



Mister Camouflage

By John Richmond

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They were already living here- next door, on the right-, when we moved in. There was the husband- Anthony- the wife- Donna- and two high school-aged kids. They were professional people and the kids were well-behaved and polite. Everything seemed normal, at least for a while.

Actually, a couple of years passed with our relationship consisting of nothing more than hello and goodbye waves and some occasional small talk around the forsythia bushes. And, so, we settled into our personal version of "life in the suburbs." It was peaceful and it was quiet- it was five o'clock in the morning- and I had just stepped outside to walk the dog when I heard it. F - f - f - f - f - th-ump!

It was a strange sound. One that I had heard somewhere in the distant past, but was, at the moment, unidentifiable.

F-f-f-f- th-ump!

There it was, again. It sounded like it came from somewhere on the right, but, still, my bearings could not yet locate it.

F-f-f-f- th-ump. Again, but this time with a more pronounced thumping sound at the end.

I walked further down the driveway so that I could have a greater perspective down the street. It was then, when I could see up the next door neighbor's driveway- yes, those neighbors- that I saw Anthony standing halfway down his driveway with a bow and a quiver full of arrows, and, he was dressed in camouflage- jungle camo to be specific. Instantly, a distant memory trace of the archery range at Boy Scout camp and what I was visually experiencing dovetailed with each other. He, Anthony, was shooting arrows from halfway down his suburban driveway into a hay target stand in his garage.

F-f-f-f- th-ump! F-f-f-f-th-ump! F-f-f-f-th-ump! Over and over, again, he shot. It was bizarre, it was strange, and that was where it all started with my next door neighbor who at that moment became known as "Mister Camouflage."

I walked the dog down the street, came back and then headed back up the driveway.

"Wow" I thought to myself, "*talk about being messed up.*"

But that wasn't the end of it. Oh, no, there was more.

The next week I watched him in both his back and front yards, setting up some sort of electronic detection system that occasionally screamed out in high-pitched tones as he was securing his perimeter.

In the winter, I would see him- yes, still dressed in jungle camo- against the snowy background, ride his ATV up and down the driveway. You see, he had outfitted it with a little plow attachment, and he was out there "plowing" his driveway.

Of course, you have to know that our driveways are basically the same

length and width and it took him longer to maneuver his ATV plow than it took me to do my driveway with a shovel.

At other times, every now and then, he looked and acted like he was heading out for someplace remote and distant. I knew that he was going because he had "outfitted his van so that he could drive his ATV up these wooden planks into it.

We did have talks once in a while. The most memorable one was when he told me something about going up into the Arctic and setting up a security perimeter to ward off the bears. Kodiaks I imagined, maybe polar bears- maybe both- but, then, again- maybe neither.

Maybe "The Arctic" was really Arctic, Pennsylvania or Arctic, Ohio- or the "Arctic Club" somewhere up on the lake.

Anyway, over the years, I have so much gotten accustomed to seeing him in camo, that on the rare occasion that I've seen him- usually in the supermarket- dressed- suit, tie, shirt, dress shoes- it seemed disturbingly odd in both a specific and general way.

Specifically odd, because to all of the other shoppers he looks like a typical "normal suburbanite," though I know somewhat different.

Generally odd, because knowing what I know about Anthony, when I stand there and look around at all of the other "normal suburbanites," well, my imagination gets going and I have to ask myself- am I really seeing any of them for who they really are? I wonder.

John Richmond has "wandered" parts of North America, taking him from a small fishing village (population 400) to Chicago and New York City. That which "fell in-between" were the people in cities and towns he lived in across New York State, Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina. Recently, Richmond has sequestered himself in his basement office where he divides his time between writing and discussing the state of the world with his coonhound buddy-Roma. His writings have appeared in *The Round*, *The Potomac*, *Syndic Literary Journal*, *Ygdrasil* (Canada), *Slow Trains*, *Forge*, and is forthcoming in *Lalitamba*, and *Kerouac's Dog Magazine* (U.K.).

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