

Robert Windorf

The People Across the Street

There aren't many houses on our street – maybe six or seven. I've never actually counted, although Monica and I have been living here for more than twenty years. We live in the old green house. That's what some of our neighbors call it. Next door lives Arthur, a middle-aged bachelor, and his immigrant mother, Rosalie. We don't see much of her, especially during summer, when she sits on an easy chair with swollen eyes glued to a TV while hiding in her air-conditioned cocoon. But, I can set my watch every workday morning when Arthur noisily bolts out of the house, with a cigarette dangling from his frozen lower lip, to catch the arriving train at our station. Luckily for him, it's only about a football field length away.

About five or six years ago, a newlywed couple moved into the grey house across the street. The husband – Roger, I believe it was – helped me to dig out our car one brutal winter afternoon. Monica would occasionally see Debra, the wife, when she used to change trains at Jamaica. I don't think Arthur had ever met them. He'd just call them, "the people across the street". That couple moved away. I think it was two summers ago. The grey house was vacant for some time until this March. That's when a similar couple moved in. At the time I thought it was a bit odd that a large moving van had been parked in front of that house for a few days.

I saw Arthur last Thursday afternoon mowing his lawn. He stopped to ask me if I knew who had bought the grey house. I replied that I didn't know. He shrugged between two quick drags on his cigarette and said, "They're just some people across the street." As I walked away, I could hear his familiar hacking smoker's cough as he restarted the mower.