

The Unpacking
by Sara
Alvidrez

PLAYERS.

IAN, Steph's older brother.

STEPH, Ian's younger sister.

PLACE.

The attic of a properly(?) dysfunctional midwestern home.

TIME.

Trivia Night.

NOTES

Set and props can be minimal, extensivity isn't necessary.

The attic hatch is located off-stage or somewhere to the side.

Hyphens preceding speech indicate contemplative pause.

The Attic. Quintessential suburban clusterfuck.

Numerous card-board boxes and random artifacts are scattered across plywood flooring.

Dust clings to everything. The smell of decaying wood and insulation is nauseating. STEPH enters, begrudgingly. IAN follows. They stumble around the space, dodging boxes and miscellanea.

STEPH

I didn't even know we had an attic.

IAN

Seriously?

STEPH

I don't know, I've just never thought about it.
It does kinda smell bad though.

IAN

...Are attics supposed to smell good?

STEPH

(shrugging) You tell me

IAN

Can we just- get this over with?

STEPH

Okay okay, let's go

STEPH half-heartedly completes an arm motion of encouragement.

Aimlessly, they search the space.

STEPH

...Remind me why we decided to start this process with the attic? Most of this is already boxed up.

IAN

Yeah but we still have to sort through all of it and decide what we want to keep, put in storage, or donate. Mom wants to downsize when we move, so we have find the stuff we want to get rid of and box that up separately. We're giving it to Goodwill or something.

STEPH
ugh okayy

They continue.

IAN finally stumbles across a box to sort through, labeled "Winter Clothes-Ian"

IAN
W I N T E R C L O T H E S !!!

IAN sets the box down and tears it open, sorting through various sweaters and cargo shorts(?). They are ugly, but not to him.

Suddenly he pauses, staring straight ahead.

IAN
I forgot the packing tape

STEPH
How could you forget the packing tape, what we're doing up here is literally in the name.

IAN
I'll go get it.

IAN stands and exits.

IAN
uhhhhhh

STEPH
What? Go get the damn tape

IAN
s h i t

STEPH stands upright, now concerned and headed in IAN's direction until IAN reenters abruptly, halting her.

IAN
The hatch is closed.

STEPH
...then open it??

IAN
No, I *can't* this type of attic hatch is from the early 80's. It only opens from the outside.

STEPH

Are you sure? Also, why the hell do you know the chronology of attic hatch models

IAN

Go ahead and look for yourself.

STEPH looks for herself.

STEPH

...Yyyep. We're screwed.

She reenters.

Let's just call mom or something.

IAN

Good plan, good plan

Pause.

They both sit in anticipation, expecting the other to take out their phone. This silence is significantly longer than it should be.

STEPH

You do it, my phone is dead.

IAN

Jesus Steph, your phone is always dead

STEPH

...and? Let's just use yours

IAN

Here's the thing. Ha. Kinda funny, actually. It's downstairs. Next to the. Packing... tape.
Haha

STEPH

Ohhhh my god are you kidding me?? Where the hell is mom anyway, she's probably the one that closed it.

IAN

-

-

SHIT. Shiiiiit shit shit shit.

STEPH

What?

IAN grabs STEPH by the shoulders.

IAN

Steph. What. Day. is it.

STEPH

...Tuesday?... ohgoditstrivianight

IAN

Mom never gets home before 2am on trivia nights

STEPH dramatically cries out in agony, breaking free from IAN.

IAN

Well, it now makes sense why she closed the hatch, when she's in the pre-trivia mindset her peripheral logic gets pretty hazy-

STEPH

Why don't we just jump on it a few times and break it open?

IAN

AbsoLUTELY not, that's dangerous. And mom is prepping this house to get on the market, she'll kill us if anything gets damaged.

STEPH

-

IAN

-

STEPH

Well shit. I'm all out of ideas.

IAN

We could... Pass the time by actually doing what we came up here for?

A moment. This is considered.

STEPH

Or we could just look around. It's not like we can do much without the packing tape.

STEPH starts opening random boxes, as a roulette.

IAN concedes, joining her. This lasts for a few moments, but eventually unamused, STEPH gives up and falls flat on the ground.

IAN finds a classic novel and a necktie. He proceeds to knot said necktie around his forehead.

IAN begins reading.

STEPH
UUGHHH. What time is it?

IAN
I don't know.

STEPH
...but you're wearing a watch

STEPH sits up.

IAN is still reading.

IAN
The piece of shit is analog. Looks cool though.

STEPH
you can't read analog?

IAN
No, I *choose* not to. Takes too long. Inefficient way of portraying time.

STEPH
-

IAN
You wanna look?

IAN offers STEPH his wrist without removing his haze from the novel.

STEPH
...why even- Nevermind. I don't wanna know anymore.

STEPH sighs. Finally, she acknowledges the ridiculous accessory on IAN's head.

STEPH
Who's tie is that?

IAN

I think it's dad's. I'm more of a bow-tie guy myself.

STEPH

Remember how he used to buy a new one every time mom threatened to leave him?

IAN

(Laughing) That man has more ties than a Men's Warehouse.

STEPH

Haha so true. What did he always say?

IAN and STEPH

(simultaneously) "New tie, new guy."

STEPH

too bad he kept pulling the same shit.

IAN

The tie thing did get old after a while.

Shift. Tension now accompanies them.

STEPH

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-

Hey um... do you think the separation is gonna stick? Like, between mom and dad?

IAN

I mean I hope so. They're better off apart.

STEPH

Yeah, they really suck to be around when they're together for too long.

IAN

Exactly.

STEPH

Aren't you worried that it's not going to change anything though? They've tried ending things before and it never went anywhere. The tie thing won mom over multiple times.

IAN

I mean I doubt officiating their separation in the eyes of the law will immediately put their fucked up relationship to rest, but at least the divorce is happening. They aren't going to be living together anymore either, so that will help.

STEPH

I guess

IAN stands and returns to his box of ugly clothes. He pulls out a random button-down or flannel. Ideally, the pattern is a confusing plaid.

IAN

Heyyy my old game-day shirt is in here.

STEPH

Game day?

IAN

Yeah, I used to wear it whenever we had a match.

STEPH

ohhhhh right. Chess. Wait didn't you have a big competition or something recently? How'd that go?

IAN

It's checkers, but yeah. We won regionals, actually.

STEPH

wwhaattttt why didn't anyone tell me about this? That's awesome.

IAN

Well you're always in your room and mom and dad weren't there, so. It's not like they could have told you.

STEPH

oh. Um. I'm sorry Ian. Did they know about it?

IAN

They did, but it's fine. They probably just forgot about it with everything going on.

STEPH just nods, unsure what to say next. She sits awkwardly.

Silence.

IAN

...you're right though it does kinda suck.

STEPH

Yeah, I bet. They should have been there.

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I'm starting to feel like this divorce is turning our parents into different people.

IAN

You're kinda right. Seeing what it's doing to mom is the worst part I think. She's been so hard to reach lately.

STEPH

Definitely. Missing your competition? That's so unlike her. Dad on the other hand? Not surprised.

IAN

Both of them *have* been weird though. I feel like I haven't had a full conversation with either of them since the damn lawyers got involved.

STEPH

Fuckin' lawyers.

IAN

Ha. yeah.

STEPH

I feel like they've gotten so lost in the mess of it all that neither of them have taken a second to see how the hell we're doing with this whole thing. If they're not arguing about legal arrangements and whatnot, dad's off having another life-crisis and mom's spending her time at a dive bar called "Bongo's."

IAN

That's true. It is pretty convoluted.

STEPH

Like I want to be understanding and all because divorce isn't easy or anything, but I dk. It just. It's hard to watch. All of this back and fourth, ya know? I'm tired of being around it all the time.

IAN

Is that why you never leave your room?

STEPH

Ya know what? Probably... Actually yeah no that's definitely it. huh.

IAN

-
-

Do you ever think that. That you could've done more? Or something?

STEPH

Ian what are you talking about

IAN

I know it's such a cliché, but sometimes I think I do.

STEPH

We are trapped in an attic right now Ian, clichés exist for a reason. Elaborate.

IAN

Pffffff nah it's probably just me overthinking

STEPH

No, Ian I think we should discuss this. I don't think we've ever really talked about what's going on until now

IAN

...Steph I don't think we've ever really talked *period*. You're a room-dwelling gremlin, and the last time we texted was for your birthday three months ago.

STEPH

That was six months ago, Ian.

IAN

oh, shit. Yeah.

STEPH

Really though, what's up.

IAN

Agh, I don't know. I guess. I just feel like sometimes if I would have just stood up and said or done something earlier, dad would have maybe been better. To us and mom.

STEPH

Ian /that's

IAN

/For the record, speaking that aloud did sound way more pathetic than it did in my head.

STEPH

No, it's not pathetic. But you have to remember, dad's a shithead and mom's a pushover. It would have been a mess regardless.

IAN

Yeah. Yeah, you're right. Their marriage was fertile ground for disaster.

STEPH

And honestly, Ian. You did more than enough. You probably got caught in their bullshit more than you should have.

IAN

I guess. That was pretty messed up.

A moment.

STEPH

Ian?

IAN

Yeah?

STEPH

I do too.

IAN

What?

STEPH

...I also wish I did more? I don't know. When mom and dad were at each other's throats growing up, you did get caught in the middle. A lot. You took a lot of shit for me and mom and you didn't deserve that. So. I'm really sorry.

STEPH stands. IAN remains silent. Then:

IAN

Ya know what? No. Don't apologize, that's not on you.

STEPH

But Ian, it's-

IAN

You said it yourself, it would have been terrible regardless. Blaming ourselves won't get us anywhere. Our parents messed up. Not us. Okay?

STEPH embraces IAN, taking him by surprise. After a moment, he hugs her back.

STEPH

Let me know when your next checkers match is. I wanna go.

End of play.