

THE EYE

Tommy stood in the bathroom brushing his teeth. Gazing into the mirror he admired his cropped blond hair and (in his opinion) a handsome set of features. Averting his eyes to his Power Rangers pyjamas his mind drifted to that glorious day when he could be just like his heroes. His mum had promised him that next year, after his seventh birthday he could take up karate lessons. He held the tube of toothpaste in both hands and outstretched his arms. Gazing into the mirror. He stood bow-legged and yelled "Go Power Rangers" in a voice as deep and husky as he could manage.

"Hurry up and brush your teeth, Tommy." a voice called behind him. "It's time little boys were in bed."

Tommy spun around. "Mum! I'm going to rid the world of evil. I going to invent this powerful weapon to blast the evil forces away."

"You can fight the evil forces tomorrow." she humoured him. "Right now, it's bedtime."

Tommy finished brushing his teeth and entered his bedroom. Pulling back his Power Rangers quilt he relaxed into the warm confinement of his bed.

"Now Tommy..." his mother said as she kissed him on the forehead and tucked him in, "as you know your father and I are going out for a meal, followed by a couple of drinks. We should be back by midnight. We will be leaving as soon as your babysitter arrives."

"Yeah, and daddy will get drunk on dirty beer and he'll be falling about on the stairs singing that funny song about the lady with the big bum," Tommy said with a cheeky grin.

"Well, you should be fast asleep at that time." She giggled and gave him a playful punch.

"Is Auntie Doreen babysitting me tonight?" Tommy enquired? "I like her, she plays games with me."

"Not tonight." mum replied. "Auntie Doreen is meeting us with your Uncle Ken. Tonight, Bert from down the road is babysitting."

Tommy reeled back in horror. "Not Old Bert mum. I don't like him. He's strange. He only has three teeth and that horrible glass eye?"

"I know Bert is a little strange but he was the only one we could get at short notice," Mum explained. "You'll have to be nice to him. He lives in that house all alone. He never married and has no friends. He hasn't had a very good life and he could do with a bit of company."

"But mum..." Tommy wailed, "He's disgusting. He scratches his belly and he picks his nose and flicks..."

"That's enough Tommy" Mum shouted. "Now settle down, he'll be here soon."

The doorbell rang and mum went to answer it. Tommy huddled himself up in bed, fearing the sight of old Bert. Clutching his teddy bear tight he listened to the chatting downstairs. He could hear old Bert's voice, that deep growling tone telling his parents' goodnight. The deep booming laugh that followed made Tommy cower more between

his bedsheets as he imagined the evil thoughts Bert must be having. What Bert would do if he were alone in the room with him?

The sound of heavy footsteps startled Tommy. The sound was accompanied by a deep chesty cough as Old Bert made his way upstairs. Tommy shivered as he imagined the leering look of Bert's jagged face with those three rotting teeth grinning at him. Quivering under the sheets Tommy heard his bedroom door creak open and a presence hovering over him like a dark cloud. Suddenly the bedclothes were whipped away and Tommy found himself looking into the haggard face of Old Bert.

Bert stroked his long bushy beard and laughed. "In hiding are we lad?" he said.

"Err Hello Sir," Tommy replied with a quiver in his voice. His hands clasped tightly on his teddy bear.

Bert coughed and spluttered as he laughed again. His three decayed teeth came into view as he smiled and the smell of tobacco that emerged from his mouth caused Tommy to wrinkle his nose in disgust.

"So, you weren't asleep hey lad." Bert boomed. "You know what happens to little boys who don't go to sleep early don't you?"

"No Sir" Tommy said, a slight tremble in his voice.

Bert leaned closer so his face was in line with Tommy's. "The bogeyman comes and gets them! Takes them away to his lair!" Bert laughed again.

Tommy shook violently with fear.

"So, your mum and dad are out for the night hey lad?" said Bert with a creepy grin. He smoothed back what little hair he had. "That means you and I are alone. And you know what happens now, lad?"

"Err, no Sir," Tommy said whimpering.

"I get to...." Bert leaned closer. "Tell you one of my stories lads." He laughed and coughed again.

"That would be nice Sir." Tommy spluttered.

"You know about my glass eye don't you lad?" Bert asked.

"Yes Sir. Mum told me, Sir." Tommy said.

"And do you believe in ghosts lad?" Bert enquired.

"Not sure Sir...I don't think so," Tommy said.

"Well believe this lad." Bert said lowering his voice to a deep growl, "Because the story of my glass eye is a true one. A story of pure evil that will have you shaking in your booties."

Tommy took a deep breath. "Yes Sir."

Bert placed his hand on Tommy's knee. "It all happened 50 years ago, lad. I was attacked in an alleyway by a group of men. They beat me senseless, stole my wallet, and left me for dead."

"I'm sorry Sir," Tommy said.

"I was found, lad." Bert continued, "I was taken to hospital but they couldn't save my right eye. I was half-blind. Imagine that lad. Only 18 years old and left with only the use of one eye. They removed the other and left me with nothing but a dark empty socket."

"It must have been terrible Sir," Tommy said.

"My nightmare was only beginning lad," Bert said as he looked out of the window. "One day they fitted me with this glass eye. I found out they had removed it from some old man who had died recently. I thought that once I'd got used to having one working eye I could lead a normal life. But I was wrong."

"What happened, Sir?" Tommy asked.

"It was no ordinary glass eye lad," Bert said glaring at him. "It was evil. It could duplicate itself. Some days I would wake up and it would turn up somewhere."

"Like where Sir?" Tommy said with a shiver.

"Anywhere," Bert said. "It would be invisible to everyone except for me and whoever it chose to appear to. One day my mother poured some cornflakes out for me, and the eye rolled out of the packet into my bowl. When I saw it, I screamed. But my mother couldn't understand what was wrong because the blasted eye was invisible to her."

"Surely you noticed it was missing Sir," Tommy said.

"That was the strangest thing lad," said Bert. "I didn't know until it appeared. You see lad, what appeared was a clone. Somehow it projected a copy of itself and lay in wait for its victim. Sometimes it would simply appear somewhere and stare at me. Of course, nobody could see it but me. My parents thought I was mad and I had to spend two months in a mental hospital."

"What happened, next Sir?" Tommy asked.

"What happened next?" Bert said. "Well, when I came out of the hospital, I never saw the eye again. I thought I'd seen the last of it." Bert leaned closer. "Until one night..."

"Yes Sir?" Tommy quivered.

"I had a date lad," Bert told him. "A lovely young lady called Elsie. I took her to the pictures. While we stood in the foyer, I decided to get us a bag of popcorn. We went to our seats and started to watch the film. And that's when it happened."

"What did Sir?" Tommy asked.

"The eye lad!" growled Bert. "Confounded thing turned up in the popcorn. Elsie screamed the place down and we got thrown out. I never saw Elsie again after that. She thought I had planted the damn thing as a sick prank."

Tommy shivered as Bert approached him. Bert sat on the bed and fumbled with his right eye. He looked straight at Tommy who saw the empty black socket where the eye had been. Tommy screamed.

Bert opened his hand and revealed the eye. He grabbed Tommy's arm and placed the eye in his hand.

"This eye has ruined my life lad," Bert shouted. "I never married and I have no friends. The eye scared them all away. Girls ran away from me. Friends disowned me because they thought I was mad. But no more lad. I'm going to free myself from it. I'm giving it to you."

"No No No!" Tommy cried.

Bert laughed, stood up, and headed towards the door. He set off down the stairs. Suddenly Tommy heard a loud crash from downstairs. He threw the eye away and hid under the bedclothes.

An hour later Tommy heard voices from downstairs, one he recognized as his mother.

"Bert! Bert! Oh No! He's dead! TOMMY!" She ran up the stairs and burst into Tommy's bedroom. "Oh, thank goodness you're safe." She gave him a big hug.

"Mum... it was horrible." Tommy cried. "He told me his eye was alive and it kept haunting him."

"Bert was just trying to scare you," she said reassuringly. "Everything is all right now."

She put Tommy in her bed and tucked him in. She kissed him on the forehead and wished him goodnight and pleasant dreams. But as she was about to leave Tommy started screaming.

"What's wrong precious?" she asked.

"Mum!" Tommy cried. "The eye! It's on the sideboard! Please get rid of it."

"But darling..." she said with a smile. "There's nothing there."