

Voices in the Night

Once upon a time, there was a ten-year-old boy named Mike who considered himself the biggest collector of stuffed animals. He had stuffed animals of all shapes, sizes and colors. He always said he never had a favorite, but secretly his favorite was a panda named Mr. P. who he liked to think was an undercover spy. Mr. P. was also the chief of all Mike's stuffed animals.

Some of his other favorite stuffed animals were Harry the bear, who came from a fancy store in England. Mike always thought Harry was very smart and talked in a British accent. Mike also had a husky named Slushie who was the mascot of his favorite football team. He was the tough guy who also had a soft side (he was always getting into trouble and had to fight through the washing machine). Mike knew it was silly but he thought all of his stuffed animals were real (especially Mr. P.).

One thing Mike loved to do every night before bed was read all his stuffed animals a bedtime story. There was a rocking chair in his room where his mom used to read to him. He would pick one stuffed animal to sit with every night, and he would use their voices when reading the stories. Some of his favorite authors were Roald Dahl and J.K. Rowling, and he also liked the *I Survived* series. On the night before his 11th birthday he started reading *The Witches* in Mr. P.'s deep voice. It started getting a little scary, so he decided to put it down and go to sleep. He needed to rest up for tomorrow anyway. His parents said they were getting him something big for his birthday present, and he really hoped it was a real husky puppy!

On the morning of Mike's birthday, he went downstairs for his favorite breakfast (french toast) and he saw a small, rectangular present on the table. He was confused because he was expecting a big present, but then he figured his parents were being sneaky and wrapped up a dog bone as a hint. After he ate his parents told him he could open the gift. He opened it up and was shocked to discover it was his own iPhone! "Now that you are 11, we thought that you were responsible enough to have your own phone," his mom said. Mike couldn't wait to text all his friends about his new phone and download this game that he saw all his friends playing called Baseball Nine. He quickly forgot all about the puppy!

That night, at bedtime, he was so busy texting his friends on the phone about his awesome birthday that he forgot to read to his stuffed animals. He actually fell asleep with the phone in his hand! The next night, his game in Baseball Nine went into extra innings, so he also didn't have time to read. He promised his animals that he would make time to read tomorrow, but the next night, his friends wanted to Facetime and pull an all-nighter so it didn't happen.

Later, he woke up in the middle of the night and the room seemed darker than usual. He noticed his door was shut, which was strange because he always told his mom to leave it open. He noticed a small flashlight laying on the floor, flickering, which he didn't remember using. Then he heard a deep voice whispering, "Down with children! Do them in! Boil their bones and fry their

skin!" It sounded like the voice was right in his room! He quickly sat up. He could barely see anything in the dark, but there definitely wasn't anyone in his room. He was super creeped out. He nervously waited for more voices but he didn't hear anything else. He decided he must be having a nightmare. He buried his head under the pillow and played some music on his phone until he went back into a deep sleep.

The next day, he told his mom about the creepy voice and she said "You're just not getting enough sleep because you're using the phone too much. We told you, you have to show us you can use it responsibly or we will have to take it away." He knew his mom was right, but that night Mr. Beast was posting a new YouTube video and he had to see it before all of his friends. So he decided he could use the phone for one more night and then take a break. The video was really long and he was too tired to read again.

Later that night he was woken again by whispers. He heard a voice saying, "I was ripped from my body, I was less spirit, less than the meanest ghost..." The voice sounded British, like Harry Potter! Were there ghosts haunting him? He sat up and thought he saw a small shadow move quickly across his wall. Mike wanted to turn on the light, but he was too scared to get out of bed so he grabbed his phone to turn on the flashlight. He noticed there was an alarm set on the phone for 3:00 a.m., which was 5 minutes ago. Mike never set any alarms on his phone. This was getting really scary. He decided to play a few more YouTube videos on his phone to take his mind off of whatever was in his room, and eventually he got back to sleep. After he fell asleep Mike didn't hear it but there was a little British voice that said, "That was a close one."

The next morning, he wanted to tell his mom what he saw and heard but he didn't want to lose his phone. That night he went to bed as soon as possible in hopes that he wouldn't hear the voices. He didn't eat dessert, read or even use his phone past 9:00 pm. He even left his phone downstairs so he wasn't tempted to use it at night. But even after all that, he was still woken up by noises in his room. This time he heard growling, like a wild animal. Then the growly voice said, "Its claw tears through my pants and into the flesh of my leg. White hot pain explodes at the gash!" Mike remembered that line so vividly like he just heard it. Mike whispered into the darkness of his room, "I know, that must have been from one of the TV shows my brother was watching." Then he wondered if all the nights Mike had heard the voices it was his brother pranking him. He was tired and also a little shaken up, so he decided that he would wait until the morning to confront his brother.

The next morning, Mike woke up and then went downstairs to eat breakfast. After breakfast, he waited for his brother to wake up so he could confront him but his brother never came down. So after about 30 minutes of waiting Mike went upstairs to check what his brother was doing, but when he got to his bedroom his brother wasn't there. He went into his parents' room to ask where his brother was. They said he had been sick and stayed in their room all night. So now Mike knew that it wasn't his brother.

That night, Mike decided to stay up all night to figure this out once and for all. So at bedtime, he grabbed everything he would need - his phone for a flashlight, some snacks, a can of Mountain

Dew to give him some energy, and his pocketknife (just in case.) He stayed up until midnight and he even left the lights on and music playing on the radio, but he still somehow fell asleep. Then, a few hours later, he woke up to a pitch black and silent room. The only light was his phone screen which was open to the notes app. He picked it up and saw a message, "You've forgotten us, but we've been with you all along." Ghosts are haunting me! he thought. He almost called for his parents but then he saw a small shadow moving very slowly across his floor. He went to grab Mr. P. to comfort him but he wasn't on his bed. The shadow was moving towards the rocking chair. He closed his eyes tight and said "This is only a dream, this is only a dream, this is only a dream." He squinted his eyes open just enough to find his phone and turn on the flashlight. When he did, he pointed it at the rocking chair and saw all of his stuffed animals around it, and Mr. P. in the chair holding a book. He noticed there was a stack of some of his favorite books next to the chair, like *I Survived*, *The Witches*, and all the Harry Potter books. How long had those been there? Then it all hit him. Ever since he got the phone, he had stopped reading to his stuffed animals, which used to be his favorite thing. He didn't realize his animals were actually listening- he always suspected they could really understand him but now he knew it! He went over to the chair and said, "I'm sorry guys, I should have understood that you are more important than a new phone. I won't ever forget to read to you again." And he picked up Mr. P. and gave him a big hug, and sat down in the chair to read. And the next night, he finally slept peacefully!

THE END

This story includes quotes from *The Witches* by Roald Dahl, *I Survived Attack of the Grizzlies 1967* by Lauren Tarshis, and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* by J. K. Rowling.