

Gone Without a Sound

By Hannah Skutt
8th Grade, Catlin Gabel School

The tall man with heavy boots and a stealthy stance tip-toed up the stairs, trying to be quiet. He merely noted that new paintings now covered the pale blue walls, but did not pause to see what was captured inside. The honey-colored floors and the glowing sunlight that streamed in through the open windows comforted him. He took a satisfying breath of the crisp autumn air; it was his favorite season. "If only my lungs were bigger," he thought to himself.

Although he tip-toed, he boots still clunked loudly, echoing in the quiet afternoon. On the other hand, he was in too much of a hurry to care. As the strongly-built man walked down the cozy hall, he saw those big brown eyes and strawberry-blond curly hair. He imagined her little giggle, and how a wide grin spread across her face when he came to pick her up. If he had been going slowly, he would have avoided the one creaky board in the entire house, but imagining her distracted him, and it moaned loudly under his weight.

"Damn it! Don't worry little one, it's just daddy," he silently comforted the baby that slept soundly down the hall.

He looked down at his shoes. The solid boots were only slightly worn and still stiff. He wore them with thick, warm socks, a pair of new blue jeans and an un-tucked plaid long-sleeved shirt, the most worn and tired-looking out of everything. It wasn't old, per say, but it was well-loved and worn often, until it became the softest shirt that he owned.

He felt calm despite his excitement and the overpowering love that he felt for the baby dreaming on the other side of the door. The house smelled sweet and peaceful. Now, practically giddy, he reached for the handle and turned it at a snail's pace. At first, he only dared to open the door a fraction of an inch, but as he still couldn't see the crib, he opened it wider and slipped through.

He was surprised that there was an absence of the usual cooing that occurred when he opened the door. He swiftly closed the last few feet between him and the small yellow crib with chipping paint that exposed the dark wood underneath. His surprise doubled when he saw that the little bundle wasn't awake yet, or that if she was, she didn't eagerly jump up to meet him. He stretched out his tan hand, trying to touch her. His movements reflected the caution that he focused on, knowing any sudden movements could startle her. He looked intently for any sign of an intake of breath. *Wake up, please.*

The tip of his finger touched her pale cheek, and the cold of her skin had a shocking effect on his heart. His piercing scream tumbled out of his mouth in a voice that didn't fit him, that sounded like an animal that had been brutally stabbed. He shrieked like the life was leaving him, but he screamed because the little bundle wasn't smiling. Ghostly white and cold-skinned, her chest lay frozen in place. All the life had left her without a sound. *Gone. No, no, no. Not her. NO!*

In an instant, her cold skin lay on the flannel sleeves of his shirt, the tears from his eyes constantly hitting her stiff body. *Shit! No. Wake up please. Not yet, not now, not her. God, help!* He screamed a more silent scream that was choked out through the barely audible sobs.

A small girl with red hair appeared in the doorway, eyes bulging with fear that quickly turned to understanding. Her mother now stood behind her, her face instantly creased with horror and shock. He couldn't look at them. He couldn't speak as he ran past them with the lifeless thing in his arms.

The mother ran after him, slipping on the steps and picking herself up, then running again. She was calling for him. "Come back," she called again and again. He only ran faster. He was in the car with the baby on his lap, driving away before she could open the front door. He glanced back to see the tears streaming down his wife's face and his only other child running after him as he sped off.

Less than five minutes later, the automatic doors of the hospital opened too slowly, and a panicked man stepped inside. White covered almost everything: the floor, walls, ceiling and furniture. Even the bustling nurses were all white. When one nurse turned to look at him, she screamed, "Oh my god! Get help now!" The others obeyed her firm orders with only slight hesitation. The little nurse approached tentatively and cautiously touched a single finger to the baby's chest. The moment she made contact, she pulled her hand away as though she had just been burned. She took a few steps back and motioned for him to follow her.

They went through a set of heavy doors and found a flushed doctor with white hair and kind blue eyes waiting for them. She simply put her arms out and he put the baby in them. She quickly entered a room; when he tried to follow, another nurse blocked his path.

The tears that he had been suppressing now streamed down his cheeks, his shoulders shaking heavily. When the doctor appeared again, her face was filled with empathy. With her shaking hands, pale and empty, she reached out to comfort him, but he shook away the hand and turned sharply.

The white walls were closing in and the lights cast an eerie blue glow. It was too clean; everything was sterilized. The building smelled strongly of chemicals and germ-killing cleaners. Everything about the hospital felt painful. He sank into a stiff, grey chair and was a wounded animal once again before he ran away from the place, his piercing scream still ringing in its emptiness.

Outside, the air he had loved his entire life now smelled bitter and filled him with sadness. He was once again called back to what he had left behind; he welcomed the numbness that would spread through him with every step, making him strong again.

Note:

This story uses characters and an event from Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*. For those of you unfamiliar with *The Glass Castle*, it is a memoir of Jeannette's childhood, growing up half-homeless with an alcoholic father. In her book, she briefly mentions Mary Charlene. Mary Charlene was the baby before her who died when she was nine months old. Jeannette's father, Rex Walls, was the one who found her in her crib, dead. He was scarred for life and started drinking again. He never talked about Mary Charlene and hated it when her name was mentioned. This is a true story. My story tells this event in detail, focusing on Rex and how he reacted, what he was feeling and how this showed in his movements. This is an original story, though it is also true to some extent. I did use an event that was mentioned in the book, but *The Glass Castle* is a memoir; everything in it is real, but Jeannette couldn't go into detail about this event because she didn't know the details. I made up the details. Rex Walls has passed, so there is no way to know what really happened or what he was thinking. On page 28 of *The Glass Castle*, there is a paragraph about Mary Charlene. From this paragraph, I was able to make a four-page story, but I had to read the entire book to feel like I knew enough about Rex to write about him. From the very beginning, you find out that he hates hospitals. I was very curious about this and wanted to know why, so I wrote an explanation that explains Mary Charlene, his hatred for hospitals and why he drinks. I chose not to use Rex's name in the story because I wanted to respect that he wasn't the only person in the world who this might've happened to. I wanted to make it mysterious, and I didn't think that the name was what I wanted my readers to focus on. The word 'Rex' doesn't describe who he is. He was one of the most complex characters in the book. I made up the settings and the events, other than Mary Charlene's death. I made up the emotions and reactions. *The Glass Castle* is an inspiring book; *Gone Without a Sound* is a fictional story based on a tiny aspect of Jeannette's life.