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I open my mail after coming home from work and the first envelope holds a letter that begins with:

'This is not a chain letter...'

It's about how I should send five dollars through the post to the strangers listed on the back of the page. The first name on the list is 'Janet Pluto'. I don't trust it. Pluto is not a planet and Janet is not really Janet.

The radio's still on from the morning, I forgot to turn it off when I left. It's playing Public Image Limited's *This is not a Love Song*, the only song it ever plays. Every morning my alarm goes off with the whining reminder,

'Happy to have, not to have not.'

It took hearing the song every morning for me to like it. Now it has worked into my thoughts so pervasively that I feel like it holds everything I ever need to say:

'You take the first train into the big world, now will I find you?'

From what I can hear, the person in the flat next to this one has the same imposed fixation, but their song is *Ego is not a Dirty Word* by Skyhooks. I count myself lucky.

I haven't lived here for very long. All the furniture was here when I moved in, keeping the silence of what went on in this room before I came to it. The first thing I did was look under the couch cushions for clues. There was only a slip of waxed paper from a fortune cookie that read:

'A house is not a home.'

It defied me to make something of the apartment. Generally I wouldn't bother, I'm not one to collect things, in fact I prefer to live in places that are as blank as hotels. But I took down the print of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* that was on the living room wall and replaced it with a photograph. It is of a wall in London with the words: 'This is not a photo opportunity' stencilled on it.

It's Banksy, recently notorious for painting an elephant like 70s wallpaper. This annoyed me because elephants are such sad, solemn creatures, but I like the stencil, and the face that's next to it, in this photo, is someone posing. Obvious? Sure.

I'd rather have the art of a living English guy than a dead French one on my wall. I choose the living over the dead any day, and while *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* is iconic, I feel as if I am not really able to understand it. Just staring at the 'n'est pas' is enough to make me feel I am in the

tower of Babel.

I wrapped the dead, mysterious icon in a plastic bag and put it behind the couch, where it fitted perfectly. Now, written over 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' are the words: 'This bag is not a toy.'

Apart from the neighbour's radio, things are very quiet in this building. I hear the soft sound of the elevator buttons dinging and sometimes the rustle of plastic supermarket bags and footsteps, but nothing else. On the balcony it's another matter. The alleyway beneath is the number one spot for couples to argue in the early hours of the morning. I blame the nearby nightclubs.

When I can't sleep I sit out there with the plants I've brought back from work and listen.

'I am not a monster!' a girl screams. From what I gather, she's been flirting with someone else. Someone who wasn't the man who yelled back,

'This is not a joke.'

Sometimes when I leave via the fire exit early in the morning there will be people asleep out there. I watch them until I see that they are breathing, then keep walking. No matter how bedraggled they look, in sleep they always seem peaceful.

I often sneak out the fire stairs because I cannot face the framed picture in the lobby that has a picture of a thin, beautiful woman holding a rainbow coloured umbrella, twirling on some old stone steps in an Italian spring, with the slogan:

'Life is not a dress rehearsal.'

I wonder whether anyone actually finds it inspiring as they leave the building to go and work in call centres and offices and department stores or, in my case, a laboratory. I genetically modify roses for a living. The company I work for developed the world's first blue rose a few years ago, and now we're trying to make it bluer. When people find out that this is my job they are delighted, but I feel uncomfortable that I'm doing something that was meant to be impossible.

To remind myself of this, I have written something above my desk:

'A rose is not a rose is not a rose.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Vanessa Berry.