

“Abe and Nell” by Sean McArdle

Abe had a plan which was to steal three items from Nell’s property. They had lived near each other for ten years and during that time each had been single and solitary apart from a child whom Nell said hello to when he delivered the paper.

The first item was to be insignificant and the intention would be to coax Nell into wondering if a thief was about or if it was the dumbing-down dementia coming on. Abe snuck out one cold September night and removed an old cushion from Nell’s rocking chair. The boards didn’t squeak as Abe had feared and his escape was simple. From his bedroom window Abe saw no light come on so the first theft was done.

Abe wanted to attract Nell’s attention but not in any simplistic way and his plan was to have her come around to his place to find out if he had seen any lurkers. He would invite her in and offer her a beverage and biscuits he had bought for Christmas. Conversation would flow, they would become friends and singleness and solitude would cease.

The second theft needed to be more significant but not important enough to have Nell call the cops. At three in the morning Abe left via his back door and quietly removed three melons from Nell’s vegetable patch. Nine melons remained so Abe didn’t see much harm. Again, no light or sound from his neighbour’s house.

The following day Abe sat peeking from behind the lace curtains and was gratified to see Nell walking up and down the street, perturbed but not panicked. Nell stopped in front of Abe’s fence and took a long look at his garden.

Success could be imminent but Abe waited a week before his final theft, it needed time for Nell to relax and himself to consider what would be the all important object of thievery. On the way to Henry Buckle’s store, Abe noticed some sports equipment on Nell’s stoep.

The week passed and wearing his soft indoor slippers, Abe removed the gloves and bat and tip-toed home. No noises or lights and Abe went to bed full of excitement for the possible if not probable visit of Nell the next day. He dreamed a little of coffee and biscuits and company.

The meeting never happened; it became known via Henry that Nell had become a frightened recluse with double locks and had given up her garden. Abe moved to Iowa, shame and grief filled his days. A year after the thefts, Nell received a bulky, poorly wrapped package which contained a cushion, melon seeds, a baseball bat and gloves and a postcard which read ‘Baseball gloves and bat!!; and in barely visible pencil ‘I’m sorry, I hope you’ll be as happy as the people in the picture. Abe’.

Abe had left his forwarding address at the store and Nell sent him a card which read ‘You didn’t need to take, I was ready to give. Nell’
