



# The Mystery of the Muddy Footprint

Liz tossed her backpack into the corner of the kitchen and headed straight for the cupboard where her mom stored the potato chips. Like usual, she had made the mistake of not eating much of her school lunch, and now she was starving. She rummaged through the cupboard until she found a bag of chips. She was already digging in when she spotted the note from her mom on the counter. She didn't need to bother reading it because she already knew what it said. She groaned, trudged over to her backpack, and unzipped it. She shoved a few more potato chips into her mouth and then heaved her math book out of her backpack and carried it to the counter.

"Hey, Liz! Come take a look at this," said Adam, Liz's younger brother. Normally Liz would have ignored her brother's request, but she detected a hint of uncertainty in his voice.

"What do you want to show me?" asked Liz, walking into the hallway where Adam was standing, staring at the carpet.

"Look, there is a muddy footprint on our carpet," said Adam.

"You better clean it up before Mom gets home, or you're going to be in *big* trouble," warned Liz.

"It's not *my* footprint. Look how big it is! Besides, I know better than to walk on the carpet with my dirty shoes on. Mom has an eagle eye for stuff like that," replied Adam.

Liz's heart skipped a beat. Had someone been in their house while they were gone? Was someone in their house *now*? "Let's go to Mrs. Baker's house. I don't think we should stay here."

Liz and Adam immediately left their house and ran past four houses until they arrived at Mrs. Baker's house. As soon as Mrs. Baker opened the door, Liz explained what had happened.

"I'm sure there is a logical explanation," said Mrs. Baker, "but you two were smart to come here right away. Why don't you call your parents at work and tell them what happened?"

Liz called both parents, but neither answered their phone. "Mom must be with a patient."

"And Dad is probably giving somebody a speeding ticket," Adam commented.

"I left them both messages to call me back right away," said Liz.

"You know," said Adam, "maybe that footprint belonged to Dad. He might have stopped at home for lunch today."

Liz looked at her brother as if he were crazy. "Are you kidding? You *know* Dad wouldn't have left a muddy footprint on Mom's carpet. He would have *definitely* cleaned it up."

"Maybe he didn't know he left it there!" Adam said, defending his reasoning.

"No, I still don't think it was Dad's footprint. If he would have come home at lunchtime, that footprint would have been dried by the time we got home from school. Whoever left that footprint did so within the last hour," Liz stated.

"Your grandma lives nearby, doesn't she?" mentioned Mrs. Baker. "Perhaps she dropped something off at your house this afternoon."

Adam shook his head. "No, it couldn't have been Grandma. That footprint definitely belonged

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to a man with larger feet. Grandma wears the same size shoe as Liz."

The phone rang. Recognizing the number, Liz answered immediately. "Hi, Dad." She told her dad the entire story about the muddy footprint without pausing to take a breath.

"Calm down and take a deep breath, Liz," instructed Dad.

"But the intruder may still be in our house!" Liz said, panic creeping into her voice.

"Liz, there was NO intruder. In fact, I am almost positive that I know who left the muddy footprint," said Dad.

"You do? Whose footprint is it?"

"A man came to repair our washing machine today. I bet the repairman left the footprint," explained Dad.

Liz's shoulders dropped as she exhaled the breath that she didn't even know she was holding. "But, wait! How did he get into our house if nobody was home?"

"We asked your grandma to meet the repairman at 2:30, unlock the door for him, and then to lock it back up after he was finished fixing the washing machine. In fact, I talked to your grandma about 45 minutes ago, and she said that the washing machine is now fixed."

Liz noticed that Mrs. Baker and Adam were waiting anxiously to be let in on the information Dad was sharing with her. She turned to them and quickly explained the situation.

"You did the right thing by going to Mrs. Baker's house, but I think you and Adam can safely return home now. In fact, your mom's appointments for the day should be nearly over, and she should be home shortly," said Dad.

The kids thanked Mrs. Baker once more, and slowly started walking back to their house. "You know, that was pretty exciting!" said Adam. "I think I might want to be a detective someday!"

- What is the occupation of Liz and Adam's dad? \_\_\_\_\_  
What text clues helped you make this inference? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which of the following is the most likely occupation of Liz and Adam's mom?  
A. dentist                      B. secretary                      C. principal                      D. store owner
- What did the note that Liz found on the counter most likely say?  
A. Basketball practice starts at 5.  
B. Remember to do your homework before you start watching TV.  
C. Practice your trumpet.  
D. Eat a healthy snack.
- Based on what you read in this passage, which character trait best describes Liz's mom?  
A. unorganized                      B. protective                      C. talkative                      D. fussy