

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

MORE THAN COINCIDENCE

I was in my home office one fall day when my husband, Neil, called me over. He pointed out several cracks in the concrete slab garage floor. "Groundhogs did this," he said, looking grim.

I winced. Groundhogs are my favorite wild animal. Because of this, Neil had agreed to make our place a kind of groundhog sanctuary. Our yard is big. We loved watching the babies play in the spring. And usually the groundhogs weren't a nuisance. I prayed they wouldn't cause any more damage to our home.

But Neil soon discovered a new burrow under the front porch. "We have to do something," he said. "What if they break into the house?"

"That would be bad," I agreed. "But we can't hurt them."

I talked to groundhog experts. We followed their advice to a T. Neil even mounted a motion-activated alarm and bright light in the cellar to deter them.

Then I heard burrowing under my office, which had a crawl space beneath it.

"We have no choice!" Neil exclaimed. "We have to shoot them." I still didn't want to harm the groundhogs, but this had gone too far. We couldn't have them undermining our foundation. Neil grabbed his .22 rifle and headed to the cellar. I reluctantly followed. He climbed into the crawl space underneath my office through an opening in

the cellar wall and wormed his way toward the front of the house. He shone his flashlight around.

"You're not going to believe this!" Neil said. The groundhogs had buried the furnace flue in dirt. Had they crushed the pipe carrying gases to the chimney at the front of the house? Neil dug it out. I heard a muffled gasp.

"The flue isn't crushed," Neil said. "But there's a big hole in it."

Where the flue connected to the chimney had rusted out, leaving two large holes that our annual furnace

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inspection had missed. And our carbon monoxide detector was at the top of the cellar stairs, far from the chimney. Within weeks, when the weather cooled, the furnace would have turned on and the odorless gas would have filled our house, and our lungs, before the alarm went off. We could've easily died in our sleep!

Thankfully, we'd caught the problem in time. A repairman replaced the flue. And the groundhogs? They found somewhere safe to settle down for the winter. Somewhere other than our cellar.

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