

Young Writers Award - 2002 winner

Sometimes Scary by Rachel Rutter

He was a big dog and he made the shadow a man would make. He had a hot smell and it seemed like his belly would be very hard under the fur. When he came near them Janey got a bad feeling. It was horrible, like she'd swallowed a slippery eel.

Bea wasn't scared but she was quiet and still, because she was thinking about what to do. Bea was very brave although she had ringworm and it was a crying shame that she didn't own a pair of shoes.

The sun fell away and the garden began to make nighttime sounds.

Bea threw a brick at the dog. It made a soft noise as it hit him on the side. He fell over a bit, but got back up. Then Bea shouted, very loudly, and he ran away.

Janey thought that Bea had made a plan, but actually she had stood on the bottom half of a smashed up bottle. It had gone into her heel and the blood spilled out very quickly because it bleeds a lot there.

When Bea pulled it out it made a thick, wet plop. There was a deep, bright circle on the bottom of her foot and the blood came out in heartbeats.

"Do you want me to go get your dad?" said Janey.

Bea nodded. Her face was watery-white, like spilt milk.

Janey started to run across the garden. Her knees felt funny. All of a sudden she remembered something important so she stopped and shouted it out. " Don't put your foot on the ground because dirt is infectious".

Janey cut through the dark part of the garden. She never usually did it without Bea because down there the bushes shook like they had animals in them. Everyone called it the garden because it was everyone's backyard, just with no fences. Sometimes it seemed like a big house, and the wild trees made rooms.

There were some flowers in the garden, with petals like folded paper. They didn't last very long though, because of the wet. They crumpled up, the way spitty balloons do when they lose their air, and dropped into the sinking grass with the ruined mangos and the fat toads that bark out horrible songs with no tune. Janey hated the toads. Sometimes Bea had to hold Janey's hand or she couldn't walk through the grass and sometimes Bea got angry because she thought it was stupid to be scared of the toads, even though they squirt poison in your eye to blind you.

Bea's dad lived in a small house under a big tree. After the rain, vines pushed their fingers through the cracked louvres and he had to tear them off the kitchen wall. His house smelt like burnt hair. He had a long ponytail but nothing on top and his eyes were grey and oily, like a tabletop wiped over with a wet rag.

He was vacuuming when she came in. He looked up and smiled but he couldn't hear her.

Janey waited quietly. There was a stitch poking under her ribs and she could feel her heart knocking in her ears. After a long time he turned off the vacuum.

"Bea stood on some glass and cut her foot because a dog was going to get us! But she threw a brick and when she yelled it went away but now she's bleeding, but with her foot up so she doesn't get infections on it!"

Suddenly, after making this picture with her words she saw it in her mind and thought the scary thought that sometimes dogs can smell blood.

"Let's go then", said Bea's dad and Janey took him back up the way she came but it was scarier now because she was going more slowly. Bea's dad was a grown up but he smelt funny and always looked around him like he didn't know what was going on. Plus Janey's mum didn't like him and sometimes made up lies so he wouldn't come in.

The frangipani had stumps like pale, fat fingers. If you didn't walk around the right side the animals would get you, so Janey led Bea's dad around the proper side and up through the trees to where Bea was. Except she wasn't there.

Bea's dad said, "Well, where is she?"

"She was there", said Janey, "she was right there".

She pointed to a patch of blood that looked like a curled up flower.

"Well she probably went home while you and me were coming up here".

"I have to go home now", said Janey.

Janey's mum was on the phone but she made angry eyes when Janey came into the kitchen. This was because she got worried when Janey was late as there were men who sometimes came into the garden, since there weren't any fences.

Janey made a cordial then held her first finger up under her mum's nose so she could see that it was scratched. Her mum kissed the tip and tickled her on the back of the neck which felt nice.

Her mum had yellow eyes, as good as the yolks of warm eggs. Janey saw her cry once, just before the father left. She was crying and the father kept saying, "don't get hysterical, don't get hysterical".

Her mum said it was because he killed a bat that she cried. The father had killed many animals, including a snake and a crocodile that wasn't very big. They were in the cellar and Janey sometimes went down there and put her fingers on their scaly skins. They smelt dry. She sometimes tried to remember what the father smelt like but usually she couldn't and it hurt her in the heart.

Janey's mum got off the phone and said, "where have you been?" Then she told a long story about a naughty girl which wasn't true.

"Be cut her foot and I got her dad but when he came there she was gone".

"Well where was she then?"

"Bea's dad said she already went home".

Janey's mum said it was okay to watch TV so she sat on her cushion and ate her dinner, which was good pea and ham soup.

Very late, in the quiet part of the night, Janey woke up with a pain like a fist in her stomach because she needed to pee. She had been dreaming a dream about the father being bit by a hungry dog.

Some light came into her bedroom from the kitchen. It shined on the mural of Jonah in the whale that she had painted three weeks ago on the bedroom wall. Bea had painted the eyes because she could make them look shiny alive.

When she went into the kitchen her mum said, "What are you doing up love", but in a way so it wasn't a question.

Bea's dad was at the table. He held his sad head in his hands. He looked like he had broken something.

"Sweetheart, I don't want you to get upset but Bea didn't come home last night", said Janey's mum and made some cocoa. She didn't put enough sugar in it, but Janey didn't say so.

Janey got wrapped in a itchy blanket and taken outside. There were no car noises but she could hear the voices of men calling to each other as if there was a big wind and crushing the damp brush. Those men had torches which flashed through the trees, making it seem like they were far away.

Janey felt tired but her eyes were widely, tightly open. She had her mum's hand and Bea's dad stood on the other side.

A big policeman came cracking through the bushes. He stumbled which looked like he would fall over. It made Janey feel a bit sad to see him do that in his special uniform. His face was pale with green shine and he had bulgy eyes so he looked like a hysterical frog.

"No luck yet I'm afraid sir", he said.

Bea's dad made a swallowing sound that everyone could hear.

"Is this the young lady that was with your daughter?" The policeman smiled at Janey. "We need to ask you a few questions? Do you think you can help us?" Janey said yes but no noise came out.

"Good girl". He stood up tall. He was a nice man. He said to Bea's dad, "When it gets a bit lighter".

They all stared into the garden for no reason. The sky was purple behind the inky trees.

Janey thought it was a funny thing that people just disappeared like that. Like a leaf curling off on the wind. Or a paper flower slipping into mud. And there was nothing much left. Just stuffed animals and a scrap of blood.