

## The night of...

Twelve chimes rang out through the eerie quiet, signalling midnight. The sound shattered the illusion of silence – a wicked infestation, a compulsory stillness that plagued the house. This evil quiet moved among us like a guard, a vicious watchman holding us captive and imposing its noiseless demands upon every room.

I stood transfixed at the foot of the stairs, wearing nothing but a thin T-shirt. I was hypnotized by the inky blackness, willing my heavy feet to move. I felt void of emotion, trapped in a trance as my fingers tightened around the knife. It was now or never. Despite the overpowering emptiness and the thick fog clouding my mind, I knew this was it. The moment I had waited for was finally here. I was ready to risk everything; there was no going back.

This was my chance – my time. It wasn't watching me. If I didn't move now – if I couldn't summon the courage to take that first step – I would never have this opportunity again. My only other option was to stay and take more of him, more of his will.

*"Please, you must move – move now! If you don't do this, you know what's left. You know what he's capable of."* My mind screamed as I lifted my hand and tenderly touched my lips. Wincing ever so slightly as my fingers trailed over the swelling. Another bruise. Another battering taken at the hands of that insidious man this morning, as the beast did his daily reminder of letting me know who was in charge – and it wasn't me.

The bruising around my eyes and the side of my face had started to fade – bruises I couldn't remember getting, or worse, what they were for. His violence had become so habitual, so customary, that the attacks merged into one another.

*Smack* – dinner wasn't on the table when he got home. *Punch* – I'd dared to speak my mind. *Kick* – he thought I'd embarrassed him in front of his friends. *Headbutt* – well, that was just for the hell of it.

Lifting my foot hesitantly, I prayed with all I had he wouldn't wake as I pressed down onto the carpet of the first step. Holding tightly to this sudden spark of audacity I felt – a flicker, out of nowhere, of bravery I hadn't felt in years quickly held me firm; as I tiptoed further up the stairs. A sense of control and fearlessness began to surge through me, a feeling I had almost forgotten existed.

My daughter was spending the weekend at her gran's, an opportunity that had unexpectedly presented itself early yesterday morning. It was a situation that couldn't have come at a better time. Divine intervention, fate, destiny, or a beautiful coincidence – call it what you will – but the door to freedom had swung open, and I grabbed it with both hands. It was a gift, a sign that my time as a victim was at an end. My suffering was going to be over; it was time to act. It was time for retribution.

I took the last step, my heart hammering so loudly in my ears I was sure he'd hear it. The hallway seemed to close in on me as I stared at the door at the end. In my mind, it looked miles away, suddenly out of reach – the same door I had crawled out of on my hands and knees countless times, desperate to escape as he whipped me with his belt; looked like it loomed at the end of a dark, sinister tunnel.

Ignoring the terror holding me tight, I moved. I'd come too far to turn back. My fingers, shaking as they were, brushed the cold, hard metal of the handle, as I eased the door open. I was in its lair and there it laid. The beast. The animal. The brute. My husband, sleeping in peace as if he had nothing to atone for.

Moving as he had always trained me to do – without a sound – I stood over the bed; the knife gripped in front of me. I stared down at the cause of all my pain, suffering, and misery and in that second, every ounce of hatred I held for this man rushed to the surface, and only one thought echoed in my mind: "*DO IT NOW!*"

I listened. For the first time in so long, I did exactly what I wanted to do, and I drove the knife as hard as I could, deep into his chest.