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## What Might Have Been

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## *What Might Have Been*

Imagine that your grandfather as a young man  
had sat in the diner for another ten minutes,  
sipping a second cup of coffee, considering  
his future one last time. Or that your mother  
had never been infatuated with creases  
and could have ignored the straight lines  
and fresh smell of your father's shirt  
before he sweated through it on the dance floor.  
Or that no one had been allowed to wear blue jeans  
to the dinner table.

Even the smallest details--a word, a passing look--  
make a difference, causing us to wonder  
how everything might have been.  
Nothing in families is trivial.

I once saw my aunt break one  
of her mother's china cups in the sink.  
It fell without a care, making a single clicking sound.  
My aunt is the type of woman who sleeps lightly,  
who awakens if someone puts a key in the front door.  
I know that if one tick of the clock travels  
upstairs in the dark, she raises her sleeping hands  
to her mouth again, looks above the chair  
in the corner, and sees the white  
of the sink and hears her mother's words,  
sharp like slivers of glass.

For years, my aunt has carried  
that one awkward moment with her.  
Her movements have become carefully  
planned, perfected, as though she had  
written them down beforehand.  
To this day, as her mother had done,  
she charms the guests in the living room.  
Alone in the kitchen, she stutters  
to herself and wears gloves  
to keep her fingers strong  
and certain.

*James Langlas*