

The next thing Hazel knew, she was up in the corner of her bedroom, gazing down on her unconscious body. She sunk back into that body, but she was paralysed. She could only open her eyes and, as she did so, a pulsing, flashing light revolved around and around the room. It was behind and in front of her eyes. She tried to blink but it would not stop. She lay there completely helpless for what felt like hours, all the while so sick and terrified that if a doctor wasn't called she might properly and finally die!

Then she saw the door move out of the corner of her eye. Trevor poked his head around, but Hazel was still paralysed. After their argument, he probably thought she was simply ignoring him. How little he knew her. He disappeared. Time passed by with no hope of a doctor. That terrible pulsing, beating light remained, constant and unrelenting.

Then slowly, very slowly Hazel's legs began to feel the softness of the bed, she felt herself move them. Her arms and body had feeling and movement again. She gently slid out of bed. The curtains were still open. She walked slowly, unsteadily, to look out. Inside her head, and in the room, the pulsing remained, but outside all looked normal and quiet. Hazel thought it must be late.

She suddenly needed fresh air; she felt she was suffocating. Inside the room it all seemed confusing, her brain was badly misfiring, she couldn't hear or speak, but her mind wanted to be outside, near normality. Outside was cool air and below her was the flat roof of the garage. If she could jump out of the window she wouldn't break much and if she hit her head it might actually stun it back out of this terrifying fault.

She fumbled with the window catch but it seemed locked. She was becoming frantic. Why did Trevor never leave them unlocked? She had to get out.

Her sixteen-inch TV was sitting on the chest of drawers near the window. It was heavy but portable, with a handle on top. Hazel slid one hand under the handle, the other under its base. She lifted it just as she felt movement behind. Trevor grabbed the television but Hazel hung on. She still couldn't hear or speak but her strength was suddenly formidable. She pulled it from his grasp but he wrestled it back again. They fought viciously. Trevor was frightened by Hazel's abnormal strength.

Finally, he replaced the TV and got her on the bed and, with all his might, sat astride her. Hazel gradually relaxed, her terror abating a little. Would he call a doctor? Did he know that she couldn't speak? He stroked her hair, her face, feeling her calm down. He gently rolled off the bed and left the room. Then she heard his voice. Was he on the phone? She could hear again, but the pulsing light had not changed, which was blurring everything. She desperately hoped Trevor was ringing for a doctor. But time just stretched on endlessly. She thought she glimpsed her mother briefly, but perhaps that was just a dream. Still no doctor.

The house then sounded very quiet. What was happening? This awful, constant, flashing light was still boring into her eyes, like nothing she'd ever known and she was trying again to fight a rising panic. Nothing was going to happen. She was going to be left to die.

She got off the bed. She knew it was pointless to find the stairs. She knew that Trevor would not allow her out of the house but she had to have fresh air. She tried the window again. Locked. There had to be a key. She frantically searched the drawers. Nothing. Then there was Trevor again, trying to pin her arms down, trying to force her on to the bed, but Hazel so did not want to die. She had to get him to call a doctor. She simply couldn't understand why he wouldn't. The thought then came to her that if she bit him, he might, just might, think she had rabies or something. She knew it was a long shot. But without speech she felt she had no choice.

He had his arms around her shoulders and was pulling her towards the bed. He sat on the edge of the bed and as he attempted to roll her on to it she bit into his arm as hard as she could. He whipped his arm away, and Hazel collapsed on the bed. She was spent; there was nothing more to do.

Trevor disappeared and, minutes later, Robbie came in. He sat on the edge of the bed and took his mother's hand and gently stroked it. Hazel would not do anything to alarm him further. She knew he must have heard the fighting and would be scared. She thought she heard Trevor talking. This time, surely, he was calling for a doctor. Robbie left. Hazel curled up on the bed and waited, but the pulsing, flashing light, if anything, seemed to worsen.

At last, there was a doctor. Hazel felt hands roll her on to her front and felt an injection in her buttock, then another. Did she get up then, did she fight? She doesn't remember because, apparently, she was given two more. She heard

the doctor say he thought she'd be alright now and he'd arrange for a doctor to visit in the morning. Relief began to wash through Hazel: the flashing seemed to be receding. But Trevor started arguing,

"No, no, she needs the hospital, something's not right."

Hazel drifted into sleep, then suddenly she awoke.

Men in white coats. Fear gripped her again. Now what?

She was forcibly bundled downstairs. Her eyes still couldn't clear the flashing lights but the pulsing was less. Out of the front door. Cold air at last. Her brain felt as though a severe alcoholic-like haze was clearing. She breathed deeply.

There, on the road, stood an ambulance. Wonderful! Then it struck Hazel that it looked rather old. She was led towards it by the two white coats. One on either side of her. As one of them leant forward to open the back doors Hazel saw there was nothing inside but two wooden benches, one down each side.

She knew that it wasn't an ambulance for the physically sick. But still she couldn't speak. There was no choice but to get in.