Darkness had fallen over the house like the ninth plague on Egypt.

Dim light had filtered into the room from the long, horizontal window set up near the ceiling and then faded away again how many times now, two? Three? She’d lost count.

Rose sat on the floor, her shoulder propped against the foot of the bed, her arms wrapped around her knees, clutching them to her chest. Deep tremors gripped her, shuddering over her in waves that ebbed and flowed like the tide. Not because of the cold, although, even with the milder spring temperatures outside, the air had chilled after the furnace had ceased its low rumbling beneath her. At night, her shallow breaths puffed from her mouth in clouds that drifted on the wan moonlight struggling to pass through the branches outside her window.

It was the dark she hated, that sprinkled raised bumps across every inch of her flesh. It had always been a living thing to her, reaching out grasping fingers, brushing cold over her skin, smothering her until she couldn’t take a breath without inhaling it into her lungs like thick, noxious smoke.

What was happening? Where were all the other women? Her roommate, Allie, never had returned after that last night at the hotel, so Rose hadn’t personally witnessed anyone being dragged away. She’d heard it, though—thudding boots in the hallway, doors flung open, scuffling, brief cries cut off by something—a hand maybe, or a gag. All much quieter than she would have expected.

Eerily so.

Clearly the women had been threatened with dire consequences if they resisted, if they made too much noise. Every one of them would have understood what kinds of terrible things could happen to them.

Which explained the quiet.

But it explained nothing else. Why the women had been taken away. Where they had been forced to go.

Why she was still locked in her room.

Alone.