Late and dark, one summer midnight, the doorbell rang, one solitary “*DING-DONG*“.

Upstairs I sat alone glancing through the ever-so-sophisticated pages of a children’s picture book. The audible jarring of the electronically simulated bell and hammer sent my mind reeling to determine my reaction.

Perplexed by the lateness of the hour, I arose to my feet for good or ill, parting ways with a certain wolf-clad boy and his island of monsters, and tip-toed toward the stair. Stealthily I descended the staircase, mustering my inner man of steel in preparation to meet my unexpected visitor. Upon approaching the door I could hear from the other side a disturbing scratching, scraping, clawing, winding up and down the door jam like a rattlesnake.

“Someone is trying to jimmy the door unlocked!” I whispered to myself. “The classic credit card slip perhaps! Not on my watch” I boldly concluded, the scratching continuing.

“Think, think!” Reaching over to the banister ledge I grabbed hold of the only object in sight that could be used as a possible line of defense; a dented and battered rubber mallet, once purchased on a whim at a dollar store. At this moment it was well worth all one hundred pennies. I silently pressed my face against the cool metal door and peered through the peep hole to catch a glimpse of my would-be burglar. My imagination ran wild with visions of wielding my rubber mallet as if it were Thor’s trusty hammer, Mjölnir, to fight off a mysterious maniac.

Oddly, my limited view of the front porch revealed nothing more than the swarm of June bugs, gnats and mosquitoes that had congregated around the porch light. But the scratching and shuffling continued from the other side of the door, only inches from my face, which was still pressed against it.

I decided to take drastic measures into my own hands. With the sweat inducing concentration of a bomb diffusing technician, I turned the doorknob counter-clockwise ever so slightly. I cracked the door open half an inch before giving it a swift and abrupt KICK with my right foot! Then, rubber Mjölnir in hand, I swung the door wide and gave a growl like Gimli as I thrust my face out into the muggy night air.

No one there.

A cricket chirped.

I smacked my neck as the sting of a mosquito jerked me back from my dumbfounded stupor.

Searching the blackness beyond the yellow glow of the porch light I glared through the swarm of gnats, down to the porch steps and made eye contact with the guilty party. Hunkered down and halfway off the side of the step, a young raccoon was staring at me with wide eyes like black pearls, panting like a racehorse. He was so shocked by my cacophonous emergence that he just sat there staring up at me as if to say, “What on Earth are you trying to do, give me a heart attack?” I couldn’t blame him either, as it was a good seven or eight-foot drop from top of the door frame where he had been eating his dinner of June bugs, to the step where he landed!

Naturally, like all good fathers do, I grabbed a flashlight, woke the children from their much needed slumber and we followed the little raccoon around to the side of the house. The masked, would-be intruder wobbled his slinky way to a crab apple tree and climbed upward.

We met him at eye level on our patio and talked to him for a little while, pretending that he and we were experiencing the same awkward feeling. He just sat there on a branch in front of us, his little black pearl eyes squinting pathetically, nose dripping with snot, occasionally chewing on a few crabapples as we watched each other in wonder, and relief.

It is needless to say, this proverbial *bandit* was dearly more fun to have spent the midnight hour with than the alternative.