

Bedrooms

by Juliet Robinson

'Blue like the ocean round Milos where he came from,' mum says as she lifts the chubby piggy bank from a box and places it on the chest of draws that had been her father's.

The pig is bright blue and he seems to glow in the spring sun. His expression is startled, almost comical, but not quite, there's the slightest hint of panic to his raised eyebrows.

She smiles as she adjusts the pig, and then places an assortment of glass jars filled with her lotions and potions next to it. Satisfied she moves over to my father's side of the bed and opens another box.

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I stood on the long garden path, looking up at the huge grey house, still not quite believing this is our new home. Mum bustles past with another box, sweeping me along with her into the house.

Her new bedroom is four times the size of her old one. A huge set of bay windows dominate one side of the room and her father's chest of draws stand there, already covered with familiar items.

I wander over to the piggy bank, which shines in the sunlight and trace my fingers over the intricate emerald vine pattern that covers his chubby body. Somehow just seeing the familiar creature, makes the house feel like home.

'I'm going to play in the garden,' I tell mum who is sitting on the floor surrounded by half unpacked boxes.

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The pig's legs are splayed and his mouth hangs open as if he is panting under his load. His tail is altogether too long, it curls in loops across his backside and round his leg. Its serpentine and its absurd.

'What are you doing in here?' Mum asks as she appears in the doorway, her arms filled with laundry. She looks tired.

'Just looking,' I reply. She places the clothes on the bed and starts to fold them. They aren't ours; they belong to the lodgers who now live with us. 'When are you moving back to your bedroom?' I ask. I don't like that mum and dad are sleeping downstairs in what they call the maid's quarters. The room is small and gloomy, overgrown bushes crowd the window and it smells funny. My room is upstairs on the other side of the house and at night I feel alone.

Mum smiles at me, 'As soon as I can.'

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To get the coins from the pig's belly you have to shake him, but not hard, especially not if I don't want to be caught sneaking my pocket money. The coins ring softly and then slowly, they start to spill out. The pig's coins always have a strong metallic smell. I imagine his belly is like a cave, the kind a dragon would choose to hide her hoard in, and that the blood-like smell of the coins is somehow related to this.

I spill his coins onto my mum's bed, where they land silently on the new white sheets. My dad hated mum buying new things, so as soon as everything was settled, she had gone on a spending spree. She is proud of the new sheets, the new sofa and the small bungalow which is now our home. I want to be proud to, but I just feel hurt, why didn't dad want us anymore.

I fill my pockets with the pig's wealth, place then place him back on the chest of draws and slip from mum's room. I don't know what I will spend my ill-gotten gains on, but it will definitely be something mum won't approve of.

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The room is filled with boxes that are slowly being sorted, but not by mum. Instead, my sister and I sift through them. It's a heavy task. My grandfather's chest of draws stands against the wall, it's the first thing you see when you enter the room, and it looks wrong. I open another box, which is filled with carefully wrapped ornaments. I pick one at random and as I lift it, it clinks softly. I know who I am holding. I unwrap the paper, and there is the pig, his startled face peering out at me. I walk across the room and place him on the chest of draws.

I smile at him and say, 'that looks better.'