

A GLIMPSE OF DAWN

by Amos Kwok

In the dark I wait. My perch is across from the house. We're on a hill so I can see the town behind, lying below—a carpet of lights. To me, the street lamps are twinkling. I blink and stare harder; street lamps can't twinkle. They aren't made to twinkle. Yet they do and it worries me. I glance back at the house. The silhouette is lost in the darkness, but I can make it out in my mind. Much clearer in my head. It's L-shaped, with a red shingled roof. Some of the shingles are brighter than others. I can't see them now but I know. The bright ones were replacements for the ones lost in the storm some years ago. But the roof of the garage is entirely new. And I know what's in there: a dusty, green Camira. But the driveway's different. It was swept clean yesterday. But already a few leaves have crept on it. More are scattered on the lawn, making a cluttered front lawn appear more so. I can't see it now, but I know there's a small plant among the shrubs with white and pink flowers. Many times I long to be part of the plant, to be one of the flowers...

On the side away from the garage, I know there is a little gate leading to the backyard. The gate's there to keep the dog in. It's a large brown dog, with a thick tail that goes thump thump on the ground whenever it sits and smiles. A well-loved dog. Lucky dog. I can't see it now, only the gate. Made of chain-link, it's already dull and covered with moss. The latch is rusted and squeaks when you try to open it. But the main door is deep mahogany and large. Inviting really. But I've never been in there. I long to feel the cool of the brass knocker in its centre. I long to knock. One day I'll try it. In front of the door lies a mat with bright orange letters spelling "Welcome". It's caked in dirt but how I wish to rub my shoe soles on it. Bay windows flank the door on either side. Same dark colour. Their drapes are firmly closed against prying eyes. Still, I like to stare at their wild zig zag pattern. Burgundy zigs and black zags.

The left of the horizon has turned light. Like a drop of light spreading into the darkness. Little ripples of light floating away from the red sun. Morning approaches. But

where's my dawn? I go back to staring at the house. I can't see its colours yet, but I can make out shapes on the front lawn now. Trees. Three of them. And shrubs huddled about their feet. I wish the sun would hurry up.

A noise comes from the left. It's a truck coming up the street. Big. Massive. Men scuttle behind, dashing to haul the rubbish bins lining the street to the rear of the truck. The men, wearing bright orange vests, fling the bins' contents into the garbage truck. They make their way across the street, slamming the emptied bins onto the road side. But the house doesn't stir.

Ten minutes later a van comes. It appears grey in the weak light. It's the newspaper delivery. I wait in anticipation. It's nearly time. Headlights cut through the half-night. A boy appears from the far side of the van. His arms are full with rolled and wrapped newspapers. I can make out his little reflective yellow vest. He flings the newspapers. The news lands in a bush, on the lawn, anywhere. After six houses, his arms are empty and he returns to get more. I wonder if he knows who subscribed to what. My newspaper comes hurtling in to land into my bushes. The van goes down the street, the boy after it. Now I see the newspaper on the lawn of the house too. Soon. Very soon.

It's much brighter now. Clouds are flowing across a bluer sky. They have undersides of red, tops of black—they're on fire. An illusion. Maybe not. Where do clouds go if they don't spit on the ground? I can see more of the house now. Red bricks wrapped around the bay windows. The ones closer to the ground have a film of algae on it. Fifty-six bricks are affected. How much longer? I can't wait any more but it's all I can do.

By now the trees have colour and shape. There's a thin one, pointy, pale green. Some species of conifer. On its right is a gum tree, its narrow leaves droopy, just waiting to join the others on the ground. Both conifer and gum overshadow a walnut tree behind them. Its fruit have fallen onto the ground, green husk peeling. I feel like running across to pick them up. The grass beneath the trees is trimmed properly. By a hand held mower.

The door opens. A crack, then more. It's her. Always in the same white robe. My breath catches. I don't breathe as I watch her cross the lawn, slippers wiping away the morning dew, making slight depressions in the grass. She bends to pick up her paper. Her hair—very brown, very long—falls over, covering her head. They're chinked and mussed up from a night of sleep. The nape of her neck is exposed—fair skin, red in the dawn light. Her left hand flicks it all back in a motion I know so well. She stands. Her face is

turned to me. Her eyes stare right at me. I stiffen. Remain calm. Smile. No... she stares right through me. And she's gone.

She heads back to the house, playing her little game of stepping where her footprints are. She stops to bend over the plant with the white and pink blossoms. Leans close to sniff. I wish I knew what she smells like. Then back to the house. I spy a bit of brown carpet... then the door closes on me. A slap on the face. What can I do? Tomorrow... I'll introduce myself.

Ends

© 1994 Amos Kwok