

“Dog War”

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“No one should have to bury a child,” is what my grandmother had said time and again after losing her own daughter at twelve to a mysterious infection that could have been cured today with antibiotics, and forty years later, after attending the funeral of my neighbor’s son Isaac, I can still hear her saying it and couldn’t agree more. Isaac wasn’t even a relative, but my wife and I, now retired, enjoyed watching him through the bay window of our house across the cul-de-sac. He’d ride his bike up and down the street, his white-blond hair blowing in the wind. We enjoyed watching him and his father play catch in the front yard. We enjoyed their annual collage photo Christmas card and note about what Isaac had done throughout the year in school, what belt he’d attained in taekwondo, what educational trips they’d taken during the summer, and we enjoyed talking to him when he’d come to sell items as part of the school, church, and Boy Scouts’ fundraisers.

I knew the neighbors who lived diagonally from our house in the Chicago style bungalow were going to be trouble when they built the dog kennels out back of their house. Well, we’d even heard speculation at the Senior Center before they moved in he smoked marijuana and that she was a bully and gossip. Probably compensating for her own inadequacy, the typical uneducated, never been anywhere, small town type who hated outsiders, like me and my wife who retired here because of low taxes and a good climate. We’d even delivered a loaf of banana nut bread when they moved in. Never even got a thank-you note. Trash.

The husband who owned a plumbing company was an avid hog hunter and had multiple pit bulls, some of which I heard cost hundreds of dollars. Almost every other weekend, he would load some of those dogs into the kennels on the back of his plumbing truck and be gone until late

in the afternoon. Even went on Sunday. I heard he killed the hogs and gave them away to poor country folks, mostly Mexican migrant workers, who lived in make-shift camps on vegetable farms, and blacks who would roast them in a fire pit.

They had a chain link fence installed around the back yard, and once in a while I'd see the wife, a bubble-butt looking woman with dyed red-auburn hair who worked as a hairdresser, and their toddler, out back in the yard. Even those dogs would bark at them, and I knew if one of them dogs ever got loose, it would tear that poor toddler, and maybe her mama, to shreds. I'd heard enough stories through the years about those dogs. They've been bred for generations to hunt, to go for blood, and when they stay caged up and don't get to hunt, that tension builds in their system. They go crazy, like an addict needing another fix.

We were watching Good Morning America when I noticed Isaac riding his bike, and I didn't hear the screaming because of the crowd yelling and holding up their signs about where they were from, saying hello to friends and loved ones, on TV. When the show went to commercial, there was enough of an interlude that I heard the last of Isaac's screams. I didn't think about my knees and the pain. I just ran out the front door, grabbed a rock rake, and hurried as fast as I could to the street where Isaac was being yanked around on the asphalt by one of those pit bulls like a rag doll. He was covered in blood and the jaws had a grip around his neck. I took the rake and plunged it into that dog. You son-of-a-bitch! Let him go, you son-of-a-bitch! The pit bull was whimpering and laying on its side as I continued to plunge the rake's steel teeth into his body, like he'd done to poor Isaac. You fucking damned dog! That fat-ass hairdresser and her shit head husband. Fucking white trash. Somebody ought to tie them up and let their god-damned blood thirsty dogs have a go at them.

My wife had come to the door and called the ambulance. Isaac's father was at work, and his mother had never heard a thing. She had been listening to Christmas music and baking

cookies. Who the hell felt like Christmas now, I wondered. My wife cried and cried. She'd never seen anything like it. Poor Isaac mauled to death by a pit bull and the trash neighbors had the gall to come to the funeral and the wife telling people they couldn't believe that one dog went mad, but the others were okay. Isaac's parents should have sued them, made them have all the damned dogs put to sleep, but they listed their house and said they were going to move and try to start a new life. Maybe have another child.

I don't believe they'll ever get over it. Just like my grandmother said. No amount of "It was his time," "Thank God for the time you had with him," and "God will take care of you" will get them through such an event. Neither will I. I believe in God, but I don't understand how a God would allow such. I keep thinking about those damned neighbors and their hunting dogs. I might go over there when they are both at work and poison them one at a time, over time, so not to get caught. It'd be a misdemeanor if I did get caught, but I don't need the trouble. Killing them off won't bring Isaac back, and it probably won't make me feel any better either, but at least no one else will have to fear an attack. I keep the rake in the bushes by the front door and now have a loaded pistol in the bombe chest in the foyer. I take it with me when I get the mail.