



Source: Kimi Yoshino, 'War-battered city rolls out red carpet for film festival', *LA Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 29/12/07.

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The table, piled with clock radios, bakes in the afternoon sun. It lies just beyond the shade of the verandah, where two women, with matching black ponytails, sit and slowly peel and eat lychees. I ask them how much the clock radios are and they gesture to a gangly man at the end of the driveway, dusting off the arms of a green velvet chair. It's his garage sale, and they're just sitting there, soaking in the stretched hours of Saturday afternoon, eating their lychees.

'Does this work?' I point at my chosen clock radio, an old one with numbers that flip over.

'Yes it works, it's five dollars.'

'I've wanted one of these for a while.'

We talk about how today is my lucky day.

I ask him about a strange metal contraption inside a smart, flecked case and he tells me it's a knitting machine.

'I bought it because I thought the case was groovy. It's impossible to work out without the instructions.'

'Nothing, sir, is impossible. I'll take it as well.'

\* \* \*

'Wake up! I bought us something.'

Although Alex has been asleep for days, he wakes up in a second. He stares at the groovy case I've set down beside him, with a look as if he had expected it to be there all along. He needs to spend most of his time asleep, like I need to spend most of my time awake. If we're both awake at the same time, after a few hours glasses start breaking and the bars on the windows get very hot and the light bulbs pop. If we sleep at the same time, things start melting.

'I had a dream that I was climbing a hill, with you, but you were a red bird,' he says. 'The red bird was dead, in a plastic bag, with tags around its ankles. What do you think it means?'

'I think it means we should swap.'

'Swap?'

'I sleep, you stay awake. Did you see what was at the top of the hill?'

'Yes, it was a giant clock radio, one of those old ones with numbers that flip over.'

I hand him the bag with the clock in it and get into bed.

It is not difficult to fall asleep after having been awake for three months. As soon as I shut my eyes I start dreaming,

but it isn't like normal sleep, the sleep I remember from before I met Alex. I can hear the clicking of the knitting machine and the sound of the numbers flipping over in the clock radio. This is the background to my dreams. My dreams all take place inside a large cuckoo clock, where my mission is to slay the cuckoo and put myself in its place.

I am climbing a chain with a bag of poisoned seed, listening to the cuckoo ruffle its feathers above me. My arms are scarred with peck marks and I am wearing an eye patch. What I had thought would be an easy mission was proving difficult; the cuckoo knew what I was up to and slept with one eye open, awaiting my next attempt. A dragonfly had brought me the poisoned seed in return for the silver ring Alex had given me the first, and only time we'd had sex. The tiles had started sliding off the roof and all the trees in the garden caught on fire. We had not tried it again.

I'd been sad giving up the ring but-

'Wake up!'

I open my eyes. The room is much emptier than it had been before I went to sleep. One wall, which used to be hung with my collection of paintings of big eyed children, now features the knitting machine. It hangs up there like the skeleton of a long, metal fish.

'I've worked out a way we can both be awake,' Alex says.

'I had a dream that I was inside a cuckoo clock, and I had to kill the cuckoo,' I say. 'I had to give your ring to a dragonfly.'

'You should have argued with the dragonfly. He would probably have accepted a couple of buttons.'

'It doesn't matter now. What have you done?'

'I've loaded the knitting machine with information about us. It knows our heart rates, and the number of breaths and times we blink our eyes per minute when awake. I think this will be sufficient to channel our combined energy. I've spent the last month collecting balls of wool, see?'

Under the machine are crates of wool, of all different colours.

'According to my calculations, we have enough wool for six months of being awake together.'

'What is it going to knit?'

'That, I don't know. That we will have to find out.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Vanessa Berry.*