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## A Noise Downstairs

by James Stiffel

Jamie could hear a noise. And it wasn't when he ate mum's over burnt crackling. Usually the Sunday roast was an enjoyable past time. Jamie could munch his roast potatoes and crackling without listening to an odd noise. It sounded like... scratching. Yes. Like something scratching...sand paper? Down in the basement.

"What's that noise?" He said looking to mum, to dad, then older brother Phillip. No one looked up. Had they not heard him? Once again, the pain of being 8yrs old was rendering him invisible. How had they not heard him? "What's that noise?" He said a bit louder. "I can't hear anything." Said mum, not bothering to look up. "It's your brain trying to jump start!" Said Phillip. "Eat your food." Said dad. Jamie frowned. No one ever listened to him. There's the noise again. To the left of him. No, to the right. But definitely below him. "Can I be..." He started to say. But nobody seemed bothered. "Humpf!" He slowly pushed his chair away from the table. Strolling past the table, he looked at its current occupants. Each face of passive contemplation, looking down at their meals.

As if sensing his approach, the scratching noise got progressively louder. A "scratch scratch", "scratch scratch" for every beat of his thumping heart, like a precisely timed drum. Jamie stared ahead at the basement door. The scratching noise, though still present, was muffled compared to that of his heartbeat pounding in his ears. His heart threatening to escape his chest. "Scratch scratch". "Scratch scratch". "SCRATCH SCRATCH". Louder and louder it got. Finally, he reached for the handle and turned it. The scratching all but stopped. Now it was but a distant annoyance, barely audible. Puzzled, Jamie pushed the door. It swung open. The creaking echoed proudly throughout the basement, which appeared deserted. The old wooden steps looked like a mere insect could befall them. Yet still, Jamie felt the tug on his curiosity.

A gentle breeze curled upwards over Jamie's face, chilling his lips. Dust particles drifted slowly up to meet his gaze, innocent in their dance. Did they too think this was a bad idea? "H-hello?" He stammered. Without waiting for a reply he edged closer. He took the first step. "Is...anyone...here?" The second step. He stared into the blackness, the disordered detritus. Third step. A bicycle wheel squeaked slowly round as it hung from the far wall. Fourth step.

“C-call out if theres someone h-here.” Fifth step. Jamie’s small form was now completely inside the basement. The steps still carried on. He listened, but heard nothing. His foot raised. “HEEE-R-R-R-R-R-R-RE!!” His eyes, now frantic with fear. Spin around, run. Jamie spun. He fell earthwards, as the wood broke beneath him. His hope now rested on the upper step. He reached out, caught it and now dangled above a sea of blackness. His legs swung with momentum, nearly pulling him down. He winced and cried in sheer desperation to hang on. His legs flailed this way and that to find a foothold. There were none to find. “H-h-h-hel-l-p!!” Something grabbed his foot. The bony hand yanked on his trainer. His grip loosened and he fell stricken faced into the black abyss.

“Jamie! I’ve told you before about not falling asleep at the dinner table.” Mum said as she picked him off of the floor. “W-what? Oh. S-sorry mum. I p-promise I wont do it ag...” Jamie tried to get his breath back. But he could hear a noise. “Whats that noise?” Asked Philip.

THE END.