

home is where Granny is...

TUMBLEWEED

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*“I am nowhere. I have left my
world behind, and have not yet
found another. That is the tragic
adventure. I have departed, but
not yet arrived.”*

*— J.M.G. Le Clézio, The Book of
Flights*

Winters were mild in Texas. The leaves on the trees never changed colors, they just fell. What little snow touched the ground never stuck, it just melted. I felt so cold getting off the school bus at Granny's house. She'd give me fresh socks, make a cup of hot tea, and drape my Indian blanket around my shoulders. Warmth. Only she knew how to give it to me.

The blanket itself wasn't particularly warm, not that it needed to be. It was a thin thing— small and rectangular in shape. We called it the Indian blanket because it was sent to her from a Native American charity she donated to on a monthly basis. "Indian" wasn't as much of a politically incorrect term back then in the early 2000s. Yellow and turquoise geometric patterns decorated its red fleece fabric, making it the most colorful thing that I owned. Each color symbolized something different. Red symbolized the sacred color of war, victory, and courage. Yellow represented heroism and intellect. Blue symbolized peace and heaven with turquoise being a stone of protection. The meanings of colors were not universal. Obviously there are variations from tribe to tribe, but they didn't go into detail about that in the charity's information packet.

There's no real guarantee that the charity was even legit. They claimed their mission was to fund schools on the reservations, which sounds like a lie because that's way too generalized of a mission. It's name is lost to me, so I can't check, and I know for a fact that Granny never did. Despite growing up in pre-civil rights America, she still had a kind heart, and thought others' hearts were just as kind. I don't think it was naïveté. I imagine she just needed some mechanism to prevent her from becoming calloused. On top of that, Granny was heavy in her faith, so she always made sure to do unto others as she would have them do unto her (I think that's what Luke said. Granny never woke me when I'd fall asleep in church). Whether or not by choice, she never mentioned the thought of this charity being a scam like so many were, designed to swindle old people who were trying to make their last years count for something. She wrote her checks, and received her gifts with gratitude.

As did I. My favorites were the dreamcatchers. They still hang in my room 15 years later, traveling with me through time to protect me from things that go bump in the night (or, more accurately, in my dreams). Beautiful items they were, with their beads and feathers, and worked like a charm, but they couldn't protect me from the cold. Not like my blanket, the item I reached for every winter day as I sat on top of the warm vents in her floor. The temperature in west Texas winters often stayed around the 40s - 50s, but I was always freezing. "Ice blocks," Granny would say to me. "Your feet are ice blocks!" Except ice was pronounced a-y-ce, with 3 syllables. Her accent was peculiar— country as hell and stuck in the 30s. She'd put an "r" in the middle of words with long "o" sounds, like coach. Onion was always urn-ion. We spoke so differently, our dialect separated by 75 years, but always understood each other. I've learned that language can transcend time. "You'd better start wearing a coat to school, gurl." I'd then have to explain to her that it wasn't cool to wear a coat in 4th grade.

I wanted so desperately to be like the cool kids. If I had been

cooler, maybe my peers would have been nicer to me. People can be quite cruel in small towns, especially if you're different. I was extremely upset by the end of just about every day, but Granny, in her kindness and patience, came up with anecdotes to calm me down rather than further upsetting me by trying to straighten me out like other adults. These anecdotes often came in the form of knitting needles and cheap yarn from the dollar store. She taught me how to hold my hands and where to place my fingers. Tuck the need into the loop. Wrap the yarn around. Pull. Tuck again. Slip off. Repeat. I'd tuck, wrap and pull myself to sleep. Always under my beloved blanket. It has hugged me the way no one ever has, and no one ever will. I can still feel its lightweight gently kiss my skin. My Indian Blanket was so soft that it seemed to disappear under my rough and peeling hands. I spent every recess on the monkey bars, the only place I felt comfortable and out of reach during recess. Years of gripping onto metal, dangling over and falling into a sandbox hardened my skin. The playground was not gentle, neither were my hands, but my blanket was. This pleasant feeling was well-received after particularly distressing days. I melted under its touch before 100 fingers rub its softness away — before 10 fingers rubbed it away 100 times. My 10 fingers. My two shoulders. My blanket. We are all stripped away with time. My touch starved body now cries out for its embrace, “cover me, please!” But when I look down, my shoulders are bare.

I only crawled out from under this blanket when Granny would ask me to go outside with her to feed Beep. Beep was Granny's bird. He was a wild bird that sat in the tree outside of her window every day for years, returning to the exact same spot even after countless migrations. They somehow formed a bond that was straight out of a Disney movie. When he would come around, Granny would call out to my sister and I, “Come look, gurls! Beep is here!” His body was sometimes hidden behind branches and leaves, but we would spot him after searching for a minute. It was routine. I'd go to my spot at her counter and

tear off the crust of my sandwich. She would take it along with crumbs from a bag of potato chips and add it to a plate of scraps she had accumulated throughout the day. This was Beep's dinner. The gourmet meal for a familiar. She had food for him every time he came around. Granny was unlike the rest of the people in town. She wasn't cruel, not even to those different from her. She was capable of identifying their beauty.

"That doesn't look very good," I said, staring at the plate.

"Well, Beep eats it every time I put it out there."

"Why not buy bird seed?"

"Why would I buy bird seed when he eats the scraps just fine. Whatever he doesn't eat, the cats can have." She takes a plate outside, sitting it high on her rusty barbecue pit so that the cats won't immediately pounce on it. Beep pecked away.

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Sometimes, things go away, and we don't know where to. Away is such a difficult concept to comprehend. I don't know what it is or how to get there. Is it a better place to be? I want to ask Granny this. She's now away at a nursing home while I'm away at college. I don't understand how we can both be in the same place, this Away, yet so very far apart. 2344 miles apart, to be exact. She requested to go to the nursing home only a few years after we stopped riding the bus to her house and Beep mysteriously stopped returning to her. His disappearance really hurt her. I got off the bus one day to her standing outside looking for him.

"What are you looking for?"

"I'm looking for Beep. I haven't seen him in a long time."

“Wouldn't he be migrating?”

“He should be back by now. He's always back by this time of year.”

“Where do you think he is?” My eyes are now scanning the trees and the sky as well. There were vultures and chemtrails, but no Beep.

“I don't know. I think a cat might have gotten to him.” I never wanted to believe that. I liked to think that Beep was living in South America with a new mate and some babies. Granny missed her bird dearly, and continued to watch for him for a long time.

I felt like nursing homes were where you sent people to die, but since she requested to go, she probably would have told me that Away was indeed a better place to be. I'm not entirely sure I could say the same. We are in similar environments, that much is true. We both are residing within a specific community bubble amongst similar people. We have our rooms, a dining hall, various classes and activities to attend throughout the day. We can have visitors as long as certain rules are followed. The price to be in such communities is approximately one human soul. But I'm in Maine, and it's much colder here. Through my layers: leggings, then more leggings, then jeans. Undershirt, sweater, then parka. Cold. I still feel it. It's a lot worse. I didn't know I could feel colder.

I mentioned this to her my first time back home after leaving.
“Hey, Granny!”

“Hi-y there, gurl.” Her eyes light up, widening so much that I can clearly see the blue ring around her irises. She speaks real slow now, only managing to get out so many words at a time.

“How are you?” I ask, and go in for a hug. Her body is so tiny,

I'm afraid I might break her.

“I'm just fine. How have you been?”

“I'm good. I go to school in Maine now.”

“That's far!”

“I know! Far and absolutely freezing. But it's so pretty up there. I brought you a postcard.”

“Thanks, can you hang it on the wall over there with all my other cards?” She has a growing collage wall full of pictures, letters and postcards. She's always been crafty. The nurses have to hang these items for her because she can't stand up straight anymore.

“Grab some of my hospital socks and a blanket from my closet over there” I did, then crawled into bed with her. We laid there watching The Weather Channel until visiting hours were over.

At the nursing home, Granny always had a blanket in her lap. They were never like my Indian Blanket though. I asked if she remembered it as it had been tucked into some unknown corner in her trailer house, a place untouched for years and caving in on itself. I asked if she remembered the color, material, or stitching. The stitch work on my Indian Blanket was something I studied every chance I got. I tried to trace where the thread entered and exited and looped, pieces of it were hidden. I tried and failed to recreate this stitch. My hands didn't have the skills or the talent as that of a stranger's. I envied the stranger's hands that spent their time stitching blankets rather than giving love to their own families. I wondered who they were and what they were like. Whether they pricked their finger during the process or scolded their children for disturbing them while they worked. A life existed in this needlework and away from it at the same time, a life

that was inaccessible to me. The stitches and I are one and the same. I, too, keep parts of myself private... hidden... secretive... away.

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Much like the lost land of Away, I also don't know where I exist on the plane of time and space. I feel like a tumbleweed, aimlessly blowing around. As the wind carries me, I search. I search for Granny. Beep. My Indian blanket. Myself. All of these things are away, and I don't know what that means. I don't know a lot of things. I don't know where Away is, where it begins and ends. I don't know how it gets there. But I do know that things aren't so cold when we're together.

Winters were mild in Texas because I had a source of warmth. Enough that frigid 52 degree weather didn't feel so frigid. But I'm not in Texas anymore and...

... I'm really cold now. I want my blanket.