

Ito Romo

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Killer Dog

The next day, his dog was dead.

He was driving home from the Central Supermarket. He hated going to the store. He'd only gone to buy dog food because he'd run out that morning. Everyone there seemed stuck up. He lived on the outskirts of the ritzy neighborhood, Los Alamos, even shared the same last two digits of the zip code with the rich folk—and the supermarket—but that's as far as it went. He lived in the poor section, the one close to services, you know, dry cleaners, all-night diners, the apartments for university students, car wash/garage/oil change places, the back entrance to the country club. One time, he took his mother who'd come to visit him from the valley to the same damn supermarket and she had wanted to buy a LOTTO ticket. The girl at the checkout looked at her as if she had just been asked the most ridiculous question ever.

“We're not you're typical Central Supermarket, you know. We don't sell LOTTO tickets,” she said. He stopped going there afterwards. But, when he fed the dog in the morning, he heard the last few chunks clink into the metal bowl. He had remembered he needed dog food on his way back home from work, just a few blocks from his house, right in front of the snobmarket.

When he turned the corner a few feet from his house, there was his dog, Nelson, in the middle of the street, jumping up at two women. Both screamed frantically, and one of them fell to the ground and flicked a BIC lighter at the dog's face, over and over, as if to defend herself.

"That damn dog attacked us. Your damn dog attacked us," she yelled at him. She'd seen him get out of his car to get the dog in the house.

"Call the cops," yelled one of them, T-shirt pulled up, big belly exposed, pants so tight they had chafed around her waist like a belt. Too tight to button, the zipper held them up precariously, and he could see all this even though it was night.

"Just call them on your cell, Gracie, 911," she yelled to the other, then to him, "That damn dog of yours attacked us."

"But he's a puppy. He was just playing with you. He looks big, but he's a puppy, really."

"Puppy, my ass."

"I'm telling you, he's a puppy. I have his papers if you want to see how old he is. Did he bite you? No, of course not. You think that huge dog wouldn't have bitten you if he wanted to?"

"Just call the cops, Gracie. Sue him."

"Sue me? The dog didn't even do anything to you."

"What do you mean? He threw me down."

"But you're not hurt. Look at you. You're fine."

"Look, Mister, we're calling the cops. Just keep your damn killer dog away from us."

“Killer dog? Away from you? He’s already inside the house. He’s in the backyard.”

The cops came—two of them—one of them played with the dog in the backyard.

“Ma’am, that dog’s just a puppy, and he seems like a really nice dog.”

“I don’t care. He attacked us.”

“Officer, he didn’t attack them . . . he jumped on them like he jumped on you when you went back there. He’s just a puppy. I saw it all. I was driving back from the groceries. I saw it happen right there in the middle of the street. Yes, he did jump on her, but not in a bad way. He was just playing. When I saw what was going on, I parked the car on the curb, look, right there, and I called the dog. He came right to me, but she was already on the pavement. I went to help her after I put the dog in the house. He’s a year and half. He’s a puppy and a sweet dog, but he started jumping the chain link fence two or three days ago, and I didn’t want to have to tie him up.”

“Well you should. He could’ve killed me.”

“Ma’am, I’m sorry, and I’ll file a report if you’d like me to, but I’ve played with the dog and I can’t imagine him trying to hurt you.”

“Go ahead, write him the report. You’re not gonna give him a ticket?”

“Ma’am, he’s got a collar and he’s got a tag. It wasn’t like he was walking him without a leash or anything. The dog jumped over the fence. “

“Well can you give him a ticket?”

“No, Ma’am, I can’t. But I’ll write up the complaint.”

“Good. Write him up. Write him up good, real good.”

The cop looked at him and rolled his eyes.

* * *

The next day, his dog was dead.

All around the yard, in the grass, the dog had scratched these trenches, as if it had been digging frantically from pain.

The two women had come back again in the middle of the night, probably all dressed in black, commando-like, probably after watching Rambo then pigging out on late night drive through sloppy burgers, and stealthily threw a poisoned T-bone into the backyard.

He found the chewed, fleshy bone by the chain link fence between the yard and the driveway.

* * *

He called the city to find out what to do with the dog's body, and the woman who took his call, seemed nice, even consoling. She told him that he should put the dog's body in front of the house in a box, and that workers would pick the dog up that very afternoon. It was strange to place the dog for pick-up on the sidewalk as if he was trash, as if it was trash day. That's when he finally cried over the phone to the woman from city services.

The dog was heavy, dead. It was hard to get him into the air conditioner box he'd stored in the garage earlier that summer when he switched out the busted window unit in

the living room. He took the old air conditioner out of the box and pushed it into a corner where it'd be out of the way until *large pieces and brush* pick-up day the following month. Then he'd take it out onto the curb, just like his dog, for pick-up

He placed the box on its side and had a hard time getting the dog's body in. When he finally did, he flipped the box upright and dragged it to the front of the house. The dog was stiff already and his legs stuck out the top. He had to push them down then close the flaps and weigh them down with a broken brick he had used to prop open one of the garage doors.

He guessed the dog had been dead most of the night, and it was already half-past noon.

* * *

Two weeks later there was a huge thunderstorm, and the house's old wiring blew a fuse. He had gone home for labor day to see his family in the valley, and when he returned late that Monday night, the whole house smelled of rotting flesh.

A brisket his mom had given him had spoiled in its plastic vacuum packaging. The plastic wrapper had expanded like a balloon and popped. He wet a towel and held it over his nose and mouth, the smell was so bad. He pulled the meat out, dumped it into a trash bag, and shook a box of baking soda into the freezer before shutting the door.

His mom had packed the giant piece of meat in ice for him so carefully. Froze it solid for several days. Wouldn't let anyone open the freezer, not her other kids when they came to visit, not even his dad, secured the freezer door shut with a piece of grey

tape to remind all not to open the door. Even, bought a \$3.99 Styrofoam cooler from the Wal-Mart so he could bring it back with him. He did. Couldn't imagine eating so much meat. He remembered thinking he'd feed it to the dog.

He figured he'd put the meat out on the curb with the trash like he did every Sunday night, right where he had placed Nelson's box not two weeks before. But when he walked back to the front door from the curb, he could still smell the rotting meat. He was sure his neighbors could smell it too. Windows now open to a rare South Texas breeze, he was sure the smell was wafting into their homes.

So instead, he carried the slab of meat to the back of the house on a shovel, then he dug a hole in the far back corner of the backyard to bury the brisket. He imagined the neighbors peeking out their windows, sniffing, smelling the rotting meat and imagining he'd killed somebody, dismembered the victim, and was now disposing the body in pieces.

He dug deep.

* * *

Three days later, noon, off work, he went to the back yard and pulled the hose from under the wooden steps that led up to the kitchen door. His intentions were to rinse away the huge puddle of blood the dog had left on the floor of his wooden shed where he'd found his body bleeding at both ends. He sprinkled Ajax unceremoniously over the pool of blood; some of the blood had already set dark and hard around the edges. He

hosed it down. He scrubbed at the edges with what was left of an old broom the dog used to chew on.