

Debris

SOUTHERLY

On Monday, the wind was extreme. From our third-floor bedroom window, I watched as the street filled. Stuff collecting in the railings and hedges, against walls; finding edges, through ways. There are other words to choose, rather than debris.

As I watched, the scattered remains of destroyed, discarded things reassembled in the wind—minor wreckage—momentarily tossed about. The life cycle of matter, creating a mess.

Last week, a hoarding was erected to screen off the renovation work on the building next door. Its large laminate signage reads 'A Boutique Collection of Parisian Décor Lux Apart with Private Balconies'. Fragments of the text made their way into the street.

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CLEANING

The same day I noticed the cries of an unknown animal being dragged across the floor upstairs. In the evening, through a chance meeting in the communal stairs, my partner and I found these sounds belonged to a new cordless Dyson vacuum cleaner, sucking up the dust from the bare floorboards in the flat above us. It was a birthday gift, a week old. The combination of sounds felt like a prelude to something I couldn't name.

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CLIMBING

On Tuesday afternoon, I'd struck off some easy wins in the morning, mostly cleaning and putting away. By lunchtime, the list of jobs I wrote the previous evening was in pieces; by mid-afternoon, the list had become a scrap of paper in the recycling.

I did most of the morning's tasks whilst listening to a podcast series about climbing. Hour-long interviews, mostly, discussing life as a climber and places I have never been.

That afternoon, I received an email. I can't donate blood due to an answer I'd given on the form. I spent the early evening thinking about past relationships, listed them out and threw the list away.

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DEBRIS SPELT WRONG

Maybe the autocorrect function on my laptop changed the word 'Debris' to the 'Debbie' in a file name. Perhaps I did it subconsciously. A minor mistake I had made in the .rtf rich text file name nestled in amongst all the other valuable tiny fragments on my hard drive. Once archived, the document became challenging to find. Every time I looked for it, I had to remember to type in Debbie, but I didn't rectify the mistake.

Debbie was the name of my first girlfriend. The name is now a sort of shorthand for the iconic first girlfriend between my partner and me. The one everyone knew was never going to last. Debbie and I both pretended to be so grown up. Despite knowing, even at the time, it was inevitable. There was absolute desperation when things fell apart -- that first falling.

In the bath on Tuesday night, I kept thinking of the phrase 'the dream life of debris'. Nabokov coined the phrase, projecting emotion and character onto inanimate objects, to the point where they feel like they have their own life, dreamt by us.

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ELEPHANTS

I decided to get out of the flat on Wednesday. The rain and high winds had slaked the rubbish outside our communal front door into a small heap. I stepped over the sodden tableau, over pieces of three-ply cardboard, the packaging of a flat-screen TV, cigarette ends, crushed water bottles, fast food flyers, half a pistachio nutshell and a purple strip of foam floor matting -- the edging used in play areas for kids.

After the shops, I walked back through the park. I took the cut-through behind the supermarket. Light shone through the railings as I passed alongside the DPD delivery depot. I closed my eyes as I walked, light touching my face in a strobing rhythm, intermittent like breath, and more than sight, like a light bumping downstairs. I didn't want it to end. I thought about the conversation I had with Jane. Last night when I was in the bath. She sat on the toilet, lid-down, and we talked as the water turned grey around me. We discussed all the bits of wasteland we grew up around -- me in the West Midlands, she in the London suburbs -- intricacies with our youth's playgrounds and impromptu adventures.

Debris

Making my way through the scruffy bit on the far side of the park, I explored the piles of earth dumped on the tarmac next to the BMX track. The mounds, covered in torn tarp, like shrouded dead elephants. The last time I had been there, months ago, it had been snowing. I remember taking a piss, like pouring warm tea on the whited-out rubbish at the base of a mound furthest from the desire-line path, revealing empty Lucozade bottles and a collage of foil crisp packets.

This spit of disused tarmac had had a lot of use this last year. It was where people came to learn to rollerblade and roller-skate. Community groups dance there, participants wearing ornate Latin American skirts over their everyday clothes. Sometimes a pilates class. I learnt to ride my bike here only a few years ago. Jane taught me. We spent hours there, sitting awkwardly on our bikes, saddles all the way down, striding around, feeling the balancing point.

The climber on the podcast spoke about the Rocky Mountains with such care. I lingered on my way home after finishing the podcast. The pile of rubble looked like ancient remains or land art. The shrouded elephant was an artefact found in the wrong context, challenging conventional chronology. These forms appear out of place, out of time, mingling one type of cultural presence with another.

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LINT

The new pair of jeans I was gifted at Christmas produce an incredible amount of lint. It collects on my handkerchief, in the left-hand back pocket. Freed by the silty bathwater, the fluff makes its way into my belly button. During Thursday night's bath, I scooped it out and smeared it on the side of the tub. The climber in the podcast talked at length about the Devils Tower in Wyoming. The isolated geological form, a butte; its sheer sides created by erosion.

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DUST

On Friday, whilst at work, my partner had a miscarriage. It was not our first. She told me over the phone. As it became true, that afternoon, excitement broke down, turned to dust, forming dismal sheets, contoured by what was beneath. This material even had a smell and gained the upper hand.

In the subsequent days, I cleaned – more podcasts. There wasn't much to say. A gift can be given and taken away—an idea of the future, a promise, fragmented. I instinctually knew not to try and gather the remains – just let the pieces fall and wait for them to settle.