

Once again, I’m running to get home for my dad, for my little sister, Anna, for my baby brother, Ben. My friend’s house is just a few blocks away. Last semester, in sixth grade PE, I ran the fifty yard dash in seven point six seconds, so I know I’ll make it home in under two minutes. Anna said she already called the ambulance. No surprise there. Anna always called when our dad went into one of his grand mal seizures. I’ve told her to call *me first*—not 911. But I don’t leave her and Ben alone with him very often—maybe once every few months—so she panics.

I never do.

I do everything I can to get my dad out of it on my own; and mostly, it works. Our dad has grand mal seizures on a daily basis, sometimes more than one in a day. In our family, calling the ambulance is a last resort. That’s all my parents need—another medical bill.

Even though Anna called, I know she will not want to be there alone when they show up with their questions and equipment; when they attempt to communicate with our flailing, convulsing father as if he is mildly deaf, rather than in a fit of catatonic spasms, as he knocks over lamps, as he rolls and snorts across our living room floor. Anna is always afraid. It is me who has to tell them: *He can’t hear you.*

My legs carry me toward them; I hear the ubiquitous sound of sirens. I hope the neighborhood kids are all off visiting their grandmas. I hope I won’t have to arrive home to a yard full of people. I hope they won’t ask me any of their inane questions: “What’s *wrong* with your dad, anyway?” “Why is the ambulance always at your house?” “Don’t you ever get tired of all this?”

But then, I know my hopes are futile.

I have this recurring dream where I’m still half in the dream, but half-awake, able to see and hear everything around me. I fight to move, to wake up. I know that if I could just scream, as loudly as I can, I will finally be free of the nightmare. Or maybe someone will hear me and come to help.

But I can’t. I can’t scream. Not right away. That’s the essence of the nightmare. I am aware yet I am stuck. And no one can hear me struggle, even though *I* can. I can hear my own whimpers as I try to break free of the nightmare, as I try to let loose the scream.

My mom is always at work when I have this dream. It happens right around dinnertime when I’ve dozed off after doing homework with the house still smelling of sloppy joes or tuna patties with Campbell’s cream of mushroom gravy. I know my dad is downstairs, and I know that he may be having another seizure while my sister is outside playing with her friends, while my baby brother is playing with the cans in the cabinets, while I am upstairs pinned to my bed, unable to move.

I know the truth. It niggles at my brain even as I hear myself making small animal noises in the empty bedroom with evening shadows playing on its walls.

No one *ever* hears me when that scream finally rushes from my throat.

I see our house ahead. The sirens are silenced, but the flashing lights of the two large emergency vehicles blocking our entire street, and the low rumble of their idling engines are enough to draw out the usual suspects. I slow to a walk as I approach, cutting through the suburban mob on our front lawn with purpose.

I am not afraid of the ten men stuffed into our tiny living room, who all look to me for answers the moment the screen door bangs shut. I stand at the threshold scanning around their blue uniformed legs and torsos for my eight year old sister and ten month old brother. I spot them. Anna is holding Ben on her jutted out narrow hip. She bursts from the kitchen, relief clear on her face that help has arrived, for her, for Ben, for our dad.