

The door at the bottom of the stairs

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There is a door at the bottom of the stairs in the old two-storey house where my grandparents live. Grandfather tells me, his tone very serious that it is "Dick Tutt's door," but I don't know where it leads. Right in the middle of the door is a beautiful big brass knob. From what I can remember, the door has always been there, and I never saw anybody ever open it. Each week, I help Grandmother polish the big brass knob and sometimes, muffled noises come from behind it, but firmly shut it remains. One day, when the sun shone through the window at the top of the stairs, and reflected off the large brass knob of Dick Tutt's door, I tried to turn it. It wouldn't open - that must have been because it belonged to him, Dick Tutt - and that was that.

Dick Tutt only spoke to Grandfather. Grandfather is very strict, and I don't ever remember him smiling or laughing, but everyone respects him. After all, he is on speaking terms with Dick Tutt, and I've never even seen him. I know Dick Tutt is definitely there because Grandfather constantly talks about him, and my Grandfather wouldn't lie. Many times I ask him:

"Who is that for Grandfather?"

"Dick Tutt."

"Who will eat that if you don't, Grandfather?"

"Dick Tutt will."

"Why do I have to go to bed now, Grandfather?"

"Dick Tutt said so."

Dick Tutt had a lot of say in our house. My mother would shake her head and smile at my Grandfather, and Grandmother would say "Bill, don't tease the child or I'll Dick Tutt you in a minute." I thought Dick Tutt must be really special if Grandfather did as he said all the time and Grandmother knew him too. So I didn't feel as though Dick Tutt would be scary, or nasty either, but I knew he was there whenever I was about to do something I shouldn't, or go somewhere I wasn't allowed to go because he would make the hair on my neck prickle.

One night, I heard voices. I recognized one of them as Grandfathers.

"Grandfather?" I ventured.

"Go to sleep."

"Who are you talking to, Grandfather?"

"Dick Tutt."

From then on, I noticed that Grandfather spoke to Dick Tutt nearly every night. They even laughed together. They must have been really good friends.

I lived with my Mother, Grandmother and Grandfather until I was five before my mother and I moved away to be nearer to my new school. I learned lots of things when I went to school. I learned that there was such a thing in life as a "Daddy" - and that I didn't have one. I knew this because the other children used to dance around me in the playground and chant laughingly, "You haven't got a Dad, You haven't got a Dad." I laughed too, because I thought it must be funny if it made them laugh, but I didn't know why. I would go through what I'd learned from my storybook at school: There was a 'Mummy', a 'Daddy', a 'Baby', a 'Grandmother', and a 'Grandfather'. But there was no 'Dick Tutt'. Maybe he'd been mixed up with the "Daddy". Anyway, if he hadn't, the "Daddy" couldn't be very useful because I'd never noticed he wasn't there before.

It was many years later that I went back to visit the area. I realized that the old house was at the back of a row of shops. In fact it was right behind the Cobbler's shop. I went into the Cobbler's, and bent over a boot that had obviously seen better days, was an old man. I asked him if he remembered the old couple who lived in the house behind. He smiled and went over to a door at the back of the shop. Turned a key and opened it. There were the stairs and the sun shone through the window at

the top, right onto the big brass knob dull now that Grandmother and I weren't polishing it every week.

"I used to rent it to them." he said, a distant look in his eyes, "and there isn't a day goes by that I don't miss my cup of tea with friendly old Bill." The penny dropped, I smiled and said, "So you must be Dick Tutt?" The old man looked surprised.

"Why, how did you know that?"

"Well... it's kind of a long story, Mr Tutt"

"Well My Dear, I've got plenty of time, and I like a good story, would you like a cup of tea?"