

THE LAST NIGHTTIME STORY

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The Last Nighttime Story

FADE IN:

Act One

BEGIN MONTAGE - NIGHT

We SEE five or six SHOTS from different bedrooms around the world (L.A., rural Mississippi, China, Europe, Africa, South America; but could be anywhere) with a parent or guardian reading to four-year-old children in pajamas (or culturally appropriate night clothes), while we HEAR a MALE TEENAGER speak.

MALE TEENAGER (V.O.)

Do you remember all those great bedtime stories your parents read to you when you were little? It didn't matter what the story was, as long as your mom, dad, grandpa, grandma, or whoever, sat next to you and read. You'd sleep like a baby afterward.

SUPER "FIVE YEARS LATER."

We SEE the same set of bedrooms around the world (L.A., rural Mississippi, China, Europe, Africa, South America) with nine-year-old children in pajamas (or culturally appropriate night clothes) playing with toys, video games, or watching TV in their rooms, while we HEAR a FEMALE TEENAGER speak.

FEMALE TEENAGER

No one remembers the last time their parents or guardians read them a bedtime story. It just happens. It comes without warning. Most kids are caught completely by surprise. It's just part of growing up, right?

(beat)

When was the last time you were read a nighttime story?

END MONTAGE

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Twins, ALEC and BRENDA (9; in gym clothes) alternate playing with LEGOs, an Etch-a-Sketch, and video games, but neither child LOOKS interested nor happy.

We SEE a small bookshelf filled with classic children's books. Two books, "*Baby Beebee Bird*" and "*Goodnight Moon*" are opened slightly and placed just inside the door, so they will be knocked over if the children's parents enter the room.

BRENDA

Think they'll come up?

ALEC

They've never missed two days in a row. Never! But they looked pretty busy tonight.

BRENDA

Late day working.

ALEC

I hear the TV.

(beat)

They aren't coming up!

Alec angrily throws some LEGOs on the floor.

BRENDA

Hey, don't mess up my room!

She pushes Alec.

ALEC

It's our room!

He pushes her back. This creates a pushing match.

BRENDA

Only 'cause you're scared to move out!

ALEC

All my stuff is here. It's my X-box, ya know.

BRENDA

It's our X-box. Under the tree at Christmas means we gotta share it!

ALEC

You don't use it anyway.

BRENDA

It's like chewing gum for the brain. That's why, birdbrain!

ALEC

They're not coming up, you know!

They stop pushing each other.

BRENDA

Probably busy on their phones, too.

Alec POINTS to the book Brenda picked out, standing open by the door.

ALEC

You picked *The Baby Beebee Bird* again? That's so pre-K!

BRENDA

You picked *Goodnight Moon!* Like that's not pre-K? Idiot!

ALEC

Don't call me an idiot, dummy. *The Baby Beebee Bird* takes forever to understand that nighttime is for sleeping! That's lame!

BRENDA

(snooty)

I agree the plot's a little thin, but the characters jump off the pages! Not like your stupid moon!

ALEC

I can't take this abuse. I'm moving out.

BRENDA

So go already. You could have had your own room all along. You're suffering separation anxiety.

They almost come to blows, and stop playing with toys.

ALEC

I'll move into my room tomorrow. For sure! That will show you!

BRENDA

Been saying that for two years! There's no nightlight in there, you'll never leave my room! We'd better get to sleep.

ALEC

You brush your teeth, moron?

BRENDA

Yep. You, idiot?

ALEC

Had to.

BRENDA

Why?

ALEC

Big honking piece of spinach on my front tooth. I looked like Willy!

BRENDA

Gross! That's exactly why I'm not gonna miss you.

They crawl into separate twin beds and turn out the light. A nightlight goes on automatically.

ALEC

Think I'll have a sleep-over with your boyfriend, Willy, on Saturday. In my own room!

Brenda LAUGHS hard.

BRENDA

He's not my boyfriend! Think I'll have a sleep-over with your girlfriend, Chelsea, on Friday!
(beat)
So there!

ALEC

She's not my girlfriend!
(beat)
Mom and Dad are bound to trip over the books!

BRENDA

They can't miss 'em!

Alec LAUGHS.

ALEC

You gotta shut up! We gotta get to sleep!

BRENDA

Why? Oh yeah. Big test in three days. Then, the costume parade and picnic!

ALEC

Multiplication tables, and sentence structure: subjects, verbs, adjectives, and a creative essay! Just to get a lousy picnic!

BRENDA

Don't forget adverbs, which modify verbs and typically end in "LY." Easy! And the costume parade and picnic are fun, idiot!

ALEC

Especially for girls! But boys got other stuff on their minds.

BRENDA

What stuff?

ALEC

(mumbles)

Like moving into the next room.

BRENDA

Just shut up and go to sleep!

There is a deafening SILENCE as the kids both glance at their closed door. Alec turns serious.

ALEC

Hey, Bren? Do you ever not want to grow up?

Brenda thinks for a moment, and answers sadly.

BRENDA

Every night.

They quietly GIGGLE.

ALEC

Good night, Baby Beebee Bird.

BRENDA

Goodnight Moon!

Their eyes are WIDE OPEN as the night goes on and on.

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Alec and Brenda awake to a loud KNOCK on the door! We hear MOM's voice (30s, soft spoken, kind).

MOM (O.S.)
 Brenda, Alec, time to get up.
 Breakfast is waiting.

Alec and Brenda stir, but it's difficult to wake up. Alec opens one eye to see that the two books by the door are gone! He HOPS out of bed.

ALEC
 They're gone! Your stupid book, *The Baby Beebee Bird*, and my great book, *Goodnight Moon*! They're gone!

Brenda still doesn't open her eyes.

BRENDA
Goodnight Moon.

Alec RACES over to shake her.

ALEC
 I'm serious. They're gone!

Brenda opens her eyes as wide as can be, and she HOPS out of bed.

BRENDA
 Must be here somewhere.

She looks atop and under everything. They both examine the other books in the bookcase.

ALEC
 Nothing!

BRENDA
 Me either!

They HEAR another loud KNOCK on the door.

MOM (O.S.)
 Downstairs! Now! You'll be late for school!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Alec and Brenda are dressed for school in nice, clean, typical school clothes. They SLURP *BRAND NAME* breakfast cereal, while speaking fast. We see MOM and DAD (30s; business clothes) from the waist- or chest-down, but we SEE them checking their *BRAND NAME* smartphones and drinking coffee.

DAD

Took you forever to get downstairs today.

MOM

Worried you'll be late for school.

BRENDA

Dad, Mom, you didn't see that old book, *The Baby Beebee Bird*, did you?

MOM

No, Dear. Why do you ask?

ALEC

Or that *Goodnight Moon* book?

DAD

No. Just finish your breakfast or you'll be late.

BRENDA

Can't find them anywhere. I think my idiot brother is playing a joke on me.

MOM

Don't call your brother an idiot.

ALEC

I think my sister the moron got up in the middle of the night and hid the books.

DAD

Don't call your sister a moron.

MOM

Clean that room of yours, and I bet you'll find them.

ALEC

We're serious. Maybe we were robbed!

DAD

I've gotta run. Kids, don't forget your lunches.

Everyone begins to leave the house.

MOM

And no stopping on the way to school. I know it's just one block, and other kids will be walking with you.

DAD

Just walk quickly.

BRENDA

Nice adverb, Dad.

ALEC

Oh, brother!

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alec and Brenda TRUDGE to school. A street sign reads: "Last St." They pass an old house and junkyard on a large lot surrounded by a wrought-iron fence. A rusty sign reads: "Rapple's Old Ancient Secondhand Antique Emporium and Junkyard." Alec and Brenda pass it without a thought. Their Grammar School is on the next block.

BRENDA

We'll find them when we get home.

ALEC

We'd better. I blame you!

BRENDA

For what?

ALEC

Getting old so fast. You're like a mini-Mom and you're not even ten yet!

BRENDA

That's 'cause you're still a baby!

They push each other as they walk.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

They didn't walk away by themselves.

ALEC

We weren't robbed. Thieves would have taken the TV, jewelry, and my comic book collection.

BRENDA
My engineering kits!

ALEC AND BRENDA
The X-box!

They stop in their tracks.

ALEC
We have a hundred kids books?

BRENDA
Why those two?

They SHRUG their shoulders, and TRUDGE to school.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

We see Twenty Students (9; various ethnic groups and genders, all in nice, clean, clothes. The biggest boy is WILLY (Half-Middle-Eastern, missing front tooth; not so smart, but happy). The smallest girl is CHELSEA (Asian), who is very bright. Willy, Chelsea, and two other kids are sleepy and cranky today. We see only the legs of MRS. SCOGGINS (60, schoolmarm, pantsuit) as she RACES around the room. The children SIT in short desks.

MRS. SCOGGINS
What's the matter? Some of you
didn't get enough sleep last night?

The children RAISE THEIR HAND before they speak.

WILLY
I didn't.

CHELSEA
Me either.

ALEC
I didn't get too much.

BRENDA
Me either.

MRS. SCOGGINS
I want everyone to get a lot of
sleep this week. We have our big
tests coming up.

The Students GROAN.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
 Multiplication tables, and sentence
 structure: subjects, verbs,
 adjectives, and a creative essay,
again!

Brenda RAISES her hand.

BRENDA
 (yawning)
 Adverbs, too.

MRS. SCOGGINS
 Adverbs often are a very important
 part of the test. However, let me
 return to the topic of creative
 essays. Do you remember writing
 your practice essays last week?

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

SUPER: LAST WEEK.

The twenty alert Students stare at blank, blue-covered test booklets. The Students struggle getting their ideas down on paper, while Mrs. Scoggins walks past them. The Students suffer the agony of writer's block, as we hear Mrs. Scoggins in V.O.

MRS. SCOGGINS (V.O.)
 Your practice essays last week were
 well below the five-hundred-word
 requirement. Many essays lacked a
 clear beginning, middle, and end.
 I don't mean to sound harsh, but
 there was a general lack of
 imagination and creativity. You
 have to take these district-wide
 exams seriously. The Principal, my
 boss, was very unhappy. She called
 me into her office and told me that
 your essays reflected very poorly
 on me!
 (beat)
 On me! I know each of you is
 capable of so much more!

END FLASHBACK

The Students look ashamed of themselves, except Alec, Brenda, Willy, and Chelsea who are barely awake.

ALEC

Five hundred words is a lot.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Each of you has a story to tell. I think your next essays will be much more creative!

Mrs. Scoggins reads from a handful of essays in her hand.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)

Willy, you already know that there is nothing too creative about shooting a basketball until your arms get tired.

The students LAUGH.

WILLY

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins. But the story does have a beginning, middle, and end, like you said.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Willy, your entire essay was three sentences: "I went outside to shoot baskets. Did pretty good at first. My arms got tired." And you did pretty well at first would be correct grammar. Your entire essay was fifteen words! Not five hundred.

(beat, mumbles)

Thank God!

WILLY

(mumbles)

I really cut to the chase, Mrs. Scoggins.

Mrs. Scoggins ignores Willy.

MRS. SCOGGINS

And Chelsea, you're a bright girl.

Chelsea barely lifts her head.

CHELSEA

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS

However, a whole essay about your dog sleeping is as exciting as watching paint dry.

The students LAUGH.

CHELSEA

It was the only exciting thing that happened all week!

MRS. SCOGGINS

One-hundred-thirty-seven words! Use your imagination. Convey your excitement and feelings! Your dog does more than sleep!

CHELSEA

He passes gas.

The students LAUGH.

MRS. SCOGGINS

(mumbles)

That would have livened up your story.

CHELSEA

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Brenda, surely something more exciting happened in your life, since you found a smashed frog in your driveway in Kindergarten?

The students LAUGH.

BRENDA

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins, but how about my clever title?

MRS. SCOGGINS

(mumbles)

He Croaked.

The Students LAUGH.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)

Two-hundred-seventy-one words, the class record!

The students CLAP.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)

Not funny!

The Students stop clapping.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
 And Alec, your essay titled, "Why I
 Hate to Write Essays," is certainly
 not going to please the district
 judges!

The student LAUGH.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
 A one-hundred-ninety-five-word
 essay is no laughing matter!
 Benjamin Franklin said, "Either
 write something worth reading or do
 something worth writing about."

WILLY
 Mrs. Scoggins, will that be on the
 test?

The students try to contain their giggles.

MRS. SCOGGINS
 If you want to score well on your
 creative essays, I strongly suggest
 you kick your imaginations into
 high gear. Your next opportunity
 will be on Friday before the
 costume parade and picnic. I hope
 your performance will be greatly
 improved. Creativity is everything!
 (beat)
 Now quietly listen for an hour,
 while I review the parts of speech.

Alec leans over and whispers to Willy.

ALEC
 Here's the part of speech where I
 quickly fall asleep.

Alec, Brenda, Willy, and Chelsea quickly doze off. Willy
 FALLS out his desk. Mrs. Scoggins RACES down the aisle to
 help him back to his desk, but he can't keep his eyes open.

MRS. SCOGGINS
 I don't know why everyone's so
 tired lately!

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alec and Brenda, just leaving school, walk sleepily toward
 home.

BRENDA
So embarrassing!

ALEC
I know. Right?

BRENDA
I don't remember what we covered in
the parts of speech.

ALEC
I don't even remember recess.

BRENDA
It's all your fault, idiot. Talking
most of the night!

ALEC
Shut up, moron. You were talking
too!

BRENDA
I want you out of my room tonight!

ALEC
There ya go again, Mini-Mom.

A pushing match begins as they walk home.

BRENDA
Chelsea thought you were an idiot
today. Said your essay was stupid!

ALEC
Like her essay about her sleeping
dog wasn't stupid. And I gave you
your title, *He Croaked*.

BRENDA
That's what you said back on the
day it happened. You forgot, idiot.

ALEC
Funny how nobody made it to five
hundred words.

BRENDA
That's 'cause nothing exciting ever
happens around here!

ALEC
That's for sure!

BRENDA

What do we tell Mom and Dad when they ask about our day at school?

ALEC

It's so sad!

(beat)

I don't even remember lunch!

Suddenly, they HEAR large pieces of steel SCRAPING and CLANGING behind Rapple's Old Ancient Secondhand Antique Emporium and Junkyard. They RACE up to the wrought-iron fence and PEEK in.

BRENDA

What do you suppose that was?

ALEC

Came from behind the house.

BRENDA

Think Old Man Rapple is burying something?

ALEC

Or someone!

They SEE a BRIGHT LIGHT in the attic of the old house.

ALEC (CONT'D)

What's that?

BRENDA

Brighter than a full moon on Halloween!

The scraping of metal stops.

ALEC

What is all this junk in here, anyway?

BRENDA

Mom says he collects stuff every day and every night. Dad says he never ever throws anything away.

ALEC

Even his garbage?

BRENDA

Chelsea's mom said the same thing. Tried to get the city to do something about it, but they can't.

ALEC
It's legal to collect garbage
forever?

BRENDA
If people don't want it, I guess.

The LIGHT GOES OUT in the upstairs room.

ALEC
I bet he's coming out!

BRENDA
Let's get out of here!

Alec and Brenda SCREAM, and RUN all the way home.

EXT./INT. HOUSE - DAY

Alec and Brenda RACE inside, and lock the door.

BRENDA
You check all the doors. I'll check
the windows.

They RACE around the house checking every lock, and end up in
the kitchen.

ALEC
Everything's locked.

BRENDA
Let's sit by the phone in case we
gotta dial 9-1-1.

ALEC
Good idea.

BRENDA
Mom and Dad will be home in an
hour.

ALEC
Unless they have to work late
again.

BRENDA
Yeah.

ALEC
I'll get my old baseball bat.

BRENDA

It's a T-ball bat! Only make them madder. And you only got like two hits that whole season. You'll probably miss!

ALEC

You got a better idea?

BRENDA

I'm gonna call Chelsea and have her keep an eye out.

ALEC

She lives two blocks away.

BRENDA

You should know, she's your girlfriend!

ALEC

She is not!

They push each other again.

BRENDA

Call Willy, then. He's right across the street.

ALEC

You should know. He's your boyfriend!

BRENDA

You're such an idiot. His mom's home, and his dad's a policeman!

ALEC

I know that, moron. But then we gotta use the phone.

BRENDA

We don't have to call 9-1-1 now. Call Willy!

ALEC

You're such a control freak!

Alec GRABS the phone and DIALS Willy. Willy's mom, MRS. GREENLEY (30, sweet) answers.

ALEC (CONT'D)

Hi, Mrs. Greenley. Is Willy there?

MRS. GREENLEY (O.S.)
Hello, Alec. Willy went up to nap.
Didn't sleep well last night, I
guess.

ALEC
Something in the air, I guess, Mrs.
Greenley. I'll call back later.
Thanks.

MRS. GREENLEY (O.S.)
Alec, I got a text from Willy's
teacher, Mrs. Scoggins, that he
fell asleep in class.

Alec's eyes open widely.

MRS. GREENLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You don't know anything about that,
do you, Alec?

ALEC
No, Mrs. Greenley, but it's pretty
hard for any kid to stay awake
during the parts of speech stuff.

MRS. GREENLEY (O.S.)
Yes, thank you, Alec. I'll tell
Willy that you called.

Alec HANGS UP nervously.

ALEC
You hear that?

BRENDA
That means Mom and Dad probably got
a text from Mrs. Scoggins, too.

ALEC
What are we gonna do?

BRENDA
First, we're going to tear our room
apart looking for those two books.

ALEC
Then we gotta clean our room so we
don't get into trouble.

Brenda and Alec RACE up stairs.

BRENDA
We're already in trouble.

ALEC
We'd better find those books!

LATER

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room looks like a tornado struck. Alec and Brenda are poring over every book title.

BRENDA
Nothing?

ALEC
Nothing!

They HEAR their Mom and Dad come in downstairs.

DAD (O.S.)
Hi, kids. We're home!

ALEC AND BRENDA
Hi, Dad!

MOM (O.S.)
Hi, Alec. Hi, Brenda. What are you doing?

BRENDA
Just cleaning our room.

ALEC
And talking about parts of speech.
Big test coming up.

MOM (O.S.)
That's good. Got a strange text
message from Mrs. Scoggins.

ALEC
Our teacher, Mrs. Scoggins?

Brenda hits Alec in the arm.

MOM (O.S.)
Said you both fell asleep in class.
Alec I would believe...

BRENDA
Mrs. Scoggins speaks in a monotone
sometimes.

ALEC
Yeah. A moron-tone.

Brenda hits Alec again.

BRENDA
Half the class zonked out.

DAD (O.S.)
(laughs)
I remember those days!

MOM (O.S.)
(to DAD)
You're no help.
(to the kids)
Dinner is in an hour.

ALEC AND BRENDA
Okay, Mom.

BRENDA
(whispering)
We gotta clean this room, pronto.

ALEC
Pronto? Is that some kind of
cleaning fluid.

BRENDA
Are you sure we're related? I think
you snuck into our house after I
was born!

ALEC
Just clean up, dummy.

BRENDA
Shut up, idiot!

They angrily clean the room. In addition, Brenda organizes
all the books in the bookcase.

ALEC
By size?

Brenda POINTS as she describes the bookcase.

BRENDA
Size and alphabetical order. You
got our Golden books, picture
books, Dr. Seuss and other
classics, modern authors, and
reference books.

ALEC
I put all the LEGOs away! Oh, and
my video games.

BRENDA
Shocking!

ALEC
What? Me putting the LEGOs away?

BRENDA
No, idiot. I didn't see two of your
old favorites: *Mike Mulligan and
His Steam Shovel*, and *The Little
Engine That Could*.

Alec ATTACKS the bookcase.

ALEC
What? Are you sure? *Mike Mulligan
and His Steam Shovel*, and *The
Little Engine That Could*? This is
disastrous!

Brenda POINTS at two areas in the bookcase.

BRENDA
Should be right here!

ALEC
I just read, I mean, saw them a
while ago!
(beat)
Last year, I think!

They HEAR Mom.

MOM (O.S.)
Dinner!

BRENDA
They're gone now! I'm going
downstairs to dinner. You probably
gave them to Good Will or
something!

ALEC
Not those books. Used to love 'em!

Alec EXAMINES every book in the bookcase.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Brenda is almost finished with her dinner. Alec's dinner is getting cold. The parents are scurrying around. Dad is washing dishes, while Mom puts food and kitchen items away. We SEE the parents only from the waist- or chest-down.

MOM

Finally, Alec. What took you?

ALEC

(sad)

I was looking for four books that have gone missing since last night.

MOM

Four books?

BRENDA

The Baby Beebee Bird and *Goodnight Moon* disappeared last night.

ALEC

And I think *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, and *The Little Engine That Could* disappeared today because we heard strange noises from behind Old Man Rapple's junkyard.

DAD

You shouldn't be anywhere near the back of that dump.

MOM

Dad's right. You stay away from there. Not safe!

BRENDA

We just heard noises from the sidewalk.

ALEC

Strange, eerie noises. Like steel beams scraping.

(beat)

Almost crying!

MOM

Quite an imagination, dear.

BRENDA

I heard it, too.

ALEC

Then there was a bright light, as
bright as a full moon.

BRENDA

A full moon on Halloween!

ALEC

Shining from Mr. Rapple's attic in
broad daylight!

DAD

Just stay out of that yard! There
used to be a big dog, ya know.

BRENDA

He's been dead since we started
school.

MOM

All those old sharp pieces of rusty
metal all over. Brenda's always
telling us we could get tetanus.
(imitating Brenda)
That needle is this big, ya know!

The kids look up and GULP!

BRENDA

I don't say it that often!

ALEC

Yes, you do!

BRENDA

Tetanus is a very dangerous
bacteria! It can cause lockjaw, ya
know!

ALEC

We weren't going to go in there,
but we think it's strange.

DAD

What's strange?

BRENDA

We lose the book, *Goodnight Moon*,
then see a bright light from Mr.
Rapple's attic.

ALEC

Then we lose *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, and *The Little Engine That Could*, and we hear steel scraping in Old Man Rapple's backyard.

The parents continue to scurry around.

DAD

Just a coincidence.

MOM

Clean your room, and you'll find the books.

BRENDA

We cleaned the room.

Alec LOOKS away.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Alec?

ALEC

The books are kind of all over the floor. I was looking for...

MOM

(interrupts)

You get up there right now, young man. No dessert!

BRENDA

But we are missing the books! It's true.

MOM

Stop this silly talk. No dessert for you, either, young lady. Now, march up there with your brother. I've got a little work to do tonight, and so does your father!

BRENDA

Yes, Mom.

ALEC

Yes, Mom.

Alec and Brenda TRUDGE upstairs.

MOM (O.S.)
You let me be the disciplinarian
again, Dear.

DAD (O.S.)
My bad. Sorry. I'll correct them
next time. They're usually great
kids. What's gotten into them?

MOM (O.S.)
Tired, I guess.

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

This time, Brenda forces Alec to help her arrange the books.

ALEC
Sorry about the mess.

BRENDA
It's okay. Lets you learn about
alphabetical order, and let's me
pick out a book for tonight.

ALEC
I should pick one out, too.

BRENDA
Ahh! *Olivia* by Ian Falconer.

ALEC
About the pig that is incredibly
energetic and imaginative? I love
that book!

BRENDA
You surprise me.

ALEC
Why?

BRENDA
Just threw together an adverb and
an adjective like a pro!

ALEC
Really? Which is which?

Brenda hits Alec in the arm.

BRENDA
You crack me up!

ALEC
I'm serious. The L-Y word is the
adverb, right?

BRENDA
Duh!

ALEC
You're ridiculously mean to me. I'm
moving out!

BRENDA
Nobody's stopping you. And I might
sleep better! But, you're learning!
Ridiculously slowly for a kid your
age, but you're learning.
(beat)
What book are you picking out for
tonight?

Alec carefully examines several books. He SMILES.

ALEC
The Polar Express by Chris Van All,
All, All...

BRENDA
Allsburg. Love that story.

ALEC
The paintings take me right to the
North Pole.

BRENDA
I wish they would!

They push each other. This time, Alec falls over and hits his
head.

ALEC
Ow! Moron!

Alec POPS up and hits his sister on the arm, hard. She tries
to act like it didn't hurt, but tears form.

BRENDA
Not supposed to hit girls.

ALEC
You started it!

BRENDA
Get out of my room! Now!

ALEC
All my stuff's here. You can't make
me!

BRENDA
I'll call Dad and Mom!

ALEC
I'll make your life miserable.

BRENDA
Ridiculously miserable.

Alec is caught off guard. Then he, chuckles.

ALEC
Sorry for hitting you.

BRENDA
Sorry for pushing you.
(beat)
But I still want you out of my room
tomorrow. Time you grew up, and
stop hitting girls!

ALEC
(sadly)
Maybe you're right.

Alec and Brenda STARE at their books. Then, they set them by
their closed door, so that they'll be knocked over if the
parents enter the room. The mood is sullen.

BRENDA
(sadly)
Think they'll come up tonight.

ALEC
I'm sure of it. They missed last
night.

BRENDA
But they got the text from our Mrs.
Scoggins, and they had work to do.

ALEC
They'll be here.

LATER

Lying in their beds, the children, with EYES WIDE OPEN, wait,
and wait, and wait. Agony!

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The kids are awakened by a loud KNOCK.

DAD (O.S.)
Hey, kids, time to wake up.
Breakfast is ready. Chop Chop.
Let's go!

Brenda and Alec LEAP from their beds. *Olivia* and *The Polar Express* are gone!

ALEC
Where are they? Did you do this
again?

BRENDA
Didn't do it the first time, idiot.

ALEC
Moron. Where'd they go?

BRENDA
No idea. Mom and Dad will know!

ALEC
Let's get dressed.

BRENDA
I get the bathroom first today. You
look for the books -- without
dumping them all out, idiot!

ALEC
Dummy!

They kids are angry and concerned, as they get ready for school.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Again, the parents SCURRY around, while sipping coffee and staring at their phones. Alec and Brenda slurp their NAME BRAND breakfast cereal, while asking questions.

ALEC
Why didn't you come up to read us a
bedtime story?

BRENDA
And kiss us good night?

Mom and Dad stop scurrying to answer (we still see them from the waist down).

MOM

We did! You were sound asleep.

BRENDA

What time?

DAD

When we finished work.

MOM

It was late. We're sorry.

ALEC

When you opened the door, did you knock over any books?

MOM

Didn't see any books, but it was dark.

BRENDA

What about the nightlight?

DAD

It was pretty dark. And we were pretty tired. Sorry, kids.

MOM

What's all this about books?

ALEC

They're gone! *Olivia* and *The Polar Express*. They're gone!

DAD

You'll have to look for them after school.

MOM

You're late again. Get going. And don't forget your lunches.

Mom and Dad head out the same time as the kids, who wave good-bye with forced smiles.

ALEC

Old man Rapple's place, let's go!

BRENDA

Right behind you!

They RACE to the old Rapple house and squeeze their faces between the rails of the wrought-iron fence. They see a cement pig lawn ornament, and their eyes open widely.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
It's *Olivia*!

ALEC
I wonder where the conductor of *The Polar Express* is?

BRENDA
Old man Rapple probably has him tied up inside the house.

ALEC
Santa too, I bet.
(beat)
He's got *The Goodnight Moon* upstairs, and the steam shovel and Little Engine in the backyard, I bet!

BRENDA
We gotta warn the other kids at school!

They RACE to school!

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY.

Alec and Brenda look at the clock, and each other. Their faces say it all -- they're late. This time, half the class is cranky and tired, and Mrs. Scoggins is in a rotten mood.

MRS. SCOGGINS
I'll have to send a text message home to your parents!

ALEC
I'm sorry.

BRENDA
I'm sorry.

MRS. SCOGGINS
And what's with my class today. Half of you look like you haven't slept in weeks!

Alec and Brenda take a seat at their desks.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
Willy, did you get any sleep last night?

WILLY
I did.
(beat)
After the robbery!

MRS. SCOGGINS
The robbery?

WILLY
Nobody noticed it but me.

MRS. SCOGGINS
I see. What was stolen?

BRENDA
We bet it was books!

Willy RACES over to Alec and Brenda.

WILLY
Your place too?

ALEC
The Baby Beebee Bird, Goodnight Moon.

MRS. SCOGGINS
That's ridiculous. Nobody is stealing your books.

WILLY
Leo the Late Bloomer, and Horton Hears a Who!

BRENDA
Willy, that's so sad.

WILLY
I didn't read 'em in years, but I do like elephants.

ALEC
That explains a lot.

BRENDA
Alec says we lost *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, and *The Little Engine That Could*. But, he hasn't seen them for years!

MRS. SCOGGINS

This is not happening.

CHELSEA

Bunny Cakes, and *Little Bear*. Gone from my bookshelf, and the fourth *Harry Potter* book was stolen right out of my sleeping hands.

ALEC

That was two nights ago. Last night, it was *Olivia* and *The Polar Express*.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Okay class, that's it. A note is going home to all your parents. This is the silliest thing I've ever heard.

Mrs. Scoggins looks at her class, and sees half of the class is asleep.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on around here, but I'm sending you all out to recess -- just to wake up. Go on! Go on!

The kids wake up and stumble outside.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Alec, Brenda, Willy, and Chelsea discuss things, while the other Students run and play.

ALEC

The good news is, it's not just us Brenda.

BRENDA

That's the bad news.

WILLY

Huh?

CHELSEA

They mean something big is going on.

WILLY

Big?

ALEC

And scary.

BRENDA

What are we gonna do?

ALEC

I don't know. I'm just a kid!

WILLY

Where are our books going? Maybe it's like the Tooth Fairy, but it's a book fairy who steals books?

CHELSEA

(smirks)

And leaves extra teeth?

ALEC

We think it's a real thief!

BRENDA

We can't prove anything yet.

CHELSEA

You have a suspect?

ALEC

One. That's all we can tell you right now.

WILLY

Can you tell Mrs. Scoggins, so she doesn't think we're crazy?

CHELSEA

(looks at Willy)

Too late.

BRENDA

We'll know more tomorrow morning.

ALEC

We need to run around. If we get caught sleeping again, we'll be in third-grade until we're twelve!

The BELL RINGS.

BRENDA

Quick. Run back!

They RUN back to class.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The Students are back in their seats, and just as quickly, Alec, Brenda, Willy, and Chelsea begin to doze off.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Creative writing. Please take notes. The three-part structure for stories dates back to the time of Aristotle: a beginning, a middle, and an end.

ALEC

(mumbles)

This must be the end.

Alec, Brenda, Willy, and Chelsea are asleep. Willy falls out of his seat and onto the floor. Mrs. Scoggins wakes everyone up.

MRS. SCOGGINS

What's going on around here?

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Brenda and Alec stumble toward home, half-asleep, when Alec perks up.

ALEC

Our suspect!

They RACE back to Old Man Rapple's place. They poke their faces through the wrought-iron fence.

BRENDA

Looking for evidence of *Leo the Late Bloomer*, and *Horton Hears a Who!*

ALEC

An elephant sitting on a nest in a tree would be pretty hard to miss!

BRENDA

So would a tiger running around!

ALEC

Yeah, but maybe not *Bunny Cakes*, and *Little Bear*. They could easily hide in all that junk!

BRENDA
Bunny Cakes is so Pre-K? Why would
anyone read that one?

ALEC
(mumbles)
Old books can be comforting.

Alec looks around the junkyard, and he lights up and points
at a cat crossing the back of the junkyard.

ALEC (CONT'D)
A tiger!

BRENDA
More like a cat, idiot.

ALEC
Not the cat! That old wood carving!

BRENDA
Leo the Late Bloomer?

ALEC
Old Man Rapple turned Leo into that
carved tiger over there! What do ya
think?

BRENDA
Gotta be him.

Brenda looks to the opposite side of the junkyard, and sees
an old pink cake box.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
There's a cake box!

ALEC
Bunny Cakes?

BRENDA
Gotta be.

ALEC
I think we've seen enough.

BRENDA
All the evidence we need.

ALEC
Now, to set a trap!

BRENDA
For tonight?

ALEC

Exactly!

The front door of Old Man Rapple's house CREEKS open. Alec and Brenda don't see anyone!

BRENDA

Let's get out of here!

Alec and Brenda RACE home.

INT./EXT. KITCHEN/BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Alec and Brenda RACE in, and begin locking the doors.

ALEC

Lock all the doors!

BRENDA

Check the windows!

They RACE upstairs, checking the bedroom windows, when Willy KNOCKS on the front door.

ALEC

What was that?

BRENDA

Old Man Rapple?

The twins FREEZE! They HEAR louder KNOCKS. They whisper.

ALEC

Where's my T-ball bat?

BRENDA

Closet.

Alec and Brenda search the closet, when they hear Willy KNOCK on the back (kitchen) door. The twins FREEZE and whisper.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

We're surrounded.

ALEC

I'm calling 9-1-1!

Willy LEAVES and walks across the street back home. Alec and Brenda CREEP downstairs, PEEK out the windows. They see nothing. They RACE upstairs and SLAM the door to their bedroom.

They HEAR a SIREN a few minutes later. OFFICER (MR.) GREENLEY (35, uniformed, but we only see him from the waist down like Mom and Dad) knocks on the door.

The kids are upstairs and too afraid to answer, until they hear his voice.

MR. GREENLEY

Kids. It's me, Mr. Greenley.
Willy's dad. Open up.

Alec and Brenda come downstairs and answer the kitchen door.

ALEC

Sorry, Mr. Greenley, Officer
Greenley, we think we over-reacted.

MR. GREENLEY

I thought so too. I was on my way
home anyway, so I thought I'd check
it out.

BRENDA

Just a knock at the door.

MR. GREENLEY

I called Mrs. Greenley before
coming from the station. She said
that Willy came by to get a
homework assignment. He thought you
were home, but nobody answered.

ALEC

That was us idiots.

MR. GREENLEY

Figured as much. Willy fell asleep
in class again. Forgot all his
assignments.

BRENDA

I'll call him right now and give
him the assignments.

MR. GREENLEY

Thanks, Brenda.
(beat)
You kids look concerned. Something
bothering you?

BRENDA

Nope.

ALEC

Nope.

MR. GREENLEY

If there was, you'd tell me, right?

ALEC

Yep.

BRENDA

Yep.

MR. GREENLEY

Good.

ALEC

Can we keep this accidental 9-1-1
call from our folks?

MR. GREENLEY

Ha! You bet, Alec. I know you're
getting too big to have a sitter
after school. Practically fourth-
graders already!

(beat)

Thanks for getting my son those
assignments.

Brenda shuts the door and locks it. Brenda begins to call
Willy.

LATER

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mom and Dad arrive home with a pizza and a jug of milk. We
see their legs.

MOM

Kids? We're home!

DAD

Pizza! Your favorite!

Alec and Brenda creep down the stairs. Alec holds his T-ball
bat, Brenda holds a badminton racket.

MOM

What were you two playing?

BRENDA

Nothing?

DAD
That's usually Alec's line.

MOM
We got another text message from
your Mrs. Scoggins today.

DAD
Said you were both late for school.

MOM
Two notes in two days.

DAD
What's gotten into you? You get
pizza anyway. We just want to know?

The twins stand defiantly in the kitchen.

ALEC
Some of our best books have been
stolen!

BRENDA
And we're sure Old Man Rapple has
been stealing them.

MOM
I'm sure they're in a closet, down
in the basement, or under a bed
somewhere.

DAD
We'll help you look for them this
weekend if it bothers you so much.
You haven't read many of those
books in years!

Dad moves to HUG Brenda, and Mom moves to HUG Alec, but the
twins step back.

ALEC
You don't believe us.

BRENDA
It's so obvious, when you look in
Old Man Rapple's junkyard!

MOM
I think your imaginations have
gotten the best of you.

ALEC
What about all that new stuff in
Old Man Rapple's junkyard?

MOM
Did you see even one book?

BRENDA
No.

DAD
Then there's nothing to explain
your weapons of choice?

The kids put the bat and racket behind them.

MOM
Let's all calm down, have some
pizza, and forget the whole thing!

ALEC
But we saw evidence!

MOM
Evidence?

ALEC
The tiger?

BRENDA
The cake box?

ALEC
And the scraping of steel like Mike
Mulligan and the Little Engine,
screaming for help from behind Old
Man Rapple's house.

BRENDA
We heard it!

Dad and Mom scurry around the kitchen.

DAD
Two notes sent home from Mrs.
Scoggins in two days!

MOM
And these wild stories! We don't
know what's gotten into you.

DAD
Alec, we want you sleeping in your
own room tonight!

Alec looks STUNNED.

ALEC

(pouts)

Do I have to? There's no
nightlight, ya know.

MOM

We think you're keeping each other
awake -- talking all night! This
has to stop.

Alec HANGS his head. Even Brenda POUTS. They eat their pizza
in tiny bites, sadly.

DAD

It's one room away, with an
adjoining bathroom. You're not
being sent to Siberia!

BRENDA

What about the X-Box?

ALEC

And the LEGOs?

MOM

You can divide things up after
school tomorrow. You can play in
each other's rooms. No big deal,
right?

Alec HANGS his head. Brenda POUTS.

DAD

You kids need your sleep! That's
why you're acting all crazy! Lack
of sleep.

MOM

I agree. Now, finish your dinner
and get up to your rooms. You will
not be late for school tomorrow!

The twins STOP EATING, and march upstairs, as sad as they
have ever been.

INT. ALEC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door CREAKS as Alec opens the door. He enters the cold
toy-less room with tiny steps. Brenda BURSTS through the
adjoining bathroom door with a forced smile, and her arms
behind her back.

BRENDA
Not that far away!

Alec tries to be brave, as he sits on his bed.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
I found these in the closet!

Brenda swings her arms out to reveal two walkie-talkies. Alec grabs one immediately.

ALEC
You're a genius!

Alec's mood lightens immediately.

BRENDA
I know, right?

ALEC
We need to set a trap!
(beat)
Quick! To the bookcase!

They RACE into Brenda's room.

ALEC (CONT'D)
Each of us picks out two more classic favorites.

BRENDA
What for?

ALEC
You'll see!

They look through all the books, carefully making two selections each.

BRENDA
Whatcha got!

ALEC
Sword and the Stone, and *The Cat in the Hat*. What did you pick?

BRENDA
Black Beauty, and *Pete's Dragon*, the novel, not the kids book!

ALEC
Great. Help me move the dresser.

They struggle, but pull the dresser out.

ALEC (CONT'D)

Put the books behind the dresser.

Brenda puts the books against the wall.

BRENDA

Okay.

ALEC

Help me push the dresser back.

They struggle to push the dresser back.

BRENDA

Fine! Now, we better get ready for bed, or Mom and Dad will go through the roof.

LATER

The twins are in their own rooms, lying in bed, and whispering into their walkie-talkies.

ALEC

Thanks for remembering the walkie-talkies.

BRENDA

Thanks for setting a good trap.
(beat)
But it's in my room!

ALEC

You wanted me out of your bedroom anyway. You said so!
(beat)
Nobody's gonna get those books.

Brenda is unsure. She looks over at the dresser.

BRENDA

(mumbles)
Nobody.

ALEC

We'll never get another bedtime story, will we?

BRENDA

Every night we go to sleep will be the same.

ALEC

All our favorite old books will probably disappear, one by one.

BRENDA

It will be tougher and tougher to fall asleep.

ALEC

We may never fall asleep ever again.

Their eyes STAY OPEN an extra-long time that night. Finally, much later, they fall asleep with the walkie-talkies in their hands.

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brenda HEARS a loud KNOCK on the door. She has great difficulty waking up.

MOM (O.S.)

Brenda, time to get up. Breakfast is on the table.

Brenda HEARS her mom's footsteps going down the hallway.

MOM (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Alec, wake up. School day. Breakfast is ready.

Brenda HEARS her mom descend the stairs. Brenda looks around her room to see her dresser has been moved away from the wall. She grabs her walkie-talkie as she PEEKS behind the dresser. She BUZZES Alec in the next room.

BRENDA

Alec! Get in here. We have a problem!

Brenda SHAKES in fear.

End Act One

Act Two

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mom and Dad scurry about, checking their phones and drinking coffee. We still see only the lower-half of the parents.

BRENDA

Did you at least lock the doors
last night?

DAD

It's a safe enough neighborhood.

MOM

We don't always check the locks.
Maybe we should.

ALEC

Ya think?

MOM

What's that supposed to mean?

ALEC

Old man Rapple lives just down the
street!

BRENDA

And strangers from out of town
drive by all the time.

ALEC

Could be gangs?

BRENDA

Or escaped convicts!

DAD

You're perfectly safe. Don't be
late for school again. Eat up!

MOM

If we get another note from your
Mrs. Scoggins, you're both on
restriction!

DAD

Alec, how did you sleep last night?

ALEC

Couldn't get to sleep.

BRENDA

Me either!

ALEC

Don't think it was a good idea to move out with all this commotion about.

MOM

Don't be silly. There's no commotion. You're both in third grade. Practically fourth-graders!

DAD

I have to get to work, honey.

MOM

Me, too, dear. Don't forget your lunches, kids.

Mom and Dad RACE out the door. Alec and Brenda take backpacks to school. We see Alec's T-ball bat sticking out of his backpack, and Brenda's badminton racket sticking out of hers, as they leave the house.

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

ALEC

Something very strange is going on around here!

BRENDA

And we're gonna find out what!

They stop at Old Man Rapple's place and STARE between the wrought-iron rails.

ALEC

Just gotta look closely.

BRENDA

I am. I am.

Alec sees a three-foot-tall 2x4 piece of wood sticking out of the ground half-way to the front door of the old house. He points at it for Brenda's sake.

ALEC

See that?

BRENDA

What?

ALEC
There it is!

BRENDA
What?

ALEC
The Sword in the Stone!

Alec is excited!

BRENDA
Huh?

ALEC
Looks like a piece of lumber now,
just to trick us.

BRENDA
(sarcastic)
Doing a pretty good job!

ALEC
It's no coincidence that one of my
favorite books gets stolen, and we
find a sword stuck in the ground
the next day!

BRENDA
(mumbles)
Sword?

ALEC
Made to look like a piece a wood.
(beat)
Probably by a sorcerer.

Brenda starts looking elsewhere in the junkyard.

BRENDA
Sorcerer?

Finally Brenda sees an old, wooden hobbyhorse with rusty
springs. She points and yells.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
The hobbyhorse is probably *Black
Beauty!* That's it!

Alec looks over, nodding in agreement.

ALEC
Now do you believe me?

Brenda realizes the time.

BRENDA
We'll be late for school!

They RACE to school.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Again, Alec and Brenda are late for school, but so are Willy, Chelsea, and half of the class standing behind them. We see the legs of Mrs. Scoggins, with one foot tapping the floor in anger. Alec, Brenda, and the other kids FREEZE, and STARE at the tapping foot.

MRS. SCOGGINS
There will be plenty of notes sent home today.
(beat)
Put your things in the back of the classroom, and take your seats.

Alec begins to whisper to Willy, but he is interrupted by Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
Alec, do you have something to share with the class?

All the children, but Alec, take their seats.

ALEC
Mrs. Scoggins, I'd like to report a crime!

All the children GASP as they turn toward Alec.

MRS. SCOGGINS
A crime?

ALEC
Mrs. Scoggins, two days ago, only Brenda and me were tired.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Brenda and I.

ALEC
Brenda and I. But yesterday, six kids were overly tired.

MRS. SCOGGINS
What are you saying, Alec?

Brenda HOPS up and joins Alec in the back of the classroom.

BRENDA

My brother's right. And today, half the class was late, and they look exhausted.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Maybe they were studying for the big exam tomorrow. Multiplication tables, and sentence structure: subjects, verbs, adjectives, and especially the creative writing essays!

BRENDA

And adverbs, naturally.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Yes, and adverbs. Maybe studying kept them up later than usual. It's perfectly normal to study for exams. Don't you agree Alec and Brenda?

Alec and Brenda stare at each other with their EYES WIDE OPEN.

WILLY

Busted.

CHELSEA

Totally!

MRS. SCOGGINS

Class, while Alec and Brenda return to their seats, perhaps we can all take out our mathematics books and review the multiplication tables.

Alec whispers to Brenda as they return to their seats.

ALEC

Geez! Nobody believes us.

BRENDA

I know, right?

MRS. SCOGGINS

Many of you had problems with the elevens. Let's see if we see a pattern there.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Alec and Brenda sit alone at a lunch table, while the other kids play a slow game of soccer (most are tired).

BRENDA

Pattern.

(imitating Mrs. Scoggins)

Let's see if we see a pattern there.

Alec is excited.

ALEC

That's it! I see a pattern! Each day, double the number of kids are late and too tired for school.

BRENDA

I'm more worried about the books.

ALEC

Some of the classics, stolen!

BRENDA

If mom and dad didn't do it, it means somebody is coming into our house! Who moved the dresser? Who stole the books?

ALEC

Maybe we should go to the police!

BRENDA

They'd say we were crazy.

ALEC

Yep. They'd say we just lost 'em.

Silence.

BRENDA

Maybe we are crazy.

Soon, Alec and Brenda are joined by Willy and Chelsea.

WILLY

Hi, Brenda. Can we talk?

Brenda wrinkles her face, confused.

BRENDA

We can talk right here.

WILLY

You've been acting a little weird lately.

ALEC

She's got a lot on her mind.

Willy turns to Alec.

WILLY

You've been acting even weirder.

Alec stands up, but Willy is much bigger, so Alec just stares meanly.

BRENDA

What's going on, Willy?

Willy pauses and looks around a bit.

WILLY

I think we should stop going out together.

Brenda looks more confused. She gets defensive.

BRENDA

Going out? Who said we were going out?

WILLY

The other kids.

CHELSEA

It was common knowledge.

Alec turns angrily to Chelsea.

ALEC

Common knowledge?

CHELSEA

Same with me, Alec. I think we should start seeing other people!

Brenda stands to defend her brother. She turns to Chelsea.

BRENDA

Seeing other people? You see other people every day at school!

WILLY

That's what I'm talking about.

Willy and Chelsea STORM away to the classroom, as the other students file by Alec and Brenda with a look of pity. Alec and Brenda LOOK totally confused.

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alec and Brenda struggle to walk. They are exhausted as they leave school, and their backpacks contain extra books, along with Alec's T-ball bat, and Brenda's badminton racket.

ALEC

What do you suppose got into Willy and Chelsea today?

BRENDA

Have no idea. I didn't know I was Willy's girlfriend! Your fault for starting rumors!

ALEC

Not my fault. I didn't know I was going out with Chelsea. You started that rumor.

They get angrier as they walk.

BRENDA

You're such an idiot!

ALEC

You're such a dummy!

BRENDA

I don't think we've been acting weird.

ALEC

Me neither! I don't know what to think, but I know one thing.

BRENDA

What?

ALEC

I know where we need to stop.

BRENDA

No way! We're going home to study for our big test tomorrow?

ALEC

Wrong.

BRENDA
No! Absolutely not!

ALEC
Old Man Rapple's place!

BRENDA
We'll get in big trouble!

ALEC
Something I gotta do!

As they approach Old Man Rapple's place, their eyes open wider, when they see a new item in the front yard: a rusty metal sculpture of a DRAGON (six feet tall), sitting across from the three-foot-tall, 2x4 post stuck in the ground. Brenda sees it first. She POINTS.

BRENDA
It's *Pete's Dragon*! You were right all along.

Alec sees the dragon.

ALEC
I knew it.

Alec sees the BRIGHT LIGHT in the upstairs room. He POINTS at the light.

ALEC (CONT'D)
Goodnight Moon! Let's investigate!

Alec tosses his T-ball bat through the fence railing, and begins to climb the treacherous wrought-iron fence.

BRENDA
Investigate what?

ALEC
I'm going to poke around! Coming with me?

Alec and Brenda YELL at each other.

BRENDA
You're nuts! Old Man Rapple will kill you!

ALEC
I'll never be able to sleep, if I don't find out what happened to our books!

BRENDA

You can't sleep 'cause you're in your own room, and there's no nightlight!

ALEC

Couldn't sleep before that! No bedtime story, and no peace and quiet 'cause you won't stop talking at night. Big mouth!

BRENDA

You're the big mouth!

ALEC

I'm going in there!

BRENDA

Outta my way, I'm going in there first!

Brenda tosses in her badminton racket and starts climbing. It's dangerous, but they both make it. Alec GRABS his T-ball bat like a war club. Brenda does the same with her badminton racket. They advance toward the house. Alec drops his bat next to the 2x4 post. He's exhausted, but he tries to pull the post out of the ground. He can't. He picks up the bat and STARES at the dragon sculpture, while Brenda (also exhausted) tries to wrestle the post free. It doesn't budge. She picks up her badminton racket.

They look suspiciously at each other as they investigate the old dragon sculpture, the rocking horse, the cement pig lawn ornament, and several other nondescript pieces of junk. They can't figure it out!

Their level of anxiety builds just as Willy and Chelsea stroll by the property and see Alec and Brenda with raised weapons.

WILLY

See what I mean?

CHELSEA

What's gotten into them?

Alec puts the T-ball bat behind him, and Brenda puts her badminton racket behind her, as they nonchalantly pick their way through the junkyard back to the wrought-iron gate. Alec and Brenda are defensive and angry.

ALEC

Just poking around. So what?

WILLY

That's private property. That's so what! And that's against the law!

BRENDA

We were just leaving! So what?

CHELSEA

Studying for the big tests?

ALEC

Extra books right there in our backpacks! Don't believe us, see for yourselves.

WILLY

My mom says Old Man Rapple can get pretty mean. Hope he catches you for your own good.

Alec and Brenda turn and look at the junkyard and house.

CHELSEA

I bet there are rats in there!

ALEC

Rats?

CHELSEA

Maybe you heard of them? They carry bubonic plague.

(beat)

Fingers, feet, tongue turn black. You get all swollen and sore as the bacteria multiply in your body like maggots.

BRENDA

That's enough, Chelsea. We're not going to get plague!

WILLY

Sure acting weird. Maybe they already got it!

(beat)

I gotta get home to study.

CHELSEA

Me, too!

Willy and Chelsea walk on. Alec and Brenda watch them leave.

BRENDA

We should get home.

ALEC
Maybe we should.

BRENDA
This was a dumb idea of yours.

ALEC
You climbed the fence first!

As they start to climb back, they HEAR the SCRAPING of steel behind the house.

Alec grabs Brenda's arm. They turn to look at the old house, and whisper.

BRENDA
What was that?

ALEC
I told you. Something strange is going on here.

BRENDA
Spooky.

ALEC
Very.

BRENDA
Dangerous.

ALEC
Very.

They timidly CREEP toward the front door, taking small steps, and looking all around.

Alec raises his bat. Brenda raises her badminton racket.

They reach the front door and PEEK in the windows, which are so dirty they can't see in. Cobwebs are everywhere.

BRENDA
Willy wouldn't like this.
(beat)
Cobwebs and spiders!

ALEC
Let's go.

Brenda keeps peeking in the windows.

BRENDA
We came this far!

ALEC

Okay.
 (gulps)
 I'll ring the doorbell.

It RINGS. No one answers.

BRENDA

Okay, let's go.

ALEC

We came this far!

Alec KNOCKS on the door, loudly. No one answers.

They HEAR a SIREN. They turn to run, but standing between them and the fence is an elderly giant of a man, MR. RAPPLE! (85; six-foot four, unshaven for days, dressed in old work clothes; frightening), though we see only his back-side.

MR. RAPPLE

What are you two doing in here?!

Alec and Brenda turn to see a Police Car pull up to the house.

ALEC

Uh oh!

BRENDA

We are in so much trouble!

Alec and Brenda are temporarily relieved to see Willy's dad exit the police car, but their mood changes when they see the scary LOOK on his face.

MR. GREENLEY

Sorry, Mr. Rapple. I know these two. They won't bother you again.

Alec and Brenda step past the mean looking Mr. Rapple.

BRENDA

Sorry, Mr. Rapple. Weren't gonna take anything.

ALEC

Didn't mean anything, Mr. Rapple.
 Didn't want to hurt nothing.

MR. GREENLEY

Come with me, kids. I'm not coming in there to get ya. I've got a twisted ankle.

Alec and Brenda walk like common criminals toward the police car. Mr. Rapple is right behind them, escorting the kids off his property, but the kids are too scared to face him.

MR. GREENLEY (CONT'D)
I'll call you for a statement in a little while, Mr. Rapple.

Officer Greenly opens the back door to the police car and points to the back seat. Alec and Brenda are stone silent.

MR. GREENLEY (CONT'D)
Get in, and buckle up.

The officer waves at Mr. Rapple, while the children SHAKE in fear, getting into the police car with their backpacks, T-ball bat and badminton racket in hand. Officer Greenley drives off without a siren.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

MR. GREENLEY
Trespassing and destruction of private property are serious offenses.

ALEC
Yes, Sir. We went into the junkyard, but we didn't hurt anything.

BRENDA
We didn't hurt anything, honest.

MR. GREENLEY
Your parents aren't going to be happy about this.

BRENDA
What's going to happen to us?

MR. GREENLEY
I've got to take you into the station, and fill out a report, after I talk to Mr. Rapple.

ALEC
Fill out a report?

MR. GREENLEY
Have to find out if he's pressing charges. Shouldn't take long.

Officer Greenley looks back at the scared children as he parks at the tiny police station three blocks away.

MR. GREENLEY (CONT'D)
Is this your first offense?

Alec and Brenda nod, "yes."

MR. GREENLEY (CONT'D)
(laughs)
They should go pretty easy on ya!

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

The front desk Officer (40; black female, uniformed) LAUGHS when Mom and Dad enter the station frantically. We don't see anyone's face, but we HEAR the commotion of a police station.

DAD
Our little girl and boy?

MOM
Are they safe?

OFFICER
Right behind me.

Dad and Mom PEEK behind the Officer to see Alec and Brenda fast asleep on a wooden bench.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Officer Greenley offered to take them home, but he had to get his ankle checked out at the docs. The kids were so tired, we thought they might be safer here. They were rambling on about dragons and steam shovels, and a tiger of some kind!

DAD
And Mr. Rapple?

OFFICER
He helped the officer guide them to the police car after they almost fainted.

MOM
Oh my!

OFFICER

He's not pressing charges. He didn't want them to get tetanus, or uncover a rat. We know his place is an eyesore, but we didn't write him up.

DAD

Are they going to have a police record?

OFFICER

(laughs)

Maybe for sleeping the most while in captivity.

MOM

Were they trespassing?

OFFICER

Old man Rapple says they were just retrieving a baseball bat and badminton racket that fell through the fence. That's the story we're going with. You can take Bonnie and Clyde home any time. Don't be too tough on them, they're just overly tired.

Mom and Dad collect their sleeping kids from the bench, and lead them to the door of the police station.

DAD

Had an exciting afternoon?

ALEC

Didn't mean to.

BRENDA

Sorry.

MOM

Oh, you'll be sorry. We know about the recent 9-1-1 call, too. They made Officer Greenely spill the beans.

DAD

What's gotten into you kids?

ALEC

Just tired, I guess.

BRENDA
Overly tired.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mom and Dad scurry around, checking their phones, and serving grilled cheese sandwiches to the sleepy kids.

DAD
You two are so grounded!

MOM
On restriction!

DAD
No TV.

MOM
No phoning friends.

DAD
No nothing!

MOM
Except studying.

ALEC
We're sorry.

BRENDA
Yep. Sorry as can be.

ALEC
Not entirely our fault though.

Brenda kicks Alec under the table.

DAD
I hope you can explain!

MOM
(sarcastic)
Please enlighten us!

BRENDA
Just not getting enough sleep.

ALEC
Not used to my new room.

MOM
Not used to the other bed? Same manufacturer?

ALEC

I haven't moved over all my stuff,
so it doesn't feel like my room.

MOM

You can do it tonight, right after
dinner!

ALEC

(sarcastic)

Thanks, Mom.

DAD

And hurry up with the move, I want
you to study for those big exams
tomorrow.

MOM

Multiplication tables, and sentence
structure: subjects, verbs,
adjectives, and your creative
essay!

Brenda is about to speak, but Mom interrupts her.

MOM (CONT'D)

And adverbs, naturally.

BRENDA

Do we still get to go to the
costume parade and picnic after the
exams?

DAD

Yes. Your mom and I will bring your
costumes just before the picnic.

ALEC

And we get to go home after the
picnic, right?

MOM

Yes, and you're to walk right home.

DAD

Right past Old Man Rapple's place
without even looking in. Got it?

BRENDA

Got it.

ALEC

What if we find our stolen books?

MOM

If you get arrested again, they are going to lock you up, and throw away the key!

DAD

Stay out of Mr. Rapple's yard at all costs! Got it?

ALEC

Got it.

(beat)

It's just that today, I swore we saw the *Sword and the Stone*.

BRENDA

And *Pete's Dragon*.

ALEC

And *Goodnight Moon* in the attic, all lit up.

DAD

Okay! That's enough. Upstairs, you two.

MOM

This nonsense has to stop!

DAD

Alec, I want you to move all of your stuff out of Brenda's room tonight! You hear me? Brenda will help!

BRENDA

Yes, Dad.

ALEC

Okay, but...

MOM

No buts!

ALEC

We still can't find our books that were stolen!

DAD

I don't want to hear another thing about stolen books.

MOM

If you're so worried about stolen bedtime storybooks, each of you can pick out your two favorite books, and your father and I will lock them in our closet tonight for safekeeping.

DAD

I'm fine with that!

Alec and Brenda's eyes light up. They HUG their parents.

ALEC

Okay, I'll move, then pick out books to save.

BRENDA

Thanks, Mom and Dad. We can't afford to lose any more bedtime stories around here.

Alec and Brenda RACE upstairs to the bookcase.

INT. BRENDA'S AND ALEC'S BEDROOMS - NIGHT

In Brenda's bedroom, Alec is moving sets of LEGOs and other toys over to his room through the adjoining Jack 'n Jill bathroom. The mood is solemn.

ALEC

I'm taking the Starship LEGOs.

BRENDA

Go ahead. I'm keeping the pirate ship.

ALEC

Go ahead.

BRENDA

You're not getting any of the stuffed animals.

ALEC

Stuffed animals are for kids.
(beat)
Except the lion.

Alec retrieves a STUFFED LION for the corner of the room.

BRENDA

That's mine. I got it for my third birthday.

ALEC

I got it for my third birthday.

BRENDA

Same day, you idiot.

ALEC

My memory is better. Dad gave it to me for being so brave.

BRENDA

Your legs were shaking like Jello in that police car.

ALEC

So were yours!

BRENDA

It's my lion!

ALEC

Take it from me!

They scuffle and make too much noise. Mom and Dad HEAR them and shout up.

MOM (O.S.)

Move going well? I hope there's no trouble!

BRENDA

(yells)
No trouble.

ALEC

(yells)
Almost done.

Alec tosses down the stuffed lion. Brenda and Alec whisper.

BRENDA

Keep your stupid lion. I've got *Winnie the Pooh*.

ALEC

Take the stupid lion! I don't want any of them. Stuffed animals are for kids.

BRENDA
What about your pillow?

ALEC
No-brainer. That's coming with me.

BRENDA
You got another pillow in your room.

ALEC
This one's my favorite.

BRENDA
Let's go see how your room is coming.

They walk through the bathroom to Alec's less-cheerful room.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
Your room looks bigger.

ALEC
(sadly)
A little emptier.

BRENDA
You'll get used to it.

ALEC
(tougher)
Yep. I'm tough.

BRENDA
Almost a fourth-grader.

ALEC
Yep.

BRENDA
We gotta divide the books.

ALEC
I know.

BRENDA
Come on.
(beat)
Back to my room.

LATER

Alec and Brenda have most of the books divided into two piles.

They sit closely on the floor and pore over the remaining books like long-lost friends. The decisions are the toughest they've made in their young lives. They are so busy, they fail to realize that Mom and Dad are standing half-way up the stairs listening in.

ALEC

What about *Casey at the Bat*?

BRENDA

You have it memorized. What about *Stone Soup*?

ALEC

Good one. Yep! And my all-time favorite is the *Lorax* by Dr. Seuss.

BRENDA

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not."

ALEC

What's your all-time favorite?

BRENDA

I guess mine is *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*.

ALEC

Yep, all the Whos down in Whoville agree.

BRENDA

I can't pick just two.

ALEC

Me either. You can't break up a set.

BRENDA

Like me and you?

ALEC

I'll go ask Dad and Mom if I can sleep in your room tonight.

BRENDA

And I'll go ask if we can lock away all the books in their closet.

ALEC

Good idea.

Mom and Dad quickly tiptoe to the bottom of the stairs, turn, and start up the stairs noisily. Alec and Brenda HEAR them and poke their heads out the door.

DAD

Just coming up to tuck you in and kiss you good night.

ALEC

Can I sleep in my old bed tonight? Just to sleep better?

MOM

I don't know, Alec. You only gave it one night. You're a big boy now.

DAD

I agree, Alec. You'll get used to having your own room, and soon you'll grow to love it!

BRENDA

I'm okay if Alec wants to sleep over tonight. Just to be safe? His room doesn't have a nightlight.

MOM

You're perfectly safe in your own rooms. You're practically fourth-graders.

DAD

Come on kids, you need to get some sleep for your tests, the costume parade, and the picnic!

The kids crack a weak smile.

ALEC

Can you lock away a few more books tonight?

DAD

A few more? How many?

ALEC

All of 'em. Except for a couple of them, ya know, for tonight.

Mom and Dad don't seem to get the hint.

BRENDA

We'll help carry them downstairs.

MOM

You're missing out on valuable study time!

DAD

And lights are going out at nine-thirty.

MOM

You need a good night's sleep for that big day tomorrow.

ALEC

Okay, Mom and Dad. I love you.

BRENDA

Me too.

DAD

We love you too. To the moon and back.

Alec looks down.

ALEC

Goodnight Moon is still gone.

MOM

It's probably misplaced.

BRENDA

We looked everywhere!

DAD

When you should have been studying your multiplication tables?

MOM

And parts of speech?

ALEC

I guess so.

MOM

You get ready for bed, and we'll carry the books downstairs.

The kids get ready for bed, and Mom and Dad cart the books downstairs.

LATER

The kids are in their beds, clutching their walkie-talkies. They whisper back and forth.

BRENDA

Sorry about calling you an idiot so often, I've been tired and cranky lately.

ALEC

Sorry for calling you a moron lately, but you've been a moron.

Alec laughs. Then Brenda laughs.

BRENDA

You know your multiplication tables?

ALEC

Most of 'em. Don't care about the others, especially the elevens and twelves.

BRENDA

Why?

ALEC

Ridiculous to memorize stuff. When we get older, we can use a calculator anytime we want.

BRENDA

Good point.

ALEC

And when we get cell phones, maybe next birthday, they have calculators on 'em.

BRENDA

Chelsea already has one.

ALEC

See. I might just wait 'til I can look up everything: parts of speech, long division, maps about where Peru is, everything.

BRENDA

What if you lose your phone?

ALEC

I'll know where to look for it.

BRENDA

Where?

ALEC
Old Man Rapple's place. That's
where!

BRENDA
We can't go near that place.
Tomorrow, we're crossing the street
just to avoid it.

ALEC
At least our books are safe
tonight, locked in Mom's and Dad's
closet.

BRENDA
Yeah! That's good.

ALEC
I'm gonna be a Star Wars guy in the
parade tomorrow. Who you gonna be
again?

BRENDA
Pirate. My Wonder Woman costume is
degrading.

ALEC
Geez! You are getting older.

BRENDA
Okay, we gotta get to sleep.

SILENCE

ALEC
What book did you put by your door?
I put *Alexander and the Terrible,
Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.

BRENDA
The Empty Pot, by Demi. I kind of
felt like the little seed that
didn't grow.

ALEC
(sadly)
Three nights in a row.

BRENDA
(even sadder)
I know.

Pause.

ALEC
Good night *Baby Beebee Bird*.

BRENDA
Goodnight Moon.

Neither child can get to sleep. They STARE at their doors, hoping for a bedtime story. Their eyes are wide open.

INT. BRENDA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Both children hear a loud KNOCK on their bedroom doors.

MOM (O.S.)
Time to get up. Get dressed immediately, will you?

DAD (O.S.)
We have a little problem.

BRENDA
Okay, okay!

ALEC (O.S.)
(excited)
Right away.

Alec sees his book is gone.

ALEC (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Alexander and the Terrible,
Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day!*
(beat)
It's gone!

Brenda sees her book is gone.

BRENDA
The Empty Pot is gone too!

The twins RACE to brush their teeth and get dressed. They RACE downstairs to see their parents, and Willy's policeman father, Mr. (Officer) Greenley (in uniform). The parents scurry around looking at their phones, serving coffee to Mr. Greenley and breakfast cereal to the kids. We see only the lower halves of their bodies.

MOM
Officer Greenely was kind enough to stop by before his shift.

ALEC
Hi, Mr. Greenley. Is Willy, okay?

MR. GREENLEY

Willy's fine. Morning kids. You had a rough afternoon yesterday, but this might be worse.

DAD

Seems that you kids might be right about a burglar in the neighborhood.

BRENDA

What happened?

MOM

Your books are gone.

DAD

Vanished.

MR. GREENLEY

We're looking into the matter, I assure you.

ALEC

Did you lock them in your closet like you said?

DAD

Well, you see, our closet doesn't have a real lock.

MOM

In fact, neither of us remembers locking the back door.

BRENDA

What? That's how somebody stole *The Empty Pot*!

DAD

Or the front door for that matter.

ALEC

Huh! That's how somebody stole *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.

(beat)

Now, we're gonna have a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day!

MOM

Our fault entirely. We left the books right here on the kitchen table, so we could carry them up to your rooms in the morning.

DAD

Then, this morning...

(beat)

Gone. But don't worry, Officer Greenley will find them.

MOM

He promised.

MR. GREENLEY

I'll have to fill out an official report.

ALEC

Okay.

BRENDA

Okay.

MR. GREENLEY

Can you kids make me a list of all the books you had in your collection?

BRENDA

All of 'em?

MR. GREENLEY

I'm going to need all of them.

ALEC

But we'll be late for school?

MOM

And today is a big test day. Multiplication tables, parts of speech, and the creative essays.

MR. GREENLEY

Willy's been studying all week.

DAD

At least there's a costume parade and a picnic afterward.

MR. GREENLEY

That's right. I have to bring Willy his baseball uniform and plastic bat at lunchtime.

ALEC

What about finding the thief who stole our books?

MR. GREENLEY

I can check out the used-book store and pawn shops, but cases like this are hard to crack if your doors were left unlocked.

BRENDA

Because the thief can say the books were left out by the garbage cans or something?

MR. GREENLEY

Exactly.

MOM

We were unforgivably negligent.

The kids are sad.

BRENDA

Good adverb, Mom.

ALEC

Should have locked the door, Mom and Dad.

DAD

We know, now!

MR. GREENLEY

I'll still need a complete list of the missing books for my report.

BRENDA

Some we hadn't read in a while.

MR. GREENLEY

How long?

ALEC

A really long while.

MR. GREENLEY

Day?

(beat)

(MORE)

MR. GREENLEY (CONT'D)

Weeks?

(beat)

Years?

ALEC

It's hard to read them all, all the time.

BRENDA

We get busy with other things.

ALEC

LEGOs.

BRENDA

Engineering kits.

ALEC AND BRENDA

X-Box.

MR. GREENLEY

I see.

ALEC

Doesn't mean we didn't like the books.

BRENDA

Being a kid is busy. We had lots of homework too.

MOM

That's true.

DAD

Maybe the thief took the books for his young children, who weren't as busy.

MR. GREENLEY

I could hunt down possible thieves with younger children?

ALEC

I can't believe they're gone!

BRENDA

Something funny is going on around here. Why isn't the TV gone?

ALEC

Or the computer?

MR. GREENLEY
 Maybe the thief is a book-lover?

ALEC
 It's not fair. We like 'em too.

MOM
 Maybe you could make a complete
 list of stolen books after school?

BRENDA
 I suppose we could try.

DAD
 Good plan.

MR. GREENLEY
 I'll look into the stolen books.
 Don't worry, kids. I'll get to the
 bottom of this! Thanks for the
 coffee.

DAD
 Thanks, Officer Greenley.

The kids notice as Mr. Greenley LIMPS out. The children do
 not look comforted.

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Alec and Brenda are tired after the first few steps toward
 school. Willy and Chelsea join them from across the street,
 but they walk several steps behind Alec and Brenda.

Alec
 Hi, guys.

CHELSEA
 Hi, guys. Tired too?

BRENDA
 Didn't sleep much.

Willy
 Me either. We had a four-fifty-
 nine.

ALEC
 What?

WILLY
 Burglary.

BRENDA
Your dad is a cop!

WILLY
(defensive)
He still goes to sleep.

BRENDA
What did they take?

WILLY
Bedtime story books.

CHELSEA
Our house too!

ALEC
Something really strange going on!

BRENDA
Anything else stolen?

WILLY
Nope.

CHELSEA
Nope.

They walk a few steps and stop.

WILLY
You guys go on ahead. My mom said I
shouldn't associate with common
criminals.

ALEC
Common criminals?

CHELSEA
It's common knowledge you were
hailed downtown by the police.

BRENDA
It was just Willy's dad, and it
wasn't downtown. It was three
blocks away.

WILLY
You guys are acting so weird
lately.

CHELSEA
Totally weird.

BRENDA

We're the same as we were last week, except a little more tired.

ALEC

Willy, why is your dad limping?

WILLY

Leg got stuck down a sewer drain.

BRENDA

How's he gonna catch the book thief?

WILLY

He's gotta do office work for three more weeks. How should I know?

They walk toward school, with Alec and Brenda leading by several steps. They start to pass Old Man Rapple's place. Brenda guides everyone across the street.

CHELSEA

Why are we crossing the street?

ALEC

Avoiding another arrest.

WILLY

Heard about that. My dad says next time they are really going to haul you downtown.

BRENDA

Why would they do that when we have a perfectly uncomfortable police station three blocks away?

ALEC

They can torture us right here.

BRENDA

You two are being ridiculous!

ALEC

We just hopped the fence to get our stuff back.

They stop across from Old Man Rapple's place, and strain to look in.

BRENDA

A flower pot!

ALEC
Wasn't there yesterday.

BRENDA
The Empty Pot!

CHELSEA
What are you talking about?

BRENDA
You don't see the connection? My book, *The Empty Pot*, was stolen last night, and we see an empty flower pot in Old Man Rapple's junkyard today?

Willy and Chelsea look bewildered. They mumble quietly.

CHELSEA
I don't see *Harry Potter*?

WILLY
I don't see *Curious George* or *Dumbo*.

They are interrupted from across the street, when Old Man Rapple RACES out from his front door.

MR. RAPPLE
I warned you kids! Stay away from here!

The children RACE to school.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alec, Brenda, Chelsea, and Willy are late! Mrs. Scoggins is TAPPING her foot.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Nice of you to join us! Do we need another note sent home?

BRENDA
No, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Take your seats. Or should I say, beds.

Alec, Brenda, Chelsea, And Willy SEE that most of the students in class have their heads on their desks.

ALEC
We didn't sleep well either.

MRS. SCOGGINS
How am I expected to administer an exam, when all my students are asleep?

Alec, Brenda, Chelsea, and Willy take their seats. They too are barely awake.

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
I thought you would all be bouncing off the walls with the costume parade and picnic today! It's a Friday, too!

WILLY
Will that be on the test? Days of the week? I didn't study those!

MRS. SCOGGINS
No, Willy. Class, you may read quietly for a few minutes, while I go speak with the principle about delaying our tests until Monday.

Mrs. Scoggins leaves the room. Alec comes to life, and JUMPS to the front of the room.

ALEC
How many of you slept horrible last night?

Brenda raises her hand, then races up to join Alec.

BRENDA
(loudly)
Come on, show of hands!

Nearly all hands go up.

ALEC
How many of you have slept lousy all week?

Nearly all the hands go up.

BRENDA
How many of you have had bedtime story books lost or stolen this week?

Nearly all the hands go up.

ALEC

I told you!

BRENDA

We have a terrible, sneaky book thief in the neighborhood.

ALEC

We think we know who! Old Man Rapple!

The students GASP!

CHELSEA

Don't you need proof?

BRENDA

The Empty Pot?

ALEC

The scraping of steel in the backyard has to be *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel!*

BRENDA

And we saw a bird there! Like *The Baby Beebee Bird.*

The students GASP!

ALEC

And how do you explain a bright light in his attic, if it wasn't the *Goodnight Moon?*

BRENDA

And you can bet *The Little Engine That Could* is in the backyard too! Been missing for days!

The students GASP!

CHELSEA

Should we go to the police?

BRENDA

Willy's dad is on the case, but he has a bad foot since he stepped in a sewer drain.

Willy, fast asleep, falls out of his desk and onto the floor with a THUD. Several Students help Willy back to his seat.

ALEC

I think we have to handle this ourselves.

CHELSEA

Uh oh. I don't like the sound of this.

They HEAR footsteps coming down the hall.

BRENDA

Sit up straight. We'll explain the plan later!

Brenda and Alec whisper back and forth as they go back to their seats.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

What plan?

ALEC

We'll think of something!

BRENDA

We've got to do something to get our bedtime stories back!

ALEC

We need a plan!

Alec and Beth STARE at each other in fright!

End Act Two

Act Three

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The students sit up straight and tall in their desks. They look alert, and smile like angels. The classroom door opens, and we see two sets of hands and legs; Mrs. Scoggins' and the PRINCIPAL's legs (50; black female in a pantsuit).

PRINCIPAL

They look wide awake to me.

MRS. SCOGGINS

But they were all asleep.

PRINCIPAL

You may administer the test immediately. However, the creative essay portion of the test has been delayed until Monday.

The students CHEER.

MRS. SCOGGINS

I don't understand.

PRINCIPAL

Try varying your voice patterns.

The Principal STORMS away.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Class, please take out two sharpened pencils, and do not open your test booklets until I tell you to do so.

Mrs. Scoggins passes out test booklets.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

The students gather around Alec and Brenda in the middle of the soccer field.

BRENDA

It doesn't matter how you did on the multiplication tables! Tell 'em, Alec.

ALEC

Someday your calculators, smartphones, and tablet computers will do all those for you.

(MORE)

ALEC (CONT'D)

You'll be able to say, 'what's eleven times twelve?' and an answer will bounce right back.

WILLY

Two-hundred and fifteen?

BRENDA

No, Willy.

WILLY

Fifty-seven?

ALEC

No, Willy.

WILLY

What if your smartphone isn't that smart?

BRENDA

They will be. Back to the plan, Alec?

Alec whispers so they all lean in.

ALEC

The shortest person in class leads the parade every year.

BRENDA

Right. So nobody trips on them.

CHELSEA

Uh oh. I don't feel good about this.

ALEC

Brenda and me will take over when we get outside.

BRENDA

That's Brenda and I.

WILLY

Don't be silly, Brenda, that's two of you!

ALEC

Don't worry, Willy, we have until Monday to learn grammar.

BRENDA

Just have those lightsabers, Thor's hammers, and baseball bats ready!

ALEC

Then just follow our lead!

The bell RINGS.

INT. CLASSROOM

Mrs. Scoggins watches as the Students get into their costumes, over their school clothes. Alec is in a Star Wars costume with a lightsaber. Brenda is a pirate with a plastic sword. Willy is a baseball player with a yellow Whiffle Ball bat. Chelsea wears a pith helmet and carries a butterfly net. The other students are equally equipped with some type of potential weapon (e.g., badminton rackets, fishing poles, footballs, swimming pool noodles, golf clubs, etc.).

MRS. SCOGGINS

Be careful with those clubs and bats. I'll go out and tell your parents that you'll be out in five minutes so they can get their cameras ready.

CHELSEA

Five minutes?

MRS. SCOGGINS

That's right, Chelsea, and you lead the group.

(beat)

Remember everyone, walk in a single file line. Give yourselves plenty of space to the person in front of you, so that you don't accidentally hit someone with a bat!

Mrs. Scoggins STARES at Willy. Willy pays no attention.

STUDENTS

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS

March around the playground and soccer field, and return to the picnic tables for the picnic. Is that clear?

STUDENTS

Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

Mrs. Scoggins exits to the playground. Alec PEEKS out the door to see Mrs. Scoggins speaking to twenty-five PARENTS, including Mom and Dad, Officer (Mr.) Greenley and Mrs. Greenley, Chelsea's parents (Asian, 30s), and random adults (30-35 various types).

ALEC

Okay, everyone! We know what we gotta do.

BRENDA

Follow us! Let's do this!

Rather than go out the back door to the playground, Alec leads the group in a quiet, single-file line, out to the hallway, down the hall past the Principal's office, and out the front door of the school. They march down to Rapple's Old Ancient Secondhand Antique Emporium and Junkyard. Alec and Brenda stand at the gate, with the Students behind them. Alec and Brenda view the entire field of battle.

ALEC

Pick an objective, everyone.
Something to rescue.

Alec points to the 2x4 post stuck in the dirt.

ALEC (CONT'D)

I'm going after *The Sword in the Stone!*

Brenda points to an old flower pot.

BRENDA

I'm going to rescue The Empty Pot.

Chelsea looks puzzled at first, but then sees a dragon sculpture.

CHELSEA

I've got to rescue that dragon for *Harry Potter*.

BRENDA

This is *Where the Wild Things Are!*

WILLY

Like Dumbo, or Horton?

ALEC

Haven't seen any elephants, but we'll be on the lookout.

BRENDA
Everybody got a target?

CHELSEA
What do we do if Old Man Rapple
comes out?

ALEC
We storm the castle!

BRENDA
He means the house.

ALEC
That's where our books are!

Alec puts his arm around Brenda.

BRENDA
We're sure of it!

ALEC
On the count of three!

BRENDA
We don't have much time. Mrs.
Scoggins and our parents will find
us soon! Ready?

ALEC
One, two...
(beat)
Three.

ALEC AND BRENDA
(yell)
Charge!

The kids charge into the junkyard, yelling, and screaming,
and hitting everything with their "weapons."

Chelsea charges to the dragon sculpture, and swats it with
her butterfly net in a comical moment.

Alec charges for the 2x4 post, drops his lightsaber, and
tries to remove the post from the soil, but it's too
difficult.

Willy swings his plastic baseball bat wildly at everything!

Brenda battles a large empty flower pot with her pirate
sword.

The other children are in battles of their own, all across the junkyard. They CHEER and LAUGH. A kid dressed as Superman is lifting an old tire. Spiderman is climbing an old bench-swing. Everyone is having fun!

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

The children are so LOUD that Mrs. Scoggins and the Parents can hear them from the school playground. They turn their heads toward Mr. Rapple's place.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Are those my students?

MOM

I may have recognized a voice.

DAD

Me, too.

BACK TO:

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD -- DAY

In Mr. Rapple's junkyard, Brenda RACES over to help Alec with the post. Together, they SUCCEED. Alec hoists the big post up like it's Excalibur! Brenda now has her pirate sword in one hand, and Alec's lightsaber in the other.

Brenda SEES a bright light in the attic.

BRENDA

It's Goodnight Moon!

All the children look up and GASP!

ALEC

Storm the castle!

BRENDA

Let's go!

The kids hold their weapons high, and CHEER as they follow Alec and Brenda up the stairs to the front door.

As they reach the front door, it mysteriously opens! Behind it, is a smiling Mr. Rapple.

The Students charge in and they SEE four long TABLES piled high with books. And books in boxes beneath the tables, each with a Student's name on it.

Mr. Rapple bursts out laughing.

MR. RAPPLE
Come in. Come in.

The Students are stunned.

ALEC
What's going on?

BRENDA
Yes, what?

MR. RAPPLE
Your teacher and parents will be
here any second. Ask them!

Mrs. Scoggins is the first to arrive. She RACES into the house and roars with LAUGHTER. We (the audience) finally see her smiling face!

MRS. SCOGGINS
My brilliant students finally
solved the case of their missing
books! Children, put down your
swords, they are useless against
knowledge!

Mom, Dad, and the other parents come racing in. Mr. (Officer) Greenley limps in last. We SEE all of their faces!

MOM
Our little secret is out!

ALEC AND BRENDA
Huh?

DAD
Mrs. Scoggins will explain.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Students, listen carefully. After
your practice creative essays, I
called all your parents. I
suggested we revitalize your
imagination.

CHELSEA
How, Mrs. Scoggins?

MRS. SCOGGINS
First, I asked the parents to quit
reading bedtime stories.

WILLY

That was rotten, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS

(smiles)

Yes, it was. Then, I asked the parents to "borrow" your bedtime storybooks.

ALEC

We couldn't sleep without our nighttime stories! That was especially rotten, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS

(smiles)

Yes, it was. Then, I asked Willy's dad, Officer Greenely to do all the pretend investigating.

BRENDA

That was evil, Mr. Greenley.

Officer Greenely puts his head down, and chuckles.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Then I asked my father, Max Rapple, if he'd store all the books, temporarily.

The Students GASP!

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)

Most of you are too young to remember that my kind, elderly father was a very respected Professor of English Literature in his day!

The students turn to Mr. Rapple, who LAUGHS heartily.

MR. RAPPLE

Dear students, all of your books are in the boxes, but you are welcome to take any of my books on tops of the tables.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Your real creative essay test will be administered Monday morning.

BRENDA

We can read a lot of books by then.

MRS. SCOGGINS

I hope your parents read to you,
too.

The parents nod, 'yes.'

MOM

Can't wait.

DAD

Me either!

MRS. SCOGGINS

More important, I would like you to
have wonderful adventures this
weekend. Build a fort, take a hike,
camp in your backyard.

WILLY

Watch a Disney movie?

MRS. SCOGGINS

Don't just watch a Disney movie,
write your own.

MOM

It might do us good to unplug our
TVs, and put our cellphones in a
drawer this weekend.

DAD

And stay off our computers.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Use your imaginations, they are the
costumes for your minds.

MRS. GREENLEY

That should be three bedtime
stories, and three good night's
sleep before your test on Monday.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Okay, everyone, thank Mr. Rapple
for storing your books.

STUDENTS

Thanks, Mr. Rapple.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Students, be sure take those books
home with you after our picnic.

(MORE)

MRS. SCOGGINS (CONT'D)
 We have pizza and veggie sandwiches
 waiting at the picnic tables behind
 the school. Let's go, everyone.

STUDENTS
 Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

MRS. SCOGGINS
 Dad, I hope you can join us at our
 picnic.

MR. RAPPLE
 (laughing)
 Yes, Mrs. Scoggins.

The Students and Parents thank Mr. Rapple and Mrs. Scoggins.

The parents help cart the books back to the school and the
 picnic. Mom, Dad, Alec, and Brenda remain behind to talk to
 Mr. Rapple, who turns to Alec and Brenda.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
 You two figured it out. You should
 be very proud.

Alec and Brenda smile.

BRENDA
 Our imaginations got a little
 carried away.

MR. RAPPLE
 Your imagination can never get
 carried away; but it can carry you
 on endless adventures.

ALEC
 But you called the cops on us.

MR. RAPPLE
 I couldn't let you figure it out
 too soon. Some parents were behind
 schedule getting their children's
 books to me.

MOM
 And you needed a bit more time to
 appreciate their loss.

ALEC
 You mean, we had to miss the books
 more?

DAD

Exactly. "You don't know what you got 'til it's gone," Joni Mitchell said.

MR. RAPPLE

Before you go, kids, I'd like to give you something.

From the top of the fireplace, Mr. Rapple retrieves two very old brass door keys. He hands one each to Alec and Brenda. They all look very carefully at the keys.

ALEC AND BRENDA

Thanks, Mr. Rapple.

MOM

Look, kids, they have letters on them.

MR. RAPPLE

These are very special keys.

ALEC

What do they open?

MR. RAPPLE

They open your creativity.

BRENDA

He means, do they unlock anything?

MR. RAPPLE

They unlock your imagination.

DAD

What are the letters for?

Mr. Rapple points at each letter.

MR. RAPPLE

This part of a key is called the bow. It's the part you hold on to. The "B" is for "Beginning," the "M" is for "Middle."

He points to the shaft.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)

You need a long middle, like the shaft of a key.

(beat)

And the "E" forms the wards of the key, which open any lock.

DAD
Beginning, middle, and end; the
parts of every story!

MR. RAPPLE
That's right! These are the keys to
every story!

MOM
Thank you, Mr. Rapple. The children
will cherish them forever!

Alec and Brenda HUG Mr. Rapple.

ALEC
Thanks, Mr. Rapple.

BRENDA
Special thanks, Mr. Rapple. We
won't let anybody steal this story
from us!

DAD
We've got to get to that picnic!
Mrs. Scoggins needs us there!

The all Laugh, and carry as many books as they can carry out.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

The picnic is in full swing, when Dad, Mom, Alec, Brenda, and Mr. Rapple arrive behind the school. The Students CHEER as they enter the picnic area. Five students finishing pizza and veggie sandwiches, vacate their seats next to Mrs. Scoggins for the honored guests. Brenda is clutching her key, while Alec clutches his key.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Take a seat. Enjoy the picnic.
Thanks, Dad. I hope my students
didn't hurt your junkyard too much.

They grab slices of pizza and sandwiches.

MR. RAPPLE
You mean our Old Ancient Secondhand
Antique Emporium and Junkyard. I
inherited most of that stuff from
your Mom, and Grandma, and Great-
Grandma!

MRS. SCOGGINS
Mom collected junk? All these
years, I thought it was you!

Mrs. Scoggins HUGS her dad.

MR. RAPPLE
She said everything on Earth had a
story. She was determined to learn
them. I just agree with her!

Willy stops by to pull Brenda away from the table a little
bit to whisper to her.

WILLY
Brenda, what you did today was very
brave. You're kind of my hero.

BRENDA
Thanks, Willy.

WILLY
And my mom and dad know you're not
a common criminal anymore.

BRENDA
Good to know, Willy.

WILLY
So if you want to keep going out,
it's okay with me.

BRENDA
Good to know, Willy. I'm in third
grade, so I'll think about it.

WILLY
Okay. Good.

Brenda rejoins the table and Willy politely stands behind
her, listening in to the conversation. Then, Chelsea taps
Alec on the shoulder, and indicates with her index finger
that she wishes to talk to him privately. Alec gets up and
stands a few feet from the table where they whisper.

CHELSEA
That was pretty cool what you did
today.

ALEC
Thanks, Chelsea,

CHELSEA

Any time you want to study your eleven and twelve multiplication tables, I could help.

ALEC

Thanks, Chelsea.

CHELSEA

Look, it's common knowledge we're going out again.

ALEC

Good to know, Chelsea.

Alec smiles and rejoins the table. Chelsea squeezes next to him on the picnic table. Willy sees this, and sits at the very end of the table next to Brenda. Moments later, Willy falls off the seat. Brenda ROLLS her eyes in delight, and extends an arm to help him up. Willy SMILES.

MRS. SCOGGINS

So, Dad, our family has been collecting antiques for five generations.

MR. RAPPLE

I suppose we have.

ALEC

What's all the scraping metal sounds we heard from the backyard?

MR. RAPPLE

Scraping metal sounds?

BRENDA

Like *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel* scraping against *The Little Engine That Could*.

MR. RAPPLE

I haven't heard scraping metal sounds like that. But my hearing isn't so good these days.

MOM

I've walked by several times. Perfectly quiet.

DAD

Me, too.

MR. RAPPLE

Bring your parents by and check it out sometime. Nobody's been in the backyard for twenty-five years.

MRS. SCOGGINS

Mom would never let us go back there when we were kids.

ALEC

What's the big bright light up in the attic?

MR. RAPPLE

Big bright light?

BRENDA

Brighter than a full moon on Halloween.

ALEC

Brighter than the moon in *Goodnight Moon*.

MOM

I've never noticed it.

DAD

Me either.

MR. RAPPLE

Must be coming from the attic. Nobody's been up there in fifty years!

MRS. SCOGGINS

Mom never let us go up there either! Maybe it's a light that goes on?

MR. RAPPLE

No electricity up there. Old house.

ALEC

Could be lots of cool junk, I mean antiques, up there.

BRENDA

Or buried treasure!

MR. RAPPLE

Buried treasure's more likely to be in the basement. Nobody's been down there in a hundred years.

MRS. SCOGGINS

(laughs)

Mom never said anything about a basement!

BRENDA

Stories galore!

ALEC

Imagine the treasures! You might be rich, Mr. Rapple.

MR. RAPPLE

Only creativity can make you rich, and it can make you rich beyond your wildest dreams.

Alec and Brenda STAND.

ALEC AND BRENDA

We've gotta go back, Mr. Rapple!

MR. RAPPLE

To my place? But why?

ALEC

The bright light in the attic, the *Goodnight Moon!*

BRENDA

We have to know what it is, and the steel scraping sounds in the backyard, or there's no "E" to our story.

ALEC

We have to know what causes them! Brenda's right. We need to know the end of our story.

MOM

We've caused enough excitement for one day.

DAD

How about just going home and resting?

Mr. Rapple LOOKS at Alec and Brenda. Willy and Chelsea look equally excited.

MR. RAPPLE

These aren't the kind of children who give up easily!

The school bell RINGS.

MRS. SCOGGINS
Schools over for the day, you're
free to go!

ALEC
Can we go, Dad and Mom?

DAD
If Mr. Rapple says it's okay.

MOM
But we're coming too. In case
there's spiders.

WILLY
I hate spiders.

BRENDA
We'll protect you, Willy.

CHELSEA
I hate rats. Did I ever tell you
about the bubonic plague?

ALEC
We'll protect you, Chelsea.

MR. RAPPLE
Bring a flashlight! Meet at my
place, at sundown!

BRENDA
Sundown?

ALEC
It will be dark then.

Alec GULPS.

MR. RAPPLE
All great adventures begin at
sundown!
(beat)
Besides, I have a doctor's
appointment in an hour to get a
tetanus booster shot.

Brenda and Alec LOOK scared.

BRENDA
Tetanus?

ALEC

And dark?

EXT. OLDER NEIGHBORHOOD - SUNDOWN

Mr. Rapple waits outside his wrought-iron fence, as Mom, Dad, Alec, Brenda, Willy and Chelsea walk slowly up the sidewalk with flashlights lit.

MR. RAPPLE

Sundown! Great. I see you all have flashlights.

Mr. Rapple lights an old-fashioned LANTERN. The children are a bit nervous.

BRENDA

Thanks for inviting us, Mr. Rapple. How was your tetanus shot?

MR. RAPPLE

An ouch of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

ALEC

It's getting mighty dark.

MR. RAPPLE

Without the dark, we wouldn't appreciate the light.

ALEC

Will there be spiders in there?

MR. RAPPLE

I hope so, they eat a lot of disease-carrying smaller bugs!

CHELSEA

How about rats?

MR. RAPPLE

Did you know that in China, people lucky enough to be born in the year of the rat are said to have the highly desirable qualities of creativity, honesty, generosity and ambition?

CHELSEA

I didn't know that!

MR. RAPPLE
It's common knowledge.

Alec and Brenda look at each other and chuckle.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
Let's begin our adventure, shall we? No one's going to sue me if they get hurt, will ya? A little danger is the spice of adventure!

MOM
No one will sue you, Mr. Rapple.

DAD
We'll watch them, too.

MR. RAPPLE
Before it gets much darker, we should check out the scraping metal sounds in the backyard.

Mr. Rapple opens the gate, and leads them through the junkyard to the side of the house. The kids' flashlight beams bob nervously.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
How are we doing do far?

ALEC
Fine.

BRENDA
Fine.

WILLY
Fine.

CHELSEA
Creativity, honesty, generosity and ambition?

The wind SWIRLS, and they HEAR the scraping of metal in the backyard!

BRENDA
What was that?

MR. RAPPLE
Let's go find out!

They walk on. Mr. Rapple's lantern SWAYS in the wind.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
Careful stepping over the antiques.

They walk on slowly and carefully with their flashlight beams pointed every direction.

They HEAR an owl HOOT, and the children's eyes open widely.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
Just an owl. Keeps the mice
population in check. Little bit
further.

They reach the back of the house. Another GUST of wind comes up, and they HEAR the SCREECHING of steel.

ALEC
Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel?

BRENDA
The Little Engine That Could?

Their flashlights converge on the screeching. We SEE a tipped-over backyard windmill (a ten-foot tall structure), with blades SPINNING and SCRAPING against an old corrugated metal fence.

MR. RAPPLE
Just our old windmill!
(beat)
Come on. Since you're all here.
Help me stand her up so the noise
doesn't bother the neighbors.

They make their way to the windmill. Mr. Rapple sets his lantern down, and the others help him push and pull the heavy windmill upright. They grunt and smile.

ALEC
We did it!

BRENDA
Sure did!

The kids CHEER!

MR. RAPPLE
Let's head up to the attic to find
your *Goodnight Moon!*

BRENDA
This is great!

MR. RAPPLE

Watch your step. We'll go in
through the back door.

ALEC

How come you're lights aren't on?

MR. RAPPLE

(laughs)

Did I mention that we're on an
adventure?

MOM

Would have been too easy, I guess.

WILLY

Probably so I can't see all the
spiders!

CHELSEA

And so I can't see the all of the
rats!

Mr. Rapple guides them through and over piles of junk on the way to the back door. The flashlight beams SHINE in every direction. The old screen door CREAKS as it opens.

MR. RAPPLE

The doors to the attic are off of
the kitchen. Never understood why.

CHELSEA

Doors, plural?

MR. RAPPLE

One at the bottom and one at the
top. Never understood why.

DAD

Maybe that's why you haven't been
up there much.

MR. RAPPLE

Not in fifty years.

MOM

This should be exciting, huh, kids?

They nervously respond with uh-huhs, as Mr. Rapple comes to a heavy wooden door. He turns the knob and pulls.

MR. RAPPLE

Locked. You kids must have the keys. Gave 'em to you this afternoon.

Brenda fumbles through her jeans' pockets.

BRENDA

I found mine.

MR. RAPPLE

Good. Open the door. I'll keep them unlocked from now on.

Everyone shines a light on the key in Brenda's hand. She inserts the key and turns it. They HEAR a CLUNCK!

BRENDA

It worked.

MR. RAPPLE

Alec, your key must be for the top door. You go first. It's a narrow staircase as I recall.

Alec GULPS.

ALEC

It's very dark, even with the flashlights.

MR. RAPPLE

(laughs)

I bet the old stairs creak, too.

Alec takes one step, and they all HEAR a loud CREAK.

ALEC

They do creak!

DAD

(laughs)

Of course they do!

ALEC

Lots of spider webs.

WILLY

Great!

MR. RAPPLE

Probably holding the walls up! Let's go. Don't you want to see what's up there?!

They climb the stairs slowly.

ALEC
(mumbles)
Could we come back in the daytime?

MR. RAPPLE
What kind of adventure is that?

They reach the top, and Alec pulls out his key. They all provide the light. They don't hear anything.

ALEC
Uh oh.

MR. RAPPLE
Turn the key the other way.

They HEAR the CLUNK. Mr. Rapple pushes the door open. It CREAKS and SQUEAKS. We see an attic filled with boxes, crates, antiques, and more cobwebs.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)
I'd better go first and test the floor!

The wooden floor CREAKS. They all fight through the cobwebs following Mr. Rapple.

MOM
Look at all this stuff!

Mr. Rapple STOPS, and looks down.

MR. RAPPLE
Hey, look at this! It's my dad's compound microscope. This is for Willy.

WILLY
Me?

He hands the wooden box to Willy, who opens it up to see an antique compound microscope.

ALEC
Cool, Willy.

WILLY
Thanks, Mr. Rapple.

MR. RAPPLE

Once you start examining insects
and spiders under a compound scope,
you gain an appreciation for
biology, evolution, and bugs!

Chelsea stops at a pile of children's board games.

CHELSEA

What's this?

All the flashlights turn to the top game, "Mouse Trap."

MR. RAPPLE

Wow! That's *Mouse Trap*, in the
original 1963 box. Take it. It's
yours. It may teach you that some
rodents are fun! Change the name of
it to *Rat Trap*!

Everyone LAUGHS.

BRENDA

Where was that bright light coming
from?

MR. RAPPLE

Follow me. I have an idea.

Mr. Rapple leads the group to a stand-up mirror by the
window.

MR. RAPPLE (CONT'D)

I bet this mirror reflects sunlight
in the daytime. What do you think?

Alec and Brenda sound disappointed.

ALEC

Our *Goodnight Moon*?

BRENDA

Yep.

Mr. Rapple rummages through a stack of books beside the
mirror, before he pulls out a thick, old leather-covered
book, "*Don Quixote*."

MR. RAPPLE

(excited)

What's this?!

The flashlights turn to the old book.

ALEC AND BRENDA

What?

MR. RAPPLE

Will you look at this?! It all makes perfectly good sense now! The treasure!

Now, Alec and Brenda are excited.

ALEC AND BRENDA

What?!

MR. RAPPLE

You kids were all racing through the junkyard with your toy weapons reminded me of a certain knight errant who battled a windmill with a broken, old jousting pole!

Alec and Brenda STARE at the old book. Mr. Rapple opens the book to a line drawing of Don Quixote battling a windmill.

MOM

Don Quixote.

ALEC

We did battle the windmill in your backyard!

BRENDA

And we were victorious!

WILLY

Sure were!

CHELSEA

Without question!

DAD

My favorite book of all time! Haven't read it since college.

MR. RAPPLE

It's an early edition. Hundreds of years old! Worth a thousand dollars, I would guess, but I want you two to have it.

DAD

They couldn't possible accept...

MR. RAPPLE

(interrupting)

Nonsense. You see, this was one of the first novels ever written, where a crazy old man wasn't afraid to see the world not as it is.

(beat)

But as it should be.

BRENDA

Wow! Like our brass keys that opened the doors, I bet the story has a beginning, middle, and end!

ALEC

That's the key to every story!

MR. RAPPLE

His imagination runs wild! Many thought he was crazy. But he was the sanest of them all. Oh, it may be too much to read at your age, but my guess is, *Don Quixote* will become your best friend in time!

Then, Mr. Rapple holds his lantern up to a string coming down from the ceiling. He pulls the string, and a light comes on!

Everyone LAUGHS.

BRENDA

I thought you said there was no electricity in the attic?

MR. RAPPLE

It would not have been such a fabulous adventure, if we made it too easy!

Everyone LAUGHS again.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family sits around the table for dinner. We see all their faces. There are no cellphones anywhere to be seen. On the kitchen counter behind them, is the old book, *Don Quixote*.

BRENDA

This is nice.

MOM

We all learned a little something from Mrs. Scoggins and her dad.

DAD

We thought stealing and hiding the books was a silly idea, and that it wouldn't work.

ALEC

Worked great, and we got our books back and more!

MOM

You got your love of reading back.

BRENDA

So, do we get a bedtime story tonight?

Mom reaches over and RUBS Brenda's head, while Dad reaches over and RUBS Alec's head.

DAD

What do you think?

MOM

No one is too old for bedtime stories.

(beat)

Now, what are some exciting adventures we can plan for this weekend?

ALEC

We can build a fort in the backyard.

BRENDA

Or have a camp out!

ALEC

We can storm Mr. Rapple's junkyard and attic some more.

MOM

Wait, wait, wait.

ALEC

And bring him homemade cookies.

DAD

Let's have him over for dinner. I bet he's a great storyteller.

BRENDA

We gotta build a campfire in the backyard, and roast marshmallows, and tell ghost stories until all the stars come out.

ALEC

We can invite Willy and Chelsea. This will be great!

BRENDA

So great!

ROLL CREDITS

BEGIN MONTAGE

We see the same set of bedrooms around the world (as in the opening montage; L.A., rural Mississippi, China, Europe, Africa, South America) with nine-year-old children in pajamas (or culturally appropriate night clothes) playing with toys, video games, or watching TV in their rooms, as their parents knock and enter their rooms holding a bedtime storybook in their hands.

FEMALE TEENAGER (V.O.)

You are never too old for a bedtime story!

MALE TEENAGER (V.O.)

Never!

END MONTAGE

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

We see the Students taking their creative writing exams filling page after page with great stories. We SEE all of Mrs. Scoggins as she SMILES and walks up and down the aisles. Alec and Brenda have their BRASS KEYS on their desks. They have HUGE smiles as they write "The End" at the end of their very long stories.

End Act Three

FADE OUT.

THE END