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The storm hit when it was still dark outside.

Malcolm awoke at 4 AM with a full bladder and an empty stomach. He relieved himself and went downstairs to rummage through the kitchen for something—anything!—to eat. There was, of course, some leftover spaghetti in a Tupperware bowl. He also found a package of Swiss cheese, a package of sliced turkey and two jars of pickles, in addition to a vast array of dressings, condiments, and sauces.

After he found a container of sauerkraut and a still-full bottle of Thousand Island dressing, Malcolm decided to construct a turkey Reuben. A *toasted* turkey Reuben, in fact.

As he sat at the kitchen table reading an article about the excavation of King Herod's tomb in Jerusalem in an old copy of *National Geographic*, he munched his sandwich and thought about those long-dead people who built the vast edifice that was only now being unearthed after centuries. It seemed odd that a king's intact tomb would somehow end up underground, just beneath a large city, and that no one would have any idea it was there for two thousand years.

How much stuff is buried in this world and we just walk all over it, oblivious

to what is lying just beneath the surface? he thought.

A jagged bolt of lightning shook him out of his reverie.

It danced across the horizon, miles away, stabbing at his retinas. A low rumble of thunder came next, rolling across river and marsh like the guttural growl of some unseen predator.

Howling winds drove sheets of rain across the river, raindrops pelting the metal roof like ball bearings.

The storm took more than an hour to grind its way inland.

As the storm's trailing edges trickled water across the rooftop, Malcolm realized that he was sleepy again. He folded up the *Geographic*, belched loudly, and clicked off the lights over the kitchen table. He retired to the sofa in the den to take a nap.

Malcolm was startled and a little disoriented when the doorbell rang just a few hours later. It was the gray half-light of early morning, and for a brief moment he had no idea where he was. Sitting up, he realized that he was in the den. He glanced at the wall clock; it was a few minutes after seven.

Did I hear a doorbell? Or did I dream that?

And then the doorbell rang again. More insistently this time.

Malcolm ran his fingers through his hair and got up to answer the door.

Gazing through the peephole, he saw a policeman in a rain-spattered poncho looking at his watch.

Malcolm opened the door.

"Yes, officer? Did you find him?"

The policeman appeared puzzled.

"Find who?"

"The guy who hit my car."

"This isn't about a car, sir. It's about a neighbor. Do you mind if I come in?"

"Of course."

Malcolm opened the door.

The cop's poncho dripped all over the Oriental rug in the entrance

foyer. He removed his waterlogged hat and set it on the table. His emerald eyes flashed at Malcolm as he whipped out a spiral-bound notebook.

“Do you know a man named John Pendleton?” the cop asked.

“I do. He’s my neighbor.”

“Have you had any recent disagreements with him?”

“No, not really. I mean, he has this dog, Snoopy. He’s a Basset hound. Barks a lot. We’ve had a couple of differences over that, but that’s it.”

“Did you call his home the other night and complain about the dog’s barking?”

“I did. It was 3 AM. Really, though, it’s not a big deal. John’s a good guy. He’s just . . . well, he’s lazy. Sleeps like a damn log. The dog was keeping me awake and I felt like I needed to call and let him know about it.”

“Did you threaten the dog?”

“What?”

The cop put the spiral notebook down on the table and looked Malcolm straight in the eye.

“I said ‘Did you threaten his dog?’ Did you tell him that he’d better do something about his dog’s barking or you’d have to?”

“I didn’t say that! Well, not exactly, but . . . what’s going on here?”

“Someone killed the Pendletons’ dog. This morning, apparently,” the cop said.

Malcolm felt a cold chill run down the back of his neck.

“My God,” he said. “How . . . I mean, to kill a family pet, that’s . . . that’s *awful*.”

“The animal wasn’t just killed, Dr. King. It was eviscerated. Someone cut the poor thing’s throat and removed the lungs, the heart, the eyes, the intestines, and the liver. Not only that, but they left the organs displayed around the dog’s slaughtered body in the family gazebo, in the back yard. The Pendleton’s daughter found the animal this morning. She’s inconsolable.”

Malcolm felt a potpourri of turkey and sauerkraut burbling up into his gullet.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” he mumbled, placing his hand over

his mouth.

“You’re a surgeon, aren’t you, Dr. King?”

“Yes.”

“Know anatomy pretty well?”

“Yes, but . . . wait a minute! There’s no way I’d ever even think about doing something like that! I mean, that dog was a pain in the ass, but I’d never kill the thing, and certainly not like that! I’ve got a dog myself!”

“Look, I know that you’re a respected member of the community. We’re just following up on all of our leads. I hope you understand,” said the policeman.

Malcolm felt his anger subside. He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Of course,” he said.

“Look, one of the detectives will be by a little later for a more formal statement. You’ll be available?” the cop asked. He picked up his hat and notebook.

“I will. We’re not going to church today. I’ve been out of town.”

The policeman moved toward the door.

“Thanks for your cooperation, Dr. King. We’ll be in touch.”

The two men shook hands. Malcolm closed the door softly as he left, latching it shut with a *click*.

“Who was that?”

Amy was standing in her bathrobe at the top of the stairs. Light was streaming around her from the window on the landing. Despite all that had gone on that morning, Malcolm could not help but admire his wife’s slim silhouette.

“The police. Somebody killed the Pendletons’ dog.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

Malcolm shook his head.

“God, that’s horrible,” she said.

“The cop came by here because I called them and complained about the dog barking the other night.”

“Does that mean you’re a suspect?”

“He said he was just following up on all leads.”

“Well, that’s crazy. You call and complain about a dog barking and now you’re a pet murderer?”

Amy sat down on the landing.

“Amy, it’s terrible. The cop said they cut the dog open and removed the organs.”

“Who could do that to an animal? It’s sick,” she said, glancing around the foyer. “Where’s Daisy?”

“I guess she’s in Mimi’s room.”

“I’m going to check on her,” Amy said, getting up.

Malcolm glanced at the grandfather clock in the hallway. It was 7:42 AM.

“I’ll come get her and take her outside in just a minute. Let me just give Ben a quick call to see if he knows anything about this,” he said.

Malcolm grabbed his cell and hit Ben Adams’s number on speed dial.

“Ben?”

“Hey, Mal. I got your e-mail last night. Just haven’t had time to look things up over the weekend.”

“No sweat. That’s not really why I’m calling. Sorry to call you so early on a Sunday. Are you at work?”

“Not yet. Why?”

“A uniformed officer came by here and told me that y’all were investigating a crime in my area. Neighbor’s dog was killed. He said the animal was eviscerated—had organs displayed all around it. They found it in a gazebo in the back yard. Know anything about that? Family’s name is Pendleton.”

“Good Lord. You know them?”

“Just from the neighborhood.”

“Well, I’ve heard nothing so far. That probably means no people were killed. I’ll make a few phone calls and call you back.”

The two men hung up.

“Daisy’s okay,” Amy called from upstairs. “She was in Mimi’s

room. You coming up to get her?”

“Yeah,” Malcolm said. “I’m just waiting for Ben to call me back.”

The cell rang as Malcolm was halfway up the stairs.

“Mal?” Ben said, hoarsely.

“Yep.”

“This is weird. We just got the call about the Pendletons a few minutes ago. The family found the dog this morning and called 9-1-1. When did you say the cop came to see you?”

“A little after seven,” Malcolm said. “Maybe 7:20 or so.”

“We didn’t even know about it then—in fact, nobody did. The family didn’t even *find* the dog until around 7:30. Was this guy really a cop?”

Malcolm’s head reeled.

“I . . . I *thought* so.”

“Mal, did the guy who came to see you this morning show you a badge? Did he flash any ID or tell you his name?”

“No,” Malcolm said. “None of the above.”

“Then he was not one of us. Self-identification is standard operating procedure for our department, and none of our cops would just forget to do that. And you were right—the dog was cut all apart. No one knew about that, yet, at the station house. I talked to the guy on site. He’s a buddy of mine. He was shocked when I asked him about it. They had not reported that little detail to anyone yet.”

“Do you think . . .?”

Malcolm stopped. His words caught in his throat, the gorge coming up into his mouth once again.

“Mal, that guy may have been the person who killed your neighbor’s dog.”

Daisy had clambered downstairs, panting, her nails clicking on the hardwood steps. As soon as she hit the bottom of the stairs, the old dog stopped panting and looked around, sniffing the air. She started whining. Her rear legs began shaking, tail tucked between her legs.

And then Daisy began to howl.

“Mal?” Amy called from upstairs. “Is the dog okay?”

“Are you there?” said Ben, his voice filtered through the airwaves. But Malcolm didn’t answer either of them. He couldn’t. Malcolm’s cell phone was lying on the entrance foyer table. He had run into the bathroom to throw up.