

## **The Sabotage Brothers**

by Brandon M. Dennis

Loch Gerden was a beautiful house that sat on a small, grassy hill overlooking a slowly moving lake. The house and lake were nestled in the woods, which were full of many tame and beautiful animals that would drink from the lake and sleep on the grass. Loch Gerden belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Stout who had lived there ever since they were married. Their children were named Kyle and Luke, and the two boys had lived there since before they were born.

Kyle and Luke would spend their days making forts in the woods and trees, dressing up like animals or forest men, inventing secret calls and shouts that only each other could understand and swimming in the lake. There was a small sunken boat at the bottom of the lake which provided endless fascination for the two boys. They would take the biggest breath they could hold and swim to the wreckage to poke around in hopes of finding treasures. They once found an oar (which became a spear) and a wheel (which became a shield) but never anything of value. That didn't matter to the boys however, for the real treasure was the swim and the search and the mere hope of finding something lost and forgotten.

The house itself was also a source of intrigue to Kyle and Luke for, unbeknownst to their parents, it was filled with secret tunnels, trap doors, movable walls and cracks that only the boys could fit through, and when the weather was too nasty to play outside the boys would lose themselves in the endless tunnels and passages beneath and within the house.

But one day Dad came home from work wearing a sad face. He was a teacher at a local university and spent his time in his study, thumbing through ancient books covered with dust, or sitting in his favorite easy chair by the fire smoking his pipe and reading. But this day he didn't thumb through any books and he didn't light his pipe. Instead, he and Mom took the boys aside and sat them down.

"Kyle, Luke, I am afraid we have some bad news," said Dad. "We are putting the house up for sale and moving to the city."

"Selling the house? What for!" cried Kyle in dismay.

“Well son,” said Dad, “some of my colleagues at the university do not like the fact that I live so far away from the school. They say that I need to keep up with the times, and that I need to move into an apartment in the city so that I will be closer to the university. They say that I need to immerse myself in an urban culture and that I am too out of touch with reality all the way out here in the forest.”

“But we don’t care about all that,” said Luke. “We like this house and have been here all our lives. You can’t sell the Loch!”

“Now, now, boys,” said Mom. “Your father and I don’t like the idea any more than you do. But Dad is next in line for a big promotion. He could become chair of his entire department, and that is a very important position. He needs to do what the school says or they may give his position away.”

“B-but we don’t care about that,” said Kyle. “What lake will we swim in? What forest will we play in? We can’t do that in the city!”

“I know this will be a tough transition for you,” said Dad solemnly. “But in the end, I have to do what the school says or I won’t get the promotion.”

“But we don’t care about all that!” said the boys in unison, so upset that they started to cry. Mr. and Mrs. Stout held the boys and reassured them that everything would turn out for the best, but it was no comfort. They spent the night wide awake, trying to imagine their lives in a place other than Loch Gerden. They couldn’t.

The next day brought a light drizzle, and the boys stayed inside to finish their homework and to play. At around noon there was a knock at the door, and from their room the boys heard a creak and some light chatter. A moment later their mom came in with a young man and his young wife.

“Kyle, Luke, these are the Tweeds, and they are here to look at the house.”

“Pleasure to meet you lads!” said Mr. Tweed and he shook their hands. The boys nodded, trying to be as polite as they could, but it was plain that they were not excited to see the Tweeds. Mom led them away to view the house and the boys sat down on the floor to sulk and pity themselves.

“Oh, what a load this is!” said Kyle at last. “How could they sell our house? We’ve been here for so long!”

“It’s criminal that’s what,” said Luke. “Parents shouldn’t be allowed to sell their kids’ home! There should be a law against it.”

“Maybe we should write to the governor. I am sure he would side with us.”

“True, but it takes so long for the mail to come. If we want to do anything about it, we need to do it ourselves.”

“Do you have any ideas Luke?”

“Hmmm, let me think...”

Luke and Kyle thought about how they could save their house for a long time until Kyle leapt to his feet and snapped his fingers.

“I’ve got it! I know how we can save the house!”

“How? Tell me!”

“Quick, to the chest!” said Kyle. The two boys ran to their chest of drawers. Kyle opened the bottom drawer and climbed in. Luke pushed it close and waited until he heard a soft knock. He opened the drawer. Kyle was gone! Quickly Luke climbed inside and knocked softly on the floor of the drawer. Slowly the drawer began to close, Kyle’s huffing and grunting barely audible from behind the chest.

Kyle and Luke found themselves in a cramped passageway below the floor.

“This way, I think they are in the parlor,” said Kyle, and he scuttled off, following the cracks between the wooden floorboards. A small stair appeared before them and the two boys quietly clambered up it. The path before them split, and they veered right, dodging the cobwebs that grasped at them from the floor. It sloped upwards and grew narrower and soon the boys were behind a wall of the house, crawling ever so quietly. At last they reached their destination and Kyle came to a halt. He put his finger to his lips and said, “*Shhh!*” and pointed towards a few gaps in the walls. Luke grinned mischievously and the two boys peered through the cracks.

“Yes it is a fine house,” said Mom to the Tweeds. “There are no drafts and it is easy to maintain. Do have a seat, I will make some tea.” The Tweeds sat on a couch resting against the wall and Mom left the parlor. Dad was no where to be seen.

“It is such a charming place!” said Mrs. Tweed. “It would be the perfect place to raise a family. We must buy it!”

“It is truly a gem of a find, I must say,” said Mr. Tweed. Suddenly he spun around and looked at the wall behind him.

“Did you hear that hun?” asked Mr. Tweed, but his wife shook her head. “I could have sworn that I just heard some scuffling...”

“Rats, maybe?”

“Oh, I sure hope not.”

Just then there was a loud bang on the opposite side of the room and the startled Tweeds leapt to their feet. They stared at the far wall but saw nothing.

“I-I heard that one,” said Mrs. Tweed.

“Must be a really, really big rat.” The words barely left his mouth before the two of them heard loud scraping and shuffling coming from the walls. The Tweeds held each other tightly and followed the noises with their terrified eyes. One set of scraping traveled along the wall clockwise, and the other counterclockwise. The young couple slowly stepped backwards as the noises scraped against the wall behind them and came to a sudden stop.

“M-m-many rats?” wondered Mrs. Tweed, but Mr. Tweed hushed her.

“Do you hear that? It sounds like...”

Mr. Tweed cautiously approached the couch. He heard a soft rustle, perhaps the wind, but as he got closer to the wall he realized that it was no wind at all. It was very soft, barely audible, and Mr. Tweed kneeled on the couch, placing his ear against the wall. Now it was unmistakable. He heard voices whispering, unintelligibly, but every now and then he would pick out a word, *stabbing* or *noose* or—could it be?—*murder*. Mrs. Tweed joined her husband and pressed her ear against the wall. The whisperings grew louder and indistinct, but then all at once they became clear and the cracked voices spoke in unison,

*“The couple heard us scrape and crawl  
and very soon these two will fall.  
With a startled scream  
and a clanking chain,  
we’ll come at them through the wall!”*

The terrified Tweeds glanced at each other with gaping mouths and then stared at the wall.

Suddenly two horrible screams pierced the air and the Tweeds tumbled over backwards onto the floor. Something began to bang the wall very rapidly, *bam-bam-bam-bam!* and the screaming continued, but by this time the Tweeds were no longer curious and leaped to their feet. They dashed out of the parlor and down the hallway towards the door. Mrs. Stout had a tray of tea and was walking towards them. She gasped as the young couple dashed by her recklessly.

“Wait! What’s wrong? Don’t you want the tea?”

“Good luck selling this terrible place!” cried Mrs. Tweed and her husband took her trembling hand. The two fled out the door as if the house was on fire and it slammed shut behind them. Dad came out of the study holding his pipe.

“What was that?”

“I don’t know. The Tweeds just left abruptly. I guess they didn’t want the house.”

“That is odd then isn’t it? I wonder what got them so upset,” said Dad, and he walked into the parlor. He heard chuckling from behind the walls and then, “*Shh! Shh!*” and all was quiet. Mr. Stout’s eyes narrowed and he puffed on his pipe.

“Mmm-hmmm.”

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A week or so later, Mom came into the boy’s room with some strangers and their children. Kyle sat in the middle of the room coiling some rope.

“Kyle, these are the Cornishes, the family we told you was coming to view the house today.” Kyle stood and smiled.

“Pleasure to meet you!” he said and then two children stepped forward.

“My name is Sarah,” said the girl, “and this is my brother Toby.”

“You children have fun playing while we look at the house!” said Mr. Cornish.

“Yes daddy,” said Toby, “but do not take too long for I am hungry and want some ravioli.”

“Well, it may take a little while, but I am sure we can—”

“I said I want ravioli!” shouted Toby and his sister shouted, “Me too!” Mr. Cornish nodded.

“Very well, we will be quick and then go for Italian afterwards.” Mom eyed the Cornishes curiously but then shrugged.

“Where is Luke at?” she asked and Kyle looked nervous for a brief moment.

“Ah...” he said, “He—that is, I haven’t seen him for a while. I’m sure he will be along shortly.” Mom nodded and led the Cornishes away to show them the house. Kyle sat back down and continued to coil his rope, ignoring Toby and Sarah.

“Hey, boy! Is there anything to do?” said Toby. Kyle looked up, as if noticing them for the first time.

“Hmm? Oh, to do? Why yes, there is plenty to do. For instance, I am coiling rope. Feel free to watch.”

“No, no, I meant, is there anything *fun* to do?”

“Sure. I’m having loads of fun. There’s nothing like coiling rope!”

“What do you need the rope for?” asked Sarah, and the faintest gleam of a smile flickered across Kyle’s face. He looked up at them and then quickly glanced around, as if making sure no one was listening. He stood up and tiptoed towards the door, peered outside for a moment, and then quickly shut it.

“I’ll tell you, but you have to promise to keep your voices down,” he said. The Cornish children glanced at each other curiously.

“What do you mean?” asked Sarah but Kyle shushed her.

“Not so loud! He may be listening.”

“Who?”

“Why, Luke of course.”

“Luke?” asked Toby. “Is he your brother or something?” Kyle laughed.

“Oh, no! I am an only child. Luke is the name of the... the *creature*.”

The children’s eyes went wide.

“The c-creature?”

“Yes, we call him Luke because we thought it was a fitting name. As you heard, Mom wanted me to keep an eye out for him. That is why I am coiling this rope, see. I’m preparing a trap for that accursed creature!”

Just then there was a low pitched moan and a short, muffled growl. Sarah clung to her brother in fear.

“Shhh!” said Kyle. “That’s him! You two noisy kids awoke him, and now he is coming!” A repetitive thumping started at the chest along the right wall, and slowly started to circle the room.

“Quick, get to the center of the room!” instructed Kyle. The terrified siblings ran to the middle of the room and Kyle picked up his rope. “All right you evil little varmint, I am here for you! Come out and prepare to be caught!” The thudding continued until it reached the wall behind the bunk bed and then stopped.

“What did it—where did it—how’s it—”

“Shhh! He’s just trying to catch us off guard.” All was quiet for a long time and Kyle frowned.

“Where did he go?” asked Sarah with a trembling voice.

“I don’t know,” said Kyle. “He usually doesn’t take this long to make his move.”

“How long has he been here?”

“Oh, for many years now. We first discovered him eating a dead raccoon in the lawn, and when we scared him away he barred his teeth at us and gave the most horrible screech.” Sarah gasped and Toby grabbed Kyle.

“Now look here, you’re scaring my sister!”

“Sorry, I can stop if you want. I just thought you would like to know what we are up against.”

Toby and Sarah glanced at each other and then reluctantly nodded.

“After that we didn’t see him for a while, but one day we heard some noises behind the walls. I followed the noises into the basement and turned on the lights. It was then that I saw his face for the first time. He is covered from face to foot in brown, prickly hair! He has a long nose, like a possum, and ears like a raccoon. He has a tail like a squirrel and razor sharp teeth. He is very fast, and can leap from one side of a room to another as easily as breathing. He has a shrill screech that can make the strongest of men

stop cold in his tracks and he has claws so sharp that he could shred through a heavy door in minutes. I've been trying to catch him for months and have had little success. But today I will not fail!"

Just then there was a hiss from behind the bunk bed. Sarah squealed but Toby hushed her and held her tight.

"There he is," said Kyle, and he let out a low chuckle. "This time I will get you Luke, this time I will get you!" He crept towards the bunk bed ever so slowly.

"What are you doing? Don't go near it!" said Toby.

"Ha-ha-ha, this day he will be mine!" said Kyle with an evil laugh and he crouched down, peering beneath the bunk bed.

"What do you see?" asked Sarah.

"I see... a crack in the wall, and a furry tail. I feel a slight breeze. I bet he has been working on this hole for months, just so he can eat me! But he won't eat me this day, no, not today! I see a pair of gleaming yellow eyes..."

"Oh!"

"I can get him... now!" shouted Kyle, and he lunged underneath the bed. There was a piercing squeal and a hiss and a growl, and Kyle began struggling with something.

"Toby! Help him!" shouted Sarah.

"You help him!"

"No, stay there, I have him!" said Kyle and he groaned and wriggled beneath the bed. "I've got you Luke, you will not escape!" There was a scared shriek and Kyle laughed, but all of a sudden his legs were pulled underneath the bed.

"Kyle!" shouted Sarah, but all the children could do was hold each other and listen, their mouths agape in terror. The bunk bed shuddered and there was a terrible thumping and clattering, and then all of a sudden Kyle screamed. Instantly the room got silent.

"Kyle? Kyle!" said Sarah, but there was no answer. "Toby, see if he's all right!"

"No! Luke may be in there still."

"But Kyle may be hurt!"

The children stood motionless in fear. After a brief moment they heard a soft growl and then a loud belch. A coil of rope shot out from under the bed landing at their feet, and along with it came a soft, low, and evil chuckle.

The children screamed and raced out of the room. They met their parents in the hallway and clutched their legs.

“We are not buying this house!” said Toby in tears.

“What? Why? What happened?” wondered Mr. Cornish.

“There are evil creatures in the walls daddy!” said Sarah. “We will not live in this house!”

“Oh come now,” said Mrs. Cornish but the two children stomped their feet and squealed.

“Leave now!” they demanded and Mr. Cornish sighed.

“All right, I guess we don’t want this house then. Thank you for showing it to us, and I wish you luck selling it!” The Cornishes left in a hurry and Mom thanked them for coming. She closed the door and turned to her husband.

“What do you think the children meant?”

“Oh, they probably just played a silly game with the boys and took it too seriously. They were a fussy bunch. I’m not terribly upset that they’re leaving.”

“Neither am I. Who lets their children act in such a way? Well never mind. I’m going to make some sandwiches.” Mom walked off and Dad took out his pipe. He walked to the boy’s room. Kyle and Luke sat in the middle of the room coiling rope wearing broad grins. They looked up and waved at their father as he leaned against the wall. He took two puffs from his pipe and his eyes narrowed.

“Mmm-hmm.”

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“Get dressed boys, the Grimbolds are here,” said Mom from the door. Kyle pushed aside his bedroom window curtains. A tan station wagon had pulled up in front of the house. A man and a woman got out and pattered around, looking at the trees and the house, taking pictures and laughing.

“Looks like two retired old people,” said Kyle.

“Ah! Perfect. We should be able to have fun with them! What should we do this time?”

“I thought of the last two ideas, you think of one.”

“Hmmm. Do we have any hair-spray?”

“Mom may. Why?”

Luke giggled mischievously.

“I just came up with the greatest idea!”

“Come boys! Say hello to the Grimbolds,” called Mom. Luke and Kyle trudged out of their room towards the door. The Grimbolds stood in the tiled entryway gazing with open mouths at the inside of the house. Mrs. Grimbold wore a pink and purple dress with flowers on it, and had a white straw hat. Mr. Grimbold wore tan slacks and a flowery shirt, and around his neck was a camera which he picked up frequently to snap a picture.

“Why, the house is just lovely!” said Mrs. Grimbold.

“Yes dear, almost as lovely as the condo we stayed in last summer.”

“The one in Aspen?”

“No, no, the one in Florida. It was too cold in Aspen. Ooo, look! Such handsome wooden beams! Is this cedar?”

“No, it’s rowan,” said Dad. He walked up and put his arm around Mom and smiled.

“Here, come to the living room,” said Mom, “I’ll get some drinks and he can tell you about the house’s history.”

The adults walked into the living room talking, but the boys stayed back. When the grown ups were out of sight the boys quickly ran to the door. They lifted up the entryway mat and began fingering the edges of the floor tile beneath it. Finding a firm hold, the boys grunted until the tile groaned and began to move. The boys dragged it across the floor to reveal a square hole that lead underneath the house. Luke jumped down and then Kyle after him, and it didn’t take long for them to replace the tile. Only the displaced floor mat gave any hint of their secret.

“I’ll be right back with some drinks, but do sit,” said Mom, motioning to the couches by the fire. The Grimbolds sat and gawked at the beautiful wooden walls and the magnificent stone hearth. Dad sat in an easy chair on the other side of the coffee table and lit his pipe.

“My, this is a cozy place!” said Mr. Grimbold. “It would be perfect for a summer home.”

“Oh yes, and then we could rent it out as a condo during the winter,” said Mrs. Grimbold. Dad sat in his chair puffing his pipe, staring at the fire.

“Tell me,” said Mr. Grimbold. “Your wife mentioned the history of this place. Is it at all interesting?” Dad glanced at them for a moment without answering, but then quickly sat up in his chair.

“Interesting? Yes I suppose, if you like that sort of thing.”

“What do you mean?”

Dad sighed and set down his pipe. He leaned towards the Grimbolds as if about to tell them a secret.

“Well since you asked, I’ll tell you. You see, when we chose this land to build the house, there was already an old hermit named Gerden who lived by the lake. He lived in an old stump that he had hollowed out, and he lived off of fish and squirrels. We bought this land from the government, and when we arrived to start building the hermit got awfully upset. ‘Get off my land!’ he would shout and he would chase the carpenters around with a large stick. I took him aside one day and explained to him that the property belonged to me and that I was going to build a house, but he didn’t listen. He insisted that the land was his and promised to sabotage my efforts whenever he could.”

“Goodness, is that so?” asked Mrs. Grimbold, and Dad nodded.

“Yes, but the story doesn’t end there. The hermit would come onto the construction site at night and set fire to the tools, break apart the foundation and cause all sorts of mischief. But he was a clever hermit and I could never get my hands on him. He was far too swift and he knew these woods better than anyone. I called the police but they never caught the fellow, and so I placed guards around the house at night. Most of the time the guards would catch him and chase him off, but every now and then the hermit would get the better of my guards and tear down a wall or ruin the foundation.”

“How on earth did you get the house up then?” asked Mr. Grimbold. The two retirees sat at the edge of the couch listening to the story intently. Dad smiled.

“We just rebuilt whatever the hermit tore down, until finally one day we managed to complete the house. The day we were to move in the hermit arrived with a box of matches, saying that he would burn it down. ‘I’ll raze this thing to the ground you scoundrels; this is my land!’ he cried. By this time I was, of course, very frustrated with the hermit, and I told him in no uncertain terms that he would not touch my house, and if I ever saw him on my property again I would come at him with my shotgun. ‘That doesn’t frighten me!’ he said, and he raced towards the house ready to burn it down.”

Dad leaned back in his chair and chuckled, taking a puff from his pipe.

“Well? What happened!” demanded Mr. Grimbold.

“He never burned down my house, and I never got to chase him with my shotgun,” said Dad coolly. “Before he could reach the house a loud roar came from the woods. It stopped the hermit dead in his tracks and he slowly turned to face the trees. An immense bear came cantering out of the woods at great pace, and charged the old hermit. ‘Now, Lucky, I don’t have time to play with you right now!’ he shouted, but the bear didn’t intend to play. When he reached the hermit, the bear gobbled him up in one giant gulp!” the Grimbolds gasped.

“Oh, what a fright!” said Mrs. Grimbold. “That poor hermit. Did you ever see the bear again?” Dad wore a peculiar grin and nodded slowly. He took one puff from his pipe and the smoke slowly escaped his mouth. Then he pointed with his pipe at the wall behind the Grimbolds. Mr. Grimbold frowned and looked behind him. Affixed to the wall above where the Grimbolds sat was the head of an enormous bear. Its mouth was open and its eyes were wide.

“Ah!” screamed Mrs. Grimbold and she stood to her feet. Dad laughed.

“Do not be frightened! He is long dead. As soon as the children were born I realized that there was no way I could let a bear wander around freely in the woods. So I went out with my rifle and hunted Lucky for days, until finally I found him fishing in a nearby stream. I shot him and dragged him back here. Just so you know, bear meat doesn’t taste very good. It’s too... gristly. The peculiar thing is, as I was removing the

head I could have sworn I heard a gruff voice quietly whisper, *‘Get off my land!’*” Dad shook his head and sighed. “Must have been my imagination.”

The boys sat behind the fireplace listening to the story.

“Do you remember Dad ever telling us about this before?” asked Luke.

“No, this is the first time I’ve heard it. I always wondered where he got that bear head.”

“Get ready!” whispered Luke. “Dad is leaving!” The boys looked through the flames to where their father sat in the living room. He had stood up and was excusing himself, mentioning that he forgot about something in his study. With pipe in hand, he left the living room leaving the Grimbolds alone with the bear head. The couple stood and walked around the room examining the pictures and tapestries, avoiding the bear but glancing at it every now and then nervously. To the left of the fireplace was a mahogany chest with a beautiful globe of the earth resting on it. When they reached the fireplace they stood and stared into the lazy orange flames.

“This fireplace looks like it could warm the whole house,” said Mr. Grimbold. “I’ve always enjoyed a real, honest fireplace rather than those silly gas fireplaces.”

*“Flee.”*

“What was that dear?” he asked.

“Hmm? I didn’t say anything,” said Mrs. Grimbold.

“Are you sure? I thought I heard you say—”

*“Flee.”*

“Yes, exactly.”

“Um, that wasn’t me,” said Mrs. Grimbold.

The two retirees stared at each other for a moment and then their eyes went wide. They heard a low chuckle coming from the fire.

*“Flee!”* shouted a voice from the flames, and all at once the fire roared up, shooting flames up the chimney. The Grimbolds shrieked and stepped backwards.

“Do it again!” said Kyle laughing, and Luke sprayed the fire with the hairspray.

“Flee! Flee!” shouted Kyle, but then he heard a clank. Luke recoiled from the flames.

“I dropped the can!” he said in horror. The two boys scrambled to their feet.

A huge *bang!* went through the house, and the fireplace roared. Flames spewed up the chimney and the heat filled the room. Mom came in carrying a tray of drinks.

“What on earth was that noise?” she asked setting the tray down on the coffee table.

“There are demons in the flames!” screeched Mrs. Grimbold clutching her face.

“Come dear, let’s get out of here!” said Mr. Grimbold, but before they could flee they heard loud coughing coming from the fireplace. The globe nearby spun wildly and then the chest on which it sat moved to the right, revealing a short, dark passageway behind it. Smoke poured out and then two boys charged into the living room, covered in ash and coughing profusely.

“Luke! Kyle!” cried Mom and she rushed to them. “Are you hurt?”

“No Mom,” said Kyle and the two boys shook the soot off their clothes. The boys glanced at the Grimbolds nervously. They weren’t smiling.

“These boys scared us half to death!” said Mr. Grimbold angrily.

“They did?” asked Mom and Mrs. Grimbold put her hands on her hips.

“Yes! They made noises at us from behind the fire and told us to leave!” Mom laughed but the Grimbolds didn’t smile, and so she coughed and faced the children.

“Now boys, that wasn’t a very nice thing to do. I know you don’t want to sell the house, but you can’t go around scaring people. Apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Grimbold.” Kyle and Luke stared at their feet, utterly defeated.

“Sorry for scaring you,” they said sheepishly.

“You had better be sorry,” said Mr. Grimbold. “And just for that, I think I would like to buy the house. How much—” he started, but he paused. A low growling could be heard in the room, very quiet, but slowly gaining volume.

“Does anyone else hear that?” he asked and everyone in the room nodded. The boys glanced at each other with wide eyes, and then looked at the bear. The bear’s head was trembling, and the growling grew louder and louder. Mrs. Grimbold clutched her husband’s hand and gasped. The growling was very loud now and the mouth of the bear began to move. At length the head came to life and the mouth opened up with a loud roar. It jerked and faced the Grimbolds, and with eyes open wide it shouted in a gruff voice,

“Get off my land!”

The Grimbolds screamed and scrambled for the door. They flung it open and dashed out of the house, raced to their car and sped away from Loch Gerden faster than the car had ever gone before.

Mom and the boys faced the bear with open mouths, but it had stopped growling. Instead a jolly laughter came from the bear’s mouth, but then left and traveled the wall until it was behind a tapestry. There was a scraping sound and then suddenly the tapestry rolled up. Standing in its place was Dad, pipe in hand and laughing up a storm. The boys cheered and raced to their father, hugging his legs.

“You sneaky goat!” said Mom, but then she too laughed.

“Ah, I couldn’t help it,” said Dad.

“But what about the house?” said Luke. “Do we still have to sell it?”

“I’ve decided that I don’t care whether I get promoted or not. This is our house. We built it and it is our home, and no little administrator from the university will make me sell the place.”

The boys cheered and Mom walked over and kissed him.

“I wish you would have told me what you were going to do.”

“I’m sorry, but half the fun was seeing your face!” Dad laughed and Mom punched him in the gut.

“Hey let’s eat out tonight,” said Dad. “I know a place that has the best pot pies in town!” The boys ran off to get their coats, Mom kissed him and went to get her purse, and Dad smiled, puffing his pipe. After a moment he turned around and looked at the bear.

“Thanks Lucky,” he said with a wink.