

SHE HAS GROWN INTO the habit of narrating everything she does, and, often, everything she thinks on top of it. She will say, “I’m going to put on the water for the beans, I guess, so they’ll be ready. They need longer than the pork chops.” She’ll say that instead of simply moving to the stove and filling a pot with bottled water. After a moment she’ll continue. “I think that’s too much water. Let me pour some out.” In each case, after she describes an action, she will perform it, and the action will be completely clear to him without any explanation. But she provides one, in advance, every time.

He is becoming accustomed to this trait. He wishes he could return the favor but every morsel of oxygen he takes in is precious to him now, and he no longer wastes his breath on speech. So in his silence he delights in the sound of her voice. The beauty of her method is that it makes him feel as though there might be someone else in the house with the two of them, someone who has asked her questions that for some reason he cannot hear. “Oh, I’ll just wash that glass later,” she will say, as if this invisible someone has offered to do the dishes for her. “It won’t hurt a glass to sit on the sink for a while. You know how it is; you can’t let these little things upset you. Just don’t you worry about it. That glass can sit right there.”

Little things. Though to her, a glass that is not washed sitting on the sideboard of her sink is hardly a little thing. It is a discussible dilemma. But she feigns a breezy outlook in these narratives. She affects apathy about the need to wash every single dish someone uses as soon as that someone sets it down.

That someone being him, of course, who must grip his iced tea in hand and sip it without once placing it in the coaster on the table next to his recliner, or she will say, “I’ll just take this to the kitchen since you’re done with it”; and nothing he can do will stop her from taking it and doing exactly what she says.

“I’ll just wash it later,” she will say, and then she will set down the glass, watch it for an instant, and then move to the sink, lift the sponge, dab a bit of soap on it, saying, “Oh, well, I’ve got a minute right now anyway. I wonder how much dish soap I have left. I keep it under the sink. I’ll just have a look once I’m done. I just can’t stand to see a dirty dish sitting here, that’s all. There’s no reason to wash it right now, but I just can’t stand to see it sitting here.”

What she thinks, too. “I think about that flower I saw. So bright and pretty. For some reason I always think cabbage rose when I see it. You know. But it’s a camellia. I know it when I stop to think about it. A nice red camellia. Blooming so good this year, too.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Move (graphite on clayboard, 14x22) by Kiki Farish