

It and the free birds
leaped on



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It was a clear, crisp autumn morning, and the free birds leaped on the back of the wind floating till the current ended then dipping their wings in the orange sun rays, daring to claim the sky. I barely moved under the warm sun, until a stiff breeze began to whistle, making me want to head home. The wind made my cheeks' tingle pleasantly as I walked briskly to my house.

Pale sunlight shone through the bare branches of the trees lining the road, and fallen leaves moved and made a noise round my feet, while the smell of bonfires staying in the air brought back nostalgic memories of the weekend before. My contentment went away, however, the moment I reached home. A cold feeling of shock gripped me as I stared at the splintered, shattered wood of my front door. The lock hung, twisted out of shape, having been forced violently apart, and I felt my pulse quicken as I noticed that the door was ajar. Scarcely breathing, I pushed it lightly with my fingertips and it swung open with the slightest groan.

Inside, the house was deathly silent. I tiptoed down the hall, peering into the rooms on either side. They stared blankly at me, deserted and unchanged, revealing nothing. There were no burglars still inside, or so it seemed. Al Jammali 1 After looking about for a few minutes, I saw that there was nothing missing. I heaved a sigh of relief at finding my precious collection of crystal untouched, and my heartbeat slowed as my initial shock subsided. Somebody has certainly broken in-but why? At the far end of the hallway, I hesitated, puzzled, then cautiously climbed the stairs. As I neared the top, there was a noise; a light, hurried, scrabbling sound like one that mice might make, only coming from something rather bigger.

I turned quickly towards my open bedroom door, only to be confronted by the strangest sight: an elderly man lying uncomfortably face-down on the floor, his plump, flushed cheek pressed against the carpet, which had been pulled back to reveal the floorboards underneath. There he was with his right arm thrust down into a gap between the boards. “What on earth are you doing?” I demanded. He rolled himself slowly into a sitting position and ruffled his thinning hair, looking embarrassed. And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. I looked at him, confused. It seemed to be like I was the one who broke into his house and not the other way round.

A few moments later, “I’m sorry,” he mumbled. “I used to live in this house and I put a box down here with my savings and some papers to keep them safe.” He brushed thick dust and cobwebs off his shirt and sighed.

“But when I moved out I forgot, and I did not know if you would let me have them. What else could I do?” I looked at his seemingly anxious face, and added, “I’m sure it will be all right.” I could not bring myself to judge or even abhor the old man for I had been taught one thing by my Al Jammali mother: to always put myself in others’ shoes and see how I would act in the given situation. One must think and ponder over their choices, maybe then they will be capable of understanding them better. The poor old man would have gone through possibly the worst of all scenarios. After all, it is the basic human tendency to not dwell, most certainly not on the potential positive outcomes but on the negative ones.

I thought to myself: “ The elderly man probably looked upon all the possible things he could have done, and thus ultimately resorted to quite an outrageously bold step: breaking into my house.” I smiled a weak smile. It was one out of sympathy I believe; sympathy for the needs and cognition of the old man. He was fortunate for me not calling the police immediately at the sight of the destroyed door; his benign attempt would have been viewed as anything but what he had told me by the police or even my neighbours.

The elderly man strode up to me and thrust out his hand, proposing a handshake. While I shook his hand, the old man noted how grateful he was for having me not call the police. His face and voice made so deep an impression that I was very glad that I had not called the police. Others may rush and hurry away from what they see as a threat, but I was saddened to be able to revel only so briefly in the presence of a what had appeared to be a false house burglary.

This urge, almost a compulsion, to keep quiet was definitely the sound choice, I then thought to myself. Had I called the police, the elderly man would have been sent to jail, and guilt would have taken over my happy times. Guiltily, but suspecting nevertheless how badly he had been living the past couple of years, he carried on walking to the front door. Slowly making his way out of the front yard, the old man leant wearily on his walking stick and gazed happily towards the house where he and hisAl Jammali 3wife had lived until her death. After he left, I stepped out into the warm morning air, still shaken by the terrifying experience but immensely thankful that it was over.

I did not know what to think. I decided to walk the five miles to my mother's office to tell her what had happened, only to find myself contemplating what had happened. As I left, the aroma of wildflowers, alluring to so many, waft up and carry on the wind too far and wide. My arms and legs yet tingled with the thought of being a victim of what appeared to be house robbery. It was a shocking experience. I forgave him as I neared my mother's office to reiterate to her the amusing incident that had taken place minutes ago. It was necessary for me to not hold any grudges towards this old man in order to alleviate the inevitable dissonance of the potential danger that he could have posed, for he did teach me a vital lesson, which I would act on as soon as I reach home: I need a much better alarm for my house. Al Jammali 4