

THE BURGLAR

by

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The Burglar hid in the hedges, crouched on his ankles, carefully surveying his target. He was dressed completely in black, adorned with a black balaclava, a camouflaged fanny pack across his waist, and an empty backpack, soon to be full of ill-begotten gains, strapped to his torso. He had been watching this house for some time now; sometimes during the day, walking past the house on the pretext of smoking a cigarette, sometimes at night, stalking, watching, but taking no action. Not yet.

The cover of light rain was welcome. It would muffle sound and obscure vision. The lawn he had to dart across was soft, and would generate no noise. Conditions were perfect to approach the house.

The Burglar's surveillance had given him enough information. An elderly couple lived here; they would be an easy target. If he did it right, they would not even wake up.

He rarely saw the Elderly Woman, only the husband. He had seen her once, through the upstairs, bedroom window, helped along by the Elderly Man. She was attached to a piece of rolling medical equipment; it was clear that she was very ill, quite feeble and close to death. Her husband was not much healthier.

Recently, he had seen the Elderly Man, a few times, outside of the house, shuffling down his walk to a waiting taxi cab, most likely to whisk him off to some medical appointment.

A few weeks ago, he had even knocked on the door of the house, on the pretext of selling satellite cable. The extremely old man had answered the door. While The Burglar was giving his sales pitch, under very false pretenses, he glanced around the entrance to the home. He saw no alarm panels, no controls to alert the police. The Burglar said his thank-you-anyways as the Elderly Man refused his offers.

So tonight would be the night. He knew that the elderly couple were prone to go to bed early. Well practiced in his craft, he could easily sneak into the bedroom while they slumbered. His mind focused on his potential bounty: pills, stashed money, jewelry. Slumbering old people were an easy target.

The Burglar was a veteran of home invasion robberies. He simply waited until his targets were asleep. He would then skillfully, quietly, enter the home, helping himself to his spoils. His experience had given him the grace and prowess of a stalking cat. He knew he would be undiscovered.

He went over the worst case scenario in his head: If the elderly couple did notice him, he would simply threaten them with his pistol. He truly meant them no harm, physically, he was there only to rob them. His gun was not even loaded. Such was his trade. Such was the only skill he had mastered, the product of alcoholic parents and an angry, antisocial intelligence, swiftly slipping through the holes in the web of society as a young man.

The Burglar assumed that his targets, if they even awoke at his intrusion, would put up no fight. If his targets were armed, he thought to himself, they would not be able to get the drop on him. Should be an easy in and out. Like dozens of times before.

The Burglar glanced across the lawn, towards the back entrance to the old house. It was faintly lit by the street lights, and he was fairly confident he could make the crossing without being seen. His only concern was the neighbor; the woman next door apparently had her bedroom right at the ground floor, facing the elderly couple's house. She was either nosy or paranoid; he had seen her look out of the window, parting the curtains, more than once. He kept an eye on the window as he mentally prepared himself for his move.

The time was now. Taking one last look at the neighbor's curtains, The Burglar saw them undisturbed, motionless. He steadied his packs, and inhaled and exhaled deeply.

He sprinted across the back lawn, up the pair of steps to the back door. A low awning provided him some cover of darkness, but he would have to move quickly. He unzipped his fanny pack as he dropped to his knees. Reaching into his pack, he produced the tools of his trade: a small, metal bar and a slim, key-shaped metal rake. The streetlight provided just enough light for him to proceed with his criminal endeavors. He inserted the metal bar into the door handle's lock, shunting it to the bottom of the cylinder, and, with his left hand, applied pressure rightwards. With his right hand, he inserted the small metal rake. He began to gently move the rake back and forth, keeping pressure on the metal bar. He felt the pins of the lock bobbing up and down as the rake combed over them. Eventually, he found the sweet spot: the pins stopped moving, and the metal bar moved all the way to the right. Another lock successfully picked; the door handle opened.

He glanced to his left. He thought he saw the neighbor's curtain moving, though he was not certain. He could take no chances. He would have to move quickly.

The Burglar quickly stashed the lock picks back into his bag, and, rising to his feet, drew out a small bottle of WD40. He quickly dabbed a few drops of the lubricant onto the door's hinges. Stashing the lubricant away, he opened the back door, and stepped into the house.

The Burglar quietly made his way through the kitchen. He heard no sounds upstairs. He assumed his targets had long gone to sleep. As stealthily as he could, he opened the kitchen drawers. The silverware appeared to be just that: pure silver. The Burglar quickly pulled his back pack from his shoulders. He had placed a small blanket in the bottom of the pack, hoping to reduce the noise as he stashed his stolen wares. He grabbed a handful of the silverware, and placed it into the pack.

As quiet as an impish feline, The Burglar made his way through the bottom floor of the house. Little of value was to be found. The furniture was arranged in such a way as to provide access for the Elderly Woman and her medical equipment, but he doubted that she had been downstairs in a very long time.

The Burglar could find nothing worth stealing. Just old memorabilia from the Koran War, and an enormous display of family photos; children, grandchildren, even a framed picture of some dog named Kaleb, a chocolate lab. He would have to make his way upstairs. Medication would probably be his only easily gotten gains. He hoped that the bathroom was not attached to the bedroom.

Assuming that the elderly couple was deep into slumber, he made his way to the staircase, and slowly started to ascend. Fortunately, the old wooden steps did not generate any creaking noise.

He could, potentially, also quickly rifle through their bedroom as they slept, he thought. Medications and jewelry. In an out. He slowly and cautiously made his way to the stairs.

The Burglar froze on the steps. He thought he heard voices. He waited, listening.

A sharp crack sounded. The Burglar recognized it as a gunshot. God dammit, he thought to himself. He quickly drew his empty pistol, a Glock 9 millimeter, from his side. Immediately after the gunshot, he heard a tumbling sound, then a loud, crying moan of despair. He could form no context for what was happening. It was time to go.

As he turned to leave, he heard a low, sad voice cry out a desperate 'no,' then a plea for help. The Burglar froze. Though he had no time for compassion, especially in his trade, he knew something was terribly wrong. Fine. He would just poke his head in the room, and then leave. He was angry. This was not to be a fruitful evening.

The Burglar burst into the bedroom, his pistol pointed directly forward. He was shocked by the sight that greeted him. Lying on the bed was the Elderly Woman, blood on her forehead, clearly dead. The array of medical equipment next to the bed was beeping a pulse of alarms.

At the foot of the bed, attempting, failing, to crawl on all fours, howling in pain with each movement, was The Elderly Man. The Burglar noticed tears pouring down his face. He glanced to the far corner, where a small .38 revolver lay. The Elderly Man desperately reached out for it, but his body, wracked with pain, could not crawl to it.

It took no time for The Burglar to assess what scene had unfolded before him. The Elderly Couple had made a decision. Life for them, so it seemed, had become unbearable. This was to be a murder-suicide. Not in the criminal sense. Not in the realm of crime where The Burglar lived his life. This scene was borne of compassion, yet something had gone wrong.

It was evident that the Elderly Man meant to mercifully kill his wife first, then take his own life. The kick of the .38 was too much for the old timer, and the gun flew out of his hand, landing there in the corner.

The Elderly Man stopped his painful crawl, and looked up at The Burglar. The Burglar froze for a moment, unsure of what to do next, lowering his Glock to his side. The Elderly Man did not seem alarmed at an intruder's presence; he was overcome instead with grief and frustration.

Only a foot or two from The Burglar, The Elderly Man made a painful crawl over to the intruder. The Burglar was frozen in place with confusion and indecision. Still on all fours, The Elderly Man raised his head to The Burglar. The old man's face, streaming with tears, held a pleading gaze. His left arm, shaking profusely, reached out to The Burglar's right wrist, the arm holding the thief's pistol.

With every bit of strength he could still muster, The Elderly Man raised The Burglar's arm to his forehead, and placed his head at the barrel of The Burglar's pistol. Speaking between sobs, he pleaded with The Burglar.

Crap, thought the Burglar. He violently pulled back his empty Glock. The Elderly Man's face was too much for him. His pleas cut to The Burglar's core. Fine then.

The Burglar made his way to the corner of the room, and picked up the smoking .38 pistol. He went back to The Elderly Man and, gingerly, raised the man's right hand and placed the gun into his palm. He gently moved The Elderly man's arm and hand back to his forehead and stepped back.

Slowly, a thought formed in the back of his mind. Crime had brought him here. Compassion would now supersede it. It was to be the kindest act, albeit ironically against the backdrop of felony.

"Thank you," The Elderly Man said. The Burglar said nothing as The Elderly Man pulled the trigger. The old man dropped to the floor, dead.

Dammit, thought The Burglar. He heard sirens approaching. The nosy neighbor's curtains.