

# *Their Tells*

## 2. Blocklist

She wondered: how do you fall back in love with a city?



To map a city is to map yourself. You can study as many A to Zs, aerial photography and OS grids as you want – they don't show the true image, she knew. Streets were functional worms of white, pushing through and into their siblings; some formed a listless grid, waffles left to be scraped into the waste, whilst others curved and entwined like congealing spaghetti. Those lines lost meaning when you looked at them for too long – a trick of the light switching avenue to cul de sac and back. The true map was the one you carried around with you. Ingrained on the insides of your eyelids, tattooed on your heart; grey blocks that caused anxiety attacks just by proximity, a rise of greenery causing elation. Memory and geography so matted together as to become interchangeable.





To see the true map of a city, height was needed. Outlying hills, tower blocks, a spire; from there the city lay arranged out in a radius. A cordiform projection of the viewer's lived experience – buildings sparkled from the corner of the eye, when sweeping the horizon. But so too were whole sections of the city greyed out.



Because she knew that to map a city is to map the pain that came from living within it. And as emotional bonds within sever, so too the connection between self and territory. When love comes to an end, there's a seemingly indelible burn on the landscape; buildings became greyed out, Qlippoth-like shells to be divided up like the more prosaic belongings; CDs, keys, clothing.

It became possible, thus, for her to be forced to separate herself from streets, areas and whole districts of the mapped sprawl just as it was to leave a lover. And the sites of pain became no-go zones, locations to be blocked to match the phone numbers and messages to be blocked from her phone.





It was easy to forget these; until the day a wrong turn led to

*[AMERICAN POOL AND SNOOKER]*

without warning. The building was there, sure, but a grey veneer – no features, like a mask. People passed in front and disappeared, only to appear from the other side; but the camouflage was complete.





Chance brought these into closer focus, too. New relationships brought with them new maps and landmarks to claim; but without warning the areas-of-no-egress could still push their way in, the subconscious easing through. A chance meeting suddenly revealed

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an A-board sign sitting in front of another grey husk, hinting at what lay inside – past infidelities, sublimated pain.

It takes time to erase these tracks. And denial, erasure of all evidence, can only go so far – there was more under there, gnawing at the hidden recess. Instead, peace needed to be made with the old ghosts.



Finally, after months and without warning (whilst staring yet again at the sprawl laid out across the horizon, like castle battlements in the distance) - an epiphany. Rewriting maps, drawing in new locations - removing dragons and quicksand, adding roads and gardens – this was how we came to know the world, and to render it explicable to our own senses. And her geography was more than just pins in Google Maps, or the roads to walk-not-down. She realised that it was fear of seeing the New World rather than pain at the loss of the Old that was halting exploration.





And with that, discovery. Books lain untouched for fear of catching the virus of longing could be thumbed through, carefully at first, and then with more energy; for the ghosts being exorcised didn't wear the scowl of demons, but instead a hopeful smile as they move into the ionosphere. Music deemed off limits became instead nostalgic. And as the spirits released, so too came the memories, untrammelled by base-level pain and instead put into context – she, the map and the territory, indelibly altered but for good as well as ill. Time as healer – a cliché, its true – and a leveller, giver of a perspective and new way of reading the trail laid out. Suddenly, moments came into focus with buildings no longer grey but instead glistening with a possibility of the future and leaving the past behind;



A grey tenement with a model plane hanging above the spare bed





A pub holding its breath as a door banged open



The alley behind a café with the smell of cigarette smoke like a haze





The lights of the city twinkling in the distance, reflecting on a  
reservoir

All the little lights sparkling, pushing through the monotone  
fascia.





And she threw the map aside, and struck up, out, onwards, pen in hand, blank paper in a clenched fist, ready to draw new maps, and no longer frightened of the faceless grey shapes that now – from height – resembled a horizon of beacon fires, drawing her towards them, and the future.



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Music taken from "Jack On Piano" (Broken20)

<http://www.patreon.com/ruaridhTVO>