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Every Day is Mother's Day

by Richard Wilding

The removals men removed from their van: one double bed and mattress (I looked to see whether or not the mattress was stained in order to ascertain what nature of new neighbour might be moving in. Plenty of stains would indicate that they would have more on their mind than listening out to the peculiar eccentricities of their neighbour, whereas an absence of stains might suggest either a) a couple long past the physical stage of their relationship and so more apt to wonder about the lives of their neighbour; or b) an abstinent, where once again there was a greater likelihood of their taking an interest in my life. I was pleased therefore to see a gratifying number of yellow stains on the mattress, like so much lichen on a stone wall); one small cot, still in plastic, indicating to me the reason for buying the house. Its cries and mewlings would suit me just fine; one double wardrobe, in three sections. It was of old, dark wood and looked possibly like a hand-me-down from one or other of the parents.

I don't know if he did actually get carried away by the taste of the madeleine (was it the taste or the smell) but I must say that what that little cake did for Proust that hand-me-down wardrobe did for me. Took me right back to Mother who brought us up, me and my sister, alone when Dad left. She'd always taunt us, when we were younger and Dad was still around with his cigarettes and his suit with the rip on the right arm just above the elbow that if we looked inside the wardrobe the bogeyman would leap out and smuggle us away to his underworld dungeon. So of course we never looked in and thinking back now I wonder what secrets Mother kept inside that wardrobe or maybe she just didn't want her children putting their mucky hands on that dress. So far as I can recall, Mother only had one dress she cared about. She called it her "Mother's Day" dress and anytime she and Dad went out together, which wasn't often, maybe twice a year, she'd get herself all dolled up and wear that dress and Dad would tell her how much she looked like Farah Fawcett-Majors and he'd give us both a wink and pinch Mother's bottom.

And Mother would blush and hit him on the arm and it was part playful and part spiteful and I have never pinched a girl on the girl on the backside because I don't agree with it. I don't think it's right. Women have rights too. But then Dad walked out one day and he never came back and he never contacted me once since and though in these connected days I'm sure I could find him and ask him why he did what he did, I don't want to because of how much he hurt Mother and I don't want to give him the satisfaction of knowing that, so. Anyway, Dad left and Mother she fell apart for a while and during that while I would sit, all quiet, at the top of the stairs and listen to her crying when she thought me and my sister were fast asleep and she was downstairs with her bottle and the telly. But the tears they dried up, maybe there were none more to be cried (maybe like heart beats we only have so many and when they're gone, they're gone) and soon enough Mother was wearing her Mother's Day dress more and more often, so that she was sometimes out every day or so it seemed and soon enough after that I'd wake up on a Saturday morning or a Sunday and there'd be a man's voice coming from her room, a different voice each time, but I never got to see the faces because Mother insisted that they leave before she thought her children were awake. I wonder if she was ashamed of them, or ashamed of herself?

I was beginning by now to form an image of the couple in my mind: young (certainly in their late twenties, just possibly he might be in his early thirties; 'professional' as they say these days although I rail at the thought that these days everyone who isn't poor and working class appears to be called a 'professional' as opposed to those few who actually took the time and trouble to pass a pretty rigorous set of examinations in order to become literally a professional – lawyers, doctors, architects, even teachers, certain members of the banking profession). I imagined them to be married and for the most part happy with one another, or at least they hadn't yet reached the part where they gave their unhappiness with their spouse the oxygen of conscious thought. That would come.