

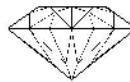
BOOGALOO BEAR



J. B. Kirkpatrick

**For
Kacy**

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ONE

The Trip Inn

It was a day much like today. I was much younger then, but I remember it like it was yesterday.

I remember where I was. I remember the smells. And I remember him.

I didn't want to go over there as I recall. But my mother felt that it was important for me to spend time with my other grandparents.

I protested vigorously, but in the end, I yielded to her authority.

I packed my usual secret stuff, along with my clothes for the weekend. I learned very quickly that my Granny had lots of ideas for fun stuff. We might go roller skating, or go to the pool at the park, or we might just stay home and bake cookies. If I was really lucky, we might go to their lease and look for the horses. That was always fun. I liked horses. I even had an old suitcase that I rode like a horse. I named him Shadow, because he was gray.

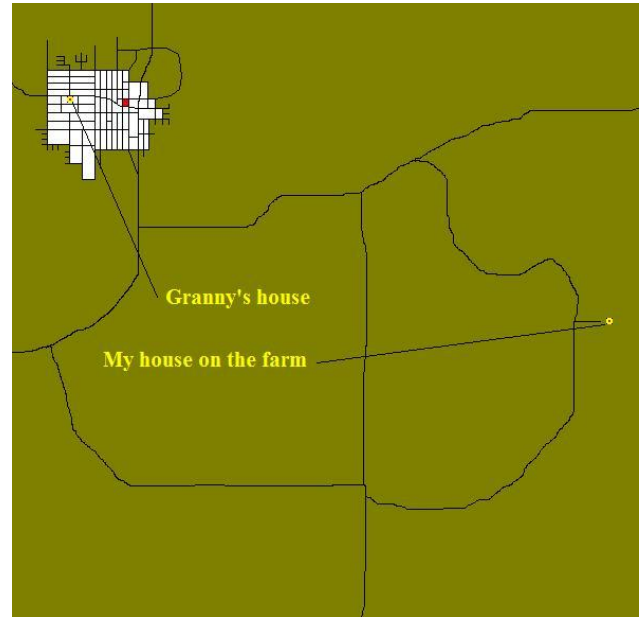
I was always prepared though, even if I wasn't a real boy scout. Living in the country with my mothers parents, had some drawbacks. But over all, I had lots of space and freedom. The positives definitely out weighed the negatives.

Though I was the first grandchild to be born to both sides of the family, I was never spoiled. Well, not that much, anyway. At least I didn't think there was any spoiling going on that wasn't absolutely necessary.

I was basically a good kid, and had never been in too much trouble or mischief. But something just didn't feel right this time. I gritted my teeth though, and yielded to my mothers wishes.

The drive in from the farm was uneventful. Unless, hanging out the window and acting like a dog would be classified an event.

We arrived in town and proceeded up one of the main streets to my Granny's house. It was HUGE! It was a two story house with dark red clapboard siding, and white shutters. The front yard had towering sycamore trees on either side, and the backyard was a maze of fruit trees and little pockets of isolated grass, all neatly trimmed and pruned.



There was a garage and small shop out in the back yard. The shop was full of all sorts of neat stuff. I even remember a small bottle full of shiny liquid. It weighed almost as much as I did, and when I spilled some on the concrete floor it exploded into a thousand tiny shiny droplets that scattered everywhere. The only letters on the faded and torn label were, MERCURY.

I coaxed Shadow out of the back seat of my moms' car and forced him to follow me up the brick paved walkway to Granny's back door. I knew what was coming as surely as I knew Shadows coat was gray.

"Hi, hon." My Granny hugged my mother.

Just as I was about to step up on the back porch, my foot caught one of the bricks and I fell forward, right at my Granny's feet.

"Oh, my...! Are you all right son?" she leaned over to help me up.

I knew what was coming. I had just enough time to dust off. Shadow remained on his side. Here it comes.

"Come here and give Granny a big hug."

If I held my breath long enough, I wouldn't choke on all the perfume and powder she doused herself with. It is a memory chiseled into my brain forever. But, being squeezed into a soft powdery front had its benefits. I was her favorite, her 'Numero Uno'. No matter what, I could do no wrong.

But I seem to be straying a bit, let's get back to the story.

Now this house was hard to miss. It had a certain air about it. In some ways it was spooky, at least to a boy of my age. It was a grand old house, with storm shutters, and balconies on the second floor. They hung majestically over the porch, and wrapped around half of the house. The front door had cut glass, and a funny door bell made out of ornate brass. You had to twist it, to make it ring.

The huge white columns that stood guard in front of this ornate door, were so big that I could barely reach half way around them. Nobody used the front door, unless you were a stranger, or a salesman of some sort.

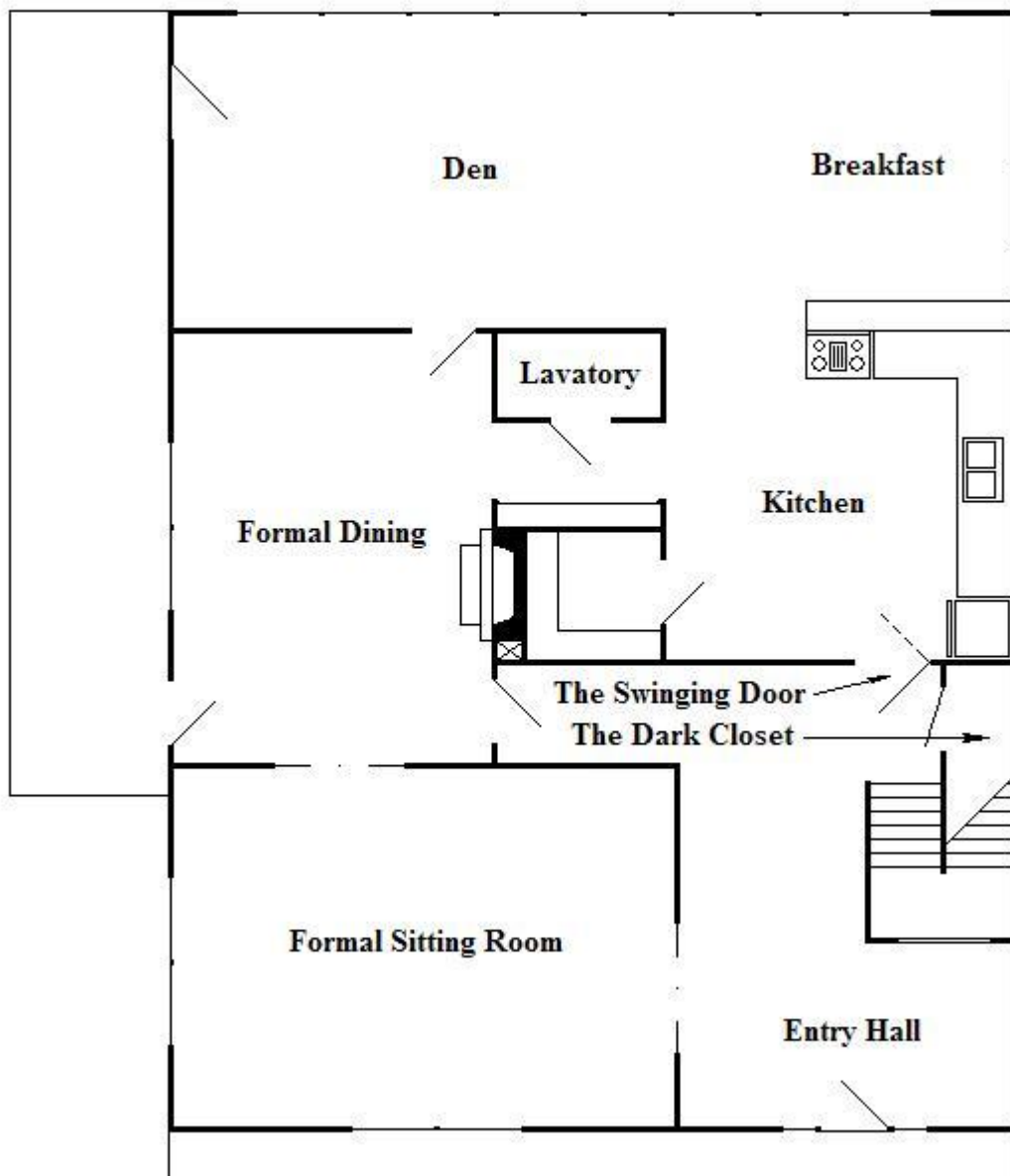
OK! I'm drifting again... let's see, where was I? Oh yes, hugging and squeezing.

I was only slightly crushed as I broke free of her bear-hug, and gasped for fresh air. Ah, good clean fresh air. Being the first born on both sides of the family had its' advantages, and it certainly had some disadvantages. I guess it was a matter of perspective, mostly mine.



Inside the back door, they sat down in the den to talk. I never paid much attention to the conversations. I was more interested in the Civil War musket that hung on the wall above the book case. My daydreams of charging up a hill, bayonet fixed and ready for action, were broken abruptly when, for the second time, they called my name.

"JONATHAN!"



TWO

The Den

"Oh, I'm sorry, what?" I managed to say.

"Your Granny was speaking to you!" my mom was NOT smiling.

"I'm sorry, Granny, what did you say?"

"You know where your room is son." she smiled.

"Yes, mam." I slightly growled under my breath as I walked away.

I yanked on Shadow as I made my way through the den and toward the kitchen. I was about to make that long, lonesome trip, into the silent unknown. Once I left the kitchen through a swinging door, I entered another world. It was a world of deafening silence, only broken by the steady ticking of the grandfather clock that stood guard by the front door.

Why does she have to call me son, I wondered as I drug Shadow across the kitchen floor? I'm her grandson, not her son! She always calls me son. I wish she wouldn't call me son! My mamma can call me son, because I'm her son, but I don't want anyone else to call me by that name. After all, that's something only a mother and son can share. Right?

I grit my teeth when I hear her tell my mother...

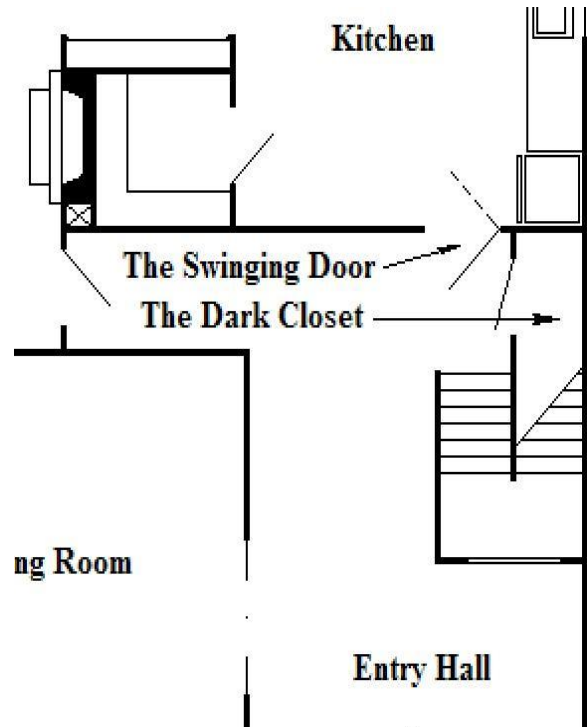
"He's such a good boy. You're doing such a wonderful job with him... considering... "

Considering WHAT I wonder? I move slowly toward the swinging door.

The door from the kitchen swings both ways. It leads into the entry hall and the stairs. As I push through, it swings back and hits my suitcase with a THUD! I always forget when I step into the entry hall, that the door swings both ways. It nudges me toward the stairs.

Those dreaded winding stairs. Actually, I only have to make three turns while going up the stairs. Once, when I reach the first landing and turn left. Then left again, and continue up in silence. And finally, another left as the stairs turn toward my final destination.

There is a small maid's closet to my left, as I hesitate taking that first step up the stairs. It's dark in that closet under the staircase. It only has one light bulb hanging from a wire. I never know if there might be something, in there. I turn and begin backing up the stairs, ever mindful of the closet door.



The first landing has a banister that overlooks the entry hall, a cut glass window to the outside world, and a mysterious round hole in the middle of the ornate wooden lattice. It stares at the front door. This round hole is big enough for me to jump through, though that might be a mistake. It IS a long way down to the entry hall floor.

As I pull and tug on my struggling horse Shadow, I look up that mountain that I am about to climb. Why would someone build a hole in the middle of that wood lattice?

"Come on horse!" I say in a firm tone, as I struggle up the mountain with my trusty steed.

My good and faithful Shadow... My suitcase is the color of clouds gathering to rain. He's a trusty steed that never complains, no matter how hard I ride him. He will follow me into the unknown without hesitation.

Shadow was growing weary as we reached the top of the first landing. I let him rest. I peered out through the hole in the lattice toward the desk and paintings that filled up the great entry hall. As I reached out my hand and touched the wood trim, I wonder what kind of magic world lay through this mystic hole.

'Awww...' probably nothing. It's just my imagination running wild again. It did however, look to me like a long way to fall if someone fell through this magic hole down to the floor below.

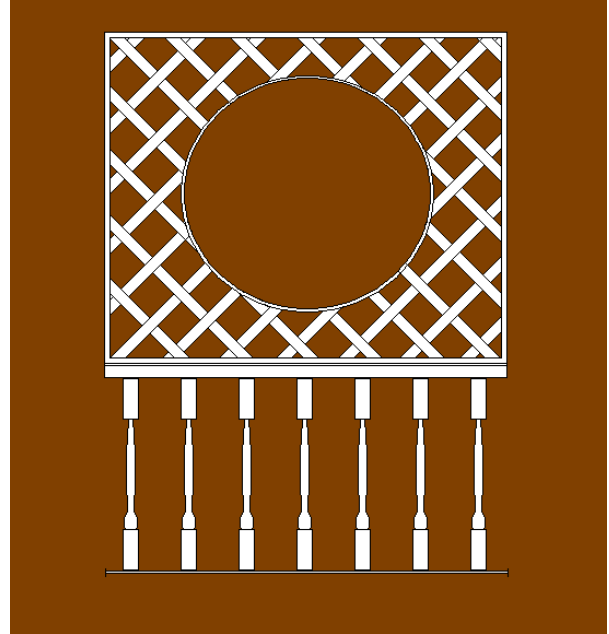
Or maybe you would just fall into another room somewhere else in time. I step back, shocked by my own thoughts.

"Come on shadow!" I give him another yank.

Off we go, up the next flight of stairs. This is the part I love. I can throw my leg over and slide down the banister. I don't have to worry too much, because of the big round ball on the post at the end. It keeps me from shooting through the mysterious round hole in the lattice.

I make my final turn and drag Shadow to the top. As I step out on the hardwood floor at the top of the stairs, I look down. It's a long way down. I look over the large round ball that sits firmly on top of the banister, at the top of the long and winding stairway. The dark stained wood trim and the strip of carpet that followed me up the middle of the stairs, end abruptly. I stare at the large square room. Closed doors, a tapestry rug in the middle, and an iron chain holding the light fixture to the incredibly tall ceiling, all stare at me.

I choose the door to my right... MY room...!



After a day or two, I would muster the courage to fling my leg over the rail for a wild and scary ride down the banister. But now, time to settle in, and get Shadow unpacked. I open the door and walk in. The room is always dark. There are no windows, only a door at the far end. It leads to the screened in porch that overlooks the back yard.

I flip the switch on the wall by the door, and the single light bulb glows against the tall ceiling. I wonder how any one could reach that high if the bulb went out?

What if it went out now? What if they couldn't reach it to put another one in? This worried me a lot. They wouldn't leave me in the dark! Would they?

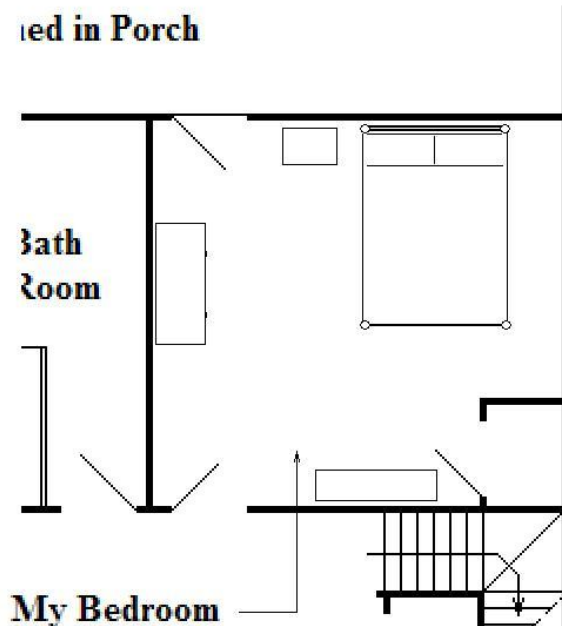
While we're on the subject, I didn't like that closet either. It stuck out inside the room like some giant pushed the wall in from the outside and couldn't bust through the wall. What if he were still out there?

I put shadow in his corral by the chest of drawers. I decided to leave everything inside... in case... just in case. You never know when you'll have to make a fast get away. I'll leave one side latched, just in case.

"Son..." I hear my mothers' voice...!

"Yes, mam...?" I was always polite. Even if I WAS the chosen one...!

I liked being polite. Yes mam... No mam... Yes sir... No sir... It always made me feel good.



"I have to go now... Can you come give me a hug, bye...?" she called up the stairs.

I ran down the stairs, two at a time. She was already at the end of the walkway by the car when I reached her.

As I watched my mothers' green Chevrolet back down the drive, the dread of what lay ahead loomed over me like a small cloud. Every where I moved, it was there. I was now alone, with my Granny, and this big house.

I thought I heard something...!

"I said... Do you want to go and see a movie...?"

My Granny looked at me and smiled.

"Go to the movies?! Just us...?! Yes... mam...!" this granny of mine sure knew how to work it!

I thought she must be the best granny in the whole world!

THREE

The Bear

Boy, no lightening this time... Whew...! The clouds faded from view.

'Daddy Ebb' was not my real grandfather. He was Granny's second husband, and a good man. He was out of town on business, so that meant just me and Granny...! I liked that...! I liked daddy Ebb, too, but now, 'it was just me and my Granny...!'

When he was here, sometimes he would take me to see his oil wells, and to see his horses. I liked horses. I liked shadow a lot, too, 'cause shadow didn't bite. But shadow didn't go fast like his horses, and I liked to go fast. But shadow didn't bite.

I liked to go fast all right. It thrilled me..., and scared me at the same time...! Yeah..., 'Daddy Ebb' was ok. And if I had to admit it, my Granny was 'pur-dy' ok, too...!

She showed me a lot of things, and she taught me a lot of things. And she always answered my questions.

Yeah, she was ok, too.

I wonder why I didn't want to come over here...?

Oh, yeah, the bear-hugs...! Oh well, nobody's perfect...!

"Extra butter on my popcorn...? milk duds...? and a cherry coke...?"

Boy...! this Granny of mine sure knows the way to my heart!

Boy oh boy...! This stuff is drippin' with butter!

The theater was dark, and I squeezed her hand a little tighter than I squeeze Shadow when we were really getting rough. If I get lost in here, I'm in big trouble. But she's my Granny, and I'm her 'numero-uno' favorite grandson. She calls me son, and I like that. She wouldn't let me get lost...

We missed the opening scene, 'cause I had to go to the bathroom after the cartoons. And I had to get some more napkins, 'cause the popcorn had so much butter on it. When I found my way back to the seats, Granny was still there. Whew! She let's me go by myself sometimes, 'cause she says I'm her little man.

When I did get back and settled into my seat, I looked up and saw one of the most beautiful horses that I had ever seen in my whole life. He was big, and beautiful, and brown, and white, like the horses the Indians ride. He had a long white mane and tail, and he was running down a mountain in the snow. Then, I saw this big bear chasing him, and then this man was shooting his gun to scare the bear off, and then the man caught the horse, and then I don't remember too much after that, 'cause I didn't see the horse very much after that.

"Are you still hungry son?" she asked as we left the theater.

"No mam..." if she only knew how full I was!

"I might make some chocolate chip cookies later." she said.

My eyes widened as I checked to make sure that I wasn't "that" full!

I don't know why, but I could always find room for a chocolate chip cookie or two... and a little milk to wash it down. I wonder if I can stay longer... this time...?

As we drive into the garage, I am almost bursting to know what's in the brown paper bag that she got at the store. Granny says she has a few things to do in the kitchen and that I should go and check on Shadow. She thinks Shadow is a fine strong horse. She doesn't REALLY think Shadow is a horse... but we pretend sometimes. She likes to pretend... and we play lots of pretend games when I'm here.

Well, there's old Shadow right where I left him. IT looks like he's doing ok. I go across to Granny's room and casually walk inside and look around the room... at the desk... the pictures on the wall, and the paintings. The roll top desk is so inviting... it has so many neat things on the shelves inside... I hesitate...

I wonder what's in this drawer?

I wonder if I'll get caught if I look in...

Wait...! What's that familiar smell...?

"Hey...! That's chocolate chip cookies!" I hear myself say out loud.

I blaze a fiery trail down the winding stairway toward the kitchen as the smell grows steadily stronger. As I burst through the kitchen door, Granny is removing the last of the cookies from the oven. With a grandiose smile on my face, I present myself ready for the grueling job ahead!

"Want some more milk son...?" she says as I lick the milk mustache off my weary lips.

"No mam... I think that I'm going to pop I'm so full!"

"Ok then son, go up and brush your teeth, and I'll be up to tuck you in, in a few minutes."

"Yes mam..."

Boy, I'm so heavy I don't think I can make it up this mountain. Can someone please carry me upstairs? Shadow... where are you...?

One step... two step... three step... I wonder how many steps there are...? I wonder...?

I get to the top of the stairs, and feel a chill!

There's something wrong with this room. I stand in the door way.
Even with the light on, I feel strange... Like there's something there...

But I don't see anything... Still... I'd better wait until...

"What are..."

"OH...!" I almost jumped through the ceiling...!

"Oh, I'm sorry son... I didn't mean to scare you. What's wrong...?"

"I thought... I... I saw something under there." pointing to the bed.

I caught myself not exactly telling the truth. But I didn't want her to think that I was just imagining something. Something really might be under there.

"Well... let's have a look. I don't see anything in the closet. Nooo...!"

GREAT! Now she's going to go through this whole routine... like I'm some kind of scared-y-cat kid and look behind every...

"Nooo... nothing behind the curtain..."

Everything... and under everything... and...

"I don't see anything under the bed. Can you help Granny up son? I'm not quite as limber as I used to be."

And you're not as smart as you used to be either... I thought quietly. Because if there WAS something under the bed... it wouldn't just stay there and let you find it...! I'm glad she can't hear what I'm thinking...

"Did you brush your teeth honey...?"

"Yes mam..."

I'd better get into bed before I get zapped with another one of those bear-hugs of hers...!

"Now... all snuggled in...? I'll tuck you in nice and tight... How's that...?"

"Yes mam, that's fine." Boy, any tighter and I couldn't breath.

"Good night son, sleep tight..."

"and don't let the bed bugs bite..." I finished for her.

I knew the line by heart.

"I love you son..." she smiled and reached for the light switch.

"I love you too... and would you leave the door open a little bit...?"

"Are you sure the light in the hall won't bother you...?"

"Yes mam..." I said and turned on my side.

Of course the light won't bother me...! That's why I want the door open...! So if anything DOES start walking around in here, I can see it!!!

Why is it that these sheets always feel like no one ever slept on them before? I don't know what she does, but the sheets on this bed are always so crisp, I almost feel like I'm wrapped up in a cellophane package.

There's old Shadow... in his stable by the chest of drawers...

Yawn...

and this is only the first day... it's not even the weekend yet...

I wonder... what we'll do...

Yawn... tomorrow...? Ahhh...

"Granny...?!"

Silence...

"Granny...?!"

Silence...

"Who's there...?!"

I hear my heart... it begins to pound inside my chest...

I raise my head a little higher out from under the covers...

I move over slightly to the center of the bed...

All of a sudden, I feel goose bumps all over. I don't like this...

"Who's there...?!"

more thumping...

I wish my stupid heart would be quiet so I could...

"Boo-ga-loo..."

What was THAT...!!!

"WHO's there...?!"

"BOO-GA-LOO..."

"Who...?"

"Boogaloo...!"

At that very moment... my worst fear... everything that I always knew would happen... my WORST nightmare...! came true!

My heart stopped dead, as I saw brown hair coming up from the side of the bed. I almost shot out of the other side of the bed and through the wall when I heard him say...

"Hi, I'm Boogaloo Bear."

What's this...? I must be dreaming...

"Uh, hi... uh... I'm Jonathan..."

My heart began to beat again with some regularity.

"Well... I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Jonathan."

"I must be dreaming...?"

"No sir... I'm just as real as you see me... Want to touch me...?"

"Uh... no... Maybe some other time...! How did you get in here?"

"Oh... I've been here for quite some time... I've been waiting for you."

"ME...?"

"Yes you... When you were ready, that is."

"What do you mean... when I'm ready?"

"Well Jonathan... sometimes people are ready when they are six, and sometimes when they are ten, and sometimes when they are sixty-two, and..."

"OK...! Ok... I see what you mean..."

"and sometimes they see me when they are ninty three..."

"ok... OK already..."

I couldn't take my eyes off of his. There was something so soft and understanding... in his eyes.

"How did you know I was ready...?"

"You let me know yourself Jonathan."

"But I don't understand..."

"You will..."

"But..."

"Look Jonathan, all of us... no matter who we are... no matter where we are... no matter how young or old we are... accept certain things. And believe in those things. Sometimes we believe in things that we see... and sometimes we believe in things that we don't see. Do you see Shadow over there by the chest of drawers...?"

"Hey...! How'd you know about shadow?"

"Oh... I know a great many things... and I will share them with you as you are ready to accept them... but back to what I was saying... Shadow... as you know, is a suitcase..."

"I know... I know, but I pretend..."

"Yes Jonathan... and pretending is great fun... and life was made to be enjoyed... and to have fun in... and life itself, is the most wonderful thing in the universe. But you know that Shadow is really a suitcase..."

"Right... I know."

All of a sudden I felt like I was being lectured to... and by a BEAR no less...!

"Look... I'm not trying to lecture you..."

How'd he know what I was thinking...?

"I'm just trying to explain things to you so you will understand... Ok?"

"Ok, but how did you know..."

"We'll talk about that, later... now, back to Shadow... As you know deep down in your heart, Shadow is really just a suitcase. Right...?"

"Right...!"

Most of my shock had gone, and I was ready to listen to this bear sitting on the side of my bed. Just to look at him, he looked so overpowering. But for some reason, I trusted him completely. Maybe it was something in his eyes.

"As I was saying... You can touch that suitcase, or Shadow if you prefer... you can touch Shadow... you can feel shadow... and you know that if you go away and come back, shadow is still going to be the same. Right...?"

"Right...!"

"The same thing is true for things that you can't see. Like the air you breath. But it's always there, no matter where you are. Ok, maybe that was a bad example... How about your mothers love?"

"Ok, but she always loves me..."

"That's my whole point Jonathan. Her love for you never really changes. Remember when she wouldn't buy you that football, the one with the stripes that you just had to have or you would just die..."

"YEAH!!"

"She just didn't have the money right then... but that doesn't mean that she didn't love you... does it?"

"No... I know she really loves me, and if..."

"Do you remember the time when you were at school, and she didn't..."

"YEAH...! I remember that, boy was I scared. All of the other mom's had come and picked up their kids, but..."

"and your teacher was getting a little nervous, and kept looking at her watch..."

"Yeah, I remember..."

"Do you remember that you were thinking that she didn't love you anymore, and that you would never see her again...? And you THOUGHT you were going to have to go home with your teacher, and she kept looking at her watch, and..."

"Yeah, boy was I scared! Hey...! How'd you know what I was thinking?"

"Never mind for now... but do you remember that she DID finally show up...? and you were so relieved that she still loved you... and she wouldn't leave you forever, and..."

"Yeah... I remember."

"Do you remember that the reason that she was late, was because she had stopped by the bakery to pick up your birthday cake... and it wasn't ready when she got there, and she had to wait?"

"Yeah, I remember all those things... boy did I feel stupid."

"No Jonathan, you were not stupid, just confused. You see, back to what I was originally saying Jonathan, about believing in things that we cannot see... You are still learning, and will keep learning, all of your life. If you let it happen that way. You are still learning things like faith, and trust, and lots of other things that are very important. Do you understand what I am saying Jonathan? Because I can stop and explain it for you at any time you want. If you don't understand something, just jump right in and ask. We have all the time that you need. Ok...?"

"Ok... I think I understand."

"So anyway, as I was saying, there are a lot of things that we cannot see, but we must make a decision about. Sometimes it takes us a long time to make a decision, and sometimes it happens quickly. Like this faith thing. You have accepted that your mother loves you, no matter where she is, or where you are. Am I right?"

"Yeah...!"

For the first time I caught myself... I was not saying sir or mam or whatever a Boogaloo bear was...

"and to answer your question, I am a male of my species, and it is ok for you not to say "sir" every time you say something to me, because I know that you respect me."

"Yes, sir..."

I don't know why, but I did respect this bear. I felt so close to him, like he was not only a teacher, but a friend.

"You see Jonathan, it's all kind of like walking, we all take our first step, then another, then another, and before long, we're walking. Sometimes, we fall down, but then we get up and start

walking again, and stumble, and get up, and stumble and get up, and before long, we are not stumbling as much as we did, and then we get better, and better, and..."

"OH! I get it!! So every time I believe in something, it gets easier and easier to believe?"

"Yes, I guess you could put it that way. What I'm saying is, that there is a small voice inside you that will lead you if you listen. It will tell you what is right, and what is wrong, it will tell you what is good and bad for you. But most of all, it can be your best friend. Take me for example..."

"Yeah, you're about the coolest thing that ever happened to me and..."

"Hey hold on, there are going to be a lot of things happening to you through your life. Some will even make you happier than you are right now..."

"NO WAY! I..."

"Just remember one thing Jonathan. Remember all I have been telling you. Remember when you came up the stairs a while ago, and you didn't want to come into this room. That was the voice inside of you telling you that you were about to discover something that you had never seen before. Remember what I said about things that you could see and things that you could not see?"

Silence...

"Jonathan, just remember this. I will always be there, if you need me. And there is nothing in this world that can hurt you. Remember, you believe in Shadow, you believe that your mother loves you, and now you even believe in something new..."

"Yeah, YOU!"

"Yes, even me. Remember, you knew that there was something under the bed, and at the time you couldn't see it, you couldn't touch it, but you just KNEW that something was there. It was me, all the time. I was there protecting you, even when you could not see me, because you were not ready to see me. Remember what I said about people of different ages..."

"Yeah, I remember that."

"You see all of us are different, each one of us unique. Each of the creatures, big or small, short or tall, each live our lives in our own wonderful way. I'm unique, I'm The Boogaloo Bear. There is only one of me. I'm special. I'm one of a kind. And you, you are special, and unique, just like me. There's only one of you in the whole universe. So never be afraid, and always be proud that you are a one of a kind."

"yawn..."

"Are you getting tired Jonathan?"

"Huh...? Oh... Not me!"

"Well just remember, that I am always around. Around the corner, under the bed, somewhere, I'm always there. And I will protect you from anything that you think might bite off your toes... HA!"

"yawn...you're funny Boogaloo, I like you."

"Well, I like you too. Remember, life is a big adventure, and lot's of things will be happening, but I'll always be there, if you need me. You just have to believe. Now close your eyes, and get some rest."

"But will you be back?"

"Yes, you just have to believe..."

"But when will you be back?"

"Close your eyes and dream sweet dreams, and I'll be back tomorrow."

"yawn..."

"Close your eyes... and believe..."

"mmmmmmmm..."

"just believe..."