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## RUBY

When we first moved into our home early last year, we were excited to get to know the neighbors and their kids. We enjoyed the occasional short chat at the mailbox or a short break while working in the yard for the spring and summer seasonal changes. Once in a while, our dogs and cats also enjoyed their own occasional tête-à-tête with a sniff at the butt, a lick at the face or a short bark. Our neighbor's pet was a little white cat with black spots. I can't recall that fluffy little thing's name but it loved to shoot out like a cannon ball with a will of its own, as I walked around the side of the garage starting out for my morning commute. There were many days, where I steadied my coffee mug from spilling, as I recovered from my heart involuntarily skipped a beat. I would like to think it was just being friendly but can't ignore

the thought that it just might be taunting me and striving to get a cheap thrill for itself. It happened a lot to our dog, Spirit, too. It would strut by causally, nonchalantly, flicking its tail in a teasing way, while Spirit was stuck on the other side of the sliding glass door with her ears up, tail stiff, and vocalizing her distress. It was not long after we moved in when that little cat welcomed us with a gift of a dead bird. They say cats do this as a welcoming, bringing something dead. I am not quite sure how it is supposed to be deemed a gift. I suppose I am supposed to consider that it took great effort for it to chase and kill something and should feel honored it choose to bring me its spoils like a titling. Now that little cat is missing. Although its disappearance has not been reported in the local police blotter, there is a subtle curiosity if it is still alive. ....

It was like every normal winter night in the Pacific Northwest. It rained and rained some more. It rained at night and rained during the day. Remnants of the rain was a deep mystical fog that blanketed our house in the hills of Squak Mountain. The fog, giving off a mystical and eerie feel, attached by the stillness and quietness of our remote cul-de-sac. In our home, the rain sounded like pennies dropping on a floor as it hits the metal roof whenever I laid in bed. It was one special night when my husband laid next to me in a deep sleep with the occasional

rumblings of a rattling snore. I had been sleeping peacefully myself until a bizarre shrieking noise shook me awake. It was a few minutes before I realized that this wailing sound was coming from just outside my open window. I used to like to keep the windows open, letting the cool fresh air creep into the room, allowing me to trench deeper under my massive down comforter. The open windows allowed me to listen to the rain that collected on the branches of our pine trees, shaken free by the occasional gust of wind, creating its own peaceful rhythm of sound. I no longer keep my windows open.

The shriek stole my deep slumber away from me. At first, I tried to attach the noise to something I knew, but realized within minutes what I was hearing sounded completely foreign to me. The sound was a cat's high pitched meow with a blood curdling scream attached to it. I popped up from my bed and peered out the window. The foggy mist had set in during the early morning hour. I could see the neighbor's cat hunched under the moonlight. It was rocking back and forth, facing something I could not see while screeching out this undefinable sound. The shrieking pierced my ears as I frantically maneuvered back and forth across the window trying to get a better view. Shifting back and forth in the dark, I was blinking and rubbing my eyes frantically trying to understand what was going on just beyond the window screen. It was then

that I heard the snorting and I felt something massive and large to the left of my open window, my sight of this body blocked by branches of our flowering shrub. I became paralyzed, stuck between complete fear and a grotesque curiosity to see what I was feeling and hearing.

I grabbed the flashlight near the bed and clicked it and scanned the yard in front of me like a cop searching for a perp. But the mist and glass from the window only ricocheted the light back at me, blinding me further. While my eyesight was recovering from the bright light, I turned and frantically shook my husband to awaken him so he could become a partner in this incredible mystery. He mumbled and rolled over burrowing under the covers. Frustrated, angry, and scared all at once, I again turned back to the window and began to maneuver back and forth across the window making every attempt possible to see what I was hearing and feeling. My eyes opened widely as I anxiously tried to see something. The adrenaline was flowing and I was now fully awake and hyper aware of every sound and motion around me. Suddenly the sounds stopped and the mist seemed to roll away, followed by a pitched blackness which prevented me from seeing anything. I no longer saw the white cat in the small sliver of the moon light. Within seconds, the frost and frozen ground began to crunch as something massive walked across it. The bushes in front of my window began to sway yet no breeze

whistled through the window. My pounding heart began to thump just a little bit faster. The low hanging limbs from our Cedar tree began to move and shake. I was mesmerized now by the silence and the intense feeling of a presence, something was out there. My mind retracted to the scene in Jurassic Park where you hear the large beast coming but all you can see is the darkness of the night and the foliage moving in front of you, ready at any moment for the monster to be in front of you. Slowly and with purpose, the unseen beast then began to trail down the side of my house. I followed it with purpose, opening up my bathroom window and searching once again to witness the beast. Shoving my forehead against the screen, trying to see what I heard walking along my window. All I could hear and sense was the slow, massive and steady trailing of the beast across our foliage with the incidental crackling of a branch. Then it was gone and deep down I knew I just witnessed Ruby.

Ruby, the infamous, curious, travelling bear that likes to circle the court of homes rattling house pets and overturning trash cans. Few have had the privilege of testifying as life witnesses to a spotting. But we all knew, she usually visited deep in the night between one and three a.m. My husband had been shaken to the core by his own encounter with Ruby just few months before. I found him stark naked and shaking like a leaf in the hallway of our home at two am in the morning

insisting a bear was outside. He had been soaking in the hot tub, in a state of tranquility, when Ruby ventured towards him from the side of the garage. That encounter ended up with a visit to the emergency room for a broken finger, from slamming the door on his hand, in his effort to find a safe haven inside our home. Of course I reveled in providing all the juicy details to the emergency staff when they asked what happened.

It has now become a debate in my home. Did I really witness Ruby? Was that a cat I heard or our friendly family of raccoons? Or perhaps, it was that large buck that likes to wander in our yard as well? I allow my husband to have his glory as being the only witness to Ruby, but I know deep down that Ruby ate that cat.