

# Poison

by Roald Dahl

It must have been around midnight when I drove home, and as I approached the gate of the bungalow, I switched off the headlights of the car so the beams wouldn't swing in through the window of the side bedroom and wake Harry Pope. But I needn't have bothered. Coming up the drive I noticed his light was still on, so he was awake anyway—unless perhaps he'd dropped off while reading.



I parked the car and went up the five steps to the balcony, counting each step carefully in the dark so I wouldn't take an extra one which wasn't there when I got to the top. I crossed the balcony, pushed through the screen doors into the house itself, and switched on the light in the hall. I went across to the door of Harry's room, opened it quietly, and looked in.



He was lying on the bed and I could see he was awake. But he didn't move.



He didn't even turn his head toward me, but I heard him say, "Timber, Timber, come here."

He spoke slowly, whispering each word carefully, separately, and I pushed the door right open and started to go quickly across the room.



“Stop. Wait a minute, Timber.” I could hardly hear what he was saying. He seemed to be straining enormously to get the words out.

“What’s the matter, Harry?”

“Shhh!” he whispered. “Shhh . . . don’t make a noise. Take your shoes off before you come nearer. Please do as I say, Timber.”

The way he was speaking reminded me of George Barling after he got shot in the stomach when he stood leaning against a crate containing a spare airplane engine, holding both hands on his stomach and saying things about the German pilot in just the same hoarse, straining half whisper Harry was using now.

“Quickly, Timber, but take your shoes off first.”



I couldn't understand about taking off the shoes, but I figured if he was as ill as he sounded I'd better humor him, so I bent down and removed the shoes and left them in the middle of the floor. Then I went over to his bed.

“Don't touch the bed! For heaven's sake, don't touch the bed!”

He was still speaking like he'd been shot in the stomach and I could see him lying there on his back with a single sheet covering three-quarters of his body. He was wearing a pair of pajamas with blue, brown, and white stripes, and he was sweating terribly. It was a hot night and I was sweating a little myself, but not like Harry. His whole face was wet and the pillow around his head was sodden with moisture. It looked like a bad case of malaria to me.

“What is it, Harry?”

“A krait,” he said.

“A krait! Oh no! Where’d it bite you? How long ago?”

“Shut up,” he whispered.



“Listen, Harry,” I said, and leaned forward and touched his shoulder. “We’ve got to be quick. Come on now, quickly, tell me where it bit you.” He was lying there very still and tense as though he was holding on to himself hard because of sharp pain.

“I haven’t been bitten,” he whispered. “Not yet. It’s on my stomach. Lying there asleep.”

I took a quick pace backward. I couldn’t help it, and I stared at his stomach—or rather at the sheet, which covered it. The sheet was rumpled in several places, and it was impossible to tell if there was anything underneath.



“You don’t really mean there’s a krait lying on your stomach now?”

“I swear it.”

“How did it get there?” I shouldn’t have asked the question because it was easy to see he wasn’t fooling. I should have told him to keep quiet.

