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The Room of Ransom Black by J.R. Angelella

He stood in his hotel room, counting coins on the dresser next to his typewriter.

The sun slept under morning clouds, giving off a bluish light through the dark buildings of the city. A breeze broke through the open balcony doors—rotting flowers and garlic. The smell rose up from the Sicilian restaurant across from his room. They were making sauce from scratch.

Ransom moved to the balcony as a garbage truck backed down the narrow alley. Two men with beards and orange jump suits clung to the back. The truck rocked to a halt. The two men jumped down and connected ropes to either side of a dumpster like stringing up a straitjacket. The truck hissed, emptying trash into its body, crushing it. The dumpster slammed down. It echoed.



The Sicilian restaurant was a small space with one waitress, an old lady named Mirabella. She touched patrons at their elbows. Each table draped in a red tablecloth, weighted down with a carafe of red wine and taper candle. Ransom only ever left his hotel to eat dinner there. It was as far as he could get without feeling short of breath.

Last night Ransom ate a seafood linguine dish in a light red sauce and drank two carafes of red wine. He stumbled back to his hotel. In the lobby was a woman standing at the counter. She had long black hair and glasses. Ransom spun her by her bony shoulders. He closed his eyes and crushed their lips together. He then sucked on her tongue. She went limp in his hands. He released her and stepped away.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you were someone else."



"I will accept the call," he said.

Another breath of garlic blew into the room.

"I thought I saw you last night," Ransom said, adjusting the phone to his other ear, pressing his finger on a coin and sliding it towards a stack of blank typewriter paper. "It wasn't, though." Ransom could see Mirabella through the window of the restaurant flipping chairs off tables, setting them right side up. "I guess we just believe in different things," Ransom said.

There was a knock at the door.

Ransom rested the phone next to the coins on the dresser.

The maid stood next to a cart of crisp white towels and a bin of dirty sheets.

"Mister Black. How you are?" She had been practicing her English. "Will you need?" she asked, searching for the right words. She patted a stack of folded towels and clean sheets.

"No," he said, handing her a fistful of coins. Ransom closed the door and returned to the phone on the dresser.

A recorded voice said, "If you'd like to make a call, please hang up and try again."

He hung the phone back on the receiver and stepped out onto the balcony.

Artist's Statement

I am obsessed with the external as manifestation of the internal, focusing on space and time and things as representative of the mind. My prose leverages dramatic principles of narrative to drive the story and reveal the psychological landscape of my characters.



J.R. Angelella is a novelist and screenwriter. He is the author of the controversial coming-of-age novel *Zombie* (Soho Press, 2012). His short fiction has appeared in various journals, including *Hunger Mountain*, *Sou'wester*, *Coachella Review*, and *Southampton Review*. His screenplay *Nemesis* won the award for *Best Dark Comedy Short* at the Houston Comedy Film Festival (2020). He holds an MFA in Creative Writing & Literature from the Bennington Writing Seminars at Bennington College. He teaches writing at the University of Maryland College Park and at Towson University. In addition, he works as a storytelling coach and narrative consultant through Angelella Editorial. He lives in Baltimore with his wife Kate and their two children Geno and Lily. Visit his website. Talk to him on Twitter.