

Apartment C



*The days at the apartment passed
much like the nights...*

Ruth Learner

Carl Halstead, once a celebrated union lawyer, turns fixer for New Labour. Estranged from his wife and his associates, he withholds vital information on GM foods, causing a scandal and sabotaging his political career. He flees London for his childhood holiday apartment in Barcelona, a legacy in his mother's Will.

Apartment C is alive with childhood ghosts – his overbearing mother, her lover, Dolores the au pair. Escaping the oppressive atmosphere, Carl begins an affair with a young drifter, Angela. Their cat and mouse games expose Carl to a new recklessness...

“I found [Apartment C] a haunting memorable read, subtle, complex and powerful in its evocation of a man in the midst of personal crisis ... Ruth Learner uses dislocation to allow us to see the world more acutely, and her tightly controlled, measured language and finely evoked observations are a pleasure.”

Anne Williams (Ex fiction commissioning editor for Headline Book Publishing),
The Literary Consultancy

“...the writing was very assured and created a powerful sense of place and atmosphere... The jumps in the narrative between London and Barcelona, past and present are deftly handled ...

“I found the opening chapters extremely assured and evocative. The two plots - the mysterious political scandal (slightly reminiscent of the David Kelly affair) from which Carl is trying to escape, and the subplot about his complicated relationship with his dead mother – are managed extremely effectively and create real dramatic tension.”

Naomi Leon, AP Watt Literary Agents

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Ruth Learner was brought up in London and moved to Melbourne as a young teenager. She has been bouncing between the UK and Australia ever since.

In Melbourne, she read philosophy, later studying photography and professional writing.

She exhibited photographs in Sydney, packed up, and took her cameras to New York. After a year of working behind the bar in (New York's infamous) King Tut's Wah Wah Hut and taking photographs of many of the characters, she was inspired to buy a typewriter and so rekindled her passion for writing. She packed and went to London, where she now resides part of the time.

Ruth has won prizes for her short stories and written non-fiction books, catalogue essays and articles on contemporary art for magazines and newspapers. When not writing, she works as an editor and looks after her young daughter.

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Apartment C (chapter 3 extract)

CARL SAT ON the balcony and eyed the passers-by. The woman from the beach appeared. He leaned forward. As she came into focus, he realised that this was a different woman, who, though still beautiful, was closer to his age. He felt embarrassed, suddenly conscious of his delinquency. Now that Angela was back, he was aware of his excitement, making him especially uncomfortable, as though scaling the barbed fence between paternalism and a more elemental desire.

Angela had dropped out of the sky, much as he had. In those first hours space opened up around him and he threw himself into it, telling the swarthy taxi driver at the airport to take him wherever he liked. The driver casually nodded and then drove like a drunken teenager towards the city, lurching one way then the other, now and then caught in tussles of beeping and gesturing. Construction work was going on all around; the hammering of pneumatic drills, the chant of a new world. Rows of towering witches hats ran alongside the highway, the roadwork half finished, scattered figures waving through cars. In the city, scorched men stood on the rooftops of old apartment buildings, raising buckets of cement on makeshift trolleys and screaming in hawking tongues over the dull noise of drills and traffic. Carl held his face up to the open window of the taxi, the chaos washing over him, its monotony soothing.

Only now did it seem incredible that the driver knew where to go. Then, Carl took it in his dream-like stride. As the driver swung around Columbus's Column, scattering a huddle of tourists, Carl saw the young bicyclist, as he often had over the past weeks, a few seconds after impact—his body perfectly curled as though moulded from rubber, his bones bent into impossible angles. Carl's stomach contracted, vision clouded, for a moment he was falling. He pressed his hands into his thighs, breathing steadily, centring himself in space once again.