

The door had never been locked before. Usually, grandmother let us play and rummage through junk whenever we wanted to. Every time our parents wanted a day to themselves, they would leave us at grandmother's house. When arriving, Esther, Edmund, Eric, and I would rush up to the attic. Grandmother always told us to have fun and to be careful not to break anything. Esther always told her not to worry. Then our parents would say goodbye to us as we disappeared up the stairs. When we were done playing in the attic, we would all go outside. Soon the air would feel like we were under a magnifying glass and dark, wet spots would appear on our T-shirts. Esther said she was going inside and we would follow. Grandmother would fix up lemonade, tell a story and soon our parents would be there to take us home. With hugs and goodbyes, we would pile into the car but today was much different.

Grandmother did not tell us to be careful. All she did was say goodbye to our parents but none of us noticed until now.

“Why would she lock the door?” Esther asked.

“It is strange,” replied Edmund.

“She didn't tell us to be careful as usual,” I mused.

We all looked to Eric to say something but he was deep in thought.

“Eric,” Esther piped up. “Isn't it strange?”

“Usually people put private things in their attics,” Eric said. “Maybe she's had a change of heart.”

“What?” Esther looked puzzled.

“She had a garage sale recently so why did she hide something?” Eric pondered.

“She found something when she was looking for stuff to give away,” I shouted.

“Yes!” Eric had a new excitement in his eyes. “We have a mystery on our hands.”

“All we have to do is-” Esther started to say.

“I don't want to ask grandmother. I want to solve this case,” Eric yelled.

“Stop,” I whispered. “We need to be quiet and we need to act normal. It's usual for us to ask why the attic door is locked.”

“Good thinking,” Edmund nodded.

“Yeah,” Eric frowned. “I should have thought of that.”

Esther started to head down the stairs. We followed.

“Grandma,” Esther called. “The door is locked.”

“What door?” Grandmother emerged from the kitchen.

“The attic door,” Esther replied. “Why is it locked?”

“Come here, all of you,” grandmother gestured toward the couch.

We all sat down. Everyone had the same question written on their face-“Why is the attic door locked?”

Grandmother sighed. “I regret to say you no longer have access to the attic or-”

“What?” I stood up.

“Why not?” Edmund and Esther both had a horrified look on their face.

Eric stood up and opened his mouth. Nothing came out.

“Quiet!” Grandmother shouted abruptly. Everyone was silent so that only the clock was to be heard.

“I am sorry,” Grandmother said. “I need it for other reasons.”

“Well at least we are allowed to play in grandmother’s room and the basement. They are as much fun as the attic although the attic allows you to look through a high window,” Eric was always trying to be positive.

“Oh, you’re not allowed in my room either,” grandmother bit her lip.

We sighed.

“Can you take the stuffed animals out when we want them?” Esther asked.

“Yes, I will,” Grandmother smiled for the first time since we had gotten here. I was glad.

Everyone hopped off the couch and headed outside. I followed but stopped.

“Lemonade will be ready when you come in,” grandmother said.

“Did you come upon something while you were going through junk?” I asked.

“Emily, I want you to go outside with you brothers and sister.”

“Eric, grandmother did hide something in the attic because of how she acted,” I beamed once I reached them.

Eric smiled triumphantly, “My theory is correct hopefully!”

“I know where the keys are,” a sly smile crept over Edmund’s face.

Esther frowned. "I wish I knew something."

"You can do something," I said.

"What!" everyone asked at the same time.

"Esther can distract grandmother while Edmund gets the keys and unlocks the door."

"Great plan, Emily!" Eric shouted so loud, I was afraid grandmother might hear.

"Well what are we waiting for?" Edmund cried. "I'm going in!"

We followed.

"But how do I distract her?" Esther questioned.

"It's your job. Figure it out," Eric hissed. "Keep your voice down. We're in the house."

I frowned. 'I didn't like deceiving grandmother but then again, she was keeping secrets from us!' I justified. Sucking up my worries, I followed my siblings.

"Grandma," Esther called. "I would like to ask a favor of you."

"Yes, dear?" grandmother looked happier than the last time I saw her.

"Um, can you get a stuffed animal down," Esther bit her lip. She didn't like lying either.

"Sure," grandmother smiled. Suddenly she looked at me. "Oh my, dear. Have you been crying, Emily?"

What we were doing was wrong so I had to cry. I shook my head.

"Yes you have. Come in the kitchen. I have something for you," grandmother put her arm around me and we went in the kitchen. She had completely forgotten Esther.

"Grandmother," I protested. "I really-"

Eric gave a gesture to shut my mouth and deal with it.

I did.

"Emily, I have just bought a jar of cotton candy. It's guaranteed to make an unhappy person smile," she smiled.

I tried but could not. I wanted to be apart of what my siblings were doing. Esther was taking my place. I started following them with my eyes.

Grandmother followed my gaze.

I looked back at grandmother. "I need some of that cotton candy. I really need to smile," I changed the subject.

“Okay,” grandmother took the cotton candy out of the cupboard and took off the lid.

I took a pinch.

“You don’t have to be polite. It’s hard to taste it if you do that,” grandmother raised an eyebrow.

I took a giant scoop and stuffed it into my mouth. I smiled as big as the half moon.

Grandmother laughed. I had made her laugh! I smiled bigger. If they were going to get that key and I was going to distract her, I decided to do the best job.

“Grandmother, would you like to hear some jokes?”

“I love jokes. Let’s go to the living room and make our selves comfortable,” grandmother started toward the couch.

I looked toward where my siblings had gone. They were opening grandmother’s door. I watched them go in and Edmund come out quickly with a key on a necklace. It jingled. Grandmother had heard! I stepped between her and the door.

“Grandmother, I think I might have a knack for coming up with jokes,” my eyes widened and I raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, that is wonderful,” grandmother did not think much of the jingling.

I turned my head toward them. Eric was smiling so big I thought his lips might crack.

“Tell me that joke,” grandmother patted the seat beside her. I took it.

“What kind of park is a fish’s favorite?”

“A wet park,” grandmother looked confused.

“No. A water park!”

“Oh, that is so cute,” my grandmother chuckled. “Esther needs a stuffed animal.”

I stopped her. I told her I wanted a little more cotton candy.

She agreed and I took the largest handful, which was half the jar.

Grandmother laughed so hard, tears rolled down her cheeks.

Washing my hands quickly, I ran up the attic stairs, leaving grandmother clutching her belly and rocking back and forth.

No one was at the top. The attic door was wide open. I rushed up the stairs into the attic and shut the squeaky door but was horrified at what I saw.

My siblings were not to be seen! I immediately started for the door. I had to tell grandmother!

“Stop!” Eric stood right in front of me. I started to scream but Edmund came from behind and covered my mouth. I was starting to relax but where was Esther? I squirmed. “Shh,” Edmund scowled. Eric went to a cupboard, which would have been behind the opened door. I had never seen that little cupboard when we had been up there. I spat on my brother’s hand. They shoved me inside of the cupboard and shut the door before I had a chance to say anything. Something touched me. I started to scream but another hand was over my mouth then I felt it push me downward into the darkness.



“Emily?” Esther was hovering over me, her face full of concern.

“Esther?” My eyes fluttered open as I sat up.

“Emily!” Esther hugged me tight.

“I pushed you down. I thought I had killed you,” Esther was relieved but I was furious.

“What?!” I cannot believe you did that!” I jumped up. “Eric, Edmund, and you pushed me down and I just helped you with grandmother! Is that your gratitude?”

“Calm down,” Eric and Edmund came from behind. Edmund looked at me.

“You seem fine,” he said approvingly.

“What?!” I didn’t understand.

“Look, Emily, we wanted to surprise you. We had no idea you would pass out right in the middle of the ride,” Eric looked disappointed.

I was still upset.

“Let’s climb up again!” Eric exclaimed.

“Stop,” I shouted. How did you get me out here? We’re outside!”

“That cupboard is a tunnel and it leads out here,” Eric replied.

“Esther dragged you down to the slope and then she sat down in front of you,” Edmund explained.

We didn't want you to scream so that's why we covered your mouth," Edmund said apologetically.

I had to forgive them. They were only boys. "I wish you could have explained to me not to scream and just enjoy it."

"Yes, we could have done that," Edmund showed some regret. Eric showed more.

"I don't feel so well about lying like this to grandmother," I said.

Esther agreed.

Eric's face showed regret.

Edmund wasn't worrying. "We're fine. No one's going to find out."

"The only way to get out of this mess is to tell grandmother before our parents get here," Eric replied, acting as if Edmund had said he was guilty.

"I'm going to confess first because it was my idea," I started toward the front door.

"Actually, let's head up the attic stairs. She probably won't let us up there when confessing. I'd like one last time in it."

They agreed. I was last up. When I reached the top, I whispered a goodbye to the attic then we all moved out, I in the lead.

"Grandmother," I came down the stairs and into the kitchen.

"Yes," grandmother looked so happy.

"I uh..." I nudged Eric.

He nudged Edmund and the nudging came back to me.

"What's going on? Why's everyone elbowing?" Grandmother inquired.

"Nothing," I said. "Uh..."

"Grandmother," Eric started. "We sent Esther to distract you..."

"And you had Emily come instead," Esther finished.

"Then we got the key..." Edmund winced.

"To the attic," I hung my head.

"We went up the stairs and unlocked the attic d-d-door," Eric looked down.

"We found a cupboard behind the door and slid all the way down," Esther said, "Then climbed back up."

Esther finally finished. When she said the last words, we hung our heads and tears came to my eyes. I dared to look up. To my astonishment, grandmother was laughing. The others saw.

“I just...knew...it,” grandmother laughed between words.

Eric had the look of astonishment and Edmund's face looked so funny, I started laughing. Soon all the noise to be heard was laughter.

After a while, we were all on the floor and grandmother was leaning on a stool for support. We laughed harder.

When the noise was gone, grandmother explained, “I knew you would be curious and try to discover my secret. It was so funny how you were finishing each other's sentences. I hid something in that cupboard. I was planning to show you later. I wanted to see how you reacted and I knew you would get up there.”

“But we didn't see anything in that cupboard,” Esther said, puzzled.

“How come we didn't see the cupboard before you banned us?” Eric yelled.

We all said at once, “Yeah! What about it?”

“You see, children, I found something when I was looking through junk and I decided to show you. Then I had that brilliant idea to hide it in the attic. I wanted you to think that something really, weird was going on. I know Eric loves mysteries so I just added my room off limits. When you played in the attic before, I covered the cupboard with the same wallpaper as the wall so you couldn't see it. I wanted to surprise you when I thought the time was right. I know you kids so well I just knew you would try some way to find out what was going on. Now, inside the cupboard is another, small cupboard to the right. I hid it there,” grandmother finished.

“WOW!” Everyone gasped.

Eric went to get what grandmother had come upon. He came down with a pink shoebox and a blue ribbon wrapped around it a few minutes later. We all gathered around on the floor. Esther and I untied the ribbon and Edmund opened the box. There was a picture of a man inside. He had top hat sitting on top of grey, wiry hair, dressed in a black suit and a red bow tie. There were also was a pair of pink baby shoes and a golden locket, which held a picture of grandmother and the same man in the other picture but younger.

Grandmother explained, "He's your grandfather, my husband and those shoes are mine. They were mine ever since I could walk."

"Wow," I breathed.

Everyone said another "WOW!"

The doorbell rang.

"Here are your parents," grandmother stood up and answered the door.

"Dad, we had the most amazing experience!" Esther ran to the door and we crowded around him.

"Where's mom?" I asked.

"She's at home."

"I can't wait until we tell you what happened," I jumped up and down.

Once in the car, We all took turns telling the story. Dad helped tell mom when we got home. When we went to bed, I dreamed of attics and secrets. I dreamed of cotton candy but mostly I dreamed of my family taking turns sliding down the slope in the cupboard; the attic's secret.

The End