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Take a Micro-Moment

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I

You are standing facing the back door.

Just to the left of it is a hook with your jacket on it. Well, your grandfather’s jacket. The long, green one with a hood full but not heavy and a lining worn but still warm. He sent you home with it once while you were visiting for an afternoon and it unexpectedly started snowing. He knew it would snow.

He stood in the back hallway where he hung his coats and held it up as you slid your arms in one at a time, not making note of your left arm needing an extra micro-moment or two to extend. “Muscle Spasticity” were two words you couldn’t spell individually or together but you knew them in the tightness you felt and continue to feel. It lives somewhere between your shoulder and elbow and always feel released as your fingers find their way out on the other end of the sleeve.

He said nothing as they made their journey that day. Well, he probably said something but it was most likely about being one day closer to Spring or how the Red Sox would be starting Spring Training soon. It definite-

ly involved either Spring or the Red Sox. Probably both.

II

You are standing facing the back door and so much behind you is half-done.

On your desk is the past week’s worth of mail, opened but not properly sorted. Piles are simply plopped and stand almost like stalactites except each layer criss-crosses the last. BRE envelopes build off of promotional magnets on top of restaurant menus resting on campaign flyers. Halos of coffee accent the space next to where your laptop sits closed and charging.

You do not need to worry about leaving it plugged in too long. You will be back in time.

You should probably worry about the amount of crumbs whisked into every corner and the spot where maple syrup and dried almond milk hold close a semi-sweet chocolate chip.

Under your bed are shoes unpaired and sticking out. You made quick work of them, wading through as you stood up from your bed, as they seemed to briefly latch onto your ankles, only to be kicked a few inches from their original spot. But also maybe closer to their mate.

On your bookcase, space is at a premium. A whole month’s worth of *New York Times Magazines* are folded, each on a shelf clinging to less than two inches of room. There is the collection of Robert Frost and E.B.

White you patched together from what your uncle left you from the Ph.D he started in the 60s and what you have found secondhand. Each time you look at them together you seem to pause, bite your lower lip, and stare off at nothing for 30-45 seconds.

The same can be said for when your eyes get to the shelf second from the top. No, it is not the unopened Kleenex boxes and ink cartridges. It is the collections of Mary Oliver and Maya Angelou. You have attempted to write odes to them half-a-dozen times each. You just keep coming back to their own words believing they said it best. You just want to capture their capacity for inciting wonder.

Just above you is the ceiling fan spinning. Just above it is the layer of dust courtesy the Fall and first half of the Winter. You want to leave it on but that much spinning through the air will only incite a flurry of sneezes. Reach up and pull on the string. Well, it really isn’t a string. What do you call that thing that dangles down and adjusts speed? Whatever it is, interlock its tassels with your fingers and pull down.

III

You are standing facing the back door and about to leave all this behind you as you hear neighborhood kids shoveling.

Your shoulders, both left and right, sting. At this moment, the mail carrier crunches on the crust of ice leading to your first floor apartment. You sense he nearly slips but presses on and presses the slightly melted up-

per layer into the lower four-to-six inches of snow.

Your back bellows in tightness. It won’t have an opportunity to be tested. Same for your knees. They will work with the rest of you to balance the best you can while getting to your car. The drive is quick and you can’t visit long anyway. After twenty minutes she sometimes blurs together who is who.

If that happens today, she’ll run her thin fingers with skin withdrawn through the jacket’s fabric not yet fraying. You will ask what she is doing and she will reply, “what I always do” and stop at a pocket to utter “Pete.”

You will wait a micro-moment or two before replying, “No, it’s me.”

IV

You are standing facing the back door and you tug on the collar of your jacket so that it’s close against your back and falls forward slightly.

No need for Nana to reach too far.

About the Author

Nicholas J. Howard is a current graduate student pursuing his Master of Arts in English at Bridgewater State University. He composed this flash fiction piece while in a workshop with Dr. Bruce Machart in fall of 2020. He plans to graduate in fall of 2021 with a thesis focused on creative writing.