

Soft Carpet

By Phillip Wenturine

Thirty-eight steps.

Nineteen up one flight. Pivot. Nineteen up another. Doormat. A twist of the key and a press of the knob, at step forty you're inside.

There's a coat rack, a living room—18 by 12 square feet, a kitchen. You have the master bed and bath, a walk in closet. A dining room. This one even comes with an office. The lake view is essentially the same—there's a window; and a lake. You surely won't have as many geese, as how could any place have as many geese as the last place, but there's a few. You can pretend it's the same. It will probably be quieter, more peaceful. Peaceful would be good for you.

The sun rises from your bedroom window so it won't be as warm in the afternoon. You'll like that. One upside. A hammock could even fit on the balcony since you won't be blinded after lunchtime. Although, keep in mind the higher rent now that you're living alone; be cautious of diving into new furniture. You got the side table and the super funky five-shades-of-blue lamp from IKEA. And you stole the mini toaster oven and the cappuccino machine, so that makes up for the recliner and the missing nutribullet. Sort of. It's all a matter of perspective.

There's no longer an island kitchen and hardwood floors, which you've always wanted, once you were settled, but you're still young, and you still have time to settle, and you can always get hardwood floors and an island kitchen. Some day. At least it's brand new carpeting. Just remind yourself how soft the carpet is. You hate hardwood flooring, you love soft carpet.

Those missing coffee mug lids, though. You can't let them drive you crazy. It probably wasn't

malicious intent, just some things getting separated when they were divvied up. You win some you lose some. You should probably drink less coffee anyways. Swap out expenditures and save money since you know wine will take over your fridge for a bit. Four months at least. They say it takes half the time you were together to cope and move on. Surely it won't take that long. That would be an expensive amount of wine.

At least you got to keep the fancy, stemmed wine glasses. Just like Olivia Pope from *Scandal*. Olivia Pope and *Scandal* make everything better. She is you—you are her. Although her wardrobe is better, you have to give her that. And her taste in wine. Oh, and didn't your coworker mention she ordered an extra wine rack she didn't need? It's like it was meant to be. Wine helps anything. And soft carpet.

You'll unload the boxes and hang up your paintings, the same ones in the kitchen go in the kitchen and the same ones from the living room will go above the couch. It's recreating the same place, really. It's the same lake, really. Put your favorite books in their rightful place on the shelf, the collection with "The Yellow Wallpaper" on the right side, second shelf, like always, from 11th grade. Was there really a girl in the wallpaper? Was there really even yellow wallpaper? Put the movies in the cabinet in alphabetical order like he used to do—you hated it, but that's just how they go now. *Along Came a Spider* through *Zombieland*. You'll begin to reminisce and ponder the past, but that's natural. It's what you'll do.

You'll sit on your balcony staring at the lake. It's the same lake, really. You just traded sunset for sunrise. But you'll eventually forget that.

You'll lay your head on your bed watching the same shows on TV as you fall asleep, probably at the exact same time that he's laying his head on his pillow watching the exact same shows,

same bed, same shows, new TV. But eventually you'll forget that.

You'll probably think it feels weird at first rolling over and grabbing some blankets and a pillow instead of a person, empty space where there used to rest another's breath, one that you often thought was warm and sticky and annoying yet you now miss, but that, too, shall pass. Either someone will fill that gap, that void, or the silence will seem less haunting. But that weird, déjà vu feeling, you'll eventually forget that.

You'll wake up and go to work every morning, just like you always have every morning. Nothing has changed. You'll still go to Bento; it was always *your* favorite sushi stop. You'll learn to go grocery shopping again. One foot in front of the other, even if the cart wheel is broken and veers to the left. Then you just pivot. Just like you'll do midway through the thirty-eight steps. You may need to shop at the buy-one-get-one racks more, again, since the rent is up, but just remember that new carpeting. It's so soft.

Time and routine. Those two things will be on your side. You'll embrace the silence of your past. You'll question things, and that's a good thing. But it may haunt you a bit, too, and that's natural, you're not crazy. The voice in your head will wonder, and that's typical. Will there always be silence? Why did this happen? How is it possible? What went wrong? How did you end up here? Literally, how did you end up facing this lake that looks like your old lake but it isn't, is it?

You'll want closure simply because you were told things happen for a reason, but what things, what reason? Was there someone else? You'll blame it on someone else. You'll flip through your phone, revisiting the pictures, telling yourself that you see someone else entirely, that this someone else, this someone else who may as well have been with someone else, they aren't that

person anymore, not to you. Who is that person anyways? Fuck that person. Those pictures, the only evidence of that person's existence.

You'll tell your friends that you deleted those photos, but you won't. And that's normal. You're not crazy. You'll send them in a text to yourself and delete them from your film roll to prove to your friends that you're not staring at them daily like you're crazy. But people like me know the real you and you're not crazy. And you have those pictures. You know he was real. Sure, he never met your friends, he was too introverted. He was too busy at work. But what you had was real. Your friends say you were too attached, but you weren't. And you have those pictures. You told your friends you deleted them, yeah; but you have them. You don't need validation to know it was real.

You'll go home from work and park your car, new parking lot, same leftward spot under the tree. You'll sit there for a few minutes, exhaling. You may have to remind yourself to inhale, but you will, and then you'll exhale again. It's just a process. Homeostasis in due time. And then you'll go up thirty-eight steps, turn the key, pour some red wine, and it's you and Olivia Pope. With soft carpet. You both run the world.

"You may think I'm crazy, but you don't think I know what you've done. When you call me baby, I know I'm not the only one." I finish listening to the terrible top 40 tracks that I tell to everyone are terrible when I secretly love them because they mimic my life. I turn off my car and open my door. As I stand, my phone slides from the seat, face first, onto the pavement. "Damnit." Shattered. Inhale, exhale. I pick it up, shove it in my bag for what it's worth, and round the corner.

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knob, at step forty I'm inside.

Step one.