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A Noise Downstairs

by Lizzie Staples

The rhythm of the day started with an alarm call at 6 in the morning for Perdy although she always woke naturally once spring had arrived. She never slept with the curtains closed, preferring to see the early morning sun stream across her old patch work quilt.

She dressed quickly and quietly tip toeing down the stairs with bare feet touching the old uneven red brick floor. Glancing her eyes quickly around the kitchen with bunches of herbs hanging from the beams, she unlocked the back door and slipped her feet into the hand knitted fair isles socks placed inside the wellington boots making it easy to step down the step into the garden.

The dew was still on the lawn as she made her way through borders of Tulips, forget me nots, Lupins and Hyacinths, along a path that she had lovingly made herself from old pieces of unwanted bricks and broken terracotta pots. The cherry blossom lay scattered beneath the old tree like confetti. It was her favourite time of year with the perfume of the garden pervading the air.

Perdy let the hens out first, leaving the eggs to be collected by her two children later on. The goats had heard Perdy and one by one she milked them and carried the milk back to the cottage, placing the milk churn in the fridge before she woke the children to get them ready for school. As always the mornings went in a flash and beds had to be made up for her Dutch visitors who were staying for several days before leaving for Scotland.

The back door was always open during the day with a large porch area for boots

etc to be taken off before entering the cottage . A little window just large enough for a child to climb through was permanently left open to keep the air flowing from the porch into the cottage where muslin bags hung dripping with whey into a large white glazed bowl.

The goats had once more been milked , the hens shut up for the night and the children read to, before Perdy sat down with her guests eager to know about their lives . It was nice for the children as her guests came with two children the same age as her own. A bottle of wine had been consumed and it was as though time had stood still for those precious moments spent laughing and talking .

Perdy was always the last person to climb the stairs making sure that she placed her feet gently on certain floor boards so as not to wake her guests.

There was a strong moon that night casting it's light across the brass bed into the room. The sheets had been freshly laundered and Perdy loved sliding into freshly made sheets with pillows sprayed with lavender water from provence.

Talks were always taken gently with her husband before the day ended. Perdy pulled the sheets around her and was about to drift off to sleep when she heard a noise downstairs. Did you hear that noise as she turned to her husband with her heart thumping loudly. No - go back to sleep said her husband as he turned over and pulled the sheets around him.

“There is someone in the cottage” Perdy insisted, "please can you go downstairs and see who it is?"

Her pleading fell on stony ground and thinking of her two children sleeping soundly in their beds and her guests, Perdy was convinced that it was only a matter of time before the intruder would make their way up the stairs. The only option left was to go down the stairs and see for herself who was in the cottage .

She quickly placed a cardigan over her cotton nightgown and turned the latch on the bedroom door . She knew every creaking floor board in that cottage like the back of her hand and slowly placed each step gently so as not to make the intruder aware of her presence. Perdy had made it down to the familiar red bricks and was suddenly confronted by a man standing in the doorway of her kitchen. In a small but strong voice she asked the stranger how they had entered into the cottage. With a wave of his hand he gestured towards the small window leading from the kitchen into the porch.

There was only one thing that was important to Perdy and that was the safety of her children and guests. In a firm voice she told the intruder to leave before she called the police. It was obvious that the intruder was high on drugs. Trembling but standing her ground she pointed to the back door and the intruder left. Quickly she closed the little window securing the latch firmly and

made her way back upstairs into the bedroom tiptoeing across shafts of moonlight. Slipping into bed exhausted and her body still trembling she saw her husbands figure outlined under the sheets in the moonlight. No words were spoken .