

Little Things

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With a thick, white ring of smoke slowly pushing towards the yellow-stained ceiling, I stared into the old man's eyes listening to a story of hunting that has been repeated so often it almost feels like a family heirloom.

Seated across the table in the Sunday-dinner-aroma-filled kitchen was my grandfather, inhaling on a cigarette. When he turned his head to the right to catch a glimpse at the latest standings of a NASCAR race I saw the uneven hairline left from giving himself a haircut with a pair of scissors and a mirror. It crept up behind his round ears and met with his thick hair that slathered back against his scalp with a thick layer of grease. Dressed in his usual attire he wore a black t-shirt with a pocket in the left breast tucked into a faded pair of black Levi's. A brown leather belt with a white-waved design hung loosely around his waist. The bottoms of the jeans were rolled up two times. Next to him was a pair of black slippers lined with brown-and-tan checkered pattern.

"I got three buckets of ashes, Jim," he said in a low voice.

His tobacco flavored breath mixed with a heavy stench of Old Spice, creating a one of a kind smell that stuck not only in my nostrils, but in my memories. Another one of his "small" favors, it was irresistible to say no once he threw his classic smirk across his face. As he pushed off the table to stand up, his once muscled filled arms barely functioned. Once completely

standing, he kicked out his left foot, then his right. I began to chuckle, remembering how my cousin and I used to call it the “chicken walk” as kids. As he slowly made his way to the basement door he bellowed out a thick cough.

The cold January air hit my face as I stepped outside onto the concrete porch with a bucket in each hand. I suddenly began to miss the warmth of my grandparent’s house. My grandfather didn’t like to cut his own grass or shovel snow. He didn’t like raking leaves in autumn or walking ten feet to the road to put a couple buckets of ashes out. He did like to do the little things, like keeping his small blue house full of heat in the cold. After lugging the buckets out to the road, I turned back toward the house, and there he was, standing on the porch, in his socks, holding the door open for me.

I shut my eyes, and took the last step into the house, and felt the warmth crawl across my body, chasing the January chill away. Upon opening my eyes, I found myself embracing my grandfather, with his uneven hairline and smell of tobacco, and nothing felt so perfect.