



## The Slum, the Mum and the Staycation

by Saffron Swansborough

### Act I. Past

When my daughter was 12  
We went on holiday, except  
I didn't go with them,  
My enjoyment of camping in itself  
Still being on a long vacation  
Instead, I put up my hand  
Volunteering to clean and tidy  
Our pre-teen's bedroom.

On the first morning of their trip,  
While my partner sent  
What's Apps of our youngest  
Deep set in a camping chair, mouthing  
"I love you mummy"

to an invisible me,  
I was videoing a Before shot  
Of the little corner of our home  
We call The Squat  
Pushing open the door at the start,  
With Lloyd Grossman asking me,  
“Who *lives*..... like THIS?”  
And me replying, “Well Lloyd,”  
But in seconds I was on Life of Grime  
As I tried to defend her,  
To John Peel,  
“BUT SHE REALLY IS A LOVELY PERSON.”

My internal PA looks at the scene  
Then sends me a memo:  
Block out your diary for the day  
And I hope that’s long enough  
For this job.

## **Act II. Present**

She doesn’t know I’m doing this.  
Her Dad and I agreed, if she knows  
She’ll say No.  
I want her to be grateful  
Yet I fear palm face emojis,  
Oh MUM.  
She’s not a teenager yet so  
Of course I won’t find

anything embarrassing,  
Under the furniture  
Or between her books.  
The uncluttering  
Is like reading  
An anthology of a life  
On the cusp of change  
Lego, Dumbo and primary school recorder  
Jostling with vegan cosmetics, period packs  
And those expensive Bluetooth headphones she wanted,  
Needed, promised to look after,  
Now lying on the floor  
Like a beached starfish  
Wondering what the hell happened.  
Through the carpet  
Of discarded earring backs  
And the things put inside things  
(that rainbow tote she lost  
Two days ago is inside a new shoebox,  
While the missing rings  
Are sleeping in the seam  
Of a school backpack)  
Is my tender girl. The photo of us  
With my mum  
When my girl was 3 is centre-stage  
That's not dusty while  
Dolly clothes remain  
within her reach.

### **Act III. Future**

I'm rehearsing future discussions  
About "stuff that's gone missing  
Since you cleaned my room"  
I resolve to keep the contents of her bin  
For a week or two  
To prove what I really threw away.  
She won't know for years  
That this is like keeping a sample  
For the doctor.  
I'll spend the afternoon  
Grouping her belongings:  
Hair things. Pens. To Do lists  
Which are all ticked off,  
Since she is highly organised.  
I wonder whether to add,  
"Saturday. 11am. Clean my bedroom."  
Later, I will film the After shot.  
I will never resent this time spent  
With my girl, while she still needs me,  
Deep down, even though (and whenever)  
we are apart. But there is one thing I cannot do.  
I won't go under her bed.