

Opening

Our bedroom was on the first floor of a detached house. The house was an old one; most of the floorboards groaned with old age and the paint peeled off the walls as if it was the bark of a dying, rotten tree. Downstairs was the kitchen where after I went to bed I would usually hear the clang of dishes being washed by mum and the front room, from where I could smell the smoke from dad's nightly cigarette while he watched the ten o'clock news.

I say 'our' bedroom because I shared it with my little brother Keith. Being two years younger than me, Keith was not as mature. Looking out from his pale face, which was partially obscured by his light blonde, hair were his big, blue, watery eyes. Keith was cocky and liked to give the impression he wasn't afraid of anything, but I knew better. Anytime a situation actually called for him to be the slightest bit brave he would give a high pitched squeak and scurry away, as quick as a mouse, to hide under his bed.

In fairness to Keith most six-year olds are like that. Slightly heavier and taller than him, with dark hair, brown eyes and glasses, I looked more like dad. I hated those glasses but I was as blind as a bat without them. I wasn't as cocky as Keith, although I knew how to stand up for myself when I needed to. Saying that I'm not a violent person or anything, I prefer to be kind and friendly to people just so long as they treat me the same way.

Problem

One night Keith and I were in bed by the usual time. Outside the wind was howling, the rain was hammering at the window and the moon peered through the clouds. Dad had warned me there was going to be a storm, maybe even thunder and lightning. For a change I couldn't hear mum washing the dishes or smell dad's cigarette.

Suddenly I heard what sounded like glass being broken and the creak of our back door being slowly opened. Quickly jumping out of bed, I quietly crept over to Keith's bed.

"Keith are you awake?" I whispered.

No reply. I placed my arm on his shoulder and shook him gently.

"What are you doing? Get off," he moaned in a low voice.

"I think somebody has broken in," I replied softly.

At that he sat up sharply in his bed.

"You're lying," he said, "you just want to see if I will be scared."

Then we *both* heard the sound of someone moving downstairs.

Anxiously I asked him, "I didn't hear mum doing the dishes or dad watching the TV, did you?"

"Oh no, we're all alone in the house with a burglar!" he whimpered, somewhat pathetically.

At that moment the moonlight illuminated Keith's ghostly face, which was even paler than usual. Eventually I calmed him down and (after arguing for a short while) we agreed to go downstairs and see what was going on. Trembling as little as I could manage, I knew I had to be brave. As carefully and silently as a tiger stalking its prey, we crawled out of our rooms and out onto the landing.

Firstly we needed to get to the stairs at the end of the landing; however if any of the floorboards creaked the intruder would know we were there. Halfway down the landing, I noticed Keith was about to put his hand on the loudest floorboard in the house. I had to decide whether to risk warning him, or hope the floorboard did not make a sound. What to do? Waiting too long to act, I decided to risk whispering to him but it was too late - he had leaned on it and it groaned like a giant waking up with a headache.

Resolution

Instinctively we both lay down flat. The burglar had to hear it, didn't he? Hearing footsteps coming out of the kitchen and then up the stairs, both of us lay as still as statues: we didn't have time to get away. Just at that moment, I heard a deafening clap of thunder and the hallway was lit up by a flash of lightning. In the dark he might not see us, but if there were another lightning flash when he reached us we would definitely be seen. Suddenly at the top of the stairs I could just see the silhouette of the burglar in the darkness. He stood there for what seemed like ages, yet instead of walking onto the landing he turned around and went back down the stairs.

Cautiously I crawled over to Keith and reassuringly put my hand on his shoulder. Shaking like a leaf, he was extremely close to crying. Telling him to wait there, I said I would go down on my own, and if I was not back soon he had to go and hide under his bed. Shining in the darkness I could see a torchlight dancing on the walls of the front room, so I ran down the stairs as swiftly and soundlessly as a ghost. Making it into the kitchen without being seen, I made straight for the phone to call the police. Picking up the handset to phone, there was no dialing tone - then devastatingly I noticed the phone line had been cut and my heart sank.

At that very moment the enormous, bald burglar with tattoos all over his head and arms walked into the kitchen. Initially when he saw me his eyes opened wide and his mouth fell open, but his mouth soon closed into a scowl and his brow became deeply furrowed. Beating at an incredible pace, my heart felt as though it was going to jump out of my chest. Rolling up his sleeves, the burglar slowly and deliberately walked towards me with his arms outstretched - a terrible curtain about to smother me, blocking out the little moonlight that seeped through the kitchen window.

All of a sudden this terrible curtain collapsed to the floor and in the moonlight that shone through again I could see the smiling face of my little brother Keith, standing on the kitchen table holding dad's cricket bat and breathing hard.

"You okay?" he managed to ask between gasping for breath.

"I am now," I answered gratefully.

Ending

After Keith had placed the cricket bat down on the table, I helped him leap off. As quick as a flash I rushed over to the kitchen drawer where mum keeps the string. At scouts I had wondered when I would ever use any of these different knots they kept teaching us, but now I was sure thankful I knew how to do them. Tying up the brute's legs and hands as tight as I could, I collapsed into a chair, exhausted, but almost instantly being pulled back to my feet by Keith.

Scampering round to our neighbour Joan's house, Keith and I scampered out the front door and rang the doorbell. Yawning, Joan answered the door in her nightdress, but she quickly perked up when she saw Keith and I standing there panting and in our pyjamas.

"What's the matter?" she asked in a puzzled voice.

I explained the story to her as rapidly as I could and asked if we could use her phone to call the police. Somewhat dazed, she told us she would call them for us (and call our parents as well), before bringing us inside. Once she had phoned the police she made us a cup of sweet, hot tea and gave us some biscuits. A few minutes later there was a knock on the door - it was the police. Warning us to stay in the house, they said they would go next door.

After a short while the police came back and brought us round to our own house again and informed us that the burglar was a well-known criminal; furthermore he had been taken into custody. Asking us not to touch anything because it was a crime scene, they complimented us for being so brave.

Finally our parents rushed in to the kitchen and hugged us both so tightly I could not breathe. Apologising profusely for leaving us on our own, they promised never to do it again, before praising us for our courage. Despite all the excitement, they said 'it's still a school night', brought us back to bed and tucked us in nice and snug. Outside the wind had died down and the moon shone clearly in the cloudless sky.

After they were gone I turned to Keith and said "thank you, I thought you were a coward but what you did was amazing."

"That's ok", he replied, "brothers have to look out for each other."