

No One Screamed

The train howled in the night like a wild animal. It was the only thing that saved Lena's life.

Her eyes snapped open.

The horn from the train howled again, and Lena pulled the blankets away from her sweating legs. Her heart pounded and she was breathing quickly. Her arms and legs were heavy. She gripped the iron bar of her headboard.

She knew that she had woken up from a dream, but the details were slipping away from her like beads of mercury, splitting and evaporating until there was nothing left but the feeling of panic still vibrating deep in her bones.

She looked around the room, searching for something to trigger a memory. Something had to explain the terror in her blood. What was there to be afraid of?

In the tiny pause between a breath and a heartbeat, she heard the creak of the step.

The second to last stair made a horrible sound when you stepped on it. Lena's father had said it was the house grinding its teeth. Everyone in the house learned quickly to step close to the wall where the board wouldn't move.

Heavy steps came up into the hall and stopped right outside Lena's door. She pressed her hand against her mouth to cover up any sound she might make.

Lena waited for a sound. She crawled out of bed and went across the floor. Something told her that she had to stay low. She hugged the wall.

She made it to the door. There was no sound, no movement on the other side.

She lowered herself onto the floor, looking through the crack between the door and the floor. She could see two heavy boots standing in the middle of the hall. They weren't her father's shoes. He worked in an office and didn't even mow the lawn.

The shoes walked down the hall. The sound was cold and heavy. She could feel it vibrating through her skull with her cheek pressed against the floor.

The shoes went down the hall, turning into her parent's room.

For twenty breaths and sixty heartbeats, there was no sound.

Then two meaty thumps. Wet sounds, one after another.

The shoes appeared again.

The right shoe had a red smear on the toe. It walked forward, closing the distance, that red stain.

The heavy footsteps got louder, the feel of them pulsing down her body.

Lena laid on the floor, praying that those shoes would walk by. That those shoes with their red stain would go down the stairs and out of her house. She watched them come closer and closer.

The shoes stopped in front of her door.

Her breath caught in her throat, but her heart kept beating. Ten beats, twenty, fifty... There was no movement in the house except the fluttering of her heart.

The boots were so close; she could see the shiny red stain on the toe of the shoes. It was soaking into the leather of his worn boot. She could smell it. It smelled metallic.

Above her, the door knob turned. She couldn't move, couldn't process it until the door swung open above her.

She rolled over onto her back.

He stood over her. He was tall, filling up the whole doorway.

In his hand was a long axe. The blade was covered in blood. It dripped onto the floor next to her head.

His eyes were cold. They stared down at her.

When he moved it happened quickly. On the first heartbeat, he swung the axe up in his hands. On the second heartbeat, she opened her mouth, sucking in a lungful of air. On the third, the axe flashed down.

There was another wet thump.

The man's bloody work was done.