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Tales Uncommonly Told



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Fall

Chapter 1

Little Ben sat on the carpeted floor of the living room and played with his toy trucks. It was a Saturday morning (at least, it felt like a Saturday); and with no preschool classes over the weekend to ruin his fun, he laughed happily as he smashed his dumper truck into the side of his fire engine.

This, of course, infuriated the fire engine; and so, he grabbed it, carried it to the other end of the room, and shoved it in the direction of the stationary dumper. The two toy trucks collided, and as the dumper was knocked on its side, the fire engine – still rolling forward – smashed into the expensive oak cabinet by the French windows.

In an instant, a loud, crashing sound reverberated through the room – caused by the disturbed glass and porcelain knick-knacks in the cabinet. Ben quickly glanced at the living room door, nervously expecting Natalia to barge into the room at any moment – after which, she would invariably scold him and then confiscate his trucks. He knew it would be unfair on him; after all, the intensity of the impact had been exaggerated by the delicate knick-knacks. However, knowing Natalia, even though nothing had been broken, he still expected to be punished.

Natalia, Ben's nanny, was his least favorite person in the whole world – always mean, always grumpy, and always threatening to take his toys away. Until about six months ago, her presence in the house had made little difference to Ben; for, while it was true that she had been hired to look after him, his mother had been very hands-on in her approach to parenting – and had not wished to hand over complete responsibility for Ben's care to someone she had hired from a recruitment agency.

As a result, for most of Ben's childhood, Natalia's responsibilities had mainly revolved around cooking his meals and cleaning up after him; that, and occasionally carrying trays of snacks to the scary guards stationed at the front gate of their home.

Now, however, Ben was four years old, and his mother had returned to work. And what that meant was that now, she left the house at the same time as his father every morning, and usually returned home very late at night – sometimes, even after dinner time.

Consequently, Natalia's responsibilities had grown – to the point that now, most of Ben's average day was spent under the watchful eye of his nanny; and, knowing what a strict disciplinarian she was, Ben knew he needed to toe the line at all times...

...and smashing his fire engine into the cabinet could hardly be called toeing the line.

Fall

Even at his tender age, Ben understood this unfortunate truth about his life quite well; and so, he had reconciled himself to his fate...

...that, because of the stupid knick-knacks that had made all that racket, Natalia would probably take his toys away and would not return them any sooner than Sunday morning.

He hated her so much...so much.

However, Natalia did not come. And instead of hearing her heavy footsteps thundering towards the living room, Ben heard a soft panting coming from behind the door; a familiar, reassuring panting, accompanied by a whimper of frustration at being stuck outside.

Recognizing the sound, Ben ran to the door and opened it.

In a flash (and with much tail wagging), Figo – the family’s basset hound – trotted into the living room.

Ben wrapped his arms around the dog and gave him a kiss on the top of his head; and Figo reciprocated by jerking his head towards the young boy’s face and sneaking a lick on his cheek. Ben then dropped to his knees and scratched Figo behind his ears, while the dog nuzzled his snout against Ben’s chest.

“You got to go, boy. Natawia’ll scweam at you,” Ben whispered worriedly to the dog. Figo was not allowed in

the living room. Figo, however, seemed to have forgotten all his training as he raised his snout and now nuzzled it against Ben's neck.

"No, boy. You got to go...before Natawia sees you."

At this, almost as if he understood little Ben's warnings, Figo turned around and trotted back to the living room door. Then, the dog stopped, turned his head around, and – looking at Ben – started whimpering.

"Shh boy! She'll hear you. You got to go. You got to go."

Figo, though, did not move as he continued to stare and whimper at Ben.

And so, Ben – not wanting his pet to get into trouble – walked up to Figo, put his hand on his head, and said,

"Okay, boy. I'll go with you."

At this, Figo happily trotted forward, with little Ben following him.

The pair made their way out of the living room, then across the dining room – walking past the long dining table under the grand crystal chandelier and dodging the cutlery cabinets – and then into the corridor that led to the back rooms of the house...

...and as they moved forward – Figo leading the way – Ben could not help but feel that the house seemed somehow, empty...

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