

## The Strange Noise in the Backyard

It was a dark, stormy night, and I was home alone. Mom had gone to pick up my little sister from dance practice, and Dad was working late. I was curled up on the couch watching TV when—THUMP!—a loud noise came from the backyard. My heart pounded as I paused the show. Was it the wind? A falling branch? Or something else? I grabbed a flashlight and tiptoed to the back door. The wind howled like a ghost, and the trees swayed like shadowy giants. The backyard looked eerie under the pale moonlight, with long, twisting shadows stretching across the grass.

Just as I stepped outside, POW!, the lights went out. Everything was pitch black. My hands trembled as I flicked on the flashlight. The beam cut through the darkness, revealing nothing but swaying bushes and the old, creaky swing set. Then I hear a rustle, something moved near the shed. My breath hitched. Was it an animal or was it a burglar? I gripped the flashlight tighter and crept closer. Suddenly, two glowing eyes blinked at me from the bushes!

I almost screamed, but a tiny “meow” broke the silence. A scruffy, wet kitten stumbled out, shivering in the rain. It must have climbed the fence and gotten stuck! Relieved, I scooped up the little furball and brought it inside. I wrapped it in a towel and gave it some milk. When Mom got home, she was surprised but happy we had a new guest. “We’ll find its owner tomorrow,” she said, scratching the kitten’s ears.

Turns out, the “scary” noise was just a lost kitten! I named it Stormy and even though the night started off terrifying, it ended with a purring friend curled up beside me.

## The Lost Pup

One sunny afternoon, I was walking home from school when I heard a soft whimper coming from the bushes near the sidewalk. Curious, I peeked through the leaves and saw a small, scruffy dog staring back at me with big, nervous eyes. Its fur was muddy brown with patches of white, and it looked skinny, like it hadn't eaten in days.

My heart sank. "Hey there," I whispered, crouching down slowly. The second I reached out my hand, the dog flinched and bolted down the street. I couldn't just leave it! Stuffing my backpack onto my shoulders, I followed at a distance, careful not to scare it more. The pup kept looking back at me, its tail tucked between its legs. I remembered my dad once saying that scared animals need patience, so I stopped chasing and sat on the curb.

Digging through my lunchbox, I found half a sandwich left. Tearing off a piece, I placed it on the ground and backed away. The dog sniffed the air, inched forward, and gobbled it up. Its ears perked up a little. "Good boy... or girl," I said softly, tossing another piece closer to me. This time, the pup hesitated but crept nearer. After a few more bites, it finally let me gently pet its head. That's when I spotted a faded blue collar with a tag, "Max" and a phone number!

I pulled out my phone and called. A woman answered, her voice frantic. "Max? You found him?" Ten minutes later, a car screeched to a stop, and a tearful lady jumped out. "MAX!" The dog yipped happily and dashed into her arms.

Turns out, Max had been missing for a week after escaping from their yard. The woman hugged me tight. "Thank you for not giving up on him." As I walked home, grinning, I realized, sometimes, all it takes is a little patience and a sandwich to save the day.

## The Broken Window

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon, and my friends and I were playing cricket in the park near Mr. Sharma's house. Rohan was batting, and I was bowling. With a loud thwack, he hit the ball hard, too hard! It flew straight toward Mr. Sharma's house and "CRASH!", the ball smashed right through his kitchen window.

My heart dropped. We all froze as the sound of broken glass echoed in the air. A few seconds later, Mr. Sharma stormed out, his face red with anger. "Who did this?" he shouted, holding up our cricket ball. I swallowed hard and stepped forward. "I-I'm sorry, Mr. Sharma. It was an accident. We didn't mean to break your window." My friends nodded nervously behind me.

Mr. Sharma scowled. "This is the third time this month! You kids need to be more careful!" He sighed, rubbing his temples. "Do you have any idea how much it costs to fix a window?" I felt terrible. "We'll pay for it, sir," I said quickly. "We can do chores or use our pocket money." My friends agreed, offering to help clean up the broken glass too.

Mr. Sharma's expression softened a little. "Well, at least you're owning up to it," he muttered. "Fine. You can help me clean up, and I'll speak to your parents about the cost." We spent the next hour carefully sweeping up the glass while Mr. Sharma called our parents. To my surprise, they weren't as mad as I thought. They were just glad we told the truth.

In the end, we all saved up our allowance for two weeks to help pay for the new window. After that, we decided to play cricket farther away from houses and with a softer ball! Mr. Sharma even joked that if we ever broke another window, he'd make us wash his car every weekend for a year. We laughed, but we definitely didn't want to test that!