



The Noise Downstairs

by Sue Thompson

There are no floorboards creaking, there are no suspicious noises, just a silence, a peaceful interlude, mainly because of the time, it is 4am. I lie in bed hearing the dull purring of the central heating coming to life, I hear the rain falling. I can just about make out the light easing its way through the small window high above me.

Sleep has eluded me yet again and I switch on the light. Still a silence fills the air. I could be anywhere if I close my eyes. I like to imagine I am lying on a beach, the waves lapping on the shore, the water just reaching my feet, splashing them as it turns and retreats. The sun is beating down on my body. I could lie there forever. Immersed in my own thoughts.

And then I hear it, the low rumble of life moving downstairs, stirring from his slumber, the irritation of my silence being invaded. I say he, but I do not know if it is a man or a woman because I have never seen them, and likely never will. But I know what they do, I have heard the rumours, people talk in a place like this, you get to know what goes on. Nothing is secret.

Am I scared of the noises below? Yes of course, but I cannot change what is inevitable, we cannot turn back the clock. I hear the room below coming to life, he is moving around down there checking the points, pushing buttons, he hums as he goes, as if he enjoys his job. I feel the need to lie on the floor with my ear to the ground. I want to know what it is that is making that noise, crackling noises come and go, a buzzing wafts up through the floor.

I can only imagine, as a fear rises up inside of me. Doors open and close, more crackling noises like lightning striking, then a dull low buzzing again. Then it stops abruptly.

They come for me at 12 o'clock, earlier than I expected. I am led down the stairs, they take me into a room and ask me several questions, I reply as best I can. I am left alone for a while, it is the longest few moments of my life.

I am led into that room the one I can hear from upstairs, the one I have spent the last 10 years listening to, hearing the mysterious noises drifting up into my space. Now it is my turn to enter that room. I feel detached from my body as I am led to the only chair in the room, and then I hear it, that noise, a clicking of a switch and then the sound of electricity crackling as it shoots through my body, that is what I have heard.

And then there is silence.