

Johnny Dangerously

by Larry Strattner

A crash downstairs woke him. The sound of someone stepping gingerly among broken crockery tinkled up the stairs. Someone moving carefully.

He grabbed his Remington 870 pump home-protection shotgun from the shelf above the bed. The gun geezer at Cabela's said the 870 was, "suitable for his 'transitional' neighborhood," where only four people painted their houses and only two of those mowed their lawns but everyone had a chain link fence and barred first floor windows.

Home invaders were down there, in his parlor, at the foot of the stairs, probably after his 52" Sharp Aquos Flat Screen and Surround Sound system. He had known they would come. An old man, a widower; living alone, defenseless. It was a given.

When he carefully reached the third step from bottom he shouted "freeze!" A quick, threatening shape ghosted through the dark.

He fired the shell already chambered in the 870. The muzzle flash in the darkness was blinding. Another sound. He fired again. Each shell spit out 9 buckshot pellets. The 870 held seven rounds. He fired again, and as passion overcame him, again, again, again.

When the gun was empty it was startlingly quiet. He flicked on the living room light. A cat sat on the plant stand against the left wall of the living room. Its eyes were yellow and seemed remarkably composed amidst the shock and awe. The cat must have gotten in through the bars on the porch window, cracked open for ventilation; knocked the damn vase off the parson's table in front of the window.

Sixty three small holes festooned the walls, ceiling and various pieces of furniture. He couldn't actually see all the holes but sixty three would equal total pellets fired from the Remington. The room smelled of cordite. Thank god, he seemed to have missed the flat screen.

The neighbors wouldn't call the cops. The neighbors never called the cops. But they would have heard. They would talk about the

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shotgun blasts and the home invaders would hear what neighbors had heard. Somebody would be thinking twice. Thinking about maybe breaking in somewhere where the dark had a lower lead content.

One round of buckshot had shredded his forty dollar Mark Twain autobiography. A few tiny pieces of its pages still floated in the air. He thought, *Sam would've loved this*. He could picture Clemens' mustache wiggling, itching to tell the story.

The cat jumped gracefully down from the plant stand, walked over to him and rubbed against his leg. It made him think of his wife and smile. "Let's go in the kitchen," he said to the cat. "I'll fix us a drink of warm milk."

