

Did you take a picture of it?

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There is an upper closet in my room that my parents had intended for me to store my garments and outfits alike when we moved in 10 years ago, but throughout the years it was never utilized for this purpose. Instead, loads of toys and video games of my childhood pervaded the spacious portion unorthodoxly and haphazardly, looking like the sink after dinner, full of dishes stained with sauces complemented by a few lonely pieces of rice. I was also weirded out by this pet peeve both I and my mother shared, an involuntary sense of incompleteness and loneliness if one storage area isn't completely occupied. Long ago she had already decided to stuff a few of her enormous photo albums inside to ease her obsessiveness, ignoring the ironic fact that her collection would be separated, scattered all over different rooms in the house.

She never gave a second thought over minutiae like these, but I did. I did not want the irritating experience of searching for something only for that certain item to be nowhere to be found, and this item would only appear when I was searching for something else at another time, and instead of the relieved emancipation from the task I felt like it's my fault that this jumbled mess existed in the first place. My disdain for this situation reverbs audibly, and I always tell myself to do better. Whatever I desired at a given time, I would not be able to obtain it. I feel like this was an inevitability, that's why I would like to stay organized. This realization prompted me to arrange its contents, and with this objective in mind I ventured into the unknown. Nonetheless, the closet was packed to the brim, and like a lock the magnetic covers sealed themselves for an eternity until yesterday when a cockroach crawled out from the slithers of the abyss and fell onto my bed. I was alerted that the prolonged negligence of its hygiene inside potentially spawned a breeding ground for insects alike, so it was an emergency to thoroughly clean out the area. I couldn't store much for the stuff anymore, nor do I have any use for them, so I figured I might as well sell the remnants of my childhood memory for some quick cash or return those that didn't belong to me to their rightful owners.

When I pulled open the covers two massive rectangular objects immediately awakened and loosened themselves from their slumber and dived towards me, unsuspecting with my head turned towards the clock to note the time. I failed to grip onto them as I saw a frame of hasty blackness gliding

across my peripheral vision, slamming hard onto my left toe before I could even identify the objects. I needn't grip onto them to know that they were as heavy as a concrete brick since the delayed yet sharp pain boosted a dose of adrenaline straight into my sluggish mind. I yelped without muffling, and I finally got the chance to glance at my inanimate assailant not before tending to my toenails, merely looking a bit worse for wear. They were the photo albums, and despite my unfamiliarity with them I knew it belonged to my mum, who just came into my room for my screams alarmed her. She first affirmed my well-being, to which I replied that I was alright, and as her gaze loosened she was pleasantly surprised that these memorable objects of hers were in my possession.

"You really should have told me that these are in the closet," she remarked with a smirk on her face. I looked at her with my eyebrows nearly touching together, annoyed at the fact that it was her that put those hefty albums above in the first place, while my toe had to suffer the consequences.

She randomly flipped to a page. I saw white-framed Kodak photographs laced throughout the sheet behind flimsy plastic pockets. She pointed to one particular photograph, which I inspected closely: both my mum and dad were laying out their palms with a wide grin on their faces, presenting something in a cage behind them, with the photo's contrast so high that I had difficulty discerning what animal it was. The photographs themselves were white but also not quite white, as the bezels had shown signs of yellowing, reminding me of my dad's tobacco-stained teeth, ironic that this discolored object houses a more youthful version of himself.

"I think we took this photo in some zoo in Beijing, sometime after we married. It was most likely our honeymoon. And, you know, since we're wearing heavy coats and thick clothing, it was probably snowing back then. I haven't seen snow again since you were born. Maybe someday you can take us to someplace that snows." She looked at me with sincere eyes and a smug smirk while spewing such a subliminal dig, yet when I looked into it I saw signs of nostalgia and shreds of lament simultaneously, as if she just sighed without inhaling or exhaling. I was fairly bothered as I had to suffer an unnecessary injury on my toe due to her unsystematic misplacement of her possession in my closet, and now I was taunted at for no particular reason.

“I mean, for a woman of your caliber, I don’t think you need me to bring you to a country that snows. You’re plenty capable of doing that yourself.” My voice echoed a hint of passive aggressiveness, but she was so entranced in nostalgia that she probably didn’t notice.

“It’s not the money part, but it’s the meaning behind it,” I was getting ready for the platitude that she had often spewed at me, yet I anticipated wrongly this time. “Going to someplace else, doing something with your loved ones has to be the best experience in your life, and you ought to make memories about it that you’re going to remember for the rest of your life. Who would not want to have memories like these? What are you going to reminisce about when you’re old, when you’re chair-bound and unable to move? This is why you really need to take me and your dad to someplace good, and we can visit different places together, or maybe get some great food, but most importantly you need to bring your camera so that we can take photos like this. Who knows if I’m going to get Alzheimer’s in the future? And hey, by doing so you will at least let me know that I raised a kid well.” She smirked during her last remark and strolled out of my room to continue with her paperwork, leaving me all alone surrounded by the silence of unfeeling objects. The photograph was then hastily laid upon the cover of the album as she expected me to tidy it up, along with the mess that was my bed.

I took some time to ponder on her words, and before I started reorganizing my things I gazed into the photograph like she did. It was really a nice picture that embodied a tenderness of a time so distant that it would never be experienced again. Happiness and contentment were sewn across their faces, perhaps eternally, and I was sure they feel the same way now after all these years. Life has been relatively kind to them, with their careers smooth sailing and our lives not too shabby nor harsh. Yet they were not young anymore, and some things just wouldn’t happen twice in life. After all, the lens of a photograph could only show you what ‘was’, a peer into the past for the present to look back fondly. I wonder, if I took such a photo now, with my face showing satisfaction and fulfillment, and keep it for 20 years, will the future me smile upon discovering it to resonate with his life then, or feeling remorseful for being reminded of a time that was but never will be again? To be honest, I can’t tell.