

2022

Empty

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Staring up at the stars, the night sky never looked so clear. It was a perfect night. The cold chill in the air felt comforting. The stars shone brightly, they seemed brighter than usual. Like beautiful sparkling diamonds laying on a soft black velvet blanket. So soft, so inviting. She could almost hear the stars calling to her to come play with them. Hot salty tears slid down the sides of her face, slowly seeping into her hair and one rolled into her ear. She wanted to brush them off her cold cheeks but couldn't. She couldn't move her hands, her arms or force her body to get up. She wanted to call out for help, but she opened her mouth and only a soft whispering of a wheeze escaped her frozen lips.

Laying in the cold wet grass was a horrible way to die. No one would find her out there, maybe tomorrow if she was lucky. Not likely to happen tonight. At least she was finally free. Free from the mind games, free from the tormenting, free from him.

How did she end up here? Well, it was about twenty-five years ago, the biggest mistake of her life had walked into her shop. The shop she worked at. At twenty-two years old she was still naïve and had a lot to learn about men and the world around her. Her gut instincts told her, he wasn't the one for her. Did she listen? No, no she didn't. They had dated for a year and half before he popped the question. Again, her gut instinct told her to say no! Punch him in the nose and run away. Change your name, change your address, change everything you want but don't say I do! Of course, she hesitated. He tried to retract the proposal and made her feel like she was the problem.

Chris told her any other woman would be happy to receive the ring he had bought. Was it too small? Not expensive enough? She had honestly just didn't want to get married. Two days later, he had asked her again and she heard herself say yes. The next year and a half, he treated her well, they planned their wedding and invited close friends and family. It was small but lovely, she had her uncle walk her down the aisle since her father had passed away when she was ten. Uncle Jack was like a dad to her and was always looking out for her. Before he walked her down the aisle, he asked her if she was sure that she wanted to go through with it. All the people came to see her do this, she had agreed to marry Chris and if she went back out now, it would be embarrassing for him and herself. She smiled and nodded. Her uncle nodded and walked her down the aisle.

A year later she gave birth to their first child, their daughter Christine, and then two years later their son, Chris Junior. Life was good for the next two years, then Chris started with little things. Lies and more lies. He had started cheating on her and then blamed her for it. Things just snowballed from there.

If she had been smart, she would have walked away then. Even if she had walked away sooner, things wouldn't have changed much. No, Chris had a way about him. He could spin a good tale. When she finally decided to walk away from their marriage, she was thirty-five years old, ten years, she had been married to that monster for ten years.

It took four more years for their divorce to be finalized; she ended up with sole custody of their children. He only agreed because she had led him to believe she would give him a second chance after finding out he had three other children to three different women while being married to her. One was only six months younger than her daughter.

Four years because he wouldn't sign off on anything until he was good and ready. Four years of her friends and family telling her what a mistake she was making. Chris was a good provider, and great dad. Who didn't make a little mistake from time to time. Chris had a way of spinning the truth. He never hit her. Not once but he made her feel responsible for him. He made her feel small and insignificant. Chris blamed her for things he did. He rarely took responsibility for his actions. Reminded her on a regular basis she wasn't pretty enough, smart enough, good enough, she wasn't a good mother or wife. No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't get it right. She wondered why he kept her around.

When she thought she was finally free from him, the ink wasn't even dry on the paperwork, he had moved on to his third wife. She had been his second. He was married to his first wife for three years before the car accident. He had been a widow for two years before he met her, when he was twenty-seven. They were now in their forties; he had been married to his third wife for six years. Happily married and they had a son together. Yet, he just couldn't stay out of her business. Her last boyfriend left her because he thought she still had something for her ex-husband. Chris had a way of making things look like they were something else. Even his wife came knocking at her door and started a fight with her.

Since then, she changed all her passwords to her social media, bank accounts, and email. He had logged in and was sending himself messages, making it look like she was still hanging on. She couldn't understand why he would do that. Not until tonight. He came over on the pretense of apologizing. She told him to stay away. Of course, none of this applied to him. She was home alone. Their daughter was away at college. Their son was on a trip, back packing with friends. She was home alone. He came over, and walked in. Maggie could have sworn she had locked the door. Obviously, she didn't.

When she had asked him to leave, he refused and pulled out a couple of glasses. Told her if she had a drink with him, he would leave. Conceding it was the only way to get him out of her home. One drink and then he left, with a smug smile. She felt tired and had a hot shower after he left then changed into her sweatpants and a tee shirt, wrapping herself in a housecoat.

She didn't even feel her head hit the pillow.

Chris towered over her. He had her sit up and drink some water, it didn't taste right. She had to be dreaming. Why was he there? He told her she had to go outside and see something. She didn't want to move. Sleep she wanted to sleep, her mouth tasted funny. Her head felt too heavy to move.

Somehow, she had made it outside and was lying in a lawn chair. It was too cold to be outside. Why was she outside. Maggie struggled to get up. Two steps and she fell flat on her face. Rolling over, and here she was staring up at the stars. So cold. Her whole body had been shivering a while ago, then stopped. Swallowing hard. Maggie tried to call for help once more but only was able to open her mouth and nothing came out this time.

Her mind began swirling, why was she so tired? Why couldn't she move? This wasn't like her. When she was going through her divorce, she had been an insomniac, her doctor prescribed sleeping meds but she never filled the prescription. Taking meds wasn't something she was good at; she didn't like putting chemicals into her body no matter what the reason. She hadn't eaten anything that disagreed with her. What did she do differently tonight? She had a drink with Chris. Then she had a dream he came back and helped her outside, but he first gave her some funny tasting water.

Did he drug her? He wouldn't do that? No, that was crazy. Why would he do something like that? She was the mother of his two kids. No, that didn't make sense. There was a star that

looked like it was shining brighter than the others. She wondered if it was a satellite, sometimes satellites would get mistaken for stars. It was moving pretty fast. Wait maybe it wasn't moving it was the planet that was rotating. For a moment she felt like she could just fall, fall off the planet and into space. So cold, she heard a neighbour out walking their dog. The dog wanted to come look in her yard, but it was Mr. Farland who wouldn't allow it.

She opened her mouth to call for his dog, "muffin." No sound, just air escaping her lips. Muffin could be heard struggling and barking at Mr. Farland, but they kept moving down the street. Her eyelids felt heavy. Her body felt light. Maggie felt like she could float off the grass, fall into space and then she could play among the stars.

The night sounds started to fade away, tears slid down her face at the thought that she wouldn't see her children again. Empty, she felt so empty, so lost.

"No Muffin! Daddy said no!" Mr. Farland gasped as his eyes fell upon her cold lifeless body. "Maggie?"

She felt someone shaking her, shaking the life out of her, or in her. Everything went dark.

Maggie came to and found herself in a hospital bed. Her family had been notified. She had heard her mother yelling at the doctor, "My daughter doesn't even take an aspirin! There is no way she overdosed on sleeping pills. NO Way!" Maggie drifted back to sleep.

It took a couple of days for her to piece it together, well the nice police officer that was called to investigate. Apparently, Chris wasn't so clever after all. He had a million-dollar insurance policy out on her. He had taken it out before they had separated, never said a thing to her. She had no idea. It was her signature on the policy; it was a mystery how it got there. Officer McCraw figured the whole thing out. Her ex-husband was trying to kill her so he could get a divorce from his third wife and move on with wife number four.