

Richard was rolling down the drapes when he got to the kitchen window. He stopped momentarily as he noticed the black car still outside, but it seemed just as deserted as it had been earlier. He did, however, note the lack of lights in the house opposite the street, where the car was parked on the curb. Richard found it a bit strange. Still, he was probably just being paranoid, he thought and decided to stop it. He rolled the drapes down, and didn't notice the dark figure sitting up in the driver's seat as he did. 'Liam?' he called, and at hearing his son reply from the living room, said, 'I'm taking a shower. Will you start the recorder at eight? I want to watch my show later,' Liam replied with a 'Sure, dad', and Richard nodded as he went to the bathroom. Liam was a good kid; a good son. He had let him stay up to watch a funny movie, because he'd promised to go to bed afterwards. Richard would take his shower now, and watch his recorded show once Liam was tucked in.

While Richard Slater grabbed a towel and turned on the tap in the shower, the kitchen door was stirring slightly as it was pushed open. He didn't hear the clicking footsteps on the tile floor, nor the slow deliberate breathing from the unknown person who had just entered the house.

Liam was happy watching the movie. He had a slight stomach-ache due to the greasy food, but he was content and enjoying himself. He'd been home from school early and playing computer games with his dad, gotten food he liked for dinner, and now he got to stay up late and watch a funny movie. It had been a good day, he thought. Liam was alone in the living room, his father a few rooms down the hall in the bathroom taking a shower. He was sitting in their sofa watching the TV with only a single lamp in the corner of the room lit, its light shining comfortably on the white-painted wall behind the television. As something funny happened in the movie, Liam buckled forward and giggled aloud, not noticing the dark-clad figure entering the room from the kitchen. Liam reached into the bowl of candy on the coffee table in front of him and playfully threw some chocolate-covered raisins into the air to catch in his mouth, while trying to focus on the film at the same time. When he was done, having caught about half of them, he concentrated on the movie, but noticed something amiss. The shadows reflected off the wall behind the television had changed somehow, and he held up a hand to check if it was his shadow. It was, he realized and waved at himself, seeing the motion reappear as a silhouette on the white wall. He chuckled, but immediately stopped when he saw another outline on the wall – the figure of a person – moving quickly towards his dancing hands. He turned his head, and his eyes widened as he saw the black-clad stranger dart

towards him holding a washcloth in one hand, and a long knife in the other. Liam screamed and stood up, but he got caught before he had left the couch, the cloth pressed to his face with determined strength. He saw a black glove holding the cloth, and kicked and wailed, but the stranger's other arm had grabbed around his waist now. Liam was thrown to the floor in front of the television, the assailant landing on top of him, moving the coffee table with the impact and tipping over the bowl of candy. The move caused the black-clad person to lose grip of the cloth slightly, and Liam forced out another scream, calling for help. He could faintly hear the running water of the shower from the bathroom, as the cloth was once more shoved into his face. This time the assailant had him pinned to the floor and thereby had him in a tighter clutch. Liam kicked around with his legs, but he could feel his body numbing, his vision disappearing and his breath coming in gasps through the smelly cloth. It had to be some sort of chemical, he thought frantically as the intoxicating fumes penetrated his mouth and nostrils. The person sitting on him held on despite his writhing and kicking, and Liam's eyes slowly started to fall shut. He heard the water in the bathroom trickle now, and then it stopped completely, and he knew his father was done showering at that point. With a final dedicated burst of energy, he pulled backwards, inching a bit along the floor with the assailant still holding on. It was far enough though, as Liam kicked with all his might, knocking over a small table next to the couch where a vase full of flowers stood on. He heard the glass vase shatter, but the impact of the sound was diminished due to the rug lying below it. His eyes fell shut as he heard a door opening somewhere, and Liam fell unconscious.

Richard stepped out of the bathroom and looked towards the living room. He had heard Liam say something incoherent, but his son often laughed when watching movies, and Richard had merely smiled. But then he said something again, and Richard thought it almost sounded like a scream, so he perked his ears and turned off the water to better listen. At the sound of shattering glass Richard had heard enough, and quickly wrapped a towel around his waist and went into the hallway, water dripping off his body. Suddenly he got a sinking feeling in his stomach as he noticed Liam no longer making any noise at all. Peering down the hallway towards the living room, Richard heard the television, but he still couldn't hear his son, and so quickened the pace.

'Liam?' he called out, and at the lack of reply he started running, entering the living room with a frantic look in his eyes and his breathing uneven. Instantly he spotted the slightly moved table, the shattered vase on the floor, and the tipped over bowl of snacks, and Richard's breathing intensified

even more. Beginning to sweat, he looked around the room for more clues. He noticed a wet patch on the dark carpet, but there was no trail leading from it.

‘Liam!’ he called again, shouting loudly. Just as he did, Richard Slater heard the kitchen door slam shut. His eyes widened, and hope filled his thoughts at the notion that Liam might just be out in the garage getting cleaning supplies for the mess he made, but nagging thoughts about the yells he had heard intermixed, and concerning his son’s safety, Richard wasn’t about to take any chances. He ran as fast as he could through the dining room and down the interconnecting passage to the kitchen. Entering the kitchen, he quickly opened the door to the outside. He heard a car door slam hard, and seconds later, as he emerged in from the doorway, he saw the car on the opposite side of the street roll off the pavement.

‘No!’ Richard yelled, and ran onto the street, dropping the towel as he did – but he didn’t care about modesty at that stage. Before he even reached the pavement on his own side, the black car skid by and sped onto the road, driving quickly down the street away from the panicked father. There was no one around, no one looking at him, and no cars driving on the street. Richard was left alone to deal with the situation.

‘Liam!’ he called again, and then ran back into the house, grabbing his car keys from the table. He looked for his cell phone, but realized it was in the bedroom upstairs; there was no time to find it, he decided. Instead, he ran outside and opened his garage, screaming at the electric opening mechanism to go faster. When it was finally up, he ran inside, jumped in the car and backed onto the street without checking the rear-view mirror, crashing into his own garbage can in the process. It didn’t matter to Richard, and he hit the accelerator as soon as he could, speeding down the street after the black car. He understood the futility of the chase, because the black car had to be far ahead of him, but he had to try; perhaps he would get lucky, he thought desperately. He had to remain hopeful, he thought, but bitter emotions soon overwhelmed the sweaty and confused man. Someone had kidnapped his son, and he cursed himself for being so careless. There had even been warnings; the pizza guy had directly told him to watch out, but Richard had stuck with his beliefs, figuring nothing bad was going to happen to *his* family. Now that lack of paranoia had cost him, he thought bitterly. Richard went through the near-empty streets of Greensburg faster and faster, slowing down occasionally to look at any parked cars which were dark in colour, but as the minutes trickled away, he realized the chase was over before it had even begun. He clamped the brakes and drove up beside a telephone booth and got out while leaving the engine running to call 911.