

The Time a Man Grabbed Me

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One night Roland asked if I needed any laundry done; he needed the jeans he was wearing for school next day. He had lessons to do, so I offered to wash the pants for him if he'd send them down the laundry chute.

The washing machine was in the basement, which had malfunctioning two-way switches at the two doors. If the light was turned off at the outside door, it could not be turned on at the other entrance. Sure enough, when I entered from the stairs, that switch did not work. Not to worry. No problem. I knew I could find my way through the completely dark basement to the washing machine. There was nothing in the way, and I did not hesitate. As I approached the machine and the light switch, a man grabbed me about the shoulders. I screamed – loud – and ran as fast as I could out of the basement.

There I met Roland and Paul, both breathless from their concerned dash down the stairs, Roland from the second floor. I yelled, "A man grabbed me!" Paul started into the still dark basement, unarmed but apparently determined.

I realized that he had no way of coping with the man; in my concern for his safety, I suddenly understood what had happened. When I had passed under the laundry chute, Roland's jeans, uninhabited by a body but retaining the scent of their recent wearer, had wrapped themselves around my shoulders. The "man" was Roland's jeans.

By that time, Paul had turned on the basement light at the back door. I asked him how he had planned to take on an intruder without a weapon. "I wondered that, too," he said. "All I could think of was to ask him, 'What are you doing here?'"

I was shaken by the experience, mainly by Paul's rash action. I was also astonished, gratified, and touched by the response of both husband and son to my scream. Paul, in his turn, was shaken by that scream; he still claims he didn't know I had that high or loud a voice. The next day he repaired the two-way light switch so that it responded to use at either door.

Oh, yes, Roland's jeans did get washed and dried for wearing to school the next day. And I have never again entered a dark basement.