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## Room 101

by Richard Wilding

Love. Love is. Love was. I believe love exists. I will measure a heart to see how much love it contains. That heart is beating at the bottom of the stairs. I put on my cap, pull up my mask and open the door to the cellar, to my own version of Room 101, a room I don't really want to enter, if I'm honest, but I have to, so.

Room 101 didn't come from his best book and it's not really a good book, in the sense that it's not especially well written. The characters are a little too wooden for my liking but I will grant you it's more a book of *ideas* than emotion as such. If you want the emotional heft of 1984 that Orwell couldn't manage, then you must turn, of course, to Bowie's Diamond Dogs (*Bowie* pronounced as in bow tie not as in the 80's group Bow Wow Wow. I do like their hit "I want candy" but not much else of their limited *oeuvre*). Diamond Dogs came out the year before I came out of my Mother so I can't attest to how it was received, not really. I can though attest to how I was received. Mother thought the world of me and I thought the world of her and what son doesn't? Mother liked David Bowie, I remember that and she liked Diamond Dogs although she said her favourite was Young Americans. I think she identified with Rebel Rebel, with the line "Rebel, rebel you torn your dress, Rebel, rebel your face is a mess," because once I saw her come home like that and Dad behind her and both of them looking like they could kill each other, but Dad wouldn't have torn that dress, would he? And he loved that face, I believe. But my personal favourite from Diamond Dogs is Sweet Thing. "It's safe in the city to love in a doorway, to wrangle some screams from the dawn. And isn't it me, putting pain in a stranger, like a portrait in flesh who trails on a leash. Will you see that I'm scared and I'm lonely?"

It is a funny thing, love. I wonder if there's life elsewhere and if there is, does that life contain love. The alternative might be that there is life abundant in the universe, the place is teeming with the stuff and we're not as alone as we think but that it's only here on this small blue dot where you find love and kindness and such like and I don't know whether that's a happy thought because we have it, or a chilling thought because no one else has.

She is asleep, I think. I light the candles and when they are all lit I turn the torch off on my phone. The candle flames flicker with my movement as I go over to ungag her. She wakes. I remind her to be quiet, not to scream.