

# Jack Driscoll

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an excerpt of

## *Prowlers*

THERE'S a ladder that leans against the back of the house, a sort of stairway to the roof where Marley-Anne and I sometimes sit after another donnybrook. You know the kind, that *whump* of words that leaves you dumbstruck and hurt and in the silent nightlong aftermath startled almost dead. Things that should never be spoken to a spouse you're crazy in love with—no matter what.

Yeah, that's us, Mr. and Mrs. Reilly Jack. It's not that the air is thin or pure up here, not in mid-August with all that heat locked in the shingles. It's just that we can't be inside after we've clarified in no uncertain terms the often fragile arrangement of our marriage. And right there's the irony, given that we fill up on each other morning, noon, and night—excepting during these glitches, of course, when we reassert our separateness, and all the more since we've started breaking into houses.

B&E artists, as Marley-Anne calls us, and that's fine with me, though never before in our history had we made off with somebody's horse. Tonight, though, a large mammal is grazing ten feet below us in our small, fenced-in backyard. This kind of incident quick-voids a lease, and we signed ours ten months ago with a sweet-deal option to buy. A simple three-bedroom starter ranch with a carport, situated on an irregular quarter acre where in the light of day we present ourselves as your ordinary small-town underachievers. And that pretty much identifies the demographic hereabouts: white, blue-collar, Pet Planet employed. I'd feed their C-grade canned to my rescue mutt any day of the week if I could only sweet-talk Marley-Anne into someday getting one.

I drive a forklift, which may or may not be a lifelong job but, if so, I'm fine with that future, my ambitions being somewhat less than insistent. Marley-

Anne, on the other hand, is a woman of magnum potential, tall and funny and smart as the dickens, and I buy her things so as not to leave her wanting. Last week, a blue moonstone commemorating our ten-year anniversary, paid for up front in full by yours truly.

Anything her maverick heart desires, and I'll gladly work as much swing-shift or graveyard overtime as need be, though what excites Marley-Anne . . . well, let me put it this way: there's a river nearby and a bunch of fancy water-front homes back in there, and those are the ones we stake out and prowl.