

Missing Mom

She became aware of how late it had gotten, maybe close to 11:00 at night. And she and her younger sister and her little brother had all been watching TV. Their mom had gone out with some friends, and the older girl, who was about 11, was supposed to babysit her younger siblings. But while they had been focused on TV show after TV show, time had been passing. The 11-year-old girl had never checked the doors, and they might still be unlocked or even open. She was afraid.

"Follow me!" she whispered to her younger brother and sister. Then they crept down the backstairs in single file, barefoot in a dark tunnel with an effulgence of light at the bottom. But what would the light reveal? The older girl thought that maybe she detected a breeze, just the slightest, coming up the stairs. Was some door open that should not be open?

She rushed down the stairs all the faster, feeling that it was less scary to confront whatever had happened with a door that might have been left open than to prolong the hair-raising moments of uncertainty. She burst out of the back staircase into the kitchen and discovered, to her fright, that the back door was wide open, into a black backyard, and had been, all this time. She felt that her blood had suddenly cooled and that everything had gone silent.

She raced to the door and slammed it shut and locked the two locks on it; then, before she got more afraid, she checked the door to the basement, which was unlocked, and she locked it, subliminally afraid that there was someone on the other side racing to turn the doorknob and shove their way into the house.

One more thing to do: she climbed up onto the kitchen sink and reached way up and pulled down the big shade that covered the picture window that sat in front of the sinks. No faces appeared before she got the shade down.

Now for the front door. She walked through the house from the kitchen to the front door, walked fast and purposefully as if she were confident about what she was doing. In truth, she was scared to death that the front door had never been locked and here it was 11:00 at night. She locked the door. No scary strangers pushed open the door before she snapped the lock shut.

She looked behind her and saw her little sister and little brother strung along the space between the front door and the kitchen pantry. They both stood like statues, staring at her. The older girl took a step toward them, relaxed now that she knew that all the doors were locked. It was late and they were by themselves, but the house was safe. They moved toward each other, stopping

briefly at the bottom of the front stairs. Then they ran pell-mell up the stairs as if seven devils were behind them. They stopped at the open door of the bedroom that the three of them shared. Then they took their time, and got ready for bed. They turned the lights out. They eventually fell asleep. They missed their mom.

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