

Nightmare

Sally heard the breathing in the darkness. The short gasps of air slowly faded into the inky night as she crouched frozen behind a wild hedge. With her heart furiously pounding in her wheezy chest, she tried to listen for the footsteps scouring the forest floor for her, but all she could hear now was the howling of the wind and the creaking bark of old and crackled trees.

Perhaps he's disappeared, she thought, desperately clinging to the hope that it could be true, and as her heart started to slow, she was able to breathe again. It was a wonderful feeling to be able to gulp the fresh air that healed her fears. With each passing moment, the pearls of icy sweat on her back started to slide down until they reached the parched soil with a welcoming thud.

Sally reached for her bag that had slipped from her grip when she had been running through the windy forest. It was such a wild place that her usual uncoordinated self had been unable to manoeuvre around the sudden turns that the trees thrust upon her; instead trying to keep to a clear path, she had misjudged the distance between the scattered trees and as a result slipped into the a ditch hidden by the undergrowth.

In her bag she reached for her phone - she needed to call for help, and quick. Her hands quivered over the buttons as she tried to turn it on, but the bag must have hit the ground at a harsh speed because the screen was cracked and the phone wouldn't turn on.

A sharp pain sliced through her, numbing her mind, until she felt a gentle trickle of blood splash onto the cracked screen.

Terrified, she put her hand to her head, which pounded furiously with the growing pain, and realised that the blood was coming from her ear. She must have hit her head hard when she had slipped into the undergrowth. But that didn't matter. She had more worrying things to think about - like what she had just seen.

She knew she was in danger. She knew she had seen something that could cost her her life, but she had no idea how she was supposed to get out of this mess. After all, it wasn't like she had luck on her side.

She was a 17-year-old girl who happened to be stranded in the middle of nowhere and was hiding from the very person who wanted to see her silenced - permanently. Sally tried to organise her thoughts, but the pain was making her head throb.

Looking around, she tried to calculate whether she could make a run for it. But suddenly, as she crept to her knees, she heard an unnatural rustle of leaves. Sally held her breath, desperately hoping that she had imagined it, but when she heard the cracking of twigs and the shuffling of dirt, she knew she was not alone.

The pain was unbearable as it clawed its way through her body.

"There you are, little girl", the woman's voice screeched.