

The Burning Bed

Told by Paul Nation

A friend from a tropical country was visiting us in New Zealand and we decided to take him and a group of other friends to my brother's place to stay for a few days. Now, it was winter in New Zealand and our friend was feeling rather cold because it's much colder here than in his country during the winter. It wasn't very cold for us but he felt it quite a lot.

Now, my hometown is up near a mountain, and we went up there so that they could all go and see the snow and have a good time. Time came to go to bed. When our friend came down to say goodnight, he was dressed in his pajamas, a tracksuit on over the top of his pajamas, pair of socks and a scarf – he was going to wear all that to bed. Well, we felt a bit sorry for him, so we gave him the bed which had an electric blanket. Unfortunately, he didn't know about electric blankets, and when he went to bed he didn't turn off the blanket, but left it on all night. Now, the electric blanket was quite an old one, and during the night it started to burn slightly; it started to burn into the mattress and into blankets.

My brother's a baker. When everybody else sleeping in the room smelt the burning, they didn't worry too much – they just thought it was my brother doing the baking. But the smoke became too much and they had to wake up and see what was happening. When they turned on the light, there was our friend lying in the bed, smiling very happily because he felt very warm, but the bed was smoking and starting to burn. So, they got him out of bed and then they had to decide what they were going to do with the mattress. They were sleeping up on the third floor of the house and they couldn't carry it down through the house or else it might start dropping onto the carpet and setting the carpet on fire. So they decided that they'd throw it out the window. But before they did that, I had to run outside and get the hose ready so that when it was thrown out the window I could put water on it, so it didn't start any serious fire. I ran outside, it was a cold frosty night; I only had my pajamas on, nothing on my feet. I looked around for the hose, turned on the tap, the hose came flying off the end of the tap, covered me with water, pushed the hose back on again, then I waved for them to throw down the blanket. They threw it out the window, I put the water on it and put it out.

By the time I'd put the hose away and tidied up outside a little bit, went back to the bedroom, everybody had given our friend one blanket from their bed, and he was curled up again fast asleep on the floor. I think he was sorry that we had to take his burning mattress away from him. It was probably the first time that he'd been really warm since he'd left his home.