

It was a small bathroom, exactly like ours, quite confining, the door next to a toilet and the toilet abutting a sink and a bathtub squeezed in beside that. I pulled on the door but it didn't open. At home I would just have closed it behind me, but at the Wishnows' I locked it—something I'd never done before in my life. I locked it and I peed and I flushed and I washed my hands and, because I didn't want to touch their towel, wiped them dry on the back of the legs of my corduroys—everything was fine, and then I went to exit the bathroom, and I couldn't undo the lock above the doorknob. I could turn it a little ways but then it would catch and stop. I didn't bang on the door or rattle the doorknob, I just kept trying to turn the lock as quietly as I could. But it wouldn't go, and so I sat back down on the toilet and I thought that maybe it would somehow work itself out. I sat there for a while but then I got lonesome and stood up and tried the lock again. It still wouldn't uncatch, and I started to knock lightly on the door, and Mrs. Wishnow came and said, "Oh, the lock on the door does that sometimes. You have to turn it like this." She explained how to do it, but I still couldn't get it open, and so very calmly she said, "No, Philip, while you're turning it you have to pull it *back*," and though I tried to do as she told me it still didn't work. "Dear," she said, "turn and back simultaneously—turn and back at the same time." "Which way is back?" I said. "Back. Back towards the wall." "Oh, the wall. Okay," I said, but I couldn't get it right no matter what I did. "It won't work," I said, and I began to sweat, and then I heard Seldon. "Philip? It's Seldon. Why did you lock it? We weren't going to come in." "I didn't say you were," I said. "Then why did you lock it?" "I don't know," I said. "Do you think we should call the fire department, Mom? They can get him out with a ladder." "No, no, no," Mrs. Wishnow said. "Come on, Philip," Seldon said, "it's not that hard." "But it is. It's stuck." "How's he gonna get out, Ma?" "Seldon, be still. Philip?"

"Yes." "Are you all right?" "Well, it's hot in here. It's getting hot."
"Take a glass of cold water, dear. There's a glass in the medicine cabinet. Take a glass of water and slowly drink it and you'll be fine."
"Okay." But the glass had something slimy at the bottom, and though I took it out, I only pretended to drink from it and drank instead from my cupped hands. "Ma," Seldon said, "what's he doing wrong? Philip, what are you doing wrong?" "How do I know?" I said. "Mrs. Wishnow? Mrs. Wishnow?" "Yes, dear." "It's getting too hot in here. I'm really starting to sweat." "Then open the window. Open the little window in the shower. Are you tall enough to do that?" "I think so." I took off my shoes and stepped into the shower in just my socks, and standing on my tiptoes I was able to reach the window—a smallish window of pebbled glass that looked onto the alleyway—but when I tried to open it, it was stuck too. "It won't go," I said. "Bang it a little, dear. Bang the frame at the bottom, but not too hard, and I'm sure it will open." I did as she told me but couldn't get it to budge. By now my shirt was saturated with sweat, and so I angled myself to be able to give the window a good strong shove upwards, but in turning I must have struck the shower handle with my elbow because suddenly the water was on. "Oh, no!" I said, and ice-cold water was pouring over my head and down the back of my shirt, and I jumped out of the shower and onto the tile floor. "What happened, dear?" "The shower started." "How?" Seldon said. "How could the shower start?" "I don't know!" "Are you very wet?" she asked me. "Sort of." "Get a towel," she told me. "Get a towel out of the closet. The towels are in the closet." We had the same narrow little bathroom closet directly upstairs over the Wishnows' bathroom closet, and we used it for towels too, but when I went to open theirs, I couldn't—the door was stuck. I yanked but it wouldn't open. "What is it now, Philip?" "Nothing." I couldn't tell her. "Did you take a towel?" "Yes." "Then dry yourself off. And you must stay calm. There's nothing to worry about." "I am calm." "Sit down. Sit down and dry yourself off." I was soaking wet, and now the floor was getting wet, and I sat on the toilet seat, and that's when I saw a bathroom for what it is—the upper end of a sewer—

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and that's when I felt the tears begin to well up. "Don't worry," Seldon called in to me, "your mother and father will be home soon." "But how will I get *out*?" And all at once the door was open—and there was Seldon and behind him his mother. "How'd you do that?" I said. "I opened the door," he said. "But how?" He shrugged. "I pushed. I just pushed. It was open all the time." And that was when I began to bawl and Mrs. Wishnow took me in her arms and said, "That's okay. Things like this happen. They can happen to anyone." "It was open, Ma," Seldon said to her. "Shhh," she told him. "Shhh. It doesn't matter," and then she came into the bathroom and turned off the cold water—which was still streaming into the tub—and, without any problem she opened the closet door and took out a fresh towel and began to dry my hair and my face and my neck, all the while gently telling me that it didn't matter and that these things happened to people all the time.

But that was long before everything else went wrong.