

## An Unwelcome Surprise

I awoke to the sound of two dogs barking which stood out for a couple of reasons. Our house that stood on Larch Lane was far from the city, the night was usually quiet, and the dogs were an addition by the new next-door neighbor. I had heard my dad complaining that the dog pen was as far from the dog owner's house as possible and right next to dad's garage on the other side of the dirt road that ran straight through our neighborhood. Please do not wake up dad I thought. Waking dad from sleep was a very dangerous thing to do. I knew this from those weekend mornings when the sound of my brother and I playing had resulted in the unwelcome surprise presence of my father as he snapped us to attention. He would be standing in the doorway clothed in a hastily thrown on bathrobe with his belt in his hands. He would squeeze the leather so hard it would make a squeaking sound. I tried to think very hard of the dogs being sleepy and then going to sleep, but it was too late, I could hear my father swearing in my parent's bedroom. There was little comfort in the thought that I was not an obvious target of dad's rage on this occasion. Perhaps I could have tried harder to calm the dogs with my mind.

When dad came home from work the next day, he seemed more cheerful than usual, almost playful. That went a long way to ease tensions of the house. After dinner, my father announced that he was going to introduce himself to the new neighbor. Even though this was an unusual occurrence, the promise of peace was a very welcome change. Later I snuck a peek out of the screen door, I saw the dog owner and my father while they drink beer, and talked about the neighborhood. Dad returned in a good mood carrying a long thin bag. His light mood lasted through the evening and soon it was time for my brother and me to go to bed. In the middle of the night, I bolted awake from the shock of two or maybe three incredible explosions soon followed by crying and screams. I could hear dad yelling something about dogs, mom was pleading with him to come back inside and someone else was pleading with my mother. Then I heard sirens. When the sirens stopped outside the house, I had to peek. From my bedroom door, I could hear mom and dad arguing. Mom was very scared; she said that they would take him away. Dad said she was an idiot if she thought they would dare try. Outside three sheriff's cars and a veterinarian with a van were sorting out the events of the night.

The shotgun blasts had severely injured the two dogs; they were soon to be rushed off for treatment. The deputies were trying to calm down the dog owner as he watched his two dogs lying in a puddle of blood. Later there came a knock at the front door. I eased down the hall as my father stepped outside to talk to the deputies, as he left he told mom to shut up and stay put. From my spot near the end of the hall, I could hear my dad talking to the deputies. From what my mother had said this was serious trouble. Dad was yelling at the deputies who were trying to calm him down. My father finished his tirade and opened the screen door to come back into the house. One of the three deputies boldly said, "We need to get the shotgun you borrowed" from the dog owner. My dad turned to them and said, "If that pussy wants his shotgun back he can, come get it himself" and with that he slammed the door in the deputies faces. It was sometime before the lights turned off, the cars left and the night was quiet again.

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