

Adverse Possession

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by

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Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they
carry out their wicked schemes.

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it
leads only to evil.

For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who
hope in the Lord will inherit the land..

Psalm 37:7-9 (NIV)



6609 Bynum Drive

Her birth name was Lieselotte Koch, but most people in the neighborhood called her Lottie K. That was to differentiate her from Miss Lottie Morris, who lived farther down the road, near the cul-de-sac abutting Kent Gardens Park with its skyscraping white pines and cedars. Lottie K did not have a problem with the shortening of her name. After all, these darned Americans wanted everything so simple. The only time she heard her full name was when her relatives came to visit from her native Dresden. Even her American husband, who passed five years ago, simply called her “Lot.”

It was a Wednesday morning in February. The residents of McLean, Virginia awoke to clear blue skies and weather chilly enough to whiten the dew that had fallen overnight on cars and lawns. Lottie’s normal routine would go unchanged. At 7 a.m., she awoke and immediately switched on the TV to watch Charlie Rose. The TV was a 25-inch flat screen her daughter gave her last year for her 65th birthday, and it allowed her to spend time with Charlie in lifelike high definition. She delighted telling friends she had such a crush on him. At her

Adverse Possession

age, calling it a crush was hardly apropos. Nonetheless, it made her feel more youthful and alive to try to cling to some trappings of her childhood, though most of them had long passed on.

By 7:30 a.m., she was downstairs switching off the burglar alarm near the front door. A woman her age living alone could not be too careful, she thought, though Fairfax County police had not answered a burglary call on Bynum Drive in ten years. It did not bother her that her alarm code was the same as her ATM code, which was the same as her daughter's gate code at her home in Sterling, which was the same as the month and day of her daughter's birthday. The fewer numbers she had to remember, the better.

Sometime between 7:30 and 7:45, she slipped on her Cole Haan down coat, a rare extravagant purchase from the Nordstrom at nearby Tysons Corner Center mall. She stepped outside just in time to greet a few of the neighborhood kids as they dipped in the rear of their parents' BMWs and Lexuses and headed off to school. The moment they saw Lottie, with her flaxen hair tied back into a bun and her supermodel complexion, they yelled, "Hi, Miss K!," further shortening her name. She always would respond with a wave or, if they were close enough, she would say, "Morning. Have a good day at school."

Lottie could tell that the kid who delivered the *Sun Gazette* this morning was the lazy rascal who rarely got out of his car, but tossed the paper from his driver's side window. Because her house, like most of the houses in the neighborhood, had front lawns about the length of a basketball court, the paper usually landed somewhere in the middle of the driveway,

Louis N. Jones

or on the top of her car. When this happened, Lottie had to walk down the driveway to retrieve the paper. However, this morning the paper landed in the middle of the yard, which meant it would be damp from the dew. Lottie grunted as she walked in the yard to retrieve her paper, the icy dew crunching under her slippers. She really preferred the kid who would walk up the driveway and place the paper neatly inside the mailbox, which was on the wall just to the left of her front door.

Over the past two months, Lottie K had added one slight thing to her routine. She glanced quickly at the five-bedroom, split-level ranch-styled house directly across from hers on Bynum Drive to make sure everything was okay. She had grown quite fond of the owners, a young couple who had bought the house just over a year ago for \$950,000. Shortly after moving in, Jesse and Jennifer Kane saw Lottie in her front yard pruning the wild hydrangeas framing the eastern edge of her driveway, and they came over and talked with her. They talked frequently in the coming days and weeks, and their talks sometimes lasted for more than an hour. Whenever Lottie's 10-year-old granddaughter, Kaitlyn, came to visit her from Sterling, the Kanes' two children, 8-year-old Ashley and 7-year-old Aiden, would entertain her in their spacious basement, play the latest video games, and enjoy marathon couch potato sessions with *Adventures in Odyssey*. The Kanes had even invited Lottie to their church a few times, although Lottie was Catholic, and the Kanes' worship style was the loud hallelujah, lifting of the hands, falling prostrate on the floor, twirling in the aisles kind. Lottie couldn't really get into their worship style, but found the Kanes to be genuine

Adverse Possession

and loving people, and connected with them based on their mutual admiration for each other.

Consequently, Lottie agreed to keep an eye on the Kanés' home while they were away on a missionary trip to Haiti. In a neighborhood as quiet and uneventful as Bynum Drive, the responsibility amounted to nothing more than making sure the UPS man hadn't placed any unexpected packages on their front doorstep. She did not need to worry about mail, because the Kanés had their mail temporarily held at the post office. The Kanés had left Lottie with the key to the house in case there were any emergencies, and in the past two months, she only needed to use it once. Two weeks ago, during heavy rain, she went to check the basement to make sure the rain did not flood it, as the sump pump was renowned for being lazy and finicky.

This morning, Lottie's quick glance at 6609 Bynum Drive found nothing out of order, so she went back inside her home to prepare for work. Today was a work day, so she could not salivate over Charlie Rose another hour. Instead, she had to shower and get dressed for her part-time fill-in receptionist job at Woodmore Associates, PC. Attorney Neil Woodmore had allowed his regular receptionist to attend morning classes at Northern Virginia Community College on Wednesdays, so Lottie K earned a few extra bucks, besides her social security checks, by filling in. After a quick bowl of muesli, Lottie reemerged from her home, climbed into her green Nissan Sentra, and headed off to work.

Unbeknownst to Lottie, someone was watching her every move. From the moment she emerged from her house, to the moment two minutes later when she started her car and

Louis N. Jones

pulled out of her driveway, eyes were focused on her.

Eyes were watching through the window from inside the master bedroom of 6609 Bynum Drive.