

Years 9 & 10  
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## Scream

Couch stained, floors sticky. Pizza boxes were tossed around the room and popcorn kernels were lodged into every crack and crease in the relatively new, now stained white, leather sofas. If anybody had walked in right now, they would probably think that I had just thrown an epic house party, but this is just what the house looks like on a late Saturday night when my parents have gone out for the weekend. The TV displayed static on its 65-inch screen as I reached over to the coffee table for my phone. 11:26 PM. Not too bad I guess. I'm sure I can clean everything up before morning. I got up off the couch and stretched my arms above my head. That was when I heard it.

A scream. A scream so powerful, it tore through my chest like a large shard of glass. It was the kind of scream that made your blood run cold. Like a scream of wild panic. A scream of hysteria and disbelief, of terror. I didn't know what to do. Should I avoid going outside and just hide under the blankets on in my bed? Should I just turn up the volume of the static on the TV to drown out the screams until it's over? Or should I go outside like every stupid person in a horror movie that dies before the halfway mark? Lucky for me I wasn't that simple-minded.

Seconds later, the front door flung open and I ran out. Mrs Mary Bartlett, my neighbour, was on the floor in a puddle of scarlet blood as her screams turned into soft sobs. The violent red stained her cheeks and her long bony fingers as she covered her abdomen as it spurted blood. "Oh my god Mrs Bartlett! How did this happen?" I gasped as I crouched down beside her. An iron wire had pierced through her middle. I raced inside my house to grab my phone, my trembling hands typed in three digits. "Hello, triple zero, please state your name and emergency." "Hello? My name is Z-Zoe, my neighbour's hurt, please, come quickly!" The conversation was short and brief, within minutes flashing lights and sirens filled the streets.

I guess when you call the police when somebody's dying, they bring the ambulances and paramedics anyway, only to come to the same conclusion as I did, the 'victim' couldn't be saved. People came out of their homes to witness the police tapes and the crime scene. Where were they all when Mrs Bartlett was screaming? Perhaps they had chosen to hide under the blankets in their beds or turn up the volume of the static on the TV.

At the time, it wasn't clear to me why there were so many policemen around, with more and more being called in to see the scene. Wasn't it simple? Suicide. Teenagers do it every so often. Even a few adults, so why was everybody still lingering around in the middle of the night? Don't they have better places to be? With all due respect, why couldn't the police just take the body and go?

"Zoe?" Asked an approaching policeman.

"Yeah, that's me."

"I've got a few questions to ask you about tonight and your relationship with Mary Bartlett."

I wondered why they were asking. It didn't seem necessary, it's not like she was murdered – actually, she never told me how she ended up with a wire pierced through her.

"Okay," I said.

"So, first of all, how old are you?"

"Sixteen," I said.

"Where are your parents?"

"Out for the weekend."

"You didn't call them?"

Damn it, I didn't even think of calling my parents.

"Uh, no, it didn't come to mind"

"How long did you know Mary Bartlett for?"

"About a year, when we moved in next door," I answered

"Did you know her well?"

"Not really, she didn't talk much," I said

Come to think of it, I have never really seen her talk to anyone before. She was always indoors and she only came out to water her already dead peonies.

"Okay then, we will need to ask you some further questions later. Is it okay if you stay out here for a few more minutes?" said the policeman.

I did nothing, distracted by the harsh ringing in my ears, images blurred.

"Mmhhh, but I was just wondering why . . . why do I need to be questioned?"

"Detective West has classified this case as a homicide," he explained. "And you're the first suspect."

My heart began to pound inside my hollow chest. I didn't murder her, but the thought of it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand straight up.

"Zoe? Are you okay? Zoe, can you hear me?"

I suddenly snapped back into reality.

"Yeah?" I said, not even knowing what he had asked.

"It's okay, you're in shock. Everything will be fine in the morning."

First of all, it was already morning, and secondly, I wasn't in shock. I was just angry that nobody else plucked up the courage to open the door to see what was wrong, I was feeling bitter, sad that I had left her to bleed out, scared. Maybe this *was* shock, I didn't really know for sure. What I was sure of was that I needed space.

"Can I go inside to get a blanket from home?" I asked.

The policeman nodded. I just needed some quiet and privacy in my own home.

I made my way up the stone steps and turned left into the living room. It was still a mess. That was when I saw it. A small note placed gently on the coffee table with three letters strung together in a gentle cursive font. 'Zoe'. My fingers trembled once more as I lifted the paper. Again, in the same beautiful handwriting, one simple sentence was written. 'You should have come out faster'.