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# MISTAKEN IDENTITY

by Rhonda Shephard

"JZBD 9178," Clara Burrows heard the strange call letters coming over the commercial radio in her kitchen. "Marva, do you copy?"

"JZBD 9178. Marva, do you hear me?" This second request was more demanding.

"That blasted breakthrough," Clara grumbled, rinsing the last dinner dish. Lord knew she told Truman a thousand times her opinion of those commercial radios. Did he listen to her? In a word, no. Of course he never listened to her. She had to stand aside while he spent hundreds of perfectly good dollars on the clatter-racket noisemakers. Now she had his expensive play toy that he had insisted on keeping her company all day. It cluttered up her sideboard and disturbed her peace with its awful crackle and squawking. He wanted to be in touch with her at all times. He could talk to her in the tractor, the pick-up, or the car. Fool man. Didn't he realize that was the very reason she didn't want them. If she wanted to talk to him, she wouldn't have needed her television. Now it looked like she might have to leave her own home to get away from that incessant source of frustration. Things had been fine for thirty years on their farm in Western Oklahoma. Why change them now. If she wanted the fast life, she could move to Oklahoma City.

"You never know what you might need or hear," Truman had waved aside her concerns and complaints.

"Yes, Roy," a woman responded.

"Must be that Marva woman." Clara muttered, arranging her dishcloth over the faucet to dry. She hated it when another operator broke through on their frequency. It was like eavesdropping. It was bad enough being on Altel's party lines with all her nosey neighbors able to hear her business, but she sure didn't want a complete stranger listening in. She crossed the room to turn the thing down. The last thing she wanted to hear was another poor woman being summoned like the hired help and her peace being disturbed. That Roy fellow probably wanted this Marva woman to fetch or tote something. Since Truman brought that thing home, she had become his personal errand runner and secretary. She made more trips to John Deere in the last few months than she had in the previous ten years.

"Marva, I'm gonna kill Uncle John." Roy's voice crackled, filling Clara Burrows' kitchen.

Clara stopped short; her fingers froze as she reached for the radio volume control. "Oh Roy, must we? Can't we find another way?" Marva responded immediately.

Clara stood transfixed at what she had overheard. "Now Marva, we've discussed this at length. We both decided to do away with the old boy. He's outlived his usefulness. He'll take a lot of care. I don't want to be bothered with him."

She felt her throat constrict. What were they saying? They were talking about killing a man—a poor man.

"I know, but he's almost family; surely we don't have to do away with him just yet." Marva sounded reluctant to Clara's shocked ears.

"But he's going downhill anyway. We'll just put him out of his misery. One quick shot, right behind the ear. He'll never know what hit him." Roy graphically explained.

"Merciful days," Clara groaned. "They're gonna kill that poor, sick man—just blow his head off."

"Roy, maybe we could just give him something in his food, and he'll die in his sleep." Marva's suggestion popped over the airways.

"Nope—too many chances it might not work. Just shoot him and it'll be done. A twenty-two bullet shouldn't make too much of a mess." Roy dismissed Marva's suggestion.

Clara clutched for the nearby telephone. She had to call for help. She had to save Uncle John. She had to let the authorities know about this murder afoot. That fiend was worried about how much of a mess shooting Uncle John would create. "Truman Burrows, this is all your fault. I never knew

about such viciousness before you got that electric devil," Clara whined.

"All right, all right—I agree—just wish we didn't have to do it. Uncle John has proven very useful to us. I guess once that you're old it just makes sense to do the merciful thing and get rid of him. Do you need any help?" Marva was now persuaded and had agreed to help in the murder of Uncle John.

Clara dialed the emergency 911 number. "Emergency, operator."

"Oh, God, please. They're gonna murder him!" Clara screamed into the receiver. "They're gonna shoot him in the head!" Clara's ears were ringing because of her rising blood pressure.

"Ma'am, please settle down," came the calming words of the 911 dispatcher. "Now tell me what's wrong." "What's your name, please?"

Clara's heavy breathing made her feel lightheaded. "They're gonna kill some poor old man named Uncle John. My-My name is Clara Burrows. You've got to do something; you've got to stop 'em!"

"Who's planning this killing?"

"I-I don't know; they're on the radio. They've been talkin' about it, plannin' it. All the details."

"Mrs. Burrows, are you listening to a soap opera on the radio? Might I remind you this telephone number is for emergency use. I could give you the number for New Horizons; it's a mental health facility in our area. I understand how easy it is to become involved in soap operas. I can hardly wait to get home

## INTER-RELATIONSHIPS

to DAYS myself."

Clara panted, "Of course not! There are two people on my commercial radio frequency, and they are talking about killing Uncle John."

"Mrs. Burrows, eavesdropping on a private radio frequency may be a federal offense. Might I advise you to check your monitor switch? It should be in the out position."

"Oh, you moron! Some scoundrel named Roy, and his hussy Marva are planning the murder of that old man. I think Roy's forced Marva to do it. They called him Uncle John. I don't know whose uncle he is. They don't know I'm listening. They don't know that I'm hearing them."

"Mrs. Burrows, have you taken any drugs lately? Sometimes certain prescription medications will cause hallucinations. Could this be your imagination? Since they don't know you're there, perhaps Roy and Marva aren't there!" the emergency dispatcher responded patiently.

"Noooooooooo!" Clara felt as if she would faint. "I'm not crazy—I'm not doing dope. How dare you suggest such a thing. My lips have never touched liquor. I'm trying to save poor Uncle John."

"Marva, are you still there?" Roy's voice came over the radio again.

Clara's bulging eyes swiveled to the radio. "Now listen to this; they're planning to kill him." Her screaming into the radio left a ringing vibration in her kitchen.

"If it will make you feel better. Please don't shout. I can hear clearly."

"I'm here, Roy," Marva finally answered.

"Just listen." Clara held the telephone receiver out so the disbelieving dispatcher could hear for himself. She decided when Uncle John was safe and she was famous for saving him, that 911 operator would be separating potatoes in some back room. Better yet she'd have Truman hire him next summer to chop cotton. Why, that would be the only decent job he could find.

"Marva, I'm ready," Roy informed her.

"Roy, I know it's tough, but it's got to be done."

"Yeah, but I sure hate to, you know. He's pretty ancient, but the Doc said he's diseased and it's a matter of days. You know, he was the best bull ever in our herd" ■

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