



THE HOUSE BURGLAR



A SHORT STORY FOR ENGLISH
READING & SPEAKING

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Introduction

What is a house burglar?

How do they get into people's homes?

Do you have house burglars in your country?

The House Burglar

Tony opened the kitchen door and came face to face with a burglar in his house.

He jumped back, letting out a sound.

Oof!

"Cor, you scared the life out of me."

The thief also jumped back. He was seventeen.

"Get back," he said. "I've got a knife."

The knife was in his hand. Tony glanced at it, quickly raised his eyes back to the boy's face.

"I can see that. I'm not gonna try any heroics."

The boy's face creased. His eyes blinked back at Tony.

"Where's the money?"

Tony shook his head.

"What money?"

"The money. Your money. Where do you keep it?"

Tony stared back at the boy. In his mind, he tried to assess what he should do in a situation like this.

Look away? Give him everything he wanted?

And what about Dorrie upstairs?

She could wake up and she would absolutely come downstairs to find out what all the noise was about. He didn't want her anywhere near this.

"I don't have any money here. Apart from what's in my pocket. And that's about ten quid. You're welcome to have that."

"Don't mess me around, old man."

The boy raised the knife. Tony ignored his shaking hand.

"I need the money. And all your other stuff. Watches, jewellery."

Tony kept quiet for a second. No use in alarming this kid. He was nervous as all hell, and the wrong word could send that knife swinging through the air.

"Look, I'm just an ordinary person. I've got a watch — you can have that. It's worth about ten quid. I haven't got any jewellery. What would I do with jewellery?"

A bead of sweat poured down the side of the kid's face.

"You must have something. Computers, phones. Give me something."

"I've got a laptop. I don't know what you'll get for that. Not much, I don't think. It's upstairs —"

Tony regretted saying it as soon as the words came out of his mouth. He needed to keep this kid downstairs.

"I've got a phone. But British Telecom gave it to me. I don't even know how to use it properly." He smiled back at the boy in an attempt to appease him.

The boy's eyes darted from left to right. He quickly scanned the kitchen, hoping to see a bag of swag on a shelf or a display of Rolex watches. He had not done his homework, he had judged incorrectly. The older guy in the pub had told him wrong.

All them houses on Bloomfield, they're all rich people, them.

Wrong.

They might have some money, but they didn't keep safes in their living rooms embedded in the wall behind a picture.

"Upstairs," said the boy. "Go upstairs."

"Upstairs? No." The words blurted out of Tony's mouth before he had time to think.

"I said upstairs, old man," the boy barked back.

"There's nothing up there," said Tony. "There's nothing here at all. Like I told you, I got a little bit of money in my pocket of my trousers — no more than fifteen quid. And you can have that. And my watch? I only use it for telling the time. It's worthless."

"Go in there," said the boy, jerking his head to the living room. He stepped forward, the knife held at eye-level.

Tony stepped back.

The boy came forward and Tony reversed back to the living room door. He opened it and stepped in.

"Turn the light on," snapped the kid.

Tony clicked the switch.

The boy came forward and shoved Tony into the middle of the room.

"Sit down," he said and shoved him onto the sofa.

Tony now had a better view of this kid.

He was skinny. And he stank of beer. He didn't seem drunk though. Maybe just a couple of pints for courage.

The boy pulled at things on the shelves. Books, small framed pictures, Dorrie's beloved ornaments.

He was muttering to himself.

"You must have something, you gotta keep something here..."

Tony stayed dead still on the sofa. He prayed that his wife did not hear a sound.

"Where's the stuff?" The boy reeled on Tony again. The frustration and fear visible in his eyes. Tony kept his voice quiet and calm.

"I told you. I don't have anything valuable here. I don't keep any money here. Any money I have is in the bank."

The boy marched to the back of the room and round again.

"You're joking. This is wrong. This is all wrong."

Tony watched, keeping absolutely still. No sudden movements, that is what he had always been told.

The boy marched up and down, panting loudly as if he were hyperventilating.

"You got to have something," he said. "Give me something. I have to have something."

He waved the knife around. Tony kept his eye on the knife. He didn't stare directly at it, but just made sure he could see it in his peripheral vision.

"I can give you money," he said. He had to get this kid out of the house. "But we have to go to the bank. We can go in my car."

"Don't mess me around, old man," screamed the boy.

"I'm not. I can see you're desperate. I'll give you money. We can drive down to the ATM at the bottom of the road."

The boy stared back at him. His teeth bared and his eyes wide and wild.

"Give me a grand. Give me a thousand."

"All right," said Tony. "Anything you want. Just stay calm."

The boy lowered the knife a little. Just enough to ease the stress in Tony's chest.

Then he remembered where the car keys were. Upstairs in his trouser pocket. This kid would not let him go up there on his own. And he didn't want Dorrie seeing him at all.

He had to find a way to go to the bank without taking the car. He needed to find a way to convince the boy to walk down the road.

The last thing Tony wanted was Dorrie seeing this young man waving a knife around.

The living room door opened a little.

"Tony? Who are you talking to in there?"

Reading Comprehension Questions

Which room was Tony going into?

Who did he meet there?

How old was the house burglar?

What does he have in his hand?

Why is the young man in Tony's house?

What is Tony's main concern while facing the young man?

Does Tony keep any money or valuables in the house?

Name three things the young man wants Tony to give him.

What object does Tony have upstairs?

Who advised the young man to go to Tony's house?

The young man wants to go upstairs, but Tony doesn't want to. Why not?

Which room do they go to next?

Describe the young man's body shape.

What does the young man smell of?

Why does Tony think he smells of this?

What does the young man pull down from the shelves?

What suggestion does Tony make to the young man?

How much money does the young man ask for?

Where are the car keys?

What happens at the end of the story?

Essential Vocabulary

There may be a lot of new or unfamiliar vocabulary to you in the story. This is the perfect time to get to know these new and strange words and phrases.

Write down all the new words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in a dictionary or online and write down the meaning next to the word or phrase.

It should look something like this:

Face to face – *a situation where two people are facing each other. Often can be confrontational.*

Burglar – *a thief that robs people's homes.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

I got out of my car and came face to face with a policeman.

I spoke to my neighbour, who told me a burglar had stolen some things from their home.

If you do this correctly, it will help you learn many new words and phrases. This will build your English vocabulary and writing down all the words and phrases, making sentences of your own, will all help you to remember all of this new vocabulary.

Discussion Questions

In your own words, tell the story of Tony and the house burglar. (If you are in a class, you could make this a group exercise.)

How old do you think Tony is?

Who is Dorrie do you think?

What is Tony trying to prevent from happening? Is he successful?

Tony says he is not going to try any heroics. Is he heroic? Explain your reasons.

What would you do in Tony's situation?

Describe the house burglar's feelings and emotions. What do you think is going through his mind?

Why is the young man trying to rob Tony's house? What does he need, do you think?

At the end, someone comes into the living room. Who is it?

How would you describe Tony's feeling at the end of the story?

What do you think happens next? Talk about this in class.

If your house were robbed, as in the story, what would you do? Describe your feelings and emotions and how you would react.

How can we stop house burglary?

In these days of high technology, is house burglary — or any kind of theft — becoming impossible?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in this role play.

Tony — the man in the story

Dan — the house burglar in the story

The Situation

Tony interrupted Dan as he was trying to rob his home.

Eventually, the police arrived and arrested Dan.

Tony has been asked by the police to talk to Dan and see if they can help him in some way. It is his first offence, and everyone — the police and Tony — thinks the best method would be to talk some sense into Dan.

Your role play is the conversation that takes place between Tony and Dan.

Tony is very sympathetic and wants Dan to realise the mistake he has made, while also trying to help him think of his future.

Dan feels somewhat ashamed of what he has done, but maybe resistant to Tony's words of advice.

Divide into pairs and work on your role play.

When you are ready, show the class!

Debate

This is a debate exercise.

Divide the class into two groups of equal number. Choose one person to act as chairperson. The chairperson must ensure there is order during the debate and give every person a chance to speak.

The Situation

There has been a spate of robberies in the local neighbourhood, and the residents have had enough. They want something to be done, but they are divided in their opinions.

One group wants the police to take action. They want the local council to provide more street cameras too.

They think this is the responsibility of the local authorities and they should deal with it.

The other group wants to take action themselves. They have heard of some countries setting up Neighbourhood Watch schemes where the neighbours police their community themselves.

They could keep an eye out for any strangers walking around, plus they could take it in turns to walk the local area in the evening to make sure everything is in good order.

Team 1

You want the police and the local authorities to take action. You think this is the best way.

You believe the police are trained to do this and cameras are the right technology to use.

You think asking neighbours to do Neighbourhood Watch could be dangerous — what if they met some thieves, and they had weapons?

Team 2

You think the neighbours should look after their own area.

You don't want police walking around. Or having a police car sitting at the top of the road. It would feel like you are being observed by the police too.

And as for the cameras... there would be no privacy at all!

It would be much better for the local people to look after their community.

Take some time in your teams to prepare things to say.

Then when you are ready, begin the debate!

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

Read the story again and see where it ends.

Now continue the story where it left off. Write the second part of the story.

How it ends is up to you!

It could end tragically. Or there could be a good and positive ending to the story.

Try to write about 500 words if you can.

When you have finished, read your story out loud to the class. Or show it to your teacher for feedback.

Credits

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