

“You take care of the baby now, Larry,” Josie’s parents said to the curly-haired dog lying at the base of the crib as they left the room.

The light from the hallway shrank to a sliver, then disappeared as the door closed, leaving the room bathed in shadows. Larry listened to his owners’ footsteps as they walked down the hall, then turned his attention to the little girl sleeping just a few feet above him. He could hear her soft baby breaths, and his eyelids grew heavy. The little girl was dreaming. As he wobbled in that mystifying place between awake and asleep, Larry listened to her dreams. Most people can’t hear it, but babies dream in music, and Larry, being a dog, had quite keen hearing. The soft rhythm caressed his ears and he slowly drifted off to sleep.

As Josie and her dog slept on, they did not notice the door of the closet slide open. Two red eyes gleamed out through the shadows and panned back and forth. Once he was sure the child and the sleeping mutt were the only living things in the room, Darkness stole out of the closet.

Darkness came from the Dream Country and made nightmares to frighten people as they slept. He fed on fear, and the fear of children was the best-tasting fear of all. It made him stronger than the fear of grown-ups did. Adults had long since lost their imaginations. Because of this, he had decided that it would be better to capture children and take them to his County of Nightmares, where he could keep them in a constant state of fear instead of sending bad dreams to scare them. In this way he would become the most powerful Dream Smith in all the Dream Country.

As Darkness crept toward the crib, he stretched out his long, greedy fingers toward the baby. He licked his lips as he thought about all the ways he could terrify her as she grew up in his lair. Darkness’s stomach rumbled as he could almost taste her fear. In fact it rumbled so loudly that it caused Larry to start, and he jolted from his sleep. It did not take long for him to notice something was wrong, for Larry, being a dog, had a keen sense of smell. Darkness, being a very unpleasant creature, had that awful smell of mothballs and under the bed when it has not been vacuumed for a very long time. Larry jumped to his feet and turned toward the smell just in time to see Darkness reaching into the crib.

“You take care of the baby now, Larry,” he heard his owners’ voices in his head again.

Of course they were only kidding when they said this, but Larry, being a dog, did not understand kidding, so he took these instructions very seriously. He jumped up on his hind legs and put his front paws on the edge of the crib. With his big nose, he shoved Darkness' hands away and picked the baby up by her blanket. With the bundle of baby hanging from his mouth, Larry ran toward the door. He stopped short as he heard Darkness laughing behind him. At that very moment, both dog and Dream Smith had realized that paws are not very good for opening doors and there was no way for Larry to escape. It was for this reason, among others, most of which involved opening the refrigerator, that Larry often dreamed of being human. There was not time to think about that now, though. Larry turned around to see Darkness closing in on him, holding a long, shadowy sword that he had drawn from the black folds of his cloak. Larry had seen a few reflections of himself in the hallway mirror, and in the television when it was off, and because of his long, curly hair, he was under the impression that he was made of fluff. Fluff, it seemed to him, would be easily chopped into little bits, so he ran for the only opening that was left. Larry plunged through the closet door, with Darkness chasing close behind, but the evil creature became tangled in the hanging clothes. Larry, with Josie bundled in the blanket hanging from his mouth, escaped into the Dream Country.