The Sammer and The Rock

Tom Vernon*
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Abstract

The little boy coming along the sidewalk looked like a cherub...
hillside is quiet. . . . The morning sun finds the men on the other side of the hill and far away. . . . But wait . . . . here to one side is one who remains . . . . he is still . . . . and the hands on his watch are still . . . . but he smiles. . . .
—John Chatellier, Ag. So.

The Sammer and The Rock

THE SAMMER

THE LITTLE boy coming along the sidewalk looked like a cherub. With his blonde curls and apple cheeks, he could pass for Cupid. But instead of wielding a bow and arrow, he was dragging a big claw hammer. His fat, right hand was clutched around the end of the handle, and the head dragged along the sidewalk.

“Hey, Carl,” said Windy. “Here comes your little brother. How come he’s draggin’ that hammer? Everyday I’ve seen him this week, he’s been draggin’ that hammer.”

“My Old Man traded him the hammer for that hatchet he had last week. You seen that three-foot gap him and Arnold chopped in the porch railing, didn’t you?”


“He’s back there behind Fordyce’s garage playin’ in the leaves.” Carl pointed down the alley.

“Hey, Gus. Let me see your hammer.” Windy reached for the hammer.

Julius swung the hammer above his head and down. Windy’s toe jerked away just in time.

“My Sammer. I not Gus.” Carl and Windy laughed as Julius went down the alley. He rounded Fordyce’s garage and found Arnold, his four-year-old brother. Julius was three.

“Whatcha doin’, Arnold?”

“I got matches,” said Arnold. Julius leaned his hammer
carefully against the rear of the garage and proceeded to help Arnold gather leaves. Arnold pulled out a match and started to strike it.

“All right, boys. We'll have none of that.” It was Mr. Fordyce. “Don't you know you could set my whole yard on fire? You'd better give me those matches.” The boys backed away, and Julius grabbed his hammer. As they went around the corner of the garage, Mr. Fordyce shook his head and started back to the house.

The boys came around to the open front door of the empty garage, and Arnold stopped. “Let's burn 'em in there. Then he can't see us,” said Arnold. Again Julius carefully leaned his hammer against the garage, and they carried leaves from a nearby pile into the empty garage. After they had built a sizeable pile against one wall, Arnold lit one of his matches and applied it. The fire blazed up fine. The wall caught, and the boys moved away from the heat. Julius retrieved his hammer and they retreated several yards down the alley as the fire built up rapidly.

Mr. Fordyce ran out of the house and turned his garden hose on. The garden hose did no good so he ran back in the house and called the fire department. The brothers moved behind some bushes across the alley as Mr. Fordyce ran out of his house again.

Children appeared from every direction and cheered Mr. Fordyce on as he played his garden hose on the blazing roof. A few mothers appeared and had little luck at keeping the children back to what they considered a safe distance.

Just as the roof caved in, the fire truck pulled up to the fireplug at the entrance to the alley. Most of the children deserted the fire to gather around the fire truck. Arnold and Julius slipped into the throng of children watching the firemen pull hose off the fire truck. Arnold heard Mr. Fordyce above the clamor of the children and turned to see him back by the garage, waving his arms angrily as he talked loud to one of the firemen.

“Come on, Julius. Let's go home.” Arnold started along the sidewalk with Julius right behind. The head of the hammer bounced a bit everytime it hit a crack.
"I'M TELLIN' YA he's got the hardest head ya ever seen," said Windy, patting the small boy's tow head. "What ya think we call him Rodney the Rockhead for?"

The small boy beamed at the three older boys gathered around him. Praise from Windy, the neighborhood leader, was a rare thing, and the little boy wiggled like a puppy being scratched behind the ear. The Rock was a grubby seven-year-old, small for his age.

"Nuts, nobody's got a head as hard as you say his is." Red came from across town. He was skeptical of everyone outside his own neighborhood.

"The hell he ain't," exploded Virgil, Windy's overgrown sidekick. "Last year when he fell out of ole man Talmage's garage's rafters, it didn't even draw blood when he lit on his head. Just made him kind of goofy for awhile. And besides you ain't never seen him butt into a tree have ya?"

"Nah, and I bet you ain't neither," said Red.

"You callin' me a liar?" Virgil threw down his school books and stepped toward Red.

"Cut it out, Virge." Windy grabbed Virgil by the shoulder. "I wouldn't believe it either if I hadn't already seen it. Show him, Rock." Rock shook his head. "Why not?"

"Mom told me not to anymore," the Rock said in a small voice.

"Look, Rock. We went and told Red about how tough you are. We know you got the hardest head of anybody, but Red won't believe us until he sees ya do it. This ain't like the schoolyard. Won't no teachers ketch ya like last week." Again Rock shook his head. "Ah, come on, you ain't gonna let down the reputation of the neighborhood, are ya?"

The Rock looked at the ground and kicked at a grasshopper. He raised his head and said, "Okay, oney don't tell my brother, cause he'll tell mom."

The Rock ran full speed at a tree twelve feet away,
lowered his head in the last instant, and rammed it against the tree trunk. He bounced off and fell to his knees.

"Gawd!" yelled Red. "I ain't never seen nothin' like that before. Tell him to do it again."

"That was pretty good Rock, but let's see you do it real hard, like the time you knocked the bark off that hickory tree," said Windy.

The Rock took a longer run and smashed into the tree with doubled force. Again he fell to his knees.

"Cheeeerist, ain't that somethin'? You ought to charge admission for this," said Red.

"Do it again," Windy said, "and show Red your bank shot."

The small boy again charged the tree, caromed off, ran at another tree, and rammed it. He staggered back to the older boys and, somehow, managed a lopsided grin as he looked up into Windy's face.

"That was real fine Rock. 'Bout the best you ever done. I guess Red sure knows you ain't no chicken." Windy laid his arm across the Rock's thin shoulders.

"You see now, Red, why we call him the Rock?" Virgil said triumphantly.

— Tom Vernon, Sci. Sr.

Dog Fight

Sam climbed to the top of one of the boulders, facing west, and looked back toward the town he had left almost four hours before. It looked so small. He could see everything and no one could see him. The clear air made it possible for him to see the different colors of cattle in green pastures, and the paths they would travel in a single file column at dusk. He could even identify a Greyhound bus rolling straightly and smoothly down a white ribbon