

Heat

by Laurie Dawson

I am sure my neighbors think I am eccentric at best and nuts more than likely. They are retired and spend many hours outside watering their lawns and tailoring them to a great degree. Once in a great while, when caught looking at me, they raise an arm in salutation. Although I have lived here for more than two years and come and go constantly, we have never spoken. I suppose it should make me feel safe. I wonder if they think it is odd that I readily open the door when my lover knocks, but will leave another person outside banging on the doors and windows for hours, without allowing that variety of penetration.

It looks like I am in danger of becoming a recluse. I met one once, over the Internet. He had established a career as a travel writer, and aside from being forced to go to distant lands where he knew no one, didn't really come out of his house much, except to get groceries and have the occasional meeting with a stranger for an hour or so. He had a great sense of humor and could argue admirably on the merits of working via the net, interacting with other humans through the electronic veil. His travel writings concentrated on the exotic insects and birds of different areas so even through the work venue, his contact with the rest of us was limited. Now I think I am following in his stead.

My lover always comes on time, sometimes ten minutes late or so, because of traffic. He is very private and doesn't carry a cell phone so I worry that he is stuck on a bridge, or trapped at work, or worse, that he has lost interest in me and can't think of the words to say. But then the knock comes and I hear the screen door being tried, and I see his handsome face inquiring as I unlock the glass screen door. I have a peephole that I never use, because humans being inquisitive, always look directly at the small glass to see if the light changes by any degree, indicating that someone has blocked the other side with their eye. So I stand there and listen, trying to intuit who is outside. I like to say that I live invisibly, right in the middle of everything. My home is an old refurbished 1930s grocery store, and my huge door opens directly onto the sidewalk. Literally hundreds of people walk by each day, cutting the corner by ducking under my awning. The door opens directly into an intersection, and the two brick walls that are both flanked by busy streets, have enormous windows in the middle of them. The windows are so big it is impossible to find blinds that fit so I hang three sets to cover them. I also have three separate layers over the windows and still feel this is not enough to ensure privacy. It is so obviously a grocery store, with the enormous door through which you could wheel any kind of produce cart or box, and with the windows set right at waist level, so as to attract customers with displays. The awning is held up by an iron pole. It is the perfect place for a business, and I live here.

Most people think that my home is a business that is attached somehow to the doctor's office next door, so I become invisible. Pizza delivery people miss it and have to call; door to door salespeople don't stop here. I hear the conversations of hundreds yet they have no idea that life resides behind the walls. I must give molecularly specific directions to visitors and still they have to call and ask. It is so obvious that it is not there.

My hands are still shaking from the second visitor of this hot evening. My sweet lover had gone off to his busy life and I had the glass screen up to try and get some air to circulate. My door was

open several inches. Since this was built to be a store, it has none of the comforts of modern insulation and becomes an oven on hot days. There is one small street level window that opens several inches and then two other windows in a more recessed room, 12 feet up that were open to get air as well. This place is long and deep, with four doors that go to back areas of this old building that takes up one third of the block. I never try to open them.

It was getting late when a car pulled up outside, a Volkswagen I think by the engine, and stopped. I heard someone get out and walk up to my door. They tried the screen door, which was locked, then reached in and knocked on the wooden door. My heart started to pound. The windows are open I thought, and so is the damn glass screen. The person stood there for a while, then walked around the corner to the small open window and reached in. Reached in! Do normal people do that? I heard the blinds rustle as someone's hand moved them about, but all they must have seen was yet another layer of window treatments. Then they returned to the door and knocked again. This went on for one hour. A female voice called out, "hello?" several times. My neighbors were observing, I am certain. Every time I thought she had gone, the knock came again. Her shadow was cast against the East window as she walked to and fro, up and down one street, then up and down the other, always returning to knock. All I could do was freeze, as any movement would surely indicate that someone was home and then she would never leave. Minutes went by and finally footsteps walked away from the door, to the car. She drove away and I never saw who it was. More important was to try and calm my heart. It's hopeless I thought, I am turning into the 'net travel writer, only he has a house with a yard that no one would dare crawl through to push their hands through his windows and fight with his layers! Why didn't I just open the door and ask her what she was up to? Or yell through the door to go away? Don't animals also just freeze when they sense some kind of danger, as if the absence of movement will make them safe?

After several hours, the sound of the car came back. Stunning! There had been no note left on the door or anything because I went out to take out the garbage. She was back, knocking on the door and calling out. God! Now I would have to leave the damn window open all night and the glass screen up. Knocking on doors has always made me sweat, ever since I was young. I was the eldest child and in charge of my younger siblings when my parents went out to drink. No one cared in those days that a seven year old baby-sat 3 younger children, it was considered normal. One night someone knocked on the door and I thought it was my parents, too drunk to negotiate the key into the lock. It was my step grandfather instead, looking very disheveled and weaving back and forth. I had never seen him like that before. He asked for my mother several times, not understanding my response that she was not in. He insisted on coming in and waiting for her. He was belligerent, throwing things at me and using language I had not heard before. The last thing I recall was dodging items as they flew past my head, and him insisting that I come near him. After that it went black for a very long time.

I grew up, got strong, got smart, got away from all of them yet still live invisibly. My hands still shake when someone raps on the door.