

Sweeping the Floor

Category: Poems

written by Elena Schwolsky | February 21, 2025



The plants that curve into the bay window in the parlor
Drop their leaves to the scuffed wooden floor of this old house
When they no longer hold life.
There they dry and crumble
Scattering dust and debris across the soft pine,
Clinging to my socks
As I stretch to open the shade
And let in the morning sun.

Today I decide to sweep the floor.
I have not swept or mopped a floor,
Washed a dish
Done the laundry
Or cooked a meal
In nine long months,
But last week I walked a mile
To the pharmacy and back,
So today I will sweep the floor.

The broom hangs on a hook in the kitchen
Next to the dustpan.
It is a short broom, meant for quick clean-ups
Overused, needing replacement
Straw bristles bending in disarray.
But it feels familiar in my hand
And will have to do.

My body bends to the task.
My arms stretch, muscles coming alive
To chase every brown and desiccated leaf
From its hiding place,
To search out the wrinkled corpses
Of the long fingers of the ficus plant
That still flaunts a crown of green in the corner window.
The heart-shaped leaves of the hibiscus turn yellow, then drop
One by one, leaving bare spots along the branch.
She is waiting for me to move her outside,
Waiting to bloom.

I too am waiting to bloom again.
Waiting for the silver fuzz on my head
To grow thick and full,
For the loose skin around my withered muscles
To grow tight
For my legs to grow sturdy
And my arms to grow strong.
But today I swept the floor.