

## “Slippery”

*Stephen Carter*

The sun streamed unimpeded through the kitchen window, warming Jake’s back as he ate a bowl of cereal. It was a pleasant feeling, but also strange. Usually the light couldn’t get in. His RV blocked the east-facing windows and—

Something clicked.

Jake dropped his spoon and ran outside.

Soon Carl came by in his uniform. He flipped his report book open and considered the empty gravel rectangle: 8x40 feet.

“So much for Fathers and Sons,” he said. Jake looked up at him and Carl motioned with his thumb.

Jake followed the gesture and saw that it indicated an unobstructed view all the way to the end of the road and out to the pasture. Not a single RV or hitch camper graced a single driveway.

An emergency elders quorum meeting was called that night. After a brief opening prayer, they discussed the facts. Every recreational vehicle in the ward was gone. No tire tracks leading to or from the missing campers could be found. The police were stumped.

The men compared the amounts each owed on his particular vehicle. Jake came in second.

Then Malcolm, still wearing his monogrammed shirt and tie, appeared in the classroom doorway. Everyone turned to look at him—the only man in the ward who didn’t camp. Malcolm walked around the room scrutinizing each face, trying to pry something out of them. Then he turned and stomped out.

“His painting from New York,” said the still-uniformed Carl. “The one with the pink dots.”

Jake tried to suppress a snicker but was unsuccessful. In a few seconds, the entire quorum had joined him.

The next morning was quiet. Lying in bed, Jake could hear the cows. A pleasant sound, but vaguely disorienting. Usually the television would—

Something clicked.

An emergency elders quorum meeting was called that night. Even Malcolm was there—tie askew—sitting in a folding chair just like the rest of them.

The facts: no signs of break-ins. Even TVs bolted to the wall were gone, their cords cut even with the floor.

There must be more than one thief, they decided. How else could the whole neighborhood get hit in a single night?

Carl was dispatched to check the Covered Wagon Motel for shady guests. Then the quorum mobilized a posse charged with patrolling the ward that night.

They separated into pairs and strode up and down the streets well into the wee hours of the morning. But all they heard were the chirping of frogs and the breath of the highway; all they saw were the shadows of deer and the halo of the Milky Way.

Jake fell into bed at 5 a.m., glad it was Saturday.

Then something clicked.

He got out of bed and padded out of the room. He grabbed a flashlight and searched through his kids' bedrooms and then through the kitchen, living room, and garage.

Everything seemed to be in its place.

"All is well," he said.

A fitting phrase.

He decided to text it to Carl.

He sat down on the side of his bed and felt around on the top of the nightstand. Brow furrowed, he knelt next to his bed and felt out the transformer plugged into the wall. He took the cord between index finger and thumb and pulled gently along its length. The cord ended with an empty USB head.

The emergency elders quorum meeting was grim. The enemy was as a thief in the night, invading with no warning, stealing their possessions with impunity. Who knew what would vanish next?

Jake stood up and cleared his throat. He said it was time to put the revealed word into action. Time to fulfill the measure of their creation; time to ensure the safety of home and family.

Then he looked meaningfully at Malcolm. Uinta Grocery and Sport was still open . . . if anyone needed to buy a particular something. And maybe some ammo.

After his wife slumped snoring against his shoulder, Jake edged out of bed and opened the closet. He reached to the top shelf and pulled down a metal box.

He fiddled with the combination and then opened the lid, hefting out a Glock 42. Its gravity assured him that tonight would be his first and last meeting with the enemy.

He paced through the house, rattling doorknobs and jiggling windows. So strange, he thought. All his things just slipping away.

Then something clicked.

He found a roll of duct tape in the laundry room cupboard. He pulled a strip free and pressed the end of it to the gun's handle. Then he wrapped the tape around the back of his hand and onto the handle again, taping his fourth and fifth finger to the grip and leaving his thumb, middle, and index fingers free.

He wrapped the tape around a few more times until the weapon and his hand were inseparable.

It felt good.

Then he sat down on a kitchen chair and, despite his best intentions, nodded into a dream.

He woke with his face pressed to the floor, his right hand cold and pained. Jake tried to raise himself to his knees but jerked to a stop mid-way.

He looked down and blinked.

His hand was inside the kitchen floor, his arm sticking straight up out of the linoleum.

Then he felt the gun pulling away from him, down into the ground, with a steady, implacable movement. His wrist bones began to separate as he labored against the force.

At first he panicked, almost crying out. But then the panic ignited into a holy rage. He squeezed the trigger again and again,

his arm jolting with the recoil, dealing round after round into the earth beneath him.

But the gun sank steadily. And Jake suddenly understood that he would lose.

He opened his hand.

And felt the bond pull tight.