



## Storm Watch

by Gayle Rosengren

**I** WATCHED MOM DRIVE AWAY with a sinking feeling. Even though she had promised to hurry, I knew she might not make it back before the storm hit. Already the sky was filling with angry gray clouds, and the wind was picking up, rustling through the trees.

"Don't look," I told myself. But I couldn't seem to look away. I was waiting, I guess, and in a minute I saw it—a flicker of light in the darkening sky. Lightning!

I held my breath, counting in my head, One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three . . . I got to one thousand six before I heard the far-off rumble of thunder. And even though I knew it was still miles away—six to be exact—my mouth was dry, my heart was beating faster, and my hands were shaking.

I closed the door and leaned back against it, as if that might keep the storm from coming. If only Jimmy weren't sick! Then at least Mom would be here. But she had to race off to pick up

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Jimmy's medicine before the drugstore closed. And someone had to stay with Jimmy, who was napping upstairs. With Dad out of town, I was that lucky someone.

Suddenly the living room windows rattled as if fists were pounding on the glass. I jumped about three feet in the air. Then I realized it was just a gust of wind, and my heart left my throat and slid back down where it belonged.

I couldn't help it. I had to look outside again. I braced myself, but I was still shocked. In just a few minutes the sky had gone from gray to black. It was so dark, the streetlights had come on, hours early. And trees were bending almost in half under the force of the wind.

I swallowed hard. This was going to be a bad one.

A loud crash of thunder was all it took to send me flying up the stairs and down the hall to my room. That's where I always wait out storms, buried under my quilt with my pillow wrapped around my ears.

I'd only gotten as far as my doorway, though, when I heard something almost as awful as the thunder. Jimmy! For a few seconds there I had forgotten all about him, but Jimmy was awake now and crying for Mom.

I skidded to a stop just as a flash of lightning lit up my room. My bed had never looked so good! I took a step toward it as the room plunged back into darkness, then stopped and covered my ears as thunder rocked the house. But when the thunder died away, I could hear Jimmy wailing, even through my hands. Jimmy, who had never been bothered by storms before, had to choose today of all days to start! I groaned and turned around before I could give in to the part of me that was saying, Forget it. He'll go back to sleep.

I backtracked down the hall to Jimmy's room. His crying got louder with every step I took.

"It's O.K., Jimmy," I called. "I'm coming."

He must have been surprised to hear my voice instead of Mom's. He actually quieted down.

I got to Jimmy's room just as two bolts of lightning blazed paths across the sky, one right after the other. For a few moments the room was as bright as day, and I saw Jimmy as clear as anything. He was standing in his crib, his face flushed

and his cheeks shiny with tears. His nose was dripping. And his eyes were wide with fear.

I forgot to cover my ears in my hurry to get to Jimmy before the thunder sounded. I almost made it. The crashes boomed right over us so loud they left my ears ringing.

"Mommy! Mommy!" Jimmy screamed in terror.

I hugged him tight to my thudding chest. In a shaky voice I said what I thought Mom would say. "Sh, Jimbo, don't cry. It's just a noise. It won't hurt you." That's what Mom always told me when I was little, anyway. I never really believed it. But, surprisingly, Jimmy seemed to. His sobs quieted to whimpers.

I felt his forehead hot against my cheek. Then I remembered his nose and I reached over to grab a tissue from the box on his dresser.

"Mommy," he said pitifully. "Want Mommy."

I wanted to say, "Me, too!" But I didn't think that would help things. Instead I said, "I know. But Mommy went to get medicine to make you feel better. She'll be home any minute." I patted his back with one hand and mopped his face with the other.

Another deafening crash of thunder set him off again. My own fear was bad enough, but seeing Jimmy's fear was somehow even worse. Maybe because he was so little and sick. Or maybe because I knew he was counting on me to make everything all right.

Desperate, I remembered something my father had tried with me when I was little. It hadn't worked because I was too scared to really give it a try. But maybe it would work for Jimmy.

"Look, Jimmy," I said. "Look out the window. It's just like fireworks. See that flash over there? Here comes the crash! Cover your ears!"

Jimmy actually giggled. He took his hands from his ears after the thunder stopped and said, "Again!"

"Help me watch, then," I said. "Let's see who sees the next flash first. Watch close now."

"There!" we both said at once, slapping our hands over our ears. This time I even managed a shaky laugh of my own.





"Again," Jimmy squealed.

So we played the game over and over.

I'm not sure when Mom arrived. We were so busy playing our game, we didn't notice. But the storm was ending when I turned and spotted her in the doorway. She was soaking wet, but she had this huge smile on her face. I gave her a little wave and smiled over Jimmy's head.

"Want more fireworks," Jimmy was demanding.

"Sorry, Jimbo," I said. "It looks like the storm's over."

"Not over. More!" he insisted.

"Not today," I said. "But, hey, there may be another storm tomorrow. Think so?"

He nodded happily, and I grinned back. Yep, there's bound to be other storms. Maybe not tomorrow, but sometime. And from now on I plan to stick around to see them. 