

What about the body

“What about the body?” Adriana stared at the dark house at the top of the hill. If she didn’t know any better she’d have sworn it was grinning at her.

Dark heavy drapes outlined light white sheers in the windows making them look like eyes staring back at her. The way age made the weather worn roof of the porch bowed in the center gave the house an evil and foreboding grin. Haunting and daunting, welcoming visitors to their doom. And something about the front door as it swayed from rusty hinges in the wind reminded her of a loose tooth in a kid’s mouth.

“What about the body...” Justin kept his back turned to her and the house. There was no way in hell she was getting him back into that house.

“Come on,” Adriana snapped around. She was surprised to see that Justin had already slid into the driver’s seat of their car. “We can’t just leave it there. What if somebody comes by, people are going to be suspicious.”

With one foot hanging out of the car Justin replied, “Who’s going to come by this place? Look around you, this place has been deserted for who knows how long. I bet nobody even knows that house is even back here.”

“Somebody had to know...that old lady hasn’t been dead long. She’s gotta have some family or friends or somebody.” She crossed her arms over her chest glaring at her friend. If he wasn’t going back she was.

“No way...no how.” He started the engine.

“Fine, I’ll do it myself.”

Adriana turned storming her way back through the twisted wrought iron gates. Tripping over an overgrown vine she stumbled. She grabbed at a branch and just as her fingers wrapped around it she heard the clank of the gates as they closed behind her.

She managed to avoid careening face first into a brier bush but she couldn't avoid scraping her arm on the sharp leaves scattered about the bottom of the bush. Adriana started to scoot back, not paying attention to the fact that the further back she moved the more the brier bush poked through the thin lining of her windbreaker.

“Lil! Lil!”

Adriana watched as the vines wound their way through the gates securing them in place and blocking any chance of Justin getting through. Then they started to stretch in her direction sliding across the worn cobblestone walkway.

Come back to the house.

Adriana turned at the faint sound of a young female voice. It was far away, timid, but she was sure it was coming from the house.

You'll be safe in the house. You must hurry.

The vines continued to slither ever closer to her. There was no where for her to go. The briars poked into her back burning as they pierced the flesh. She snatched her leg back as one of the vines reached for her foot.

Hurry...it's almost too late.

The sound of Justin's voice had long been smothered by the thickening wall of foliage that continued to grow over the gates. The sky grew grey heavy with a darkness that was unnatural. To her left, a dense mist crept through the line of birch and pecan trees the distance between it and her shortening with each breath.

Adriana!

The panic in the little girl's voice was enough to startle Adriana out of her daydream and before she knew it she was dashing towards the door of the house. The

vines were growing at an alarming rate and they came from all directions, sliding down the trees creeping through the mist. The sound of her feet pouncing against the stone was drowned out by the screeching of little animals whose bones were being crushed by the massive weight of the traveling greenery.

Adriana reached for the outstretched pale hand peeking out of the darkness of the doorway. Her fingers wrapped around those of the little figure disguised by shadows and as she plunged into darkness the wooden door screeched and slammed behind her.

Panting, Adrian inched her way to the window. She peeped through the curtains watching as the vines wove a barrier around the front of the house. There was no way she'd be able to get out the front door. She jumped as one of the vines danced in front of the window before it darted in her direction.

"You don't have to worry. They can't get in the house."

Adrian narrowed her gaze at the tiny figure sitting at the bottom of the stairs. The little girl's attention was focused on the doll she held in her hands but there was something oddly familiar about the figure sitting quietly on the stoop.

"Who are you?" Adriana asked as she moved a little closer to the girl. She kept the couch between them, just in case.

"You should know..." The little girl turned saddened eyes up at the woman who would soon become a prisoner to this place, just as she had so many years ago.

"Excuse me?"

"You left me upstairs on the floor in the bedroom."

Adriana's brown came together causing two miniature peaks to form just above the bridge of her nose.

"You must be mistaken," she said. She could hear the sound of the vines growing as the exterior of the house gave way to the grasping and weaving of them against the aged wood. "There is an old woman up there"

The little girl reached for the golden amulet hung from her neck. As her hand passed through the light of the full All Hallows' Eve moon the fingers of an old woman secured the trinket.

"Yooooouuu're neeeeext."

Adriana didn't know how long she'd been lying on the floor but when she opened her eyes the light of the moon covered one of her hands. She stared at the aged fingers; the wedding ring that Justin had given her four years ago appeared too large for the worn frail fingers. Flipping her hand over, she stared at the dark spots on her palm, age spots.

"What's happening to me," she whispered as she pulled her hand out of the light. The less light her hand was exposed to, the younger her skin grew until in the darkness, the fingers appeared normal.

She had to figure out what was going on. Following the sounds of voices, laughter, and what appeared to be a baby crying Adriana climbed the winding staircase. The steps creaked with age, sending an eerie chill racing through her very being. Gas lamps lined the wall illuminating the walls covered in burgundy and green striped wallpaper.

She covered her mouth as the powerful stench of some putrid herbs rushed down the stairwell. She stopped for a moment, the scent forcing her down a few steps. What was that smell? Not only was it a horrible smell, but it took her a few moments for the coughing and burning in her throat to subside. Finally able to stand the stench Adriana continued her ascent into the darkness of the floors above.

The sweet scent of lavender met her at the top of the staircase, a welcome change to the wretched stench she met near the center of the staircase. The thunderous roar of a voice echoed down the narrow hallway. The hall appeared different than it had been when she and Justin had first ventured in the home they had been sure was empty.

The hall had appeared to be a welcoming place, filled with the light of the afternoon sun escaping from the open doors of the rooms lining each side. Now, though, with the doors closed and only the light seeping from the one partially open doorway near the end of the hall this place felt more like catacombs than a hallway of rooms.

“Hello....little girl.” Adriana waited for a reply, but either the little girl wasn’t in the only room that appeared to be occupied or she couldn’t hear her over the bicker of the others and the crying baby.

The walls felt cold, empty as she pressed her back against one side of the hallway. The last thing she needed was someone flinging a door wide open on her as she passed. She listened carefully before passing each door. No sound escaped from them as she stuck her ear against the cold oak and concentrated.

Passing door after door of silence, Adriana continued through the darkness reaching slightly in front of her to make sure she didn’t bump into anything that may have been placed in the hallway.

She paused, her feet freezing to the spot she stood as her hand came into contact with a brush of cold. She waved her hand in front of her and the feeling followed, but as she reached to the right, the cold turned warm. Again she moved her hand to the left and it was met with a cool brush. A little further to the left and once again warmth.

There must be a vent here she thought as she drew her hand back but something grabbed hold of her wrist. She couldn't move, and not just because she felt something holding on to her. She'd lost all sense of time, of presence, of being. It was as if something had captured her very existence and played it back before her.

Images of her childhood, swinging on a tire swing hung from the massive oak tree in the center of the open field that made up her father's farmhouse backyard. Pictures of her teen years slipping behind the barn with Justin for a few midnight romps danced before her eyes. Her wedding, the white doves released after she and her new hubby had committed to one another it all played out like a panoramic movie.

Tears filled Adriana's eyes as she thought about Justin. Would she ever see him again. Had what the little girl said been true. Was she going to turn into some old woman to be found lying lifeless on the floor of this house for some nosey strangers to stumble upon?

With blurred vision Adriana attempted to focus as much as possible on the images that continued to flood her mind, images of what appeared to be her future. The first was that of a child, a daughter. The little round face with the bright blue eyes reminded her of the little girl sitting on the stairs. But how was that possible? No one, not even Justin knew she was pregnant. She hadn't even confirmed it with her doctor.

Then the next image... a man, maybe in his late 20s or early 30s sitting on the porch of this house, this very house she was standing in. He was watching a woman, probably closed to his age as she played with three young children.

Who were these people? She couldn't see their faces and yet they felt familiar, like they were family.

What was she saying? She didn't have any family. She hadn't had any family since before she could remember. She never found out what happened to her father. Supposedly her mother went crazy after his death and sliced her legs and arms up until she bled to death in some hole in the wall restaurant bathroom.

The crying baby pulled Adriana from her dream. She was sitting on the floor. How did she get on the floor? And the voices. The other voices were gone. Just the crying baby.

"Is anybody there?" She managed to get to her feet but she had to hold on to the molding on the frame of the door to keep her balance. Something about this place made her lethargic. It was as if this place was draining the very life out of her.

"Hello!"

"Your baby needs you," A feminine voice from the end of the hall said.

The voice was coming from the only room with a light.

"I don't have a baby..." Adriana replied. She didn't attempt to move any closer to the door. She had no plans on doing so until she had a better idea of what was going on.

"You should tend to your baby."

This voice sounded much like the other one, but aged. The chipper undertones had been replaced with sorrow. Then, silence hung in the air. The voices disappeared and only the light at the end of the hall remained. Even the crying baby was no more.

A creaking from behind drew Adriana's attention. She turned just as one by one the doors she'd passed on the journey down the hallway opened and slammed shut. The thud of the doors was enough to urge her to run towards the light.

There was nothing there to break her fall but the hardwood floors. Maybe fall wasn't the right word. She'd taken a dive through the cracked door just as the door across the hall swung wide open. She'd caught a glimpse of something, eyes maybe. But the intensity of the glow as it came closer to the door gave her all the more reason to take a dive to the safety of the light and kick the door closed behind her.

Her arms burned like hell and she was sure that she had a number of splinters and as she climbed to her feet she realized that the room was far from empty. Standing at the window was a woman dressed in a pink floral dress. Her hair, if one could call the ruffled mess sitting on top of the woman's head, was bright orange. The same orange color of Adriana's hair, the same as her mother's.

"Welcome home."

There was that familiar voice. It sounded so much like Adriana's. The woman never turned from the window. She only pointed to the pink lace bassinet in the corner of the room.

Adriana tried to fight the urge to follow the path of the woman's outstretched arm but her body moved on its own. Her mind fought to gain control, but something

continued to pull at her spirit forcing each foot to rise, move forward and drop. She squeezed her eyes shut not sure that she wanted to see what was in the bassinet.

What was there to fear? She'd heard the cried of a baby earlier. What else could it be? She could feel the energy of the bassinet though she still chose not to look at it. The air around it and her started to cool. An emptiness crept into the surrounding area and eventually into her body a nothingness that poured into her body making her cold.

“Adriana! Adriana please wake up...Adriana...”

Adriana opened her eyes. She didn't like the worry on her husband's face. The deep creases in his forehead, the sorrow and fear in his eyes. None of it was becoming of him.

“What happened?” She asked as her took in her surroundings.

The room was nearly empty, save for the bed and a dresser. It was the same room they'd found the body lying in.

“I have no idea. I woke up in the car and you were no where to be found.”

“How did I get in here? And where is the body?” Her hair slapped her in the face as she turned her head searching for the body of the old lady.

“Body..what body?”

“The body..the old lady...don't you remember?”

“Sorry sweetie, I think this house is starting to get to you. Are you sure we didn't make a mistake moving into this place so soon?”

Adriana sat still for a minute. Had this all been a dream...or maybe a premonition. As she glanced at the picture hung on the bedroom wall she recognized the image of her

grandmother. It had only been a month since the woman's passing. They'd found her body next to the bed.

"I have something to tell you." Adriana cradled her husband's chin between her palms.

"And what might that be?" He gave her a look of concern. She didn't look well, but he was trying his best not to show worry.

She smiled at the man she'd loved for most of her life. "There's a reason I wanted to move so quickly. We're going to need all the space we can get."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"Yes."

Releasing a sign of relieve Justin spoke. "You should see this."

He grabbed her by the hand, helping her down from the bed. They walked side by side down the hallway stopping at the door of the only room they hadn't opened in the house.

"Open it."

Adriana did as instructed. The tears welled in her eye blurring her vision. A warmth consumed her. She turned to Justin unable to speak.

His only reply, "I hope it's a girl."