



DEVILTOWN

POPULATION 6001

**DEVILTOWN CREATED BY
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By Basil Morrison

He'd heard the noise even before Sunset growled. He put his hand out and said, "Easy, girl, come." Her nails clicked on the pine floor and in a step she leaned against the bed, her throat still rumbling deep down inside.

"It's OK, girl. It's only them young hellions makin' a racket up on the hill again. Duhya have to pee? I'll put on your collar and leash so yuh won't be goin' after them."

He pulled back the covers, stood up and put the covers back in place to keep the heat in the bed. He stood for a second to adjust his eyes to the dark, walked to the door and took down the leash. "Come, girl, we'll go outside."

He had his hand on the doorknob when he hesitated. What if one of those young fellas had come down to the cabin to torment him and was hangin' around outside? The way they'd bin gettin' worse and worse this past year you never knew what they might do. He went over to behind the stove and picked up his brushing axe. It didn't have the weight and power of his splitting axe but it was light and quick.

When he opened the door, Sunset strained at the leash and went straight to the long grass for a pee.

"Good sign, girl. You mustn't smell 'em or hear 'em up close else you'd be goin' after 'em"

He stood still, listening, then looked up at the stars. After a moment he sighed. "Sunset, do you figure one of them shiny fellas way up there is aimin' some kind of devilment down at us to make everythin' go so haywire as it has? Somethin' must be doin' it. Any year's bound to have some brown spots but this last one's bin way over the edge. Somethin' must be doin' it. It's not natural the way things have turned.

"Listen to the way those boys are carryin' on up there on the hill, as if they're not right wit. You'd think their folks would wonder where they are at this time of night. I guess they must not care."

He turned and she followed him through the door. He put a couple of sticks in the stove and sat down in his chair. "We'll sit for awhile, girl. There's no tellin' how long they'll be makin' that ruckus. What's the world comin' to when an ole man gets edgy enough to carry an axe outside on his own land in case some damn fool is skulkin' around in the dark lookin' to do him mischief. It didn't used to be like that."

Sunset got up and put her chin in his lap. "Ah, bless your heart, good girl, you've saved my life. If you hadn't wandered into the bush here and found me when you weren't half grown six years ago I think I might have lost my grip. After Maud died I was so lonely I didn't know what to do." He rubbed his eyes with the back of his wrists. The dog licked each

hand as he put it back in his lap.

"She was a wonderful woman, Sunset, you would have got along great with her. She was like you, full of love." He chuckled. "She didn't lick my hands the way you do but she had her ways. She used to read to me. That was so nice. She knew I couldn't do it for myself but she didn't judge me for that, nor blame me. She just took me the way I was." He hung his head and let the tears roll down his cheeks and drop onto his lap.

He stroked Sunset's head and said, "There used to be lots of nice people around here. I made a fairly good livin' for a man with no education. People had me do all sorts of odd jobs for them and paid me in cash. Sometimes they'd give me things besides, like stuff from their garden or broken things I could fix up and sell. People seemed to like me but lately they've all turned against me. I can't think of what I've done to deserve that."

The noise from the hill got worse, then settled down to silence. He said, "We won't talk any more tonight, girl. If they come by and hear me talkin' to you they'll be sendin' the loonie wagon out here to get me. When I walk into town the kids already have bin yellin' 'crazy ole man' at me. If they knew how much I talk to you they'd be sure of it."

He woke at dawn as usual. He put his hand out and Sunset shoved her head under it. "You know what, girl, we're goin' to have a bite and then go up to the ridge and see if them young devils left anythin' for us to look at. They're like the bats, they'll all be gone by first light."

They climbed the hill without a sound, watching for signs. The scent of smoke led them to the scene of last night's celebration. Sunset sniffed around the edges of what had been a large fire. He stood in silence, wondering what had taken place. There had been a quite a few of them it seemed. There was evidence of many feet having trampled here. "What duyah think, girl? Was it some kind of weird ceremony they were doin'?" What would that be about? Let's get goin'. I tell yuh, dear girl, I don't know what's happenin' to our town." He turned and started away but his toe moved something and he looked down.

"Hello, what's this?" He bent over and picked up a sort of book from among the ashes. "It's readin' stuff, Sunset. No use to us, but we'll take it home anyway."

Back in the cabin, Sunset settled down at his feet and closed her eyes. He sat back in his chair and opened the book. "Maud could read this to me if she was with us. Bless her dear heart, she's gone on to better things, I guess." He smiled down at Sunset. "This is as much good to you as to me, my friend. No wonder my teacher and the kids at school made fun of me. These letters are dancers to me. They turn from side to side and upside down. I can

never make them stay still and behave. What do yuh think they mean by this? Theummm panttk, iepa,sp oe,s.p." Sunset looked at him with a raised brow.

"Never mind, good girl, it means somethin'. I'll read what I can an' we'll decide later whatever we want it to mean." He moved his lips silently and turned the pages slowly. After awhile he looked at Sunset and said, "Well, my good friend, what do you think? What does it say?" He looked at her with fondness for a moment but then changed his expression.

"Sunset, my golden friend, what have you done? You haven't had an accident like that since you were a pup. That's what you look like now, a young pup. Get up, you silly mutt. Look at the mess you've made. Go, sit over there. I'll clean up and take you outside. My, my."

When he was back inside, feeling upset but strangely energetic, he pointed at Sunset and ordered her to lie down. Passing the mirror by the sink he stopped and stared. "Good god, my hair's changed colour. It looks brown again. I'd better get some more sleep."

END

