

A Mustafa, a Mouse Trap, and a Martinez  
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My ears burned red even with the AC blasting right in my face; the heat was never a problem back in Chicago. I slumped further down in my chair at the thought, looking down at the chemical equation staring right back at me.

The house was silent without Mama and Baba out. I think they were looking for paint at Home Depot since they didn't like the bright blue in the living room during the showcasing. I didn't like it either; in fact, I didn't like every aspect of living here. I want to go back to my real home. Here, I don't even know where the pantry in my own house is.

Now that my workflow was interrupted with thoughts of my old house, I couldn't continue doing chemistry; why would the teacher give us homework on the first day anyways? I stuffed my papers back in my bag and shut down my Chromebook. I needed to brush my teeth anyway. In our old house, my whole family shared one bathroom, but here, there was a bathroom connected to my bedroom so I don't have to step outside of my room. I guess that's a plus.

My eyes squinted as the lights flashed on. Dang, California has some bright lights. I felt around for my toothbrush, still unable to see correctly. Thankfully I found it because of the hard spiky bristles, which is probably not a good thing. Yet, I still brushed just as hard as I usually did because I was desperate to get out of that bright bathroom. My parents still weren't home yet, which was weird. Maybe they decided to do some furniture shopping while they were out.

Spitting out the last of the toothpaste in my mouth, I shut off the water. *Ouch!* The water was so hot I dropped my toothbrush on the ground. I bent over to pick it up and- *Whoosh*. The whole house made a deep whirring sound and the once bright lights shut off completely - the power went out.

"Oh no."

I squinted again and looked around the small bathroom, but that very moment, I heard glass shatter. Someone broke into the house.

Heavy footsteps came from the basement which made my legs tremble much more than they already were. *Thump thump thump*. The footsteps seemed to trail deeper into the house, but there was a problem. We had just arrived at this house a week ago, and I don't know the full layout yet. So I don't know where the burglar is. Maybe it isn't a burglar? Maybe it's just my parents who lost the key to the house? My thoughts sounded like a jumbled up mess of words mixed with pictures. There surely wasn't much time left before whoever was in the house reached where I was. *Thump thump thump*.

*Click.* Without second guessing myself, I opened my bedroom door and stepped outside. The house's unfamiliar air filled inside my head as I stood there, frozen. I scanned my surroundings with the help of the moon shining through the window. *Bathroom, my parents room, empty bedroom, closet.* The door was dark and menacing, yet I still had the urge to open it. I remember my parents putting a few boxes in that closet; maybe there was something I could use to trick the intruder. But how was I supposed to make a whole trap without making a single noise?

My palms began to sweat and my face grew even hotter than it was in my room. Faint sounds I never knew were there grew louder and louder. *Tick. Clock. Drip. Sink. Thump. Thump. Thump...*

*"Mama, something in the kitchen smells funny,"*

*"Really Moose? Are you sure it isn't you?" Mama's laugh was so warm it could be heard all the way from the bedroom.*

*"No, mama, I'm sure. The room is getting foggy now too. The air tastes funny."*

*"Are you sure you're not lying?" I could hear her rushing down the stairs now.*

*All I could do was cough. The smoky air had filled my tiny lungs already. Mama let out a fierce scream when she saw me. "Mustafa!"*

*She had grabbed me by my shirt and placed me on the sofa, fast, but not fast enough for me to miss the flames erupting from the stove.*

*That day, I had seen my mother save me from a fire happening in my own kitchen.*

***Thump. Thump Thump.***

The heavier and louder steps woke me up from whatever sort of trance I was in. He has surely made it to the living room now; I don't have much time.

So I put myself together and slowly yet surely opened the closet door. *Click.*

The moonlight poured inside the dark, tiny room. Almost nothing was visible, but in the corner of my eye, I saw a shiny object; a mouse trap. *Thank you mom, for whatever reason you decided to put a mouse trap in here.*

I took the trap in my hands, the plastic cheese dangling from the hook. Crawling, I made my way to the stairs. This house had a large staircase, spiraling in all its glory. If I place the trap on the stair railing, the intruder would have no idea thanks to how dark it is. Man, I really am a genius.

My steps were swift and soundless as I tiptoed towards the stairs. Carefully placing the trap on the square part of the railing, I hooked the metal bar around the loop, setting the trap. ***Thump thump thump.*** His heavy footsteps could be heard much louder now as he approached the staircase. I stepped back into the closet, leaving only a crack ajar in order to get a vision of the man. Almost all the sweat that had been on my palms before had evaporated.

A shadow cast onto the beginning spiral of the staircase. He was going up the steps now.

***Thump. Thump. OW!***

The final thump was replaced by the thud sound of him falling to the floor in pain.

“What the HELL was that!” His voice was muffled by the sound of him clenching his teeth. Through the corner of my eye, I could see that he was blowing air onto his hand, holding it close to his face. A dark shadow cast over his lying body.

I couldn’t believe it was my own feet that were doing it, but I stepped out of the closet. “A mouse trap,” I replied.

A small gasp came from his mouth as he turned around, but before he could respond, a soft buzzing sound came from the garage, followed by a soft swing of the door. Mama’s distinct soft voice could be distinguished from a mile away. “Moose, come help- what happened to the lights?”

This had to be the funniest moment of my life. The second I caught the robber, my parents came home. I looked down and saw him turn bright red, trying to shake off his hand one last time before making a run for it, but unlucky for him, it was too late. I stepped on his shoulder. “Come here, Mama, Baba, see this.”

The still unnamed intruder was tugging at my foot but was unable to break loose; his face was redder than a fresh tomato right out of the garden. And there he was, a deer in headlights. My parents had found the intruder at the hands of myself.

Later that night the police came to our doorstep, flashing their familiar red and blue lights. His name, from what I heard, was Bruce Martinez and he was supposedly a well known criminal in the San Diego area. I had also heard that he had broken into our house by shutting off my generator from the outside to turn off the security cameras, then sneaking in by the sliding glass door in the basement that I never knew was there. Regardless, I had an eventful night which made for a cool story at school today; it was only my second day of school and I had a ton of new friends in this new town.

