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Suspicion

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Suspicion

by Mike Vanden Bosch

At nine, Dad gave me two nickels a week—
One for God and one for candy.

Those nickels were all the money I ever handled.

“Dad, I want a flashlight,” I said one day.

“What for?”

I couldn’t tell him I was scared of the dark,
so I said, “To find stuff in the dark.”

“What stuff?”

“Any stuff,” I said, but he just shook his head
and said, “I don’t have money for a flashlight.”

So I started saving my weekly candy nickel—
not the one I got for God—that was his.

But if I just saved the other each week,
in two weeks I’d have ten cents, in four, twenty,
in sixteen, eighty, and the flashlight I eyed cost 85 cents.

So I saved, checking each week to see if my flashlight
still lay in the glass case at the store.

When my friends bought their Milky Ways or Spearmint gum,
I went without, slightly pained but
slightly smug in knowing my time would come.

It did.

On the eighteenth Saturday, four friends trailing me,
chewing on their candy,

I walked into Van Aller & Intveld’s Hardware Store and
counted out 17 nickels on the glass counter for the flashlight—
the one marked “85 cents”—and then added one more for tax.

When Dad picked me up, I showed him the flashlight, first thing.

“Where’d you get money for that?” he asked.

I told him. He looked at me, and when he said,

“I’m proud of you, Mark,” Christmas dawned in my head.

Two weeks later when my Uncle Manny was visiting,
Dad called from the living room:

“Mark, come show Uncle Manny your new flashlight.”

As I showed my black flashlight to my uncle,
Dad was telling him how I’d saved my nickels

for four months to buy it, to which

Uncle Manny said, “Which nickel did he save?”

It was a quip that Dad didn’t think deserved an answer,
but it drew blood from me and
scared me of a dark no light could lighten.