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ATLANTIS SHORT STORY CONTEST

WINNING STORY

The Perfect Witness

By Robert Laird

Word Count: 2.076.

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The Perfect Witness

Me (1)

I do have a name but it's hard to pronounce (and spell) so we'll not bother with that, suffice it to say that the story I have to tell is true and I must tell someone, if only to ease my conscience. For reasons that will become obvious, I was unable to take any action so you, I'm afraid, are the chosen one, it is entirely up to you what you do, if anything.

Just to set the scene, I moved into a new apartment about a month ago. It is on the third floor of a building in a pleasant part of town. Not too far from the ground yet not too close. The lounge has a large set of glass doors opening onto a terrace, perfect. The terrace faces South so it catches the sun nicely, beautiful.

It's in a pretty multicultural area, there are churches, synagogues and you can see the minaret of the local mosque from the terrace. The streets are always busy with people of all races and creeds, a great example of peaceful co-existence, or so I thought.

Now, I am an inquisitive being by nature, some would say nosey, so the fact that I have a great view of all that is going on around me is a bonus. That is until this happened, after which I will never show any interest in people's actions again.

Patty and Eddie

It's a Monday morning and I'm bored so I'm just whiling away the time looking at what is going on in the lounge of the apartment I overlook. It's fairly nondescript, with cheap furniture and a plasma tv on the wall. Funny how people will pay more for a tv than the furniture they sit on to watch it. There's a dining table in the corner with dirty crockery on it together with what look like maps and other diagrams, although I can't see that clearly. There's a small waste bin filled to overflowing and there are half-full ashtrays dotted around the room. All in all, pretty dismal really. It's a shame as the view from their terrace is fantastic.

The door opens and a man and a woman walk in, laughing about something. The man is quite tall, slim with short dark hair, a number 4 I believe it's called although I don't know much about such things. I obviously don't know his name so I will call him "Eddie" for this narrative. The woman is a lot shorter, a blonde, who could probably do with losing a few pounds (god, I'm so bitchy!). I'll call her "Patty".

Eddie is carrying a large backpack which he takes off and puts on the floor. He seems quite relieved to be rid of it, it is a warm day and he's sweating quite a lot. He says something to Patty who disappears into another room and returns with

two cans of what looks like beer. They slump onto the sofa, Patty accidentally knocking one of the ashtrays onto the floor. The ash hangs in the air, caught in the sun streaming through the terrace doors and the cigarette butts lie there like dirty yellow maggots, ready to pupate, I find that quite an attractive image, strangely.

The two of them just sit there for a while, talking and smoking, occasionally taking a swallow of beer. Nothing much to interest me, time for a snooze, I reckon.

Hang on, there must be someone at the door as Eddie gets up from the sofa and goes over, opening it to let another man into the apartment.

Hank

I shall call the new arrival "Hank", don't ask me why as I have absolutely no idea, he just seems to be a "Hank" that's all.

Patty looks pleased to see Hank and gives him an enthusiastic hug, Eddie just nods at him, acknowledging his presence. Patty clears the dirty crockery from the table and takes it into the next room and returns with a can of beer for Hank (I'm assuming it's beer now). The two men sit at the table and start studying the maps. Patty stands behind them but doesn't seem to be saying much whereas Hank and Eddie are engrossed in conversation with a lot of gesticulating going on. They seem to come to some agreement and move the maps to one side while Hank

reaches down and pulls the backpack out from under the table. He places it carefully on the table and takes a pair of mobile phones out.

Patty moves behind Hank, occasionally touching him on the shoulder as if to confirm that she agrees with what he is saying. Eddie looks up but says nothing. He takes the backs off the phones and fiddle around inside them, eventually attaching a number of wires to one of them.

At this point, they all turn towards the door and Patty goes over and lets yet another person in. Wow, it's getting a little crowded in there now!

Stevie

The new arrival is a short guy with blonde hair, cut in a peculiar "bob" style that you normally only see on young children. He's obviously in his early twenties but looks about sixteen. He is wearing a pair of round-rimmed glasses and it makes him look a little like a very young John Denver. I shan't call him "John", I shall call him "Stevie" as it sort of conveys how young he looks. He's wearing a tee-shirt with a large blue and red logo on the chest, together with blue jeans and a pair of white trainers on his feet.

Hank shakes Stevie's hand and leads him over to the table, Patty stays by the door. Eddie says something that I obviously can't hear but Stevie gives him a small smile and nods his head.

The three men (two and a boy?) sit at the table and renew their interest in the maps, one in particular holds their attention and Eddie marks what looks like a route on it. Stevie picks it up and looks a little more closely, nodding as he does so.

Hank then opens the backpack and Stevie peers inside, nodding again (he's doing rather a lot of nodding). Hank hands him one of the mobile phones, the one without the wires attached to it. Stevie says something to him and Hank points at the screen, Stevie nods (again) and puts the phone in his pocket, along with the map with the route marked on it.

Patty goes out of the room and returns with a bottle, of wine I presume. She opens it and pours some into each of four glasses she has taken out of a box by the terrace doors. The four of them hold their glasses up and touch them together as if toasting something. They are all looking out at the terrace and the minaret of the mosque catches the sun.

They all turn back into the room and focus their attention on the table again.

Hank takes the backpack and attaches the wires from the second mobile phone to something inside and places the phone carefully in an interior pocket of the bag.

He picks the bag up and holds it while Stevie puts his arms through the straps and tightens them.

They all gather in a circle and hold hands while Eddie appears to say some sort of prayer. When he's finished, he puts his arm round Stevie's shoulder and they both go to the apartment door and leave.

Hank and Patty

Hank closes the door after the two men have left and turns towards Patty, who is standing just behind him. They embrace each other as Hank seems to whisper something in her ear. She smiles and looks at her watch, picks up the half-empty bottle of wine and two glasses, then leads him out of the lounge into another room in the apartment. (I can make a rough guess at what is going on there!).

A fair amount of time goes by and then the door opens and Eddie comes back in, without either Stevie or the backpack. He looks a little flustered and seems to be shouting, the other two's names I suppose. He then looks at the table and sees the two remaining glasses and no bottle, his face visibly darkens with anger. He

goes to a drawer in the kitchenette and takes out a large carving knife, he does not appear to have good intentions.

I am now totally engrossed in the unfolding events, I cannot look away, even if I wanted to.

Eddie

I can see that Eddie is now in a state of total rage as he storms out of the lounge in the same direction as the other two took earlier.

Now I can't see anything happening at all, then Patty rushes back into the lounge. She is covered in what looks like blood, and is completely distraught. She carries on running out of the door into the outside hallway. She is obviously screaming but I cannot hear what.

Eddie now appears out of the other room, he too is covered in blood and has the bloody carving knife in his hand, his arm hanging loosely by his side. He goes over to the door to the terrace, opens it and steps outside, dropping the knife which lies there glinting in the sunlight. He stands there for what seems like an eternity

then takes a look behind him and just climbs over the terrace railings and lets himself fall. My view is obstructed here but there is no way he could survive a fall from that height.

I don't know what to do now, I just sit there and the time passes, I don't know how long.

Me (2)

The sun is just starting to set when a movement catches my eye(s).

The door opens and two uniformed men come into the room with guns in their hands, they must be the police, thank god. They move through the apartment and return to the lounge, their guns now holstered.

A third man now comes in, he is dressed in a dark suit and he has some sort of gold badge on a lanyard around his neck. He is obviously in charge as the other two seem to be following his instructions. He has a mobile phone to his ear and listens intently, looking around the room as he does. He walks over to the terrace door, still looking around and suddenly stops, looking directly at me, I know that he has seen me even though I am trying to hide from view.

Malone

Malone has been a Detective for over fifteen years and he likes to think that he has seen most things but today is busier than most. A woman runs from an apartment in hysterics, a man jumps from the third-floor balcony in the same apartment, and a second man is dead in the bedroom, having suffered multiple stab wounds. To cap it all, he has just had a call from his superior to say that a young blonde man has been arrested with a backpack full of explosives while trying to jump the barriers at a Metro station nearby.

Where does he start? He ends the call and sifts through the papers on the table.

He looks at the two uniformed officers, 'What do you think guys?'

They both shrug and speak in unison, 'You're the detective, Detective Malone.'

Malone smiles, he has known these two for years. They all joined the force together and they regularly rib him about making Detective while they both chose to stay in uniform. He walks over to the terrace doors looking around him. He notices a movement out of the corner of his eye and looks up, squinting in the sunlight. He can see a dark spot where the ceiling meets the wall. He takes a pair of surgical gloves from his pocket and puts them on, then takes a pen from his jacket and moves closer to see what it is that has caught his eye.

After a couple of seconds, he turns back to his two colleagues. 'If only that little guy could tell us what has been happening here' he says to the other two, pointing to a spider nestled into the point where the walls and ceiling meet. 'If he could speak, he'd be the perfect witness'.