**Assumptions**

# **Unit 11**

Brian left his door **ajar** on the pretense that since it was getting warmer outside, his room was getting stuffy at night, and he needed a little air to circulate. His dad was a stickler for not turning the central air on until May 1st. It did not matter how hot it got before that. If they had to open all the windows and sleep in only their underwear, if it wasn’t May 1st yet, his dad was all right with that.

It really wasn’t a surprise to anyone because his dad was that way with all their utilities. The heat wasn’t turned on until November 1st. All lights had to be turned off when a room was vacated, and when you brushed your teeth, you had better not let the water run continually. Heaven help the person who became **lax,** or careless**,** in any of these areas. If Brian’s dad, Josh, felt that anyone was wasting utilities, thus wasting his hard-earned money, he would hold a boot camp on conservation on the next available Saturday.

 Brian knew something was up when he had walked into the kitchen after the girls’ basketball game and found his mom and dad engrossed in a very heated **dialogue,** back and forth. The second they realized he was in the room, though, they immediately stopped talking to each other and switched into their “happy, loving parent” mode. For some unknown reason, they never wanted Brian, or his brother Brandon, to see them having anything but a friendly conversation. People have disagreements all the time, and most don’t have a problem with someone else observing or hearing their altercation. Not Brian’s parents, though. They always wanted to appear in agreement, especially in front of the boys.

Brian heard the mantle clock, which was sitting on the fireplace **hearth**, ring ten times. He knew his mom and dad would be heading upstairs shortly. They always headed to bed right around 10 p.m. However, first, his mother would put out clean water and fill the food bowl for their cat, Skipper. His dad would check to make sure all the doors were locked, and then he would set up the coffee pot so it would already have brewed a pot when they awakened in the morning. Then, and only then, they would grab each other’s hands and climb the stairs to their bedroom.

It was the same ritual every single night. Tonight appeared to be no different except for their argument in the kitchen. That was highly unusual, thus the reason for Brian feeling the need to leave his door open slightly so that he could hear if they continued their conversation in their bedroom.

Brian was beginning to **mull** over the idea of going downstairs to find a tin can or glass that he could use as an amplifier against their door. He had seen the technique used in a couple of movies and figured it was worth a shot to see if it actually worked or not. Just as he was about to exit his room, he heard his mom and dad walk past, but he did not hear the door latch closed.

He couldn’t believe his luck. When he had mentioned to his parents that he was going to leave his door ajar, to avoid his room warming up too much, he hadn’t really expected them to follow suit. However, upon peering out his own door, he could detect light emanating from the doorway. That could only mean that they had left their door partially open. He just hoped the opening was **adequate** enough to allow the sound of their voices to travel to his room. Only time would tell.

Brian knew his parents wouldn’t start talking until they had both gone through their nightly bathroom rituals. They always washed their faces and hands, brushed their teeth, and set out their clothes for morning. Brian had lain in bed and listened to or pictured them doing this on so many occasions that they were **innumerable**.

Why did tonight feel so much different? Brandon wasn’t home yet, but he rarely arrived home before midnight, what with taking day classes at the community college and working evenings and weekends at the pizza shop, he liked to spend some time with his friends before he came home for the evening. No, the only thing different about tonight was walking in on his parents arguing. Although it seemed like a small thing, it was like a **gigantic** burden weighing on his heart.

Brian walked as silently as possible over to his desk. He bent over, picked up his desk chair, and carried it over to his doorway. He could have just sat on the floor, or stood for that matter, but he had the feeling he was going to need his lucky chair. He considered it his lucky chair because he always sat in it to do his homework and to study. Since he had been using it, he had earned nothing but A’s. He also considered it lucky because the **emblem** of his favorite college basketball team was carved into the back, and they had just finished second in their conference and would probably be playing during March Madness. He sure hoped they would be! If they did end up in the tournament, he had already planned to move his chair right in front of the flat screen, so he could watch every game from it. In addition, of course, he would do his homework at the same time.

Brian sat down. His parents were still going through their routine, so he just let his mind wander for a bit. He was remembering the time that he, his dad, and Brandon had bought tickets to a Georgetown home game. They had risen early, and Dad had cooked a big breakfast. The hour and a half ride had passed in a wink because they all were cutting up and laughing the whole way there. When they arrived at the Verizon Center, Brandon had taken Brian up and down the escalator to show him all around the stadium. After the game, they had walked around the **infamous** Chinatown district, where rumors abound about the underground activities taking place there. Brian remembered that trip as the time of his life.

Brandon was changing now, though, and Brian wondered if he would ever have good times with him again. He wasn’t sure why it was happening, and he didn’t like it at all. They had always been very close, but he could sense that something was beginning to **mar** their relationship. Brian just could not figure out what the problem was. Even his parent’s and Brandon’s relationship was eroding, but every time Brian made an **overture**, or proposal, toward his brother, Brandon would just cut him off and say he didn’t want to talk about it, or he didn’t have time at the moment.

Brian just didn’t understand why his brother was so secretive, why his brother never spent any time at home anymore, and why all their relationships seemed to be crumbling. It was as if Brandon had brought the entire family dynamics to a **stalemate**. His parents couldn’t or wouldn’t change their extremely habitual routines, and Brandon couldn’t seem to accept that in them, even though his life had become as ritualistic as theirs only in a different form. All of this rigidness was playing **havoc** with Brian’s vision of what his family should be. It was chaos instead of perfection.

The longer Brian sat in his lucky chair, the more his resolve began to **wilt,** like a parched flower. Even if he could hear his parents soon, he wasn’t sure if he even cared anymore. He might hear his parents arguing, but what was that going to solve? It wasn’t going to change anything. It wasn’t going to repair the seemingly irreparable cracks in their relationships. About all it could do is make him feel more **vindictive**--spiteful. He didn’t think he really had the strength or the stomach for that right now.

Brian picked up his chair, not concerning himself about noise, and moved it back over to his desk. Writing always helped him sort things out, so he thought he might sit down and compose a **narrative** of this current situation. He knew he wouldn’t show it to anyone, but he hoped it would help lift the burden from his heart. He first went over to his doorway to douse the light and close the door.

As he reached the doorway, he saw his brother, Brandon, race past to their parents’ bedroom. Brian stood very still by the door. It was extremely early for his brother to be home and highly unusual for him to go to their parents’ bedroom for anything. Brian stuck his head out the door, so he could hear to his best advantage.

“Brandon, calm down and slow down so we can understand what you are saying,” Brian heard his mother **implore,** pleading with him.

“Okay, I almost had to commit a **misdemeanor**—not a felony--to get this done, but I am here to tell you—mission accomplished!”

“Didn’t I tell you he would come through,” Dad stated emphatically.

“Okay, Mr. Know-it-all, you were right. I am not even going to ask how you were able to pull this off,” Mom stated.

“Do you think he knows?” Brandon asked.

“I don’t think so, but he did walk in on us arguing over which of us would end up right and what the loser, being your mother, would have to do for the other,” Dad laughed.

“Mom, how could you? You should have known I was going to come through.”

“I have to let your dad win once in a while, don’t I?” she chuckled.

 Brian was totally baffled. *What in the world could be going on?* He didn’t have to wait long to find out.

“Here they are, Dad. Four tickets to Madison Square Garden to see Georgetown play in the Big East tournament!” Brandon announced as he pulled the tickets out of his pocket.

“Brian is going to be so thrilled with this birthday present. Thank you, Brandon, for being such a wonderful brother and son,” his mom said weeping.

“All the extra hours paid off, and I couldn’t have done it without you guys’ support and tutoring. I’ll be glad not to have to work until midnight anymore. It’s going to be all worth it, though, when I see Brian’s face tomorrow!”

Brian walked over to his lucky chair, kissed the Georgetown emblem, and decided to draw up a **pact** with himself instead of writing a narrative. He vowed never to doubt his family again. Then his face erupted with the biggest grin ever.

--Ronald Powers

**UNIT 11 VOCABULARY**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **WORD** | **DEFINITION in your own words from context clues** | **MEMORY TRIGGER** |
| ajar |  |  |
| lax |  |  |
| dialogue |  |  |
| hearth |  |  |
| mull |  |  |
| adequate |  |  |
| innumerable |  |  |
| gigantic |  |  |
| emblem |  |  |
| infamous |  |  |
| mar |  |  |
| overture |  |  |
| stalemate |  |  |
| havoc |  |  |
| wilt |  |  |
| vindictive |  |  |
| narrative |  |  |
| implore |  |  |
| misdemeanor |  |  |
| pact |  |  |