

In the Moment of Breaking

When the conception of change is beyond the limits of the possible, there are no words to articulate discontent so it is sometimes held not to exist. This mistaken belief arises because we can only hear silence in the moment in which it is breaking.

- Sheila Rowbotham,
Woman's Consciousness, Man's World.

They do not meet until the last year of high school. She is on the tennis team and debate club, bubbly, chatty, curly blond hair and eyes blue as forget-me-nots. She smiles constantly and draws people to her. When they start dating, he is kind, gracious, charming. She becomes dizzy with his attention. Her friends joke that all he is missing is the armor and white stallion. He is handsome, stunningly so, dark hair, hazel eyes, a lopsided smile. He plays the saxophone in the jazz band, and acts in most of the school plays, usually as the romantic lead. He is smooth talking, easy to look at - a true charmer - and she constantly feels she needs to pinch herself. She blushes profusely when someone mentions his name. She is sweet and lovely, but she had always been 2nd-picked, the best friend of the popular girl, and she doesn't know how to handle being the one everyone looks at, looks to. Everywhere they go, she feels they are being gossiped about; he literally radiates from the attention, he shines as if he were on stage.

He always drives her home, from school, the downtown movie theater, from Denny's, the mall. He walks her to her door, holds her hand, kisses her cheek. His lips are warm and dry. On their one month anniversary, he gives her a necklace with a gold heart-shaped pendant. They talk about what they might do after high school.

Commanders have complete discretion when determining the appropriate administrative or judicial action to take against active duty abusers. Rule 306(b) of the Manual for Courts-Martial states that allegations of offenses should be dealt with quickly and "at the lowest appropriate level of disposition."

**- The Family Advocacy Program
Commander's Guide**

He wants to join the Air Force, she wants to go into nursing. He tells her that she is lovely, that everyone looks at her. He says he wants to be the only one to look at her. She laughs and they kiss, tentatively, for the first time. His lips taste like almonds.

Sometimes he'll become upset if he thinks her clothing is too revealing. He tells her that she is showing too much skin, smiling too much at the other guys. He knows she doesn't mean anything by it, but other people might get the wrong idea. He says he is just looking out for her. She tells her best friend that he's a bit jealous and she replies, of course he is. It means that he really likes you.

He buys her Abercrombie jeans, Express sweaters, and sometimes Victoria's Secret lingerie that he asks her to model. When she does, he mentions, casually, that perhaps she has put on weight. She sees her reflection in the mirror, purse her lips, pinch her side and roll the skin and fat between her thumb and forefinger. Perhaps she has. Nonetheless she is insulted and he shrugs, he didn't mean anything by it. It was just a thoughtless comment.

He flips through her cell phone when she is changing, even though she has told him to stop doing that, and asks why she called Eric or Ricardo or Josh, what they talked about. She tells him that he shouldn't be jealous and he says he's not, he just wants to know what's going on in her life.

They are voted "Best Couple" in the high school yearbook. He is thrilled, tells her to dress up and they'll go out to celebrate. As she comes to the door, he yells that she looks like a tramp with all that make-up on. She stares at him, shocked, then breaks down, and he rushes to hug her, gets a tissue and wipes off the eyeliner dripping down her cheeks. Shh, it's ok, I just don't see why you have to get so decked out in this clown make-up, you're pretty as you are, there, see? At

Margaret, Air Force Reserves, medical field: *About two months ago, there was a woman who works at the hospital who came in with some very bad bruising on her face, and she went to her supervisor and said, "My boyfriend and I are having some issues and as much as we try to work it out, I just can't handle him hitting me anymore." The boyfriend was also active duty, and they try to deal with it in the military at the lowest level possible, but I think when somebody shows up with bruising on their face, that's not something that needs to stay at the lowest level anymore. That's something that should go directly to that person's supervisor. If you get a DUI, that goes directly to the highest person in that person's chain of command, and I think that's where domestic violence should go. So the man got in no trouble at all and when it happened the second time, she came in and said, "This needs to be dealt with and I don't feel comfortable going to civilian police but I will go if I have to, but I want it to be dealt with here." Then it became, "Well, what have you been doing? Why is he hitting you? What's going on in your house?" and so she ended up going to the civilian police because nothing was being done and it was being focused on her. I mean, she's showing up with visible bruising on her face and people are saying, "Well, why the hell would he hit you? What did you do to him?" It was really disappointing to hear that story, really disappointing.*

dinner, he cracks jokes nonstop, winks because he knows she likes it when he does, brushes her hair from her eyes. She forgives him. Of course she does; it is so easy to forgive him.

She stops wearing short skirts or low-cut tops, stops wearing eye make-up. She loves it when he's in a good mood, and these are such little things that he doesn't like. She wants him to always find her beautiful, always worthy of loving.

They are inseparable. Her parents complain jokingly, but they adore him. He praises her mom's taste in décor and clothing, her amazing baking, chats up her dad with football and soccer stats. He is witty, funny, relaxed. Next to him, sometimes she feels a little wilted.

He picks out her clothes because he knows which pants make her look slimmer, which tops make her waist look smaller, he knows which haircuts elongate her neck. When he is not there, she isn't sure that she can make herself look the way he wants.

Sometimes he blows up at a glance she made, a conversation she had, the way she walked in front of another boy. She inevitably cries. He apologises, holds her tight. Can't she see how much it hurts him, why does she keep on mocking him? She doesn't mean to. She wishes, fervently, that he would trust her. She stops calling Josh, Eric, Ricardo, stops talking with other guys when he's watching her across the room. She still gets breathless when she looks up from her desk and meets his intense gold eyes. Even when he's not there, she can feel his look, warm like embers, on her skin.

He can cut her to the quick with his sharpness, his biting anger so out of the blue that it knocks the wind from her. He calls her a slut, a whore, a cunt, and he spits the names out so they hit her like a slap. She screams and cries and paces back and forth across the room as he stands

Willow, Air Force, linguist: *From what I understand the Air Force takes care of whoever it is that's being abused. They try to protect them as much as they can, but I think part of that goes back to you being responsible for yourself and who you allow yourself to be associated with. Because, yeah, someone might beat you, and you might tell your first shirt, "My husband's beating me," and then he'll take you away from that home, he'll take your kids away, put you somewhere safe. But if you go right back to that person, nothing's ever going to change. I think the Air Force does what they can. They give us as much information and education on it as they can, but you can't force someone to step up and say, "This is what's happening to me."*

watching her, sneering. Even in anger he is collected and calm. She is sometimes afraid of what his composure contains, but she will not admit it.

The next day, he is contrite, apologetic. He would not have said those things if she hadn't aggravated him, if she hadn't moved so suggestively, if she hadn't been so flirtatious. Was she purposefully trying to make a fool out of him? She says, no, no, she didn't mean it. She apologises. Sometimes she forgets he is so sensitive. Her best friend says, of course, he's an actor, he's one of those artistic types. He can't even usually remember the names he called her in anger, but she always does. "Bitch" and "whore" cut her from the same lips that caress her with "beautiful" and "love" and "mine". When he's happy, she is so grateful just to be in his glow, his overflowing generosity and joy. He promises her forever, and she believes him. It is so easy to believe him.

During the prom, he grabs the microphone on stage and proposes to her. He is on one knee and his grin is radiant, he is radiant. She can't remember if she says yes, she knows she is shaking and can't hold her hand still enough for him to put the ring on. His eyes are a kaleidoscope of greens. Time stalls, starts up again, slows down, rushes up in waves. She feels she might drown in the swells of her emotions, in those bright, fierce eyes, she feels light-headed and drunk and dizzy and she thinks, I will never love anyone else like this.

Her parents suggest that, after all, they are young and eight months hasn't been much time. Perhaps they should wait a little longer. But they are eighteen and he is excited and eager to get married, and she is thrilled and flattered. She thinks, this will surely prove her love, this will ease his insecurities and doubts.

They get married a week after graduation, two weeks before he joins the Air Force. They travel to Honolulu for their honeymoon and spend

Women who leave their batterers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer than those who stay.

- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1988

five days in the translucent topaz waters. She watches him stretched out in the sand, his eyes squinting up against the sun, arm thrown across his forehead, the veins of his forearms a jewel blue against the tan of his skin. She thinks, in a moment, she will go to him and lay her head in the hollow where his shoulder and neck meet. In a moment, his sun-warmed skin will smell like redwoods and grass and incense. Her fingertips will trace his veins, silky with the delicate rushings of blood. But for now, she watches him and can't stop smiling. She wishes she could stay paused in this moment, this breath of time, for always.

He gets stationed in Omaha, Nebraska, thousands of miles from her family and friends. She knows no one in Nebraska, or the entire Midwest for that matter. She gets a job as a telemarketer during the day, attends nursing classes at night. She gets pregnant almost immediately. He complains that he never sees her anymore, that she is prioritising everything ahead of their relationship. He suggests that she quit her job or the classes. She doesn't like the idea, but once the baby is born, she finds she doesn't have a choice. She doesn't make enough for them to afford to pay for daycare for the baby, so she stops working and taking classes.

She calls her family weekly, and he will sit in the room with her, the television on. She can see him stiffen when she tells her mother she sometimes feels isolated. After she has hung up, he confronts her. What kind of impression must her mother have of him, like he's keeping her a prisoner in her own home? She protests, no, she didn't mean it that way. She finds her words frequently get twisted in his mouth, and it takes more energy than she has to fight against what he believes.

She will occasionally pause during her busy days, the wet laundry dripping off her hands, or

Military Family Advocacy Office

counselor: *The most common recommendations for treatment would be anger management, couples' communication, some individual work if necessary. I've made some referrals to Batterers Intervention programs; in a year's time, I'd say we might refer 3 or 4. I think we catch things at a lot lower level in the military and so that kind of program isn't something that we would need to refer to as frequently.*

white flour caked between her fingers, and stare out through the window, unseeing. Her eyes go past the flat golden stretches of the cornfields, towards the horizon line blue and empty, to a silence that rings. She will remain motionless until the baby cries or the oven timer goes off, and then time crashes back down on her and, try as she might, she cannot remember what her thoughts were in that stillness.

For the next four years, she goes from breastfeeding to pregnant in a seemingly nonstop cycle. She gives birth twice more. As the months flow past her, in spurts and torrents, she finds her dissatisfaction with being a housewife ebbs away too; she does not have the time to be reflective. There is the dinner to be made, the to-do lists, the vacuuming and mopping and diaper changes; she feels she is always a few steps behind. Air Force wives invite her to their meetings but she knows her husband does not approve of her talking to people he doesn't know, so she stops going after a couple of meetings. He has been busy and easily irritated lately, and she doesn't want to provoke him.

During their arguments, he corners her against the wall and punches it, inches from her face. Throws her debate team medals at her from across the room. The walls are dented with their history. Afterwards, he says, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I can't help myself when I'm that angry. Sweetie, you know I'm sorry, right?" Of course she knows, she knows him intimately. She knows he means it.

The first time he hits her, she stands there stunned. They had been arguing about dinner being late. Or him being late to dinner. All their arguments have been blurring together in her mind. She puts her hand tentatively up to her face; her skin feels hot and prickly. He has already gone to get the ice, is applying it to her cheek gently, hovers protectively over her. She wants to run from the room, away from him,

Intimate partner violence is about power and control, and is not caused by anger management problems or communication problems in the relationship. Anger Management classes do not replace Batterers Intervention, and you cannot substitute one for the other.

- Florida Department of Children and Families, 2000

but he grips her hands and won't let go. They are both crying. He asks, why do you have to constantly snap back at me? Why can't you just let things go? She doesn't know why. She knows she should have more patience with him; she thinks, next time she won't argue back, next time it'll be different. Next time she'll know better.

The evening afterwards, he brings home tulips, purple and pink silky promises. He orders Thai food and lays out a blanket in the living room and they watch *The Princess Bride* while eating out of the take-out boxes with disposable chopsticks. During the movie, he wraps his arms around her so that she leans back against him, her head on his shoulder. His touch is gentle as Nebraska accents. He whispers into her hair so quietly she cannot hear his words, but it doesn't matter. She knows what he's trying to say. She closes her eyes and lets herself fall into the lull of his voice like soft heartbeats.

The first time she goes to the base hospital, the doctor asks her about a faded bruise. He is kind and gentle, says there is help if she needs it. She finds herself talking more than she intended; she is relieved to be able to talk to anyone at all. When she leaves the office, the doctor places a call to her husband's commander, who pulls her husband into his office and reprimands him. He doesn't want to get into her private business, but it doesn't look good that she is saying those things in public. He says there is couples' counseling if they need to work out some issues between them, but he doesn't want to have to hear about it again, is that understood?

By the time she gets home, her husband is in the kitchen, his body taut, waiting for her. She learns her first lesson in the importance of keeping family matters within the family. She learns to withdraw more into herself, to distrust official military personnel, to not make eye contact. She learns to smile at the base police who show up for reports of a domestic disturbance. She

Nicholas, Air Force Special

Investigator: *If you're a victim of domestic violence, and a guy's beating you up, and you report it but you keep taking him back or you let him get away with it, he's going to beat you worse and worse and worse, and then one day, he may kill you. And then there's always the fallout from that, the neighbors who say, "Oh well, we heard them, but we figured everything would be okay." There's so much fallout that comes with not reporting, as opposed to reporting; there's no fallout when you report something. There's never any fallout from that.*

uses the word "fine" more times than she could count. Every lesson is marked like battle scars on her body.

She cannot remember how she has gotten to this point in time. She cannot remember when he first began checking the odometer on the car after her errands, comparing the grocery bills to the allowance he gives her. She cannot remember when he took away her cell phone, or when she stopped talking to her parents or friends altogether. She tries to think back, but it feels like perhaps it has always been this way.

Some days she places her keys on the kitchen table and then cannot find them. She tears the house apart. Later, she will find them on the kitchen table. She does not know that her husband purposefully moves them, so that when she begins to feel like she is going crazy, when she begins to distrust her senses, his constant presence will cut through her confusion and fear. She knows with certainty that his eyes will shift from green to gold in the sunlight, that he will always feel warmest before waking, that his mouth tightens before he explodes in anger. These are the certainties in her life that she clings to.

The months rush past her, and she watches bruises slowly bloom across her body. They are never readily visible, on her back, her sides, her upper thighs; he is always careful. Afterwards, he sees the bruises on her body and is horrified. Each time, he says, "I love you so much, you know that. You're the only one who understands me. Don't ever leave me, promise me you'll never leave me." He clutches her hands desperately, his fingers hot against her cool skin. "I'm so sorry. I swear, it won't happen again. You believe me, don't you? God, I swear," and she holds his head in her hands and comforts him, shhh, it's ok, I'll never leave you, I promise, I promise. She knows she is the only one who can save him.

Find healthy ways to express your anger. Don't keep angry feelings locked inside you.

Remember to calm down. Think carefully before you speak.

Name the problem. Calmly and clearly explain why you're angry or what the problem is.

Use "I" statements. These statements focus on you and your needs, wants, and feelings.

Identify solutions. Say what you would like to change or see happen in the future.

– **Self-Care Handbook,
Managing Anger, used in Family
Advocacy anger management classes**

She sees him switch on and off like Jekyll and Hyde. His unpredictability leaves her like a tightly wound string, all her senses sharpened. She can hear the inhalation before the baby cries, see her husband's body become still before the storm. Each moment is a breath held in suspension. Sometimes the building of tension becomes so great that she will purposefully provoke him just to release it. She knows him intimately; she knows a couple of bruises today will prevent a sprained wrist, a broken finger later. She doesn't have to talk to anyone to know that no one will understand this.

When her husband is first officially arrested by the base police for domestic violence, he is ordered to couples' counseling and anger management. As they go to couples' counseling together, she learns that their relationship needs more compromise. She learns that she needs to adjust her behaviours for the relationship to work. During sessions, she speaks rarely, unsure of what might upset her husband should she reveal it. She frequently misses the appointments that the Family Advocacy Office on base has scheduled with her. When she does attend, he demands to hear everything that she has said. At the appointments, she says, "Things have gotten better. Everything's going great. Yes, he's definitely learned his lesson. Yes, counseling has really helped us." She keeps her gaze on the counselor's chin. She knows that everything they have, their base housing, their grocery money, their health insurance, the children's schooling, is dependent on her husband's career. Everything is dependent on her ability to nod and agree that things are perfect and great, just fine.

When domestic violence is seen as a two-way street, it frees us to transfer from a “men must give up their power” model for treatment to a “walk a mile in each other’s moccasins” model for treatment. It frees us to focus not on a scapegoat oppressor, but a mutual responsibility dance; not on punishment, but prevention. It frees us not to treat a slap as terminal cancer, but as a signal we need to make our love healthier.

**– Equal Justice Foundation,
organisation recommended to me by
a Family Advocacy counselor**

Ania, domestic violence advocate:
She then proceeded to show me her injuries and her bruises, and it was just awful, after sitting in one room and saying, “Oh things are great, don’t worry.” I’ll never forget it because it was so drastic and so scary. He was kicking her all over her body, in her head, down her back. She had bruises all the way down her back, she had an injury to her finger that was swollen. Her arms were black, I mean it was all black and blue, it was just awful.

She feels like a scar, tight and raw. One night he reaches out and their oldest child cringes instinctively. She will remember this for weeks.

And so, on a Wednesday afternoon, she leaves. She had practiced it over and over in her mind, what she would pack, what they might need, but when he leaves for work in the morning, she walks quickly out the door with only the children and the clothes she is wearing. She does not look back.

They spend two nights in a homeless shelter. He finds her the second night, stands in the parking lot of the shelter and screams her name in sobs. He threatens to kill himself if she doesn’t come home. She walks outside, and he is kneeling on the ground, lost, panicked, terrified, and he says, “I can’t lose you. I’ll kill myself if you leave, I swear I will.” Knowing him, she believes it. She kneels next to him and he clings to her, tight and fierce, his body shaking. He’s a man drowning, and she lets him hold onto her as the streetlights swirl around them. In a few moments, she knows she will take the children in one hand, her husband in the other, and she will lead them all back home. But for now, she watches him break apart in her arms and, in his despair and chaos, his desire stronger than life, she lets herself fall back into him.

When she is introduced to the community civilian domestic violence advocate at one of her last Family Advocacy appointments, she repeats, “Yes, everything’s going great. He’s doing everything he’s supposed to.”

At the end of the meeting, the advocate pulls her into a separate room, and she asks, “Can I talk to you without anybody knowing?” When the advocate says “Yes,” she nearly cries. She can’t remember the last time that she spoke to someone without her husband finding out, and the weight, like a waterfall rushes from her.

And she was scared for her life, but she was also scared to say anything to anybody anymore because she had spoken up and it had gotten her those bruises, because of the chain of command involvement. She was scared to even think about thinking about getting away, because he had told her he would kill her, and as many times as he had hurt her, and nobody had believed it, she was sure that he was going to kill her and that he was going to kill the kids.

Then one day she called me and she was whispering, saying "I'm in the bathroom. He's going to kill me, I don't know what to do. He just came home, he wasn't supposed to be home." It was in the middle of the day, and he would make unannounced visits to see what she was doing, and he hadn't found her yet. She was in the bathroom and had locked herself in, and I said, "If you can get out of there, come here and we'll deal with everything from here."

I was terrified, I didn't even have an address for her, so I didn't know where to send them if I needed to send law enforcement - he hadn't done anything yet.

She calls the advocate every now and then, when she can get to a pay phone for a few minutes. She says, I'm still alive, and I'm still scared, and I still don't know what to do. She clutches at the telephone wire and wraps it around her fingers so tightly that it cuts into her skin. When she hangs up, she finds she doesn't want to let go.

She doesn't call for a long time.

She is in the bathtub, fully clothed, pressing the baby to her chest and shivering uncontrollably. She takes a sharp intake of breath and realises that she hadn't been breathing. "I'll call you right back," she whispers and, without a sound, places the phone down on the bathmat.

Outside the bathroom door, her husband is loading and unloading his gun, each snap! of steel jolting through her spine.

She called me back ten minutes later and that was the longest ten minutes, I tell you what, I was just pacing. She was hysterical, but he had left again and she was packing up the kids and coming down, and that's what happened.

She came down here, we called law enforcement, they took a report on the kids and also on her, and all the injuries and you know they knew how bad it was just by looking at her. She was just a wreck, terrified. They had the military Office of Special Investigations come out here and meet law enforcement and they listened in on the report and, because it was so bad, she needed to go to the emergency room and have herself and the kids checked because he had hurt them.

The OSI agent went with her because they hadn't arrested her husband yet. He went into the emergency room and checked it all out to make sure her husband hadn't heard from somebody and was already sitting there. He stayed with us through the whole procedures of having X-rays taken and reports filed and everything, which took hours, and then in the meantime, he got a call saying they found the husband. They had arrested him and taken him to Sarpy County jail, and he was just livid.

The house has been quiet for she isn't sure how long. She tries to count but time shifts and slides underneath her fingers. Five minutes? Twenty-five minutes? She imagines him outside the door, waiting. She cannot hear anything but the erratic rush of her heartbeat in her ears. She thinks frantically about where the children are, if they remembered to stay where she hid them.

She is surrounded by footsteps, doors opening and closing, cold fingers, badges everywhere. She thinks she must look like a train crash. As soon as she speaks, she can't remember what she has said. Everything that touches her is cold or metal. There is so much chaos around her, flowing constantly in and out of the doors, she feels like she has become a sliver of stillness.

She keeps her eye on the advocate because she is the only familiar face in the room, this woman she has seen only once before but whose voice she recognises instantly. The advocate is petite, black hair and steel-coloured eyes. She smiles often, but it doesn't reach her eyes, so that she always looks a little sad.

So then, after being done at the hospital, we went to the house to get some things and the agent went with us. There was light in the house, and we didn't know why there was light in the house because theoretically nobody was supposed to be in there. So the OSI agent got permission from his commander that allowed him to go in there and check the house, and he went in there with his weapon; it was like on TV.

We were waiting outside in the car. The kids were in the car: there was a baby, a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old. The 5-year-old was hysterical, "Please don't make me go in there, I don't want to go in there! I'm scared, he's going to be there, he's going to hurt us!" It was just horrific, the 3-year-old was crying but she wasn't saying a whole lot and we were standing outside waiting for the agent to come back out to tell us that we could go in.

She walks through the front door. Their house has been completely ransacked. The couches are overturned, the dining chairs broken, bookcases toppled. Her jewelry and the children's toys have been strewn along the floor and trampled upon. He had taken scissors to her clothes, which lay in piles in the bedroom.

The phone rings nonstop. When the answering machine picks up, his voice crackles through the line, "Pick up. I know you're home. Pick up the phone." Click. Rings. Click. Rings again. They ask if she wants to unplug the phone, but she shakes her head, panicked. "No, he'll find out. He'll find out I unplugged the phone." She's convinced that he could show up at any time, despite their insistence that he could not be out on bail until the next day. The phone rings again, stops, rings again, stops, rings. She cannot stop shaking.

So we packed her things and we put her in a hotel and the kids were so relieved when they could get out of there. She didn't have any money; the chain of command tried to get money, but he had emptied out the account already and I think he posted bail.

Her parents came into town to try to help her pack a U-haul, so we coordinated with the base to have that street blocked completely because he was out. Security forces blocked the whole area so that she could pack her house and get her things out. The base was on high alert just because of this guy, who had also made threats to law enforcement

The agent says, exasperatedly, "Look, you need to get your things and we need to get out of here, and if you're scared, I'm going to unplug the phone, because he's not going to know that it was me." And before she can say anything, he has, and the phone shrills silent, leaving a sharp echo that sifts down into the cracks of the floors.

She wants to go back home to Maine, where the accents are slow and warm and the December snow drapes heavy on branches. Beneath the bright whiteness, it seems possible to start over and start new every day. She will change her name, her social security number, her look. She'll be born again from that frozen land, where everything becomes clear and transparent, where icicles taste like spring.

That case stands out because after there was public knowledge of what was happening and what was going on, the military had no other recourse than to go with what the public knew about it, so then they started protecting her and helping her and being supportive and he did get kicked out of the service in the very end. They chaptered him out.

He received one year probation. Not for the domestic violence either, for the child abuse.

I talked to her one time when she was out there and she said, "I don't know what to do - he sits on the opposite side of the street from where I work. They already banned him from this side of the street but he's allowed to sit on the opposite side of the street."

And that was the last time I heard from her.

She is told that they can't press the domestic violence charges if she doesn't return for the trial, because they have no evidence besides her testimony. The thought of having to be in the same room, the same county even, as him, to see him again after six months, makes her stomach cramp. Her oldest has just begun to sleep through the night. She is terrified to go back and she knows the police cannot protect her if he's out; they've told her, for her own safety, not to return.

On a misdemeanor domestic violence conviction, her husband would face, at most, a year in jail. A year in which he could plan and wait, and on his release, he would hunt her down.

A year later, he does find her.

When she looks through her window, he waves to her. The court tells her that it is a public street after all. Her co-workers take turns walking with her to her car, and she drives home by a different route for every day of the week. She cannot shake the feeling that his eyes are always on her. "I will never let you go," he had told her when they first began dating.

She believes him still.

This story is an assemblage of creative non-fiction and fiction. While the events are based in fact, names and identifying details have been altered to ensure anonymity of all involved.

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