



So Roses and Joy

by Ar Grey

[Home](#)

[Spring-Summer 2012](#)

[Winter-Spring 2012](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

I walked into the shop right behind my mom. I usually walked right behind her whenever we went anyplace. I was shy, is why. Well, at four, why not? I was small, even for a girl, and maybe that's why I was so shy. But at four we could indulge our little fears and enjoy our little sanctuaries in ways grown-ups can't, much as they want to but can't. They've got no one to hide behind.

Even at four I understood a lot, and was grateful and only wished I understood more, everything. I never wondered if knowing everything was a good or a bad thing. We hide behind those who shield us and pity those with no one to shield them, from other children or from ourselves, and even pity those with no one to shield. We all need someone to shield, yes we do.

My mother spoke to a woman, about her own age I guessed, who stood on the other side of the counter. If I stood on my very tip-toes I could just barely see over the top of the counter. She was a very shy lady, I could tell. She wouldn't look up at my momma but smiled self-deprecatingly (I learned that word later, a lot later) and bowed low and her head lower the whole time, repeating every word my mother said in broken English with a very strong accent, Chinese I supposed:

"Yesss. Fried rice. Yesss. Moo Shu chicken. Yesss. Wonton Soup. Yesss. Very good miss. Ready ten minutes." And she bowed again, never looking my momma in the eye, not looking at her at all. I didn't realize 'till much later that there are reasons other than shyness why someone would not dare look you in the eye.

The shy-maybe-something-else lady behind the counter risked a quick glance at me, though. I saw it, but she very fast looked away, afraid, I think, that my momma'd notice and disapprove, be angry, maybe take her business someplace else.

The woman behind the counter spent her days... long days into late evenings seven days a week 52 weeks a year, I understood... behind the counter with a view of the world passing her by, starkly visible through the huge window of the shop-front. I caught her watching with furtive glances the world pass by from behind that counter in the in-between times... in-between walk-in customers, in-between phone orders, in-between filling orders, in-between all that kept her and her family, in-between all that frightened her so much she wouldn't, couldn't, look up and look it in the eye.

Fragile they were, her customers, and skittish... and free. So free, her customers were... to go where they pleased, to shop wherever and for whatever they pleased, to eat whatever and whenever they pleased... free of least thought of her and hers. Such do-as-you-please freedom astonished... terrified... her. I could see it and feel it and by every sense tell. Never knowing such freedom herself, I suppose. I suppose I could understand such a thing... but no, I can't, not in a million years. I understood to pray almighty thanks for such ignorances.

There was another thing I did not understand... that sometimes, not looking someone in the eye could mean something other than shyness or fear. I saw it sometimes when a customer ordered... and spoke to the shy lady-on-the-other-side-of-the-counter as if she were one of those boxes, one of those talk-here-to-order boxes, like you see in fast-food drive-up car lanes. No person there at all, just a box to which you issue orders.

But anyway, as I was saying... after a while of going to the Chinese take-out place I realized that everything was 'ready ten minutes', and it was only years later that I realized she only knew to say 'ten minutes' because it was about all the English she knew. That and 'yesss'. Some things I learned so early and some so late, and I sometimes puzzle over that even now and wonder why that is or should be.

Anyway, as I was saying, if I stood on my very tippy toes I could *just* see over the countertop. And always... *always*... there he was.

He was very shy too. More shy than I was, I quickly realized. My eyes, barely visible above the countertop, stared at him. For a while he didn't notice, didn't see me, so busy he was. At least, I think that was why. Are there other reasons people don't see or don't notice? Yes. I was sure even then, but didn't know what those reasons could be.

He had very short-cut hair, straight as straight could be, thick on his head. It looked so soft I wanted to reach over and touch his head, pet him like a kitten. That's when he looked up and saw me watching him.

He stared at me a long instant not realizing what he was looking at. Then, suddenly understanding that I was a little girl looking at him, he suddenly, quickly, shot back to what he was doing. So disciplined he was that he didn't once look back up the whole time we were in the shop. I know. I watched him the whole time, to see.

Later, it dawned on me. It wasn't discipline, though that too I was sure, as much as... *shyness*.

That was something I knew something about... *shyness*.

But there are other reasons people won't look at you. It took me a very long time to understand that, and what some of those reasons are.

Ar Grey grew up in Brooklyn, NY, and--anticipating that writing fiction would not likely afford a living wage--graduated from State University with a science degree. Subsisting frugally, and working thirty (long) years, Grey managed to retire and now devotes full-time to writing.

Copyright 2012, Ar Grey. © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.