

## NURSING HOME WIDOW

KATEY MIDDLE

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This old path is broken. It fell to shards, scrap and pieces at around 2:13 am last night. It was pronounced then, anyway. I heard it rise and then fall. I could feel rumblings for weeks. A kind of raspy wasp of air that hissed at the sun. I heard but did not know what it was saying. So I kept the pace. I swept the buzz of white concrete stained brown. Each day the sweep. The exorcism of grains worn down to dust and powder. I flung them about, and around and behind me then next day woke to feel more sand shifting under my feet. Always more. Then last night, one great and final rise. It's so quiet now, no beeping and ticking and whirring and I can imagine the long line raised like a giddy prop in a magic show. Can imagine the moonlight whispering its secrets, making it glow and glisten and sweat. I see it suspended for just a moment. A fighting moment. Then the fall. The final fall and that break of blood and bone suddenly and I imagine stillness. And a soft settle of dust.

I am so tired of sweeping. Of the smell of the path, the never ending journey along its crumbling edges that still had to be up-kept. I thought this path would be prettier. But did I see wildflowers as I stood at its step when I was a young? Or was it just the crinkle of smile and seduction. The twinkle of something not given but sparkingly whispered like diamonds and masterfully sold. No sparkles, no perfume, but the smell of chemical and body was a haze of allergy that I hated inhaling since it was not mine. But still I mopped the stains from the stone.

I chose to walk barefoot today. Chose to leave my stockings on the floor, my cardigan inside out on the bed. That empty bed. I felt each crack crisp and poke at the souls of my feet. I felt each broken braid, each knotted root of tree pushing away from the ground to the light. I'll never know if it was a cold winter that snapped the stem and crushed fragrant petal, or if it was that the buds never really grew at all. This path, though that winds through the park is gone. No longer feeding a traveler over the arching ground to a silent corner and an old park bench. Old woman alone on sunny afternoons begging silence and peace and always waiting for something to change. I step off the concrete. I don't slip, I have no pain in my body. I walk back to my house, grass soft under steps and make some tea. I have no need for sweeping today.