

Kinara Lane

Raveena Grover

No matter how much Ajax I used, our house on Kinara Lane always smelled like mothballs. It was in the middle of the street, flanked by identical-looking homes on either side, sandwiched by the stench of camphor so potent I swear the cockroaches in summer died prematurely. Tessellations of red brown red brown red brown red connected the lane, en vogue for a 90s Better Homes and Gardens catalogue cover, the walls and rooftops melting into a gradient as the sun fell back towards the horizon.

Kinara Lane began at the junction of Smith Street and ended in a cul-de-sac, the road straight enough you could ride your skateboard leaning your torso only ever so slightly to the right, yet rounded enough that if you stood at the juncture and peered straight, you wouldn't make out where we lived was a dead end.

We'd been here for three years. The mornings in winter were frigid, the warmth from the previous night's sunset unharnessed and the dawn not brave enough to pierce the windows of my kitchen.

Shifting my weight from my mattress onto my pink ugg boots on the wooden slats, the house groaned as my ankle joints *crackity pop cracked* on the seven step walk from my bed to the blue dressing gown hung behind our door. The door handle was unpleasant to touch at this hour, the brass a black hole of the frigidity of our room.

Like clockwork, *thud thud thud* up the stairs I heard paws and then nails rasp against my door. Daisy's eyes were blueberry big, waiting for my body, as my feet were waiting for hers. I carried the both of us back to our bed and lay back towards you as she curled into the bottom of the mattress between our feet, yawning. You stirred awake, your eyes narrow, front uncurling against my front, your breasts pushing up against mine and arms stretching out without a single *crackity pop* to the ceiling.

This morning, the sun had not broken the clouds, the kitchen would still be cold after dawn, and the cool grey of the day sunk into your eyes.

We're like the colours of dirt, you used to joke, shoving my box of tampons aside for your *L'oreal Paris Casting Creme Gloss 550 Mahogany* packets in the bathroom cabinet. As quickly as the red made your greys disappear, my brown hair gave way to natural grey highlights.

I shifted further back to see your face, the knot of my gown's waist belt pressing into my stomach. 'Hey,' you sniffed, chucking the blankets to my side of the bed as you rose, burying Daisy under the covers. As a puppy, Daisy had pushed and yanked and pawed at my arms as they tried to furl her. On the couch she could tolerate my lap, but our bed was her space to sleep on top, no arms or doonas or pillows to bury her.

You flexed your back, spine curved towards me as your frizzy reddish greys hovered over the bed. I winced at your bare feet on the flooring, colder than mine were moments ago before my canine heater hopped to her morning station, and as Daisy's wet snout battled with the edge of the doona, you walked towards the loo.

Driving on the way to inspect our first rental property in the summer we moved in, I told you, seat belt cutting into my neck and the AC blasting on to my chest, that I would only apply for a house if the bathroom was in a separate room to our bedroom — hyper aware that any bacteria from latrine activities that didn't drain into the sewer would overtime crawl its way into our bedroom, onto the bed frame and into my sheets. I kept the shopping tab for UV lights open in my private browser, and you'd once asked me why I ordered wet wipes from Woolies Click & Collect three weekends back to back.

It turned out that finding a place to rent in 2023 with even a single caveat was pretty fucking hard. 'Bit precious of you to reject an ensuite,' you had said, turning the AC up a notch.

You took fifteen steps to walk into the faecal matter ward, feet shuffling against the cool wood, and that's the last Daisy and I saw of you before the sun set back down.

It was 9pm by the time I could respond to your morning greeting. Daisy missed you, I said. Your crimson hair gathered in curly clumps on your shoulders, soaking through your Fred Again hoodie.

You bent down to pick Daisy up and she squirmed.

'How was work, babe?' I asked.

'Good. Yours?'

'Yeah it was okay, a bit hectic but I really enjoyed the kattal biryani for lunch and got good feedback on my pitch.'

'Nice, babe.'

'Missed you for dinner. Do you want me to wash up and then we'll finish that episode of The Crown? I'll bring up some Oreos too.'

'I'm tired. Gonna sleep.'

'Okay, love. Good night.'

I wiped down the kitchen for the night with a turmeric stained cleaning cloth, the slimy residue of Ajax drying on my fingers. The brown masoor daal stain from earlier this evening was stubborn on my laminate counter. I wondered how many Ajax bottles I'd have to forgo buying before the brown stain became brown stains and soon the inside of the house was nothing but the same brown brown brown brown red as the outside.

Daisy was in her bed, a brown tuft curled up in a perfect doughnut. When I had picked her up from the RSPCA a year earlier, her case manager warned me she was anxious, not toilet

trained and a yappy puppy. I brought her home the same morning I met her, and like ice she melted into my lap on the couch, warm, asleep. Two weeks later, I went back to Petbarn and exchanged the unopened packet of indoor doggy pee pads for a Kong.

I turned off the kitchen light, leaving it as cold as it was this morning and made my way upstairs to you. The bedroom door was shut but a stench hit me. Gritting my teeth against the cold brass of the handle, gently, I opened the door. The digital photo frame on my bedside, a Kodak carousel of you, glared bright white into the bathroom, its door wide open.

I tiptoed quietly, hand clasped to my mouth and nose, my uggs carrying the dust from the wooden floor onto the lime green bathroom tiles. I looked over the left edge of the sink into the toilet. The smell of Ajax and shit collided and I immediately sucked in my stomach, slamming the toilet lid down and jamming the big flush button. I looked back at you asleep on the bed, rolled to the further side of the mattress, doona wrapped around your body and the side where I sleep, bare.