Friday Snippets: From the Ghost Files

written by Holly
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I'm at a point where I really can't post any more of the Moonroads book, at least not for a while. But I still want to do Friday Snippets. So I figured for your amusement and edification, I'd post snippets from the stuff I've had rejected but that I still intend to keep trying to sell, albeit perhaps in a different genre or in a highly revised version.

Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part One
Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part Two
Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part Three

This stuff may NEVER see print. I hope it does, but I acknowledge that you may be reading ghosts. However, in case I ever can find the right market for these stories, please don't repost, quote or copy the following excerpt. It is copyrighted and not yet abandoned. Hope remains.

BLACK DOG

(…Chapter One continued…)

Real plant, scientific marker. F2 … that was a genetic term. She tried to remember high school biology, and that was either the parent or the child second generation in genetic experiments, wasn't it?

Genetic experiments.

The chill she felt in that instant wasn't from the cold. The fact that tender flowers were blooming and tender plants were bearing fruit in a cold mountain valley while covered with snow could really only be explained by genetic engineering, couldn't it? Natalie couldn't make sense of any of the rest of the label, though the word 'human' in context with a genetic experiment involving plants scared her.

All her happiness at finding this miracle garden in the wilderness bled off, and she started snapping pictures of the markers at the bases of the plants for another reason. She'd bet her next year's profits that this was a GM live test site – a place where genetically modified plants were being grown outside of controlled conditions. And if the 'human' on the label meant someone was crossing human DNA with plant DNA, she would bet her 401K every bit of this was illegal. Dangerous. Something that could hurt people. With food crops involved – and she stared at the apple trees and the corn and the berries and all the rest – it could be lethal.

She snapped pictures as fast as she could, trying to get all the labels. Someone should be able to figure out what they meant. She had to get as much proof as she could, and as much information. She didn't know who she'd give it to, but she would worry about that later.

And then the feeling that something was watching her returned, and she looked up. And on a post, fairly well hidden by plants, she saw a surveillance camera. Red light blinking on the base. Pointed right at her.

No.

She took two steps to the left. The camera tracked her movement.

A second snake in the Garden of Eden. Oh, God.

And then, right beside her, out of nowhere, a deep rumbling growl crawled into her ears and through her brain and straight down her spine and turned her knees to jelly.

She looked to her right. Slowly.

A black dog the size of a Shetland pony advanced on her, hackles raised, teeth bared, eyes glowing an insane fiery red. She heard a pathetic, whimpering, dying-rabbit noise and realized that it was coming from her. She turned to face the dog, but at the same time started backing away.

Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God was she in trouble.

The dog had to weigh at least two hundred pounds. At least two hundred. He was the biggest, most terrifying animal she had ever seen in her life; the only thing she could think as she stared at him and backed away was, Run, but if she ran, he'd jump on her and tear her apart. He would. She knew it.

She backed up the side of the mountain, through the carefully planted and labeled genetically-modified plants, past another surveillance camera, her feet leaving deep tracks in the snow. She kept backing, and then she was out of the test beds, and feeling scrub brush and forest understory plants smacking against the back of her head.

She bumped into a tree, and the dog snarled and stalked closer.

His eyes looked as big as saucers. And they were still glowing red. What the hell kind of dog was he? Was he the thing that she'd thought she felt tracking her through the woods?

I'm going to die here.

She skirted around the tree trunk behind her, never taking her eyes off the dog. She wondered if she could find a climbable tree, and if she could get up it before he could

pounce on her.

Maybe to the first, she decided, not a chance to the second. She kept backing, with the bright colors of the nightmare garden gradually giving way to more and more leafless understory plants.

The dog seemed to be herding her someplace, she thought. And when she thought it, his ears suddenly perked forward and he stood up straight and the snarl went away, replaced for just an instant by a big, doggie grin that transformed him almost completely from something terrifying into something friendly. Except for those weird red eyes.

Natalie was staring at the dog. Something about him wasn't right. Not right at all. She was almost certain that she could see the outline of the tree right behind him through him. Which was insane.

And then, right before Natalie's eyes, the dog faded like fog under the hot sun.

She yelped.

And a strong arm wrapped around her chest and a leather-gloved hand clapped over her mouth – hard – and a man's deep voice snarled in her ear, "You have about 30 seconds to decide whether you want to live today, or whether you want to die."

End of Chapter One.

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