

## The Knock at the Door

by Stuart Mead

1 Joey Carter was thirteen. He lived with his mother. He hadn't seen his father for a long, long time – not since he was in kindergarten. He couldn't remember his father's face very well. But, at night, he could still hear him say, "Good night, Joey. I love you."

5 Joey's mother never talked about his father. There were no photographs of him anywhere in the house. Joey didn't ask about his father, but he secretly hoped his father would return one day. He felt sure that he would.

The old house they lived in was built by Joey's grandparents. They were dead, but Joey always felt that they were still there, watching over their house and everyone who lived in it. He never told his mother about that. Maybe she'd think he was silly.

10 One stormy night, there was a telephone call. Joey's mother answered it. She listened to the other person talking. She said nothing for a while. Then she said simply, "That's right." She looked worried.



15 "I have to go out," she said. She didn't even look at Joey.

She put on her coat and her old shoes and took her umbrella.

20 As she got to the front door, she turned to face Joey. "I won't be long," she said. "I can't tell you where I'm going. Don't go outside. And don't open the door if anyone tries to get in. Promise?"

Joey nodded.

She left quickly. The door closed behind her with a bang.

25 It was all so fast – the phone call, the goodbye, the promise, the closed door. Joey didn't know what to think. He just stood in the middle of the room. All around outside, the storm was a raging beast. The rain lashed against the house and the wind howled.



30 BANG! Something hard hit the roof. Joey jumped. He sat down on the sofa and held on to the book he had been reading. It was a scary story about a dead man coming back to life and returning to his family.

The lights suddenly went out. In the darkness, the wind and rain grew louder and seemed closer.

35 Joey sat still, his heart beating fast. It made a ‘thump, thump, thump’ noise in his chest.

Where had his mother gone? And why? It was a very bad night to be outside. It was a bad night to be reading a scary story, too. In the story, there was also a storm, and an old house, and a young boy, and a ...

40 BANG! Again there was a loud noise on the roof. Again Joey jumped. He held the book more tightly. The wind and the rain suddenly stopped. There wasn't a sound. Just the dark night. Joey waited.

BRRRING! BRRRING!

The telephone!

45 Then it stopped, even before Joey had moved.

Then there was nothing. Just the darkness. The same darkness as in the story. Joey put the book down on the sofa, then got up and walked slowly to the window. He wanted to see if the storm really had stopped. Carefully, he opened the window and looked out. There were a few lights in the distance – other houses.

50 Again: BRRRING! BRRRING!

Joey ran to answer it.

“Hello.”

Nothing.

He put the phone down.

55 BRRRING! BRRRING!



Quickly he picked it up again.

“Hello. Who’s there?”

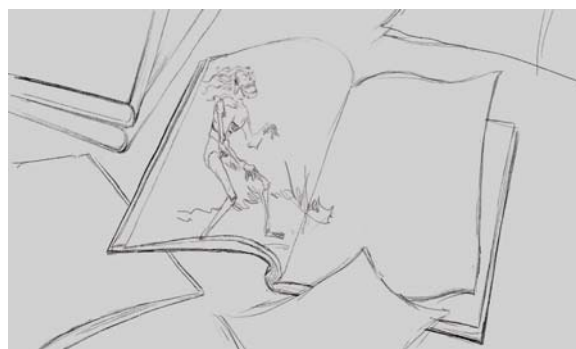
Nothing.

“Is that you, Mum?”

60 Nothing.

He put it down a second time. He waited for it to ring again. It didn’t.

65 He went back to the open window. Just as he got there, a strong wind came into the house – whoosh! – blowing books, magazines and other things all over the room. The book Joey had been reading was open at the page where there was a picture of the dead man who had returned on a stormy night.



70 Joey rushed to close the window. The wind was strong! He had to work hard to stand up. Then the rain came back. The wind blew the rain through the window. The rain was cold – like death – and it felt angry.

As he closed the window, he got totally wet. What would mum think? “Get some dry clothes,” he said to himself. As he passed the telephone, it rang again.

75 BRRRING! BRRRING!

When he put out his hand to pick it up, it stopped.

Then, with a ‘click!’ the lights came back on.

“Good!” Joey thought.

Then the lights went off again.

80 The BANG! on the roof again.

The BRRRING! BRRRING! again.

Then there were three knocks on the front door.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

“Mum!” Joey thought immediately. “But why doesn’t she come in? She has a key.”

85 Joey walked slowly and silently to the door. He put his ear up close to the door to listen.

Nothing.

He waited some more.

Nothing.

90 Then, all of a sudden, came the three knocks on the door again. They were loud, as if made by a man.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Joey jumped back.

“Mum! Is that you?” he called out hopefully.

95 There was no answer from the person at the door.

He stepped forward, reaching for the door. His hand was shaking and his mouth was dry.



100 “Don’t open it! It’s him!” came a shout from behind him.

Joey’s heart almost stopped. He turned around. His mother was running across the room towards him. She must have come in through the back door.

“Who?” he asked.

“It’s him! It’s him!” I’m sure it’s him!” his mother shouted.

105 Her clothes were wet, and her long, wet hair fell across her face. Joey thought she

looked a bit crazy – or very scared.

“I told him you were alone. And I told you not to let anyone in. Oh, where is it? Where did I put it? He can’t come in yet. Not until...”

She stopped suddenly.

110 Joey looked at her, not understanding, but becoming more afraid.

“What’s happening? Who is it?” he asked.

Again there were three loud knocks on the door.

**KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!**

It was like the dead man in the story – trying to get into the house.

115 Joey’s mother screamed, “No, no, no!”

Joey started screaming, “What? What? What?”

“Got it!” she shouted, holding up her hand with something in it.

Joey couldn’t see what she was holding. The room was too dark.

“Open the door!” she shouted.

120 “No!” Joey shouted. “It’s him!”

“I know it’s him!” his mother replied. “We have to let him in.”

“No, we don’t!” Joey said.

“He has to come in,” his mother said firmly.

“No, he doesn’t! He has to stay outside!” Joey said.

125 He was thinking about the man in the story. He knew it was him!

“Let him in!” his mother said. “I have it now.”

“Have what?” Joey asked.

“The money,” she answered.

“What money?” he said.

130 “The money for the pizza,” she explained.

Very slowly, Joey opened the door.

“Seafood pizza?” asked a very wet and very cold young man.

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That night, Joey and his mother sat in their dark house and ate pizza for dinner. While they were eating, someone knocked at the door.

135 KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!