



Thursday Memo – January 29, 2015

A Mess - by Martha Duffy

Her house was a mess.

As I drove up, I wondered if this was the right place. There's trash outside scattered across the lawn - opened cans of dog food, plastic bags, a month's worth of coupon flyers. As I entered, I saw that a lifetime was accumulated on the tops of every flat surface. Snow globes, hurricane oil lamps, paper, overstuffed bags with contents unknown. A yappy dog is hiding in a blanket on the floor. There's barely room to walk for me, an able-bodied person. There is almost no room for my patient, an elderly wheelchair-bound woman, to roll around the house, staying in the foot-wide path clear of debris.

Her bedroom is the front room, complete with hospital-grade electric bed, bedside commode, and toilet paper stacked and threaded on a broom handle.

She asks me to sit, but there is nowhere. One reclining chair is covered with bags and blankets and paper. She says, "oh sit there and points to the chair." I moved the pile on top of an adjacent pile and sat down. I felt like I was in an elderly neighbor's house. The neighbor who has no family, who tries to take care of herself, who is too proud to ask for help, who doesn't trust outsiders.

I wonder how anyone could live like this. But this, was my patient.

This was a very different picture than I would see when she came into the white walls of my clinic. The things she revealed to me there were things I wouldn't have heard if I was sitting behind my computer in my clean white coat.