



To the Rescue

After we had a story about a 'false' emergency with an elderly neighbour last week, perhaps this is a good time to visit an episode where the emergency was real ...

When I bought this building around eleven years ago, the main 'feature' that drew me to it was the room down in the lower level by the river. Although it was completely unfinished - nothing more than a bare concrete box actually - I thought that I would be able to turn it into a pleasant workroom. I took out the original glass doors and replaced them with a solidly constructed wooden wall, in which there are four very large windows, reaching up to the ceiling level. This gives me both good light for my work, as well as a clear view of the property across the river.

All of the land within view over there is owned by one family, and most of it is unused. This suits me just fine as I would much rather have a view of trees and open land than buildings. That land is higher than on this side of the river, and although the Tamuras - the family over there - have a wide flat space on which their home is built, there is point where the land falls off sharply towards the river, in a quite steep slope. Steep enough to have possibly proved fatal on a day a few years ago ...

My windows face the slope, on which there are all kinds of shrubs and trees scattered about, and I can also see Tamura-san's driveway and garden. One day I happened to look up from my work, and noticed that a 'little old lady' had entered the property and was walking up the driveway. I thought nothing of this, assuming that it was a visitor dropping in, but as I idly watched, she didn't make the normal turn towards the house entrance, but came across the rougher ground, directly towards the place where the land drops off.

She seemed quite old, and walked irregularly, taking her steps slowly one at a time. She came closer and closer to the edge of the slope. There was no point in yelling to warn her; my voice would of course not carry through my windows and up to where she was. I then watched in shock as she came to the edge, took another step, and went straight over.

She tumbled head-over-heels a couple of times, and then came to rest in the dirt, motionless. I of course dropped my tools and ran straight out the door. I quickly scrambled down my ladder, waded across the river in my stocking feet, then clambered up the other embankment and scrambled up the muddy slope to where she lay.

She was on her back, arms waving feebly like some kind of overturned beetle. Her face had apparently hit a soft patch of earth and was caked with it, and her mouth was full of dirt too. I used my fingers and a corner of my shirt to get her mouth clear, and as soon as I could see she was breathing, I left her for a moment, ran up the slope over to the house, and banged (and yelled) madly on the front window to attract their attention. Tamura-san poked his head out and I asked him to call an ambulance, and then got his wife to bring some towels and a washcloth.

A couple of minutes later, there was a real crowd gathered around - as I guess I must have yelled pretty loudly. A couple of ladies helped me with the cleaning, and a very short time later we heard the sound of the approaching ambulance. Just before it arrived, a lady pushed her way through the crowd, bent over our pa-

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tient, and suddenly tried to grab her arms and pull her upright, saying something like, "Let's get you back to your room ...". We instantly stopped her from doing this, as who knows what bones might have been broken.

The ambulance then arrived, the professionals took over, and a minute later they were gone, and it was all over. I headed back home to change out of my soaked and mud-caked clothes and return to work.

An interesting thing happened a few hours later; I had a visit from the police. They asked to come into my workroom, so that they could 'see what I had seen' as the episode developed. They asked me to go over the sequence of events, and asked me repeatedly whether or not I had seen anybody else together with the elderly lady. "Did you see anybody guide her towards the dangerous place, or push her?" I hadn't of course, and gave my opinion that it seemed to be a case of the lady simply not being clearly aware of just where she was, or where she was going.

But the fact they asked such a thing, and so intently, makes me wonder just what kind of episodes really do happen out there sometimes ...

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