

# Thicket

*by* Dave Clapper

Through the window, I see the police. Lots of them, trampling down the blackberry brambles. Something reeks. I started to smell it a couple of days ago, but I convinced myself I was imagining things. It was in the 70s, then. Now, the thermometer is pushing ninety degrees and there's no mistaking the smell of decay.

Jack has been gone for eleven days this time. He's never been gone longer than three. I haven't called the police, though. Every night, on returning from my shift at Wal-Mart, I expected, or perhaps only hoped, to hear his stereo blaring.

The thorny vines are much too thick for the uniformed men to wade through. They've started hacking away at the mass with electric hedge trimmers. In response to the whine of the motors, the two German Shepherds strain harder at their leashes.

Jack often disappears for a day or two. During the summer, it's not as obvious — the school doesn't call to report an unexcused absence. Last time, he turned up at his father's. It would have been nice for Scott to have called me when he first arrived, but he assumed I knew Jack was there.

The men are getting close to the center of the thicket. Several of them are holding their hands over their mouths, I'd assume to filter out the smell.

I pick up the phone and dial Scott's number. Holding the receiver, I walk out onto my deck to watch the men's progress. The phone rings six times, seven. No answer.

They have created a small clearing now. There's definitely something on the ground. Four of the men have donned gloves and masks. Each

takes a hold of something. They trudge out of the vines, bearing their load.

The dogs are frantic, and I can barely hear one of the cops yell to another outside the clearing, "It's a deer!"

A deer. I exhale and slowly move to the kitchen, removing my red vest from a chair where I draped it last night. I'm late for my shift.

