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Trouble Afoot

Fiction

By Donald McMan

No one had heard from Spencer in three days, and now his friend Abby stood outside Spencer's apartment while the building superintendent used his master key to open the door. His name was Buff, and he wasn't. As he bent over the lock, cleavage showed. He could have been called Butt. The lock clicked. The door emitted a squeak that made fingernails on chalkboards seem like celestial music. The air was hot and stale.

"There you go, lady," said Buff. "It's open. Take a quick look around, and then let's get outta here and lock it up again. Don't know how I let you talk me into this."

Abby said nothing. They walked in, and the door slammed shut behind them. They both jumped. After taking a moment to recover, Abby began to look around. She checked the small living room. It was messy. Three used mugs on the coffee table. Newspapers. Spencer's laptop on the sofa. Odd he hadn't taken it with him, wherever he went. The kitchen counter was covered in unwashed dishes. A fly feasted on what might at one time have been a pan of lasagna. The bedroom was as messy as the rest of the place. Unmade bed. Unwashed clothes. Wherever Spencer was, he was without most of his wardrobe.

"Hurry up, lady," said Buff just as Abby entered the bathroom. It was pristine. Everything was washed. Polished. It smelled vaguely of disinfectant. She could have been in the bathroom of a builder's show home. But then she noticed. There were no towels. There was no bath mat. The counter was completely empty. Not even a Kleenex box. Nothing.

Despite the mystery, despite the tension, the super was unprepared for the volume of Abby's scream.

"What the hell?"

“Foot!” she yelled. “Oh god. A foot. His foot. It’s here. On the floor. Behind the door. Somebody’s cut off his foot. And left it here.”

She ran from the bathroom. He ran towards it. They collided. She started sobbing.

“Hang on, lady. Let me check this out.”

He came back from the bathroom. “Where are you?” he called.

She returned to the living room, after having thrown up in the kitchen sink. Good luck for the fly. “I’m here.”

“Yup. That’s a foot. Least there’s a reason for me to have opened the place up. Better call 911. You’d better stay here. The police will wanna talk to you. They will for sure. I was a security guard for seven months. Got to know the procedures.”

And then Abby’s face went white. She sucked in her breath. Grabbed Buff. And Buff grabbed back. They stood there, frozen, listening to the unmistakable sound of a key in the lock.

Since 2001, **Donald McMann** has worked as a professor in the English department of MacEwan University. Before that, he worked as a communications practitioner, which involved everything from copywriting and editing to directing campaigns. He is happily married and the father of an adult son. In his spare time, he sings (badly) and golfs (also badly), and is an unapologetic car nut.

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