

# Waiting

## a short story

The boy sat alone on the crumbling veranda. He wore frayed jeans and a shirt so faded, it was impossible to tell what colour it was originally. It was winter, and the only thing the boy had blocking the chill was his tangle of thick brown hair. He obviously did not care about his appearance, and his mother obviously didn't care either. The couch he was sitting on was ripped and neglected, with the inner stuffing leaking out. The boy's long, dirty legs dangled over the edge of the bare concrete. I tried to look at his face, but I could only see shadows. It was as though he was waiting for something. Something I could not see. Something I could not understand.

It struck me that all these days driving past on the way to school, I had never seen the boy before. I was familiar with the house; with the rotting wood propping up the roof, the broken windows, the wildly growing grass and the weeds that hid the rubbish and broken bottles. The only plant was the black, twisting wisteria that was suffocating the western side of the house. I looked at the dismal property from the car window every day.

I saw all this from the window of our Mercedes as we waited at the traffic lights on Crossing Street. Normally I sat on the right side of the back seat, but we were taking John's friend to school, so I sat on the left. I wondered why I had never noticed this boy sitting on the veranda of the housing trust home before. I'd travelled by hundreds of times before.

The next day, I sat on the left again. The boy was on the couch, in the same position, wearing exactly the same clothes. It was as though he hadn't moved. His face was in the shadows again. The morning was frosty, but he showed no signs of feeling the cold. The sun moved beyond the clouds, and I glimpsed the boy's face. His skin was dark, and his nose was long and narrow. Then I saw his eyes. They were brown and glazed over, almost lifeless. The boy was staring at something in the distance. I turned to look, but Mum accelerated through the traffic lights.

The third day, the boy was still there as we stopped at the traffic lights. Once again I followed his gaze. He was looking at a point above the housing trust buildings across the road. I twisted my head, but the roof of the car was in the way. I put down the automatic window and stuck my head out. Perhaps a plane was writing in the sky. But the sky was empty, except for distant rain clouds. I wondered who was living in the house with the boy. It was consistently dark inside. The air gushing through the window was cold and smelled slightly like sewage. My thoughts were interrupted.

"Mum, Adam is staring!" John yelled. Mum turned around from the driver's seat.

"John's right, Adam," she said.

"Can't you see the boy there, Mum?" I asked her.

"Where?" she asked looking around.

"Yeh, I don't see anyone," John added.

"He's there, sitting on that old coach on the porch, see," I said, pointing.

"Adam don't point," Mum yelled at me. She reached over to the back seat, grabbed my blazer collar and pulled me around so I was facing the front. A car behind us beeped because the light had gone green. Mum sped off. From then on, it was difficult for me to look at the boy. I sat on the right side for a few mornings, and Mum and John soon forgot about the incident. I am ashamed to say that after a week I had forgotten about the boy.

Six months later in the summer holidays Mike and Dean came over to my place. We were bored of playing World of Warcraft on the computer, so decided to walk to the shopping centre. It was when the houses became increasingly decrepit and I smelt the slightly fishy smell of the area, that I remembered the boy. A tingle of anticipation and fear travelled my spine. The boy was right there, still sitting on the couch. His jeans hung above his ankles now, and his discoloured shirt was stuck to his skin with sweat, exposing his scraggy [is there a word missing here?]. I slowed my pace. Dean and Mike pushed past, engaged in an in-depth conversation about whether Diablo III was better than Diablo II.

I stopped walking and looked at the boy, who was shaded slightly by the now green wisteria. I looked at his eyes; they appeared older than before. The boy sensed me staring, and moved his eyes to me. I froze on the spot. The boy stayed seated. We both looked at each other. The boy's facial expression began to change, and a strange struggle between the muscles of his face ensued. When the struggle finished, his expression had changed from a frown to a kind of painful upturning of the sides of his mouth.

It was only when Dean and Mike called and I walked away that I realised the boy was trying to smile. I suddenly felt embarrassed. Embarrassed about myself. Embarrassed that I had forgotten about the boy. He was still waiting for something. But what?

I was deep in thought at the shopping centre and disinterested in things I normally loved like computer games. All I could think about was the boy. Mike and Dean walked close to me on the return journey. As we walked past the boy, I gave him a little wave. His expression changed as he saw me. I noticed the wisteria had some purple flowers that I didn't notice before.

"What are you waving at Adam," Dean asked. I shrugged my shoulders.

That night, I lay awake, not because of the usual annoying mosquito, but because I could not get the boy's face out of my mind. When I had waved to him from across the road, his expression was questioning. I knew what he was asking. He was asking why I was afraid, why I was scared. I myself didn't know. The hours passed, and still I couldn't think of an excuse. Still, I was unable to fall asleep. It was 5am, and the sun was just rising when I decided what to do. I pulled on my sneakers and a shirt as my feet took me silently out the front door.

So here I am now. One house away from the boy's, at 5:30am in the morning. I tell myself I am not afraid, just a bit nervous. He is my age. He is the same as me. Exactly the same. He just hasn't been as lucky. I tell myself this as I begin walking down the boy's driveway. We are exactly the same. The boy is curled up on the couch, but I step on a twig and he jerks his head around. He instantly recognises me. He struggles out of his rotting seat. As he walks towards me I see his smile. Suddenly his eyes don't look so old. As we stumble into each others bodies in the semi dark, I realise what the boy had been waiting for. He had been waiting for someone, anyone, to come and help. He is not waiting anymore.

Monika Holmwood, YACSA young member



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