

The Empty Room
A monologue for radio
By Phil Hurst

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Scene 1

A bedroom. McFell, early thirties, sits on the bed.

Yesterday was the first time I'd seen her. I heard her before, shuffling downstairs. Heard her TV once or twice - but not too many times, thankfully. But yesterday morning I was up using the toilet - I haven't been sleeping well anyway, and my bladder only needs the slightest encouragement to deny me any more - and I decided to get a look at her.

I'm always a little dubious about new neighbours. Especially as downstairs is a rental. People who rent don't seem to realise that there are certain things you don't do in a flat. You don't have the TV up too loud, you don't have loud sex, and you don't keep pets.

She has a dog.

Still, she'd been living there for a couple of weeks and, the occasional bark aside, I'd not heard or seen her. So I suppose curiosity got the better of me. I went into the empty room and waited for her to leave.

I didn't have to wait long. Out she went - and oh my God - she is stunning. The dog came out first, running to the end of the path in the excited, enthusiastic way that dogs do. But following this pathetic little creature came an angel.

Bright blonde hair, pulled back into a long ponytail that finished about halfway down her back. Tight black leggings that showed the curvature of her behind perfectly, and a bright orange one of those supportive bra-come-t-shirt things. There wasn't an ounce of fat on her.

I think I fell in love. Right there, in the empty room.

My bladder groaned, and I hobbled to the toilet, relieved myself and slid back into bed.

Ellie barely stirred.

A herd of elephants could charge through the bedroom, and Ellie would barely stir. It's a skill I believe she perfected when I staggered back from award shows and events, pissed and obnoxious.

Here's to us. And all that bollocks.

The alarm buzzed less than an hour later, she keeps it under her pillow so that the vibrations wake her up. Probably give her brain cancer in the future, but... what does she care?

She climbed out of bed and headed off to work, dressing in the empty room so to not wake me. I pretended to be asleep throughout.

Fade.

Scene 2

A hospital waiting room/corridor

There's a queue for the physio again. There's always a queue. They ask you to get here fifteen minutes early, then make you wait. It's like they don't understand that some people are busy..

It's not getting better, anyway. The shoulder. I can feel it. Still not as strong as it was. Can't open a jam jar. A jam jar. Used to be nothing that could stop me. Now a jam jar can reduce me to tears.

But the calendar has a green star over the date, so in a taxi I jump, and to the hospital I go. Fifteen minutes early, as requested.

When I go in though, it'll be the same old routine. A shake of the head, a questioning look at my latest x-ray. He won't be able to understand why it's not getting better. He won't be able to fathom how a shoulder can stay so weak, for so long. Next time it'll improve, he'll say. Next time there'll be some improvement.

Then he'll ask me if I'm ok. You know, in my head.

And I'll tell him I miss hearing (because you never see the exact moment) the contact a golf club makes with the ball. That bittersweet moment when the swing is completed, and you look up to catch the flight of the ball.

Those few microseconds, until your eyes make contact with it, the uncertainty, the excitement... And when it goes exactly where it is intended to go - that feeling..

Perfection.

And he'll tilt his head, and ask if that's all I miss, and I'll tell him to fuck off and leave the room.

Apparently there's a website. What happened to Adrian McFell? What happened to the prodigy who promised to set the world of golf, who made the likes of Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods weak at the knees with admiration?

I don't go on those websites. It's not my place. Someone will tell them eventually.

I just go and look at the trophies in the empty room. I touch them, with the one arm that can reach above my head, and hope that some of the talent that earned them can somehow infuse itself into me, that the events of that night will somehow undo themselves, and my shoulder will be fine, and we'll be back on the golf course again, sun on our backs, smiles on our faces..

For the last few days, I've been pretty much camped at the window while Ellie's at work. Willing the girl downstairs, in the middle of the day when I know she's at work, willing her to go for a run.

I can stare at that path for hours.

Anyway. I've a plan for that girl. I've decided. It's perfect. I'll be her sugar daddy. I'm older, wiser, experienced, not entirely unattractive. She'll be putty in my hands.

"Mr McFell to room 242" echoes down the corridor

Here we go then.

Fade.

Scene 3

Back at home, in the bedroom.

We ran into her on the way back from Sainsbury's. Her name's Olivia. But we should call her Liv. Twenty-five. Public relations to some celebrity agency. Anyone we should know? I asked. No one you'd particularly care about, she said.

She asked me if she disturbed us with her early mornings. I looked at Ellie, gave her my best confused face, and said no. Ellie laughed. I'm dead to the world when I shut my eyes at night, she said. We all laughed.

I was aloof. But not too aloof. Ellie's known me almost as long as I've known myself. She knows I'm a nice person. So if I'm not nice she'll know something up. Even though nothing's up. Yet.

You'll have to bring your boyfriend for dinner one night, I said, a double date. See what I did there? Assumptive. Probing.

Oh, she said, I'd love that. I'm not threatened by him. Probably some annoying little know-it all yuppie. Easily discarded.

Ellie wasn't sure later - they're ten years younger, she said, what are we going to talk about? I pointed out that the psychiatrist said that meeting new people and broadening our social circle is an important part of the healing process.

She doesn't have a clue about my true motives. I'm sure of it.

She's in the empty room now. Sleeping. Meditating, something. I don't listen. I know it all upsets her. I know she blames herself. I mean. It was her fault. But she shouldn't blame herself. No point. I suppose she looks at the trophies and wonders how things could have turned out. No point. I don't. I don't look at young Liv and wonder what if? I think, I'm going to get that. Positive action.

The affair will help, I'm sure of it. I'll be happier, I'll be more receptive to looking after Ellie. I'll listen more, because I'll be too busy thinking about fucking Liv. Maybe she'll fall in love with me, and move

in. I'll be one of those trendy and cool men you see with a harem of women following him around.

I could do that. A different room each night. Alternate them. Stimulating conversation with Ellie one night, discussing politics, religion. And then next night, swinging from the rafters with Liv.

The best of both worlds. It's perfect. I'd be a fool not to.

I mean, once I've redecorated the empty room.

It needs doing.

Fade.

Scene 4

A kitchen. The sound of food cooking in the background. Wine being poured.

Ellie's not here.

She's on a business trip. All week.

She came home all sullen and miserable and told me the other day. Apparently there's been some minor industrial accident in one of their French factories, and they needed on the site expertise to deal with the fallout.

So off she went, crying the second the taxi door shut. She was worried about me, she said, worried how I'd do without her. I told her not to worry. I'm a big boy. I can take care of myself.

I told her I'd take the week to redecorate the empty room. She asked me not to call it that. It needs doing, I said. It's part of the healing process. She asked me to leave it alone, and to stop calling it that.

I slipped a note under Liv's door. Invited her up for a drink this evening.

He takes another glass from the cupboard.

You should see her. Knocking on the door as soon as she came home. Her boyfriend's giving her grief apparently. Some London hotshot, apparently. She thinks he's letting his secretary suck his dick, apparently.

She's been drinking already. Eyes kept glazing over as she chatted away. She's ranted about his tiny penis, about how she's sick of men her own age, how she's thinking about turning lesbian.

I pointed out that turning lesbian is not really something you can do on a whim. Then she asked me for that drink I'd promised her.

You should see her. Skirt suit, tailored to her body perfectly. Hair loose now, flowing over her shoulders. A blouse that just keeps opening over her chest. That perfect creature I see every morning is now sat on my sofa right now, letting her skirt ride up her leg and laughing at all of my jokes.

He takes a bottle of vodka from the fridge and adds it to one of the glasses of wine.

I'm not a bad person.

Liv's boyfriend's a bad person.

He's fucking his secretary.

Fade.

Scene 5

The bedroom. McFell is a state.

I told Ellie everything. I wanted to. I met her at the door... wearing exactly what I am now. God knows what she thought had happened.

I sat her down in the empty room and told her everything. The plan. My obsession with Liv. My plan to seduce her, to create a new live with both of them. My harem.

I told her about getting Liv up her. About how she was already drunk and angry, and how I kept giving her drinks and listening to her complain. I was a shoulder to cry on, a kind ear to listen to her troubles.

When Liv had eventually leaned in to kiss me, how I had kissed her back. How her hands had run all over my body, how they'd caressed my shoulder and made the pain go away.

Ellie didn't cry. She didn't scream and throw things at me. She just waited for me to finish.

I told her how Liv had led me upstairs, and how she hadn't wanted to have sex on the bed that Ellie and I shared. That she'd pulled me into the empty room and made me watch as she slowly stripped down to her underwear.

Her red, expensive, perfectly fitted, underwear.

How I'd not been able to move. How what I was about to do had frozen me to the spot. How I'd looked around and seen things I'd not seen in months. How all of a sudden I saw Adrian's trophy's, and his golf clubs, still packed away in the corner. The walls, covered with his drawings of him and me on the golf course. His faithful caddy.

Then she'd come over, pulled my shirt over my head, and pushed me back onto his bed.

Onto Adrian's bed.

I threw her out of the room, I screamed at her, I scared her.

And I left this beautiful young woman, dressed in only her lingerie, crying in the corridor outside our flat,

flabbergasted that a man such as me would turn a woman like her down.

I told Ellie all of this, and she just looked at me.

I told her how I'd gone into the room and tidied everything up, smoothed down his sheets and made it just like it was before.

I'd polished the trophies, how I'd thrown her clothes into the corridor. How I'd looked to the heavens and begged for Adrian's forgiveness. How I'd fallen asleep in the middle of the floor, like a dog.

I stopped. I looked up at my wife, and I asked her why she hadn't asked me any questions. She just looked at me. Then she stood up and walked into the room.

I followed her - what was I supposed to do?

She leaned in and sniffed the pillow. She looked up at me, a look of relief on her face. I stood in the doorway, silent.

She asked me if I still thought it was an empty room.

I said no.

It was Adrian's room.