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My Father's Hobby Morton Marcus

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Morton Marcus

MY FATHER'S HOBBY

My father's hobby was collecting sneezes. No stamps or coins for him. "The stuff of life," he said, "of life."

My mother and brothers shook their heads, his friends smirked, but he hurt no one, was an honest electrician, and everyone eventually shrugged it off as a harmless quirk. As his closest friend, Manny Borack, told my mom, "It could be worse."

Dad would mount the sneezes on glass slides he carried in his pockets everywhere he went. Some sneezes resembled flower petals, others seafoam, amoebas, insect wings, still others fanshaped fingerless foetal hands, splatters of raindrops, or empty cocoons.

Next he stained the specimens magenta, turquoise, egg-yolk yellow, and placed them in the glass cases that stood in all the rooms.

Late at night when the family slept, he'd arrange handfuls of the slides on the light table in his study, and, switching off the lamp, he would peer down at them and smile.

One night, a small boy with bad dreams, I crept terrified through the darkened house to the study. He was bent over his collection, his face, surrounded by darkness, glowing in the table's light, as his lips murmured something again and again.

I slid my small hand into his and listened. He was rocking back and forth, bowing to the slides. "God bless you," he was saying, "God bless."