

“After these messages,... we’ll be right back.” The annoying cartoon fire hydrant sang.

“This show is boring; change the channel.” I whined for the forty-second time.

“Shut up, you chose the last show.” My sister said.

“Hearts, stars, and horseshoes, clovers, and blue moons.” Lucky the leprechaun sang.

“No I didn’t, I haven’t had a turn for three shows!” I whined some more.

“Well, then you can choose the next three shows.” My sister said. She didn’t even bother to look at me when she spoke. She was staring at a Chuck E. Cheese commercial with a look of longing on her face. “Where a kid can be a kid.” The giant cartoon mouse sang. Ever notice how many cartoons sing stupid songs?

“I’m going to tell Mom when she gets home!” I whined louder.

Jodie finally looked at me. She was smiling her evil-big-sister smile.

“You’re going to tell Mom that we sat here watching cartoons all day instead of doing our chores?” she asked. “How about you go do the dishes if this show is so boring?”

I didn’t have an answer to that. The show was boring, but nothing was as boring as doing dishes. So, I sat back down on the couch and watched the boring show.

Jodie laughed and said, “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

I hated it when she won arguments like that, so I kicked my little brother.

“Move Skid, that’s where my feet go.” I said.

“Ow,” he whined. He was such a whiner.

Just then, we heard a car in the driveway.

All three of us looked at each other, panic in our eyes.

“Shoot, they’re home early!” Jodie shouted.

She turned off the T.V. as we all jumped up and started hiding things.

Cereal bowls and half eaten packages of raw Top Ramen got shoved under the couch, toys were thrown into the closet, and candy wrappers were stuffed in pockets. I ran into the kitchen and started washing the same cup that I had been working on when my parents left six hours earlier. The vacuum roared to life in the hallway and I knew Domenic was shoving more stuff under his bed.

The kitchen door opened and my parents came in carrying groceries. I prepared myself for a class seven explosion, at least. But, it didn’t come.

My dad just stared at me silently. His eyes were colder than the dishwasher in the sink. He set down the groceries on the counter and walked into the living room.

I winced. I knew he was touching the back of the T.V. to see if it was warm. It was probably hot enough to reheat my half-eaten bowl of Creamy Wheat under the couch. Mentally, I counted down, waiting for the detonation.

But, it still didn’t come. Instead, my dad walked down the hall, into his room. Less than a minute later, I heard him come back out.

This whole time, my mom quietly moved about the kitchen putting groceries away, shaking her head.

A lump of ice had formed in my stomach. I knew we were in serious trouble this time; it was always really bad when my dad was quiet and angry.

I heard him walk back into the living room.

"Kids, come in here." His voice was loud, but only so Jodie could hear him over the vacuum; he wasn't shouting.

Now, I was really scared.

I waited for Jodie; there was no way I was going in there alone. I could tell from Jodie's face that she was as terrified as I was. Together, we marched slowly into the living room. Domenic was peeking around a corner on the other side. He scampered into the room when he saw us.

The three of us stood shoulder-to-shoulder facing my dad. None of us dared to look him directly in the eyes.

"We've talked about this enough; I'm tired of it." That was all he said. He didn't raise his voice or ground us. He just turned towards the T.V. and raised his .22 pistol.

Jodie and I both realized what was happening at the same moment. We screamed, "Nooooo!"

He pulled the trigger. There was a deafening crash and flash of fire. The screen shattered and a wisp of smoke drifted sadly out of the gaping hole.

My dad walked out of the room without looking at us. We stared silently at the ruined television for several endless moments.

At last, Domenic whimpered, I sniffled, and Jodie groaned; a little piece of each of us had just died.