

A Room Within a Room
Marnie Slater, 2009

A Room Within A Room (Newsprint)
West Facing, David's Study
A Man's Voice

Pen. Paper. Something to press on. This will do. How does it go, my address, today's date. What is today's date? Wednesday was the 16th, that makes today the 18th. OK, their address. Where did I put that damn piece of paper. In my pocket? No, um, other pocket? Yes. Great, OK. Shit, my pen is going everywhere. OK. The beginning needs to be *punchy*; I'm aiming for effect here. Am I? Yes. Jesus, I can't start this thing without really believing *that*.

Dear Editor.

Great start. Really to the point. Polite, yet direct. This Editor person, man or woman? Man, *definitely* a man. His desk is big and wooden, with one of those spongy leather tops so you don't need anything to press on when you write. It looks out onto a city dotted with construction cranes. An indication of progress in action. This man has an innate understanding of how the world moves in a forward thrust. But he is, of course, attentive to the small stuff, knowing, no, *believing* that what it all boils down to is a thick syrup of voices humming up from the footpaths of the world. He's expecting my letter, its been weeks, no, *months* since this kind of revelation has landed on his desk. OK. Direct yet earnest. My hands are shaking.

Are you sitting down?

Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. No, shit. Ahh. I imagined the desk, of *course* he's sitting down. He's probably incredibly busy; he doesn't get to his mail until the evenings. He works late. Burning the midnight oil. He's a man of fine tastes (god, I need to watch my grammar) and he enjoys a sneaky

glass of scotch while reading the stack of letters accumulated over the day. It's a huge tower of folded paper inside envelopes, licked and decisively sealed. That's a *lot* of spit. There must be swimming pools of spit mingled with glue circulating the globe towards him at any given moment. By the time he reads my letter he's probably on his third, generous pour. Perhaps he's already fallen asleep, the creases of my carefully folded letter making angular indents in his skin that will become *embarrassingly* obvious in the harsh light of the late-night subway carriage. His three cats, no two, his favourite tabby died months ago. His two cats curl around his feet at night like bed socks, and purr loudly as he dreams of deadlines and distractions. Beautiful women draped in newsprint; The ominous, but already tangible threat of the creative-writing graduate just appointed to the by-line team; The new foot spa he *yearns* for at every Christmas staff-party gift-giving ceremony humming gently underneath his desk; *Outrageously* accurate spam filters; Being invited to sing with homoerotic barbershop quartets featuring prominent world leaders. No, no, no, no, no, the *speech-writers* of prominent world leaders. They meet once a month in a small room with lemon-yellow walls and thick, red carpet to practice the tricky task of hitting traditional vocal harmonies while performing wildly erotic body language toward each other. "'Cause Mister when you start that minor part, I feel your fingers slipping and a grasping at my heart, Oh Lord play that Barbershop chord!" It goes kinda like that for a couple of hours until they're all exhausted, but happily so. Then, afterwards, someone *usually* suggests that they leave the building and go to the pub for salty snacks and cold beer. The Editor is one of those overweight, OK, we can say he's not just overweight; he's *fat*. He's one of those *fat* men who eyeball you the moment you lift a hot chip to your salivating mouth. This makes you feel super uncomfortable, partly because you sense that his entire being would *love* to snatch the whole steaming packet from your hands. The homoerotic quartet knows this, and eats their battered calamari and over-priced spicy chicken wings quickly and defensively, averting their eyes from the desperate gaze of The Editor. He tries to console himself by imagining the delicious, low-fat, guilt-free, snap-frozen, rich-variety, diet-plus, well-packaged meal-for-one of white fish and beans waiting for him at home. Sacrifices *must* be made. This much we know. In the office, he's held in a constance state of tension until the monthly singing telegram arrives, inviting him to the next meeting. It goes: "Dear Nellie, The sun is shining tonight at 8pm. We will be happy. Love from John." He smiles

broadly to himself. A wave of release; A deep well of happiness; A flood of pure joy last felt, well, no. *Actually* the next time he feels this will be when he reads *my* letter. My letter. Where was I?

A Room Within A Room (Dust)

West Facing, in David's Bedroom

A Woman's Voice

She wakes to a faint electronic hum.

She lies still for a minute and thirty-nine seconds.

She feels soft vibrations permeate her room and coalesce audibly in the middle of her forehead.

She faintly sees her dreams as they disperse outwards and downwards.

She recognises yesterday returning and today opening.

She slides her hands over the slant of sharp sunshine.

She disrupts the trapezoid of dust suspended in mid-air.

She reaches over and shakes you awake.

I notice the textured pattern of the wallpaper, the small pink hearts and the corresponding blue squiggles, the seemingly infinite repetition, the brutal cut of pattern at the corner of the room, the slight mismatch of one heart to a severed squiggle, the careful tailoring of pattern over a mute power socket, the cluster of air bubbles, once sworn over, now forgotten, the four small black holes (you know that a foreign landscape used to hang here).

I carefully slide out of bed.

I keep my back to the window as I dress and then turn to use the exposed pane of glass as a large mirror.

I turn around and lightly touch your hair as I leave the room.

She hears you close the bathroom door and, moments later, the toilet flushing and the door opening.

She follows your path through the lounge and into the kitchen.

She loses you in the bangs and thuds of breakfast making.

She makes a list: get up, then shower, then clothes, then the bed, then toast with honey, then tea with milk, then a cup of black coffee with a cigarette, then the dishes, then talk to you.

She emphasises the *talk*. *Talk* to you.

She slowly arranges for her limbs to coordinate getting up.

She opens the door and hits straight into you.

He rubs his shoulder.

He has been up for hours.

He finished his book yesterday.

He has also lost his contact lenses.

He runs his hands over the rough wall surface, over the slippery light switch, over the angular doorframe, over the silky door, over the angular doorframe, over the rough wall, across the sharp corner, around the fine picture frame, back to the rough wall, over the angular doorframe, over the thin shelves of the bookcase, over the coated spines of 15 hardcover books never read.

He leaves his tactile map and edges slowly through the field of blurred forms.

He moves along the channel of cool air coming from the open door.

He brushes his hands across the sofa and across your back.

I stiffen then relax.

I look at my watch.

I sit for four minutes and twenty-six seconds.

I hear the doorbell ring, then buzz, then the room shifts.

I stand as the sofa is lifted and for two long moments the violence of blue against red plays staccato.

I watch the blue sofa being negotiated out of the door and into the hallway.

I listen to it being bumped and pushed and shoved and cursed.

I hear the front door shut.

I breath evenly.

I slither into the darkness under the new red sofa to wait in preparation.

I breath evenly.

I hear the front door shut.

I listen to it being bumped and pushed and shoved and cursed.

I watch the blue sofa being negotiated out of the door and into the hallway.

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He has also lost his contact lenses.

He finished his book yesterday.

He has been up for hours.

He rubs his shoulder.

She opens the door and hits straight into you.

She slowly arranges for her limbs to coordinate getting up.

She emphasises the *talk*. *Talk* to you.

She makes a list: get up, then shower, then clothes, then the bed, then toast with honey, then tea with milk, then a cup of black coffee with a cigarette, then the dishes, then talk to you.

She looses you in the bangs and thuds of breakfast making.

She follows your path through the lounge and into the kitchen.

She hears you close the bathroom door and, moments later, the toilet flushing and the door opening.

I turn around and lightly touch your hair as I leave the room.

I keep my back to the window as I dress and then turn to use the exposed pane of glass as a large mirror.

I carefully slide out of bed.

I notice the textured pattern of the wallpaper, the small pink hearts and the corresponding blue squiggles, the seemingly infinite repetition, the brutal cut of pattern at the corner of the room, the slight mismatch of one heart to a severed squiggle, the careful tailoring of pattern over a mute power socket, the cluster of air bubbles, once sworn over, now forgotten, the four small black holes (you know that a foreign landscape used to hang here).

She reaches over and shakes you awake.
She disrupts the trapezoid of dust suspended in mid-air.
She slides her hands over the slant of sharp sunshine.
She recognises yesterday returning and today opening.
She faintly sees her dreams as they disperse outwards and downwards.
She feels soft vibrations permeate her room and coalesce audibly in the middle of her forehead.
She lies still for a minute and thirty-nine seconds.

A Room Within a Room (Lens)

South Facing, Derek's Studio

A Woman's Voice

In black and white: the tasselled edge of the rug is met by the knotted edge of a rug met by the falling edge of dress fabric met by the wooden edge of a cupboard met by the chequered edge of a jacket met by the gap between floor boards met by soft corners of a feather filled blanket met by the shadow of midday sun met by the surface of a salty window pane that we often replace with the lens of a camera.

A camera comes to rest on her hand.

There was a house. There is a home. Or perhaps I should start by saying when you have lived on an island.

It is on an island that a third of our story has taken place.

It will be the beginning of spring.

Her hands run from him to her back to him again, feeling as she moves her hands the various possibilities presented. A hyperlinked layer of time hangs over the collection of fabrics, and we both wrestle with how to prepare for the coming event.

They will be returning home. She likes to imagine that they were instructed to leave in a hurry. So their locked-up house has been preserving the remnants of a moment in time, sheltering still objects held in anticipation of reanimation. She likes to imagine that she is inside, among these objects, when she hears them take effort to turn the key in the corroded lock.

It is on an island that a part of our story takes place.

It is almost as if the house knows they are coming. It begins to warm. Although the dust is too thick to lift itself, at least it thinks about it. The ruins of their last meal together have finally come to a point of reconciliation and wear their historic status with appropriate solemnity. Smells that have kept their energy in reserve start a slow release, finally meeting in tidal waves in between the kitchen and the hallway and on the upstairs landing. I sense the camera beginning to reconfigure the correspondence between its aperture settings and focal length, in expectation for what is to come.

In many ways, the two that are about to walk through the door are invisible. But you and I, well we understand them as accessible fields, compilations of records, mimetic surfaces, and stacks of accurately articulated printed matter. Many observe their invisibility, and I also see what this evaporation enables. Through a bending of appearances, a tactic of reverse camouflage, they make gestures towards each other, interventions against unwanted deliveries, and leave traces for us. The house too is invisible. Although the outside reserves its place in the world, the inside opens as a face does.

In black and white: the tasselled edge of the rug is met by the knotted edge of a rug met by the falling edge of dress fabric met by the wooden edge of a cupboard met by the chequered edge of a jacket met by the gap between floor boards met by soft corners of a feather filled blanket met by the shadow of midday sun met by the surface of a salty window pane that we often replace with the lens of a camera.

At the house now, and the key is turning.
She enters and She follows.

She slowly closes the door that is now behind them.

There are no heavy bags to challenge the staircase with.

The smells now find their way up nostrils.

They inhale.

She notices the sagging houseplants.

She mentions that she never really liked the rug under their feet.

I watch them wondering if they can feel their bodies changing against the familiar extension of the house.

In black and white: the tasselled edge of the rug is met by the knotted edge of a rug met by the falling edge of dress fabric met by the wooden edge of a cupboard met by the chequered edge of a jacket met by the gap between floor boards met by soft corners of a feather filled blanket met by the shadow of midday sun met by the surface of a salty window pane that we often replace with the lens of a camera.

She takes a few comforting steps and collapses. Into her a chair collapses.

Her hand comes to rest on a camera.

Upstairs She dresses.

Her hands run from him to her back to him again, feeling as she moves her hands the various possibilities presented. A hyperlinked layer of time hangs over the collection of fabrics, and her and I both wrestle with how to prepare for the coming event.

It is almost as if the house knows they are coming. It begins to warm. Although the dust is too thick to lift itself, at least it thinks about it. The ruins of their last meal together have finally come to a point of reconciliation and wear their historic status with appropriate solemnity. Smells that have kept their energy in reserve start a slow release, finally meeting in tidal waves in between the kitchen and the hallway and on the upstairs landing. I sense the camera beginning to reconfigure the correspondence between its aperture settings and focal length, in expectation for what is to come.

At the key now, and the house is turning.

Her hand comes to rest on a camera.

She slowly closes the door that is now behind them.

In many ways, the two that are about to walk through the door are invisible. But you and I, well we understand them as accessible fields, compilations of records, mimetic surfaces, and stacks of accurately articulated printed matter. Many observe their invisibility, and I also see what this evaporation enables. Through a bending of appearances, a tactic of reverse camouflage, they make gestures towards each other, interventions against unwanted deliveries to their island, and leave traces for us. The house too is invisible. Although the outside reserves its place in the world, the inside opens as a face does.

I like to imagine I am inside, among these objects, when I hear them take effort to turn the key in the corroded lock. At the house now, and the key is turning.

Her hand comes to rest on a camera. She takes a few comforting steps and collapses. Into a chair She collapses. Their camera comes to rest on her hand. Upstairs She dresses. It is almost as they know I am here. I begin to warm.

Her hands run from him to her back to him again, feeling as she moves her hands the various possibilities presented. A hyperlinked layer of time hangs over the collection of fabrics, and her and I both wrestle with how to prepare for the coming event.

It will be a spring beginning.

In many ways, the two that are about to walk through the door are invisible. But you and I, well we understand them as accessible fields, compilations of records, mimetic surfaces, and stacks of accurately articulated printed matter. Many observe their invisibility, and I also see what this evaporation enables. Through a bending of appearances, a tactic of reverse camouflage, they make gestures towards each other, interventions against unwanted deliveries to their island, and leave traces

for us. The house too is invisible. Although the outside reserves its place in the world, the inside opens as a face does.

It is almost as if the house knows they are coming. It begins to warm. Although the dust is too thick to lift itself, at least it thinks about it. The ruins of their last meal together have finally come to a point of reconciliation and wear their historic status with appropriate solemnity. Smells that have kept their energy in reserve start a slow release, finally meeting in tidal waves in between the kitchen and the hallway and on the upstairs landing. I sense the camera beginning to reconfigure the correspondence between its aperture settings and focal length, in expectation for what is to come.

Her hand comes to rest on a camera.