

Attic Assault

by C. T. Martin

She had felt for several days that something was wrong. Odd odors lingering in the hallway of her new home, strange noises above her bedroom, things missing from her kitchen. It was late at night, very late, and this time the sound coming from upstairs was unmistakable.

Immediately, Patty sat straight up in bed. All of her senses were heightened while she shivered in the cool night air. About twenty minutes passed without her hearing another sound, so she got up and began walking down the hallway towards the thermostat. Although she tried very hard not to look, her eyes tore away and looked up at the attic door. The thermostat clicked and the heat turned on. The noises of the heating system gave her a kind of comfort as it hummed and blew out warmth. She went on pretending that she didn't hear the sounds after all.

"Patty, maybe it was just all in your mind again. Didn't your therapist say that these feelings would continue long after John passed?"

The two friends were fast walking together around the lake just as the sun was rising.

"I'll ignore you just said that Susan. Anyway it's been three years ago, I've moved out, moved on, and dealt with my grief. Not that I would ever forget him."

"Sorry Patty, I just meant that you have to cut yourself some slack. It *might* be somehow related to your loss, and of course all the stress of the move this year."

"That's right! How could I be so stupid!" Patty mumbled to herself, stopping mid step. She grabbed Susan by her jacket.

Susan's eyes gazed at her with expectation.

"For weeks it's been nothing but a revolving door at my house, getting things installed and hooked up."

"What do you mean?"

"You know, appliances and utilities. The only one that scared me was the cable TV guy. I think he's harassing me."

Her friend mustered the most sympathetic look she could. "What bothered you about the cable guy Patty?"

"Don't patronize me Susan," she said, beginning to walk again, but at the pace of a stroll. "It

was real. He's a nut and it would explain why..." her voice trailed off.

"Explain what? What are you talking about?"

"This guy was weird okay. He asked me if I wanted the TV installed through the cable line or through the telephone line. When I told him I preferred the cable line, he looked at me as if I was crazy and it was going to make his day hell if he had to do it that way."

"Okay, so he was upset that the install would take longer than he wanted. What does that have to do with you hearing noises in the attic?"

"Everything! He was up there for *hours*. Going on and on about how nice and big my attic was. Asking why I didn't have any pets and saying there was plenty of room up there for a couple of dogs."

"Why should he care what you do with your property?"

The two arrived back at Patty's house and continued talking out front.

"I know, he was so weird it's hard to describe. So he goes out to his truck to get more tools and stuff. I watch from the front blinds and notice he's got two little mutts, one in the back of his truck, the other roaming around my yard but tied to the door handle of the truck!"

"You've got to be kidding me Patty. That's strange."

"Oh yeah, it's gets stranger. As he was coming back into the house he stopped to answer his phone on the porch and I heard him talking, saying something like, 'she doesn't want one,' and 'she's being very difficult,' and 'I'll fix it up before I leave.'"

A gasp streamed from Susan's mouth as her hand flew up to cover it over. Her eyes grew wide with recognition the moment before Patty uttered the words, "What if he put those dogs up in my attic?"

The key went into the lock like butter and the door flung open.

"I smell it too now Patty. It's some kind of smoke or something."

Patty had already ran underneath the attic door.

"Oh my gosh! That's not all. It smells like something just went!"

The women both covered their faces in disgust.

"Call the police Patty."

“What do I tell them? My cable guy left his dogs in my attic. That’s not even technically a crime is it?”

“Just call them. It’s got to be some kind of crime, like vandalism. They’re dumping all over your attic aren’t they? Besides who knows if this guy planned to come back and rob you or something.”

“Damn!” Patty froze, staring upwards.

Susan ran up, holding her cell phone. “What?”

“There’s smoke coming from up there and I know I heard someone’s voice.”

Immediately Susan dialed 911 as the two ran out of the house.

The sirens blared as two cop cars raced up the street. The cops slung the squad cars out front in slipshod fashion and raced up to the door.

“It’s unlocked!” Patty yelled, her arms flapping in emphatic gesture.

Both officers drew their weapons.

“Step back please ma’am.” They went inside with more stealth than Patty would have expected from small town cops.

“Come down now!” one of them yelled. Both of the men had their guns pointed at the attic.

“Open the door,” one of the officers said to his partner.

Plumes of smoke billowed out as the door opened and the ladder unfolded. The light of candles could be seen above beside a woman sitting down meditation style as she chanted unintelligible words. Beside her an old woman lay unconscious, her dress blood stained.

Back at the police station, the lieutenant could hardly believe what he was hearing over the radio.

“She did what?” he asked of the senior officer on the scene.

“She and her mother snuck up into the homeowner’s attic. Been in there about six days now. They were part of the neighborhood welcoming committee or at least they used to be.”

“What were they doing up there?”

“The daughter lost their home, got evicted last week, by you sir matter o’ fact. They kept playing the part, discovered this homeowner’s back door unlocked and made their move. Took food, candles, and incense up there too.”

“How did the old lady end up dead?”

“Daughter says she made too much noise. Couldn’t keep hiding up there very long if her mother kept talking. She also complained it disturbed her meditations. Slit her own mother’s throat with a knife she lifted from the homeowner’s kitchen.”

The coroner had arrived and the mother’s body was hauled out of the front door. The daughter, handcuffed, said nothing as her head was shoved down into the back of a squad car. The blank stare of her ghostly eyes sent chills through everyone.

“If it wasn’t you on the scene I wouldn’t have believed it,” the lieutenant said back over the radio to the officer.

“I’m here watching it and I still don’t believe it.”

“How is the woman who owns the home?”

“How would your wife be lieutenant? She won’t be staying here tonight I can guarantee that.”