

My mother never allowed us to stay up past eight fifteen, but the one time in my memory when it was okay was when that man showed up that night on our doorstep. When he could not get his phone to work and bolted out the door with the girl writhing in his arms, eight fifteen was just about the last thing on anyone's mind. When he stood on our porch, begging us to "please, please call 911", trying frantically to shield the child's frail body from the rain, time stood still.

What's going on? Tell me. I broke into a cold sweat and my heart was racing so fast I thought it might beat out of my chest. This must be a clear misunderstanding. Nothing bad ever happens to the people I know. My mother made a phone call to tell a nice man where to come find us, and I went to my room to say my prayers. There was nothing else an eight year old girl could do, besides, it was past eight fifteen and I always said my prayers before bed. The girl downstairs needed help too. Maybe I can pray for both of us.

*Now I lay me down to sleep,*

The growing pit in my stomach deepened every time the man told his daughter, in a strained, quivering voice, to "look at Daddy", but she could only give an empty response. I wished the nice man Momma called would hurry.

I watched from the top of the stairs while my mother cradled the shivering, feverish child in a blanket, took her father by the arm, and led them both to the couch. She stroked the girl's hair and spoke soothingly when she vomited a pool of crimson that contrasted with our polished hardwood floors. I might be sick too.

*I pray the Lord my soul to keep.*

By the time the ambulance streamed into the driveway, breaking the deafening silence of our street, every laboured breath the girl took was becoming shallower than her last. Her skin was cold like marble and her lips and hands had taken on an unearthly shade of blue.

*If I should die before I wake,*

Men in uniform bolted through the door with mountains of equipment. They demonstrated their ability to work methodically, like robots, with careful, practiced movements and pried the child from her sobbing father's arms. The blanket was thrown off her tiny body, and her arms were pulled out to both sides before being strapped to a stretcher. Tubes and wires sprouted from her bare chest while the men carried her away, allowing the poor father to trail closely behind. Just like that, they were gone.

*I pray the Lord my soul to take.*