

## Tired Hobos Like to Break Down Doors

I'm afraid that a hobo lives in my attic. I know what you're thinking, but I'm *not* joking. I fully believe that some dude—actually, in my head there are a few dudes up there—has set up residence in the uppermost story of my house. I know, I know. Why can't I have a rational fear like those peanut butter phobic people or something, right? But rest assured, I have an extremely valid reason for my fear.

You see, one morning I was walking into my living room and noticed that something was wrong. Very, very wrong. There was a person on the couch. A person who wasn't my mother or my sister. Someone had broken into my house, had invaded my home—the place I was supposed to feel safest. And he hadn't left. He was right in front of me.

“Rehann, Mom is totally freaking out!”

I turned away from the TV to face my sister, who'd just entered my bedroom. Without knocking, of course.

“Really? What about?” I asked her as I sat up in my bed.

Hands on her hips, Ashley started her story. “Well, this guy just knocked on our door and asked to use the phone, but Mom wouldn't let him in. And then she said she'd call someone for him, but he pulled a disappearing act. So now Mom's called Aunt Jacquie and is totally freaking out.”

Clearly my sister hoped for a response that agreed with her opinion of the situation. She wanted me to raise my eyebrows, scoff in disbelief, and say something like, “Are you kidding me? Wow. *Someone* needs to take a chill pill.”

I disappointed her, however, since I experienced the occasional fear of an intruder even then. Actually, just a day or two beforehand, I'd sat twirling in the computer chair considering the chances of someone burglarizing our house. By my calculations, the chances were slim to none.

“Wait—he just disappeared? Like he was there, and now he's not? Poof?” I asked worriedly, rising from the bed to go find my mom.

“No. When I say he pulled a disappearing act, I mean he got a big neon sign with an arrow pointing down that says ‘I am here.’ What else could I have meant?” She sighed. “Come on, Rehann. You can't really be afraid, too.”

I elected to plead the fifth on that one.

I found Mom as soon as I opened my bedroom door. She was in her own room, peering out of the windows.

“I can't see him, Jacquie. I don't know where he went,” Mom said, and it was clear in her tone that she was indeed freaking.

“Really? Are you sure? Thank you. I'll tell the girls. Ok. All right. Bye.”

“Mom? What's going on?” I asked as I went over to the window and peered out. Nothing. That didn't eliminate my fear, though. In fact, if anything, I'd say it exacerbated it—at least slightly. I guess it was because, even though actually seeing this guy would have been scary, at least I would have known where he was. But I had no clue where he was hiding. Could he see me, trying to find him hiding behind a tree?

I quickly turned from the window, hoping that would bring my heart rate back down.

“Aunt Jacquie and Uncle Marty are stopping by to pick us up—thank God they just got back home. You two go and get packed—just what you’ll need till morning. We’re spending the night at their house.”

Ashley rolled her eyes at Mom’s declaration, but I couldn’t. Not when images of a gun-wielding psychopath were pervading my mind.

I tried to erase that image as I went into my room and started to throw a few things together.

Before I crossed the threshold, however, my gaze landed on my house key, which was lying on the floor. And suddenly, I was watching a movie—*Night at the Museum*. I saw one of the old security guards take a key and push both sides into this silly putty-looking stuff so that he could make a copy of the key and come back to steal stuff later. I decided that that wasn’t going to happen to me. Maybe this guy would break in once, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to come again and again. So I grabbed my key and ran out of the door, hurrying towards the safety of my aunt’s house.

Morning came as smoothly as my night had ended, and at about 8:30, we went back home.

When we arrived, Mom opened the garage and we all went through it into the basement to the door that led to the first floor. Unfortunately, we didn’t get very far.

“Mom, do you have a key—this door’s locked,” Ashley said after a few futile tugs at the door.

Mom started to reach into her purse before freezing. The look on her face was full of worry. And not the there’s-a-burglar-in-our-home-and-he’s-trying-to-kill-us kind of worry, but the oh-shit-I-locked-us-out-of-the-house-so-we’re-stuck-out-here-until-someone-comes kind of worry.

Yeah. That’s right. Mom left all of her keys inside. Furthermore, she’d locked the basement door for quite possibly the first time ever.

Luckily for us, my fear—which might have caused Ashley to mock me in another time and place—worked in our favor.

I reached into my bag and withdrew my keys, feeling triumphant. “I have my house key!” I announced happily.

After we went around the house, I used my key to gain entry into our living room, and from there we dispersed.

Mom and (unbeknownst to me) Ashley instantly turned left and went through the hallway. My aunt crossed the living room to check the door in the breakfast nook. I followed her after pausing to take off my coat and shoes.

Before this day, I always thought that the slow motion scenes in movies were more of a theatrical technique used to increase drama. I never thought that a person could actually see things in slow motion. But that’s how I remember this next part.

As I crossed the living room, I happened to glance over at the couch. I noticed that there were feet sticking out from under a blanket—someone was sleeping there.

At first this discovery didn’t alarm me. Ashley usually sleeps until 12 o’clock at least, so my first thought was that she’d collapsed on the couch as soon as she could.

That story made sense to me for about two whole seconds. Because the feet on the couch? They were most definitely masculine. And while my sister may be many things, a boy is one thing she most definitely is not.

So, my brain tried to rationalize what I was seeing once more. I concluded that Mom had called a friend at work to house sit. Just in case.

Alas, logic once again informed me that that idea made absolutely no sense at all—maybe even less sense than my first one. So, only one conclusion remained:

*Oh my God. A guy broke into our house. And fell asleep on our couch. And he's still here!*

I could feel my heart rate increase until it felt like I had lightning swirling around inside my chest. Breathing, a talent I happen to possess, suddenly became very difficult for me. Furthermore, I forgot how to do that talking thing, and neither could I remember how to walk. I was too overwhelmed with shock.

I just couldn't believe that this was happening. I mean, my life was boring. Horribly, exhaustingly boring. Though I might have thought about being burglarized, I never thought it would actually happen. *Never*. My life wasn't exciting. My life was anything *but* a movie.

Movie or not, everything I was seeing was most certainly real. Worse still, I wasn't guaranteed a happy ending. My story had the potential to end very badly.

That thought allowed me to gain control of my legs once again, and I used that ability to walk slowly backwards. Maybe it would have been faster or easier if I'd chosen to turn around and walk normally, but speed and simplicity weren't my considerations. I could think only that, as soon as I turned my back on the intruder, he'd leap up from the couch—knife in hand—and stab me in the back.

So I chose to walk backwards.

As I was doing that, I heard my aunt say something from behind me. I looked down, which was what she was doing, and noticed woodchips scattered on the floor. *From the door*, my brain told me.

I mutely continued my backwards trek until the kitchen wall safely obscured me from the intruder, and I then I finally managed to actually say something.

"Couch! Couch! Look!" I whispered as I pointed to the living room.

My aunt looked in the direction I was pointing. When she jumped slightly in the air, I knew she'd seen what I'd seen. So I wasn't going crazy. At that moment, I wasn't entirely sure if that were a good or bad thing. Both, I guess.

"Anastasia!" Aunt Jacquie called to my mom, and I could see from my hiding place that fear had her as solidly in his grasp as he did me.

Mom came to the breakfast nook to see what Aunt Jacquie was pointing to and soon noticed the man as well.

"Go, Rehann! Go!" My mom commanded breathlessly as she pushed me into the hall towards the door by the stairs—a door aptly named the Dungeon Door.

As I walked, I moved my head to the left to see if Ashley was in the computer room. No. Upstairs in her room, then.

I started to climb the stairs to get her, mumbling "Ashley, Ashley," under my breath, but Mom stopped me and went upstairs herself. Instead, I stood back and watched my aunt lose the battle with the door.

With a snap, the handle to the screen door soon broke off, and so there was no way we were leaving through that exit. We had to backtrack to the basement door.

Mom and I came down the steps just as Aunt Jacquie and I turned to head for the basement stairs.

In what seemed like only moments, the door was unlocked, opened, and we quickly ran from basement to garage, and then garage to the outside. We scrambled into Aunt Jacquie's car and then drove to the neighbor's house.

Once there, my aunt asked the elderly lady who inhabited the house if she could use her phone to call her husband. My mom had already called 911.

Ashley and I stayed in the car. At that point, I wondered if I could get out even if I tried. I felt myself shake and could think only about what just happened.

The police arrived quickly, and when they did my life became even more like a movie. Cops swarmed out of the cars and started circling the house. Almost as soon as they appeared, so did my uncle with his rifle (this IS Pennsylvania, after all).

The next few moments entailed Mom, Aunt Jacquie, (who were still in their Pj's and bathrobes) and Uncle Marty shouting at the cops, "That door! Go through that door! No! Not that one, the other one!"

The police, it seemed, could not decide which door to go through. Of course, the cops eventually figured it out and cautiously entered our house, guns drawn. They were prepared for anything, which is good, but it turns out that it was wholly unnecessary in this case. When the cops entered the living room, they found that our "guest" had slept through the entire thing.

That didn't make the experience any less terrifying, however. Especially when we learned the guy had escaped from a halfway house. It wasn't until a few hours after the cops dragged the guy away that I finally stopped shaking. And even after that, I jumped at shadows, afraid he'd escape again and try to gain revenge. Each and every time I went upstairs, I imagined him crouching in the dark, ready to attack once I reached the landing.

We don't live in that house anymore, but I still have some of the fear from that day. Obviously. So, when a homeless person comes up to me and I run away instead of handing them money, know that I have a pretty good reason, considering my experience with vagabonds. And I don't think the whole ~~a-bunch-of-hobos-live-in-my-attic-and-use-our-dishes-and-eat-our-food~~ thing really so unreasonable. Yes, I have a little bit of paranoia, but it's better to err on the side of caution, isn't it? After all, just because they say lightning doesn't strike the same place twice doesn't mean that lightning can't, upon occasion, do exactly that.