

Shelter Magazines

by Crystal Hope Hurdle

the 3 Chalcot Square apartment newly decorated
when the Plath-Hughes moved in
Sylvia's rose wallpaper clean but blowsy
thinks Assia, new tenant
the vermilion in the kitchen and hall
too much like blood
not enough like passion
even five coats would not be enough whitewash
that murderous violent crimson hue
might as well have been black
Assia likes to wear black
fashionable, exotic
sublet-er wants to make her mark
but all in good time
one can always lease to own

Assia as plunderer
wants elegance
in house, fashion, ...men
but on little or no money
no splurging for her

at Fitzroy Road
Sylvia gone so suddenly
just like that
Assia hangs back at the threshold
dragging her patent leather feet
suddenly a school girl
not a real inhabitant
like those alien mewling children
so she brings in finds
from the street for cheering
she brings in offerings
if termites accompany, so much the better
to hollow out Sylvia's presence
so strong in her absence

in Court Green
Sylvia is phantom queen
playing her on the black and white tiles of the playroom
moving deftly ahead
Frieda runs and hides under its white trestle table

Assia delights in being able to finally
use her own round table
latterly stored at Court Green
greet it like a friend
so few of those lately
embraces it, hugs it, arms fully extended
to take in its whole wide circumference
much better than Sylvia's scrawny elm plank table-desk
made by Ted
lovingly planed by him and Warren
do-it-yourselfers before it was fashionable
poverty makes strange bedfellows
Poking about she sinks shin deep deeper
into the red wall-to-wall of Sylvia's study
She explains that the desk reviles her
but Ted just isn't in the mood

it's Assia's/ it's Sylvia's/ who cares?
ownership, claim, a myth
the children make their own claim

the scary small dark roomhole wormhole off the kitchen
a Bluebeard's? rustling with whimpers, keening
she avoids

good advice—
buy whatever you like for the whole house
and then swap it out
don't do things room by room

Assia looks at each with awed contempt
the walls too pink, too red, too labial
On the furniture so many red red hearts
claim ownership, assert having been loved
her teal-dripping paintbrush is excoriated
and she's afraid to tell Ted

a struggle for Assia living here there and everywhere
and always with the scent of Sylvia before her
pheromones she can't douche away

what to do with that blasted matrimonial bed
at least not at Fitzroy Road
she thinks and fears, having rolled over there
into a Ted-shaped declivity
she will not think on that

the imprint of Sylvia's body sinks deep
and all the ethnic coverlets in the world
baby blankets end to end
--why won't Nicholas stop crying?--
crewel work or vintage or hand-quilted
as if she has the time! (never mind the talent)
won't convex the concavity

House and Home

Vintage Flea Market Style

flip through any shelter magazine
copy any spread
but try to make it one's own
conflicting advice
such a struggle
especially with no money

Assia benefits from Sylvia wanting NEW
Dido horrified at this weirdly American desire for posh

by the time it came to Assia
the Bendix washing machine
plumbed though four feet of stone wall
Sylvia in the bore holes, that cooker, the mattress
oh that mattress!
even so soon
it was already sticky with fingerprints
white elephant grungy
second-hand

just like Ted