**Dwelling**

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The trial unfolds like a real life game of Clue: the Filipino, under the viaduct, with a 10” kitchen knife. Guilt already established. We jurors are here to determine the degree. Did he steal or borrow the murder weapon? Did he intend to brandish or thrust? Can the testimony of indigents and itinerants be trusted?

Before we were selected, the judge quizzed us about our views on homelessness and drug addiction. Did we see people or problems? Could we keep our minds open? I was dressed in my work uniform of slacks, a silk blouse, and a jacket for the A/C. I’m not from Hawaii, and I’m Haole (white), but maybe working in a Honolulu historical museum cancelled out the usual deterrents to selection. Some of the jurors work for social agencies that daily face what the rest of us prefer not to see.

The prosecutor shows us slides of the victim’s prone body. The inch-long slits in his neck and back where the knife went in, where the blood spurted out. (How much force does it take to ram a kitchen knife, point first, into flesh? Are my kitchen knives sharp enough to pierce a human neck? To skewer a diaphragm, aorta, and spleen?) We hear that the deceased was named Darylle Wong. He was 59 years old, suffered from schizophrenia, was chronically homeless, and was known to use and sell drugs. We aren’t told his ethnicity. We never see his face.

We view floor plans and photos of the victim’s “dwelling” and hear that he lived under the viaduct for seven years. He constructed shelves and a bedframe out of discarded shipping pallets and crafted a rug out of sheets of cardboard he seamed together with duct tape. He had a Mickey Mouse comforter on his bed. A curtain but no door. In this space where he made a home, perhaps he removed his shoes indoors like housed Hawaiʻi people do. I wonder who inherited his furnishings and space when he was gone. If he hovers there still.

The witnesses identify themselves as the victim’s neighbors and friends. A couple who resides under the bridge and beside the crime site are the owners of the knife, gone missing until it turned up next door, dripping blood. A man from Seattle says he sometimes parked his bike with Darylle but kept his clothes in a public locker. The witnesses speak softly and look at the floor, as if wishing to be invisible. They are voices from a community that talks only to itself. I wonder how many times I’ve driven over that bridge, clueless about a village existing underneath. How the legal term “dwelling” differs from the way the newscasters say “encampment.” How witnesses calling each other “neighbor” implies more than proximity.

The defendant is in his early twenties and has an interpreter who whispers in his left ear. We learn that his parents came to Hawaiʻi to provide opportunities for their children, but this one, their eldest, failed at English and found trouble. That once he took to the streets, his family turned him away. I search the visitor benches and see a middle-aged couple holding hands. They stare straight ahead. I imagine tears in the father’s eyes, prayers on the mother’s lips. They have sacrificed so much to be in the glow of America’s promise. At the end of the day, we will all step out into the same brilliant sunshine and balmy sea breezes.

At the end of the day, I will return to my office in a restored palace then head home to my remodeled condo with its sweeping view of the ocean. The defendant, less than a mile away, will dwell in a cell the size of my bathroom, with a cutout of sky. The city beneath the city will haunt my dreams.