The pattern of the living room carpet had always bother Sherrie. Made up of concentric brown and yellow circles, it looked as though something had been spilt and tracked around by unknowing shoes. She stares at this ugly carpet now, running her toe around and around one of the small mustard rings.

She knows she should look up. She can’t remember how long it has been since she looked Derek in the eyes. Probably around the time he told her he was leaving.

Sherrie can hear him droning on, how he didn’t mean to fall in love with Lucy, how it just happened, how she shouldn’t be surprised, they have been growing apart for years. It is all white noise to her.

She thinks how she should have redecorated the living room when they moved it. It had been a blessing to inherited Dereks mums house when she moved into a retirement community. They had saved only a little for a down-payment, but it would have been enough for some new carpet. Derek had wanted to go to Fiji with friends. It had been a great holiday; Sherrie must admit. But looking at this carpet now she wonders if she would have had more enjoyment out of updating this room, or even the bathroom. She had longed for a proper bathroom, one without the old shower tub combo that never had enough water pressure.

She is aware Derek has stopped talking. She can feel his eyes boring into the top of her head. Her toes feel raw with carpet burn, she had been pushing them harder than she meant to. She looks up at her husband now, his face red, chest puffed out the way he does when he thinks he’s made a good point.

‘Well?’ Derek looked expectant.

She looked at her husband. Really looked at him. Derek towered over her. At 6.2 to her meager 5.3 she had always loved how it made her feel to be next to him, like she was being watched over, protected. So different to her father. He was barely 5 foot 5 and terrified of everything, especially Sherrie’s mother. He never said a peep when she was around, except for a grunt of agreement when needed. Derek wasn’t afraid of anything. That’s how Sherrie met him in the first place. Some guy at a pub wasn’t taking no for an answer and Derek stepped in. Defended her. She had been his ever since. For 25 years.

Now he was leaving her for some 23-year-old in his office. How boring. Sherrie wished it was something more interesting. Why couldn’t he be leaving to join a cult or to become a woman. She would have liked that, she thought. They would have had more to talk about if he became a woman. But no, Derek wasn’t exciting enough for anything like that. He was just a middle-aged cliché.

She had been silent so long that her voice almost surprised herself when she said ‘I think I might redecorate the living room.’

Derek said nothing, staring at his wife until he eventually left the room and, with a slam of the front door, the house.

The carpet, Sherrie thought. The carpet will be the first thing to go.