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Jack-in-the-box

by Sho Botham

The sound of his gloved fist connecting with my jaw frightened me most. Physical pain came later, along with the telltale swelling and bruising. Within a week or two these outward signs had all but gone. The emotional impact hung around like a bad smell in the background as if waiting for an opportunity to remind. Although forgotten much of the time such remembrances can emerge unexpectedly triggered by a voice, a sound, a thought.

Once triggered it's like a jack-in-the-box, difficult to put back. Once triggered, the sound of it is relived, the emotion is relived, the disbelief is relived. But then as if, knowing it's done its damage, the jack-in-the-box allows itself to be put back to await another outing. It might be a month, a year, a decade or more before it once again startles when it pops up.

When triggered the memory feels real and immediate. It takes no effort to be back there, hearing the sound, feeling the shock, not fighting back. Trying to regurgitate such memories without a trigger is challenging, as if the door to them is locked and then, remembering is a chair that is hard to sit still in. The urge is to downplay, to avoid the difficult parts, shrugging them off as nothing much. To squirm in that chair as if keeping the lid on the jack-in-the-box can seem to be what matters most - not wanting to release it, to relive it, to remember.

But releasing the jack-in-the-box and accepting the challenges this can bring may offer relief from that long-standing emotional impact hiding in the background.

Finding a way to sit still in that chair of remembering, finding a calmness, a resilience that helps with healing might mean the jack-in-the-box has had his last outing.