

What did it matter after all?

Irene cleared some newspaper from the comfy armchair and sat down with a groan.

“When did that start happening?” she wondered to herself “ I didn’t used to groan when I moved”

She was bone tired, sad and a little frightened. Only two days to go and her sitting room was full of half packed boxes and didn’t look quite like hers anymore. All the familiar clutter had been cleared away by Sally, her efficient daughter in law, accompanied by exclamations of

“Tsk this coupon is four years old!” and “do you really still want these back copies of Royalty”

No, she supposed she didn’t - all those pictures of fabulous gowns, gleaming smiles and wedding outfits, but on a rainy afternoon she had liked to flick back and peep into their glamorous world. It seemed rather silly now in the face of Sally’s tolerant amusement.

How did you choose what to take to one room, from a house full of memories? The kids grew up here and she still had photos of them as babies and in their new school uniforms sized to grow in to. Dan, her Husband, dead these ten years, had painted the picture over the mantelpiece at art class and the teacher had put it in an exhibition. He also made the cupboard the television stood on, with it’s one stiff door. Then there were family things, her grandmothers jam pot with the silver lid and handle and the best china that she’d been given for her wedding present.

Irene had offered, but none of the young family setting up seemed to need anything of hers, they bought new at Ikea and started with everything. Irene smiled – she had washed by hand for the first two years of their marriage. She and Dan had laughed themselves silly treading sheets in the bath, the sudsy water bubbling between their toes. They’d wrung the sheets out, one at either end, twisting, twisting and always a kiss in the middle as they walked in bringing corner to corner to fold them for the line. Good times she thought.

Back then she hadn’t imagined herself alone in the house, but she’d managed pretty well since Dan died. She had made a life for herself with the local church and her friends. It was just recently that things had got difficult. Her joints were getting stiff and when she turned suddenly, she sometimes lost her balance and fell, it had happened a couple of times. The last time out in the garden. She forgot things too and had burned a pan black and filled the kitchen with smoke- she had got distracted and had left her dinner on the hob.

The family had persuaded her to move into a retirement centre, with activities and help at hand. It seemed like a good idea, only now it was actually happening, she didn’t want to go.

“Not too much stuff now Mum,” Robert, her eldest had said “or your room will feel cramped. “Sally will help you”

But what Sally didn’t understand, dressed in her expensive coordinates and leaving a trail of Chanel perfume behind her as she moved, was that leaving any of these familiar things behind, to be cleared by

strangers, felt like ripping a hole in the tapestry of her life. She knew herself here, but who would the new Irene be, stripped naked of the clothing of her life's possessions and her home?

"Still" thought Irene giving herself a mental shake "No point fretting now, I'm better off than most and anyway what did it matter after all? Was it not the law of life?"

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