might beep the horn for him, but she doesn't. As he pulls away from us, I turn and stare out the back window. I see his break lights glow red, and think for a second that he may have changed his mind. That he'll turn his car around and chase us down. But then I realize he's only paused for the stop sign at the end of the street and in less time than it takes to rethink it, he turns one corner while we turn another.

Z.Z. Boone was born in Brooklyn, NY, where he spent far too much time in Catholic schools. In 2010, his work has been nominated for Dzanc's Best of the Web ("Canaries," from *LitNImage*.) and the Pushcart Prize ("Run Away," from The 2010 Jersey Devil Press Anthology.) Stories have also been published in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Annalemma*, *The MacGuffin*, *Underground Voices*, *Temenos*, *Third Wednesday*, *FRIgg*, *Word Riot*, *Rumble*, *Pank*, and other terrific places.

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