**Patient Coat, Doctor Coat**

Our hands view each other’s:
hers not washed enough,
mine washed too often.
This distance from where she ends
to where I begin
is measured in solitude,
hers and mine.

She tells her tale
in frustrating iterations
of digression.
But you must let her finish this rendering,
though you know its ending.

In those hands I see chipped plates,
plastic sofa case, dripping taps,
the smell of too little tenement light,
of urine rained on hapless clothes,
a smell her grandson will call stale
and will define everything in life
he will forever run from.

Her sallow hands, atrophic
from not holding
and not being held,
like garaged brush stiffened
with last year’s paint;
hands that rest, as she finishes,
on her coat
indifferently stained;
this coat with wrinkles of fear and lints of stress,
a snow fence retaining
winters of faltering bones.

And as her words end,
I become aware of my coat,
stiff with veneer, this bullet-proof vest,
 presumptuously feigning sterility,
and myself, within, uncomfortable
of its starched and disconnected whiteness.

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