

SEEKING ADVICE AND/OR ASSISTANCE RE: MOUNTAIN LIONS

** Story — transcription from recording **

What follows is a personal story transcribed from a field recording. The speaker was an addled-looking man in his mid-thirties with matted hair, dark circles under his eyes and several days' chin stubble whom I met riding the #9 Trumbull County Transit bus to ~~the~~ GroceryPlus ~~S~~supermarket. He did not give his name, although I asked for it repeatedly. He seemed distracted, fretting constantly with the frayed cuff of his sweatshirt sleeve and tapping the toes of his sneakers erratically on the rubberized floor.

This also seems an opportune place to mention, regarding the various theories ~~of~~behind ~~the town's~~ ~~strangeness~~peculiarities, that there are those, perhaps more practical-minded, who by way of explanation cite Odsburg's proximity to a state-run psychiatric hospital a few miles away in the town of Klester. I cannot say that I favor one explanation over another—the supernatural and the psychological have always struck me ~~more~~as branches of the same tree—nor am I suggesting that the gentleman who gave the account below was a psychiatric patient. On the contrary, he seemed like ~~quite~~a rational, level-headed person in what I would describe, at risk of understatement, as a challenging situation.

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* Story – transcription from recording *

~~SEEKING ADVICE AND/OR ASSISTANCE RE: MOUNTAIN LIONS~~

~~Yes, so:~~

There's a family of mountain lions living in my basement.

I say "~~a~~ family" because I know there's more than one, but I don't know exactly how many. If I knew how many, I would just give you the hard number. Like "~~there are~~ five mountain lions ~~living in my basement.~~" But that's ~~would~~ only ~~be~~ a guess.

To be fair, "~~a family of mountain lions~~" may not be accurate, either. I'm not sure they're related. To be really precise, then, ~~is~~ there is a *group* of mountain lions living in my basement. And in case you're wondering, there's ~~is~~ no proper term for a group of mountain lions. I looked it up.

Not a herd, or a pack, or a gaggle, or a pride—not even a murder, as it is with crows, ~~and~~ which I, personally, think would be apt.!

Please notice that I have n't ~~yet~~ entirely lost my sense of humor ~~yet~~.

Anyway, apparently, they—mountain lions—typically fly solo. Solitary beasts. So no one ever bothered to name a group. What I want to know, then, is how I managed to get so lucky.

A whole group of them in *my* basement!

-I'm being facetious, if you couldn't tell, ~~about the luck~~.

~~I want to~~A note ~~seems in order~~ here ~~that~~, ~~about planning~~. I did plan to have my house custom-built. ~~It's a beautiful house, by the way. Three beds, two baths, open floor plan, in a desirable neighborhood. I did a lot of research. Figured out all the details. Took out a sizable loan~~

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~~from the credit union to finance it. It's a thirty-year mortgage, but worth it. At least, that's what I kept telling myself.~~

~~I thought I'd planned for everything, but~~ I did not plan to have mountain lions living in my basement. ~~Even though I only planned one of these, both things happened.~~ So I suppose that goes to show you can't plan for everything. That is what I call a *lesson for life*.

~~It's a beautiful house, by the way. Three beds, two baths, open floor plans. In a desirable neighborhood. I did a lot of research. Figured out all the details. Thought I had planned for everything. Took out a sizable loan from the credit union to finance it. Thirty-year mortgage, but worth it. That's what I kept telling myself.~~

During construction, I stopped by every week to see how it was progressing. One day, I noticed ~~that~~ the foundation was open, exposed to the elements, while the construction crew framed and walled the main structure of the house. It occurred to me that if it rained ~~during this time~~, water would get into the foundation. ~~So~~ I said something to the construction workers, ~~and but~~ the foreman said not to worry, they had it all under control. Then he waved me off like a buzzing fly. Told me to relax, ~~—~~leave it to the experts.

But do you know what did not occur to me when I saw the gaping foundation? That a group of mountain lions might nest in the basement. So I didn't say anything about that. My mistake, I suppose.

I think they must have come down from the hills north of town. The mountain lions, that is. Not the construction crew. The construction crew came in from Graysville. I didn't even know the hills had mountain lions living in them.

But I guess they do—or, rather, they did.

So anyway, wherever the mountain lions came from, now they're in my basement. Let me restate for the record: the possibility of this happening did not occur to me. It simply did not occur. Apparently, it didn't occur to the construction foreman either. Or to any construction foreman, ever. Or to the people who wrote the building codes. There's nothing on the books about it at all. So, for these reasons, the foreman insists ~~that, for these reasons~~; he's not liable. He says he followed standard procedure and. ~~He says~~ this is my problem alone. He also said they had everything under control. I guess ~~maybe~~ that's just an expression.

Still, whoever may or may not be liable, there are mountain lions in my basement. And I'll tell you something else: I didn't even know they were there. Not at first, at least. Not for a while. I know that ~~That may sound~~ silly. How ~~You may wonder how~~ one could anyone overlook a group of mountain lions? Well, I'll tell you how. It was winter when we moved into the house and the mountain lions must have been sleeping very deeply. Taking a long winter's nap or something. You'll notice that I didn't say "hibernating." ~~That~~ word choice was intentional.

According to my research, mountain lions don't hibernate.

Call it what you will, then. Sleeping. Napping. Snoozing. Lying in wait. Whatever. They were down there in the basement, quiet and unmoving, for months. At any rate, when spring came, the mountain lions awoke.

They must ~~have~~ been hungry by then because ~~t~~. They started scratching at the basement door. I remember thinking. I first heard the mountain lions when I was in the kitchen, where the basement door leads into. What could that be? I thought to myself when I heard the scratching. I didn't know yet that it was mountain lions. I peeked through the narrow gap underneath the door in the kitchen and. I saw big tan paws and sharp claws and fangs and fur and whiskers and several large, pink noses. When I put all this together, I had my answer.

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Commented [MS1]: Later on in this story, the speaker bemoans the fact that his family can't use their new washer and dryer, but if they've lived in the house for several months, surely they would have been down to the basement before then to do laundry—or for any other reason, really. There might be a good opportunity for humor here if we can come up with a reasonable explanation as to why the sleeping mountain lions escaped notice for so long... or it might be easier to shorten the timeline so that the mountain lions "move in" around the same time the speaker's family does. I'm not sure how they'd get in in that case, though. I'll keep thinking about this.

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~~It was~~ mountain lions.

The ~~mountain lions~~ were scratching from the inside-the-basement side, where they were. I could hear them from the other side, the outside-of-the-basement side, where I was. So at least we were on opposite sides of the door, me and the mountain lions. I guess that's what you call a silver lining.

They were also snuffling, which was quieter than the scratching, but still audible. It made me feel weird to think that they were smelling me. ~~And w~~When I say *weird* I suppose I really mean *terrified*.

~~I called the Department of Fish and Game and asked if they could help me. Maybe bring over a couple of those neck snare things, like you see on those nature-man shows. Pull the lions out, take them back to their native habitat, let them loose. They said it's not their problem either. Those guys and the construction foreman, two of a kind.~~

~~They also said this particular type of mountain lion is endangered, meaning it's illegal to kill them. It would even be a felony if I let them die of neglect in my basement.~~

~~So then I thought maybe, if they're so rare, I could make a few bucks off them. Sell them to a zoo. Nope. Selling them is a criminal offense, too. Endangered animal trafficking.~~

~~I first heard the mountain lions when I was in the kitchen, where the basement door leads into. I noticed I could also hear them from my bedroom when~~When I tried to go to sleep that night, I could still hear them scratching from my ~~My bedroom is~~ bedroom ~~is~~ on the second floor, ~~which meant they were scratching pretty loudly.~~ My wife and our baby son were both scared. My wife was scared of the idea of being mauled by mountain lions. My baby son was just scared of the unfamiliar scratching sound. He is too young to know what mauling is, or what mountain lions are. Another silver lining.

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Commented [MS2]: Matt: I've rearranged the next couple of paragraphs. I know Odsburgers are used to unusual happenings in their town, but while reading, I thought it seemed strange that the speaker would try feeding the mountain lions first, instead of calling the authorities immediately. I think this arrangement makes more logical sense while also preserving the humor. Please let me know if you would like to handle this some other way.

~~To address the scratching,~~ I went to the garage and got a saw, ~~which~~. I used ~~the saw~~ to cut a narrow slot in the basement door. The slot is for sliding raw steaks into. The raw steaks are for feeding the mountain lions. The feeding is so they would hopefully calm down and stop scratching.

After all, ~~the wooden~~that door wouldn't stand up to all that scratching forever. I mean, sure, it's solid ~~hard~~wood—really high-end construction—but come on: those multiple sets of four-inch claws, working day and night? Piles of ~~the~~-rich blond wood shavings had begun to collect and grow larger on the threshold. And the math behind it so brutally simple: the bigger the piles, the thinner the door.

Where was I? Oh, the feeding slot. The feeding slot seemed like the only sensible thing to do. And the steaks appear to appease them. There's a lot less scratching now. But at what cost? I mean, I can tell you at what cost. I have the receipts. Steaks are not cheap. So it's not a sustainable solution. Not to mention, at risk of stating the obvious, the mountain lions are still there. And the scratching and snuffling haven't stopped, they've just lessened. So I can't say the problem is solved. De-escalated, I guess. With an endless and very expensive series of raw meat ~~B~~and-~~A~~aids.

~~Last week, I called the Department of Fish and Game. I asked if they could help me. Maybe bring over a couple of those neck snare things, like you see on those nature-man shows. Pull the lions out, bring them back to their native habitat, let them loose. They said it's not their problem either, though. Those guys and the construction foreman, two of a kind.~~

~~They also said this particular type of mountain lion is endangered. Meaning it's illegal to kill them. It would even be a felony if I let them die of neglect in my basement. Another reason to keep it up with the steaks.~~

~~So then I thought maybe, if they're so rare, I could make a few bucks off them. Sell them to a zoo. Nope. Selling them is a criminal offense, too. Endangered animal trafficking.~~ And to top it off, word has gotten out to the animal rights people. A whole bunch of them are picketing out front. They're carrying signs with slogans:-

ANIMAL RIGHTS: NO ANIMAL WRONGED.

PROTECT THE LIONS' PRIDE.

At first, I thought they might be of some help. Raise awareness,-~~Help~~ get these animals back to the wild, ~~back~~ where they belong. But no;- their position is exactly the opposite. The mountain lions have chosen to live in my basement. They should be allowed to remain. We've taken over their habitat, so ~~now~~-this is payback. The activists insist they'll *intervene immediately* if I try anything that might harm the lions. Or anything that might infringe upon the lions' *inalienable rights*. Which apparently includes living in my basement.

So no help there, either.

~~I know it seems trivial, all other things considered, but~~And did I mention the thing about the laundry? The washer and dryer are in the basement. So we can't do laundry, considering the mountain lions. I know;- we could go to a laundromat. But we ~~just~~ spent two grand on a new washer and dryer. And now I'm going to go and spend even more money to wash my clothes at a laundromat? In their inferior washing machines? With their harsh ~~powdered~~ detergents? In their non-adjustable oven-like dryers that will shrink all my clothes and? ~~That will~~ burn my nice sweaters into charred husks of lint? That will transform my poplin shirts into what? Into very expensive, nappy rags, fit only for doll costumes! Come on. I mean, really, come on. And then what will I wear to work, when all my clothes are ruined? I'm a professional—an engineer, for goodness sake. I have an advanced degree. I work at OdsWellMore. I can't just go to work in a, a

Commented [MS3]: Be more specific here—your humor is always strongest when it's focused on details. What about the laundromat's washing machines makes them inferior? Are they old? Incapable? Do they smell weird? Are they only slightly more efficient than doing it yourself in the bathtub with an antique washboard?

Commented [MS4]: "Goodness" here feels too tame. This man is OUTRAGED about these mountain lions. If he isn't the type to swear, I think even saying "for Pete's sake" would be more fitting.

pair of greasy sweatpants. So, no. No thank you. I will not throw my wardrobe away in those ill-maintained lint traps! Those churning boxes of imminent fire hazard! ~~Gosh-damn-it-all to hell!~~

Wait, stop.

Deep breath.

I think I'm misplacing my anger about the mountain lions ~~and~~ ~~—t~~aking it out on the idea of laundromats. ~~When in fact~~, I'm not angry at laundromats. Not really. Laundromats don't deserve that kind of badmouthing. They're perfectly productive businesses that provide a needed service to society. I just lost my head for a minute. Please excuse that outburst.

Anyway. If you have any idea what to do about the mountain lions, please let me know. I'm kind of at the end of my rope, here. Damned if I do, and all that. A felony to kill them, a felony to sell them, and a danger to keep them around. I mentioned ~~that~~ I have a baby-~~son~~, right? And a wife? They can't defend themselves. ~~Not~~ against a hungry-mountain lion ~~—~~ ~~m~~. Much less against an unknown number of hungry, ~~and~~ captivity-crazed mountain lions. And that door won't hold forever. I may have to take matters into my own hands, consequences be damned.

But not right now. Not yet. I don't want to do anything too rash, too hasty. Not until I've exhausted all my other options.

So, like I said: if you have any ideas, I'm open to suggestions.

For now, though, I'm headed to the GroceryPlus. We're all out of steaks.

Commented [MS5]: The mix of "gosh" with "damn" and "hell" feels incongruous. Perhaps that's the intention, but it doesn't feel natural. I would pick one or the other—vulgar or folksy.