

EVERY TRICK IN
THE BOOK

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EVERY TRICK IN
THE BOOK

Everything I'm about to tell really did happen, just not the way I'm telling you. And when I paint, I'm the narrator, you're the reader, and everyone plays their part.

Kirov Tzucanari

Notebooks



Former Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis,
Dame Cressida Dick

(at the time Assistant Commissioner
of Police of the Metropolis for
Specialist Operations)

1.1

On a first visit your eye couldn't help but roam over the tastefully muted colours of the walls, of the skirting boards, of the large rug in the wide, short and low-ceilinged hall. On one side you'd note deep drawers, in dark-painted medium-density fibreboard, with handles of dull chrome. Above these, paintings of the image of a horse, the *Waverley* ferry sailing 'doon the watter' of the Forth of Clyde and a lighthouse on Skye directs the eye to muslin voiles hanging on thin, white, dusty metal hooks, which would falteringly close only with a tug of the hands. You would see the rug and floorboards end and a terracotta tile floor begin, naked and buffed.

Now your eye would scan an open space of eight metres by three metres. To the right, in front of a disused chimney breast, would be two small armchairs of pristine white chenille and again medium-density fibreboard shelves holding ornaments carefully arranged and displayed. Over on the other wall there would be a small relief map of Scotland, too small to see the detail of from here. In front of you there would be a large, high-backed couch and a rough Bakhtiari Garden carpet on the floor, seemingly held in place by small white hooks like on the rail for the muslin voiles; two dark-red leather easy chairs, parallel to the couch; then a chunky set of mango-wood bookshelves in distressed white, neatly displaying books of all sorts: fiction and non-fiction; cooking and gardening; travel guides; a *World Atlas of Wine*; a *Larousse*; both old and new Vintage Classics, Pelicans;

paperbacks and hardbacks; old and new first editions. In front of you here in a recess, piled one on top of the other are old tape cassettes and CDs, a CD player and an amp with, it might seem, too many buttons and lights; and on the floor, propped up against a wall, a colourful canvas capturing the moment of fireworks going off above the Edinburgh Military Tattoo. In a blocked-off wall space of bare brick, a sill still running along the bottom, there would be a picture of an empty rural scene. You would see a 1928 architect's table in teak and a large metal stool, devoid of any drawing implements. Two mobile phones, seven various chargers, an uncountable tangle of in-ear headphones, a Samsung Galaxy Tab 7.0 and a Kindle DX International would sit on a shelf by the door. Below a window sits a square, tall set of free-standing shelves, painted a dull orange, holding sparsely spaced ceramic ornaments, to the side of a circular iroko worktop with a stainless-steel mounting and high stand, with four leather-topped stools arranged around it, bringing the eye again to the muslin voiles.

Colours of chestnut, reds, sky and baby blues – deep and rich, sometimes incongruous, almost seeming thrown together – would prevail, with dark hues creeping in elsewhere – a Joan Miró-inspired fabric pattern here, the colour-matched red-, orange- and blue-spined books there. At night, a space that is too dark and low-lit; in the morning and afternoon the windows of the Victorian shell of the house cause revealing shafts of unusual light. And in the summer, this effect – on ornaments, CD spines, high iroko worktop and stools, glints from the stainless steel, small pools of light, and thrown shadows on the floors and walls, the marble kitchen worktops, thin muslin, stainless steel, chenille – would make this seem like the beautiful life, the Sunday supplement life.

1.2

At last we reach the next room, which would again have wooden floorboards and rugs. A French queen-size would be here, near the door, and at each side, low and wide bedside cabinets with a comb on one and a watch and ring-holder holding three rings on the other, alarm clocks and small lamps on both, and then books lying here and there. Along one wall, freshly green-painted medium-density fibreboard doors would be built in, and a leather Eames recliner would be in front and just to the side of these. In the en suite you would see light dressing gowns; chrome fittings; our reflections – those people who are us staring back at us through a small, wall-mounted looking-glass. There'd be a Braun electric shaver and separate beard trimmer; toothbrushes; perfumes; deodorants; shampoos; conditioners; shower gels; bath gels; handwash and body washes; hair waxes and beard waxes. Simple emulsion whitewash and white egg-shell skirting and woodwork; everywhere white Egyptian cotton for towels and sheets and duvet. Back in the room, on a set of shelves, sits a large sphere light, an old tape cassette-radio player and a Kindle 1. The bed's headboard is solid, padded and plaid patterned. Light floods in from the street, and shadows are forming and lengthening. Under the bed are dust and books and a few forgotten things, and there in the en suite an unassuming, short, wide, colourful painting of a fish somehow seems too prosaic, informal and imperfect.

1.3

The next room is mostly empty. There are shelves, but these seem to serve no purpose. There are a few postcards – Susan

Alison MacLeod's *The Mythopoeia of Christ*, a detail from *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, one of Escher's never-ending staircases, a portrait by Jeremy Andrews, a Kandinsky sketch, a sepia-tint photograph of boys in Glasgow by Oscar Marzaroli, Jenners in Edinburgh, J.B. Yeats' portrait of W.B. Yeats – Sellotaped or Blu-Tacked to the wall. Far off to the right is a short plastic set of drawers for holding stationery with a melted LP record moulded into a bowl shape on top next to an empty square plain white plastic lidded container. In front of a large window there's a low-slung sofa. Yet the feeling of emptiness predominates. No objects that give away the purpose or function of this room. A desktop computer is present, but it is on the exposed floorboard floor, keyboard and mouse stacked up against the monitor, gathering dust. There's a wide chair, right here in front of us, but you couldn't sit down on it, as it is stacked high with patterned pillows and throws, designs by Miró, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Klee, Picasso, Matisse. Other plastic objects seem to have form but no function: art objects; perhaps the unrecognisable out-of-context bits and pieces of large- and medium-sized children's toys. Upstairs are the children's bedrooms and another bathroom. A lovely house, a pleasant home.

1.4

The beautiful life, the Sunday supplement life. A simple life, gratifying, satisfying. Deliveries of takeaways when cooking in the cramped, dark galley kitchenette, where there's never enough storage or worktop space, could not be faced. In late June, in the evenings, is when the house is most alive.

1.5

After the school run they would potter and dawdle, smoking at the back door past the kitchen, or in the back yard. They would work from home for a while, then eat at home or go out for something to eat at a coffee shop, usually the independent one, but Starbucks when the independent one was closed.

Always neat but always informal, comfortable, liveable. It was just the way they lived, comfortably, creatively, thoughtfully. They would be on their laptops, listening to CDs, or just chatting quietly to each other. Dinner would be after the kids had eaten in front of their screens, having no interest, now, in sitting down with them. Sometimes they would all go out for pizza together.

A life like this could go on undisturbed, always neat, always comfortable, Sunday supplement photogenic, always beautiful, as though this life were made for them. Of course, they could walk away at any point, sell up and move anywhere, travel the world for a year or two, live near the beach in Costa Rica, perhaps, or visit Machu Picchu: their own family gap year. Anything would be possible. Free and in control; comfortable to go, comfortable to stay. A simple, beautiful life.

1.6

But if you were given more time to look around, having been deflected from the upper floor, the girls' domain, closer inspection in the hall, behind the front door, would reveal the unruly pile of posters, leaflets and placards – most, if not all, of which have the word, or perhaps words, ORGAN:EYES somewhere. Professionally-printed placards reading ORGAN:EYES THE EYES OF THE WORLD ARE ON YOU; an amateur placard

in a child's painted hand reading ORGANEEYES OUR EYES ARE WATCHING; ORGAN:EYES WE WATCH, WE SEE; SCRUTINEYES PARLIAMENT; and again, a child's painted script on a placard reading ORGANEEYES WE ARWE WATCHING! THE WORID IS WATCHING! Repeated often, a diagrammatic faceless head with index and middle fingers of a schematic right hand pointing one finger at each place where eyes should be, then the same faceless head with index and middle fingers pointing at the viewer of the image.

And going along the bookshelves slowly, methodically, you would notice the mixed and eclectic reading, though you would also notice the preponderance of certain books, due to the number by one author: here, Anthony Burgess and Joseph Conrad; there, Yukio Mishima, Flann O'Brien, Georges Perec and Anne Rice; here, books by or about Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, Voltaire, Orwell; there, books by Dr Seuss, Hergé, Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain and Jack London; higher up, books by Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and the Ossian texts; higher up still, the novels in translation of Romain Gary and Émile Ajar; on a shelf to themselves, books by Pablo Neruda and Tristan Tzara and Tom Stoppard; and then, lying off the shelves, casually tossed under a chair or elsewhere, books by John le Carré, Elena Ferrante, Richard Bachman, Woody Allen. A pattern would be emerging.

1.7

How happy they would be. People like many others. Normal people doing normal things normally. Or, rather, no one's normal – normal's not the right word. Natural. Natural people doing natural things naturally. Natural people, people at ease in their environment, their world, people at home in their own skins. People who know who they are. Their north London home at this time in the evening, on the 24th of June, the lazing

informality of bare feet or sloppily falling apart slippers they wear at home. A woman and a girl in the main bedroom, the woman lying up in bed, legs slipped into the turned-down bedspread and quilt, reading her Kindle, Elena Ferrante, the girl across the foot of the bed, lying on her stomach, her legs swaying half time in the air to the music coming from her iPad through pink headphones into her ears, Sugababes.

Through at the dining table, a long oblong of rough-hewn laminate elm atop a repurposed IKEA frame, a young woman sits in the pool of light from a lowered long-wired, circular, brown ceiling lampshade, wearing glasses, her hair tied high at the back, doing her homework, the American Revolution, the man leaning over and into the pool of light to see what she's stuck on as she says that, no, it's not this she was asking about.

The man straightens and expresses an acknowledgement of his lack of understanding. The young woman twists and gets comfortable with her arm over the back of the chair and says, no, it was what one of her teachers was saying today about subatomic particles, and she makes clear that it's not homework. The man takes a deep breath and repeats his realisation he doesn't really know what the young woman means.

The young woman says that she doesn't really get it.

The man asks her what she doesn't understand. He walks round to a chair across from the young woman, who repeats what her teacher was saying, that down at a subatomic level, well, like there's protons and neutrons and electrons, right? The man questions whether this isn't atomic level.

With a slight sarcasm in her teenage voice, the young woman says that, yes, right, this is spot on, but even at that level we know mostly it's like fresh air. Not fresh air, but you know what she means: vacuum – nothing between these teeny particles, and electrons especially, just flying around in nothing, mostly nothing, oceans of nothing in comparison to the teeny, tiny boat on the ocean that the electrons are.

The man tells her that this is a nice image, a very good image.

The young woman thanks him. Was that sarcasm, the slightest of slightest hints, too? Then she continues that the teacher was saying today that at the subatomic level there are even tinier component parts of protons and neutrons and electrons, particles literally insanelly small in vast, vast galaxy-sized spaces of vacuum, literally nothingness.

The man says that he's hanging on in there. So, the young woman continues, at this quantum level, it's insane, we are basically vacuum with these teeny, tiny, literally... she seems unsure what. The man asks what it is that's bothering the young woman about all this.

The young woman says, further to these concerns, that at a sub-quantum level particles just come into existence and then disappear. She sounds alarmed. The man mentions the Large Hadron Collider.

The young woman says that the teacher said that we can't be sure where anything is or whether it's there or not. The man mentions the Uncertainty Principle, with a level of uncertainty, you would have to say. The young woman thinks he is right in mentioning it, though. Then the man says solicitously that these facts, these data, such as they are, seem to be bothering the young woman.

She lifts her left arm and slaps it with her right hand and says something about the point she's making being self-evident. Look, the man knows to wait. He knows this young woman, how revelation works for her. She slaps lightly again and repeats herself, saying that she literally *feels* solid, but that she's not. At a quantum level she doesn't know where anything is. How can she feel *solid*? It's barely there. There's nothing there.

The man is smiling and says something reassuring, calls her 'kid', reassures her that the facts of life will just blow her mind sometimes. His tone is mocking. The young woman sits still,

open-mouthed. And the man says that the facts will literally blow a gasket in her mind at some point.

She says that she just doesn't get it, looking down at her unbelievable arm.

1.8

In a kitchen drawer, a letter from the Right Honourable Emily Thornberry MP and their marriage certificate, which is addressed to Mr & Mrs Paul Dorian, 18 Moon Street, Apt. 18, London, United Kingdom, N1 0QU and says 'THE CITY OF NEW YORK, OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK, MARRIAGE LICENSE BUREAU, License Number,' and the licence number, 'Certificate of Marriage Registration, This Is To Certify That Paul Dorian residing at 18 Moon Street, Apt. 18, London, United Kingdom, N1 0QU born on 03/10/1964 at Glasgow, United Kingdom and Julia Smith residing at 18 Moon Street, Apt. 18, London, UNITED KINGDOM, N1 0QU born on 01/27/1966 at Manchester, United Kingdom Were Married on 03/10/2005 at Office of the City Clerk, 1 Centre Street, NYC, NY 10007 as shown by the duly registered license and certificate of marriage of said persons on file in this office. CERTIFIED THIS DATE AT THE CITY CLERK'S OFFICE Manhattan NY, March 11, 2005. PLEASE NOTE: Facsimile Signature and seal are printed pursuant to Section 11-A, Domestic Relations Law of New York.' Then the seal, then the signature of Victor L. Robles, then, 'Victor L. Robles, City Clerk of the City of New York.' Then there's all the paperwork from this young woman's baby months, toddler years and early childhood, noting that she didn't get immunised for MMR, and she developed measles at age five just as the second kid was born. She developed pneumonia, was hospitalised in Edinburgh, the Western Infirmary, and then the Royal Hospital