

A House That Works

A door slams somewhere inside the house. Propped open windows and doors funnel a breeze – that later will bring white clouds, which at first we'll admire for prettying the sky, then as they crowd the afternoon with grey, our initial relief will turn to regret and disappointment that the good weather is over. The wind passes through, driving stale smells from last night's cooking out of curtains and cushions. Dust is redistributed. Dislodged and fallen in clumps to spiral gently across the floor eventually collecting in hard to reach places that you never think to look. Underneath the bed behind the plastic storage container, down the back of the wardrobe where the vacuum cleaner won't reach. Here is where I'll stuff some thoughts and let them collect dust too. Later, in the evening, just small particles will remain, caught by a shaft of light as they slowly settle, circling and landing in the empty silent rooms. For now, the breeze gently rocks the ceiling lamps, from side to side. A crack runs across the expanse of white, I'm unsure if it's new or if I just haven't noticed it before. Its jagged line is unfamiliar, unlike the friendly knots of the floorboards and in the panels of the wooden doors, whose faces I recognise: two eyes here, a nose there, and half a smile. The cracks are more malevolent, shifty things – their linear forms too much just themselves. You can't trust them not to move or widen over night, and who knows what might enter in through them, or slip away without permission. A floorboard creaks, as if a foot has stepped in a familiar place. But the house is empty, waiting. The wood shifts, expanding in the heat. Echoing former feet passing here, or anticipating footfall soon to come.

A gust knocks down a postcard, propped up on the bookshelf between a favourite jug and a stone you picked up on the beach and gave to me because it looked like a fish. It lands on the floor, the black and white image face down, obscured, leaving an empty void, where my eye will later falter, missing the image no longer on display. The kitchen table is expectant, blank; disordered chairs half pulled out anticipate bodies. The debris from the night before – the dregs of red wine left un-drunk, a solidified tide line around a glass; a slip of butter, leaving a greasy stain seeped into the grain, and crumbs of this and that; empty beer cans, scrunched and crumpled, alongside bottles with damp labels half torn off at the edges; wax, peeled and pummelled, holds the imprint of a thumb and fingernail; a piece of foil from the top of a bottle, twisted and shaped, turned over and over in the hand as someone made their point, endlessly, and finally only to themselves – has already been cleared, the table's surface scrubbed clean. Ready for coffee and tea and toast

and papers, laptops, phones, work and discussion. Outside there's a gentle tinkling on the fishpond, as falling water tickles the surface. The fish are circling slowly in the depths, fish of orange and ghostly white, another black and almost hidden. I've heard it said, and perhaps it is true, that goldfish will grow as large as their home will allow. In a bigger pond just think what monsters these might become.

And then begins the steady thud of clay being readied for use. She lifts then drops the clay on the wooden workbench with a thud. Working it to get rid of air bubbles. Lift, pause, then thud. Kneading down into the clay, using her entire body weight and gravity to help. Lift, pause, thud. I hear this sound across the yard. Lift, pause, thud. A purposeful and invigorating sound; a beginning. Lift, pause, thud. A sound that is a precursor to another rhythm, as later she kicks the wheel at a steady pace. Bent focused on the spinning, steadily growing form. Balls of clay are neatly lined up ready to be made into identical vessels. An almost magical transformation into a neat row of jugs, placed on a shelf, to dry and wait their turn alongside mugs and bowls, for decoration and firing. But for now it is just beginning.

Lift
pause
thud.