



**WHERE
THERE'S
GRIME
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BY KEIRA FEGAN

THE ADVERT



A steady consistency of spray and wipe was what my day consisted of every Wednesday at 2 pm. This arrangement had been in place for the past eight weeks.

I had been scanning local ads on the pernicious Facebook and responded to a cleaning job. The ad was clear: 2 hours clean every Wednesday, DAY non-negotiable and the client would not tolerate the cleaner being late. In return, \$100 cash in hand. As a side hustle, this was easy. I'd been cleaning people's houses for over a year. Always cash in hand! I didn't necessarily need the cash. Cleaning just appealed, given it was physical, tax-free and was a job with a start and finish; a sense of completion. Clients were very gracious with compliments generously leaving me feeling appreciated.

The first Wednesday I received a text telling me the locked box key number and where they'd left the cash. On the fridge amongst the yearly dog calendar lay a small blue post-it note with a list. Labelled '**Important areas to focus on**'. The putrid smell in the unventilated kitchen permeated the air. Third, on the list read 'apologies spilt red wine' 'please clean'. Blotted vivid shades of browning red marked the spot. Perhaps a fine red Moselle or prestigious Malbec? Job done - no problem.

The same arrangement happened every week. The post- it note, still glued to the fridge beside the dog calendar. Now labelled October, the poodle's eyes ever so slightly followed my every move. Another request to clean the red stains. Every week seemed to be in a different room. On the fifth week, out of curiosity, I examined the fridge, recycle bin and Lancaster glass cabinet. No evidence of alcohol or wine glasses! For all the clients' peculiarities, I found the work too rewarding to suddenly give it up. By week seven my mind rattled with thoughts, questioning the size of the stains. I'd never met the client but knew her presence was a total enigma. Most women working for the government had become automatons of the modern workplace, lived alone, had no children or children who have left home and remain particular about how their 1,500 thread count linen sheets were tucked.

She had to be fit with a small petite frame, evident from her washing. A minimalist with a few personal possessions. I suspected some health issues as the medicine cabinet, hanging off of its bare-bones, contained a miscellaneous collection of prescribed NSAID. The label painted with a large hazard/poison symbol read, "Do not take more than the recommended dose. Keep out of reach from children under the age of twelve and animals."

A new item on the list required me to put the slow cooker on medium as I locked up. The house was already filled with a musty aroma but the loathsome smell of flesh only added to the stench. My stomach turned at the smell of the slow cooker. My vegetarian appetite did not find the look of freshly cut meat appealing. Never before had I noticed the exotic machinery on the bench-top. The sight of the rendered fat made me nauseous. The meat was dehydrated and singed like scorched leather.



I continued to clean every week. Cleaning the same abstract stain that would appear in numerous places throughout the house. *Was this woman an alcoholic?* My thought, however, was not conclusive as there was no evidence of alcohol. Pixelated images filled the screen, as like any other human, I found comfort and a moment of distraction from watching television.

"More alarming news this morning," exclaimed the newsreader, "as we cross over to Rebecca in Tuggeranong... reporting the disappearance of dogs."

"Good morning, six residents of Monash have raised concerns about the disappearance of six dogs in the past three months. Numerous neighbours have voiced their concerns that police were not taking the community issue seriously," reported the ubiquitous anchorwoman.

"Urgh they're probably just exploring the streets," I scowled, forcefully sweeping the dust off of the tv unit.

"All dogs are described as being small house dogs and left in backyards. The four streets identified included Baraclough crescent, Brache place, Stein place and Kneeshaw street. Whilst there is no evidence of foul play, residents found it highly unusual their pets have vanished."

I paused. The TV still blaring. The camera slowly panned around the neighbourhood. There it was, the house I'd been cleaning, every Wednesday at 2 pm. 12 Brache Place, Monash. The same weather-worn damage to the exterior and heavily bolted gate. One neighbour suspected children were opening backyard gates. Another stated they were being baited! One resident disclosing she had several complaints about the noise coming from her dogs.

Suddenly my mind was bombarded with obvious notions I had perhaps overlooked. The stain, the slow cooker, the stench! The stain, scarlet and sticky coated the carpet like toffee over an apple. Standing still amongst the vastness of stagnant air, my mind overloaded with a bombshell of thoughts! The floors lay expectant as if the house was once full of life.

Had I unknowingly been complicit in a crime?