

HOUSECLEANING

Judith Works

Today I mailed my mother. She deserved it but I had hesitated to take the final step out of some remnant of family loyalty. Every time I opened the closet door there she was on a shelf wedged between the spare vacuum cleaner bags and the bottle of easy-care floor cleaner. She would have liked the location had she been sentient because housework was her profession and she was a pro. Never a speck of dust on the furniture, never a dirty window. Never an unmade bed or waxy-yellow buildup on the kitchen floor.

And of course that was the problem. I always felt her specter looking over my shoulder, pointing out my housekeeping shortcomings like she did whenever she came to visit, which was too often. “Look at this! The dust must be an inch thick. You could write your name in it.” “The bathtub has a ring just like your husband’s shirt collars. Poor man!” On and on. It was no wonder he left home. I hope my next one doesn’t have a mother. It’s a great relief I don’t have one any longer, at least one like her. No one but me and the cat who deposits fur balls on the bedspread and sheds rolls of fluff on the back of the sofa where she watches out the window for birds. We’re a team.

I know my goody two-shoes sister was desperately sad not to have been around for the services and will shed tears of happiness when she receives the package. She’ll put the urn on the mantel above the hearth in her gracious living room, the place of honor between her wedding photo and the one of all the kids on their summer vacation at the lake last year. Her house has a gas-burning fireplace so there are no ashes to clean out. Soon, she will be able to take a few moments from dusting her immaculate house so she can contemplate the remains and her relationship with our mother any time she wants. My sister is a good housekeeper.

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