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A Noise Downstairs

by Garf Collins

“What’s that. Did you hear that?” Jo said, as she elbowed Mark awake.

“Wha.. What’s the matter,” Mark mumbled as he reluctantly exited a dream about flying high above the hills behind their house.

“I heard a noise downstairs.”

“What sort of noise. You’re not imagining mice again are you?”

“No. A sort of scraping noise. Maybe someone’s sawing through the hinges of the back door.”

“I think that’s very unlikely but I’ll go down just to satisfy you,” Mark said grudgingly as he climbed out of bed and retrieved the hockey stick he kept under it for such emergencies. He set off, treading silently down the stairs. He was well used to his wife’s alarms. She could hear sounds anywhere that in her imagination were the harbinger of disaster. As he padded downwards he remembered the most recent example on the plane, ready for their flight to Minorca.

“Can you hear that knocking noise in the engines. Sounds odd. Do you think we should tell someone?”

“The captain must have heard it and thought it OK. See we’re taxiing already.”

“But maybe this time she did hear something to worry about,” he thought, taking a firmer grip on the hockey stick. He was by now very well awake. The adrenalin rushing through his arteries seemed to heighten all his senses.

He caught the faint smell of the steak they had grilled that evening. He was acutely aware of the fabric of the carpet beneath his feet and he could hear furtive sounds from below.

As he entered the kitchen, there was a distinct smell of lemons. A dish of newly prepared lemon curd had been overturned and the window was wide open. There was a neat hole cut by some special tool close to the catch.

He turned in the direction of the sound of rummaging in his study. There were occasional flashes of torchlight and muffled curses as the intruder found nothing of value in any of the drawers. As Mark approached the door of his study, the lemon perfumed burglar emerged, with Mark's very expensive computer in his arms. They looked at each other in surprise for an instant. In that moment, Mark thought how easy it would be to hit the man on the head but found that he couldn't do it and so he threw the hockey stick aside.

Recovering from the unexpected encounter, the burglar managed to shift the burden of the computer and extract an evil looking knife from his pocket.

"Get out my fucking way or you'll get this," he shouted.

"OK.OK. No need for that. Take what you want but just leave us alone. Look I'll even help you," he said as he opened a door off the hall. "This is the quick way out."

The burglar, puzzled by this offer, looked sideways at Mark as he was ushered into the windowless utility room.

Mark quickly locked and bolted the door and, picking up the telephone, he dialled 999.