

Noises

by John Wentworth Chapin

Snap and creak: somewhere in the house. Footfall or hingesqueak or bannistercreak—probably the kitchen. You strain to hear more: the throbbing around the sides of your head swells in volume and speed. You swallow, nothing there, and stop breathing, lifting your head from the pillow so both ears can hear nothing but the muffled business of circulating blood. Nothing. You lay your head back on the pillow.

Another noise, softer than the first: swish, thud. You are still. The house is very loud tonight.

Three sharp sounds. Rattled window stripping? Mice? Footsteps?

Houses settle, stairs creak, wind whistles through a screen door. You know this. The shadow outside the window has been nothing but a tree since you were a child. But there is a point at which you stop believing what your experience tells you. People are killed randomly in their beds all the time.

You do not want to speak or turn on the light; there's nothing in the house. If you pull your arms out from under the bedsheets, it will get you. Annoyance at your own fear and increasing terror:

- Stop worrying.
- Call the police!
- Go to sleep.
- What was that?
- It's just the refrigerator.
- What is the refrigerator doing on the stairs?

Every time this happens, you climb out bed: nothing. You slink back into bed, mollified and ashamed. You never learn, do you?

But there is something in the house. The house is very loud tonight, indeed.

