

6. His Eyes

The boy stabbed down on the rewind button, measuring out a well worn period of time in his head for this mixtape. He loved this track, a real hit for this 1980s New Wave band. He pressed play, sat back on his haunches to settle and appreciate his music choice on the blue floral, acrylic carpet. Simultaneously, there was a crashing sound and vibration from downstairs. The boy, tall, thin and with a face that could light up, but mainly stayed solemn, froze. He looked like a strange dog, with his brown/black mane of hair, sitting there, poised and also hesitant. Indecisive.

His bedroom door was closed, his room a safe haven, disconnected from the world, curtains closed at this time of the evening. More noises, bashing and struggling, raised voices, all of which assailed him almost physically, attacking his psyche, resulting in a deep shiver that started in his shoulders and rolled down his back. He slowly pirouetted, facing the bare white door, starting to rise, his ears hypervigilant to the noises, but they were quieter than earlier. That was more worrying.

Quickly padding to the white portal, reaching for the handle, his ears were almost pointing up, his head cocked sideways, more like a listening puppy, than an adult dog. Decision made, he turned the handle, pulling the door open and stepped into the dark landing, a number of doors, and stairs immediately to his left. Almost immediately, he was on the first two steps, frozen, listening, but not looking directly down into the lounge, dimly lit.

Decision again. He padded cautiously further down some steps, allowing most of the cosy lounge to be visible, though it was more shadows and poorly defined furniture, visible by overwhelmed lamps. The tableau was almost stuck in time, scarred in his mind and memory, a gothic horror painting by some unknown, disturbed artist in dread. His mother was pinned against the dark wood panelling of the far wall, her arms up, her hands around the forearms of his father, who was pushing her almost into the wall, his hands exerting increasing pressure around her neck. There was no verbalisation, only the rasping, struggling sound of her breath, his father oddly silent, despite the growing effort of his grip.

The boy somehow found himself leaving the bottom step, his body aligned with this grotesque dance of marionettes. 'Dad', he shouted quietly. 'Dad!', slightly more stridently. 'Dad!!!', rising to a scream. No response, his evocation tailing off, like an echo dissipating energy through a mountain pass. He hesitated again, finding himself now on his parent's right, his mother's face blooming red, desperate eyes growing larger in her head. He reached out, tentatively, then with some more inclination and grabbed his father's upper right arm, shouting, 'Dad!!!', now with more force and direction.

As if a spell was broken, his father eased off his mother's neck, his face turning to his son. The boy saw his father's eyes, completely obsidian, like paired black holes, both drawing him in, and signalling perhaps the next victim would be him. The boy was terrified. Then, the focus of those eyes diminished, the tension in the room now a deflating balloon. The man pulled back, turned and stalked off. Reaching for his mother, the boy eyes wide in terror and fright, she flinched, until her eyes locked and recognised his features, concern, and fear. 'Why didn't you stop him quicker?', she whispered, with a hoarse and wavering voice. The boy stepped back, perplexed, confused, guilty and scared.

His mother suddenly pushed past him, the porch, then the front door left open, allowing the evening chill and more darkness in. He paused, the hesitant puppy stance, then running after her, worried sick. He found her some time later, hiding in a bus shelter, like an animal watching with wide eyes for a predator in the street. In the morning, he made his way to school as usual. 'How are you today?', said the teacher at the gate, already turning to the next school child as the boy replied, 'Oh, fine, I'm fine', albeit with a hint of deadness in his voice. But she did not notice, and only if you really listened would you have heard the inflection. *But no one ever did.*