

## Night Moves

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**Sometimes** the name they give you is all wrong. Fortunately, they give you a picture, too, or there'd be some really tragic mistakes being made every once in a while. That'd be pretty ugly, all that slogging through wet backyards, all that tricky stuff with cats and dogs, the difficulty of the window itself, nine times out of ten. Why would you sleep with your window closed? Afraid someone's going to come along and whack you in your sleep? It's usually just about as bad coming out as it is going in, too, and then you'd be sitting there waiting for pickup, thinking you'd done your job. . .

Funny thing is, today's world's so cranked up, so full-speed-ahead, so move-move-move, nobody'd notice. Well, I suppose they would eventually. I mean, they'd have to, wouldn't they? But, like I say, they give you a picture, too, so if you do your job right, if you take pride in an unblemished record (as I do), take pride in a job well done (as I do), then when you get there, you take a look. You drag out the picture, and you hold it in whatever light there might be coming in through the window, or maybe a night-light, or sometimes they leave the door open, and you've got a fair amount of light, but then you've just got to be that much more careful. Now that's truly creepy – sleeping with the window closed, but the bedroom door wide open? Somebody explain *that* to me, would you?

If everything looks right, then you do your job, you get out, and you go wait for pickup. If the picture's not the same as the face you've got it next to, then you just get out. Knowing it wasn't your screwup doesn't make it any easier getting out, but at least you can gloat while you wait.

*This*– this is definitely the wrong face. The hair's wrong, the eyes are too far apart, the nose in the picture is straighter and longer than the little button on the face, it's just all wrong. Like I said, I take pride in my work. I have an unblemished record, and I want it to stay that way, so I take a turn around the room, moving silently. There's a little desk-thing, and there's a pile of papers on it, and some books and stuff, and a pink padded "My Diary," and I leaf silently through the papers till I find a name, and, yep, just as I thought. Wrong, wrong, wrong! So if you wake up in the morning, and something just isn't right? Something smells a little funny, something's out of place, something doesn't feel quite like it should? That was me. Oops, sorry, my bad. Just think how much worse it could have been.

I get out, and get back across the yard. At least this isn't one of the hard ones. No dog, no cat, no ambushes by clanging angry deck chairs, just a sorry little patch of scruffy grass and dirt, and then the alley. Check my watch. Over an hour till pickup. Sorry, what? Oh, no, sometimes you need that long, if there's a problem, or something, but this time it's just left over. Shift the stub of cigar to the other side, wish I could risk lighting it. Pace a bit.

Ok, maybe I take too much pride in my job. Why else would I look up and down the alley, wondering if maybe they didn't get the name wrong, they just got the house number wrong? If I could go back and say "Ok, you bozos, you got it wrong *again*, but I saved it for you *again*, I pulled your bacon out of the fire *again*. . ." Talk about gloating. Talk about your bragging rights.

The first house east of me looks pretty easy – another yard like the one I just crossed twice, window open a crack, and no sign of animals. Backtrack up the alley, to the first house on the west. Long grass, dew-shiny in the moonlight, a whole six-piece patio set, all poised to spring out at me, a sleeping dog spilled down the top two steps, a cat like an Oriental sculpture on the porch rail. Well, that makes it easy. Easy to decide, anyway. It's a perverse universe. I'm pretty sure I know which house my target's in.

There's a procedure they teach you for sneaking past animals. Check the wind direction first, make sure you're coming straight up the wind at it. That way you smell it, it doesn't smell you. Well, you might not smell it, but the scent's there on the breeze, waiting to be taken up. Now watch the head. Watch. . . watch. . . watch. . . Don't look away, don't blink, just watch. You're watching for that one moment the animal looks your way. Let it look, still as stone, silent as death. It looks away and you take three quick silent steps, swivel your head as far around each way

as you can, looking for other dangers, and go stony again. Never try to take a fourth step, never decide *no, it's not going to look around this time, I'll just go again*, just wait. It *will* look around again, and you'll get another three steps, and another. . . you'll get there. Only thing is, it doesn't work on cats. Cats never look around. Dogs, deer, goats, yes – cats no. I snuck in past an anxious mother pig once, and it worked. Cats, no.

What you've got to do with a cat is you've got to go down the street or alley or road until you find a dog that's loose, that isn't tied up or fenced in or something, and you wake him up, and then you run for all you're worth back to the first house with the dog in hot pursuit. What? Oh, he'll chase you, all right, either because he wants to play, or because he wants to kill you. Look at me! Wouldn't *you* want to chase me out of your yard? Now you get him to chase the cat, and while they're at it, you slip in unnoticed. Theoretically.

This time, I've got one of each, and it might or might not be any easier that way, but the sleeping dog's a golden retriever, so I've got it made. As soon as I get through the fence, I spot a tennis ball lying on the ground. One good toss, *thump* the dog in the side, the dog jumps up yelling "*Play? Play?*" and the cat takes off, and I'm across the yard and through the window long before they've exhausted all the possibilities of their chase.

Drag out the picture again, check the face. Yep, the perverse-field theory of the universe has saved me again. This is the right one. The red pigtails, the freckles, the nose, the tooth-gap in the parted lips, everything just right, and I get the job done quick and get out to wait for pickup. I can make a lot better time now, the tooth only weighing a fraction of what the half-dollar does. Those big coins are heavy and awkward. It's like you hauling around a frying pan, and trying to sneak. As I struggle through the wet grass, hurrying so the animals won't get back and find me, I think yet again of the popular picture of fairies. Wings! Ha! I wish.