

The Willow Street Terror

Mary Johnson

I GUESS I was the only one on Willow Street who even spoke to Mr. Maclean. Well, he did seem like an odd little man. The kids hated him because he always called the police when they played ball in front of his house. He said he did it because he lived right off of busy Southeastern Avenue, and a car could turn onto Willow and hit a boy before anybody knew what happened. The neighbors said he was afraid somebody might knock a baseball through the rear window of his old Plymouth that always sat on the street in front of his house. The neighbor kids called him "Maclean the Fiend."

Maybe the biggest reason for the general hatred of Mr. Maclean was the way he treated his wife. He used to come out on the front porch and yell at her all the time. Mrs. Maclean would just take it—at least nobody had ever heard her say a word back. Mrs. Bobbit, who lived right next door to the Macleans, said that Mrs. Maclean was forever trying to make up for her husband's actions. She would bake pies and cookies for the Bobbits and her other next door neighbor, Old Frank Higgins.

Mrs. Bobbit always said that Mrs. Maclean would have had to bake a lot of sweets to make up for her husband. He had Keep Off signs posted on all his trees.

When the Macleans first moved in, they and the Bobbits agreed to split the cost of a new fence. Mr. Bobbit bought the material and paid the carpenters, but he never got a cent out of Maclean. Maclean could not get along with his other next door neighbor any better. He was always afraid that Higgins' big boxer Duke might get loose and come after him. Maclean kept a broom on his front porch to swing at dogs. When he left for work at three each morning, he would carry it down the steps and to his car if he thought any dogs were near.

What a difference there was in the way Mrs. Maclean got along with Duke! She would talk to that dog for hours. She used to come out back and say,

"Well hello Duke! How are you today? My, you're a pretty dog. Yes, you are. I'll bet I could find a nice bone for you if I tried." And Duke would turn his head from side to side and whine a little like he understood everything she said. Everybody thought Mrs. Maclean was an angel, but I always said she was just a little too sweet. If she was that perfect why did she marry Maclean, I would ask them.

Well, one morning Mr. Maclean was half way down his steps, so he later told me, when he heard a dog growl and made out Duke's form in the darkness. The dog was crouched on the sidewalk in front of Maclean's car, and he did not have his broom. Maclean was afraid to move back toward his house, and he certainly had no

intention of going to his car. He stood on his steps and yelled for help. Finally he started for his door, but Duke had the seat of his pants before he reached the porch.

Oh Maclean was mad! He called the police and the city pound, but no one could cart Duke away because Maclean was the only one who had ever complained about the dog, and Maclean was always complaining to the police about something. Usually, by the time I got home from work at five each morning, Mr. Maclean had already left for work, and Higgins would be warming up his car to leave. This morning the two men were having a big fight. Maclean accused Higgins of letting Duke out purposely, and he told Higgins that he was not going to get away with it. To add to the confusion, Duke was still running around loose, and Mrs. Maclean was trying to get him to come to her. She cooed and coaxed, but the big dog was enjoying his freedom too much to give it up for a few pats. She finally caught his collar, but Duke snapped at her and got away. You should have seen her face when that dog ran off; it hardened like marble.

When Higgins went out to feed Duke before leaving for work the next morning, he found his dog over against the fence stone dead. Beside Duke was a piece of half-eaten steak that Higgins had not given his dog.

Well, Higgins and Maclean had another big rumpus. This time, I guess Higgins really scared Maclean. He warned Maclean to be real careful when he came out for work each morning because "terrible things happen to dog killers." Maclean tried to slap a peace bond on Higgins and get police protection for himself, but by now the police regarded Maclean as a joke. Nothing about the incident was a joke to Mrs. Maclean; she was heartbroken. Mrs. Bobbit said Mrs. Maclean cried over Duke for a week.

I really never did think Maclean poisoned Duke. That man was too scared of that dog to go out back in the dark and throw the animal a piece of poisoned meat. Everybody else thought Maclean did it. A couple of days after the incident he came out to his car and found his tires slashed. The police came this time and Maclean wanted them to go right over and arrest Higgins. He thought the old man had either paid some kids to tear up his car or had done it himself. The police told Maclean that they would do all they could to find the vandals, but they also told him that he ought to try to get along with his neighbors better, or he might be in for a lot of this sort of trouble.

Mr. Maclean took their warning to heart. He told me that afternoon that he was going to lock his car from now on and he said,

"I'd really like to be friendly, but I don't have a chance with these people around here. You know, half the time I'm afraid to go out of the house. That old man over there is crazy enough to shoot me, and I can't take her anymore." (Maclean nodded toward his house.) "I never poisoned that dog, but try to tell her that. Every time I

bring it up she starts bawling. I've about decided to pack up and move out. I've had it."

The neighbors say there was a big fight at the Macleans' that night. Mrs. Bobbit said there was a light and a lot of noise coming from Mr. Maclean's room. When I turned off of Southeastern onto Willow the next morning at five, I was surprised to see Mr. Maclean's car still in front of his house. Must have overslept, I thought. Seeing Maclean in his car, I rolled down my window to ask if he was having any trouble getting started. His head rested against the steering wheel and his eyes stared downward vacantly. Something long and straight rose from his rounded back.

I must have driven down Willow and laid on the horn until the neighbors came out. I can't remember what I did. When they told Mrs. Maclean she cried over and over,

"Everything I love leaves me." A doctor had to give her something to quiet her down.

The police went straight to Higgins after learning of the quarrel. It turned out that he had been over to his sister's all night. She comes and washes for him once a week. Since Maclean's wallet was missing, the police said it looked like an open and shut case of robbery. Higgins said it was probably one of those dope fiends. I never did go along with that. If Mr. Maclean kept his car locked, how could anybody get in the back seat and wait for him as they must have done?

There was a patrol car prowling Willow for a month and I was always reading in the paper about new suspects being picked up and questioned, but the police couldn't find the killer.

Mrs. Maclean was afraid to be alone with a killer loose, so Mrs. Bobbit and Mr. Higgins tried to stay with her as much as they could. She told Mr. Bobbit that she didn't have any family. Her mother was not married when she was born, so she gave her daughter to her mother and father. Mrs. Maclean said that her grandfather died when she was only about eight and her grandmother passed on a few years later. She would have been all alone in the world if it had not been for Mrs. Bobbit and Mr. Higgins. He put up her storm windows, raked her leaves and played Canasta with her. He had to put chains and night locks on her doors because she was so afraid. Mrs. Bobbit kept her company and took her to the store all the time.

Then we all began to notice things. Mrs. Maclean told Mr. Higgins to leave the Keep Off signs on the trees. The police came out whenever a group of kids played ball in front of the Maclean house and there was no old Plymouth there now—Mrs. Maclean had sold it. Some said Higgins was calling the police because he was worried about his own car, but I said that was silly. Why, half the time when the police came, Higgins was at work. I knew who was doing it. She never offered to pay the Bobbits, either. The biggest thing was the way she acted when Mr. Higgins' sister came to wash each week. Mrs. Maclean would dash for her trash burner to raise all the smoke and soot she could.

Despite her actions, Higgins continued to do odd jobs for her and play cards with her. Mrs. Bobbit came over to get Mrs. Maclean to go to the store one day, and Mrs. Maclean started telling her what a wonderful man Mr. Higgins was. She wound up telling Mrs. Bobbit that she and Higgins were going to get married. Mr. Bobbit congratulated Higgins that afternoon, and that's how Higgins found out what Mrs. Maclean had said. He didn't know anything about it, and he told Bobbit that he had never proposed marriage to Mrs. Maclean. He was going to retire soon and go to California. He told Bobbit that he and Mrs. Maclean were going to have to get a few things straight. He went into her house, and they had a battle royal. When I left for work at eight, things had quieted down. Higgins had gone home, and I thought everything was all right.

I got off and started home the next morning as usual. It was hard for me to turn onto Willow ever since Mr. Maclean. I was always afraid that I would flick on my brights and see Mr. Maclean in his car. I turned and felt relieved as I knew I would. Maclean's Plymouth wasn't there, just Higgins' car. I rolled down my window to speak when I saw Higgins in the car. As I got nearer, Higgins thrust his arm out and bent his hand into a claw. He turned a twisted face toward me and tried to speak. Another hard handle rose from his back. A shadow moved across the back seat and Mrs. Maclean stuck her head up to glare at me. This was Mrs. Maclean—this wild old witch? I knew she was just waiting for him to die—so she could take his wallet. I couldn't take my eyes off the old woman. My car crashed into a parked one, pinning me in on the left side. I was so scared I felt sick. I heard a car door slam, and I knew she was either headed for her house or coming after me. I scooted over to lock the doors on the opposite side, but a shadow fell across the dash, and I drew back against the left side of my car. A rabid grey figure grabbed at my car door. Just then a porch light flashed on, and Mrs. Maclean's head jerked up like an animal's. She moved away from the car as a man came out on the porch and yelled,

"Well, that's all I need! Somebody's smashed up my car."

The next thing I knew a policeman was slapping my face and asked me what I knew about the corpse in the car behind me. I told them, and we went to get her. She looked tired and frazzled when she answered the door. She did not seem to know what was wrong, but she let the police go through her house without a warrant. When they told her Higgins was dead, she slumped into a chair and cried,

"No, he wouldn't leave me—not Frank."

The police looked all around. They finally found Maclean's suitcase—still packed—in her closet, a blood-stained knife and a half empty can of arsenic in the kitchen. All she would say was,

"I loved him. We were going to be married. I'd never have hurt him; he was all I had. Now they'll send me to the electric chair because they think I did it. I'm old, but I'm afraid to die. Tell them somebody."

"Don't worry about that ; you'll never get put to death," I told her.

Lighter Darkness

David Dawson

[ALBERT DARRS: He is independent, self-willed, and an extreme realist. He is concerned with his own wishes and desires. Nothing stands as an obstacle for him. This is especially true in his business dealings, for he is aiming at the position of vice-president. He is nearly 10 years older than his wife.

MARY DARRS: She is Albert's wife, small, slender. She is a sensitive, perceptive woman who offers a complete contrast to her husband. She is much younger than her husband. Therefore, she bows before his years and authority in all decisions until the latter part of the play.

MADGE LIGHTON: Mary's sister. She is extremely attractive with dark hair and eyes. She dresses expensively with much jewelry, and there is a noticeable resemblance between her and her sister. She has a moody temperament ranging from extreme gaiety to deep depression.

GEORGE THOMAS: He is about Albert's age and one of Albert's friends. Like Albert, he married a woman younger than himself. He is a stable, settled person.

Madge has come to live with her sister and brother-in-law after the death of her mother. Madge's father, whom she adored, died some years before. After that time, Madge had a complete breakdown and was hospitalized. She came home to stay with her elderly, bed-ridden mother until her death. She came to Mary and Albert and immediately suggested changing their way of living, remodeling the house, and generally criticizing their tastes. She made open advances to Albert and was frequently seen in town with older men. Mary and Albert find her presence uncomfortable and limiting. When Madge comes home drunk while Mary and Albert are entertaining an important business client, Albert raves. He demands that Madge leave and puts it to Mary to tell her. It is now the following morning.

(There is a large sofa center with end tables on either side. Upstage is a large arch with stairs coming into the hallway from the right leading upstairs to the bedrooms. There is a door up left to the outside and one up right to the kitchen. The whole room is decorated in very good taste. Albert sits on the sofa reading a newspaper.)]

MARY: (entering through the arch after coming down the stairs) She's still sleeping.

ALBERT: Hum. It figures. Drunken stupor, I suppose.

MARY: I didn't want to wake her to tell her anything. She's calm now and resting.