Chapter One: Baby Cries

After uploading a number of horror stories to various places around the internet, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of supportive emails and messages I received. It spurred me on to write more, to take my ambitions seriously, and to commit an increasing amount of my time to the pursuit of becoming a published author.

Little did I know that this new found acknowledgement of my writing would lead to a series of horrific and abhorrent events.

For over a year I received numerous messages and emails, most very positive and enjoyable, yet every few days I would also find a strange, disconnected and fragmented piece of correspondence sitting in my inbox. Each email would consist of one random word as a subject heading, with the message itself comprised of a simple phrase, normally only two words long. The email address would change each time, but it was clear from the nature of the content that the author was the same.

At first I dismissed them as the idle product of a bored lurker on the internet, attempting to amuse themselves with the thought of myself reading garbled, puzzling, yet worryingly cryptic messages. As the days wore on, however, and the emails became gradually more twisted and prophetic, I began to suspect that they were of a far more sinister origin.

I had posted and contributed to many websites and forums over the years, and it was not unusual to wake up each morning to twenty or thirty new emails in my inbox. I often spent my lunch break answering them, and I

genuinely enjoyed the correspondence. However, the day after posting a story called 'The Passenger', I followed my usual routine of logging into my email account at noon, only to find one message which stood out most uncomfortably from the others.

The subject heading was 'Suffer' and the email itself contained just two words:

'Baby Cries'.

I sent the message to my trash folder and thought nothing more of it, until later that night. It had been a long day and as I had been writing from dawn to dusk, I was tiring rapidly, feeling suitably ready for a good, long overdue sleep.

It was around 11:30PM and, just as I started to drift into a dream, I heard a noise. It was not out of place, nor did it cause any real concern to me. coming as it did from my neighbour's house through the wall. It was the type of common sound any resident is familiar with.

I smirked to myself thinking 'baby cries', and drifted back to sleep sure that the child's mother or father would soon be there to comfort it, as they always were.

I woke again, glancing at my mobile phone which cast an unearthly green glow around the room. Seeing that it was after three in the morning, I became agitated knowing that I had a long day ahead of me; rest does not come easily on those nights when we know we must rise early. The mere

thought of the necessity of a good night's sleep before the next day's work, precludes any notion of sleep itself.

Lying there I listened in the darkness to the infant next door, breaking its heart, inconsolable and distraught. Surely the parents had not let it scream for all those hours, lying there alone in the blackness of night, unattended? After trying to block out the child's cries for what seemed like hours, I admitted defeat and moved to the spare room that my family and friends normally stayed in, on the rare occasions when they visited.

At 7:30AM my phone alarm sounded and, after fighting the reality of another day, I reluctantly left my bed, walking slowly to the kitchen to make some coffee. From the window I looked out onto the street below. What I saw horrified me: a police car and two ambulances parked outside of my neighbour's home.

Even through my groggy, pre-caffeinated mind, the memory of that helpless child crying in the night sprung to the fore. Immediately I stopped what I was doing, threw on some clothes, and ran outside.

I was not the only person watching, as the usual nosey residents stood at their doors, with some even out on the street, still wearing their dressing gowns idly gossiping, whipping up any number of scandalous rumours. Asking several onlookers what had happened, I was told a variety of accounts, from a child being abducted to someone having a seizure during the night.

A hush fell over the street as my neighbours' front door finally opened, slowly. Three police officers exited the house sombrely, as a collective gasp seeped out from the mouths of the crowd of onlookers. Quickly behind, two men in sterile white clothing carried a stretcher, and on it a body bag containing the now deceased remains of one of my former neighbours.

A few cries rang out from across the street, those who knew them wept, while those who did not, gossiped. Then, another silence, followed by another stretcher, and another body bag. This time no one uttered a sound. The street was void of noise. A tangible tension spread through the air, a hanging sense of dread as all of us waited, hoping beyond hope for no more death.

Heartbreak.

The last stretcher, supporting a small and insignificant shroud, was carried out solemnly into the morning air, and placed carefully into the back of an ambulance. Tears were wept, and answers were demanded from the police, but I could not cope with the sight. I could not bear it. The sound of that poor infant screaming through the night, screaming for its very life rang out in my ears. The sound of a child now forever silenced. The memory was deafening.

How was I supposed to know? The child had cried before, as many do. I did not know!

I walked, dazed, back through my garden and into the now hollow sanctuary of my house. I'm not ashamed to say that I cried, cried knowing

that maybe if I had just paid attention or shown more concern than simply getting to sleep, that if I had noticed something was amiss, I could have called the police and then perhaps they would still be alive!

Several hours later, two police officers arrived at my door to ask if I had seen or heard anything unusual from the night before. They said that they were not at liberty to tell me what had happened, but that any information I could give them would help immensely with their investigation.

When I told them about the email I had received they looked at each other with an obvious sense of scepticism. When I showed it to them, they asked if they could have my login details in an attempt to trace where the email came from. Of course I gave it to them and then they left after saying that they would be in touch.

As soon as they were gone I returned to the computer screen to switch it off. I recoiled in horror at the sight of another cryptic email sitting in my inbox. The subject heading said 'Fan', and the email again contained only two short words. Two words which drove fear through every part of my being.

It simply read:

"You Told."

I was utterly unprepared for the events which followed.