Moondial by Helen Cresswell

It is midnight in that most dark and secret place. If you should chance – and why should you? – to be walking there, you would be blindfolded by the night. You would hear the hooting of a lone owl from the church tower, the scuff of your own steps on the gravel. You would smell the ancient, musty scent of the yews that line the path, and the curious green odour of dew on grass. You put out a hand. It gropes to find the unyielding touch of stone. The shock of it brings an uprush of fear so strong that you can almost taste it.

At that moment your fifth sense is restored. A slow silver light yawns over the garden. Shapes make themselves, statues loom. Ahead, the glass of the orangery gleams like water. You notice the shadow the moon has made at your feet as you would never notice a mere daytime shadow.

You stand motionless, with all five senses sharp, alert as a fox.

But if by some chance you should possess another, a sixth sense, what then? First a tingle of the spine, a sudden chill, a shudder. You are standing at a crossroads, looking up at a statue. A huge stone man seems to be locked in struggle with another figure, that of a boy. But the presence you feel is all about you now, and with a lifting of the hairs at the back of your neck you are certain, certain that you are being watched.

You turn slowly, half dreading what you might see. But the path before you is empty. Your gaze moves to the great, moonwashed face of the house itself. The windows are blank and shuttered, though that strange sixth sense is insisting on hints, whispers, secrets.

The scene fades and you realize that the moon is going back behind the clouds, and then you run. And as you run through the disappearing garden you feel that a mighty wind is blowing and voices are clamouring in that empty place.

What you also hear, and what you will remember ever afterwards with a shudder, even in the full light of day, is the lonely sobbing of a child.