

## Going Home

By

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I haven't always lived in a closet. Daddy used to let me live in the house proper. I even had my own room that I shared with my older brother Malcolm (I'm eight, he's eleven). It wasn't until I changed that Daddy locked me in here. Malcolm says it's because he's scared of me that he keeps me locked in here. When I ask Malcolm why Daddy would be scared of a kid (I am eight after all), when he is a grown up and way bigger than me, Malcolm says it's what's inside my head that Daddy is scared of.

I see what Malcolm means because one time, before I started changing, Daddy brought Malcolm and me out to the Ott's Farm and we watched as Daddy and Mr. Ott cut open this big old pig that was just about as fat as a pig can get. The guts were all over the place and boy it was a mess. And then Daddy cracked open that pig's head and scooped out the brains and put the brains in a big metal bowl. And when I saw the brains all wet and squishy in that metal bowl, I nearly got the all-overs and I had to run out of the barn and puke and I heard Daddy and Mr. Ott laughing as I ran. But Malcolm wasn't laughing.

I am lucky because if a guy has to have an older brother than Malcolm is the best older brother a guy could want. I'll tell you how great a brother Malcolm is: during the days, when Malcolm comes home from school and when Daddy and Mommy are away at work, Malcolm comes into my closet with me and reads me books. It doesn't matter if we have read the book a hundred times before; he will still read it to me. I especially like the books with color pictures in them, what are called *illustrations*, on the cover and inside the book. Malcolm is smart because he can read. I can't read. But I can do other stuff.

Like this one time me and Malcolm were in my closet and he was reading to me, and we got to losing track of the time, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, we hear Daddy's rattling old truck pull up in front of the house. And Malcolm gets scared because Daddy told Malcolm that he wasn't to come in my closet, and he has even locked the closet to keep him out, but Malcolm is good with tools and he just picked that lock with nothing but a piece of wire from an old coat hanger.

So we hear the truck, and we hear the squeak of the breaks and the rattling as the engine shuts off, and then we hear the scrape as the door of the truck opens and pretty soon we know Daddy is going to come in the house and find Malcolm in my closet and he is going to be all mad because he is always kind of mad when he gets home from work anyway.

So Malcolm says, real loud but sort of under his breath, "Shit!" And I know he is going to get caught and Daddy is going to be mad and when Daddy gets mad he uses his hands, and I don't want him to use his hands on Malcolm because he is my older

brother and I love him.

So I get this picture (*illustration*) in my head of Daddy walking from that old rattling truck, passed the old metal mailbox, and up the walk to the door and then I say in my head “*Fall Down!*” real loud, but only inside my head. And I hear Daddy’s lunchbox hit the walk outside, and I hear another sound like of falling, and then I hear Daddy say, real loud so anyone can hear, “Shit!!!” And then I hear, but I can sort of see it too, Daddy on his hands and knees putting his leftover lunch back into the lunchbox. And then I say to Malcolm, “Go Malcolm. Its okay now.” And Malcolm picks up the books he brought and sticks the metal door opener in his pocket and runs out of my closet slamming the door real hard and then I am alone again.

And he must not have gotten caught because he came into my closet later on at night when I was asleep and sort of snuggled up against me and put his arms around me, and I woke up and saw it was him, and he whispered in my ear real low, “I thought we were toast, Kip. Next time we have to be smarter. We have to have a look out or something.” And I said still kind of sleepy, “Yeah. We should.”

But in my mind I kept thinking how two people like me and Malcolm could be toast? Because I know toast is two pieces of bread that are heated up in the toaster until they are all crispy and have a black coating on them. But I don’t ask him this because I remember that there are such things as *metaphors* that they use in the books he reads to me. Being toast is a *metaphor*. I can’t read those books. But I can do other things, like with Daddy and the truck that time.

So, sometimes it’s not all bad in my closet, like when Malcolm comes and reads to me or when I get the food that Mommy cooks for me. Usually she makes me something with meat in it. Like meatloaf or hamburgers or pot roast (but only once and awhile with the pot roast). But the funny thing is, no matter how much food I eat, I keep getting smaller. Mommy says I am small for my age (I am eight), but I know that I should not be getting smaller and skinnier if I eat normal meals. Malcolm eats normal meals like me and he is getting bigger, but not me.

I have to eat in my closet, not at the table with Malcolm and Mommy and Daddy because Daddy says he gets disgusted looking at me since I have changed and he says that he will barf if he has to eat and look at me at the same time. So I eat in here and listen to the TV out in the living room, and I hear the clink of the silverware on the plates out in the kitchen, and sometimes I hear Daddy yell at the TV in the living room, especially if there is a sports game on. Then when I am finished with my plate, Mommy comes and takes the plate away, and I see Daddy standing behind her swinging the key on his finger and watching me like I am going to do something.

Then it’s dessert time, but I have to wait until Daddy goes up to bed because he has to get up early in the mornings. Mommy comes in my closet (Malcolm opens it for her) and gives me the dessert and sits down with me (These are also my favorite times in my closet, right next to the times with Malcolm reading to me). Sometimes she will hold me and kiss my head with no hair on it and tell me she loves me. That seems funny to me that she would say that because I know she loves me because I can see she loves me in her eyes and also in her head.

But I don’t tell her about that because I am afraid that she will then get scared of me like Daddy is scared of me, and then she won’t come into my closet and sit with me and give me dessert (pie, pudding, cake sometimes).

I know that Mommy also thinks about how she can get me out of my closet and away from the house. But I also know that she is too scared of Daddy to try it because he sometimes uses his hands on her too. And she also wouldn't have anytime to do it because she works all day doing something with phones and when she gets home Daddy is home too and when she doesn't come to bed at a certain time at night Daddy yells for her to come to bed. So there isn't time for her to do anything. I see she thinks about taking me out of my closet and away from home a lot more now that I have changed.

Sometimes when she is in the closet with me, I tell her that I like being in my closet just fine and I really don't want to go anywhere anyway. Just to put that thought out of her mind. She smiles at me, but only on the outside. I can still see on the inside she is thinking about it. And sometimes she sings to me very low so Daddy won't hear. She sings songs like *Mocking Bird* and *Angel of the Morning* and *Fly Me to the Moon* and *Beyond the Sea*, songs like that. And boy you don't know how beautiful her voice is. Sometimes her voice is so beautiful that it makes me cry, but in a good way, and then Mommy cries sometimes too.

So, sometimes in my closet I play games with myself. One time Malcolm asked me what I do in my closet all day when it is locked and dark and he is at school and Mommy and Daddy are working, and I told him I play with myself. And he started laughing so hard his face got all red and tears started coming out of his eyes and I asked him what was so funny? But he said I wouldn't understand (which is probably true).

So, the games I play I made up myself. With all that time I got to thinking, what would be a really good game for being in a closet? And then it came to me: with all the stuff in here like shoes and coats and hats and dresses and mittens, I could play dress up. But I didn't want to dress up in any of those old clothes anyway. So I thought that if there were other people, like a woman to wear the old dresses and a man to wear one of those old coats, it would be a lot better than just me in those old things.

So I closed my eyes and I pictured in my head an old man with gray hair to wear the hat with the red checkered pattern on it and the old green coat, and I pictured a woman with long curly red hair to wear the yellow dress with the flowers, and before you know it there they were in my closet with me.

The old man had the hat and the coat on just like I saw it in my head and the lady with the red hair had on the yellow dress with the flowers. I was so happy that they were actually there that I started laughing in delight, and clapping my hands with my long fingers, and then the man with the hat and coat and the woman in the dress saw me and then saw where they were (in a closet) and they started to get scared.

The man asked me where he was, and I told him in my closet with me, and he said he didn't know how he got in the closet, and I said I thought him up, and then he got here, same thing with the lady with the red hair. But he told me that he wasn't made-up, his name was Arthur and he lived in Minnesota and he would really like to go back there if I could manage that. I told him he wasn't in Minnesota now, and he asked me where in the world he was, and I told him he was in Michigan, in the United States, in my closet, which is also in the United States. Then Arthur asked the lady with the red hair where she was from, and the lady said she was from New York, and her name was Carolyn, and then she asked the man if she was dreaming, and Arthur really didn't have an answer for that.

So I got to thinking, how would I like it if someone from New York or Minnesota stuck me in a closet without me knowing it? And then I felt kind of bad for doing that exact thing (except the opposite) to Arthur and Carolyn. So I told them that if they wanted to go back to where they came from than they would just have to tell me what the places they left looked like, so I could picture them in my mind, and send them back there.

So Arthur told me that he was in his den, reading the newspaper, before he came to my closet, and he told me it had a long sofa on one wall and a TV in the corner and pictures of him and his family on the wall and also a picture of him and a really big fish that he had caught when he was 18 years old. I could kind of see the room in my head, but not really.

So I asked Arthur to get a really good and clear picture of his den in his mind, and when he did that I could see it really good in my head, so I closed my eyes and when I opened them again Arthur wasn't in the closet anymore. So that just left Carolyn to send home.

I asked Carolyn what she was doing before she came to my closet, and she said she was at work doing hair. I asked her what did she mean by 'doing hair'? And she told me that she was a *beautician* (that means cutting and styling people's hair) and she looked kind of embarrassed when she mentioned hair because she saw that I didn't have any, and then she asked me if I was sick. I told her that I wasn't sick; all my hair had just fallen out after a while. My hair falling out was the first part of me changing.

She really didn't know what that meant, and I could see she was getting kind of nervous and she was thinking things like, she would never get out of this closet with this little bald kid and back to her job. So I told her to just close her eyes, and picture in her mind what she was doing the minute before she came to my closet, and she did. And then she was gone too.

So, sometimes I have funny dreams. Not funny in a good way, funny like when someone says, "Ewe. Something smells funny in here." Or, "That dog with the foam on his mouth is acting funny." It's pretty much the same one over and over again. I'm not in my closet anymore. I am in this big wide open field, and the stars are out and shining so bright, and the night is so clear that you feel like you can reach up and touch one of them. And then I get to hearing this buzzing in my ears and all throughout my head, and then one of those stars up in the sky gets really bright like the sun (which is also a star but not dead like the rest of them) and the light from that star comes down and washes over me, kind of like water from a hose, except this is light now, and I feel my feet leaving the ground and then I am up in the air, and I know I should be scared being up in the air like that, but I'm not for some reason, and then I look around and I can see the whole field I was in, and all the trees around the field, and the roads leading to the field and then I see the house and Daddy's old rattling truck and I can hear voices too, but I don't know what they are saying because they sound very far away, and then I wake up in the dark in my closet.

Is that funny or what?

So, sometimes I hear Mommy and Daddy yelling at each other and what they are yelling about is usually me because I hear my name being yelled a lot. Mommy says that Daddy shouldn't be treating me like he is because it isn't what a good Christian would do to another human being and their son on top of that. And Daddy says that I

am not his son, and as far as being a human being, he says, there is no evidence that I am one of those either, so what does it matter? Mommy asks him how he can say things like that and how he can be so cruel and he says, "Just look at the little freak." And he means me, and that's when he calls her all sorts of names that I don't want to mention. And then the crying starts, and I know that the crying only makes Daddy madder because he tells her to "Shut Up!!" real loud, and I know that if she doesn't stop crying soon that he is going to use his hands on her, and I don't want that, so I close my eyes and think of all the times she has come in my closet with dessert, and sat with me and hugged me and kissed me and sung to me, and all the good feelings it gave me, and I send those pictures in my head to her head and that usually makes her feel better and she usually stops crying.

Except this one time, I sent pictures of my dream to her head by accident, and she started screaming real loud and the crying came on even harder. So the next time I had to try really hard to just send the good feelings to her. But it's funny, the dream always gives me good feelings, but not her, maybe she is scared of being so high in the air like that?

So, remember me telling you that I like the books with the pictures (*illustrations*) that Malcolm reads to me the best? Well here is why I like them the best. The pictures are all of something other than a closet, which I already know what that looks like, so all I have to do when I am in my closet is picture the places that are pictured in the books and then I can go there.

There is this one book named *Where the Wild Things Are*, that has these great pictures of jungles with all sorts of animals and stuff, and sometimes I go there. You think a kid would be scared to be all alone in a jungle with animals and other things, but you would be wrong. It is one of the best places to be. The dirt of the jungle feels great on my bare feet and the sounds that those animals that live in that jungle make is also great.

Or there is this other book named *The Polar Express* and that takes place on a train and in the North Pole, and boy the cold air in the North Pole is just about the best air there is. Not at all like the air in my closet that smells like old clothes and shoes. And on the train they give you all sorts of food and hot chocolate whenever you want, it's like having dessert before dinner, or no dinner at all. I have to be careful not to be gone too long or else Malcolm or Mommy, or even worse, Daddy, would get home and look in my closet and not see me there and then they would be scared, or if it's Daddy, mad.

I really don't know why Daddy is mad so much all the time and why he has put me in my closet. I ask Mommy sometimes if he is mad because of something I did, and she always tells me that it is not because of me. Sometimes, she says, that people are just mad for no reason. But I think I know why Daddy is mad all the time.

Before I changed, or maybe it was while I was changing, Daddy and me were driving to town to pick up something for his old rattling truck, and we were driving along and I was looking out the window and he says to me, "How come you're always so quiet, Kip?" and I say to him, "I don't know." And he says "What are you thinking?" and I say, "What was Grandpa like?" And he asks me why I want to know about him for. I say, "I don't know," again and then I say, "You were thinking about him, weren't you? You were thinking about that time in the field."

And he stops the truck real hard and the old breaks squeal on the road and I am

thrown forward in the seat, but the seatbelt is on so I am okay, and he turns to me real mad and asks how I know about that. And I say "I don't know" again, and he grabs my shirt and asks me who told me? And then I say no one told me anything. I only saw little pieces of pictures, like the field, and the birds flying in the sky, which is really blue, and the sun, which is out and shining down on him when he is a little kid, and Grandpa, whose pants are down and his penis is out. And then he slaps me hard across the face and tells me real loud, "Shut up!!" And then I start to cry and he looks away and I know he is trying hard not to cry too. And then he gets real quiet and looks at me for a long time and then we turn around and never get to the store for the piece to his old rattling truck. And when we got back to the house he used his hands on me until I could barely walk, and then he put me in my closet.

So I had the funny dream again, and it was the same one, except this time it was different. I was in the field like always, but this time Malcolm and Mommy were there with me, and both of them were crying and Mommy kisses me and tells me she loves me and tells me to "be good" and then Malcolm hugs and kisses me and gives me the book named *Where The Wild Things Are*. And then I am up in the sky again, moving towards that really bright star, and I am crying too because I know I am never going to see Mommy or Malcolm or Daddy ever again.

And when I wake up I see that the door to my closet is open, and someone is standing in the middle of the doorway and when my eyes get used to the light and being awake I see that it's Daddy standing there in the doorway. He's just standing there and not saying anything to me. The key to my closet is dangling from his finger, but he's not swinging it around like he sometimes does and I can hear his breathing which sounds low and funny.

With the light behind him and no light here in my closet I can't see his face and I say, "Daddy?" and he still doesn't say anything, he just keeps standing there and breathing. And then he backs up without saying anything and closes my door and locks it and I am alone in the dark again.

So Daddy didn't come home from work today at the normal time. He didn't come home for dinner tonight either and I could tell Mommy was worried, and by the time it was time for bed I knew she was really worried. I was also kind of worried too, but I was also tired, really tired, so I fell asleep and I don't know anything until I hear screaming and crying out in the living room later on.

The screaming is from Daddy who is yelling at Mommy and also Malcolm and the crying is from Mommy. Daddy is screaming and saying things like, "I can't live like this anymore!" And Mommy is crying and telling him he is drunk and telling him he should go to bed. And her telling him that he should go to bed just makes him madder so he hits her across her face making her fall to the ground. He hits her so hard I could hear the slap even in my closet. And then Malcolm screams, "Bastard!" and tries to grab his arm because he is going to hit her again, but he just tosses Malcolm away on to a table and I hear a lamp breaking and Malcolm hitting the floor. Then it is quiet for a while and I hear footsteps walking away to another part of the house and then I hear Mommy scream, "No!"

And then the door to my closet opens and Daddy is standing there with his shotgun and I can really smell the liquor on him now. I am too scared to do anything because I know he is going to shoot me because I can already see in his head where he is going

to bury me in the woods. He points the shotgun at me and I grab the book *Where The Wild Things Are* and put it up in front of my face to block the bullet, and I close my eyes and wait to get shot.

But then I hear a sound like a hammer hitting a watermelon and then something hitting the floor, and I open my eyes and see Daddy laying on the floor moaning and Malcolm standing over him with a big gold trophy with a football player on top of it. Malcolm has his mouth hanging open like he can't believe what he just did, hitting Daddy and all.

And then Mommy pushes past him and steps over Daddy, who is still moaning, and picks me up and takes me out of my closet. She grabs Malcolm by the arm and pulls him toward the door and then we go out of the house and into the night air, which smells wonderful, and all the crickets and things are making noise in the trees around us. And the sky is so clear and all the stars are out.

Mommy takes me and Malcolm and we go over to her old yellow car, but just as we are about to get in the car she says real loud, "Shit!" and I know why she says that because she doesn't have her keys to her car, because she is in her night clothes and the keys to her car are in her purse, which is in her bedroom, in the house.

And then we see Daddy walk out of the house with the shotgun in one hand and the other hand holding his head where Malcolm hit him with the trophy. And Mommy and Malcolm scream at the same time and Daddy gets this real mad look on his face and starts walking over to us. And I close my eyes and say real loud in my head, "*Fall down!*" And I hear Daddy fall down on the ground, and I open my eyes and see him on the ground and blood is all over the front of his face and coming out of his nose, and that's when Mommy takes me and Malcolm and we run off down the driveway toward the main road.

I can tell Mommy doesn't know what to do when we reach the main road because we are way out of the way and not many cars come down this road, especially at night. And that's when I send the pictures of my dream into her head and I know this is a bad thing to do because the last time I did that she started to scream and cry, but this time when I do it she just closes her eyes and I can see little drops of tears coming out and then she sort of shakes her head no at me. And that's when Malcolm screams and we turn around and see Daddy stumbling down the driveway toward us, and that's when she makes up her mind, and we run off the main road and into the woods that lead to the field.

The moon is out really big and bright, so we can make our way easily through the woods. Mommy and Malcolm are both in their night clothes and they both have no shoes or socks on, and as we run through the woods I wonder how they can stand the sticks and rocks and pine needles sticking into their bare feet. But pretty soon we are through the woods and into the field and at least the field is a little softer on their feet.

Mommy lays me down in the long grass and it is cold on my bald head, but it is also a great feeling because I don't feel this kind of thing in my closet. And I look up into the sky and I see all the stars and they are just as bright and clear as they were in my dream, and then I think that maybe this is a dream because everything seems the same as when I dreamed it, except for the feeling of the wet grass on my head. That's new.

I start to laugh because the wet grass kind of tickles my head, but Mommy tells me to be quiet because she and Malcolm are both being quiet because we are hiding in the

long grass. And I can hear the crunching of sticks in the woods and the breaking of branches and I know Daddy is on his way to us in the field.

And then I hear the buzzing sound in my head and I can feel it all over my body too. And I know Mommy and Malcolm feel it too because they both look at me and I can see that their hair is floating over their heads like they were underwater. And then I look up into the sky and I see the stars and they start to move.

All the stars I see start to come together and swirl around and make sort of a tunnel in the middle of the sky. And then this light shoots out of the tunnel and the light is so bright that it makes the field at night seem as if it is in the middle of the day. And the light is really warm on my face and my arms and my bare feet, and it is the best feeling I have ever had, way better than in my dreams.

Malcolm and Mommy are still staring at the stars in the sky and I can see their mouths are open because a sky doesn't do this that often and it is really something to see. And I can see at the edge of the field that Daddy is also staring at the sky with his mouth open, and the shotgun is on the ground at his feet.

I look at Mommy and say to her that this is my dream, and she is smiling, but also crying a little too, and I can see in her mind that she doesn't want to let me go, but also I can see that she thinks she has to because I will be better off wherever I am going, instead of sitting in a closet, and she says, "I know, honey." And then she kisses me and hugs me and tells me she loves me (even though I know it), and then she tells me to be good.

Malcolm gives me the book named *Where The Wild Things Are* and this surprises me because I thought I was holding the book in my hands, and then he says to me, "Don't forget about me, Kip, okay?" Malcolm is my brother and I love him, how could I ever forget about him? And I say okay, even though I think this a pretty dumb thing to say, but I say it anyway because he is my older brother and I am supposed to listen to what he says. And then he kisses me and he doesn't have to say he loves me because I already know he does because of all the times he came into my old closet and read to me even though he didn't have to.

And then I am up in the air and I can see the field and I can see Mommy and Malcolm and Daddy, way back near the trees, and I wave good bye to them. And then I can see the house where my old closet was and I can see the old rattling truck and then I look up into the light, even though I know you're not supposed to do this because you could hurt your eyes, but my eyes don't hurt. And then I hear the voices again, but I don't hear them with my ears I hear them with my brain. And this time I know what they are saying They are saying welcome home.