

The Pest

Closed curtains, inflatable bed still on the sitting room floor, duvet pushed back in a heap.

“Feck it anyway.”

Tension gnawed at my shoulders. I’d been looking forward to sitting down with a large cup of camomille tea. My boss had been in foul humour again and spent the afternoon breathing down my neck.

I wondered where Anna had got to. She was probably on a wild shopping spree in Penny’s. To cheer herself up.

Her voice echoed in my head: “Oh Debbie, the buzz is great. You can spend twenty euro in that shop and come out feeling like you’ve blown a hundred.”

It was fine for Anna to be going around the shops, indulging in retail therapy.

I tiptoed around the bed and flung back the primrose curtains. I flicked on the TV for the news at 5.30, while folding the sheets. As I unscrewed the nozzle, air hissed out of the bed.

It was three weeks since Anna had split up with her boyfriend and the list of her misdemeanours as a guest was growing. I came home to find little treats missing – luxury yoghurts from the fridge, Yorkie bars from my cupboard. Of course Anna would always replace the items. However, there was no offer of rent - or money for bills. Most annoying of all, Anna wasn’t teaching during the summer months and stayed up until 2a.m. watching re-runs of Ricki Lake, while I struggled to get up for work, bleary-eyed.

Though college friends, we’d never shared a house. Anna had boarded with her aunt back then. Guilt surged through me as I remembered how she’d helped me through my degree, sharing notes, reading over essays. Ratty from lack of sleep, I put on the kettle and came to a snap decision. Broken heart or no broken heart, Anna would have to leave.

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“Just these, er, items?” the cashier asked.

“Yes, thank you.”

He scanned the mouse-traps and the jar of peanut butter and bagged them discreetly.

On my way home from the corner shop I imagined having the place to myself again. Oh, to be able to soak in a lavender bath until I shrivelled up like a prune, without worrying about anyone needing the facilities. To be able to lie full length on the couch while watching the Fr Brown mysteries.

Back at the house, I scooped a teaspoon of peanut butter into each of the traps and lay them in strategic locations on the landing, by the bins and in the sitting room. I was getting up off my knees when Anna clomped in, laden with bags.

“Hiya. Oh!” She stopped in her tracks. “Do we have furry friends?”

I avoided eye contact. “Yes, I’m afraid so. Awful for you, sleeping on the floor.”

“Oh, well, the traps should sort it. Lucky I’m not squeamish.” She plodded into the kitchen, “Do you fancy a yoghurt?”

Tightness crept back into my shoulders. How I longed for a leisurely lavender bath.