

J.P. Coleman
527 N. Buchanan, Edwardsville, IL.
(618) 791-9921
YourBuddyBodhi@Gmail.com

Cabot's Cellar

“Gran, I’m telling you it’s not a telescope,” I said, pressing into my temples with a heavy sigh, “it’s a zoom lens. Cabot has the thing pointed at your parlor all hours of the night.” I knew my photography; I wasn’t being paranoid.

“You’re worrying for nothing, Jase. Mister Cabot has liked astronomy as long as I’ve lived here!” My grandmother spoke sweetly, like always. Three months of physical therapy had done nothing to dampen that. “Things aren’t like downtown, Sweet-heart. Not everyone is out to get you, there’s no window to window voyeurs. You need to ease up on Nathan and give him the benefit of the doubt.” She gave me a tender smile and glancing wistfully over to Cabot’s two and a half story Victorian.

“Look I understand Cabot-“

“Mister Cabot or Nathan, please.”

“Mister Cabot, is a fine guy everywhere else but I’ll call him Tom if I damn well please when he keeps peeping on you, Gran!” I said, collapsing into one of her garishly upholstered wingback chairs. “You can’t assume just because he’s a gardener and a state rep that he’s some sort of saint!”

She looked straight through me with a piecing glare. “You can’t assume he isn’t based on some wild nonsense.” she said, clicking her tongue.

I drummed on the chair’s arms for a moment before wrenching myself back to my feet. “I’m gonna get back to my desk then.” I said. “If I can’t convince you it’s a moot point.” I shook

my head and headed over to the stairway. "I'll be at my desk. Text me if you need anything, okay?" I said, starting up the stairs with heavy footfalls.

As I reached the landing, I looked out over that dreadful bore's driveway. *Why would his car be out at eight pm?* I wondered, *I thought he was always in bed by eight.* I sat staring out the landing window for what must have been five or ten minutes, focusing on that ancient Continental parked on the fresh concrete slab. I could just make out Cabot himself behind the wall of impenetrable shadow cast by the headlights, digging around in the trunk. I leaned up against the window frame, nearly pressing my forehead to the pane of glass to get a better view. As the massive trunk of the Continental Mark III swung closed, I saw his shifting form stop. He was holding something, something large and bulbous. Feeling his eyes on me, I realized I hadn't turned off the soft lamp illuminating the landing.

I raced up the rest of the stairs, my heart pounding harder than my boots on the worn wooden flooring. "Shit." I mumbled, wrenching the door to my studio open and closing it as gently as I could. *I need to know. I have to know. He probably killed some poor corner girl.* My mind was racing, I had to know.

Two days later I got my chance. A town meeting was called, attended by everyone of repute. My grandmother took her meds and laid down early, but she was a light sleeper. That was easy enough to get around. I refused to use the stairs, preferring instead taking the trellis down. I've had enough late-night escapades to learn the ins and outs of the old house. As my boots sunk into the rain-soaked garden soil, I crossed the narrow side lawn into Cabot's backyard. His cellar door was unlocked, no chain or bar to hold it closed. *Odd, I thought, but he's old. Just forgot.*

Throwing the door open I descended the cellar stairway. The moment I stepped onto the floor, I felt my boots sink, just like on the mud outside. It wasn't cold, though, it was warm. Pleasantly warm, like Vaseline after it sits on your skin for a while. As the warmth began creeping up my leg, I fumbled with my phone and spun my screen around to view the floor. There wasn't concrete, or dirt, or anything natural. It was as if I had stepped into a butcher's scrap pile, animated under some ungodly means. The creature spanned the floor and was now creeping steadily up the walls, writhing with an assumed hunger. With great effort I hauled my feet out of the thing, though it kept my boots as its prize. It must have enjoyed the old leather, though I wouldn't visit again to ask. I kicked in the screen door to Nathan Cabot's porch and sat on his favorite Adirondack where he read the paper every morning.

When the headlights of the Continental swept over the porch screens as he returned my breath stopped. The door slammed, Cabot's footfalls coming much faster than I thought. He burst through the hanging screen tire iron in hand, but when he saw me his face softened.

"Oh, Jase." He said, tossing the iron onto the small table next to his chair. "I am so sorry I thought it was a burglar of some sort. My boy you're soaked through! Where are your shoes? You look like hell itself!" He crossed the final four feet between us, putting his hand on my upper arm.

"Cabot, I know what's in your cellar." I said, locking eyes with the older man. "Whatever that thing is, I think you've been feeding it. People. Like the one you pulled out of your trunk." My heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest.

“My dear boy you’ve been on something again, haven’t you? I have a fungiculture setup in my cellar, it was knocked over a few weeks ago and I’ve neglected to clean it up. Look, I won’t press charges, but don’t go breaking my screen again.” He said.

I pushed past him and went back inside my Grandmother’s house. How long until he took me, or her, or anyone else into that cellar? I sat back in the old wingback as my ankle started to burn up. It felt terribly hot, with a dreadful itch that crawled over my skin like a rolling boil.

It’s been three weeks since I spoke with Cabot on his porch. The itch has crawled up my leg to the thigh. If I press into my leg, it feels porous and radiates a soft heat that could almost be considered comforting. I don’t get any work done anymore. I moved my desk against the east window to overlook Cabot’s side yard, with just a glimpse of the cellar door. I’ve been sweating more recently, though whether it’s withdrawal mania or my leg I can’t say. Most of my day is spent staring out the window with my eyes locked on that door, thinking about the moist air of the cellar. I don’t have much choice, as I’ve found myself unable to remove myself from my desk chair in days. Every time I shift, strands of fabric pull at the exposed spongy flesh. The weight of warmth that surrounded me in the cellar seems comfortable in hindsight. I’m not even upset that I lost my favorite pair of boots. I think I should go look at the thing again, whatever it was. I think I will in just a moment, after I unstick myself from the chair. I’d like a place that wasn’t so cold, somewhere I could just be. My temple feels soft now. As I sit and think of the culture in the cellar, my contemplative hand sinks a little into my cheek just a little too far. I feel like the loamy soil outside with its soft and forgiving texture. That’s not so bad, really.