

# “Intruders”

by Andrew D. Doan

It’s a straight-backed maroon leather chair with bulging armrests and stubby claw feet. Its skin—worn and wrinkled—whines under my weight when I lower myself into its embrace. The chair is old, but it’s also familiar and comforting. I don’t know exactly how old. At least 50 years, I imagine. Nearly as old as I am. I’ve got it beat by about a decade, I think.

The chair and I are resting. We sit together in the front room of this stately colonial on the outer west side of the city. It’s a fancy neighborhood known as Brookwood Run. Large homes. Large mortgages. Large egos up and down the street. I’ve walked the length of the neighborhood countless times. The multi-car garages. The boats and RV’s. The pool houses. Brazen materialism radiates from every property.

I suppose I’m not in much of a position to judge, am I? After all, I’m here too. 47 Loon Lane. Two stories and 3,000 square feet of upper middle class. The front room looks like it would be better suited for a library or art museum. The walls are lined with intricately carved frames protecting painted portraits and landscapes. Directly behind me is a floor to ceiling, wall-to-wall set of shelves holding hundreds of books (many of them rare or antique) and an astonishing assortment of knick-knacks and collectibles. These are not the kitschy type of souvenirs you can buy at the “trading posts” along the nation’s highways. These are finely crafted miniature masterpieces made of precious stones and metals. They are fragile and costly. I will spend my evening here with them instead of with my wife.

She wanted to go to dinner tonight. It’s not an anniversary or birthday. It’s just a Friday night in April. She likes to go out on Fridays. Most people do. Who likes to cook dinner on Friday night? Not Diane. We talked about it this morning before I left for work.

“Let’s go to that new Mexican place on Patterson tonight.”

I told her I wasn’t sure. I would have to think about it.

I didn’t think very long. I made up my mind before pulling out for work. I called her on my lunch break and told her I wasn’t up for it. Maybe she could give Shelia a call. Girls night out. That sounded like fun, right?

She consented with a sulking sense of resignation. She knows me. She is fully aware of my fascination though she has taken

to calling it an obsession. A sickness. She doesn't talk about it much anymore. She's spoken her mind to me about it time and time again over 30 years of marriage. The time for discussion has passed. I am who I am. She can't change that and she knows it. That doesn't mean she has to like this part of me. She's made that quite clear.

"You can whittle your life away on your little trinkets if you want to, but don't expect me to join you. One day, you might regret it."

And so, here I am. She's out for the evening, and I'm not. I'm sitting in the front room inhaling wisps of the wonderfully musty atmosphere that only a room filled with old books and leather chairs can produce.

I lean forward slowly—reluctant to leave the warm confines of the chair—and stand in front of the massive wall of shelves. I glance left and right. Each item resting on them is unique. Each one has significance—historical or sentimental. Each one is stunning and priceless—to me at least if not to others. I reach out and take one into my hands. It's a hummingbird made of blown glass tenderly formed by an expert craftsman.

It's mine. Not originally, of course, but it is now. I could pass it on to someone else. It would fetch a fine price online or at some local antique store, but as I roll it back and forth in my hands I know this is one I'll keep for good. Some of my acquisitions are solely for the purpose of flipping for a profit. It's a side business that supplements my regular income. Diane doesn't like it, I know, but she doesn't seem to mind the Friday night dinners we couldn't afford without it.

Occasionally I come across something that resonates with me in such a way that I know I can never let it go. It's too pristine. Too unique. Too—

The back door of the house creaks slowly as it closes. My grip tightens instinctively on the glass hummingbird. I remain rooted to my spot—listening. Sure enough, I can hear the muffled sound of footsteps ascending the stairs.

Someone is in the house.

My throat tightens as my pulse spikes. I can hear the intruder moving about upstairs. Nearly choking on my own anxiety, I tiptoe across the wood floor to peek out the window along the side of the house. The neighborhood is bathed in moonlight, but the street is empty.

What are my options with this guy poking around upstairs? The police could come for him, but it might be a while before they get here. What if I run into him before then? I'm not looking for a fight. Not even my beloved figurines are worth risking my life. I figure I should get out of the house as quickly as possible. Once I'm outside and away from the property, I can collect my thoughts and form a plan.

I consider a climb out the window, but rose bushes just beyond the glass present an obstacle that my aging body won't navigate easily.

I remain at the window and lose myself in thought for longer than I should. Why haven't I ever broken down and bought a gun? When I was younger, I never thought seriously about it. That wasn't my style. Sure, the world is a dangerous place, but real danger seemed so far away—like a country you've always heard about but have never visited.

It feels different now. Nearly everyone has a gun. It seems that way at least. People are more defensive these days. Aggressive. Fearful. You never know when you might run into someone who will pull a pistol and fire away.

I should have a gun. It makes sense. Those are the rules of the game. It wasn't that way when I started out, but that's the way it is now. Shoot first or get shot. I realize that now. Once I get out of this situation, I'm gonna talk to someone.

First, I have to get out, and that is far from guaranteed at this point.

I turn quietly from the window and look toward the hallway at the center of the house. It provides two possible routes of escape—the front door or the back. I'm going out the back door. It's a farther walk, but it also provides more cover once I'm outside. My skin may be wrinkled and worn like the leather of that old chair, but it's also pale and pasty. It will reflect the moonlight too much in the front yard. I can't risk detection. My course is set. The back door it is.

I move smoothly across the room and pause at the entrance of the hallway to assess my surroundings. The pattering footsteps upstairs have fallen silent. Does this mean I've been detected? Is this guy up there assessing his surroundings?

My heart wants me to remain in the front room with the chairs, the books, and the knickknacks. For some reason, those things feel safe. I know this is ridiculous, but that's how I feel. Just wait in that wonderful room until the danger is gone. I rattle the idea

from my head with disgust. You can't wait here, stupid! You'll be trapped! You have to get out, NOW!

With fear tingling to the tips of my fingers and toes I begin moving down the center hallway. I can see the backdoor. Twenty feet away. Down the hallway, across the kitchen floor, and out into the yard. That's all I have to do.

Two steps from the kitchen I stop short and suck in my breath. I can hear the sound of someone around the corner just in front of me! He must have descended the back staircase. I hadn't thought of that earlier. My path to freedom is blocked. What do I do? The journey to the front door now feels unbearably long. Buzzing beads of sweat form along the fringes of my hairline and seem to paralyze me in the hallway.

I take a small step toward the kitchen and lean forward just enough to be able to peer around the corner. He's standing in front of the counter looking down. I might still have a chance to make a break for the back door. It's risky, but I have the advantage. I know he's there, but he doesn't know I'm there. Three long, fast steps and I'm out.

Don't think about it. Just go for it!

One deep breath and then I'll—

I hear the explosion at the same moment that the bone-shattering thump rips into my back between the shoulder blades. The tile floor of the kitchen rushes upward and slaps me mercilessly in the face and knees. My lungs bulge with searing heat, and my ears pulse with pain.

I'm able to roll over to my back and look. The man who'd been pilfering in the kitchen is now looming over me. From the central hallway where I'd been standing comes a woman with a pistol in her hand—still poised with deadly potential.

Two! Two people came into the house, not just one! How stupid of me. It's a costly mistake I hope to never make again. The numbness creeping over my face and neck makes me wonder if I'll get the chance. Diane will be so frustrated when she finds out what's happened. She's been warning me about it for years.

The man and the woman are looking at me and talking to each other. It looks like maybe they are arguing. I can't tell for sure because I can't hear anything other than a deep, pulsating hum.

The woman looks especially frantic. She is talking to the man with wide facial expressions and lots of gestures. She still holds the gun in her hand—waving it wildly as she talks to her partner. I

wonder for a moment if she might shoot me. Oh, wait—she already has.

A shock in my palm stands out against the sluggishness swallowing the rest of my body. I'm able to turn my head to look at the source of pain inside my hand.

The hummingbird juts out from a deep cut in my bloody palm. The glass has broken into several jagged chunks—unable to withstand the force of my fall.

Now, that's just not fair. Not fair at all.

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The man in the white shirt and loosely knotted yellow necktie leans forward across his desk and pushes a red button on the side of a digital voice recorder. He peers closely at the LCD on the front of the device. Once he confirms the numbers are counting upward from 0:00:00, he leans back and begins speaking.

“Okay, so, it's Friday, April 11<sup>th</sup>. 11:54pm. This is Detective Collin Detwiler speaking. I'm the lead investigator. I am sitting in my office with Mr. Rick Pine and Miss Aubrey Tinnan. Mr. Pine and Miss Tinnan arrived here at the police station about an hour and a half ago, but we are just now beginning the interview because the couple requested the presence of a lawyer, Mr. Eddie Howe, before proceeding. Mr. Howe is in the room as well.”

He addresses the man and woman while avoiding eye contact with the lawyer, “All right, I think we can begin. I can tell you that the easiest way to go about this is for both of you to tell me everything that happened. Leaving details out is only going to complicate the situation. Does that make sense?”

The man and woman, looking ragged and tense, nod in hesitant assent.

The detective looks down at the paperwork in front of him for a few seconds, “Well, let's just start with the most obvious thing. It is my understanding that Officer Willis has already escorted you down to the morgue to see the body, is that correct?”

“Yes.” Only the man answers.

“And it is also my understanding that you were able to identify the body as the same person you encountered in the house...the house located at...” he glances back down at his notes, “47 Loon Lane, correct?”

“That’s right.”

“Miss Tinnan, for the record, I need to ask you directly. Is the man you saw in the morgue the same person you shot with a handgun earlier this evening?”

She swallows roughly before eeking out her response, “Yes.”

The detective jots something quickly then continues, “Okay. Well, let’s just walk through the whole story moment by moment. Mr. Pine? Can you get us started?”

The man glances in the direction of the lawyer who offers a curt nod of affirmation. “We got to the house a little after 9. Around 9:15, I think. We came in through the back.”

“Was the back door locked when you came to it?”

“Yes.”

“What about the security system?”

“No. It was off. Disarmed, I mean. Once we got inside, I stayed in the kitchen for a bit. I saw some mail on the counter, and I wanted to sift through it.”

“And what about you, Miss Tinnan? What did you do once you were inside?”

“Well, um, I went upstairs.”

“Where upstairs?”

“To the master bedroom—to the walk-in closet up there.”

“Okay. What happened next?”

The woman speaks, “Well, after a couple of minutes, I didn’t find what I was looking for, so I came back down the stairs.”

“There are two sets of stairs, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Which stairs did you use?”

“The main stairs. The ones in the center of the house.”

“Okay. Just getting the picture in my head based on what I saw when we processed the scene. Please go on.”

“I was almost to the bottom of the stairs when I looked in a mirror hanging beside the front door. In the reflection I saw an older man standing at one of the windows on the far side of the front room. He was looking outside.”

“Did he see you?”

“No. I don’t think so. He didn’t move or react at all. I was caught completely off guard when I saw him there. I knew Rick was in the kitchen, but I was too afraid to walk and down the hall. I didn’t want the old man to see me and freak out.”

“So what did you do?”

“I went back upstairs as quietly as I could.”

“Why?”

“I wanted get something we could use to defend ourselves.”

“What did you get?”

“I went back into the master bedroom and found the gun lock box.”

“Where was it located?”

“In a drawer in the end table on the left side of the bed.”

“Was the gun box locked?”

She hesitates and looks at her partner.

“Miss Tinnan, was the box locked?”

“No. It wasn’t.”

The lawyer speaks up for the first time since the questioning began, “That’s not entirely unusual, Detective. A lot of people neglect to lock up their guns.”

The detective raises his hands innocently, “I’m just trying to get the facts here. That’s all, I promise.” He scribbles another notation. “So the box was unlocked. What happened next?”

The woman resumes giving account, “I took the pistol out of the box, and—“

“Was it loaded?”

“Yes. I checked to be sure.”

“Go on.”

“I carefully walked back down the main stairs. I looked in the mirror again, but the man wasn’t in the front room anymore. I turned and looked down the hallway toward the kitchen. I saw him standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the hall.”

“Which way was he facing?”

“He was turned away from me. Toward the back door.”

“So he didn’t see you? His back was toward you?”

“Yes.”

Another note.

“Go on.”

“I just stood there for what seemed like forever, watching him. I didn’t know what to do. I was really afraid he might try to hurt Rick. I could hear Rick humming in the kitchen as he went through the mail, so I knew he didn’t realize someone else was in the house. I was scared.”

“So what happened?”

She looks down at the floor and stumbles her way through, “He started to move forward—into the kitchen. I just knew something bad was going to happen to Rick so I—“

“Yes? Please continue. I need you to say it, Miss Tinnan.”

“I raised the gun and pulled the trigger as fast as I could.”

“How many times did you shoot?”

“Just once.”

“And what happened to the man?”

“He fell to the floor immediately.”

“So, you knew right away that you hit him.”

“Yes.”

“Did you know where you hit him?”

“Well, not exactly. There weren’t very many lights on.”

“Where did you aim?”

“I aimed for his chest—just like they taught us.”

The detective’s eyebrows rise in surprise, “They?”

The man cuts in, “We both took a gun safety and home defense course a few years back.”

The detective writes and speaks at the same time, “Ok. So after he fell to the ground, what did you do?”

The man answers, “Well, I was so surprised when the gun went off that I about crapped my pants. I turned and saw him on the floor. He was bleeding pretty bad.”

“And what did you do, Miss Tinnan?”

“I rushed toward the kitchen to see if Rick was all right.”

“And then?”

“Well, we both stood there for a minute to see if he might try to get up and fight back or something.”



“Did he have a gun or a weapon of any kind?”

“No. He had some chunks of broken glass in his hand.”

“Did he get back up?”

Her eyes glaze over as if she is picturing the scene in her mind, “No. He didn’t move much at all.”

The man puts his hand on her shoulder and leans forward, “I’m pretty sure he bled out and died pretty fast.”

“And what did you two do then?”

The man speaks, “We called 911.”

The detective makes a few more notes in his file. Then he closes the folder with a quick sweep of his hand, “Okay. Is there anything else you need to tell me?”

They both regard each other cautiously for a moment before shaking their heads.

“Okay, then. I think that wraps it up!” The detective reaches out and pushes the red button on the recorder. He stands and smiles, “You two are free to go. If we need anything else from you, we will give you a call. We have all of your contact info, correct?”

“Yes. We gave it to the front desk clerk when we came in.”

“Perfect. That’s very helpful.”

The lawyer opens the door to the office, and the man and woman move slowly in that direction. Just before leaving the room, the woman turns back toward the detective and inquires, “Is that really all there is to it? Everything is going to be...fine?”

The detective shrugs, “Well, I’ve got some follow up work I’ll need to do before we can make an official ruling on the incident. The crime scene guys are still over at your house processing everything. We need to make sure that all of the physical evidence there supports your story, but I’m not anticipating any problems. The fact that he wasn’t armed makes things a little more dicey, but the laws in our state are pretty clear. If someone comes into your home illegally, you have the right to defend yourself—even if that means you use deadly force.”

The woman looks at him with wide, sad eyes, “Do you know who he is? I mean—was?”

“No. Not yet. He wasn’t carrying any ID. Actually, you may have inadvertently helped catch a serial house thief. There have been a string of home robberies in Brookwood Run and some of the surrounding neighborhoods over the last two years. It’s been kind of

an odd case to follow. The guy never takes what you would expect him to—TV's, computers, jewelry. Most of the homeowners report only odd items missing. Knickknacks, family heirlooms, and little artsy craft things—that sort of stuff. Of course, I'm not positive that our guy tonight is the same one, but it's definitely a possibility."

"Thanks, Detective. Thank you for all of your help."

"No, thank you both. You've been very helpful tonight. Sorry it's so late. You should get out of here. Go get a hotel room. The crew won't be finished at your house for a while. You should get some rest. I know this has been a traumatic ordeal for both of you. Hopefully, you can put it behind you soon."

They both nod and walk hand in hand out of the office in silence.