

“I have to run out for a minute, Jeremy. You just stay right here and watch television,” Ms. Wilson says.

“Okay,” I reply. She leaves and I wait to hear the door slam but it doesn't. Ms. Wilson is pretty quiet for a big lady. She used to slam the door real loud when she left and she'd make the whole house shake when she walked. All of mom's special China plates with pictures of lambs and little girls and stuff would rattle and I'd be really afraid they'd crash down into a million pieces and mom would blame me. But lately Ms. Wilson's gotten really good at not making a sound. I think Ms. Wilson wants to be a spy. I want to be a spy too and go around the world and shoot bad guys. So does Andre.

“No, Andre,” I say, “Ms. Wilson told us to stay here.” Andre is bad sometimes. Well, he's not bad. He's a rebel. That's what mom calls him, a rebel. Andre wants to slide down the stairs again. The big stairs. The stairs that Ms. Wilson and mom told me not to slide down.

“I know they're not scary, Andre, but I'm not supposed to,” I say. Andre can be a real jerk sometimes.

“I am not a baby, Andre. Fine. We'll slide down the big stairs. It'll prove forever that I'm not a baby and you can't call me one ever again and nobody else can either,” I say. We walk up the big stairs. I open the big closet in the hall and get a blanket. Andre says he wants to ride in front.

“Okay, you can ride in front,” I tell him. “But make sure you hold on to me, okay? I don't want you getting hurt.”

We're sitting at the top of the stairs and it looks like it's a really long way down.

“I'm not scared Andre,” I say. “Ready? We'll go on three. One, two, three....”

The house is quiet. Andre is next to me. We're in bed, peeking out from underneath the covers. I hear the babysitter men downstairs. I don't like the babysitter men. They're terrible babysitters. I'm not a baby and I don't need to be sat.

“There's no need to be afraid, Andre,” I say. Andre is scared of the babysitter men. I tell him not to be scared of them but he doesn't say anything. Mom calls Andre the strong, silent type.

“What's that Andre? No, they won't come up here. No, they aren't bad men. They aren't scary men. They're just bad babysitters. When mom and dad come home they'll have to leave and we'll tell mom and dad never to hire them again because they don't listen to us,” I say. Andre's not convinced.

“No, Andre. Until mom and dad come home, I'm not going back to school,” I say.

Andre says that because I'm not going to school I'm becoming dumber by the minute, and that if I don't start going back to school soon, they may not be able to fix how dumb I've gotten. He says that if I went to school I'd be able to see my friends and tell them about the terrible babysitters. Maybe then one of my friends would let me and Andre stay at his place until mom and dad get home.

That'd be nice, unless Dennis wanted me to stay at his house. Dennis is mean. And ugly. Mom doesn't like it when I call him mean and ugly, but I think that mom secretly agrees with me that he is mean and ugly.

Maybe when mom and dad come back they'll send me to another school. I don't

really like the one I'm in. I'm pretty sure nobody would invite me to stay at their house even if I told them that mom and dad were gone and that a couple of really awful babysitters were looking after me. They'd probably just laugh and call me a baby. I really hate it when people call me a baby. I'm not a baby. Andre wants to know where Ms. Wilson went.

“Ms. Wilson went out for a little while and left the babysitter men in charge,” I tell Andre. “She'll probably be back soon. And if she's not, mom and dad will be back soon.” I like it when Ms. Wilson is the babysitter. She lets me stay up late and watch TV and always gets me snacks and doesn't get mad when I don't listen to her.

The door slams. The babysitter men are gone. Andre and I run downstairs and start watching TV. Andre says he's thirsty and I'm thirsty as well. I go into the kitchen to get some juice from the fridge. I like juice, especially orange juice.

The babysitters moved all the glasses to the highest shelves in the cupboard by the fridge, so I have to get a chair and move it next to the counter so I can climb from the chair to the top of the counter. I open the door to the cupboard and I'm on my tippy toes and reaching inside. There are a lot of glasses in the cupboard. I think the babysitter men are lazy because the glasses are always dirty even if they've been washed. I start to pull one down but it slips, hits the counter, bounces, spins and explodes into a million pieces when it hits the kitchen floor. The babysitter men are going to be really upset when they see the mess I've made. I start to reach for another glass.

There's the sound of footsteps and voices coming from the front porch. People are at the door. I can hear keys jingling as a key chain is pulled from a pocket. I jump off the

chair and run and grab Andre and I'm up at the top of the stairs when they come in. I can see them but they can't see me. I can hear a woman yelling.

“What the...?” the woman shouts. “You guys just leave broken glass all over the floor before you go to class? What's the matter with you?” I want to run downstairs and see if it's mom but I know it can't be mom because this lady's voice is different than mom's voice. This lady's voice is husky like she's smoked too many cigarettes. Mom's voice is soft and sweet. Mom smells good too, not like she smokes too many cigarettes.

“Just chill out. It wasn't us. It was the kid,” says one of the babysitters.

“What kid?” the woman asks.

“The kid who lives here,” the babysitter says. Now they're both quiet and speaking in whispers and I know that they're talking about me but I can't hear them. Andre is afraid and wants to go back to our bedroom. We walk on our tippy toes down the hall and up the stairs and jump into bed.

Lying under the covers, my face is wet and hot and I can't help it. I hate crying because I'm a big boy and big boys don't cry. I'm almost old enough to take care of myself and not have babysitters.

“*Oh my God*. Seriously? You're joking right?” the woman asks.

“It's only for a little while longer. They're going to come and get him in a couple of days,” the babysitter says. I squeeze Andre tighter.

“See Andre?” I whisper, “I told you mom and dad would be back soon. And now they're coming home and the stupid babysitters will have to leave and it'll just be me and you and mom and dad and things will be great again. And mom and dad will bring me

back a big present and maybe one for you as well and they'll tell me how sorry they are and how they love me and how they'll never leave me again.”

I'm worried about Ms. Wilson. The babysitter never said anything about her. I'm worried about her, but I'm still mad at her for not telling me that these men were going to babysit me. I don't want to think about it anymore. I hate that word *babysitter*. I'm not a baby.

Our house is big and has lots of stairs and a scary basement. I don't want to go down in the basement. My friend Dennis says that there are ghosts in his basement. I don't believe him because ghosts don't exist. They're just a stupid idea that people made up to scare you. Dennis isn't really my friend but he lives down the street and goes to my school so mom says I should try to be friends with him.

One day Andre and I invented a new game. We were just sitting at the top of the stairs in front of my room on a big blanket from the closet. I wanted to make a fort, but the blanket was too small and Andre didn't want to help me make a fort anyway. So there we were, just sitting at the top of the stairs when Andre suggested we slide down the stairs on the blanket

“Great idea, Andre!” I said. Andre's pretty smart for a bear. We looked down the stairs. Andre felt a little scared and said maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all.

“It's okay,” I told Andre. “There's lots of carpet on the stairs. We can't get hurt if there's lots of carpet.” So we slid down the stairs on the blanket from the closet.

Whump, whump, whump, whump, whump, whump....

“Jeremy? Jeremy what was that noise?” Mom yelled. Andre and I were at the bottom of the stairs, laughing.

“That was great, Andre!” I said “What's the matter?” Andre wasn't moving. I picked him up and noticed he had a scratch on his arm and I did too so we went downstairs and showed mom.

“That's a carpet burn, honey,” she said. She picked me up and ran my arm under the tap. It hurt so I pulled my arm back.

“We have to wash it out because if we don't wash it, it'll get infected,” she said. I gave her my arm and she washed it and it hurt a lot. I closed my eyes until mom cleaned the burn and put a plaster on it.

“Andre has one too,” I said

“How'd he get that?” mom asked. Mom took Andre's arm and started examining it. She looked kinda worried. I felt kinda worried too.

“We were sliding down the stairs. Its really fun, mom!” I said.

“Jeremy, that's a very dangerous thing to do. Don't slide down the stairs anymore,” she said.

“Why not?” I asked. “It's not dangerous! The stairs are covered in carpet and you can't hurt yourself on carpet. Even Dennis said so.”

“Not dangerous? What do you call this?” she asked, holding up Andre's arm.

“That's nothing,” I said.

“Jeremy, I said no,” she said.

“I'm not dumb, mom. There's no carpet on the main stairs. It'd be dangerous to slide down those,” I said. “But the ones to my room are fine.”

“Jeremy, sliding down the stairs like that is dangerous. You could really hurt yourself. I don't want you to do it anymore,” she said.

“Okay,” I said.

“Promise me you won't do it anymore, okay?” she asked.

“Okay, okay, I promise,” I said. I had my fingers crossed behind my back so it doesn't count. Sometimes mom worries too much.

“And you,” she said to Andre. “I know this was probably your idea. No more sliding down the stairs, you hear me?”

“He knows, mom. He'd not dumb,” I said. She took my face in her hands and kissed me on the cheek.

“Gross, mom!” I said.

“Why is that gross?” she asked.

“Because I'm not a baby, mom. Only babies get kissed by their moms,” I said.

“Did Dennis tell you that?” she asked.

“No,” I said. Well, he did. But I knew that before Dennis told me because I'm just as smart and probably smarter than he is.

I'm in my room, playing with Andre. The babysitters and a whole bunch of their friends are downstairs. They're loud. There's screaming and yelling and awful music. The house will be messy and smell really bad tomorrow. When mom and dad get home I'm

going to tell them what the babysitters did, how they didn't take care of me and how they had people in the house and made a lot of noise. My cheeks are wet and warm and my eyelashes are wet too.

If I was mom I would have told dad, “No, I'm not leaving Jeremy here. I'm going to stay and we're going to have lots of fun together while you go on your stupid business trip.” Mom and dad usually let me go with them, but they didn't this time. They said they'd only be gone for a couple of days, but....

I can hear footsteps. Two sets coming up the stairs from the living room. I can hear voices too, a soft voice and a deeper voice and then a door opens and closes.

“Be very quiet, Andre,” I say. “The babysitter's friends won't come up here if we're quiet.” Andre nods and I nod. I slide my knees to my chest, wrapping my arms around my legs and burying my face in my knees.

Three more sets of feet are coming up the stairs.

“Dude, did you hear that?” a man's voice says.

“Hear what?” another asks. “I know where they are. Check it out. The door to Duane's room is closed. They're totally making out in there. Let's bust it open. It'll be hilarious!”

“No way, Brian. You know how angry Phil can get. He'd probably come out swinging. That guy totally has anger issues. Let's just get out of here. This party kinda sucks anyway,” the first voice says.

“Forget that. This is like the only decent party going on tonight,” the other voice says. Brian. His friend called him Brian.



“Whatever. This place is kinda creepy,” the first voice says. “I bet Angie's party is decent by now.” I stick my leg out and the bed squeaks a bit. Andre was getting squished and couldn't breathe. I don't like to squish Andre. He's my best friend in the whole entire world.

“Scott, wait... did you hear that?” Brian asks.

“Hear what?” Scott asks.

“That sound in the attic,” Brian says.

“Andre, you'll have to be quiet or they'll hear us,” I whisper.

“I definitely heard something that time,” Scott says

“What did you hear?” the third man asks.

“That noise in that attic that Brian was talking about,” Scott says. “Someone's up there.”

“Maybe they went to make out up there,” the third man says. “That'd be so creepy.”

“What's so creepy about that?” Brian asks.

“Because this place is haunted,” the third man says.

“Whatever, I don't believe in ghosts,” Scott says

“Don't listen to him Andre,” I say. “He's just trying to scare you.”

I can't hear their words anymore but I know they're whispering because there's a sound like tiny scratching underneath us.

“Come on, there's three of us. Let's go up there,” Scott says. “What the hell is the ghost going to do if there's three of us?”

“I thought you said you didn't believe in ghosts,” Brian says.

“I don't believe in ghosts,” Scott says.

Three sets of feet are banging up the stairs to my room. Andre and I crawl under the bed. The door swings open and hits the wall with a bang.

“Turn on the light, Andre,” Scott says. Is he talking to Andre, my Andre? How does he know Andre? Maybe the third man's name is Andre. If he's named Andre then maybe it won't be so bad if I come out from under the bed, because you can't be mad and angry and mean to someone with the same name as you. I know this because Steven Evans and Steven Wall in my class are best friends and they always say it's because they're both named Steven.

“I can't find the switch,” the big Andre says.

“Why do you need the lights, Scott? Are you afraid of *ghosts*? Woooooo!” says Brian. I don't like Brian. He sounds like a jerk. Some jerks in high school stole Andre once and were going to do all kinds of bad stuff to him. They were throwing him around when Ms. Lee, my math teacher, came out and made them stop. Andre was so scared when I got him back that he was shaking.

“Where's the light switch?” Andre says.

“Its right here, Andre. Right in front of your face,” Brian says. I hear click, click, click.

“Doesn't work,” Scott says.

Little Andre has been holding his breath since the men came in the room. I'm worried that he'll pass out. Dennis says that you can pass out or even die from holding

your breath. I know that isn't true and that Dennis lies a lot. I asked mom and she said that you can only pass out from holding your breath. Maybe it'll be a good thing if he passes out because then it'll be easier for me to take care of him. Right now he's really scared and looks like he wants to scream or cry.

“Man, this place is creepy. It looks like it used to be a kids room,” Scott says.

“Whatever, its not that creepy,” Brian says.

“Brian, come on. This whole house is totally creepy. It's got that creepy feel,” Scott says. “Hey Andre, who told you this place was haunted?”

“I thought everyone knew about this place being haunted,” the big Andre says. “It was, like, this huge tragedy. A young family used to live here. The parents went away on some trip and left their kid here with a babysitter. She went out for a bit to get some milk or something and when she came back she found the kid in a pool of blood at the bottom of the stairs. They rushed him to hospital but it was too late, the kid was gone. The parents caught the next flight home. Only thing was, their plane got caught in a storm and crashed straight into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Nobody survived.”

“W-what?” The word leaves my mouth but I don't want it to leave. I grab my mouth and try to catch the word and put it back in but it won't go back in. I want the liars to go away because they are terrible men and they are scaring Andre.

“Did you hear that?” says the big Andre.

“Scott just said 'what,’” Brian says.

“No, I didn't,” says Scott.

“Well I didn't say anything,” Brian says. The men are quiet for a moment. Now

I'm holding my breath too because I'm worried that they might be able to hear me breathe.

“But I heard someone say 'what,’” the big Andre says.

“I did too,” Brian says.

Andre is scared and I am scared too. I want the liars to leave. I can't help it, I am trying to hold it down but out of my mouth a really loud sound like a fire engine is coming out.

The men run out of my bedroom and slam the door behind them. I can hear their feet pounding on the floor in the hall below. They are running down the stairs and into the living room. The music stops. Someone is yelling, loudly, and all the other voices in the living room go quiet.

I can hear noises coming from one of the bedrooms below me. It sounds like a girl is in pain. I think a man is hurting her because I can hear him making sounds as well.

The front door opens and people leave, their feet stomp on the front porch as they go. The noise in the bedroom stops and I hear two sets of footsteps leave the bedroom, walk down the hall, and go down the stairs to the main floor. Someone turns the music back on. It is much quieter now than before. I crawl out from under the bed and look out the window. The streets are empty and fat flakes of snow are falling, covering everything in white. We crawl into bed and under the covers and Andre falls asleep right away.

Ms. Wilson came back today. She made me lunch and it was my favorite, tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches.

“I have to run out for a minute, Jeremy. You just stay right here and watch TV,” she says.

“Okay,” I say. She leaves but I don't hear the door slam. Ms. Wilson is pretty quiet for a big lady.

“No Andre, Ms. Wilson told us to stay here,” I say. Andre wants to slide down the big stairs.

“I know they're not scary Andre but mom told me no,” I say. Andre can be a jerk sometimes.

“I am not a baby, Andre. Fine. We'll slide down the big stairs but just once to prove to you forever and ever that I'm not a baby,” I say. I walk up the big stairs. I get a big blanket from the closet in the hall and Andre says he wants to ride in front.

“Okay, you can ride in front. But hold on to me. I don't want you getting hurt,” I tell Andre. We're sitting at the top of the stairs and it looks like its a really long way down.

“I'm not scared Andre. Ready? We'll go on three. One, two, three... *go!*” And we are going down the stairs. It's fun and not scary at all and we go *bump, bump, bump*. Andre starts to lose his balance so I reach for him. The blanket gets caught and tangles in my legs and I'm falling and I don't know where Andre is and I can't stop because everything is happening fast, too fast...

I am lying in bed. Andre is next to me. The house is quiet. I hear noise on the front porch and the sound of the front door opening. I get up out of bed and I run down

the stairs and down the hall to see if it's mom and dad. I hear voices but they're not mom and dad's voices. It's the babysitter men. I stop at the top of the stairs and look down. They can't see me but I can see them. There is a lady with them. She looks like Ms. Wilson but not like Ms. Wilson. I run back upstairs and dive onto my bed.

There are footsteps coming up the main stairs. Now I can hear them in the hall below me. Someone is walking up the stairs to my room. Roll off the bed and crawl underneath it. The door opens.

"Jeremy? You can come out from under the bed. I'm not going to hurt you," the voice says. It sounds like Ms. Wilson. I know it's not Ms. Wilson but she sounds a lot like her. She peeks under the bed.

"Hello, Jeremy," she says.

"You can see him?" one of the babysitters yells from the bottom of the stairs.

"Yes," the lady says. "Would you mind giving us a few minutes alone?" Two sets of footsteps walk down the hall and down the main stairs. The lady steps back and sits on the floor, cross legged, in the middle of my room.

"Who are you?" I ask.

"My name is Elizabeth, Jeremy," she says.

"You're not Ms. Wilson?" I ask.

"No. Ms. Wilson was my mother," she says.

"But you're old," I say. She looks older than Ms. Wilson.

"Well, that's not a very nice thing to say," she says.

"Sorry," I say.

“Would you like to come out now?” she asks.

“Okay,” I say. I roll out from underneath the bed and sit down, cross legged, in front of her.

“Do you know where my mom and dad are?” I ask.

“They're gone to a really nice place. Would you like to see them?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say.

“Take my hands,” she says, reaching towards me. I take her hands in mine.

They're warm and soft, like my mom's hands.

“I feel scared,” I say.

“That's okay. You're safe now, Jeremy. I won't hurt you,” she says.

“Okay,” I say.

“You want to see your mom and dad now?” She asks. “They're waiting for you. Just breathe deep and let go, Jeremy. Breathe deep and let go.”

“Okay,” I say.

“Jeremy,” I hear a voice, my mother's, calling from a distance.