

Being Afraid

“And when I did remember,” Grandfather went on, “I had the most awful time making myself wriggle out from under the bed and go looking for my father or my mother to ask them to go out and find Melvin for me.”

“Grandfather!”

“I told you I was afraid. This is a true story you’re hearing so I have to tell the truth.”

“Of course,” said Thomas, admiring his grandfather for telling a truth like that. “Did you find them?”

“I did not. They had gone out someplace for an hour or so, but I’d forgotten. Thomas, fear does strange things to people ... makes them forget everything but how afraid they are. You wouldn’t know about that, of course.”

Thomas stroked his cat and said nothing.

“In any case,” Grandfather went on, “there I was alone and afraid in the kitchen, and there was my poor little dog alone and afraid in the storm.”

“What did you do?” Thomas demanded. “You didn’t leave him out there, did you, Grandfather?”

“Thomas – I put on my raincoat and opened the kitchen door and stepped out on the back porch just as a flash of lightning shook the whole sky and a clap of thunder barreled down and a huge man appeared out of the darkness, holding Melvin in his arms! That man was seven feet tall and had a face like a crack in the ice.”

“Grandfather! You said you were telling me a true story.”

“It’s true, because that’s how he looked to me. He stood there, scowling at me, and said, ‘Son, is this your dog?’ And I nodded, because I was too scared to speak. ‘If you don’t take better care of him, you shouldn’t have him at all,’ said the terrible man. He pushed Melvin at me and stormed off into the dark.”