Killer

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PAUL hurried to the door of the hot, crowded dressing room in the ice-arena and quickly pulled on his overcoat as he walked past the darkened ticket offices toward the main entrance. In the lobby a janitor was whistling softly as he mopped the gray, mud-tracked floor. He stopped in the middle of his tune and smiled up cheerfully as Paul approached.

“Great game you played tonight, Mr. Stewart,” he said.

“Thanks,” Paul said sullenly as he tracked across the floor toward the heavy glass double-door.

The janitor’s smiling, cheerful face suddenly became sober and quizzical. He and Paul Stewart were friends. After each game Paul always stopped to bum a cigarette from him and to joke with him. All the players did that. Called him “Rabbit’s Foot.” Once when he’d asked Paul for an autographed hockey stick for the kids he’d laughingly given it to him, and with it a new pair
of skates and a dollar bill for each of them. On Christmas Paul
had sent a turkey with all the trimmings over to the house, and
he and the rest of the team had even chipped in and bought toys
for the kids and a new gas-stove for him and his wife. But tonight
Paul silently ignored him, pushed open the heavy door, and
hurried into the crisp winter night.

Large flakes of snow floated down and speckled Paul's hat and
cloth as he hurried along the quiet street. The yellow light from
a street lamp on a corner cast ghost-like shadows on the fresh
snow. A little man bundled in a heavy sheepskin coat hurried
across the street and walked into the warm circle of light just
as Paul approached it. Paul stopped him.

"How far is it to General Hospital?" he asked hurriedly.
The little man didn't break his pace. "Four blocks," he
mumbled through his heavy fleece collar.

The rhythmic crunching of the snow beneath Paul's feet as
he hurried on down the street reminded him of the crunch of
his skates as they'd slid and twisted and turned in the hockey
game earlier that night. A little smile flickered across his face
as he recalled that his team had defeated the conference champ­
ions by three points, but the smile was lost in a frown when he
remembered the accident in the second period . . .

Paul brushed a large, cool flake of snow from his cheek and
quickened his pace. He passed through the circle of light re­
flected from the street lamp on the next corner. "Three blocks,"
he thought.

The second period had just begun, he remembered, when
suddenly a player from the championship team had tripped and
fallen right in front of him. Paul had tried to turn out or stop,
but his skates had only scraped on the hard, bluish ice and he'd
skidded into him, fast. He'd fallen on the other player—number
28 it was—and he'd heard a little cracking noise as his knees
crushed into the man's ribs. The crowd had suddenly grown
quiet when Paul climbed quickly to his feet and left the man
lying there limp and motionless . . .

Beneath the next light Paul paused for a moment and let a
car whiz by through the thickening snow. Two blocks. He broke
into a half-run . . .
Two trainers had scrambled out with a stretcher and had rolled the injured player onto it. A little trickle of frothy, crimson blood flowed from one corner of his mouth and ran down his chin and neck to form a bright spot on his jersey. He'd opened his eyes just as they started carrying him off the rink and he'd tried weakly to smile at Paul. The stretcher-bearers didn't turn into the door of the dressing room, they went right out through the main door that led to the street. Paul knew that the ambulance waited out there during every game.

On the next corner the yellow light illuminated a red and white sign and Paul read the words, “Hospital. Quiet Zone.” He could see the soft, pale lights shining from the hospital windows a half-block down the street. The snow-covered driveway going up to the front door was bathed in the bright rays from a flood-light. Paul ran through the heavy snow and turned into the drive. He had to wade through a drift to get around the white ambulance still parked near the door.

He paused for just a moment in the foyer and brushed some of the snow from his hat and coat. The sickening smell of antiseptics floated to him from the operating room. A doctor's voice boomed down a silent corridor as he gave instructions to a nurse. Just inside the door a Grandfather's clock was ticking slowly and loudly. Paul hurried to the desk.

A crisp nurse smiled up at him and asked if she could help. For the first time, Paul noticed that he was breathless and excited.

"Yes, I'd like to see—that is, I'd like to find out about—about the hockey player."

"I think he's still in the operating room," was the reply. "Won't you have a seat?"

Paul slowly walked into the waiting room and sat down in a creaky wicker chair. He glanced at the big clock in the hall—9:20. Two hours ago he'd been laughing and joking with the fellows as they were dressing for the game. They'd kidded him about the number of penalties he'd been getting for roughing it up. There had been gang fights during the two previous games and he'd started both of them. Someone had drawn a sketch of him wearing both boxing gloves and skates, and had pasted it on his locker door. Beneath the picture someone else had scrawled jokingly in chalk the single word "Killer." Paul had
laughed at it then; all during the warm-up and during the first period of the game his teammates had yelled it at him whenever he got the puck. The crowd had picked it up and shouted it . . .

Paul pulled a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. Far down the hall he heard the muffled sound of a man's footsteps as he approached. The nurse at the desk brushed back a straggling lock of hair, looked down the hall and smiled. The footsteps grew louder and a young doctor dressed in white walked up to the desk and spoke to her softly.

Paul rose from the creaky chair and walked slowly toward the desk. The doctor turned to meet him.

“Doctor, how—how—?” He stopped as the doctor slowly raised his hand.

“Lung punctured. Tried to operate. Passed away just a couple of minutes ago.”

Paul turned from the desk and staggered to a chair. He ran his trembling hand through his hair and passed it over his forehead and eyes. The clock in the hall was ticking: “Killer . . . killer . . . killer.”

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**Meteor**

Keith Shillington

Sc. So.

Tonight I walked beneath the hawthorne tree,  
And in the west beheld a meteor's glare  
Swept down to earth. A whole eternity  
Of slaving for convention gone in flare.  
And in the fiery astral glow I saw  
My heart—fraternal planet, wildly sore—  
Who would escape beneath the oak and haw  
Into the shadows and be serf no more.  
Gone was the flame! And then I realized  
While man may freedom from convention wrest,  
For his revolt past life is sacrificed,  
From man-scorned ashes he must build the rest.  
I could not bear to stand apart and so,  
Turning, I walked into the street lamp's glow.