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Birdwatchers Club

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BIRDWATCHERS CLUB

ELLEN IPSEN

The man slammed the door on his faded blue Ford before he remembered he had left his brief-case in the passenger seat. He slowly searched his pockets for the key he had held mere seconds before — somehow they were already lost. He had been distracted all day at work and didn't finish the report that should have been done yesterday. Before going inside, he examined the cracks in his windshield. They looked like they had spread, but he wasn't quite sure.

He could smell something cooking from inside and his stomach growled. Still, he saw his neighbor in the yard across the street and went to chat. He didn't particularly like small talk, but he went to chat. He found out his neighbor's laundry room had flooded, and could they possibly borrow two eggs? They were out.

Finally he headed in to the house. He remembered he had set up a new 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle on his work table and sighed. Now he would have to work at the dining room table. The atmosphere in the living room was all wrong for work. There was a painting in the corner that he hated and the lighting was too bright in one corner and the rest of the room felt like a shadow. But it was there or take apart the unfinished puzzle.

The man's wife was calling him for dinner but he hadn't finished his evening cup of tea — English Breakfast with a splash of milk. His daughter once told him it was funny, he only drank English "Breakfast" tea before dinner and never with breakfast. But he thought, English Breakfast is just a name and tea time was at 5:30 PM.

Dinner that night was good. It was some new recipe from the exotic cookbook his wife was trying out. Most of the new things she made were alright, but sometimes he wished they could have ordered pizza. He didn't say that. But that night dinner was good. Besides, they had ordered pizza the

night before and they were progressing towards being on first name basis with the delivery boy.

They quickly did the dishes before he sat in his favorite chair to watch a bit of the game. It was baseball season, his favorite. He also liked football season, but wasn't much of a basketball fan. His favorite team, the Minnesota Twins, were doing average. He wished they would do better, but he was loyal and would never want to be labeled a "band-wagoner."

The Twins lost and he looked at his watch. It was getting late. He had better start on that report. Instead, he decided to work on his jigsaw puzzle a bit first. Within an hour, he successfully finished the border. The border of the puzzle was the easiest and should be completed first. He refused to look at the picture on the outside of the box because that was cheating, but he knew this puzzle was some sort of forest scene. He looked at his watch, it was getting really late.

Finally, he sat down at his laptop set up in the living room. He rearranged to be closer to the light. With concentration, he finished the report in an hour. Maybe not his best work, but it was complete work. Good enough, it was time for bed. He was laying in bed when he remembered he hadn't brought the neighbor those eggs.

The woman had been busy all day. She had walked the dogs, gotten coffee with a friend, gone to work, and gone on a bike ride. She was always doing something. She liked it that way. When she got home, she pondered what to make. They had ordered pizza the night before, so she wanted to make something. Something new and exciting.

She got out her new cookbook. Her friend had brought it back for her from her latest trip. Her friend was always going on exciting trips and discovering the world. But she always brought the woman back a cookbook. The woman flipped through the book before settling on something — compared to some of the recipes she had recently tried, it was a plain dish but looked easy enough to make.

She absentmindedly started sautéing vegetables and looking out the window. There was a bird at the bird feeder that her husband had put up when they first moved into the house years ago. He still filled it and the birds kept coming back.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw her husband was home, parking his pick-up. He was examining the window. Or looking for something. She couldn't tell from inside. She didn't understand why he loved that truck so much. She knew he could afford something nicer. He worked a lot and wasn't a big spender. But he kept that truck and probably would until he died or it did.

Now she saw him talking to the neighbor — the ones she didn't care for. Their boys were always running around the streets as if they had no parents at all. That was okay though, she got along quite well with the neighbors directly to her left and three doors down to the right.

Dinner was ready, but her husband had yet to finish his precious tea. He finally came down and ate. He gave her a rare complement on her cooking. She disagreed wholeheartedly and found this particular dish quite bland. She would not be making it again. Next time, she would make something more exotic.

Afterwards, she did all the dishes. Her husband was doing something-or-other in the kitchen, but mainly just in the way. She was looking forward to watching a movie she had recorded on the TV, but by the time she got there, her husband was watching a baseball game, which usually took hours. They had another TV, but that room was always cold and her movie wasn't recorded there.

She decided to go up and read, but she only got a few pages into her book before she fell asleep with the bedside lamp still on.

The weekend was finally here and the man had exciting plans. In fact, plans he had been looking forward to all month. He was going birdwatching! He was going to get up early the next morning, drive to the wildlife reserve, and spend a glorious day tromping about the marsh, bird book and binoculars in hand.

He had recently inherited his son's iPhone, which he wasn't entirely sure how to use. He had gotten into many arguments with his kids about their generation's dependence on such devices. They got mad that he didn't see their calls for days after, but he didn't really see the big deal. Besides, he used his new iPhone plenty. In fact, he had learned how to download applications. He was very excited to try his new birdwatching app. It played five bird calls for every species. He had paid twenty dollars for it, which his kids told him was an insane amount for an app. But he couldn't think of a better way to spend twenty dollars.

His son used to come on these expeditions with him. His daughter occasionally used to come on these expeditions. Now they were both gone, but he would call them to tell them about his day. His wife had never come, she scoffed at the idea of birdwatching.

In four hours, he saw twenty-five species of birds. What a day! He was excited to tell his friends about it. He was meeting them at his favorite brewery later that night. He had even used his new app a few times, although he found he liked the book more. He didn't take photos but the day had been so beautiful that he had wished he had a camera. Or an artistic eye.

On his drive home, he wondered why birdwatching was considered "lame," as his son had eloquently put it. He didn't consider himself to be old yet, so why was everyone calling it a grandfather's hobby. He called his son to ask him, but his son never even answered his question. His son wouldn't stop laughing at him for forgetting that his iPhone had a camera. Maybe he was getting old. He sup-

posed it didn't really matter.

Besides, he was joining Birdwatchers Club next month.

The woman sat listlessly on the couch. All of her friends were busy. Her kids were gone. Her husband was birdwatching. She had asked him to go to a play that night, but he hated the theatre and despised musicals. Typical.

She absentmindedly flipped through a magazine she found laying on the coffee table. She tried watching TV. She took the dogs on a walk. She cleaned the house.

Finally, she tried calling a friend she had drifted apart from, but alas, she was too busy. She called her daughter who talked to her for an hour. Her daughter gushed about some new guy, some exciting class, some cool trip she was taking.

She decided she would bake something to fill the time. She settled on a classic – chocolate chip cookies. She started mixing everything together. She was excited because she hadn't baked anything in a while. Maybe she would even take some to her neighbors.

She went to the fridge for some eggs, but they were out.

The man came home one day. He couldn't find his wife anywhere in the house. He figured she was with a friend or running errands. He was content having the house to himself for a few moments of peace.

Dinner time approached and she still wasn't there. He was getting hungry. He waited a little while longer before deciding to start making something. Before he started cooking, he called his wife, out of curiosity. She didn't answer.

Later that night, she came in the front door silently. She seemed okay. He asked her where she'd been. She said she drove down to see their daughter. That was four hours away so she must have been gone all day. He was surprised.

That morning, she got up. Then she decided she wanted coffee from that one coffee shop. The neighborhood cafe near her daughter's new house had the best coffee. If she remembered correctly. She wanted that coffee. So she called in sick to work. On the way there, she cried a little, but she didn't know why. On the way back, she sobbed.

The daughter remembered a story she used to tell her brother. They only told it to him up at the beach cabin they went to every summer. Her favorite place. A place they hadn't been in year.

A mythical bird exists in the Daybob Bay Grove: a Snipe. Snipes change form and can look like anything. A tree, a chair, a sister. A Snipe is powerful and evil. A Snipe may be in the house. It may be in a bedroom. It may be anywhere. It is impossible to tell if a Snipe is there or not. If a Snipe is there, you need to catch it. If you don't catch it, you will have bad luck forever. If a Snipe doesn't find you, you're lucky. It takes years to catch a Snipe.

Once a young man came to visit Daybob Bay and with his wife and a Snipe discovered him because his life was so happy. The Snipe was there the day the man left his wife. He was there the day the man lost his job. He was there the day the man drowned in the ocean. The man didn't believe the Snipe was a problem, so the Snipe was angry and persistent.

The son didn't know what to make of this story. His sister told it to him to scare him, he knew that. But he couldn't sleep for a weeks, because he was convinced there was a Snipe under his bed. As he grew up, he knew for sure the Snipe wasn't real. And he didn't live at Daybob Bay. But every once in a while, he thought his family was followed by a Snipe. One they could never quite catch.

The woman sat on the porch swing. Her son had just sent her a message telling her he had a dream about the Snipe. The Snipe he used to run around with a pillow case and flash light try-ing to catch. She laughed at the memory.

The man came home and saw his wife sitting on the porch swing. She was smiling. He went out and asked her if she wanted to go birdwatching that weekend with him. He didn't know what he wanted the answer to be.

The woman coughed in surprise. The old porch swing creaked. She almost said yes. The man went back inside and made his tea. He half-heartedly smiled.

Birdwatching. Old men. Typical.