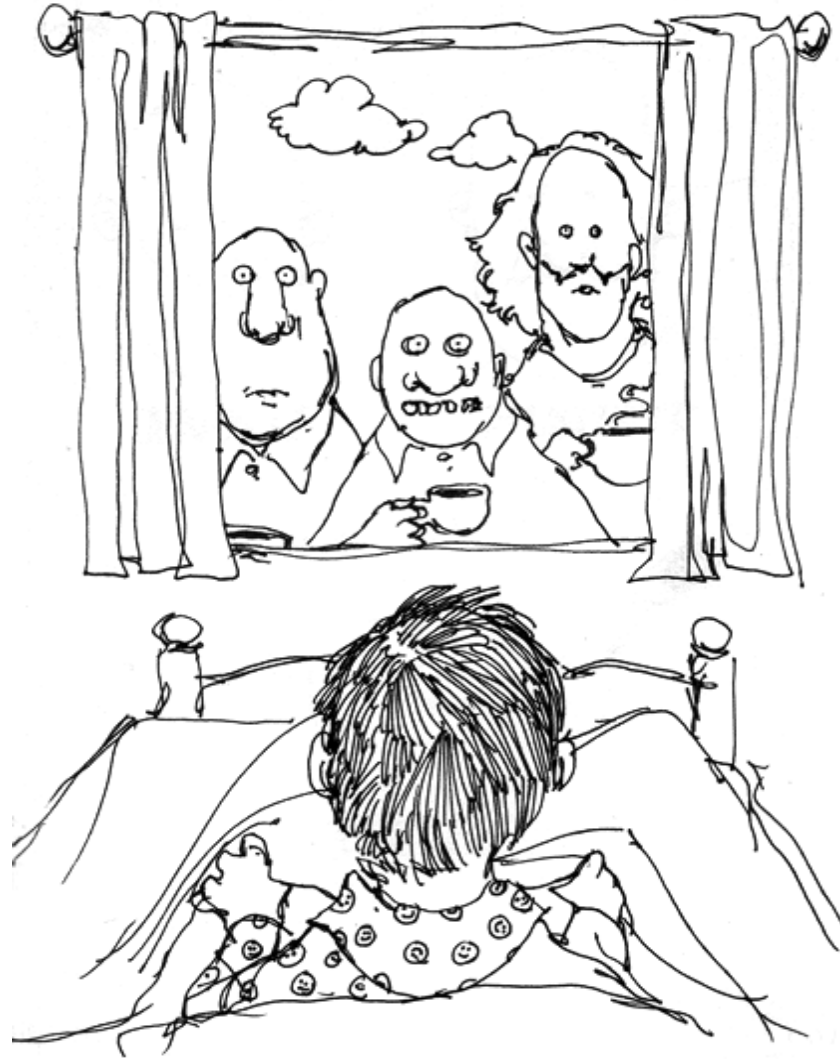


Large Round Eyes

- Various Tales of Innocence -



by Zack Schuster

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Large Round Eyes

- Pickup Truck -

I was really looking forward to going to the circus that morning. Mom and Dad couldn't take me, so they got Grandpa to drive me there instead. The sky was thin and blue and full of clouds when the both of us jumped into his old pickup. We drove for a few minutes when he said he needed to stop into a place to say hello to some friends. The place had a big neon sign that read "O'Mally's". He stopped me before I could get out of the truck.

"You'll have to wait inside the truck for me, you can't go inside here."

I didn't bother to ask why. Grandpa was just saying hi. He'd be out in a few minutes anyways, so no big deal. I rocked my feet back and forth and hummed as I stare out the front windshield, up at the big blue sky. Slowly it got thick, then it got yellow, and the clouds gradually disappeared. I heard the door open a bunch, but every time I looked I was disappointed because it wasn't Grandpa. A nice-looking lady in shorts and a t-shirt brought me out a can of pop and a bag of chips once. She said it was from Grandpa.

"How are you doing, sweetie?" She smiled. Her front teeth were stained

yellow and had purple blotches.

"I'm ok," I mumbled.

I asked her to open the pop for me since I wasn't good at it yet. She did and she left and I guzzled down the pop before I started in on the chips, which turned out to be really salty and made me thirsty. I kinda wished she would bring me out another pop, but she never did. I stayed thirsty until I fell asleep. When I woke up the sky had turned black and the stars had come out. I rubbed my eyes and heard the door open and I looked back to see Grandpa stumbling out. He slowly made his way over to the truck, then suddenly bent over to grab something and coughed several times. He stood back up, wiped something off his chin and got inside. He looked over at me and smiled and his eyes were red and when he breathed he smelled like that liquid Mom had poured on my knee when I scraped it, only a lot warmer. It hurt a lot when she poured it on me.

I didn't say anything to him when he drove me home. I was kinda sad. He parked outside the house and walked me to the doorway, only he leaned on me a lot until we got there, which hurt my shoulder. He knocked on the door and Mom smiled when she opened it and stopped smiling as soon as she saw Grandpa. She didn't ask him how the circus went, which was kinda odd since she knew we were going there and didn't know about the stop Grandpa made. She shut the door on Grandpa and took me upstairs and tucked me in and said she'd be back in a moment. While I waited for her to come back I thought about

Grandpa's eyes and how different they looked, how lower, like when the sun came down and hit the ground and kept going until I couldn't see it anymore.

- Back Alley -

Thomas and I ran into the back alley with it in our pockets. He peaked out, breathing heavily, then tapped my shoulder and kept running. I didn't stay to see the shop owner still chasing us. The alley took a bunch of sharp turns and I didn't even know where we were anymore, I was just running and trying to hold onto it and keep up with Thomas.

After a few really nasty turns we got separated. I got really scared. I felt my heart thumping up in my ears and I heard myself breathing so loud I wouldn't hear the shopkeeper creeping up on me. I wouldn't know to run when he finally caught me,

which he did, eventually, of course. Thomas was nowhere, enjoying it while I sat in a corner as my parents apologized to the shopkeeper and berated me for stealing. But I was hungry, and it was so tasty.

I think what bothered them most wasn't that I stole, but that I was caught. Thomas' parents didn't say much when they found out. They just mumbled something about not doing it again and kept watching their reruns.

- Near the Garden -

I went inside to get a can of pop and when I went back outside my cousins were sitting next to each other under the two trees by the garden. One of my cousins was playing his gameboy while my other cousin tussled her hair and stared dreamily into the branches above.

I sat down against the tree opposite them. The trees had really wide branches and lots of leaves which swayed with the light breeze. They were the kind of trees that were perfect for hammocks.

“I wonder why they haven't put a hammock out here,” I said. Gameboy just shrugged and Hair just continued to tussle and stare.

I looked over at the garden a little ways away where my aunt was growing tomatoes. She gave one to me earlier and it was sweet and delicious, not what I expected from a tomato. She told me not to pick any from the garden, but she didn't tell me why. I sat under the trees for awhile waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened. Gameboy continued to play and Hair continued to tussle and stare. I got up and walked over to the garden, took a deep breath, and

picked a tomato. I took a bite and spit it out right away. It was sour and tasted horrible. I heard a faint bit of laughter and I looked over and saw my aunt rocking on the porch, smiling. She adjusted her shawl and looked back towards whatever she was looking at before. She told me later that the tomato wasn't ripe yet, which is why it tasted so bad. I just shrugged, rubbed my hand through my hair, and stared at the ground. My cousins had already gone upstairs, waiting for me to walk downtrodden up the stairway to them. I didn't.

bills when I was around. Not for a long time.

- Crashing Waves -

When I was seven my parents took me to the ocean. We swam together on the low embankment, about four feet deep, chest-high to me. I grabbed Dad's hand and he swung me around in the water and smiled. I smiled too. The waves were small and rocked me slightly. It was kind of fun at first.

Eventually my parents got bored and stopped pretending to swim, just stood there talking about where we'd go after I got done swimming. They stopped looking at me so I swam out further. The small waves had started getting annoying; I would just get comfortable wading in a spot and the waves would rock me out of it. It was annoying.

The waves were getting bigger. It was fun to swim through them, like I was pushing back against a throng of enemies beating on the door while the scientist tried to defuse the bomb. I closed my eyes and pushed in tune with the waves. I was doing my part to save the world. Well, at least my part of the world.

As I swam further the waves got much bigger and much harder to resist. I was getting tired and the door was collapsing.

"Just a few more minutes!" the scientist called out.

I kept pushing, kept wading out further. The hero never faltered until the job was done. The waves grew enormous. The door was almost destroyed. Enemies were starting to pour through. I couldn't do anything. They knocked me back and rushed towards the scientist.

"Almost done," he was about to say.

I blacked out for a moment and when I woke up I had a mouthful of seawater and I was a handful of yards away from my parents. They smiled at me and laughed and

Dad took my hand and we went to get some ice cream. I totally wanted to swim here again.

- Dripping Ice Cream -

My parents were smiling at me as they held my hand and took me to get ice cream. We stood in line at the vendor, a nice guy in a carnival suit underneath an umbrella over a tin-looking wheeled ice cream carrier machine. It was hot out, and I was sweating.

“What kind would you like?” He asked.

“Vanilla!” I said.

“We’ll take three vanilla,” Dad told the vendor.

“Cones, right?”

“Yeah, cones.”

What else would we order?

Dad handed me my cone and we walked back to the truck.

“Make sure not to spill any on the upholstery, alright?” he told me as we sat inside. I nodded and he started up the truck and pulled out. Him and Mom started talking about boring stuff that I tuned out right away as I licked at my

cone and looked outside. I had my window open and it was still hot, even though the A/C was on.

The cone started dripping. I kept licking at it to keep it in place, but the drops slid down my fingers and fell onto the seat, leaving bright white little stains. I rubbed at them and they looked gone, but a few minutes later they dried white and there was nothing I could do.

The truck stopped, and when we got out I was worried Dad would yell at me for staining the seat, but when he opened my door all he said was that I'd left my window open.

- Coke -

The first time my dad gave me some Coke I knew I was hooked. I loved that rush I got from it and how bubbly it made me feel. I begged him for some Coke whenever I could. Some times he would give me some, while other times he just got really irritated. It was kinda scary going up to ask him, but kinda exciting too.

Then one day my dad had a heart-attack from his Coke. Mom and I found him lying in the living room, staring blankly at the ceiling, Coke all over his face. I was terrified.

I still wanted Coke.

- Christmas -

It was night everywhere in the household as everyone slept. I lay huddled in my blanket as the fire crackled, tiny sparks flittering out from the fire's glow and into the room's darkness, shining intensely for a moment before wisping away, disappearing into the indoor night. I didn't sleep. I was thinking about all the nice presents everyone had gotten, of the rocking chair for Aunt Sue and the new tires for Grandpa and the plates for Mother and the shaving kit for Father. I thought of how everyone was so eager to open their presents, and how they all looked so happy to get what they had. I thought of how I had gotten the nicest present of all.

The fire hummed lower. I sat up and grabbed more of the wrapping paper with the poker and stoked the fire with it. It sparked up a little before settling back to a crackle. I let out a cold breath as I huddled back inside my blanket. I rubbed my feet against the low-hanging branches on the Christmas tree. Fuzzy. The teddy bear that little Joanna had gotten, she named him Fuzzy and he was her best friend. She set him in the corner and opened her other presents and he

watched her the whole night, supporting her like a good friend, remaining wordless as she cried in joy at every new present, every “best ever present” she had ever gotten. The stitched smile on his face grew wider, it seemed, or maybe he was just looking happy like everyone else. The bestest friend ever would always look happy, wouldn't he?

I heard Aunt Sue snoring upstairs. How late was it? Sooner or later Joanna's muffled footsteps would lead her to Mother and Father's room, where she'd wake them up for a glass of water she wouldn't drink. Fuzzy would be in her hands, maybe. Or maybe it would be Fluffy, or Puffy, or Bear. She never made up her mind. No worries. He'd always look happy for her.

Mother was washing the plates Father had gotten her, telling Aunt Sue how wonderful they were and how the plates had a wonderful sheen and how it'd be so nice to eat off the new plates. Plates this, plates that. Plates were really very nice to get as a Christmas present. Gregory from two doors down got a set of hot plates for Christmas last year. He smiled when he got them. Then he burned part of the carpet. I didn't look nice at all. He didn't smile when they found out.

Aunt Sue had to sew a tear in Fluffy while Grandpa and Father put the new tires on the car. They were nice seventeen-inch rims, croned, though who knows why someone would put a crone on a tire. Like, imagine the wicked witch of the west spinning around and around your tires as you drove down the road.

Would the west witch get turned around if you drove east? Would she get confused if you turned north?

But I had the best gift of all. Everyone was so amazed when I opened it; none of them smiled. Even Fuzzy seemed to frown. I held it in my hands; it was so nice. I felt like throwing it into the fire. In a second it would be ashes and no one would know. But I didn't.

I wonder why Mother got Father the shaving kit. He never shaved, ever. I don't think he even owns a razor. Hmm, maybe that was why.

The fire finally started to die. I yawned and went to sleep. I was hidden in the dark.

- Carnival, Part 1 -

Dad dropped me off at Grandmother's house then drove away. He left me with my bag of toys, which was cool, but Mom was out of town and he said he needed the house to himself, so he drove me out to Grandma's house over in the next state. He said he'd be back in a couple weeks.

Grandma gave me a nice big hug when I walked inside. She looked kinda sad but she said she wasn't. She said she was really happy to see me. She asked me how I was doing and sat me down at her little table in the kitchen and cooked me a grilled cheese sandwich, my favorite meal.

While the stove crackled I stared out the window in the living room. I half-expected Dad to be back soon. Grandma's apartment was small and it smelled like lotion. The kitchen was barely big enough for me to get past her and get a soda from the fridge and she only had one bedroom, so she said I could either pull out the bed in the couch or sleep in her bed with her. I said I wanted to sleep on the couch like Dad did sometimes back at home. Grandma frowned a bit as I said that, flipping the sandwich over. She had let it blacken a bit too much, I think.

After I ate my sandwich Grandma told me we'd go to the carnival tomorrow. It was the last day it was going to be open and she thought we'd have a good time. I nodded. I'd never been to the carnival before. Dad took me to the park once, but it was windy and he and Mom were busy talking while I rode a swing by myself. They didn't look happy. I felt bad for making them come to the park while it was so windy. I feel bad for having to make Grandma cook me a sandwich and pull out the bed when she could have had the house all to herself like Dad. But maybe going to the carnival tomorrow would make her happier.

- Carnival, Part 2 -

When I woke up next morning Grandma was coughing in bed.

“I'm sorry dear, I don't think I'll be well enough to take you to the carnival today.” She looked a little bit pale, I guess, though the lights were off so I didn't really know. I told her it was fine and I went back out to the living room and flopped onto the pullout bed. I pulled out my special edition He-Man figurine with the glow-in-the-dark sword and I had him fight Optimus Prime for the right to save the world.

“Skeletor was a much bigger threat than Megatron!” He-Man said.
“Megatron was just a dumb robot!”

“Hey,” Optimus Prime said. “I'm a robot!”

“Yeah, but you're not dumb!” He-Man said.

“Oh, ok, that's cool then.” Then the two of them fought each other. They were pretty much neck-in-neck until I closed the curtains and He-Man's sword started glowing, then he just mopped the carpet with Optimus.

“Oh man you were right, you're a much cooler dude than I am. Go save the world He-Man!”

“Thanks Optimus Prime!” Then I tossed Optimus Prime away and I pulled out the giant Tyrannosaurus Rex stuffed doll that was hiding beneath the bed.

“Rooooooar!” T-Rex shouted out. He charged He-Man but He-Man's sword was still glowing so he beat down T-Rex in one hit. But then I opened the shades and He-Man's sword stopped glowing and the light made T-Rex powerful again. T-Rex smashed up He-Man, but right before he could completely smash him to bits Optimus Prime rushed in and beat up T-Rex for He-Man. He was metal so it didn't hurt as much when T-Rex bit him.

“Thanks for saving me Optimus Prime,” He-Man said.

“Oh don't worry about, I was just in the neighborhood.”

“But you know I had it all handled, you didn't need to save me.”

“Oh of course, I just thought I'd be nice since I owed you from when you saved me that one time.”

“Oh right I forgot about that. Well I guess we're even then.”

And then they rode off into the sunset. There really wasn't much else to do then so I just snuck into the kitchen and grabbed a soda to drink.

- Carnival, Part 3 -

The next time the carnival was in town was when my Dad came by to take me to it. My uncle had moved in to the apartment with Grandma, so I had to sleep on the bed with Grandma and he took the couch. I had to do that for two days before Dad stopped by and took me to the carnival. I told him all about all the fun I had with the toys I had. He nodded a lot and smiled. He didn't say much about taking me back home, which I knew he was going to do.

We got to the carnival and there were a bunch of things to do, like ride the merry-go-round or shoot the targets with a water gun. Dad walked me around through the whole carnival and we did all sorts of really neat things. We had a blast, and I even won a few prizes, like a stuffed animal and some candy. Then we sat down for a while and ate because Dad said he was getting kinda winded. The food tasted great. After we ate he said we needed to head back because it would rain soon. He drove me back to Grandma's and we were walking inside. He still hadn't said anything about going home, which he was going to do, right? I started to wonder.

"I can't wait to go back home and see Mom," I said as we got to the front door of Grandma's apartment. Dad didn't reply. "We're going back today, right?" Still nothing. Dad opened the door and walked us inside.

"Welcome back boys," Grandma said from the kitchen. She was cooking something. Uncle was in the living room, drinking beer and watching the game. "How was the carnival?" Grandma asked.

"We had a good time," Dad said.

"I hope you didn't get too hot in your dark suit, dear. It was awfully sunny today."

"Oh, I was fine."

They talked a bit more but I didn't pay attention to them. I showed Uncle my stuffed animal that I won. He took it and looked at it and gave it back and smiled and went back to watching the game.

"Leave your Uncle be," Dad said. "He's trying to get important stuff done."

"Fuck you," Uncle said. "Get the fuck out of here."

"Don't talk to me like that in front of my son."

"Then take your son with you. Don't just abandon him on your mother's doorstep."

"Now, now, boys, settle down," Grandma called out from the living room.

"Shut up, ma," Uncle shouted. "Leave me the fuck alone, John."

I felt Grandma's hand on my shoulder as she led me away from the living room. She went with me to one of the rooms in the back of the apartment and she closed the door and played with me and my stuffed animal. They shouted for a while in the living room. A long while.

“Why are they fighting, Grandma?” I asked.

“Oh, that's just what boys do,” Grandma replied.

I heard the door slam right after the shouting ended. Grandma left to check the food and apparently Dad had left. I didn't see him again for several more weeks when he finally took me home. Mom was gone. Apparently she went to Heaven to be with Jesus, though Dad sometimes said New Jersey instead when he was on the phone.

- Snowflakes -

My sister and I were outside climbing the huge pile of snow in the field behind the apartment building. It was dark outside, and it was snowing kinda. If it was raining I would've said it was sprinkling, but you can't say it's sprinkling with snow, right? It doesn't sound right. My sister lets out a squeal and slides down one of the sides. I stay on top of the snow and she climbs back up and sits down next to me.

“My butt hit something hard but I hardly felt it through my snowsuit,” she said. I didn't reply. She pushed against my arm a few times. I just rocked back into place. I was ignoring her on purpose.

“Hey, did you hear me?” she said. She kept shoving me. Finally I said yeah, I heard her. “Well why didn't you say something then?” I don't know, I was just kinda zoning, I guess. “Well stop that.” I kinda nodded, I think. “Did you hear me? I said stop that.” Yeah, ok, I heard you. She slid back down the snowdrift and I followed her. I let out a squeal, too.

When we were climbing back up the drift, the back door to the apartment

opened and somebody walked out with a shovel. He started shoveling this way and that way down the sidewalk. After about ten minutes of this he stopped by the door and set down the shovel and took out a cigarette and lit it and started smoking. He glanced over at us.

“Hey, do you think we're still supposed to be out here?” I don't know, when were we supposed to be back inside? “I don't know.” Maybe Mom sent him outside to check on us. She might be worried about us. We should go back inside.

So we did. We slid back down one more time and we waded back through the two-foot-thick sheet of snow, tramped our way up to the front door, and I took out my keys and I put them in and opened the door and we went into see Mom.

“Hi Mom, we're done outside,” Sis said. We started taking off our snowshoes and snowsuits and stuff right in the doorway and Mom made us put them away in the closet next to the door.

“You guys sure got down fast out there,” Mom said. “Would you like some hot chocolate?”

“Yeah!” Sis said loudly. She hopped up and down excitedly as Mom smiled and got the hot chocolate packets out of the cupboard. She made two cups, one for both of us, and while it was heating up in the microwave Sis jumped through the hallways, chanting “Gonna have hot choooooocolate, gonna have hot choooooocolate, gonna have hot choooooocolate” in a sing-songy kinda voice. I

picked out a movie for us to watch: "Big Trouble in Little China". The guy on the cover - Mom said his name was Kurt Russell - he was cool. He drove a big truck and he beat up bad guys. Sis and I sat on the couch and sipped our hot chocolate while we watched the movie with Mom, who sat next to us.

"When's Dad getting home?" Sis asked midway through the movie, right around the part where Kurt Russell is sneaking into the bad guy's hideout with his sidekick. Mom shrugged. He works late a lot.

- Patio Door -

Sometimes I liked sitting next to the patio door and looking outside. I liked looking for a rabbit that bounced around in the woods just a few yards away. I never really saw it outside of a white blur every now and again, but every time the grass rustled I knew it was my rabbit, playing.

One day I thought about opening the patio door and running away into the forest with the rabbit. I reached up and grabbed the door's handle, but I just let my hand set there. I wasn't worried about where I'd go. I'd find a place to be. I was worried that the rabbit wouldn't come with me.

Mom walked by and saw me. "What are you doing, honey?" "Nothing."

I shrugged, but I didn't look back. I had a feeling the rabbit was hopping by soon. But it didn't, not for the rest of the day. I didn't stop watching until it got so dark I couldn't see outside. Then I got up and went into Mom's bedroom. She was working on something. I crawled into the bed next to her.

"What are you doing, Mom?" "Nothing."

She shrugged and didn't look away from the papers. I thought about asking her if she wanted to run away from the nothing as badly as I did, but I got confused the more I thought about the question. Who runs away from nothing?

The next day, when I saw the rabbit hopping around, I opened the patio door and shooed him back away. I'd join him another day. I felt fine inside, for now.

- Leukemia -

I'm dying and I'm okay with it. It hurts to live. Everyone's huddled around me, crying, telling me they're going to miss me, asking me with their eyes to hang on for as long as I can, but I don't want to live anymore. They said I'll be with Grandma. They said I won't hurt when I die. But they still want me to stay.

When they're gone I cry a lot, too. I feel guilty, though they say I shouldn't. I just feel really sad for making them cry, and I know they'll cry more when I finally go to be with Grandma. I don't want them to cry.

One night the nurse came in to change the sheets. I asked him what he would do if he was me. He thought about it while he made my bed.

"I think I'd..." He didn't have the words and I knew it. But I wanted him to say something. Anything. "I'd..." Please. Say something.

He didn't say anything. He sighed and tried to say he was sorry then left to cry, just like everyone else. I was too good at making people cry.

I turned on my side and squeezed my pillow and waited for the light to

come through the window and take me to a better place. It didn't. I was stuck here for another day. I was beginning to hate everything.

- Having a Sip -

The 'rents were gone so I had some of their beer. It was bitter, but good and I drank a couple until I got hazy and had to sit down next to the cupboard where Dad locked up the booze. Yeah, sure, they'd notice some of the beers were gone, but Dad would never believe I would pick a lock and steal his shit.

I thought I heard them in the driveway so I tossed the bottles in the trash can with the others and went and brushed my teeth and sat in my room doing homework like a good boy. But it was just Steve being dropped off by his mom. Good thing, too, since I forgot to lock the cupboard.

We ended up drinking too much and by the time the 'rents got home we were completely shit-faced. Now I'm grounded, and I think Dad might have moved the booze. Shit.

- Spider-Man, Part 1 -

The doorbell rang and I rushed over to open it. It was my friend, Will, and he was being dropped off by his mom.

"Hey Will, hey Mrs. M," I said.

"Hi," they both replied.

"Where's your Dad?" Mrs. M asked me.

"Oh, he's downstairs, I'll go get him. Come on Will." Will came inside and we went downstairs. Dad was sitting at his desk. "Mrs. M is upstairs Dad, she wants to talk to you."

"You just left her there?" He asked.

"Yeah, so?" I was halfway down the stairs.

"Nothing," I thought I heard him say as he stood up. Will and I got downstairs, so I fired up the Xbox so we could play his new game that he brought over.

"You excited for the movie?" He asked me.

"Yeah, it's going to be awesome." We were going to see Spider-Man later. We'd been looking forward to it all week.

"I've been looking forward to it all week," Will said.

"I've been looking forward to it all month." I replied.

"Well I've been looking forward to it all year," Will said.

"Well I've been looking forward to it all decade," I said.

"Well I've been looking forward to it since I was born," Will said.

"Well I've been looking forward to it since before I was born," I said.

"Well I've been looking forward to it since before my Dad was born," Will said.

"Well I've been looking forward to it since before..."

"Hey, would you two keep it down?" Dad shouted from upstairs.

"Yeah, ok," I shouted back.

"Man, he's grumpy," Will said.

"Yeah, I know."

"Why's he so grumpy?"

"I don't know. Oh well."

We kept playing the game for a bit. We were halfway through the third level when we heard a knock on the wall behind us.

"Time to go," Dad said.

"Yeah, ok, just one minute," I said.

"No, we need to go now."

I sighed loudly. "Fiiiiine." Will and I paused the game and rushed upstairs to go to the movie. It was going to be great.

- Spider-Man, Part 2 -

Will and I hunched down into our seats in the movie theater. Mom and Dad were sitting to my left and they were talking about something, I don't know what. Grown-up things, I guess. I pulled up my legs so that my knees were pressed against the back of the seat in front of me and started munching on my candy and Will started munching on the popcorn sitting in his lap. I reached over and grabbed a few kernels. He didn't say anything. Darn. After a few minutes the previews started. There was one for a new Lord of the Rings movie and one for a new X-Men movie.

"Those look cool," Will whispered to me.

"Yeah, way cool."

After that the movie started, and man, Spider-Man rocked.

+++

Will and I were jumping around in the parking lot after the movie ended. It was dark out now and tons of people were leaving.

"Dude, that rocked!" Will said.

"I know!"

"Check me out, I'm Spider-Man." Will ran over to the theater wall and pretended to climb up it like he really was Spider-Man. He sang out loud (really loud) "Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can..."

I joined in, belting out the tune while I jumped up the wall with him. Sadly, after a few seconds of it Dad yelled at us.

"Stop that, we need to get going," he said roughly.

"Yeah, yeah."

"Don't 'yeah, yeah' me, mister," Dad said.

"I was just trying to have some fun," I said. "Not that you would know what that is," I said too, but under my breath.

"What did you say?"

"...Nothing."

"No, you said something. Tell me what it was."

"I didn't say anything."

"Fine, if you're going to lie to me then you're grounded for a week."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"No fair!"

"Totally fair."

"Honey," Mom said, "Don't be so rough on him."

"No, he needs to learn."

I got into the truck with Will. It was a long silent ride back home. When we got back Dad shut off the Xbox – totally losing our game - and carted it upstairs. Will and I sat on the couch in the living room and watched war documentaries while we waited for Mrs. M to get there. When she did, Will rushed over to the door.

"Hey sweetie, how was the movie?" Mrs. M asked Will.

"It rocked," Will said.

"That's awesome." She looked over at Dad, who was standing in the hallway behind him. "Thanks for taking him," she said.

"No problem." He smiled. I didn't know he could.

"I'll see you later."

"See you."

They left and Dad sent me upstairs because it was "past my bedtime". Whatever. I lay back in bed and closed my eyes and pretended I was Spider-Man, shooting webs all over the place and catching bad guys. I heard a knock on my door and Dad came inside. I turned away from him.

"Do you want to tell me now what you said?"

I stayed silent.

He waited for a few moments, then said, "Alright, I was going to take away your punishment if you told me, but if you're going to be like that then you're grounded for two weeks."

Whatever. I stayed turned around and a few moments later he flipped the lights off and I heard the door close.