

Chill

By Terri Pine

*Blood freezes on snow,
Glittering death staining white.
Crystallised crimson.*

They both heard it at the same time. Helen raised startled eyes to meet her husband's across the scrubbed wooden table and as one they turned to look at the back door. It came again, a quick, almost furtive scratching sound.

'Dog?'

'Whose?' his tone was scathing, Helen bit her lip.

'Stray?'

'In this weather? For Christ's sake, there's almost a foot of snow in places out there.'

'Well whose fault is it we're stuck here in it?' She heard her own voice rising in anger again ... it wasn't unusual these days.

'You wanted a holiday,' he flung back at her.

'I suppose I should have known better than to expect a normal holiday, like normal people have,' she snapped.

'At least it was free. You should be grateful my parents let us stay here,' Craig returned at once, as if he had been waiting for an opportunity to remind her of his family's generosity.

Three year old Louis frowned at the accusatory glances that flashed like sparks across the table between his parents. Helen glanced quickly at him, a false smile on her face in an attempt to deny what he had heard. Still frowning, he examined his brutalised sandwich before pulling more pieces off and dropping them on the floor.

Helen moderated her tone for the sake of her son.

'I'll go and have a look,' she offered, standing up. Craig immediately rose to his feet as well, reaching for the back door. Helen watched him with increasing irritation. So even this was a race, was it? It was getting ridiculous, the competitiveness of their five-year marriage. Still, up to him. She shrugged and gestured at him to go ahead and do what he liked.

Craig pulled open the back door and Helen winced at the frigid wind that blew in. Even Louis looked up and shivered.

'It's cold, Daddy,' he complained. Craig peered out into late afternoon half-light, and Helen waited for him to duck back in and tell her that there was nothing there, they were hearing nothing more than leaves and twigs blown by the wind. Instead he looked at Louis, holding a finger to his lips to hush the boy's whining. Helen felt her heart speed up ... out here in the middle of nowhere it could be anything. She'd heard that they were trying to breed wolves back into these Highland forests and suddenly their cosy holiday cottage had become less a haven than a prison. Having no electricity didn't help.

The snow hadn't been forecast, they had expected rain, but the temperature had dipped that crucial couple of degrees, bringing this furious white storm. Judging by the radio weather report, though, it wouldn't last; rain was expected later that evening as the cloud thickened and temperatures rose again. Craig pulled his jacket closer around himself and turned to Helen. Prepared for a reassuring, even patronising explanation aimed more at Louis than herself, Helen was surprised to see the solemn, almost sad expression on his face.

'We'll talk when I come back in. Louis can go to bed, and ... we'll talk, okay?'

His voice was unexpectedly gentle. Helen felt a prickle of tears at the back of her nose and her throat closed up. Maybe talking would solve it, maybe not, but at least he was prepared to try.

She nodded and he stared at her for a long moment before turning back to venture out into the snow-driven yard. She watched him, huddled in his coat, ducking around the corner of the cottage before she came back inside properly, shivering as she closed the door and sat back down next to Louis.

'Where's Daddy?' Louis asked at once.

'Gone to have a look at the snow, to see if we're going to be able to play in it tomorrow,' Helen told him, brushing his hair back from his eyes. It was crazy how she was barely able to keep from touching this child, even after all this time ... if he was close, she had to be holding him or brushing his soft skin with her fingertips. Craig said she was storing up trouble for herself later on, but then he would say that, wouldn't he? Louis had never been as close to his father as he was to her.

When almost a quarter of an hour had gone by and Craig hadn't returned, Helen started to get jittery again. She put Louis's plate in the sink ready to wash the next morning when the water was hot, and stared out into the gathering dusk.

'What the hell's taking so long?' she muttered, straining her eyes against the snow that had rendered the garden unrecognisably featureless. She hadn't heard any more scratching noises. It had probably been a fox or some similar creature looking for shelter, now frightened off by her husband's clumsy stomping around out there. It was a shame; it would have been nice for Louis to get a close up look at some wild creatures.

Typical big-hero Craig had ruined that for the boy too, she thought, knowing she was being unreasonable, but unable to help it.

'Sweetheart, sit tight, okay? I'm just going to nip out and see what Daddy's doing.' She called to her son, who glanced up quickly at the darkening day outside the window. He was still upset by the argument, and it showed as he turned back to look at her again.

'Kay,' he muttered, his mouth turned down disapprovingly.

'I really won't be long,' Helen assured him, pulling on her coat and boots. She picked up the huge torch that lay on the sideboard - it really was getting dark quickly tonight. Hardly surprising.

Pulling the door closed behind her, Helen stepped off the small porch into the yard. The snow wasn't too deep here, the wind had blown it into drifts against the garden wall. But still her boots crunched prints into it beside the ones her husband had made. Following those rapidly filling indentations, she made her way around the side of the cottage holding tightly to the torch. She wished she hadn't brought it now, it wasn't as dark out here as it had seemed from indoors, and the torch was too big to fit into her pocket. Her hand was aching within a moment of being exposed to the biting wind.

As she rounded the building the snow gusted hard into her face and she gasped and staggered back steadying herself on the icy stone wall of the cottage.

'Craig!' she yelled into the wind, hearing her cry whipped away as easily as the flakes of snow that spun crazily in the air. She spat and shook her head as her lashes became encrusted and more snow flew into her mouth. She called again, but the wind seemed to step up its howling as if to deliberately thwart her.

Another gust took her breath away and, as she turned her face to the side to regain it, she caught a movement low to the ground at the edge of the garden. It was difficult to identify with the driving snow and gathering dusk and the perimeter fence was over fifty feet away, still something about its quick movements struck Helen as less defensive than furtive. The scratching at the door ... this was no dog, but she couldn't imagine what kind of animal it could be. Not a wolf either though, she knew that much.

On the heels of this frightening thought came the question; if whatever it was was eager to hide from her, where was Craig that he posed no similar threat?

Too soon she had her answer. Ahead, where the corner of the cottage met the rear garden, a glimpse of blue in a huddled shape on the ground.

Oh, God ... he had fallen, maybe broken a bone and passed out. She had to get him indoors before he froze to death out here.

Hurrying to his side, she dropped down beside him, heedless of the wet snow soaking through her jeans.

'Craig!' she cried, her voice urgent but small against the rising shriek of the wind in this exposed part of the garden.

He was lying face down in the snow, one arm tucked beneath him, so Helen got her hand under his shoulder and used all her strength to push him up and over, rolling him onto his back to allow him to breathe.

Staring anxiously down at his face as she rolled him, it nevertheless took seconds for her to register what she was seeing. That his eyes were open translated themselves in that first instant to his being conscious, on the verge of laughing and crying out "Gotcha!" But a heartbeat later she understood that he would never laugh or speak again.

Open eyes, snow-encrusted lashes and eyebrows. Open mouth, a scream that had frozen and gone unheard ... or unuttered.

Her gaze jerked down his inert body, seeing but not comprehending at first the bloodied clothing, jacket and shirt torn and finally the hollow cavity of his stomach, ripped open, grey loops of intestine and internal organs spilling across his hips and groin. Blood pooled on the ground in the warm patch of ground where he had lain. Already starting to freeze, the deep crimson gleamed wetly in stark contrast to the pristine white all around. Snow gusted in,

dusting everything with a light covering ... it was almost enough. Helen stared in numb horror at the eviscerated body of her husband, not even realising that she wasn't breathing until her head grew light and her own body took over. She dragged a deep, frozen breath and coughed. The cough turned into gagging and she shoved backwards with her knees, her crazy thought that to vomit on him would be the most terrible, disrespectful thing she could do. She moaned aloud as she retched, purging herself until she was too weak to move. Only the thought that she would freeze to death out here beside her husband gave her the strength to climb to her feet. She couldn't look at Craig, but she became vaguely aware that he was becoming little more than a shapeless mound of snow, and she knew that, although leaving him felt wrong, it was all she could do for now.

What had done this? What kind of creature would attack a full grown man in his own territory? Helen gasped aloud as a cold thought slammed into her head ... Louis! What kind of danger was he in? She gave a low moan and her head spun as she moved, but the thought of her child drove her back towards the house, her one thought to find him and protect him.

Before she had got halfway back, she saw it again. This time it wasn't hiding. This time it was leaving the cover of the hedge, and heading across the garden towards her. Helen had never seen anything like it in her life: standing around three feet tall, no higher, it nevertheless possessed an air of such menace that even before she saw its face, the strength ran out of her legs and her gorge rose again.

Unlike any animal she had ever seen, it scampered in an almost sideways gait, two-legged with long arms on the ends of which sprouted large hands, and disproportionately elongated fingers.

The head was elongated too, with a sharp chin and a crown rising high above and away from deep-set eyes. The creature stopped its shambling suddenly, head raised slightly, and as the eyes lighted on Helen where she stood paralysed, they glowed a dim, dirty yellow. It began moving again.

As she watched it advancing, she thought she understood now why Craig had been killed; a small, shapeless mound she had not even noticed in her shock at finding him that way lay near his freezing body - unmoving, and of the same size as the beast that came towards her

now. Somehow he had bested one of their number, an act which had drawn more out of the forest and Craig had paid dearly.

A sound to her left snapped her attention in that direction and she heard a breathless little scream tear from her lips. Another of the creatures, its strange sideways movements carrying it with terrifying efficiency across the snow-covered ground.

Helen took a stumbling step back and turned to run for the back of the house. All too vividly she could picture those long-fingered hands grasping the front door handle, turning it, those obscene creatures finding her baby, her Louis ...

She ran harder, her feet slipping and sliding in the snow, her breath coming in ragged gasps, her throat raw from inhaling the frigid wind.

She rounded the second corner and stopped dead in helpless horror. Two more of the creatures were loping towards her. There was no way she could reach the back door before they did. She tried to concentrate, to think of a way to get past them, but her treacherous mind blazed with images of her dead husband, his wide staring eyes superimposed on the face of her little boy.

'No!' she cried, and was relieved to hear the edge of anger instead of the weakness of dread. Along with the fury came a sudden, calm thought. If she could make it to the shed she would be able to get to the axe which her father-in-law kept there for chopping firewood. The small shed lay to her right, the back door ahead to her left. If the shed was locked she would be committing suicide and leaving Louis at the mercy of these murdering hell-creatures. But if she could get the axe they'd both stand a fighting chance of making it down to the car, half a mile away at the edge of the forest.

There was no decision to be made. She broke to her right, losing valuable ground as her right foot slipped from under her and she went down, her legs parted painfully, drawing a cry. Shoving up and forwards, she headed for the shed, sparing a quick glance to see whether they were following her or going for the door. To her amazement she saw all four of them had stopped as if undecided. They all held their heads at an angle as if listening, and then, as one, with their eyes glowing that sick yellow again, they turned in her direction. It seemed as if they were under the control of some remote intelligence and Helen felt a chill that had nothing to do with the heavy snow gusting hard at her side. Her time was running dangerously short.

She reached the shed, seeing at once that the padlock was hanging loose, and dropping the torch she grasped the bolt, trying to force herself to work steadily at it. A glance over her shoulder and she moaned aloud through tight lips. They were too close ...

The bolt snapped aside and, sobbing with relief, Helen pulled at the door. One of the creatures was right there behind her, and as the door opened outwards she had to step back into striking range. A second before she threw herself into the shed, she felt a hot pain rip at her calf. Blood began soak through her jeans and she swallowed the nausea, pulling the door closed behind her and casting around frantically for the woodman's axe that usually hung on the wall.

It wasn't there ... how could it not be there! Helen shrieked her fury and frustration as she held tightly onto the door, while she stared around into the darkest corners of the shed. It had to be there, it couldn't be anywhere else! The door was jerked hard in her hands, the skin catching beneath her wedding ring and pinching hard enough to make her eyes water.

'Fuck off!' she screamed, her anger rising above anything she had ever experienced. She held tightly to the metal handle, barely noticing the blood trickling over her hand from the torn skin of her wedding finger. Unreasoningly she screamed again, kicking at the door, hoping to scare them back while she looked for something else she could use. It didn't work, the door shook under her hand harder than ever.

The shed had been emptied of almost everything except a few old tins of paint and some rusty handtools, still at least they were weapons of some kind. One handed, she picked up two plastic handled screwdrivers and a file, and shoved them into her pockets, wishing she hadn't dropped the torch outside; it was dim in here, and the light that filtered through the dusty window was fading even as she worked.

At last there was too much blood on her fingers to grip the handle sufficiently, and she cried out as the door was jerked back out of her hand. As she turned to face her nightmare she saw the axe. It was propped in the corner beside the door and she had blundered past it without seeing it. The first of the creatures was inside, and its long fingers slashed out at Helen as she lunged past it, seizing the axe. It was heavier than it looked, and the head made it unwieldy but she dragged it towards her even as the creature ripped its claws into her arm. There was no pain, at least not yet. But she knew she only had a moment and swung the axe

around as hard as she could, connecting with the its blunt edge rather than the blade. But the force of the blow had the desired effect.

The creatures fell back in confusion as their leader stumbled, and again, Helen saw them cock their heads as if waiting for a telepathic signal. She took one look at their muddy-yellow eyes and snatched her chance, thrusting past them out into the icy winds again. Her arm started to sting as she moved and she glanced down quickly at the wound, seeing the torn material of her shirt flapping in the wind, revealing a long, clean gash in her forearm. It wasn't too bad, not as bad as it might have been, she told herself; her mind skidded once more to the violent manner in which Craig had died, and she was horrified to find her eyes filling with tears of grief. Not now, for Christ's sake! There would be time enough for grieving later - she hoped. Right now it was Louis she had to think about.

Abruptly she turned back to the shed with the thought of slamming the door and trapping the four hell-demons. But she was too late, the sudden flash of inspiration snuffed as soon as it was born ... they were already out and loping towards her again. Feeling the axe slipping in her bloodied hand and with more blood pooling in her boot and seeping down her arm, Helen stifled a desperate sob and took off across the garden again, heading for the back door.

Why did the house seem so far away? The axe dragged the ground, slowing her down as she ran, but she couldn't let it go, it was her only hope. She heard the low, chittering noises of the creatures as they gained on her, and the fury rose in her like a beast itself. Her chest grew tight with it, her vision blurred, she wanted to scream and scream at them, swing the axe and slice their disgusting heads clean away from their equally hideous bodies. She wanted to stand there in the snowy garden, screaming until she couldn't stand any longer ... but there was Louis. And now, Helen saw with a heavy feeling, one of the four had broken away from the others and was making for the front of the house. She had no time to spare, she had to get in and lock all the doors from the inside. Then she and Louis could wait them out until the snow melted and the power came back on, restoring their telephone link to safety.

Grunting with the effort of moving through the deepening snow, tightening her grip on the axe, Helen forced herself to go on.

She was almost there when it happened. A wrong step, an over-eager lunge for the door, whichever it was, her foot caught in some object beneath the snow and she went down again.

This time the pain was instant, a deep and bursting agony that shot through the top of her right thigh and then the immediate gushing of warm blood. Her head light, the scream tearing loose before she had time to swallow it, she realised what had happened and a glance down at her leg confirmed it; one of the screwdrivers she had shoved into her pocket had driven deep into her own leg as she fell, and was stuck in her thigh like a dagger. The amount of blood was terrifying, the pain pulsing like a living being, its teeth tearing into her even as she understood what she must do.

Dropping the axe, forcing her freezing fingers into the top of her jeans pocket she grasped the handle of the screwdriver and pulled upwards. The tool came free with ease, and her fingers slipped in the sticky warmth of her own blood as she got a better grip and pulled it all the way clear of her pocket.

With a cry of outraged horror, she flung the crimson soaked screwdriver at the advancing creatures and felt a surge of vicious pleasure as by pure chance it struck the leading monstrosity in the forehead, driving it back and drawing blood as deep red as her own. She fumbled in back pocket and pulled out the remaining tools she had shoved there, aiming carefully and throwing them one at a time, but her hand was shaking and her vision unsteady. The metal file glanced off the arm of one of the creatures and the second screwdriver skittered harmlessly on the snow, looking absurdly normal as it lay, blue semi-clear plastic gleaming dully on white.

The creatures had hesitated in the face of these missiles, but now they began their advance again and Helen rose dizzily to her feet, her hair hanging limp in her eyes as she stood, bent over the wound in her leg, willing herself to ignore the pain and move.

'Louis.' She muttered. 'It's alright, I'm coming ...' Teeth gritted, she picked up the axe again, this time in her bloodied left hand while her right was clamped over her thigh, pressing tight to try and stem the alarming flow of blood.

She bit back rising nausea and stumbled over the last couple of feet to the back door. The nearest creature was now no further than ten feet away and, as Helen pushed open the door, she turned and swung the axe. This time she was holding it the right way, and the blade bit deeply into the high forehead of the hellish fiend, where it stuck fast. The two remaining

followers stopped still, their eyes on her, yellow and burning as she wrenched the blade free, the creature dropping at her feet with its limbs twitching, fresh blood glistening on the snow.

Then they began a high, wailing keening sound which drilled into Helen's brain like a rusty bit and, with a cry of her own, she slammed the door shut, turning the key and pocketing it. Leaning against it in the relative safety of the kitchen, she dragged breath after shaky breath, feeling all the aches and pains crashing down on her at once. Her arm was on fire, her wedding finger and the back of her calf throbbed but worst of all was the deep, unrelenting pounding in her thigh. She grabbed a tea towel from the rack as she stumbled across the kitchen making for the front door. Twisting it into a rope she wrapped it around her upper thigh as high as she could and pulled it tight. Reaching the front of the house she saw through the glass panel of the door that she was just in time, as the fourth fiend lurched onto the porch. Sobbing with effort, Helen twisted the key and shoved the bolt across for good measure.

Now to find Louis.

Back in the kitchen she fumbled in a drawer until she found a wooden spoon and, shoving the long narrow handle through the makeshift tourniquet she twisted it to pull it tighter. The wound throbbed still but the blood flow seemed to be easing and, not wanting to frighten Louis, she grabbed one of Craig's massive sweaters from the laundry pile and pulled it on to conceal the worst of the blood in her arm and leg. She forced her tone to sound as normal as she could as she called her son.

'Louis? Where are you, lovey?' No answer. Fear gripped her as never before. Once again the image of Craig's frozen, eviscerated body leapt to the forefront of her mind, and she clenched her fists tight as she fought it back.

'No, no ... not my boy.' She muttered thickly, feeling her head grow light again, her vision narrowing and swirling. Too much blood lost, too much ...

Helen dragged her leg behind her as she moved into the front room where she had last seen Louis. Through the darkness that now crept through the house she could see that he wasn't in there, and called to him again.

'Louis? Come on, laddy-o!' she said brightly. 'Daddy's outside still, but we need to stay together until the power comes back on, okay?' Putting her fist to her mouth she bit on her knuckles to keep from crying out as pain flared in her leg again, and the house remained silent but for the wind and that awful wailing outside as those monsters grieved for their dead.

'*Fuck you, fuck the lot of you,*' she hissed at the windows, at the walls, at where she imagined they might be. 'I don't care, get it? You touch my baby and I'll rip you apart with my *teeth*, you can bet your revolting little lives on that, you ...' suddenly no words seemed bad enough for what she wanted to say and she subsided, letting out a shuddering breath. She was so tired, she could barely see straight, and she leaned on the back of the sofa and fought the urged to simply lie down and go to sleep.

The wind picked up outside and a door slamming somewhere at the back of the house brought her back with a jolt. There must be a window open! Unless ...

'Louis!' she cried, pushing herself away from the pull of the cushions and turning to leave the room. He stood in the doorway, his thumb tucked firmly into his mouth, his other hand grasping a storybook.

'Read to me?' he asked, holding the book up. Helen wanted to weep with relief, but instead she gestured at the fading light with a smile of regret.

'It's too dark, darling,' she explained. 'But I could *tell* you a story instead if you like?'

'Where's Daddy? He tells good stories.'

'I, he's still outside, he's...'

'Why?'

'I was just telling you, sweetheart, he's, um... he's checking things.'

'You're lying! He's gone because you kept fighting!'

With these words flung at his mother, the little boy turned and ran. Panic seized Helen as she realised he might try and leave the house, but he couldn't reach the bolt on the front door and she had the key to the back door in her pocket.

Instead he ran into the back bedroom and Helen dragged herself after him, moaning softly each time she raised her right foot and placed it down again.

'Louise, please ...' she begged, wondering if she would be better leaving him after all. In the end the choice was taken from her.

Once more crossing the kitchen she heard a smash in the front room, the demons had discovered the huge picture windows. Helen picked up the axe from where she had let it fall on reaching safety and felt her resolve harden again. She had no intention of letting those things get their hands on either of them and she would fight to the death. Turning back to the front room, she gripped the axe tightly and pushed her pain to the back of her mind, focusing instead on preparation for the confrontation.

Three left, just three hell-creatures and she had the advantage.

Hoping surprise would work in her favour she stood outside the closed front room door, axe raised to knee height, thinking to chop at them one at a time as they came through. One good, hard blow would put each one out of action, if not actually kill them. She would be buying a little time.

Once more she wondered about that group-consciousness thing they had exhibited; she was ready to bet that it wasn't each other they were listening to, but there had been no sign of any more of them outside. And why were they so intent on killing? Was revenge driving them to hunt down humans when there would be a much richer hunting ground with far less resistance out there in the forest?

She had no further time to dwell on these thoughts, a chittering sound was coming from just behind the door now, accompanied by a low snuffling, then scratching at the handle. Helen's heart stuttered as she hefted the axe in her hands, praying that she would have the strength to carry her plan through. She would be safer in the little back room with Louis, but if she could wipe out this enemy now, then they could make it down to the car and away from this hell-hole. The thought of those nails ripping into her child gave her the strength she so desperately needed and, as the door opened and the first of the beasts appeared, she swung as hard as she could, driving the axe blade deep into its chest. Once again the blade stuck and she grunted with frustration, but the creature was already dead and as it fell away she pulled at the handle and the blade came free.

The two remaining set up their wailing again and Helen shook her head to dislodge the almost physical barrier it put up. She couldn't concentrate in the dreadful keening noise, and staggered back, keeping a tight hold of the axe as she stumbled, her wounded leg letting her down. As she fell, she saw the two fiends coming at her and lifted the axe handle in front of

her face. Claws raked at her hands as they tried to pull the handle aside, and remembering Craig she drew her knees up to protect her belly. There was so much blood now, too much of it hers, mingling with that of the two dead creatures that stained the axe head and dripped down the wooden handle. It was getting too difficult to hold, sticky and slick with blood and sweat and Helen used the last of her strength to shove her attacker back with the axe, letting it go finally and rolling over onto her side. As she gained her knees she saw something so terrifying that her heart almost failed her ...

The front room was full of them. Climbing over each other, each one adding its voice to the others as it saw its dead partner in the doorway. At least thirty, maybe closer to fifty ... Helen sobbed aloud, pushing herself through her exhaustion to rise to her feet, hanging onto the wall and leaving bloodstained handprints smeared on the innocent floral patterned paper. She had nothing with which to fight anymore, and no strength to escape. All she could do was hope that she could make it to Louis' bedroom door so that she could lock it, keeping him safely inside. She pulled herself along the wall, her hands slipping as she went, her leg dragging behind her, blood now flowing freely again as the temporary tourniquet slipped and loosened on her thigh. She held tightly to the wooden spoon handle and tried to twist it again, but her hands didn't have the strength to do it properly.

More than, fiery pain blazed down her leg and turning to see the closest of the demons reaching out for her, she saw that many of them were standing in bemused grief over the single dead creature. Suddenly, seeing how she might yet buy time to lock herself in the room with Louis, she ripped out the wooden spoon from the tourniquet. Sacrificing a moment might be worth it in the long run, she realised in a swift moment of clarity and, feeling her stomach muscles bunch in anticipated revulsion, she turned the spoon in her hand and drove the long, narrow handle deep into the creature's right eye.

A jellied mass burst out immediately, flowing down the handle and Helen jerked her hand back as if it might burn her. The beast shrieked in agony, turning back and grabbing at the object that protruded from its eye-socket, sending its followers into confusion. Helen wasted no time watching or even allowing herself a moment to congratulate herself. She began to run as best she could, warm blood coursing down her leg as the circulation was once more freed, until she reached the door to the back bedroom.

Throwing it open, she fell inside, only just turning to lock it in time before the beasts began their clawing and scratching. No longer worried about scaring Louis, she grabbed him and hustled him over to the bed in the corner, the farthest distance from the door and the tiny, high up window.

Still, she reached up and pulled the curtains, ignoring Louis's questions until she was sure they were safe. There was even a telephone in here, she remembered with relief and sooner or later they were going to be reconnected. Finally, satisfied that nothing was going to happen to her baby, she pulled him close and kissed him over and over, despite his trying to pull away when he saw that she was covered in blood.

'Where's Daddy? And what's happened?' he asked, when at last she held him away from her and just drank in the sight of him here, with her and unharmed. She sensed that now was the time for at least some of the truth. He needed to be at least aware of the potential danger. She sat beside him on the bed and told him about Craig, that he had been killed by the same things that were trying to get in here for them. The boy accepted the news of his father's death, but Helen knew it hadn't sunk in yet.

Tiredness was taking over, the pain in her leg receded to a distant hum and she knew that it was dangerous to go to sleep, but maybe five minutes wouldn't hurt ... she cast around for something to replace the wooden spoon and re-tie the tourniquet, and found a ruler on the little desk.

'Whatever you do, Louis, don't open the door or the window and don't make a sound,' she told him through gritted teeth as she twisted the ruler, re-awakening the pain briefly.

'Maybe they'll go away, okay? We'll just sit tight here until the phone is back on, then we'll be safe.'

Safe. A word that sang in Helen's heart as she sat beside her beloved child in that tiny room. She knew that they would be okay now, the creatures couldn't get at them - there was no way they could break down the door, and the window was too high up.

Safe.

At last.

Her eyes slipped closed and she gave herself over to the slumber that crept over her, claiming her bit by bit until she relaxed completely.

She never saw Louis looking down at her thoughtfully. Never saw him suddenly cock his head on one side as if listening to something. Never saw his eyes suddenly glowing a dirty yellow as he went to unlock the door.

The End.

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