

**Fever**  
**Laurie Halse Anderson**

I dreamt of roast beef, sliced pink and dripping with juice. A roast beef bigger than a horse, set on a giant platter that took up the entire front room, surrounded by steaming potatoes and parsnips, and loaves of fresh bread. I had a bowl of butter all to myself, and my very own pitcher of cold apple cider. The smell of mincemeat pie floated in from the kitchen.

I lifted the first bite to my mouth when a noise snapped me awake.

A footstep. A heavy footstep by the window. Silas scrambled off the blanket and ran across the floor.

"What was that?" a strange voice asked. The room was silent. I held my breath.

"Probably a rat," a second voice answered. "Hurry up, 'get in there.'"

Another footstep landed by the window. I turned toward the noise and saw a thin man in the moonlight. He was nearly as tall as the door, but I couldn't see his face. He glanced around the room. His eye did not catch me in the shadows.

A second man entered through the window, shorter than the first.

"There's no one here," the tall one said with more confidence in his voice. "You worry too much."

I closed my eyes. I am still dreaming, I thought. These men are not here. I opened my eyes again. The tall one opened one of the cupboards built into the wall by the hearth. The short one peered outside.

"I saw what I saw and I saw smoke coming out of tile chimney today," the short one said. "I don't know why I follow you. We should have gone to Fourth Street'. Nobody down there." He tapped the back of a chair nervously.

"You worry too much. Look at this fireplace; there's been no light here for weeks. Come away from that window and help me. They don't serve whiskey here, but they have plenty of pewter, and silver hidden somewhere, no doubt. Check the drawers over there," he said as he pointed to the chest behind me.

My stomach flipped. What should I do? If I screamed, Grandfather might wake, and they could attack us both. The front door was locked and I didn't have the key. I could try to slip out the window and run for help, but who could I run to? Would anyone bother with a trifling robbery when there was death at every door?