

365
Things
Katrina
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Palmer

“We don’t see the ordinary things we live with. In fact, we should avoid looking at familiar objects because we can’t make a spectacle of the everyday without losing it. If we look directly, in an attempt to scrutinise its ordinariness, the very quality we want to inspect will recede.” He says this, then turns his head away from her and narrows his eyes. She withdraws into the blurry impressions on the furthest periphery of his vision.

On the other side of the room, she watches his fingers caress the handle on the desk drawer and she leans forward, curious to know what things he keeps inside it. She’s about to ask him, but just catches the grey fog of indifference to her presence descend over his eyes as he turns away.

Talking aloud (but as if he's addressing the things in the room rather than the woman in his armchair) he says, "I knew something eccentric was happening from the moment I walked in. It started when I saw this glass handle on the drawer. I've always known that it's an unusual feature, but normally it's only just visible under the surface of the desk. Something was different this morning. It hovered with a slippery translucent presence that unsettled my imagination. The impression it left on me was somewhere between my sensory perception of the real item in the room and my internal idea of it, because of course, they're two different things, they really are."

While he talks she gets up and moves from the armchair to the bookcase. She casually picks up his _____ and turns it over a few times in her hands. It's heavier than she thought. She places it back on the shelf, then nudges it just enough to tip it off the edge. It doesn't break but there's a loud and sudden noise as it hits the floor. He doesn't so much as glance in her direction.

His eyes skirt over his_____on the windowsill and then across the desk. He says, "I walked in here this morning and became so compulsively focused on the drawer, that when I moved my hand in the direction of the handle, the damned thing took hold of me. At least I think that's how it happened. I've been here like this all day, standing next to the desk, gripped by this supposedly facilitating protuberance, but unable to open the drawer... I'd like to lie on the bed for a short while, but I can't let go." He continues to look away from her, and with an earnest intensity in his distracted gaze says, "Let me try to describe the physicality of the handle."

She stands in the middle of the room looking directly at him with her arms folded. Her head inclines so that her hair falls over her face, with much the same effect as curtains being drawn. From beneath her fringe she can just see the neglected_____, the desk legs and the lower half of his body. If he looks in her direction, he won't be able to discern her eyes. She feels herself withdrawing further into this enshrouded space from where she listens to the disconcerting undulations of his speech.

Looking away from the drawer, he describes the handle from memory "It has an aquamarine glass orb about two centimetres in diameter with a rounded head, undisturbed by grooves or engraving. The top of the dome has been rubbed to a glossy sheen, while the depths of the underside, where the handle recedes into the base, are matt and dusty; untouched. But the thing that really strikes me is... it's standing back-ly. I know my terminology's odd, but if the drawer simply stands back, then it'll be holding itself in the moment of back-standing. But it isn't. It's standing back-ly, because the description (the standing back as a way of being) and the temporal event of the narration (the movement backwards) are conjoined."

She takes several steps towards him then stops beside his collection of _____s, every one meticulously cleaned and coveted. There is something overbearing about seeing such a deluge of the same thing in one place, it unnerves her. She leans against the wall next to the desk and closes her eyes, resigning herself again to the uncomfortable monologue emerging from his head.

With his back to her and thinking only of the dumb little knob in his clutches, he says, "As I cling to this handle something in me is caught between holding on to the moment, and a curiosity about what might be in the drawer. I'm wondering if I've put something of great importance in the cavity and repressed my memory of it. Perhaps my resistance to opening it is to protect myself from its contents. Yes, it suddenly seems possible that I once saw someone else opening it and secreting a disturbing item inside." He stops. She's moved to stand right next to him. There's the slightest turn of his head in her direction before his eyes close and he's able to return to his thoughts.

She's close. Close enough to detect the little gusts of articulated breath that flurry through his teeth and escape from his mouth. She lifts her face, inhales slightly and imagines invisible utterances coalescing with the saliva on her tongue and slipping down her throat. Improbable contents for the drawer are beginning to materialise in her imagination with the randomness of unfettered conjecture. She thinks while he speaks, "Open the drawer. Open the drawer. Open the drawer!"

“It was last June,” he recalls. “I hadn’t been able to sleep. I found myself outside, in front of the living room window. The glass was wet with condensation, I wiped it with my palm and was able to peer in at my_____and the familiar array of things that make this room my home. Of course everything was as I’d left it, but now that the window separated me from the space, I felt strangely dislocated...Then something peculiar happened: the television was off but sudden movement fluttered across the wide-screen. In its blackened reflection of the room I saw a pair of white-gloved hands. If they were attached to a body it was indiscernible in the dark ambience. I looked across at the real room. There was no sign of a figure or the hands.”

The_____, the_____and a_____quietly bear witness.

He says, "I gazed at the television. In the non-transmitting blackness of the screen one of the gloved hands turned and revealed my_____. The other hand reached out to this very drawer under the desk. A sheathed finger swept over the bluish surface of the handle, then pulled the drawer open and placed my_____carefully inside. As the hands eased away, solicitously, my anxious eyes stole a glance at the real drawer: it was shut and silent. I immediately looked back into the screen, but the hands were gone."

She reckons he dreamed about the gloved hands and the drawer, although his current predicament is not so different. It seems entirely possible that the drawer could have a fantastical narrative attached to it. She sees it as one thing among a whole constellation of items in the room, all of which are in a continuous flux of uncertainty in terms of their status, their purpose, how they are perceived, the ideas that circulate around them, and the extent to which they are believed in.

He pauses, and in the first real interlude since his monologue began, he finally looks directly into her face, returning her gaze. He opens his mouth.

In a flash, her eyelids with their fringed skirt of lashes, swing down and up again as she stands up straight.

“You’ll stay attached to the handle until it feels hot and damp with the sweat in your palm and then you’ll hold on even tighter. You’re afraid to move because you suspect this drawer has no resistance to its action. It only requires a minimal gesture, the slightest tug towards your body and the drawer will slide open.”

“No,” he says, with a new and petulant stubbornness in his tone. “It’s my drawer and I’ve decided that it’s not going to move.”

“Oh really,’ she says, “I’ve got my own ideas about it... Just open the drawer! Open it! Isn’t it obvious now? This fixed point could unfold into endless complexity and uncertainty. This drawer contains an infinite world in a finite space, no less than an entire universe in an ordinary drawer.”

He says, "Somehow, so long as I don't open the drawer it contains a possible-ness, a sense of possibility in-itself, and that potential, by definition has to remain undisclosed. Like desire, it's lost if it's realised...I don't really want to know what it might contain, I have no desire to conceptualise the characteristics of a universe that doesn't exist."

With her body right beside him, she delivers an impassioned retort, "We have to conceptualise the universe in the drawer. Think of it now. It's comprised of infinitesimal spherical planets. Even the largest of these planets is too small to be seen by the most powerful microscope. Yes, the existence of this mini metagalactic system is and can only be a matter of conjecture, but it's a place of great mystery and suspense. As a cosmos without suns it's entirely dark. Every time the drawer is opened and light pours in from the neighbouring universe, outside, one or more of the tiny translucent planets inside bursts into a multitude of new entities that fizzle into existence along with their many attendant life forms."

He closes his eyes.

She notices the corner of a _____ that is almost imperceptible between the stack of _____s and the side of the desk, she pinches its edge between her finger and thumb and pulls it out into the light as she says, "The drawer is a beguiling thing, it doesn't float off into a transcendental space, but it has a complex history and the potential or contextual versatility to be something else. The life of an impalpable being on one of the mysteriously inconspicuous stars within the drawer is an unknown and unseen existence that's both hopelessly precarious and insistently optimistic. It's an idea in an undisclosed object." She stops talking, steps away from him and walks out into the garden. From the other side of the window she looks back. He's still standing there. Nothing has changed.

At the very edge of his perception he's aware that that she has left the room and that she is about to move further away. He leans towards the window but continues to hold the handle. Looking at the glass rather than at her, he says, "I've told you before, we shouldn't give our attention to ordinary things, if we do, they become special." The warm air from his mouth touches the window and he watches the quivering edges of a vaporous mass that forms on this pane of material between them. But as he breathes in again, the circle of moisture retracts; his vision momentarily penetrates the glass. Eyes. A face threatens to transpire. He exhales with some determination before he speaks, "The withdrawal of the ordinary thing into its banality is so essential to its definition, that the violation of my regard doesn't bear thinking about." He shifts his focus back to the minimal opaque shape reforming on the surface, achieving a delicate discretion in his gaze.



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