

Erased Jodie Platts

Dust motes

The windows are not quite clean, everything through the glass slightly opaque, even the dust motes shimmering in the weak winter sunshine. Furniture in the living room solid but slightly shabby, scuffed on the bottom from the vacuum cleaner misjudging the thrust necessary to get right up to the edge. The dog that is not supposed to be on the sofa curled up with her unmistakable dog odour against the nice cushions that would benefit from a wash. She's old now, lumpy and bumpy and no one has the heart to say 'get down, in your own bed'. Her own bed now storage for the squeaky toys she no longer plays with and the teddy bear she once thought was her baby. The rug not quite parallel to the dusty skirting, with its own microclimate of biscuit crumbs, small lego bricks and bits that look suspiciously like toenail clippings in its thick, shaggy pile. The TV cabinet mirrors the sticky fingerprints on the wall and the ghost of the time the baby got felt tips and drew on magnolia emulsion while he was on a call and she was at the supermarket. She was cross, he was defensive and while they bickered the baby drew some more. Mark making according to childcare experts. Another milestone reached.

Parallelogram

The door on the big kitchen cupboard needs screwing back in tight, masquerading as a parallelogram instead of a rectangle like the rest. Corners and edges skewed and off center. The junk drawer has spread to three instead of just one, invading where she keeps her travel magazines and where he keeps seeds and balls of jute string ready for springtime planting. Takeaway menus, screwdrivers, freezer bags and batteries no one is sure works tangled together by chargers for mobile phones long upgraded, or radio controlled cars, or that annoying keyboard his mother brought over. The felt tip pens with no tops, lip-gloss with no lids, half used pots of sudacreme, long dried out mascara, instructions and a guarantee for the smoothie maker that lives in the garage and a spare dog lead, along with a sticky stain from a refresher bar given last Halloween. Crumbs around the toaster, in the snack cupboard and on the floor, bananas infecting the rest of the uneaten fruit bowl with the ability to go from green to rotten in a day. The brushed chrome fridge reflecting back the dining table strewn with unopened letters, a school bag that should be hung up, more crumbs and a half drunk glass of milk gone lukewarm, the condensation drying to a ring on the slightly tacky wooden surface. Veneer damaged beyond repair. Or so they say.

Unmade

Three unmade beds, one unopened blind. Dusty glass of water by her side of the bed, on a pile of books she hasn't had the energy to read, newsfeeds on her phone stealing her eyes until she scrolls herself to sleep. The TV remote for the flatscreen TV she didn't want in their room somewhere in the tangle of pillows and quilt. More lego and dead make up, fusty towels on the floor, jumbled up with school uniform that should be in the wash, or even worse, hung up. The bathroom with dried toothpaste around the sink, empty loo roll holders competing with almost used up shower gels and shampoos for space around the vase of fake flowers she thought would add class but instead seems to attract spider webs and dead skin cells, like the bottom of the shower tray collects the black fluff from his thick work socks that sticks to his feet. The pile of clean laundry to put away on her bed, the pile of dirty laundry making a bid for freedom from the hamper, the box of Christmas decorations waiting to go up in the loft. The flotsam and jetsam of family life scattered like confetti whilst she sits amongst it, studiously not cleaning and tidying. Not putting things away. Not dusting or hoovering, noticing it all but not finding any good reason to do anything about it. The tide will come back in again, anyway.

Poetry

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The Stain

She notices it first as she is picking toddler toys up from the floor to put in the basket ready for morning and the toddler to take them out again. It's not very big, about the size of a tennis ball but irregular shaped, like a continent on Mars yet to be discovered. She wipes at it with a damp cloth which simply turns the honey colour darker, like cold tea, and more noticeable, the magnolia paint around it becoming a border for the unexpected installation on the living room wall. Over the next couple of weeks they wonder and ponder, privately and to each other about what it is and what they should do about it. Trying to erase it didn't work, and now the paintwork around is fading though the edges of the continent seem to be encroaching on the border of the paintwork. Covering it up didn't work, even with the expensive solution applied before the paint. And then it is expanding, creeping up the wall and along the wall and up towards the ceiling, fingers of cold tea reaching towards the light fitting, flirting with the shadows cast by the ceiling fan blades. Reaching into the dappled light from the tree outside the window and erasing the contrast between light and dark, smudging her reality with its insidious presence. She fears it, he fears it but they don't know why. It's visceral, almost.

Consumed

It must have travelled through the ceiling because it announces itself in their bedroom, peeping out from behind the back of the white Ikea wardrobe they eventually bought online so as not have to face actually visiting again, following the lines on the floor and the signs up above, following other families around and around and around, buying the same things to recreate the sleek Scandi look in tired terraces in tired Northern towns. The extra hanging space she so desperately needed now redundant as workwear gave way to maternity wear, dry-clean only to easy iron, low maintenance, comfortable, practical. She started sleeping in with the toddler, he began drinking and passing out before he had to confront it. They stopped inviting people over, she kept the blinds closed and the sunshine out. And when the stain appeared on her arm, always wearing long sleeves even in the summer, and on her face large aviator sunglasses even when it was dull, saying she had headaches from the light. It moved across her body, already permanently scarred by childbirth, down her shoulders and across her chest, a dun, dull lifeless shadow that was constantly there, visible to her and she suspected to others, though no one mentioned it. It was her dirty secret that no amount of washing or hoping or praying to a god she did not believe would erase. She hoped it would not be part of her forever, but suspected it would become her eventually, erasing her inch by inch by inch until she too was a dun shadow of her previous self. Consumed by all that she wanted. Still wants.

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