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## **Invasion toward Balance**

In rural parts of the United States, if there's no car in the driveway, nobody's home. I knew that's what the boy assumed, no car in the driveway, nobody home. He tried the door and found it unlocked. With no close neighbors to observe him, he felt safe, so he opened the door and walked in. But Laura and I didn't own a car to park in the driveway, and we were home.

The dog we had then, King Edward, thought he was a differently-formed human, with all the rights of humans. Sometimes he slipped away from the house and our control and explored. He had slipped away and wasn't watching that day, a job he had never agreed to do anyway, so he didn't warn us about our unexpected company.

Laura and I heard something from the kitchen. We looked at each other with questions in our eyes. The boy, nine or ten, towheaded, thin, walked out of the kitchen, through the livingroom, and into the small room near the south windows where Laura and I sat, reading, and then waiting to see who walked toward us. When he saw us, he was so startled and so scared, I was surprised he didn't faint. I thought he might fall down. He backed into the doorjamb. He said, "What did... I didn't... Oh."

I said, "What are you looking for?"

He said, "I was... I didn't... I came in to see what time it is. Can you tell me what time it is?"

I said, "It's 9:30. Do you always go into other people's houses without knocking?"

"I didn't think there was anybody home. I had to know what time it is, because..., I have to go home. It's past time. I got to go." He started retracing his steps, very tentatively. I think he thought I was going to jump up and grab him and stop him from leaving, but I just sat and watched him, then listened as he walked back through the kitchen, out of the house, and shut the door behind him. I didn't try to stop him because I really was concerned that if I added to the fear that showed in his movements and on his face, he might collapse.

Laura and I talked about our visitor. She said, "There isn't much here he could take, if he was looking for something to

steal." Then she said, "I did leave a dollar on the kitchen counter." She got up and walked into the kitchen. I followed her. "It's gone. Jon, that was our last dollar."

I said, "It isn't the dollar so much. Can't buy much with a dollar."

Laura said, "I feel like we've been invaded. Do we have to lock our doors, even when we're home? Now what do we do?"

"About the boy? Nothing. He must live on one of these farms close around here, but I'm not going to try to find him. I don't think I've ever seen anybody that scared. Maybe fear and the realization of what could have happened will make him think and help straighten him out. I had to explore for a while when I was a kid, to figure out what was right and wrong. Instructions from the adults around me were so messed up, so often inconsistent with what they actually lived, and the world seemed like a confusing place. I learned before I got into any serious trouble. I think that boy might have learned something today."

I didn't like to leave King Edward on his chain, because the spirit went out of him when he was chained up. Most of the time, he honored our agreement and stayed close, but sometimes, he slipped away. An unsupervised dog can get into trouble fast, and Edward came close to losing his life because of being out without supervision.

One morning, weeks after the boy took our dollar, a car pulled into our driveway, and a woman got out when I walked out to see who came to visit. She said, "I was about to shoot your dog, but my son asked me not to kill him. He said he knew where the dog lived and he knew you, so we brought your dog home."

The back door of the car swung open, and a young, towheaded boy stepped out of the car and brought our proud, shiny black Norwegian elkhound cross with him. The boy turned toward me, and I recognized him as the one who had come uninvited into our house one morning a few months before.

He said, "Your dog didn't hurt any of our rabbits, yet. Maybe he wouldn't. Maybe he was just on his way through. But the thing about rabbits, they can die just from fear, and sometimes mamma rabbits abandon their babies if they get scared. My Mom woulda been within her rights to shoot this dog, but I seen this dog here, so I knew he was yours. I said wait, give me a chance to take him back, so we brought him home." He let go of Edward's collar and Edward came over and

greeted me.

I stepped forward and extended my hand, and the boy and I shook hands. I said, "Thank you."

I never did learn his name, and he didn't know mine, but we both understood that any debts between us were canceled. Any transgressions were forgiven, in both directions. Each of us learned something important from the other about living in the world. We were both proud of our friendship as he looked through the back window of his family's car driving down the road away from me and waved, and I waved back.