

## The Linen Aisle

Some moments are frozen as fossils, trapped in your mind forever. For the second time in his life, it had happened again when the pleasant young woman in a pale purple smock had ‘slipped’ into the back room behind the counter of an out-of-the-way antique store. Oh, she hadn’t actually *slipped*, but as far as he could tell, she hadn’t gone into the back room either. She had simply disappeared.

Milo’s neck hairs stirred as he recalled a similar moment thirty years before when Milo was five. The popular Catmint dishtowels had cost two weeks worth of Nana’s ironing earnings. But his Nana was determined to have them displayed in her kitchen. At the mercantile, Nana had instructed him to come along with her or stay put at the magazine rack as she all but raced toward the linen aisle. He’d ‘stayed put’ because he knew he’d still be able to see her from where he stood. And he did undeniably see her-*vanish* as quickly as a ripple in a tranquil pond as she stepped into the All-things-Linen lane.

After a while, folks gave up looking for Nana; chalking it up to her having simply run away. *From him?* He didn’t believe that for a minute. But something told him that if he went into the linen aisle, he might not come back either, so he never did. Not even to see if Nana had been buried under an avalanche of Catmint dishtowels.

Thirty years later he still believed she hadn’t left him on purpose and he’d since been collecting every old tin container, calendar, and kitchen utensil he could find that reminded him of her – except linens. Milo steered clear of linens of any sort.

When a soft breeze, as through an open window, gently caressed his face, Milo’s gaze lifted toward the stockroom where just inside the open door, an ancient Singer sewing machine gleamed beneath overhead lighting. For a galvanizing second, the Singer appeared to quiver the way heatwaves do above blacktop, and he blinked. The next moment, the pleasant young woman stood before him, apologizing that there were no vintage calendars in stock –but, she did have a fetching assortment of Catmint dishtowels if he’d care to step in back and have a look.

Reaching for Milo’s car keys glinting brightly on the ground beside his car, an elderly woman slipped them into a pocket of her pale purple smock and wondered how long he’d keep running.

Tangelo T. Peel