

The woman pauses at the top of the marble staircase, running her index finger over the cold banister. She calls out her dead son's name. Tom. She waits, then calls his name again.

Her daughter peeks out into the hallway.

Her husband comes home from work, kisses her on the forehead, and asks her how her day was.

She calls her son's name again.

At bedtime, her husband and daughter try to get her to lie down but she won't move. She's still standing at the top of the marble staircase, lightly touching the banister.

Tom? she calls softly, as if her voice might bring him back.

The husband calls the doctor, who arrives later in the night. He checks the woman's blood pressure, her temperature. She's in perfect health, he says, she just needs to get some rest.

That night she calls her dead son's name every hour on the hour, after the chimes of the grandfather clock.

The next day her husband picks her up and carries her to bed, but she bolts out from under the covers and returns to her station at the top of the stairs.

Weeks pass and the woman is still at the top of the marble staircase. At her feet are blankets and pillows—the palate her husband made for her in case she decided to lie down and rest. But she hasn't lied down, nor has she eaten or drunk anything in all this time, and she is becoming pale.

Years later, the daughter has moved out of the house, gone off to college, and the husband has filed for divorce from the woman, still lingering at the top of the stairs.

They board up the windows and doors of the house. At nights, cockroaches scuttle across the woman's bare feet. Dust covers her hair and gives her skin the appearance of stone. The grandfather clock is long gone and she calls her dead son's name less frequently now, only once every few weeks.