

Footprints

Good. You've found my note, and pressed the 'Play' button.

So. This is a true story. I tell you, it is - though whether you believe it or not is up to you.

But I swear that it is.

It was late in the fall of 1967. We were together, my family and me, in the forest cabin we owned in upstate New York...there's a black and white photograph on the stairs...you will have passed it many a time. The snows had come early that year, so I guess it could have been early winter. Time does strange things to your memory, doesn't it? It warps the images, one **fuzzy** scene bleeding into the next. Anyhow, it was late in the year.

Ma and Pa had gone out for the day, or maybe for the afternoon at least.

"Ralph. We're goin' into town. Keep your eye on your kid brother," I remember Ma saying, "Pa's goanna visit the gun-shop, and I've got things to do."

She didn't wait for my answer – she never did. I can still hear the scrunch of the tyres on the newly-fallen snow as the flat-back Ford left the yard, the headlights punching holes through the gathering gloom. And then it was quiet – apart, that is, from the sound of my precious brother moving about upstairs.

Marty was my parents' favourite. Always had been. He'd been planned for, while I was a mistake. Whatever Marty touched turned to gold; he was their blue-eyed boy who could do no wrong. I, on the other hand...

I stayed downstairs, in the kitchen, I seem to recall, where it was warm. I was always a dreamer so spent my time drawing, playing with my Bowie knife, making up stories, and counting the minutes till the Ford's headlamps would fill the room with light, announcing Ma and Pa's arrival. The old clock ticked in the corner and I hummed to myself. I didn't check on Marty. He would come downstairs if he was hungry, I figured, and besides, I preferred my own company to that of a spoiled brat. The afternoon became evening. I made myself a sandwich – thick, rustic bread, home baked, with slices of pastrami, Ma's favourite. I added fuel to the wood-burner and stoked it till it blazed into life. Still no sign of my parents. No more noises from upstairs. And then the auto arrived, the door opened, and my Ma came in, brushing off the snow which melted on the hard stone floor. I went to hug her, but she backed off, hung up her coat and hat. Then Pa came in. He looked around.

"Where's Marty, boy?"

"Don't know. Upstairs I guess."

He went upstairs and a minute later came down again.

Marty had gone. No sign. Nothing. And he'd never be seen again.

I took my parents outside and showed them the footprints in the snow. Like a human's but bigger than a bear's.

We never saw him again.

It's true.

I swear.

498 words

(Inspired by the title '*Unreliable Memoirs*'- Clive James)