

## Things That Go Rattle in the Night

I'm sitting in my bedroom working on a book report when I hear something downstairs. My blood turns to ice water. Mother, Daddy, Robin and Ronnie have gone to Wednesday night church services. There shouldn't be any noise coming from down there. I creep out into the hall and hang over the half-wall above the staircase. I hear it again — a quiet, clattering rattle, like someone sorting through the sterling silverware in the buffet drawer in the dining room.



The rattle stops and starts, several times. My blood starts to freeze up. We never lock our doors because there has never been any problem with crime here. Now I'm sure that the first burglar in the history of Los Alamos has chosen our house to begin his life of crime. We've made things even easier for our invader. We leave lights on all over the place, so he can easily see what he's doing. But with or without lights on, wild horses couldn't drag me down those stairs to investigate.

My thoughts churn as fast as my stomach. I consider what to do when and if he starts up the stairs. Should I hide under my bed like I did when I was five years old and Mother left me home for ten minutes while she and Robin walked to the store around the corner? No, I'm too big to fit under the bed now. Should I get one of Daddy's guns? No, I couldn't even shoot at a squirrel in the woods. I'd never be able to shoot at a person. So what should I do?

After intense thought, a minute or two later I come up with a plan. I quietly lift the receiver from the wall phone in the hall and dial the Mills' house next door. In the intense quiet, the five dial spins sound loud as a jet engine. I hope the burglar isn't listening.

"Mrs. Mills," I whisper as quietly as I can, "I'm home alone and I think I hear a burglar downstairs."

"Stay right where you are!" she yells. "We'll be right over. Is the door unlocked?"

"Yes," I whisper. I wonder if the burglar hears her. In her excitement she's shouting so loud I don't think I really need the phone.

I've barely hung up before I hear a thunderous bang on the front door. As I peer from above, Mr. Mills (a small man, barely taller than I) bravely bursts into the house, carrying Jocko's baseball bat raised above his shoulder. He dashes into the living room, through the dining room, and into the kitchen. Within moments he reappears in the entry hall below me.

"I think I've found your burglar," he announces with a wide grin. An object dangles from his outstretched hand and Mrs. Mills peers over his shoulder.

I tumble down the stairs to examine the mousetrap he's gingerly holding by the corner. A small gray mouse thrashes below the tail caught in the trap.

"Oh, my gosh! I'm so sorry!" My face feels seven shades of crimson, and I wish the floor would open beneath my feet and swallow me.

"Don't worry about it. I'm glad you called. You did the right thing. I'm just glad this is all I found!" he assures me. "I'll take care of this little fellow. You should be okay now." He leaves with the mouse in one hand, the bat in another, and Mrs. Mills close behind.

I sit down on the stairs, take a few deep breaths, and then begin laughing hysterically.

When Mother and Daddy get home half an hour later, I meet them at the door with my exciting news.

“Oh, that’s just great,” exclaims Mother. “So you let all the neighbors know we have mice.”

Daddy just grinned. I think he was glad he didn’t have to empty the mousetrap.