

## The Lil' King

"I'm gu'na tell!"

"Oh no ya' not!"

"Yes I am!" Bobby's face reddened slightly, which, strangely enough, made his freckles more prominent.

"Ya' do and I'll pound ya' face in!" Jimmy's lips stayed tight and his fists snapped up to back up the threat.

"You hit me and my dad'll knock your block off!" Bobby's voice wavered and his face went pale. He took a step backward trying not to let it show in his face.

"I ain't ascared of ya' dad. Anywayz, I'd beat ya' up worser the next time. So think 'bout that." Jimmy filled in the space between them, standing so close to him that Bobby could smell his bad breath and see his yellow teeth. Jimmy's two canines stuck out longer than the rest and spittle hung from their sharp tips to his bottom lip when he talked.

Bobby backed up more till he pressed against the playground fence. "We did som'din wrong. We gotta tell before it get worse." Even Bobby's hands were white now, and his freshly cleaned and brushed blonde hair made a sun-lit circle around his head.

Jimmy reached into his pocket and whipped out his "knife;" a fork with the center teeth missing and the tips sidewalk-sharpened into jagged points. He flipped it in his hand once and thrust it toward Bobby's face. Bobby gasped and trembled. Water began to well up in his eyes and his arms shot out, clinging to the fence on either side of him. Jimmy's pointed tongue flickered in and out of his smiling face. He twirled the "knife" slowly between his thumb and fingers, making the two blades blaze in the sunlight till a passing cloud plunged the two boys into shadow.

"I said ya' ain't say'n no'tin and I men' it." Jimmy's voice tightened into a hiss that sent the tears racing down Bobby's cheeks. Bobby's mouth went dry and his stomach twisted so tight that he had to fight back his urge to cry.

Brrrrrrinnnnng!

The recess bell startled Jimmy and he froze for a second before leaping for the sandbox. His legs kicked and his arms flailed as he tried to dig his way under the sand. Beneath the bright, hot sand there lay a cool, dark layer that was Jimmy's favorite

hiding place. He could lay there until it was clear and then "hop the fence" and spend the rest of the day doing whatever he wanted.

Bobby stood frozen also, his hands still spread wide clinging to the fence. Slowly he hung his head and quietly cried. He let loose of the fence, and wiping the tears from his face, he joined the other children in the reluctant march to class. Even the idea of fingerpainting couldn't cheer him up this time. He just walked heavily back to the room.

As soon as he was out of the gate, Bobby raced for home. He knew that Jimmy had hopped the fence and would be waiting for him somewhere. Bobby left all his books in his desk so he wouldn't have to carry them. He ran as hard as he could. Half way home he got a side-ache, but he just grabbed his side as tight as he could and ran faster. He had to tell his Mom. It was just too important not to.

"Ha ha ha haaa!"

Bobby stopped dead in his tracks. There was no mistaking that laugh. Frantically he looked for its source, but could see no one.

"Ha ha ha haaaa!"

Bobby looked up and there he was hanging upside down by his knees from a branch of an oak tree.

"Ha ha ha haaaa!"

Bobby turned and bolted for home. Home was only a block away, but he still wasn't sure he could beat Jimmy there. Bobby rounded the corner and could see, just a few houses down, the brass porch light next to his front door. He ran harder, wondering whether it was Jimmy or only the echo of his own feet that chased him across the driveway and up the porch. He dare not look back. To look back would mean certain doom.

Without the relief he expected, Bobby burst through the door and slammed it shut behind him.

"Hey, what did I tell you about slamming the door, huh?" His mother's voice rang out from the kitchen.

Bobby stood by the door listening for Jimmy's footsteps, but all he could hear was the dishwasher running. Satisfied that it was only his own footsteps he heard chasing him, he locked the door and headed for the kitchen.

"Mom?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Honesty's the best policy, right? I mean, you're always sus-posed to tell the truth no matter what, right?"

"Of course you are, why?" The fork she was rinsing glimmered in the sunlight that came through the window.

Bobby's stomach made a familiar twist, and he wrung the

front of his shirt nervously. "Jus' wanted to get it straight in my head. Thanks, Mom."

"You're welcome, sweety."

Bobby turned and walked to his room where he sat quietly till it was time for dinner, which he ate in silence.

Outside, Jimmy danced and whistled in the empty lot near the school. He waved his mighty "knife," slicing it through the air. As it grew darker, his dance became more frantic. He leapt into the air, kicking up great plumes of dust. He spun around and around until the world spun, twisted, and teetered all by itself. Then Jimmy ran down into a pit in the center of the field and waited for darkness. In this place he ruled supreme. He always won. No kid was safe if they dared step into his domain.

Jimmy stood at the bottom of the pit, opened his mouth wide, and with his greatest effort he laughed. He laughed because it was dark. He laughed because sooner or later he always won. He laughed because he was king.

"Ha ha ha haaaa!"