

# HOME ALONE

Directed by Chris Columbus  
Produced by John Hughes  
Distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox  
Released in 1990

Kevin MacCallister, mistakenly abandoned when his family travels to Paris, is left alone to reflect. A winning child with a precocious grin, he initially believes that through a bit of magic he willed their disappearance, which delights him. The change does him good, and he awkwardly embraces newfound freedoms. But living alone is soon revealed to be a disappointing struggle with fear. The attic, the basement, a gangster movie, and the mysterious next-door neighbor each strikes terror in Kevin's soul. His fear of the next-door neighbor, a rumored serial killer, is addressed three times at least, appropriate in light of later events. But as "man of the house" Kevin feels guilty cowering in the midst of these subtle horrors.

In a critical scene which defines the very purpose of the film, Kevin offers some ironic advice. Entering a large church on Christmas Eve, he reverently removes his knitted cap while reviewing the stained glass iconography. Taking a seat, he discovers his neighbor, Mr. Marley, here-to-fore seen carrying a snow shovel and the cumulative weight of perpetual gossip. Seeing his neighbor wide-eyed with fear, Marley approaches Kevin and asks to share the pew, seeking to allay the young boy's fears. The first substantial topic of conversation is family. "How you feel about your family is a complicated thing."

We had seen earlier that Kevin's fears had each prompted cries of help to his mother. He now admits that his behavior some days previous had been indefensible. Mr. Marley reciprocates Kevin's vulnerability, admitting that he is estranged from his son, the sad result of a major row between the two "years ago, before you and your family moved on the block." Thus Marley had not killed his family physically, but spiritually. Kevin admonishes him to let go of his pain, and, no longer fearing rejection, boldly call his son to set things right. Kevin uses his newly enlightened perspective on the forbidding basement as a point of reference. Left unspoken is his deathly fear of this man Marley until a few minutes previous. But just as Kevin's fear proved unjustified, perhaps too is Marley's fear of rejection. They shake hands and part with a warm Christmas salutation.

Kevin does not relate to his kindly neighbor a fear that trumps all others, the burglars. After deflecting their interest while they cased his family's palatial suburban domicile, Kevin decides to fight them on his own, taking his lessons about fear to an extreme application. Where before he cowered at their presence, now he taunts and humiliates the thieves, accepting their threats of violence as his penance for dishonoring his mother. He sets himself up as a target; by currying their escalating wrath, he distracts them from their goal of robbing his home. He even directs the police to the house across the street, and not his own. By putting himself in danger, he keeps the family belongings safe. Also, by taking on the burglars, he is proving to himself that he is mature, that he is responsible, and despite his family's condescending derision, he is capable, valuable, implacable. They could not see his promise, but he will summon it, *tonight*.

His plans to stymie the bandits are outlandish and devastatingly effective. Inevitably outmatched, Kevin betrays his buried fears, but bravely faces the threat of a tortuous demise until Mr. Marley intercedes, dispatching the thieves and conveying the boy to safety in the film's rousing climax. Kevin's response is instructive, whispering, awestruck, "Wow." After all he has seen this night, after all he has accomplished, his childlike capacity for wonder is left intact.

A classic denouement ensues. The thieves are imprisoned, and Kevin is reunited with his mother. He remains circumspect and humble amidst an admiring family, a victor content with himself, no longer in need. Best of all, he is allowed to share in Mr. Marley's reunion with his son. Teary-eyed, he waves to the friend who saved his life while acknowledging Marley's thanks for the courage he inspired. They have saved each other. It is a beautiful portrait, fear conquered in love.