

Kitchen

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THE DISHES ARE piled, food scraps encrusting their surfaces. The appliances gather with grime and dust. This is my kitchen, my home.

The floors are wooden, like the rest of the house, stained with deep red and brown. The walls and cupboards are painted wheat yellow. The paint peels and flakes. Sixty years well used, sixty years, unloved. Beneath the cupboard in the top far right corner is the most used appliance in the room, the kettle. It never moves. Each time it billows with steam the cupboard above it swells and bubbles. The wheat paint stretches like a pregnant woman.

Everything is rundown. The taps in the kitchen sink are stubborn. The taps are always being used; on, off, on, off. Constantly on demand like a poor, hapless man dating a nymphomaniac, and like dating a nymphomaniac, the taps eventually give in and the plumbing is fucked. So you work them with a familiar and careful hand. With the right amount of pressure and a delicate touch, the source of life, water, escapes the spout.

Live in my house long enough and it all becomes normal. You start to appreciate the simple things. The things that actually work. The oven hasn't worked in over twenty years, but it still occupies its place in the kitchen. The oven sits centre stage, beneath the sky light and all the dead bugs that are trapped inside it.

There are no family dinners here, no Sunday roasts. No baking of fresh bread. Those are the aromas you would associate in almost any other kitchen, but not here. Instead there are the lingering odours

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of stale beer and the putrid bin that hides under the bench where the microwave sits. The microwave is the least used, yet most reliable appliance in the kitchen.

Empty beer bottles and merlot bottles decorate the kitchen, tying it to its owner. The fridge has a weak seal. You have to give it a real nudge to make sure the door is shut properly. Behind the door are half empty condiments and if I'm in good fortune, a nice cold beer or two.

Two of the stovetop rings are shot; the remaining two provide the heat for all my meals. That's why the oven stays, for the stovetop. Finding food from the cupboards can be an ordeal. Half the knobs are missing, making it an effort to open the doors. Usually it's a pointless effort anyway when you open the cupboards. You're often met with a couple of old brown onions and a jar of hundreds and thousands from about ten years ago.

It wasn't always this way though. My father used to live in this house too and everything worked back then. Everything except the oven. But now he is gone. His legacy to the kitchen is a black burn ring on the white bench top. Years ago he carelessly placed a hot saucepan on to the white surface. I still look at that black ring and smile. He is still with me, through his folly. He is still here in some way. The kitchen reminds me of easier times. The kitchen reminds me that every day I am now alone.