

## **“My Side of the Story”**

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I was sitting at my desk in my bedroom practicing my signature when my brother came in and asked me if I wanted to throw the ball around or shoot baskets.

“No,” I said. So he looked over my shoulder at the signatures, went into the bathroom for a few seconds, came out, went to his own desk, unraveled an entire roll of Scotch tape and stuck it on my head.

Naturally, I was outraged. “What did you do that for?” I asked. It was a stupid question because I knew very well why he had done it. He had done it for the same reason he had stuffed me in the laundry hamper and tied me to a chair with my best ties. He had done it because he was fourteen and had the great good fortune to be blessed with a little brother he could bedevil at will.

“Try to get it off,” he said.

This I attempted to do, but he had rubbed the Scotch tape so hard into my scalp that it had become a part of my head.

“Let me try,” he said.

So he tried, and I yowled, and he stopped. Then he gently pulled a piece of the Scotch tape off the side of my head, along with six or seven of my temple hairs.

Even at the age of nine I knew that I had been mightily wronged; even at nine I knew that this violated every code of justice and fair play that I had ever been taught. And so, my heart full of righteous rage and indignation, I leaped out of my chair, past my brother, in search of justice.

In those days justice looked a good deal like my mother. It had lovely brown hair, a warm enchanting smile, and a soft, understanding voice. It was comforting to know that in a matter of seconds my mother would hear the evidence, weigh the evidence, and punish my brother. Generally, things were murkier. Generally, I did something by accident, then my brother did something back, and I did something back, and on and on until it was impossible to tell who was at fault. But this—this was the case of a lifetime. And the best part of all was that the evidence was stuck to my head.

When I reached my mother’s room, I saw that the door was closed. For a moment I hesitated, wondering if she was sleeping; but I was so sure of my case, so convinced of the general rightness of my mission that I threw open the door and burst into the room screaming, “Mom! Mom! Skip put—”

And then I realized that I was talking to my father, not my mother.

In order to understand the enormity of the mistake I had made, you have to understand my father. My father was five feet seven and a half inches tall, stocky, powerfully built, and larger than life in laughter, strength, character, integrity, humor, appetite, wit, intelligence, warmth, curiosity, generosity, magnetism, insight, and rage. Consequently, he was not concerned with the little things in life, such as sibling shenanigans, rivalries, or disputes. His job, as he saw it, was to make us the best human beings we could possibly be—to guide us, love us, and teach us the large laws of honor, courage, honesty, and

self-reliance. He was the only man to turn to if you had a severed artery, broken ribs, or any serious disease or financial problems, but he was not the kind of man one would knowingly burst in upon screaming anything less than “The house is on fire!” or “Somebody stole your car!”

I knew this, of course, which is why I had run to my mother’s room in the first place, and why, when I saw my father, most of the color drained from my face. My first impulse was to walk backward out of the room, closing the door gently before me as I did so, but I had shifted so suddenly from offensive indignation to defensive fear and astonishment that I felt a little disoriented. For a moment I considered telling him that I smelled smoke or saw someone stealing his car, but I couldn’t lie. I couldn’t tell the truth, either. In fact, for a moment, I couldn’t speak.

“What the hell are you doing?” my father said.

I started to say, “I was sitting at my desk minding my own business, when—” and I stopped. I stopped because I knew instinctively that Scotch tape on my head was not enough, not nearly enough to warrant my wild, unannounced entrance into this room.

“When what?”

“Nothing.”

“You ran in here screaming about something. What happened?”

“I didn’t...”

“You didn’t what?”

“I didn’t know you were here.”

“So what! You knew someone was here! What did Skip do?”

“Skip...uh. I was sitting at my desk, and Skip...”

“Skip what? Tell me!”

“Put Scotch tape on my head.”

This apparently was all my father needed to set the wheels of his anger in motion.

“You came running in here without knocking because Skip put Scotch tape on your head?”

“No, I—”

“You didn’t care that the door was closed? You didn’t care that your mother might have been sleeping?”

I wanted to explain to him that this had been going on for years, that Mom and Skip and I had an understanding, but I knew that we weren’t having a discussion. I also knew that he was working himself into a rage and that anything I said would only make it worse.

“Is that what you do? You run into rooms screaming?” He was on his feet now and advancing toward me. “You don’t knock?”

“No. Yes.”

At this point my brother entered the room, saw what was happening, and stood transfixed.

“Here!” my father said. “Here’s what we do with Scotch tape!” And with that he pulled the whole wad off my head, along with fifty or sixty of my hairs.

I knew that he was only a few seconds away from his closing arguments now, and my calculations were just about right.

“You don’t...” Whap! “...ever...” Whap! “...come in...” Whap! Whap! “...here...” Whap! “...without knocking! Do you hear me?” Silence. Whap! “Do you hear...”

At this point I heard a wheeze of escaping laughter where my brother was standing, and saw him run out of the room.

“Do you?”

“Yes, Pop, yes. I hear you.”

“Are you ever going to come in here without knocking again?”

“No, no.”

“Ever!”

“No.”

“Now get out of here!”

And I got out and heard the door slam behind me.

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There was not much to do after that but sit at my desk and wonder what had happened. I had been signing my name, Skip put Scotch tape on my head, I ran to tell Mom, found Pop, and the lights went out. Where, I wondered, was the justice in that? Obviously, when I burst into my mother’s room, I had entered a larger world of justice, a world where screaming, whining, mother dependence, not knocking on closed doors, and startling one’s father were serious crimes. That part I understood. The part I didn’t understand was the part about why my brother, who had started the whole thing by putting Scotch tape on my head, hadn’t been punished. So, in the interest of a smaller justice, I went over to his trophy shelf, picked up one of his baseball trophies, and gradually wrested the little gold-plated athlete off its mount.

With a little luck, my brother would want to tell Pop about it.