

A TENDENCY TO STICK IN WET WEATHER

(By M.S.Clary)

When Toby was fifteen, he asked if he could paint his room brown. When he'd finished, frankly the walls resembled the colour of dung. Unsure of how to react, and not wishing to discourage, I merely told him to make sure he cleaned his brushes properly.

You see, that's the main difference between Helena and me. She's always so sure of herself. Always knows what's right, and never holds back from expressing an opinion. For instance, when she first saw my staircase, she immediately said it would have to go. But I rather liked its airy, open tread effect and the banister rail was handy for drying the washing. Another thing she would tackle me on was the front door. I had become accustomed to its awkward lock and its tendency to stick in wet weather. It pleased me hearing its perky slam as I left home in the morning and I welcomed the secure thud as it closed behind me at night. But to Helena, these objects were architecturally incorrect. Whenever I ventured that surely this was only a matter of taste and convention, she dismissed the suggestion. No, she insisted. Post-modern Scandinavian and a Georgian copy front door just didn't work in a nineteenth century worker's cottage. This had nothing to do with personal preference. It was simply wrong and must be changed. She'd written a paper on it. When I told her I would think it over, she seemed pleased and offered her brother-in-law's carpentry skills for the transformation.

I valued Helena's friendship in many ways. When Toby went into depression in his first term at Uni, she came over at once, and recommended a Therapist. A Mr. Borodino. During the Christmas holidays, Toby spent most of his time in his room. (I'd re-decorated it by then of course, off white, with an attractive eau-de-nil border and some nicely framed pictures of dolphins.) But despite his sessions with Mr. Borodino, I became very worried when Toby announced that he wasn't

going back for the new term.

Helena came up with a solution. She believed that the furniture in our sitting room was interfering with our creative energy. She said she could actually feel a hostile element coming from one particular piece (I believe it was the sideboard) and she knew the very person who could advise on the cosmic benefits of re-structuring. One weekend in late January we heaved everything out onto the front lawn and waited for Sasha. (A charming young woman who turned out to be Helena's niece.) We spent the whole morning sweeping the empty rooms with a sage brush while chanting. Actually, the supermarket had run out of sage so we had to use parsley instead. Helena and Sasha wanted to go into Toby's room but I managed to convince them it was better not to. Just as well, as I found out later that he'd started to paint his walls again that day. It began to rain before we had finished, so a lot of the cushions got wet, I had to replace two, and the lacquer on one chair started to bubble up. Sasha said it wouldn't matter too much, because she could feel the positive energy starting to flow through the house again.

Mr. Borodino telephoned soon after this to speak to Toby. I called up to him as he was still in bed. (He seldom left his room these days.) But he said he didn't want to come to the phone and asked me to take a message. Mr. Borodino and I had quite a long chat. I told him I had enjoyed talking to him and he asked me if I'd like to make an appointment to see him in his down-town office. He said he wouldn't charge me the full rate, as he was already seeing Toby. As an after-thought, he asked me if I'd seen Helena lately. I hadn't realised she was his cousin. That night, Toby came downstairs saying he felt hungry. Instead of going straight back upstairs with a plate as he usually did, he lingered while I scrambled some eggs. It was the first time we had sat down together at the table for a long time. He said he quite liked the new arrangement of the sitting room furniture, apart from the obvious difficulty of accessing the kitchen especially on a chilly day, so he

helped me to move things around a bit, until we realised it was more or less back to where it was before.

Mr. Borodino had a very smart office in a new block down by the railway station. He offered me a cup of coffee which he made himself in a rather impressive machine, then he lay down on the couch. I complimented him on the attractiveness of his surroundings, and the view, but he told me that the rent was very high and he was worried that he may not be able to keep up the payments due to unsound investments. Even worse than this, he was in despair because his wife had left him for another woman, and they were writing a novel about it. He was such an easy person to talk to. In fact, I found I had to say very little. After fifty minutes, he got up from the couch and suggested another session next week.

Sasha came back on her own to purify Toby's room. They were closeted up there for several hours. I think they must have skipped the bit with the sage brushes because I never heard any chanting, though at one point she did come downstairs looking for a bottle opener. Later on, towards evening, the house became filled with the sweet scent of vanilla candles, and I heard them both singing along softly to one of Toby's favourite C.D.s.

Mr. Borodino and I continue to meet regularly, and he is gradually getting over his difficulties, but I don't see so much of Helena these days. She seems to have lost interest in the importance of architectural accuracy since she went into Wedding Planning. Toby and Sasha were her first clients, and now she is helping them in their Design Consultancy. It has become so successful, they have started mixing their own paints and selling them on the internet. Toby tells me the most sought-after shade this season is Rustic Brown.

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