

TRAILOR COURT

I was home from work, sick from a flu or something. It was the first time I'd been sick in over a year. I coughed at the air. I coughed and hacked all over the room- didn't bother covering my mouth. I was allowed this rebellious behavior because I lived alone, although I can still hear, "Cover your mouth," from grandma who's picture judges me from the corner table.

I went to my porch and sat in the rickety chair I'd found on the street. Then I saw her. She was always there but someone I didn't really know. This was true of most of the residence at Sequoia Traylor Park.

I saw her leave her trailer. She was not a big woman. She could have even been considered smallish. I remember pondering her age. She was somewhere between 35 and 50. I watched as she called to her cats in a sweet barely audio voice, "Ginger, Teddy, Whiskers..." They were her multi-colored family. They were also prolific breeders and left their prodigy throughout the park. I went back inside, uncomfortable with this aching body I wore. I stood at the kitchen sink watching her from the narrow window. I took an antihistamine with a glass of water.

Mrs. Johnson is what I always called her. At that point I didn't know her first name. She shuffled slowly across the gravel, her arms folded in front of her. She wore a flowered robe and clutched a pack of cigarettes in her rust-colored hands. A scarf barely covered the rollers in her hair. She watched her feet as she walked. Yes, there she was stepping down from granite steps with a few of her kitties following, to the gravel walkway, to the mail boxes. I felt ill again. It came in waves. The mail boxes were severed heads on poles and her head sat on a pole on the very end. I laid down on the futon that when opened resembled a bed.

I wondered dismally how many unseen, un-cared about people lived in this

trailer park. I drifted into a deep sleep. I dreamed that I won the lottery and moved to a national park where my lover was a cave bear. At one point I woke laughing. My head hurt when I laughed. And then I slipped into a near coma. Sequoia Trailer Park is overgrown with abandoned parts of trailers and other debris. It has been taken over by a national park. I often wonder what people think when they come to this particular clearing. If they could only have experienced it as I had - the runny nosed kids, staggering drunks, angry housewives or mistresses.

I came awake to pounding on the door. A pounding that shook the entire habitat to the point of breaking glasses. "Gessus Criss! I shouted through a dry mouth. When I opened the door two gigantic cops were standing in the door frame. My head was fuzzy my eyes a blur. I wasn't sure if I was dreaming. They asked to come in.

They stood of course as there was no place to sit -each chair with clothes, papers-old food. Well don't blame me I told myself, I've been sick! Then to the dream like characters who filled the room I said, "How can I help you?" As though I were a clerk in a big men's store.

"Were you here last night?" One asked

"Yes." Why doesn't he just get to what ever he really wants to know. "Yes, I'm the one who called days ago to report the loud stereo. I realize this type of thing is not as exciting as a murder or, or - I don't know, but when one lives in a civilized society...."

The cops were holding up their hands. I realized that they were confused by what I was saying. They wanted to know about strange noises last night. They wanted to know if anything out of the ordinary occurred before the murder.

"Strange noises last night?" I muttered. "Murder? What are you talking about?"

No - my god what day is this?" I realized I had pretty much slept away a full night and part of a day. I told the cops this then offered them coffee. They stood about stirring the instant coffee in many my times washed styrofoam cups. "

"Did you see anyone visit Lilian Johnston?" One cop said pushing his hat back on his head.

"Lilian? Oh Mrs. Johnson? I didn't know the lady very well. We said hello in passing." Then like something hit me smack in the face. I sobered up, came alive.

"Whoo. Wait a minute, wait a minute. What's going on?"

"Ma'am, your neighbor was murdered last night."

Lilian Johnson was murdered the night before, while I was under the influence of flu killers. The police could find no relatives or friends listed anywhere in her apartment. There were yellow streamers with black letters - DO NOT CROSS CRIME SCENE... around Lilian Johnson's trailer. The gruesome scene included slaughtered cats. Who would do a thing like this. I walked around the boxed home with other buzzing neighbors. One turned to me and said, "This is more exciting than the '89 earthquake." I smiled at him and said "Yes" in what felt like a slow Tennessee Williams yes. This was live theatre. This was not something I could change the channel or turn off so I became one of the players.

Then there was something I must do without being noticed. I put my hands in my jean pockets and hummed - trying to be casual - as though anyone would notice me with all the goings on, yeah sure. I walked up to the mail boxes and took mail from the box with *Johnson* written on it. A large Calico cat sat on the box and hissed showing her claws. "I got it," I hissed back. I folded the letter put the red flag down and stuffed the envelope in my pocket humming all the way back to my mobile home. Through the corner of my eye I could see the police bending down

and picking things up and putting them in containers. Neighbors continued into the night standing about in little clumps whispering,

"I hardly knew her."

"Me and the wife would see her at Dented Cans, shoppin' sometimes."

"I heard them say she was alone too much"

My heart raced as I swung around to close the door behind me. I was sure no one saw me. I closed the curtains and treated the envelope as stumbled on pirate treasure. I ripped it open. It had been addressed to - oh, dear Publisher Clearing house? Well, they would never deliver her the millions now. There was a knock at the door. I thought of tearing up the evidence of my crime and disposing of it in the toilet but then thought better of it when I remembered the time it backed up and destroyed the small garden of the lady next door.

I opened the door expecting the police. Gwad! They had seen me and wanted the tampered evidence. No it wasn't the police it was Jimbo Faber. Actually James. I usually made every excuse to send him away but today I was never so glad to see him. I once imagined he was stocking me - I don't know if he really was. It was just nice to know the police weren't after me. Jim was dressed impeccable as usual. The only discrepancy in his outfit were the huge bunny slippers he wore. When I say out of place I don't mean to say they were well worn. They weren't. They were new, as though he bought them yesterday.

"Hey Jimbo, how's it going? Want a beer?"

"No thanks a glass of water would be fine." Then his voice raised an octave, "and would you please, please not call me Jimbo. I would really appreciate it if you refer to me by my proper name, James."

"Did you know your voice raises to soprano when you're angry", I snickered as I poured his water. What a bore. But when I gave him the glass of water I noticed

his face for the first time. He had soulful brown eyes. His profile was that of a Greek god. What a mismatch of beauty and personality I thought. "Thank you," he said with his normal baritone.

He sneezed and pushed his hand out to the air, "Don't get too close, I think I'm coming down with something."

The thought of getting too close to Jimbo was like wanting to make friends with the neighboring cockroaches that took over my kitchen at night. He wasn't a bad guy just irritating. When I told him I was just getting over a cold he ask about the over the counter attack medicine I was taking and then went on and on about the various types and what the side affects were and how the drug companies were out to screw people. He sat on a kitchen chair allowing papers to slip to the floor and as he talked about the latest cold remedy - he also checked his crotch. I felt this was a terribly important place for his eyes. He did not look at me. I thought I could have been nude under a sheer robe with tits half exposed and he would have looked past me - first to my medicine cabinet and then to his crotch.

Later;

"Oh we'll have to put it in the back seat, my trunk is full of stuff." I said as though the car was too disabled to carry more. Jimbo and I were on our way to Dented Cans, a local discount grocer.

"You know a lot of these cold remedies are exactly alike, exactly! They have the exact amount of polyethylene hydrochloride." Jimbo rambled on and on. He became a walking encyclopedia of drug information. I was too involved in getting him back home to his place. Then I said something that I nearly regretted, I said,

"I wonder how she was murdered. Did you hear gun shots last night?"

Jimbo was studying the label on a tiny bottle of eye drops. "Oh no" he said, "There weren't gun shots because she was not shot she was bludgeoned to death.

Oh, I guess I'll take this. I just wonder if eye drops are really better than pills for allergies."

My blood chilled. How did he know *how* Mrs. Johnson was killed? I looked at Jim standing there, like a psychopath reading the labels of cold medication in his fuzzy bunny slippers. You always hear about these types. Quiet, keeps to himself. Come to think of it I had never been in his mobile home...and now I will never go there. the question was how to get the hell out of here.

In the car Jim was quiet. I wondered if I should take him straight to the police. I wondered if he tossed out the bloody shoes he wore while bludgeoning Mrs. Johnson. How suspicions can you be - wearing those silly looking slippers with a suit? I had to get him home and find another place to live. I glanced over at him and imagined him in a rage, then -

"Turn down this road," He said breaking the cloud of silence with a thunderous voice.

"Why, I mean no, I mean I've got to get home!"

He grabbed the wheel and steered the car down a gravel path, "Go, go up there!"

He ordered. This was it. He was on a real killing spree. God only knows how many went before me. I felt his shallow breath as he leaned on my shoulder steering the car.

Then he demanded that I get out of the car. He had a gun, a rifle, weapons only used in wars. Or a sword, or knife. I saw his powerful hand raise in the air.

"Look! Look over there - behind you silly!"

I looked behind me and there was a valley and a host of greenery a large meadow and purple mountains beyond, a water fall to a clear stream framed by wild flowers. I stood awe inspired.

"Isn't this the most beautiful place you've ever seen in your life?" Jimbo said sneezing.

"Oh it really is," I said sighing with relief, "But not much good for allergies."

On Monday, I went to work. I bought the local rag with headlines of the grizzly murder. The police were still investigating. I work in the boarded up town of Antlerville. It wasn't such a bad job. The supervisor smoked weed and told me to just go with the flow. He gave me my assignment – cold calls using the phone book. Point to any number and dial.

"Hello, Ma'm, excuse me Sir, my name is RB and I am calling on behalf of our local cable company. Do you have cable? Are you satisfied with the service, etc, etc."

Few costumers of the local cable company are happy so I tell them I will write down all the complaints. Oops spilled coffee on that one. Oh wow no Christian network that's a shame I tell one. What!? And the local news did not show the grizzly murder scene! Damn I wanted to see that too and I live right there.

I do this job because no one bugs me...speaking of bugs I must learn to clean off my desk of chips and peanut butter sandwich crust and gwad I don't even remember what all I shoved into my gut between calls. There are armies of ants marching and swarming over everything. They even crawl over my bare feet that are parked on the side of the desk. Geezz! There are quicker ways to get to the crumbs I leave this miniature army.

Jimbo called me at work to say there was a meeting at the park and I should get back as soon as possible.

There was a hazard unit clean up crew at Johnson's trailer. I drove my jeep slowly past and tried to get a glimpse of what they were doing. They were in what

looked like white space suits. Jim came from behind me grabbing my arm and in a loud whisper said, "Come this way."

"Hey man!" You're beginning to creep me out. He pushed me to an open area behind Shachamo's trailer where most of the parks tenants were congregating. I don't remember Shach's real name we just called him that because he played the trumpet - badly - get out the ear plugs we'd say. He was hardly a Louie Armstrong.

The lady with the oversized thighs and thin lips slapped her child and told him to shut up or she'd rip off his arm and beat him with the bloody end of it.

The old guy who rarely spoke sat on a crate next to me. The smell of alcohol mixed with his habit of chain smoking *roll your owns* was overwhelming even out doors like this. I thought he could be the killer. You know because he was the quiet type. But then it could have been the abusive mother just as well. Or it could have been me - I mean - think about it - I was in REM sleep maybe acting out a horror dream and killed Mrs Johnson to protect the cats from some fury she had locked up inside her quiet self.

Soon every one was talking a once...

So IWasn'tTooSadSeeingThosedamCats..

IKnowWhynotKilleAll...okayAll... IgotMyrifilAnd...PlentyOfBeerInTheCooler...

IsThatAFullMoonNoThatWasYesterday...

Suddenly, a woman screaming - the piercing howl cutting through the darkening horizon. Everyone is frozen in place - statues waiting for the slaughter of a million pigeons to land. The guy with a riffle stood up slowly and shouted, "I got a gun! It's loaded." BAM BAM! We called out to the helpless woman and flashed lights in every direction in an anxious and chaotic display. "Where are you?" We

called out. I expected the worse - more dead cats another stabbed woman. The two lone dogs barked and howled from inside a trailer.

Then

Red lights flashing - sirens - sheriff deputies with guns drawn. We huddled, yes we did like frightened children. The game warden came with a large van. The game warden? A short squat woman deputy sauntered up to us tugging her belted gun holster. "Okay, folks," she said, "Lets just all calm down. We got the screaming mountain lion. He had a cat in his mouth. Unfortunately we had to put him down."

So

After viewing the poor beast who screamed like a woman who slaughtered our neighbor and her cats, we retired to our respective caravans and continue to tell stories about the lion or was it a grizzly or maybe all just a head cold filled dream.