

THE SHADOW IN THE ATTIC

A Tale of Two Brothers



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The Shadow in the Attic: A Tale of Two Brothers

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Max tried his best to ignore his little brother Leo as they sorted through boxes in the attic. Dust tickled Max's nose, and sunlight zigzagged through cracks in the wooden roof, making everything look a little spooky—even in the middle of the day.

“Max, look!” Leo shouted, his voice echoing off the rafters. He pointed at the wall, where the boys' shadows stretched long and wobbly under the bare attic bulb. Leo made silly faces with his shadow. Max rolled his eyes but couldn't help grinning just a bit.

Leo didn't notice. He was busy hopping around, pretending to be a giant shadow monster. “Grrr! I'm the attic beast!” he said, cape of dust trailing behind him.

Max snorted. “Your shadow has noodle arms, Leo.”

But something odd happened. Leo's shadow grew—just a smidge—right in front of Max's eyes. It reached for Max's own shadow, which seemed to

shrink away. For a heartbeat, Max wondered if the trick was just the flickering light. He squinted at the wall.

Suddenly, a cold draft rustled through the attic. The shadows jittered and danced. Max shivered. He scolded himself for feeling weird—it was only Leo, being silly. Wasn't it?

Leo, not bothered at all, stomped closer and the shadows overlapped. “Look, Max! My shadow ate yours!” he giggled, sticking out his tongue. But Max's shadow didn't return to normal. Instead, it lingered, thin and squished.

Max's heart thumped. Maybe attics were supposed to be creepy. Or maybe, just maybe, these shadows had secrets all their own.



That night, the memory of bending shadows clung to Max like an itchy sweater he couldn't take off. Once Mom switched off the lights, Max squeezed his eyes shut, but sleep tiptoed past him, careful not to wake his busy mind.

His bedroom door creaked. Leo crept in, grinning in his superhero pajamas.

“Max, I found something weird in my pocket,” he whispered, holding up a crumpled, yellowed paper. “It must've fallen out of one of those attic boxes.”

Max tried to be annoyed, but curiosity got the better of him. He flicked on his flashlight, and Leo spread the paper out on the rug between them. It was jagged at the edge—like the rest of it had been torn away. Faded lines twisted around a messy circle, with spiky marks that looked like stairs or...teeth?

“There was a wiggly shadow following me on the wall when I came back from the attic,” Leo

whispered, eyes wide. “Look—it’s tiny writing!”

Max leaned in, trying not to let the unfairness bother him. Why did Leo always find the cool stuff by accident?

A curling script read: ‘Follow the whisper when the clock strikes twelve, where the shadows split, your courage will tell.’

Max snorted. “Probably just some old grocery list.” But he stared at the half-map anyway, feeling its strangeness burrow under his skin.

“We should look for the rest!” Leo said, eyes shining.
“We can be mystery detectives together!”

Max felt that familiar twinge inside—Leo always made everything sound so easy, so fun, and he always wanted to share. Max wanted to be the one who found something first, just once.

“Alright,” Max said, voice low. He didn’t want to miss

out. “We’ll go to the attic at midnight.”

And right then, a shadow danced across their
bedroom door—just a whisper, just for a second—and
was gone.



The clock ticked closer to midnight, its hands creeping along as if they were just as nervous as Max and Leo. The house was unusually quiet. Even the creaky floorboards seemed to be holding their breath.

Max led the way with his flashlight, Leo sticking close behind, clutching the torn map. Each step up the attic stairs felt like they were marching deeper into a secret world, away from grown-ups and bedtime rules.

In the attic, their shoes stirred little clouds of dust. Leo's breath came out in fast, excited puffs. Max felt a little braver with his brother by his side, even though he'd never admit it.

“Where do we start?” Leo whispered.

Max squinted, searching for something out of place. That's when he noticed a strange line behind an old bookshelf—a thin crack in the wooden wall, barely

big enough to spot. On a hunch, he pushed aside the books until they thudded onto the floor.

Hidden behind the shelf was a small, iron door, crusted with cobwebs. Its rusty latch looked like it hadn't been touched in a hundred years. A faded carving above the handle looked an awful lot like the twisted circle from Leo's map.

Leo's eyes went round. "Is that...it?"

Max swallowed. "Has to be."

He reached for the latch. It was stiff and cold, and for a second, his hand shook. Leo placed his small hand over Max's, and together they pulled.

With a long, groaning creak, the door opened a crack. The attic filled with a new chill, and for a moment, the boys' flashlights flickered.

Inside, the darkness looked almost alive. But Max felt a strange, secret thrill. Whatever lay behind this

door, they would face it together. Or at least, try to.



They squeezed through the tiny door and found themselves in a small, musty room they'd never seen before. Old trunks and forgotten things were stacked along the walls, but what really caught their eyes were the shadows swirling everywhere—sloshing over boxes, sliding up the walls, always moving.

Max shone his flashlight across the floor. The shadows didn't vanish in the beam. Instead, they wriggled and twisted, almost playful, almost...alive.

Leo's hand slipped into Max's. "Did you hear that?"
he whispered.

A whisper brushed through the air, soft as a dream.

Max held his breath. It sounded like someone—something—was chanting words they couldn't understand. The shadows flinched every time the boys got close together, shrinking away from their joined hands. But when Max edged away from Leo, even by a step, the shadows swelled, bold and thick.

Max's heart raced, but Leo giggled nervously, trying to hide his fear. "They're scared of us!" he said. "Or maybe of us together?"

Determined to test it, Max squeezed Leo's hand tighter and took another step forward. Instantly, a patch of shadow on the wall writhed and faded, clearing a path toward a faded painting with a golden frame.

"Look—when we stick together, they go away!" Max whispered, surprised by how steady his voice sounded.

"Like superheroes," Leo said, grinning now.

Together, the brothers tiptoed through the strange room. With every step they took—side by side—the darkness thinned, letting through glimmers of something hidden beneath the dust and gloom.

And just when Max started thinking maybe they'd

chased the last of the shadowy whispers away,
something moved behind the painting. Something
watching. Something waiting.



They froze, hearts thumping, as the painting slowly swung open on hidden hinges. Behind it was another wall—stained, cracked—and on it, stretching from floor to ceiling, loomed a shadow darker than any other.

This shadow didn't flicker away as they approached. Instead, its twisted arms reached for Max, swelling and curling as if it could sense something inside him. Max stepped back, his grip on Leo's hand loosening.

With their hands apart, the shadow seemed to grow, its edges flickering wildly. Max felt something strange—a sour prickling in his chest, the same jealous feeling he often had when Leo got special attention or found something fun first.

A cold voice rasped from the shadow, no louder than a whisper but hard as stone. "I am made from what you hide," it hissed. "I grow each time you wish to be alone. Each time you want more than your brother."

Max stared, shivering. The shadow beast twisted brighter and bigger, swallowing patches of the room. Leo reached for Max, eyes wide. "Don't let go, Max!"

Max squeezed his eyes shut, remembering every time he'd wished for more toys, more praise, more Mom hugs—wished that just once he could be first. Around him, the shadow grew taller, darker.

He peeked one eye open. The creature's shape flickered between scary things—a giant claw, a glaring face, a storm of jumbled arms, but always, it seemed to frown in the shape of Max's own feelings.

Max gulped. This shadow wasn't just scary. It was made of things no one else could see. Unless...

He reached for Leo's hand again, heart pounding, and the shadow's body flickered, thinner at the edges. Maybe, Max thought, if he didn't feed the shadow with his jealousy, it would shrink away for good.



Max locked eyes with Leo and took a shaky breath. "I think it wants us to fight. Or for me to be mad at you—or jealous. That's what makes it stronger."

Leo nodded, squeezing Max's fingers. "But when we hold hands, it gets smaller. Maybe if we help each other, it'll go away?"

Max wasn't sure he had the answer, but he nodded anyway. They faced the giant shadow together.

"Okay," Max said, his voice steadier now. "So...let's try something."

He turned to Leo. "You're good at finding clues. I get jealous sometimes because you notice stuff I don't. But we both found this together."

The shadow swirled angrily, shrinking around the edges—just a little bit. Leo's eyes lit up.

"I get jealous too," Leo admitted. "Sometimes I want as much time with you as I get with Mom or Dad."

The shadow let out a low, disappointed moan, then pulled away from the boys like mist in the sun.

Max reached into his pocket, pulling out the half map Leo had found. “Let’s see if it fits anywhere in here...and figure it out together.” He offered Leo the map, letting him hold it for a change.

They studied it side by side, talking softly, checking the boxes and trunks—never letting go of each other’s hands. For every kind word and every burst of laughter, the shadow hissed and shrank, curling smaller and smaller until it was no bigger than a puddle under the painting.

“See?” Max grinned. “Better together!”

Finally, with a little shimmer, the jealous shadow faded away, leaving only regular attic shadows, nothing more than silhouettes on the wall. The brothers high-fived, grins wide and hearts light,

ready for whatever came next—always, always
together.



The attic was quiet now, the only shadows left small and gentle in the lantern glow. Max and Leo felt bigger somehow, braver and lighter, as if a weight had floated off their shoulders.

In the place where the jealous shadow had been, something glittered—half-hidden under the dust. It was an old wooden chest, painted with stars and moons, and stamped with the same swirling circle from the map.

Max knelt beside it, and Leo helped him lift the heavy lid. Inside, the boys found treasures: tiny wooden boats with two names scratched on the side, a pair of matching marbles, a faded photograph of two grinning sisters, a letter folded in a heart shape, and a medal that said "Best Team Ever."

Every object was a reminder that other brothers and sisters had been here too—and that they'd conquered their jealous shadows together.

Leo picked up the medal and handed it to Max without a word. Max clipped it to Leo's shirt, then poked his own chest and said, "My medal's in here."

Leo giggled. "There's enough treasure for both of us!"

Tucked at the bottom was a blank page and a pen. Max grinned, and together, they wrote their names on it:

Max & Leo—Bravest Brothers, Shadow Busters.

As they closed the chest, a warm breeze swept through the attic, making the tiny flashlight beam sparkle. Max wrapped his arm around Leo's shoulder.

"Let's leave the attic door open, so the next brothers or sisters can find the light too," he said.

And as they tiptoed downstairs, the shadows on the wall waved goodbye, friendly as ever.

Before You Drift Off...

How do you think Max and Leo felt when the shadow creature grew and shrank, and what could we do if we ever felt jealous like Max did?

If you found a mysterious attic with shadows that changed when you were with someone you loved, what would you do, and who would you want by your side?