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## "My Conversation with Officer Bennett"

It happened a year ago, on the first of September. We live in a college neighborhood, and the duplex next to us is a rental, usually occupied by students. This year a group of suburban girls moved into the left half, and boys from Chicago into the right.

Rachel and I met the boys' parents and explained the bad experiences with loud afterhours partying we'd had with the house in the past. One of the dads gave us his home phone number back in Chicago, and told us to call him if the boys ever disturb us.

That night, the boys met the girls, and a small, but loud party, spontaneously broke out. Around 1 PM, I woke the father in Skokie and told him the good news.

The next afternoon was gorgeous. Our house was full of kids, our own plus neighbors. Our family TV, a brand new Magnavox screen-within-a screen model, was

beaming Star Trek reruns from the living room. My trusted dog Beauregard lay sleeping in the sun on the front porch.

In the midst of this, someone entered our house from the back door, unplugged the Magnavox, and made off with it. I went to turn it on, and all I found was a warm spot on the TV stand.

I called the police, and within ten minutes I saw a figure in blue slowly approaching the house. It was a woman officer, but she walked in a policemanlike way, flatfooted, and with her head tilted back and at a fatigued angle.

She introduced herself as Officer Bennett as I told her the incredible story of the bold burglary -- right under our noses. Without blinking she eyed the house and adjoining properties. I showed her the TV stand, now cold.

"Do you suspect anyone?" she asked. And I told her I was wondering if the new neighbors had retaliated for calling their dad the night before. She nodded, and made her way to the backporch, and looked at the students next door, having a back yard barbecue.

"I'm just going to stare at them for a few minutes," she murmured. "You see, I have a psychic gift for surfacing emotional discomfort. If any of those kids feels guilty, I'll know."

While she stared, she spoke to me. "I think I know what kind of man you are," she said. "You're a nice guy, right? Leaves his doors unlocked? Has a hard time saying no to people?"

Yes, I agreed to all that.

"Don't feel bad," she said. "Those are good qualities, they just make you a victim in this world. You're weak on the outside, but inside, you're strong."

She turned to face me. "I wish my LeRoy was more like you," she said. "I know he loves me, but he won't say it."

She pulled at her holster-belt until the leather squeaked. "And I'll let you in on a secret," she said. "This belt isn't getting any looser, if you know what I mean."

"You're going to have a baby?"

She clenched her jaw and nodded. "And he and I are too much alike. I seem strong, but inside, I'm scared." She stared at the grass.

I swallowed. "So -- do you think any of those kids took my TV?"

She nodded. "The kid on the steps, smoking a cigarette. He won't make eye contact. He took it."

"What should we do about it?"

She shook her head and smiled dryly. "Nothing we can do. I may be psychic, but I'm not about to lose my job for it."

She wrote down some notes, and I grasped at straws. I didn't care about the TV any more. "You know," I said, "chances are, LeRoy is exactly where you are at -- full of feeling but unsure what to say. Maybe you have to trust his love until he's ready. And hope he's ready soon."

She folded her notebook up and packed it away. "That's the best advice I've got all day," she said. "And here's some for you. Don't replace the TV. It's a waste. Get your kids a computer."

And she ambled away. It was like the last scenes of *The Lone Ranger*, where the masked man gets away before anyone thinks to thank him. I wanted to tell her we had a computer. I wanted to wish her luck with LeRoy. And with the baby. And to get a case number in case the TV showed up.

But she was gone. And one of the most remarkable conversations of my life was over.