



The Boy and The Tower

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“If this happens one more time, we’re going to have to let you go.” The words still repeat in my head as I sit watching the screens. My name is David. I work security at the [Union Station](#) mall here in [St. Louis](#). It’s not the busiest mall, but being downtown and having the MetroLink on our back doorstep brings its fair share of undesirables. For the last week though, we have had a repeat offender who has not only helped himself to hundreds of dollars of merchandise, but has done so consistently on my watch and I don’t mean when I’m watching the screens, I mean when I’m out on foot, patrolling the mall.

Sure, they all made a joke of it at first, how this little boy could get away from me so often. Ok, so maybe I had been blindsided by my thirties and let my fitness slip a little. I know I was not as fast as I used to be, but this kid? He couldn’t be more than twelve years old. Even when I had a hold of him, probably a firmer grasp than I should have had, he still managed to disappear. Each time heading to the 18th street entrance, but when I get out there he’s gone. Nowhere to be seen. He even seemed to elude our cameras.

Tonight will be different. As I walk the second floor proud in my crisp pressed white shirt my eyes flick around the store fronts. We’re not that busy, which is good. The child I am keeping my eyes peeled for is about four foot eight, and no more than seventy pounds. His hair is short and black, his eyes brown. I have a photographic memory, and an embarrassing secret I have kept from my fellow security officers.

I always wanted to be a private detective. After this weeks events I am extremely glad I did not tell them. Working out stuff always appealed to me. I love any kind of mystery story. My wife keeps telling me I should just go for it, set up a detective agency, but a stack of credit card debts and a crippling car payment have so far stopped me from fulfilling my dream. Now I risk losing my job because of a small child.

“Dave,” my radio squawks. “Just got a report of your little buddy at Lids.”

Lids is on this floor. Perfect.

“What’s he doing?” I ask.

“I can’t see him on the screen, but the clerk says he’s just looking at stuff.”

“Nobody looks at stuff on my watch!” I try to sound tough, and fail. Every inch of my body wants to run towards the store, but usually that means I am out of breath by the time I get there and the kid gets scared off. Agonizingly I walk, admittedly briskly, towards the hat store.

I can see the store front as I walk through the beginnings of the food court. I decide to cross to the other side, so I can really sneak up on the kid. As I pass the different stores the employees all nod to me. They know what’s going on. They want me to catch him as much as I do. I am actually pretty popular, despite this last week.

The Glow Putt store is closed down, we’re not in season just yet. I stop.

“What’s taking you so long?” I decide to ignore the radio. I can see the boy. He’s looking at me. Straight at me. It’s like I can see his mind working, with a smile he turns and grabs the nearest ball cap he can and runs.

Now I give in to my body and break into a run myself.

“Hey! Stop, security!” I shout, not sure why I said security but feeling that ‘stop’ alone sounded weak somehow. The boy heads straight to the escalator and runs down it, this is different. Usually he heads straight for the exit, which is on this level, and as I get to the top of the escalator I see that tonight his plan is no different, he’s heading past the security booth towards the stairs to the exit. Now I’ve got him. Staying on this level I run around towards the exit, arriving at the same time as the boy leaps up the stairs. We come face to face and the boy smiles. Smiles! Turning to his left he heads up another flight of stairs which leads to the [Marriott](#) hotel. I catch my breath and begin to run again, expecting the kid to head straight to the [Grand Hall](#) but at the top of the stairs he breaks right. Now I know I have him.

He has run himself to a dead end. The entrance to a closed down comedy club would be the scene of tragedy for this young thief and triumph for me. Except, he’s found a fire escape I did not know existed. How I never noticed it on my patrols before I do not know, (photographic memory, remember?). This would explain why I had never found him out on the street. It had never occurred to me that he would go anywhere but out, and our cameras do not cover the entrance to this abandoned club.

I follow him through the fire exit into a stairwell that must lead up to the administrative offices. I can still hear his footsteps as he runs up the stairs. Now I begin to

feel a small pain in my side. I try and keep up by taking two steps at a time, but I worry that I will slip and fall. I don't want that.

After a few flights his footsteps stop, there is no sound. Did he fall? It didn't sound like it but suddenly re-energized I press on, only to see the kid, now wearing the ball cap smiling at me from another fire door, heading back into the building. He disappears through it just as I reach his level. Trying to tell him to stop, but not having the breath. I pull the door, which really should be locked, and enter what appears to be an abandoned storage room. Very abandoned. Wood debris sits in layers of dust, and dirt, a few cheerfully rude graffiti messages denote we're not the first to find this room. All this I take in as I glance around, but the boy has headed across the room towards another stair case, this one made of wood, and looking much older. I follow leaving my big heavy footprints in the previously undisturbed dust. Reaching the bottom of the wooden stair case I stop again to catch my breath. I'll admit I'm starting to breath pretty heavily, and apart from the kids footfalls on the stairs above me he makes no sound.

I climb the wooden stairs slower than I would like and I find myself in another room, this one square, but now I realize where we are. I allow myself a smile. I look above and see more stairs winding upwards. This is the [clock tower](#). He can only go up and once he reaches the top there's nowhere to go but down. Now my concern is for the boy's safety. These stairs are old. Very old. Plus, it is almost night outside, I grab my trusty flashlight, the only weapon we are allowed to use in our fight against mall crime.

"If you stop now," I call up. "We'll make it really easy, you can give us back the stuff you stole, we may even be able to keep your parents from knowing." Of course I cannot make those promises really, I just did not want him falling and breaking something, or worse. The child continued up, still making no sound but his feet pounding on the boards of the stairs. All my extra energy is gone now as I trudge up the stairs, which look to be original. The footsteps above me keep me moving.

"I'm following the boy up into the tower," I report back to my associate. "He's got nowhere to go."

I pass a huge copper water tank and keep moving. The footing is deadly, and I use my light to check the steps as I ascend. The boys footsteps stop, and I finally reach the clock. The four faces marked by wooden hinged circles in each wall. The small amount of light shining through the imperfect edges enable me to see that the boy is not here, but there is the room where the clocks motor lives.

"Ok, just come with me. I promise you'll be safe." The boy is not in the motor room.

Suddenly, directly above me the footsteps begin again. He is headed even higher up into the tower. This time the stairs are narrower, and there's a big section of floor missing,

presumably from the old pendulum. I take care to avoid it, and continue up the smaller staircase.

“Look, I know you must be scared. This is freaking me out a bit myself now,” I try to make conversation, then I think of a way to engage him. “Hey, this reminds me of the first Batman movie. Have you seen that?”

Nothing, just footsteps.

Now, I’m at the top and the stairs end. There is more light up here, because there are a few windows. I can’t see the boy. I stand silently trying to listen to where he may be, hiding in the shadows.

The whole tower is silent. Somewhere below I hear a car horn. I look around this room at the top of the tower with my light. There is only one place the boy could be. A nasty looking ladder leads up into a kind of small wooden box, with a hole just big enough for a man to climb through.

“Ok, I’m coming up to get you. If you won’t come down, I can wait all night. I’ve got nowhere to be.” This was a lie, I had a bowling game when my shift was over. I stepped on the first rung of the ladder, listening for movement. Not wanting the boy to surprise me and make me fall. Slowly I ascended.

The box room was dark. I shined my flashlight in, despite bracing myself I still almost fell. It was empty. Empty of life at least. There was no boy, no way a boy could be in here with all the stuff that was. Every item stolen the last week was crammed up in this little room. [Cardinals](#) stuff, a train from the toy store, a bunch of CD’s, everything. Sitting on top, neatly as if it had just been placed there, the ball cap that I had, not ten minutes ago, witnessed the boy steal.

I grabbed the cap, it felt cold to the touch. Almost like it had been up here for months, not seconds. Carefully I removed each item that had been stolen until only one thing remained. It was an old wooden box with a rusty old padlock. It must have been up here for a century at least. I easily broke open the lock, and flipped the box open. Inside was what amounted to a small treasure horde, jewelry, diamonds a few gold coins which were apparently old \$20 coins. The thing which caught my attention however, was a small sepia toned photograph. An old man standing in front of a train, I presume here at the station. Next to him in the photo was a young boy. Although the clothing in the photo was of the period, there was no mistaking the short dark hair and those mischievous brown eyes. My little kleptomaniac, at least ninety years ago.