Iterations of Emptying

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All our content culled: books and clothing sorted into piles to keep or to discard, old radios and broken clocks taken to the tip, unwanted furniture sold or given away. What is kept: silver christening mugs, spoons and sugar bowls; a set of teacups, fragile as flowers; crystal inkwells and decanters containing only light; my grandmother’s porcelain doll; passports of long-expired relatives, with pages of stamps and dates and visas; medals from the Boer War, World War One, World War Two, and an assortment of sports events; my father’s flying logbooks, written in his scratchy hand, April 15 1945 Harvard III Thornhill – Kabanga; my mother’s manuscripts typed on paper thin as dragonfly wings, faintly redolent of nicotine; old school reports and magazines, a photo of the swimming team, my hair in pigtails, my limbs awkward with adolescence; paintings of msasa trees, Victoria Falls, Muntplein, Wadi Dayqah, Aberdeen harbour; squash rackets and cricket bags smelling of linseed and mould; a filigree box with milk teeth and thrupenny coins; photographs of our sons, new-born in my arms; waving on merry-go-rounds; blowing out candles on train cakes, pirate ship cakes, volcano cakes; with footballs; with girls in prom dresses; graduations and engagements, weddings and babies. All packed in boxes, numbered and inventoried, ready for removal.
First Iteration.

When we have subtracted our belongings, what remains is the evidence of absences. Rooms seem smaller once they are empty, stripped of the objects that gave them their meaning. Sunlight filters through pollen-stained windows to slide unhindered over floors and riff languidly with drifts of dust. Smudges on the wall at the end of the corridor are testament to games of indoor cricket, a visual Howzat? Vanished paintings have left their scars. We feel the silence: unheard voices, A pale patch of where the table which we sat and studied. Fractal dynamics, Homer a bell curve struck. Fluted holly crackles flame. Echoes of difficult conversations reflect off the walls. It’s cancer of the tongue. I’m dying, sis. Outside, amputated limbs of trees. We were not born here but still we leave our imprint on this soil, the rowans that we planted, energy latent in spring bulbs. The clothesline airs only spiderwebs. Hidden in the rhododendron is a tennis ball; a toy boat floats on hosta leaves like a plaything of snails. Somewhere among worms and weeds, a lost wedding ring.
Second Iteration.

Afterwards, some residue of emotion perhaps, like particles of dust but finer in the air. Sorrow collects in corners. Vibrations of unbeaten drums, had or tension did not touch. Memories dis-integrate like the slow fade of midsummer light, like the shapes of trees against encroaching mist. Dreams infiltrate the walls and floors, sneak into the dusty loft. seasons undulate Rowan trees bear serr scar ber autumn; naked at the winter configure their The patterns of through time. their blossom, lea clus ter ies in branches grope sky. Patterns own dimensions, shifting through spatial scales like the density of generations. The secret pathways of the mind are repeated in the splay of creeping buttercups across damp shades of lawn, in the filaments that ered galax ies together. The spiders have abandoned the clothesline. The shadow of a sparrow-hawk silences songbirds; apples fall unharvested upon the ground.
Third Iteration.

What is left when memories are gone? Stories are erased. A building is a container for a air, a poem without words, a forest without trees. A web is a gesture in unconfined space. Boundaries lose all meanings under empty of the lights of a forgotten past. Instinct provides reference points of generations; without gravity the way is lost. Space sings its birth-song. Held in the grip of sun and off the earth the moon will not flinch from the precision of its dance. We cling to that reassurance.