

The Drama in the Black and White Room

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Drama No. 85

A silver-gray Mercedes quietly parks inside a dark garage. The motel attendant quickly draws a curtain, which serves as the garage door. The driver turns off his engine, opens the car door and gets out. He knows the price, the usual cost of doing business, and after paying it, quickly walks over to open the passenger side of the car. Slender legs in black nylons step out of the car. A red skirt sways with her movements. She sneaks into the motel room before the attendant can get a glimpse of her face.

A dim light. Two guests stand in front of a big round bed in the middle of the room. Seconds pass without haste. Rough hands reach out with passion. The cold air chills the woman's delicate figure, yet she is warmed by his touch.

The 10x12 foot room is postmodern decor. Mirrors cover three sides of the room. A round mirror sits above the round bed. The front door hides the bathroom. The room is furnished in two colors—white and black. Black bed. Black sofa. White wall. Black bedpost and headboard. The floor is black and white marble. Cool air flows in from the vents, bathing the two bodies on the round bed. Quieter than the breeze, their breaths linger in the room.

If only the two guests paid more attention to the room, they would see two 16 watt lamps— one on the wall and one on the ceiling. Inside each lamp there is an oval glass concealing a hidden camera, which captures everything that happens in the room. If the guests were able to look through the wall on the right, they would have been shocked because, in the next room, someone is watching their every move. They are unable to look into the room from which they are being watched.

A grey wisp of smoke rises from the cigarette in the voyeur's fingers. He lies down on a long sofa. His eyes watch the screen with ease as if he is lounging in a first class theatre. In fact, the sound system in this room is better than any theatre in Thailand. Every sound from the room comes through eight amplified speakers. Two half-inch microphones planted in the room clearly pick up everything, even the noise of a pin falling to the floor. Two back speakers blast the sound of a trumpet— background to the couple's lovemaking.

In the corner of the voyeur's room, a 50 inch television screen is anchored in the wall. It transmits everything that is happening in the square room through the closed-circuit cameras, which adjust to infrared mode when the room is dark. But at the moment, he does not

look at the screen. He stares blankly into the air. This pastime has developed from a simple "peeping-Tom" to high tech entertainment. This is his personal pleasure.

He looks back at the reality show in the black and white room. The pitch black bed linen contrasts with the figures of the "performers." Black and white. He likes this contrast. The mood in the room becomes more passionate when the two bodies alter their rhythm. He becomes as excited as his "performers" because this is not staged. This is not a film where actors pretend for the audience. This is not an X rated movie where parties engage in sex for money. This is real life drama—shot just once. No second or third take. No director. Every scene is real. The whispered conversation has not been rehearsed. The performers are real. Their actions are uninhibited. There is no attempt to hide their true feelings.

The grey puff of smoke dissipates in the air as the drama finally ends. The woman rises to get dressed while the man sits quietly on the bed. The voyeur takes a long deep breath and gets up to rewind the tape that has recorded the actors. He writes the number "85" on a sticker and attaches it to the tape. He puts the tape into a cabinet, which contains a number of videos.

The watched room grows quiet, and then the man sitting on the bed breaks into tears. Surprised, the woman asks, "Why are you crying?"

The man shakes his head but does not answer.

The voyeur is intrigued by this scene. For awhile, the woman is silent. Although she is unsure of what to say, she approaches the bed and asks, "What's bothering you?"

"Don't worry about me," he says, "It's my problem and it has nothing to do with you."

"Tell me about it."

The man sighs heavily. "Coming to a place like this makes me sick to my stomach."

"Men go out at night all the time."

"I don't go out because I want to have fun. I go out because I'm lonely."

She smiles while she puts her clothes back on. "It's normal for a single man like you to go out."

"I have a family---wife and children."

"Well, since you're already here, why worry about it?"

"The truth is, I haven't spoken to my wife in two years."

Silence fills the room and the voyeur can hear his own heartbeat.

The man continues to murmur, "I feel trapped." Once again, the woman sits on the bed.

"I try to solve my problems by going to clubs. I picked you up, thinking that being with someone new might make me feel better, but it's doesn't."

"I understand you..." She looks him in the eyes, "...but the thing, I don't understand is why you cry about it. Instead of being hysterical, you should do something. Maybe, you should go back to your

wife and try to work it out."

He shakes his head, "Thanks for the advice, but my marriage fell apart a long time ago..." He feigns a smile. "...You go first. I'll sit here a little longer. The money is on the table."

The woman looks at him and says, "Good luck." She picks up the money and leaves the room. The man sits there and buries his face in his hands.

The voyeur watches the man for awhile before he decides to leave. He walks along the gravel path that slopes away from the motel room. The parking lot is full, yet he feels empty. Many cars are concealed by the black curtains, which hide the secrets of their owners. The idea of running a motel is to provide customers with the highest level of privacy. The voyeur emphasized the need for privacy with the architect who designed the motel and that result was achieved. The entrance, the exit and the floor-plan are cleverly designed. The guests who come here to enjoy themselves know that this is the only place in Bangkok that they can drive in and out without being seen.

The voyeur starts his car and cruises into the insomniac city. The sides of the road pass like a slow motion movie. White road. Black sky. Though his house is situated in midtown, he regrets the time that is lost in the commute. Twenty-four hours in Bangkok disappear so quickly. Time spent in traffic devours each day. People must manage the rest of the time for the other activities of life. It's not surprising that the ways of life are becoming more and more hurried, including sex in a transient motel. He often sees a couple in business clothes sneak into the motel during their lunch hour for a 15 minute quicky, 10 minutes to eat fast food and then rush back to work before the end of their break.

All the way home, he thinks of the show he's just seen. Something the man said makes him think of himself...

"Why are you back so late?" the emotionless voice jars him from this thought. She is waiting for him in the living room. He looks at the clock. Normally, she does not wait for him past midnight.

"Sorry, I was stuck at work."

"Anybody can take care of the motel. Don't you know that it's Noi's birthday today?"

"I..."

She presses him, "Don't tell me you can't remember your daughter's birthday."

He smiles at his wife, "Of course, I remember. But there were VIP guests today."

"Are the VIPs more important than your own daughter?"

He does not answer but walks instead to the pantry in the corner of the room and starts to mix himself a drink.

"What? Why don't you answer me? Are you seeing someone?"

Silence. He thinks again of the drama he saw in the black and white room tonight. He hears a grumble, "Bastard," before his wife

walks furiously upstairs to the bedroom. Holding his glass of scotch, he stops in front of his daughter's birthday cake, which is cut into pieces. He sighs and thinks to himself— work is not more important than his daughter's birthday. But these past few months, he feels like he has lost interest in his family. I feel like...that's it. He thinks of what the man said, he had thought about it all the way home, "I feel like I'm trapped..."

2:15 am. He is drinking alone on the terrace.

Drama No. 86

On the following night, two men and a woman make their stage debut. The clock strikes 9 and a red sports car speeds into the motel entrance. Music blasts so loud that the entire motel can hear it. The drama lasts until midnight. The voyeur looks through his glass wall and mockingly laughs at the scene. It is not often that he sees an orgy. They seem to be inexhaustible. The first act finishes shortly before 10, and they order drinks to the room. In that moment, he notices that they are only college students. This takes him by surprise since it is exam week. Normally, the motel would have fewer student customers. He stops the recorder when they start to chat. He listens to their conversation about the \$1,200 dress, which they bought from Hong Kong, the \$700 Heuer watch and so on. They talk for about 20 minutes before they start the second act. This time, the girl initiates it. He turns on his recorder again. He observes the girl in the shadows and thinks how naïve he was when he was that age. As his friend once said, "the world has changed."

Looking at the girl, "This is hundred times more realistic than the red-light district," he thinks to himself.

In one moment, the girl rolls to the edge of the bed. The light shades on her body and the camera zooms on her face. The voyeur is stunned. His heart almost stops. The light reveals the left half of the girl— his daughter!

He is frozen. But when the light shows all of the girl's face, he releases a big sigh. No, he's wrong. The girl is not his daughter, but she has the same facial structure---no---the light in her eyes is similar to his daughter's eyes.

He trembles slightly. He feels giddy like he is about to faint. His throat feels dry. For the first time, he feels like he misses his daughter. He knows he thinks too much. His daughter's life is different from the girl's in the black and white room. She has been in good hands since she was young. She should be at home in bed by now, not in bed with somebody somewhere in Bangkok.

The performers from drama no. 86 leave the motel around 1 am. He overhears that they are going to the Thorus club afterwards. He goes home. The car cruises onto the never sleeping city. The sides of the road pass like a slow motion movie. White road. Black sky. (Again! Why does he have to see everything in black and white?)

The road is clear, but not his heart. Many thoughts have filled

his head since noon when he went to pick up his daughter from tutoring. They stopped to have lunch in the mall.

"How was the class?" He asked his daughter.

"It was alright, Dad." She looked surprised as if to ask him, "Why did you ask me the question?"

"Why are you surprised?"

"Well, you never asked me about my school before."

She's right. He had never asked her about school. He looked outside the restaurant. Many teenagers were wandering around the mall, more than half of them still in their uniforms. He thought to himself that when he was a teen, he never saw students wandering around a mall, not once. He was afraid to even think about his daughter having skipped class to go to a mall. He is even more afraid to think about her skipping class to go hang out in a motel. But, how could he be certain?

His daughter is now 17. She finished high school last year but could not pass the entrance examination to get into a government university. Because of this, she is spending the year in a tutoring school to try and retake the test. He does not want to fix the problem by using, "sending her abroad." He was born in poverty. His father migrated from China to Bangkok and died before he could establish himself like other men who came on the same boat. He did not have a chance to go to school back then. His hard work helped him start a business and make his way in the world. It was not until much later that he was able to go to school for the first time. He started to write his first Thai alphabet when he was 25 years old. Ten years later he passed his GED. Thus, he does not believe in a school's reputation more than one's own efforts. He sees many examples of students who have become good-for-nothings regardless of having attended acclaimed institutions. He does not want his daughter to be like the college students in the black and white room.

He used the opportunity to take her to an afternoon movie. Rather than concentrating on the screen, most of the young couple were making out. The movie showed an explicit sex scene. He complained as he dragged her away from the theatre. It must be true, as some said, the more promiscuous the father was the more protective he is of his daughter.

"Why did you rush out of the theatre?"

"This kind of movie is not suitable for you, Noi. What kind of movie was that? I can't believe that they released such a movie— no censorship."

"Oh, Dad. I am a grown now. I know right from wrong."

He looked in her face. It was the first time he noticed that she had become a woman. Her full figure, breasts and hips suggested that she was no longer a child. She was near the age of the girl in the black and white room. This made him extremely uncomfortable. Is it possible that one day he might see her in his black and white room?

01:30 am. He is drinking alone on the terrace.

Drama No. 87

A male college student is laying his head in the lap of a middle aged woman. The voyeur often sees her in the newspapers. She is one of the most successful businesswomen in the textile industry. She makes huge profits from exports. If someone did not see this with their own eyes, they would not believe that she would be in a motel with a good looking young man. But, he is not surprised because this is not the first time they are here. He remembers the first time the young man brought her here. She looked shy. She is more relaxed now that they come here more often. She might be criticized if she brought a young man to a five-star hotel or to her home, and it might affect her career. However, this place provides so much privacy that no one can see her drive in and out. This makes the woman feel secure that she can keep her personal life a secret.

He vaguely remembers their moves. She is an old maid who has long been pressured from work and living as a single. When she is here, she becomes a different person. She is totally free. She releases her stress through sexual desire. In real life, she is the boss with every male under her feet, but on the other side of the mirror, she satisfies the young man as if he is her own boss.

When the show finishes its first act, they sit on the bed. The young man again lays his head in her lap. He smiles so innocently under the orange light of the room. It is no wonder that she would fall for him since he is as beautiful as a girl. They quietly whisper. Yet, his microphone records every syllable. The sound is so clear that it is as if he is lying on her lap himself.

"Do you still have money?" she asks.

"I've already spent all the money for this month on books..."

The old maid reaches for her purse on the head of the bed. She takes out rolls of bills and gives it to the young man.

He graciously thanks her.

"I feel bad that you do this."

"Don't worry about it. You are like my family, even if you don't spend it on your education."

He kisses her on her cheek. "I won't disappoint you."

She smiles contently. "Study hard. When you finish, come work for me."

"Certainly."

The young man pulls the woman onto the bed again for the beginning of Act 2. The voyeur walks over and pours a drink while the camera records the show. It is over when the two start to get dressed.

"Come. Kiss me goodbye before we leave."

The young man obeys her command and embraces her as if they are parting forever. In that moment, the camera catches a shot of the young man's face. The voyeur smiles when he sees the man's lips. He laughs to himself, remembering that this young man has brought more than five other women to this motel within the past two months. An

award winning actor couldn't compete with this young man. The voyeur sighs. Poor woman! She has worked hard all her life after her husband left her only six months into their marriage. The gossip news claimed it was because she was much better in business than her husband. He thinks that must be true. No man can bear to live with a woman who is better at business than he is. From that time on, she dedicated her life to work. She never takes a break. He understands her because he has done the same thing in his life. She has achieved success in life and now comes to release her stress in a tiny motel room. As for him, he releases stress by watching.

The voyeur raises his glass and talks to her, "but... loneliness... we both are full of loneliness, right?"

He married when he was 24. His parents arranged everything including finding a woman for him. Marriage is the start of establishing a life together. Love is something that occurs after you spend time together. In the 25 years they spent with each other, he has never told his wife that he loves her and neither has she. It is the same with other millions of other married couples in the world, yet rarely does these arranged marriages end in divorce.

The first few years of marriage, they had tried different businesses and it had been up and down. Their business took a turn when Americans came to fight in the Vietnam War. Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Cliff Richard and bars mushroomed to serve the needs of the soldiers. He opened a restaurant to entertain the G.I.s at the New Phetchaburi Road and changed the direction of the business following the market trend to be part restaurant and part bar. He hired a couple of musicians. Business then started to pick up. When the war ended, he changed the restaurant into a motel to answer the entertainment needs of the modern customer. He survived the 60's, 70's and the 80's. It is strange that motel business never goes out of style. To this day, he still runs his business. The only thing that is changed is the architecture. It is prettier; more inviting than in the past and the service does not 'interfere' with customer's privacy.

Throughout many difficult years, his wife stood by his side. Before they could establish themselves, they had had a hard life. They went bankrupt for many times. They were starving. Their meals consisted of rice and fish sauce. Yet, it is strange to think that he was happier then.

Now the black and white room is empty. There are no more guests to put on another show for him. It is time to go home.

But, he does not want to drink tonight.

Drama No. 88

When the new show begins around 9, he is not in his usual good mood. He misses the first part because he is talking on the phone with his wife.

"Honey, I'm not going to eat at home tonight."

An emotionless voice responds, "you didn't need to call. I know."

He can imagine her face when she says these words.

"I have to work..."

"Work, work, why on earth do you have to work so much?"

The real life show in the black and white room continues in silence.

"Will you listen to me first?..."

"Don't say anything else. If you don't want to come home then don't."

"But..."

His wife violently slams the phone.

He puts the receiver down. His hands are shaking with anger.

Unsuccessfully, he tries to control his temper. He then slams the phone so hard it falls on the floor. Many times, before, when he was in this same situation, he wished he could escape to the top of a far away mountain and scream releasing all his frustration. He never does. Even though he is too old-fashioned and does not believe in divorce, he does not know how much longer he can stand in this predicament.

The drama in the black and white room still continues.

In the dimness of the room, a man in his thirties is performing his act with a naked woman on the round bed. The voyeur pauses for a moment then sees that the young girl is unconscious. He knows right away that she has been given a date-rape drug. He reaches to open the door but stops. He then sits back down, sinking into the comfortable sofa. Quietly, he continues to watch the show.

The first act ends at 10:05 pm. The second act begins when the girl wakes up and realizes what is happening to her. She cries her heart out. The man tries to console her. The mirror-wall clearly reflects the two bodies. Dim light. The two figures stand behind the light and thus create a hazy shadow. The picture on his screen appears so clear that he can see the woman's curled eyelashes.

"Don't cry. I love you. Everything will be okay." His gentle voice echoes through the 8 speakers. There is no background music today.

Tears drop down on her face. They are not fake. "What will I do if my mother finds out?"

"She will never know..."

"How could you do this to me?"

The hands which greedily fondled before, now gently stroke her back.

"Don't worry. You know I'll take care of you."

The voyeur mumbles to himself, "This guy is good. He's better than the villain in a soap opera. He puts on an excellent act. He rapes her, and then smooth talks her."

This is the first time he has to force himself to watch his hobby. He is not sure why he doesn't have the courage to stop this show. Is he afraid that things will get out of hand if the police are involved? His twenty years old motel business might be destroyed over night. The business like his marriage may soon be sunk.

He picks up the phone, from the floor, puts it on the table and goes home.

He needs liquor tonight.

Drama No. 89

Two men are in the black and white room. One is younger than 20. The other is a middle aged man in his fifties. The older one roars with laughter.

He asks the young man, "let me change clothes first, alright?"

"Sure."

At first, he can't believe his eyes. The old man comes out of the bathroom in a nightgown which was made of a see-through pink lace. Beneath it is a glimpse of a bra. His lips are painted with the same color as the gown. The younger one says, "You look so pretty."

The voyeur turns off the recorder. He is too old-fashioned to appreciate such a show.

For a while, they chase after one another and he is not sure who is chasing who. The two men burst into laughter. The young man finally let the old man catch him.

"Come on. Let me kiss you."

"Don't, dear."

"Just once."

"No..."

Their lovemaking continues in ecstasy. After the first act, they lie down on the bed. The old man's head is on the young one's lap. His hand touches the other's face.

"I have something to tell you." The young man starts to talk.

"What?" The old man rises and bites at the young man's ear.

"I can't see you anymore. This is our last time together..."

Sometimes, the voyeur thinks about making a movie since he has a lot of footages that he can simply edit into a real life drama. He does not continue to watch this show to the end. When he drives home, he thinks of the smudges left by the tears on the old man's thickly made-up face, and the phrase, "good luck" which the young man said before he departed. While driving, he thinks of everything that has happened to him in these last several years.

He hates break ups. He dislikes the goodbye scene at train stations and airports. He especially distastes separation between a couple who has been together for many years. He admits that he is old-fashioned, but he does not want to go cry alone in the motel after sex with a prostitute like the man on tape no. 85 or the old gay man on tape no. 89.

He remembers how he tried solving his problems in the beginning. He went out night after night. After he was tired of going out to clubs, he started filming the real life shows as his hobby and drinking alone.

Perhaps, the prostitute in no. 85 might be right, "...but the thing I don't understand is why you cry about it? Instead of being hysterical, you should do something. Maybe you should try go back to your wife and try to work it out."

The real life dramas in the black and white room these past nights seem to be different from the past.

*Is it that he has a different way of looking at them?
He does not know.*

Drama No. 90

The businesswoman in the drama no. 87 returns to the black and white room—alone.

He doesn't wonder where her young man has gone. He doesn't care, but still he finds himself looking at her crying quietly alone on the bed. A trail of tears flows down on her face and disappears into the pillow. There is no background music. She is smart enough to know that the relationship with the young man is only an illusion. The voyeur understands this well. She needs that kind of dream. She reached for it, and sooner or later, she would have to suffer for it.

Always, sooner or later!

She has already fallen asleep. Her arms and legs curl up like an infant in its mother's womb. He keeps looking at this picture and thinks that this will be the last scene that he will watch from the black and white room. He turns off all the equipment. He thinks that after she has had enough rest, she should be able to figure things out.

He looks at the videos in the cabinet. Every one of them records a real life drama, but he now finds that he does not really enjoy the carnal acts in this room at all. The performers; male, female, homosexual, take turns to come to the room to cry, to laugh, to have fun, and to mourn. He has seen an orgy, perverted sex, rape and consensual sex. One day, he might not be surprised to see his own wife come to the black and white room with a young man.

Suddenly, he starts to feel sick in his stomach, like someone who has been eating meat all his life, and all of sudden, feels repelled to the smell of meat. He runs to the bathroom and throws up. He feels better afterwards.

He turns off the light and drives home.

He might not drink tonight.

When his car disappears from the sight of the motel's door, he sees a car of new guests pass him. The bronze car stops in front of the garage door before quietly parking in one of the curtained spaces. The motel attendant immediately draws the black curtain...