

## Window for the Night – Samalmi, Year 11, WA

I find paradise in a window. Every night it is a different one, but I have worn this neighbourhood down and must seek anew. There is a little girl in a big house who now waits for me as the sun settles into its throne, sighing out a wind that rattles my bones. Her hand is warm, and her eyes are soft with care, but melancholy. She is a fallen angel.

I know because even the sunlight seems to favour her, draping a cloak of gold across her narrow shoulders. Her soft cheeks flush as winter's promise grazes her face, but the cold fellow does not linger long.

She waits for me by her open window, curtains billowing like unsettled things. The room behind her droops under the weight of its riches: embroidered tapestries and grand chandeliers that aid a monster in hiding his teeth. She is the only gold in her gilded manor.

The food she brings me is heavenly, buttered biscuits still boasting the heat of their creation and meat so tender I understand their love for their God. It is a taste beyond human frontiers. I wonder if the monster worships the God.

Most days, he comes home under the watchful eye of the moon, the sharp planes of his face illuminated a ghastly blue. His fancy car, a sleek machine like a panther, glides to a stop in their driveway. He has developed a ritual, long before I came to watch him. He straightens his jacket and flips his collar up just so; to hide the red mark blooming on his neck. He checks his face for blemishes in his car mirror, sometimes catching my eye. He ignores me, reaching for the cologne he keeps in his briefcase just for this occasion. Afterwards, he goes to open the front door. But a beautiful, tired woman opens it instead. Her smile is hopeful; I see the girl's gentle charm in the lines of her face. It drops as her husband walks past, muttering of 'work' and 'new deals' and 'goodnight, dear'.

I would feel bad for her if she hadn't grabbed me by the neck and thrown me across the street some time earlier. She does not need my pity anyway. She sees another fancy car stop in front of another big house. The man that emerges sways in a clumsy dance, there is a red lip stain on his pressed white shirt. The beautiful, tired woman shuts her door with relaxed shoulders; at least my husband isn't a cheating scum like Mary's, she thinks.

Anyway, I must leave this place. The little girl gets in trouble because of me and even a harsh hand does not stop her. I am evanescent; I am not destined to build a nest like these people. I will seek this city's south side today. There is no huge difference between a wide, manicured street bordered by Victorian-style manors and a cramped alleyway. People are strange; the good ones, with their soulful eyes and healing hands rough with hard won callouses, give the nice places to the bad ones. Who drop cigarettes still alight onto the grass, leaving their mess for the garbage men who come at night. Who pound the footbath with their kitten heels and sleek shoes like a gavel, kicking aside the rocks and limping kittens who had dared to cross their path.

As I wander away, the houses begin to shrink and flickering lamp posts replace imposing light structures. Professionally pruned fruit trees, like eyesores on large lawns, fade to brambles in weathered pots that can't be wrangled out, roots linked with the daisies and marigolds that hide in those thorny arms at night. The vines climb up crumbling brick, leaving the ground generously for the green rivers that crack the grey concrete like the pulsing veins of a goddess.

These areas are louder at night, but no more active. Two girls are stumbling home, knees weak but eyes bright behind the tears. They pull crumpled bank notes from the pockets of their ripped shorts, giddy at the thought of feeding their families. They do not mind where the money has come from. A body is easy to sell. A younger brother is hard to protect.

I follow them, they seem to glow in the endless night, beacons of the unfathomable hope that adores building homes in the smallest slivers of forgotten people. They separate at an intersection with a quiet promise to see each other tomorrow. The taller one takes the stairs two at a time to a tiny apartment. I scramble up the ledge to watch her. There is a young boy at the kitchen counter staring at the door like me. When it opens, he pretends to be deep in the textbook he has before him, muttering an indifferent greeting. The sister sniffs the air, then turns angrily to the young boy.

"Did you make something again? It smells like fish, very burnt fish." Her voice is a quiet hiss amongst the sleepy hush of a downtrodden city.

"What if I did?"

"Idiot! I was going to cook it today."

"Ow," she'd slapped him across the back of his head, "Jeez, if you keep this up I'll stay with Marie."

The girl snorts as she falls into an old armchair, "That's not the threat you think it is."

The brother catches smatters of purple bruises blooming on her neck before she sinks into the shadows. He gulps, ignoring the eyebrow arched in wait for a snarky reply.

"I'm going to bed, don't stay up late," He walks the few steps to the small sofa, curls himself into the familiar curves and sleeps in a blink. The sister moves quietly to my window; I do not have time to scamper away before she opens it. She glances at me, surprised, and rests a gentle hand on my back. In the other, she holds a cigarette, "We're quite alike, aren't we little thing?"

I tilt my head at her. She smiles affectionately, "You're a cat, I'm a dragon," she blows a whip of smoke into the darkness, "see? Probably second cousins, maybe thrice removed."

I lean into the dragon's side, glad for this window, a cradle, a cot, for the night.