

The Fantasy of Being Boxed-In
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The Box was old news as of three hours ago, but Veda had 'school,' which they were inclined to attend.

By the time school got done, the sun had got down, and the light was hardly enough, wet and orangey like wax dripping out of the ear, like asphalt might be appear to be under sodium-light and rainy conditions, and Muna Sauber was annoyed with waiting; envious of the idea of School, yet unlikely to herself School, she resentfully paced her family's apartment, waiting for Veda to show themselves in from the rainy cold so that the two of them might show themselves out again and get down to the Box, which dropped only four or five hours ago, it is said. Muna unwilling to go by herself, which is prudence.

Where is Cory, said Veda, having opened and shut the front door softly. Muna's family's apartment was not locked to Veda. The apartment maintained a steady homeostasis of cramped warmth and also sheltered the constant threat of relatives, hence they spoke softly. Muna announced herself from the kitchen, softly, but also yelling, He's asleep, Let's wake him, then, Hell no, said Muna, Let's just go, the two of us, a prudent reader might at this point notice that Muna is a kind of divine, or hopeless, fool.

But; Ok, said Veda, and smiled, and they both figured they had won something. I might get to thinking you are more attached to my brother than you are to me, Don't think on it, said Veda to Muna, I can assure you it's true, Oh, stuff it.

That is of course when Cory himself appeared from a dark couch-corner and made himself known by announcing to no-one that he had Worms in his mouth! By which he meant he was thirsty, and then he was hugging Muna's leg. Thus Cormac, the youngest and, by matter of course, the most liberated member of the Sauber family, was to accompany the two not-lovers to the Box, which dropped only five or six hours ago, it is said. A charismatic member of the family is simply indispensable in such times.

A pale fat girl in a red sash was explaining to the three of them how it all worked. She clapped her hands over her ears to demonstrate electrodes. Then having delivered her industrial knowledge she moved on to the next clump of people. Everybody was wearing eager hats that made them feel taller. Also, it was cold.

Wait, did she tell us the price? Muna asked a man near them, He was earnest and had hairy ears, She sure as shucks didn't, he said earnestly, and then fished for another offering, I hear it's 'spensive though, Right, Muna took this bad news in stride and turned dismissively away from the messenger.

Veda was anxiously measuring the length of the line. It was at least three school-cafeteria lines long, and moved like an intestine, which is to say, at its own pace, You were right, you should have gone on without me, Veda whispered to Muna, But I couldn't, I hear the Box is

‘sensitive, Doll, I might get to thinking you’re more attached to my money than you are to me, Don’t think on it, said Muna to Veda, I can assure you it’s true.

Sometimes the beloved is an object of hatred, thought Muna, and then she tried to unthink it. Where’s Cory?

The wind played hopscotch with plastic bags. Down the street people waited patiently even in the gathering dark. The new art form, the innovation, the Box had been installed in an old movie theater; people once might have waited like this to see a premiere; once. That was long before Muna was born; adolescent girls tend to define themselves by what they are not; Muna was not a lucky girl. She elbowed Veda. Where’s Cory?

He’s over there, don’t worry. Where? Near the front. I’ll go get him, you stay here? Just hold your horses, We shouldn’t have brought him! Well lookit here’s him now, Cory returning to them with the fat pale girl in the red sash in tow, looking like she needed a leash, and also now she had sunglasses, which really altered the mood.

Is this your kid? He’s my brother, said Muna importantly, and she could see her reflection in the pale girl’s big sunglasses. She grabbed Cory’s hand. Ok, we don’t recommend bringing kids into the Box, but he’s really cute.

Everyone looked at Cory. He stuck his tongue out.

It’s getting late, the fat pale girl in the red sash who wore sunglasses succinctly observed. Yes, said Veda, thinking she knew why the fat pale girl in the red sash had chosen to wear sunglasses. We’re gonna have to turn alotta these folks away, the man with hairy ears was eavesdropping and Muna pointedly trod on his foot. But since you’ve got a little kid, we don’t like to disappoint, we’ll let you skip the line and go on in, here it seemed she looked pointedly at Veda, If you’re willing to pay forrit.

What color had the fat girl in the red sash’s eyes been, before she replaced them with sunglasses? Watery gray? Stinkbug brown? How much? And the girl in sunglasses told them the price of skipping the line, and Muna boggled, and Veda said, Sure, and cash was exchanged gently, like they were handing each other live cats, and they all went in.

Everybody inside the cavernous old-fashioned movie-theater wore a red sash, or else they were blind idiots, uninitiated, or so it seemed to Veda P. Walz, as the fat pale girl in the red sash who still wore sunglasses led them to the check-in kiosk, They must be big on company uniforms around here, said Muna, thinking the same. Veda had a brilliant intuition that maybe this wasn’t such a good idea, that the three of them were doing something irresponsible such as using cruise control in a school zone. But adventure at any price, right? Veda reached for Muna’s hand. Muna squeezed Cory’s hand. The three of them were ready to hear the price of entering the Box.

The woman working the check-in kiosk with Christmas-colored nails smartly rang them in for three Boxes, one each, and Muna boggled at the price, and Veda had to correct the woman with Christmas-colored nails, no, just one Box, we can’t afford to do three separate boxes, Honey, the woman said kindly, as though Veda were an idiot or a dog covered in poo and

wearing a sweater also covered in poo, You don't want to just one, It'll be (she covered her mouth in mock-gasp) *embarrassing*, just the one, please, Veda said firmly, We've come this far, Muna whispered encouragingly to Cory and he ignored her, and the woman allowed the embarrassing thing to happen against her better judgment and a large amount of money was exchanged, less gently this time. Then there was paperwork.

Just one more thing, honey, the woman with Christmas-colored nails said before she let them go, The rule is one Box, one vision, don't share those electrodes with anyone else in your party, Sure, said Muna, Sure, said Veda, The woman actually waved a Christmas-colored finger, like something out of a story, It's dangerous, messes with the electricity, Elec-trick-city! said Cory and Muna laughed, the woman with Christmas-colored nails frowned and waved them off, there was a blurry of red sashes and several hallways and then they were in-front of the door of the Box Veda had purchased use of, for one half-hour.

Veda adjusted their crown of electrodes gently. Muna looked around for visible red-sash supervision and there was none. The moneymaking red-sash apparatus had distributed them to a potential future with a minimum of conflict or freedom. Cory opened the door before either of them told him to, it was a little out of his reach and he had to tippy-toe. They went in.

If you have ever hidden in a dark closet in a basement during a thunderstorm, then there is no need to describe cramped conditions to you. Let us say simply that the Box was cramped and that Cory was afraid of the dark, a reasonable parameter. He began whining a warning almost as soon as Muna had shut the door behind them and she scooped him up and he tried to kick his shoes off and almost kicked Veda in the head and then far wall of the Box began to glow like it was one big window and the sun was coming up, but the glow was a moving image, Veda depicted larger-than-life on the screen. Frick I'm nervous, said Veda, and they had not said enough on the subject.

On-screen Veda was sitting in bed in compromised position, they looked rather skinny and coy, their hair was afluff and they were likely to be naked, there being sheets in the way of discerning that particular truth, at this point on the screen Muna entered the room, if you have ever watched gay or romantic porn you might know how this is going to go, Veda opened their legs and Muna went between them with her tongue, there were encouraging moans, at which point Muna covered Cory's eyes with one hand and Veda was panicking ripping the electrodes off their head, causing the screen to flicker and the encouraging moans to schizoid like someone was DJ'ing the volume dial, causing Cory to cry more, Muna tried the door to the Box and found it locked.

She of course wanted to go down on Veda until they were sweaty and feeble and chemically driven to affection, for her it would be a kind of victory, over what? remains unsaid, She at this point however did not think Veda would appreciate her bringing this up, and kept her happiness, but not her love, unrequited. Veda was still ripping electrodes out of their hair, which was afluff, and that made the big screen and consequently the whole Box uncomfortably dark and quiet, and so upset was Veda by the communal and unconsensual witnessing of their

apparently innermost desire and evenmore the resulting quiet that they panicked and roughly pasted the electrodes onto Cory's head.

Now Cory appeared on the screen, the image a lot less clear than Veda's had been, with shaky-cam and unrealistic shadows, but it was Cory, alright, and on-screen his dad held him in his arms and talked to him about drill bits. Cory finally stopped whining so that he might begin talking. Thank God mom remarried someone useful, said Muna, while the on-screen Cory wriggled through a lecture on how to hold a drill The Right Way, his dad trying and failing to keep both him and the drill cradled comfortably in his arms, the on-screen Cory wriggled down from his dad and chugged into the background, and his dad chased after him, this was a fantasy, after all, the point is not to be loved, but to be overwhelmed by love and to reject it.

Me now, said Muna, and she plucked the electrodes from Cory's head. This time he did not cry, something might be loose inside him, but now was not the time for inquiry, it was the time for selfishness, anyway he was liberated from consciousness and likely to be fine, at least it's easier to think that. And so Muna pasted the electrodes on her head, it felt a little like applying glue to one's hair, and the screen glowed for the third and final time.

Now Muna Sauber appeared on-grainy-screen in the aforementioned Sauber apartment, as did everyone else, appearing in diminishing clarities, Cory Sauber and Veda Walz, Cory's dad and Veda's sisters, who have not appeared in the story so far but whose personal history nevertheless remains causative, also some of Muna's closest friends, Momma Sauber and her Momma's closest friends, you know how it is in fantasies, everyone important is summoned, a real hullabaloo of people tucked into the Sauber apartment, some of them sunk into the walls from the torso-up, and all waving cheerily for on-screen Muna, who felt small, and the Muna in the Box felt small, too.

And Muna communicated, to her overwhelming company, that: A fatal danger has followed me (Muna) here, I have cursed you all by revealing the location of this hidey-hole, And what is the danger, Muna? Everyone wanted to know, far from being shunned, Muna as the sole possessor of knowledge was crown Princess of Information, this was a fantasy, after all. Muna in the box felt unable to answer, boxed-in. Her community was unsecure.

Veda found Muna's hand and pushed Cory's hand into Muna's hand, and Cory used his other little hand to pull the electrodes from Muna's head, and the screen in the Box at last was dark, so at last the three of them heard the pounding at the door. A sea of red sashes threatened.

Veda tried the door and found it still locked. It's still locked, they called, and a red-sash voice called back sheepishly, Ok, But we told you not to share the electrodes, You can't tell people not to do something and then put them in a box with nothing to do but the forbidden thing, Muna found her voice at last, We respect your payment, said a different red-sash voice, we won't come in until your time is up.

Why are we in trouble? Muna whispered to Veda, who shrugged, Flouting authority, I miss my dad, Cory observed, True story. The three of them felt safe as long as they were together and hidden, like ducks under a pier. Then the door opened and there was an anticlimactic walk of

guilt as the three of them marched past the long lines of FOMO-stricken working-class young people yet to be separated from their money, and then were almost no consequences for flouting authority, just a dismissal from the check-in (and apparently check-out) kiosk and another longer walk home to the Sauber apartment, and the whole way home Veda was thinking What just happened, Muna was thinking I could really use a cigarette, it would help me think through what just happened, and Cory was thinking, I really like those movies.

Cory's dad/Muna's stepdad was waiting for them in the Sauber kitchen which was unheard of on weeknights. Cory went right to him and Cory's dad scooped him up; Cory remembered he was supposed to be wriggling and he wriggled; choice rushes along the few pathways that fantasy makes available. Then he put Cory down and Cory promptly disappeared and the dad-man looked so uncomfortable without something to hold, he moved his tongue around his mouth like he had a fishhook dug into his cheek and he was trying to hide it, for shame.

He looked to Muna, then to Veda, C'mon what's it, said Muna, This is family business, he bluffed, Veda's family, then, she bluffed, Well, then, said Veda, I'm going to go find Cory, Stay, warned Cory's dad, just I have one thing to say. Well Jesus, what's the shit, Watch your language, What's it, If you mess with the Box people again I'll get laid off, We weren't messing with them, said Muna at the same time that Veda said Ok, it won't happen again.

But how'd you know? Muna insisted, Didn't you sign some paperwork? They contacted me and I can't have a troublemaker, you know how much a good family means in my line of work. Sure, said Muna, Sure, said Veda, and he had a few more vague threats somewhat muffled by some vague praise and he then found Cory passed out under the kitchen table and they both went off to dream.

It's been a day, said Veda. Yeah. Do you want to come over to my place? No, said Muna, but she did briefly fantasize about saying something else and knew she would expand on it more later, maybe in bed.

Ok. Do you want to go back to the Box sometime? Yes. We'll have to use our fake ID's and maybe wigs, or something. Oh, and we'll have to draw on moles.

I can't believe I'm saying this, it was Muna saying it, Because it was the most anxiety-inducing thing, to glue on those electrodes and look at the screen and not know what I was going to see, but know I was going to recognize what I saw, it was the worst feeling but also kind of nice, too.

It's better than going to the movies, that's for sure, now it was Veda saying it, I think it might be addictive, You're right, said Muna, I love that not feeling responsible for what comes up, it's like a rollercoaster, let's go back tomorrow.

