

A few years ago a house went up for sale in my neighborhood. It was a 1960 ranch house on a canal that led to the open bay, a fixer-upper with an unusual indoor pool—emptied of water, but with a lingering odor of chlorine. The house had belonged to an older woman who'd died, and her daughter enlisted the longtime housekeeper to meet us there and show us around. The housekeeper, hunched and wild haired, led us through the still furnished rooms and told of parties held at the house in its heyday, of the death of the woman's husband, and then, with a dark look, of the woman's death—how she lay on the bedroom floor a few days before anyone knew it, and how it fell to her to clean the stain up off the carpet. "I couldn't get it all up," the housekeeper said. "You can still see it." The house was sold to someone who planned to tear it down and build something bigger. This sort of erasure, the impermanence of our bodies, our structures, prompted my story.

—Karen Brown

