



Clarion Review

General

Footfalls

Eddie Gresham

23rd St Publishing

978-0-9800821-3-5

Five Stars (out of Five)

If Jimmy Culver the thirty-something hero of Eddie Gresham's frighteningly macabre fantasy novel *Footfalls* were to choose a favourite song it definitely wouldn't be *Lay Your Head on My Pillow*. Jimmy's bed pillow has been his lifetime source of inescapable winter sounds—the "Whush...Whush...Whush" of demonic footsteps crunching in the snow and coming after him. The footfalls have resonated throughout Jimmy's life bringing with them the horrific deaths of neighbourhood pets a boyhood friend and several innocent bystanders. They've also brought Jimmy a crushing burden of guilt and mind-numbing terror. And thanks to Gresham's ability as a storyteller they've given us a clever mesmerizing story that screams to be read.

Gresham can electrify the tension of a story with the best of them. He uses flashbacks and cutaways at just the right moment leaving the reader gasping with shock but forced to wait for what happens next and imagine the worst. He permits fear and loathing to develop over pages and chapters introducing Jimmy's demon as some generalized unknown thing and gradually revealing more and more frightening details. Even stylistic techniques of ever shorter sentences and briefer paragraphs are employed to ratchet up the tension increase the reader's apprehension and capture the imagination. And anyone who can read the repetitive hair raising "Whush...Whush...Whush" of the demon's encroaching footfalls and not react must be emotionally bereft.

Structurally the story is told in three parts over a thirty-year time span. In Book One Jimmy is an adult returning to New Oberlin a stone's throw away from Peoria Illinois where he grew up and first experienced the intrusion of the footfalls in his pillow. After moving away with his family getting an education in Texas losing a job and experiencing a failed relationship he's come to a new job as an internet systems engineer working for his longtime friend. But it is winter and it isn't long before Jimmy is trapped again in the footfall episodes he thought were

behind him. And just when Jimmy falls to his knees in the snow after reading a posted notice on a telephone pole and cries out “After all these years it’s found me” Gresham flashes back to Jimmy’s childhood when the terror began. Neighbourhood animals disappeared and Jimmy saw his chum being spirited away into the woods blotted from the community’s memory as a runaway kid. Now despite all of Jimmy’s best efforts to forget his winters past Book Three presents his final confrontation with the footfalls from his pillow the deaths of a couple of neighbours the suspicions of the small town residents with whom he lives and the threats to a new-found lover. The keys to helping him protect her lie in deciphering the meaning of the number of footfalls he hears along with two sibling bookshop owners a long-forgotten family photograph a battery of high powered lights a swatch of fluorescent paint and the faith and trust of four friends.

A deliciously chilling read *Footfalls* is right up there in Stephen King’s footsteps.