The Carpet

It was once a beige or light tan, but the sun, time and use had changed all that. It was barely brown, almost a dark ivory, and worn. It had the look of an elder you see on the cover of National Geographic, one who had seen and done and experienced, but while worn was not worn out or down.

It also wore the years, of babies, children, teens, and now no one. With the furniture gone, the darker spots where they had rested unmoved like the boulders of Stonehenge were visible like new grass in a field.

There was the pale pink smear near the wall where little Janie had “borrowed” Mom’s nail polish and made her first attempt at doing her nails. The polish had nearly dried when Mom caught her and the remover had merely spread the red dot into a pink stain. there was the slight orange stain near the entrance to the kitchen where Uncle Henry who definitely “had it” dropped five pounds of spaghetti, three pounds of meatballs, and two pounds of sauce and Great grandmama’s platter from the Old Country. The only reason he was still alive was that the platter hadn’t broken.

There at the edge of the carpet near the lanai sliding door, was the cigarette burn where Aunty Vera had dropped her Marlboro after Thanksgiving dinner and three glasses of chablis. Mom didn’t let anyone ever smoke in the house after that, not even Grandpa and his cigars.

The carpet smelled new, of cleaning and cleaning fluids, chemicals manufactured to remove years of smell and dirt. They had removed the faint smell of cinnamon that Grandmama had sprinkled onto the carpet, saying it brought good fortune and would help the house sell. Before that the carpet carried the vague musty scent, of pets long departed, and parties unphotographed. It carried the scent of Grandpa’s cigars and Jameson’s, of Father’s beer, and of life well lived.

There was a silence, mournful almost, and terribly out of place, and absence where before there had been fullness. No caged birds sang, and no fishtanks burbled. There was just the silence.

The carpet reflected the silence as the woman walked around the room, critically surveying the room like a general before a battle. “It’ll have to come up, but not yet, let’s get the kitchen done first.”