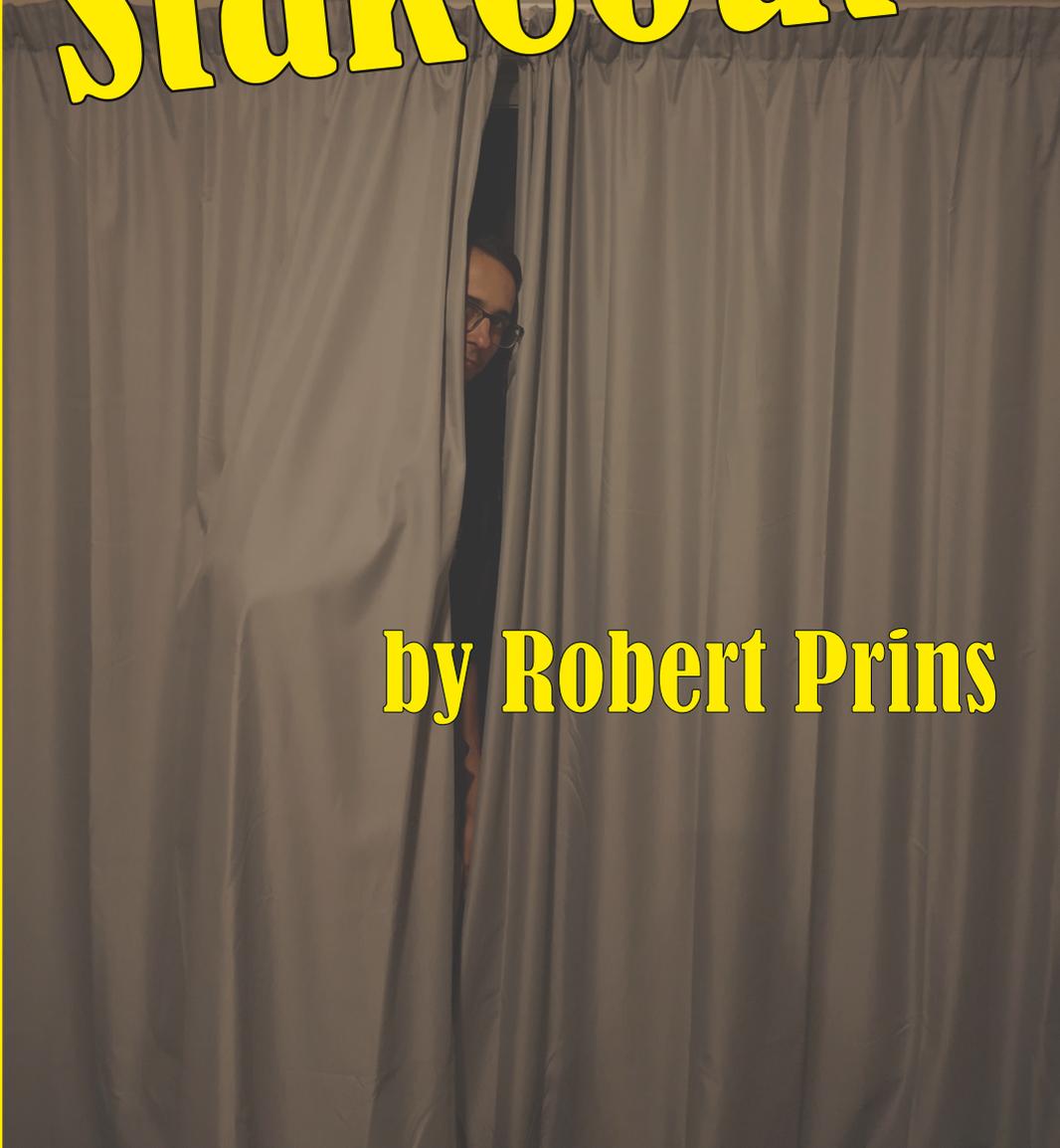


# Stakeout

A man wearing glasses is peering through a narrow opening between two heavy, grey curtains. The scene is dimly lit, with the man's face partially visible in the shadowed gap. The background behind the curtains is dark, suggesting an indoor setting at night or in low light.

by Robert Prins

# Stakeout

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The clock struck midnight. Michael woke with a start, instantly alert. He mentally reprimanded himself for dozing off and scanned the area for signs of activity.

Sergeant Michael Christopher had been with the police force almost fifteen years. Now was not the time to sleep. His senses were on high alert as the chime of the grandfather clock faded away. Silence descended, broken only by the ticking of the pendulum. A minute later he heard the telltale beep of a wristwatch alarm. It stopped almost as soon as it began.

The house was in darkness, the curtains closed. Two doors led off the lounge where he sat on a second-hand couch: one led outside and the other into the hallway. He stood up and moved silently into the darkest corner of the lounge where he crouched waiting between the television and a bookcase. From there he could see both doors, the couches and the coffee table, without being seen himself. It was time.

Stakeouts were commonplace for Sergeant Christopher, but this one had him on edge. It was not the darkness or the silence that got to him, not even the fact that he had no backup, it was the unpredictable situation. This was one of his most delicate operations ever.

A noise. Barely perceptible. Footsteps on carpet. Right on time, barely three minutes past midnight. He strained his eyes and ears to see and hear more. The footsteps stopped. Did they suspect he was waiting? He could not see far past the doors to tell what was going on. The sound of whispering was heard over the ticking of the clock. There were two of them. This was not what he was expecting. One sounded nervous and the other was obviously leading. The stakes had been raised.

He listened as footsteps came toward him. Faint torchlight sent shadows shooting down the hallway. A door gave a slight squeak and then clicked shut.

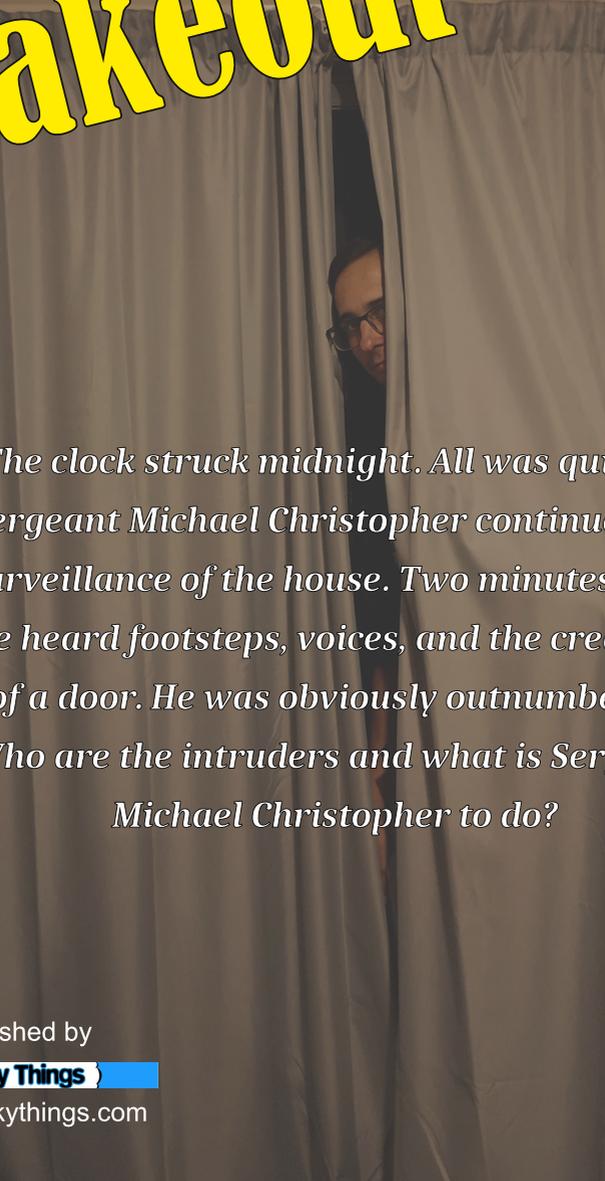
On edge, Sergeant Michael Christopher rose from his hiding place and crept toward the door leading to the hallway. He peered around the corner. The hallway was empty. All the doors were shut – even the kitchen door which had been left open.

He edged toward the kitchen door and listened. They were in there. He had to make a move. If he opened the door, they would either flee into the dining room or ... he hated to think of alternative scenarios.

Very quietly he turned the handle and opened the door a crack. He could see them both. Cupboards were open and goods were being removed. He took the chance while they were both distracted and opened the door to catch them red-handed.

“Caught you!” he called. There was a blood-curdling scream and a crash as a tray dropped to the floor. Running over to the still screaming culprits, he scooped his eight and 6-year-old daughters up for a hug. The midnight feast was over and the marshmallows were safe.

# Stakeout

A person wearing glasses is peeking through a gap in grey curtains. The person's face is partially visible, looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*The clock struck midnight. All was quiet as Sergeant Michael Christopher continued his surveillance of the house. Two minutes later he heard footsteps, voices, and the creaking of a door. He was obviously outnumbered. Who are the intruders and what is Sergeant Michael Christopher to do?*

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