

Diego Luna

THE AWAKENING



He came home reduced in body and fortified in spirit. He'd left home to find work to support his family. He'd planned it for years and everything was supposed to be perfect. In many ways, it was not. But ultimately it was the cancer. His cancer reduced him to a stick and the therapy wasted him further. A year later, he was without speech and minute motor control completely. He didn't want to pass in a strange land where people were unlike people, he indicated. So he was brought home, where people and nature had a postcard quality. O how I wished his lips could form sweet words of reconciliation, how I wished his return was under different circumstances—but they could not, and it was not.

It all gave me pause. What's this life I'm living? I thought, as I sat there at his side daily. He lay there inching towards the unknown. I was frightened, very frightened indeed, by this question for I had no answers. Plus, I began to feel that death was a silent figure lurking in the shadows waiting to pounce on me. It was as if I could feel its dark presence just behind me as I went about. I felt that any day now I could blink and be in my brother's position—maybe not the exact, but dying at a tender age nonetheless. My relief came from recalling, in between his visitors, the magnificent times we had as children.

He'd made our growing up some great times, indeed. We're from a family of humble means, you see, but his natural skills brought joy. I remember his ability to make the highest flying and sweetest singing kites. I remember his guava wood tops that

refused to split from the piercing of the sharpened nails of other tops, and his box trucks that mirrored Lennox's busses. Then there were the wood-knot balls he'd used against the cypress-wood cricket bats. The bats with the bicycle-tube cushioned handles. I remember the gummier sailing boats that voyaged across Meldrum Pond, Big Pond and Dover Bay. In between him pointing to the one marked passage of his book to visitors, I said these things to him and he shook his head and his eyes welled with tears.

But as adults we had grown apart. Like most creative people, he didn't always tow the line. This landed him in trouble mostly at home but sometimes at school and resulted in some straps from our mom, which changed him little. I was, conversely, as straight as a pin: I did—not!—tow the line, the line towed me! It was these differences that served as a catalyst for our conflict over inheritance, which soon drove us apart. It was stupid though: who should inherit what property is so very small in the overall scheme of things.

I envied him. Now that I am looking back through the clairvoyant mirror that is time I see it plainly. You see, I recall meeting a man from mainland, Grenada, who on hearing that I was his brother proceeded to fete me to the limit of his means. The reason was some previous experience of kindness and trusting that my brother had shown this stranger. I had only tried, desperately, to be appreciated as him. Yet again, there were his architectural masterpieces. He'd bucked father's career path for him and went into construction. His mastery of the craft and natural talents earned him the reputation for creating the finest roofs. His masterpieces of residential buildings unlike most withstood the wrath of the recent hurricanes. He had a great legacy, a legacy that I could only dream about. Perhaps it was these things, since I'd had acquired much property on my own, which had filled my sails in fussing over inheritance. I said this to him and he shook his head as *our* eyes welled. It was inevitable: I suppose; that his illness had re-cemented our bond.

The same man, who'd feted me years before on the mainland, came just before he passed. It was for this man he'd last opened his book. It was for this man he'd last pointed with a feeble finger the marked passage. The man, who understood the gravity of a dying man teaching what might be his last lesson, tearfully read the passage out loud:

Remember now thy creator in the days
of thy youth, while the evil days come not,
nor the years draw nigh when thou shall say,
I have no pleasures in them

The reading completed, a serene smile marked my brother's face and he exhaled his final breath.

Now that time had passed, I see that in dying he thought me how to live. His exodus gave me unwritten scrolls in the shortness of life and the fullness of living. I know now that next to love the most positive thing that happens to a person is death. That death is not to be feared but embrace it with a might; that I should equate life and death for if held the same there are no existential questions. It would be easier from now, quite easier in fact, for my troubles will be lessened as I trod through this life I'm living. And whenever I remember him hammering on the roof tops, sailing boats, making tops, or bowling his left-handed medium pace his life's lessons will forever hold fast in my heart as the unmovable residential homes he built.

Still, I wish my enlightenment had come by other ways; that our story had happened otherwise—but, it had not.