

The Intruder

Something woke Terry Mathews. The digital clock read 3:15 a.m. Terry glanced at her sleeping husband and settled back on her pillow, listening—only country sounds; a welcome change from the cacophony of Brooklyn.

She heard it again—a thump coming from downstairs. She shook Jim’s arm.

“Wha—mmmph?”

“Shh.” She clamped her hand over his mouth. “Listen.”

“Was I snoring?” He yawned and started to turn over, his bulk straining the bedsprings of the antique bed.

“Someone’s in the house,” she whispered.

Instantly awake, Jim bolted upright and reached for the bedside lamp.

“Don’t turn on the light.”

“How d’ya expect me t’go downstairs in the dark?”

“I don’t expect you to go downstairs. Call 911.”

“It’ll take ‘em at least twenny minutes to get out here. We’re not in Brooklyn anymore. We could be dead by the time they get here.”

Another thump.

“Did you hear that?”

“I heard it. I’m goin’ down.” He swung his legs over the side of the bed and began to rise.

Terry tugged at his arm. “You can’t.”

“Why can’t I?”

“You’re not dressed.”

“I’m not plannin’ on invitin’em t’tea.”

“Put on shorts at least.”

Grumbling, Jim picked up his discarded shorts and hobbled into them. “How come the dog ain’t barkin’?”

“I don’t know.” She paused. “I bet they knocked him out with something.”

“You watch too many crime shows.” He started toward the bedroom door.

“Wait! I’m coming too.” Terry stood up and straightened her nightie.

“No. You stay here.”

“I will not. I refuse to be murdered in my bed.” Terry reached under the nightstand and picked up the maglite from the lower shelf.

“Take this.” She shoved it under his arm.

“Whaddya expect me t’do with that, shine’im t’death?”

“No. Hit him with it.”

“Arrgh.” He pushed Terry behind him as he tiptoed forward. He stopped abruptly nearly toppling Terry who was as close as his shadow.

“Judas Priest, Terry. You left that damned footstool out in the middle of the floor again.” He bent over and rubbed his shin.

“Shh. Why don’t you look where you’re going?”

“I’m not a dad-blasted cat, dammit. I can’t see in the dark.”

“I think we should call 911.”

“And tell ‘em what—I hear somethin’ downstairs and my dog’s not barkin’ because I think they drugged ‘im?” he said, mimicking her singsong voice.

“No need to be nasty, Jim,” she huffed.

“Don’t get your panties in a wad.” He cocked his ear toward the open door. “I don’t hear anything now.”

“They’re dragging something across the floor. I wonder – it must be –Oh God, Grandma’s silver—it’s in one of the unpacked boxes. Ahh, I’m going to faint.” She clutched her chest.

“Always the drama queen.” Jim grabbed her arms and shook her, tossing her head like a rag doll. “You’re not gonna faint. You’re too heavy fer me to lift, so get over it.” When they reached the top of the stairs Terry stopped and grabbed Jim’s arm.

“For cripes sake, Terry; you’re stabbing me with those claws a yours.”

“Wait. They might be armed. I read in the paper where a burglar shot the husband when the man resisted.”

“That guy was an old duffer.”

“And what’re you—Superman?” she asked in a hoarse whisper.

“I spent thirty years on the docks. It ain’t for panty-waists.”

“Watch the fourth step. It creaks.” She huddled against him, her fingers locked in the band of his shorts.

“Don’t push me, woman.”

“I’m not pushing.” They skirted the fourth step and slunk down the rest of the stairs; Terry close enough to be Jim’s second skin. As they reached the bottom step, Jim raised his arm and held the Maglite above his head, poised to advance and strike.

“Huh!” Terry’s hand flew to her mouth, her eyes wide with fright.

“What?”

“The light’s on in the kitchen. See?” She pointed to the beam of light at the base of the kitchen door. “They’ll see you as soon as you open the door.”

“Hmm. I know—the element of surprise. I’ll crash through the door and knock ’em over.”

“And if they’re not in standing in front of the door—?”

“You got a better idea?”

“I’ll stand on one side of the door, you stand on the other.”

“Yeah—and then?”

“I’ll— I’ll—scream. When he comes through, you bash ’im in the head.”

“Vicious little thing, ain’t ya?” He smirked, a look of pride flashed across his face. A muffled noise from the kitchen refocused his attention.

“Spouse there’s more than one?” Terry “I dunno. I’ll do something.”

They positioned themselves on either side of the door, Terry clutching her nightdress to her chest, Jim poised like a ballplayer, ready to strike.

“Okay, let ’er loose.”

Terry froze, her eyes wide with fright.

“Well—what’re ya waitin’ for?”

“What if it doesn’t work?”

“We go to Plan B.”

“What’s Plan B?”

“Haven’t figured it out yet. Come on, woman. Give it all ya got!”

She drew in her breath and expelled a lengthy, chilling, scream. All hell broke loose, the intruder burst through the door and Jim swung, knocking him to the floor.

“Now you can call 911.” The second one caught him by surprise. The man looked from his unconscious comrade on the floor to the burly man in his skivvies to the wild-eyed woman clutching her nightdress.

“What have you done to my pal,” he shouted. The devil was raising himself up off the floor, the second one bent to help him. Jim raised the Maglite to strike when someone grabbed his arm in midair.

“What the hell is this, a damn convention?” It was three against one. Jim threw up his hands in surrender. “I give up. Just take what you want and get outta here before the cops come.”

Terry shrieked and charged one of the men, ready to scratch his eyes out.

The man stood there grinning, his left arm holding Terry, a chicken leg in his right hand.

“Jeez, Mom, I didn’t expect such an enthusiastic reception. We didn’t have this much excitement in Iraq. I guess you’ve already met Tony and Bob.”

“So this is peace in the country, huh?” His buddy said, rubbing his head. The yellow Lab danced around them all, his tail doing a one-eighty.

“Omigod, Will. You’re home.” Terry threw her arms around him and wept.

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