

Awkward Dances in the Cold

A cold morning in Georgia.
I make my way to the kitchen
slowly,
not lifting my feet,
to let my socks dust hardwood floors.

It is not the cold that slows my movement.

I unload the dishwasher,
listen to the coffee maker hum.

This is the routine:
small daily exercises,
familiar clink of clean cups,
heaving, rhythmic breath of brewing coffee,
in a cold house gray with dawn.

The furnace is relentless,
like a steady wind,
but working hard to bring this drafty house
to a temperature that feels like home.

I hear my husband's hard steps
from the distant bedroom
where he sleeps,
get closer,
louder,
as he walks to where I am.

Brown leather shoes, a gray wool coat,
hair gelled hard like helmet,
face freshly shaven.
He is ready for his day.
He smells of soap and department store cologne.

In the kitchen,
leaning on the counter,
he is looking at his phone,
while I put spoons and forks in proper places.

I turn to gather more utensils,

and see peripherally he is closer to where I am.
Programmed by domesticity,
I turn to put the spoons away.

When he sees me turn away from him,
because I have not seen how close he's come to me,
he then moves away from where I am:

Three steps backward.

He looks at his phone;
I put knives and forks away.

No steps forward.

An awkward dance,
after fourteen years of marriage,
still tentative on how close to get,
still uncertain of how close the other wants us to be.

Memory, not as crisp now,
I can't remember
if some argument resides between us
from the night before.

This clumsy moment in the kitchen will be the residue this evening.

Always some reason
not to thoughtlessly succumb
to simple love.

He says goodbye and leaves.

The door slams shut.

I finish putting plates away,
moving slowly on this cold and bitter morning.