

Evidence

All photographs, no matter their maker's intent, possess the presence of absence.

By Uma Anyar

This is a true but inaccurate story.

There is a room that exists in time and space... somewhere. I have a photograph of this room- thus proof of its actual presence... someplace.

The photograph haunts me. Not in a macabre over stated, horror- movie sort of way but rather more of a feeling, or a sense of a place you have visited in a dream, some place real but not in reality, a place that is on the edge of memory's recall yet stubbornly remains shrouded in ambiguity.

I think about this room more than I care to. I feel the room wants something from me. It has pressed itself on my mind. It is insisting that I figure it out, to crack the enigma.

The obvious questions are: Whose house is this room in? When was I there and why did I take the picture? And, most important, why don't I remember anything about it?

The answers get tangled and complicated when I try to answer them logically. Maybe it is not someone's house, maybe it is a hotel I was in only briefly. Which hotel? Where? When? Why?

I had to have taken the picture because it is on my digital camera. It is the type of photograph I tend to take of domestic settings or if you prefer, interiors, *but I cannot remember being in the room.* This is not some slippage of memory; mere forgetfulness, because I can tell you where and roughly when, every other photograph in my file, was taken. Photographs have been called 'touchstones for memory'. They jog the memory not confound it.

By now you are thinking that '*Someone else took the picture using your camera without your knowledge*'.

No one, I repeat no one, ever uses my camera. Really, I do not know what this room wants from me.

Why should I feel this vague and poignant loss about a room I don't remember being in? Why does the room evoke such unreasonable emotions? This is why I suspect there is a reason this picture is in my camera's digital memory. I was there and something happened. Something I can't or *won't* recall.

Are the clues in my head or in the picture?

What would a detective do?

Study the evidence. The evidence is the photograph itself.

This is an image of the mysterious room.



Does this room belong to you? Have you ever been in this room? Do you know someone who might have been in this room?

NO...?

But you see what I mean, don't you? It is a room you *might* have been in. Maybe only once, or at most, twice but when and under what circumstances you can't recall. It is such an ordinary room on a second floor of house, on a street some where in the United States, or England or even some European city. The top of the tree makes me think it is a

two-story building. Don't you agree? It is difficult to know exactly what kind of tree lives outside the windows. But I guess a palm tree. What's your take on the tree?

Now, you understand my dilemma? My disquiet over this ordinary room somewhere *you* cannot quite recall. Do you sense the ordinary unreality of this room? Are you starting to understand that the room is masquerading as an ordinary room? It is someone's idea of an ordinary room. It is not the room itself, but an idea, a representation of the notion of an ordinary room.

Let's examine the evidence before our eyes. Let's read this picture for clues.

The image shows a conventional brown leather sofa of no particular style. Matching leather chair with one orange or is it yellow, perhaps burnt sienna is the actual cushion color. A corner of a wooden fireplace mantel painted white, a green houseplant, three white or cream drapes tied to one side of each of the three windows. A basic brown patterned, four by six foot area rug lies flat between the sofa and the chair and fireplace. The walls are a yellow and the wood molding is painted the same shade of white as the fireplace. There is a shut door on the same side of the room on which the sofa resides. Feelings creep in, even to my most objective approach. It is not an unpleasant room yet rather unsettling, because it feels like no one actually occupies this room. Ever. No one ever stretches out and watches TV or listens to the radio, or reads a book or a newspaper. Certainly, no one surfs the Internet in this room.

Or.. I could be wrong, insensitive to some nuance or something blatant, obvious. What do you see? What does the evidence tell you?

Yes, thank you I see that you understand. The room is haunting me because it is an idea, a notion of a room not an actual real life reality room. Maybe, there is no such room. It fell apart when the building was torn down, when the street made way for a highway. Perhaps, the room wants to go on, to continue to be. I have seen this room only once, just as you have.

It wants us to remember it, to carry it around in our heads, to enter in to our dreams and most of all, to *be* again. The room needs this. It has come back to us as an idea of an ordinary living room. It has forgotten

its own essence and lost its place in the scheme of things. It has misplaced its people. The inhabitants of the room have left, forgotten the room and now it is wandering around like a ghost seeking attention.

Tonight, as I lie on the smooth white sheets of my quiet bed in Bali, I will conjure up the image of the room. I will stand on the threshold of image and reality for as long as it takes until the room permits me into its story.

Writers are persistent.