The Absent Sky

Evening drives are usually therapeutic for me. Although I’m desperate to get home from a long day at work, the drive home is one of my only opportunities to be alone and relax my mind from life’s struggles. I look up towards the sky for a moment, marveling at how the luminous stars brighten the dim, atramentous night sky. Wherever I go, the moon follows me with its tremendous light beaming down on the path ahead of me. However, tonight the sky was lacking any stars and enormous clouds overcast the moon, shielding me from its gleam. The sky offered me no comfort from the anxiety inducing news that an old friend Alya had told me over the phone. My husband had been cheating on me.

I cursed the slow, beat up Mitsubishi in front of me as I maneuvered around it from the middle lane into the adjacent left lane. I pressed down forcefully on the gas pedal to propel the car rapidly enough to beat the yellow streetlight. I could see my neighborhood coming up on the left. I turned and sped through the entrance, recklessly driving down every winding road and traffic circle that led towards my house, completely ignoring the sign stating that the speed limit was 25 mph. Once the house came into view I noticed something peculiar. The driveway was empty. This meant that my husband wasn’t home. His car couldn’t be in the garage because the garage was a hoarder’s wonderland full of storage boxes containing his junk.

As I pulled into the driveway, my phone began to vibrate inside of my purse that was seated in the passenger’s seat beside me. Once the car was parked, I rummaged through my purse, moving my stun gun out of the way before taking out my phone. It was my husband. I hadn’t noticed how sweaty my palms were before seeing his name largely displayed on the offensively bright screen of the phone. The anxiety rose within me like passengers on a drop tower ride. Without answering the phone, I could hear his voice speaking to me normally at first, asking me if I was still at work. If I answered yes, then I would endure his persistent barking at me about how I’m never home early enough to cook for him or to satisfy his sexual needs. Never did he say anything like, “It’s dangerous for you to leave work so late”, “I’m worried about you”, or “I miss you.” I’ve always been afraid to comment about any of this out of fear of how he would respond. To say he was short-tempered and impatient was an understatement. For years, he’s yelled and laid his hands on me but I remained complacent with my situation out of sheer reluctance to do anything about it.

Besides the reluctance, I stayed silent over his violent behavior because our relationship wasn’t always about the abuse and his egoism. There were good days where I would melt in his attractive turquoise eyes and his teasing, youthful smirk would remind me of the two love-struck, mischievous teenagers we used to be. I cherished the connection we had from being together so long. I’ve never been in a relationship with anyone besides him and I knew I would never find the unique connection we had from growing up together with anyone else. However, these things started to become less significant to me since about three months ago when I had a pregnancy scare. That scare sparked my realization that I couldn’t bring another person under his abusive control. Even if I could stand to be mistreated by him, I couldn’t allow the mistreatment to fall upon another person. There was no helping the thought that maybe I could use this cheating incident as a way out of this marriage.

I stared at the illuminated phone vibrating in my trembling hands, and decided to let the call go to voice-mail. I reclined the black leather car seat and opened the sun roof of the car. Staring at the mysteriously absent sky, I thought back to a similar night as this one years ago. My senior year of high school, when I was about 18 years old, my same friend Alya, who was also my husband’s cousin, came running to me with similar news of him cheating. The news devastated me so much that I remember shaking more severely than a person with Parkinson’s disease and sobbing so heavily that when I drew in a deep breath to continue, I became light-headed and felt like I would faint. Just the memory of that entire ordeal added to the pounding headache that I felt on the right side of my head. I closed my eyes and let out a deep breath.

At that same moment, I heard someone slam their car door next to me on the driveway.

I turned my head towards the sound and saw my husband staring at me through the passenger’s side window. His eyebrows furrowed in confusion at me sitting in the car, laying back in my seat with a terrified expression on my face. I diverted my eyes and stared straight ahead at the large, yellow painted garage door. I closed my eyes again and felt the pounding headache intensify with the storm of thoughts about how or if I would confront him over what Alya had told me earlier before I left work. Not even a minute passed before I heard rough tapping on the driver’s side window. I jumped at first but then promptly reclined the chair back to how it was before, turned off the car, and got out.

“What the hell are you doing?” he asked.

“Just relaxing a little after the long day at work.” I answered.

He rolled his eyes the second he heard me say “long day at work”.

“Wouldn’t a better question be where you’ve been? I thought I was the only one with a demanding job.” I said.

I quietly made my way towards the house but was abruptly stopped by his forceful hand jerking my arm back. I turned around and as he was about to flare up in anger at me, his gaze shifted towards something behind me. Following his gaze, I saw a late-night jogger slowing their pace down as they passed underneath one of the only lit streetlights on our street. Their bright blonde hair and neon pink workout top displaying the words “JUST DO IT” were easy to see even in the dark across the street. I took the words as a sign. I wiggled my arm out of his grasp and looked around to see if any other late-night joggers may have been around and seen this little scene.

“Let’s go inside before you decide to blow up at me.” I said.

As we walked into the house, I contemplated several things in my mind. Was he really doing this to me again? If he was, would I leave him? Could I? If not, then what would proof of his cheating be good for? As we approached the living room, I continued to contemplate these things while staring intently at the accumulated dust on the glass coffee table.

“Ok, what’s up with you? You’re acting strange.” He said.

I stayed silent.

“Tell me what’s wrong, now.” He said sternly.

“I don’t want to.” I said.

“Say it!” he said aggressively.

“No!” I screamed.

Then, I heard him stride towards me and I ran to the other side of the living room, hoping to slip into another dimension or timeline where I could avoid this predicament. Before I could make it to the corner of the room, he wrapped his arms tightly around me and stopped me. I expected a rougher embrace from him but he was holding me surprisingly softly. He turned me around in his arms so I was facing him. I struggled to look him in the eyes but I knew I couldn’t escape from him now.

“Fucking tell me right now.” He said, so close I could feel his breath on my face.

“I know you’re cheating on me.” I nearly whispered.

He immediately loosened his embrace and a moment passed where neither of us said a word.

“Are you cheating on me?” I asked, my tone a little higher this time.

I kept searching for some sort of confirmation or denial within his turquoise eyes but he purposely averted my gaze.

“Why are you asking that?”

“A little bird told me about it.”

“Does this little bird have a name?”

“It’s none of your business, just answer the question honestly.”

He looked me straight in the eyes this time and asked: “When did you become confident enough to speak to me that way?”

“Ever since I decided I’m sick of your bullshit.” I said putting my hands to his chest, trying to push myself out of his grasp to no avail.

“If you want honesty from me, you should try speaking a little more sweetly to me.” He said, putting his face closer to mine. “Or maybe a little sexier.”

I usually gave into his teasing but it didn’t turn me on in the least.

“Let go of me!” I insisted, pushing more and more against his chest. The more I tried, the more it seemed to amuse him and the tighter his grasp became. The way he laughed at my attempts to free myself from his embrace annoyed and horrified me. My breathing became heavy and my pleas to let me go became repetitive as tears filled my eyes. Then, suddenly, he loosened up his arms around me a bit.

“What difference would it make if I did cheat on you?” he asked.

“A huge difference.” I responded.

“It’s not as though you’d leave me.” He said.

“You don’t know that.” I said.

He threw his head back and rolled his eyes, chuckling a bit to himself.

“Stop playing around with me and be serious!” I yelled at him, some spit landing on his chin. He finally seemed to listen to me because he stopped moving and chuckling to himself. Then, he closed in on me and shot me his signature smirk, the one that I thought I couldn’t resist.

“It was just sex.”

Hearing that statement, I felt my love for him crawl like a spider out of the web of my soul, up my esophagus, and out of my mouth then dissipate into nothing. His lack of remorse shouldn’t have astounded me but it did. I resented my reluctance all these years, for not fighting him back and not having more self-respect for myself. He had instilled a fear in me through his words and his fist that were too difficult for me to shake off until now. I wanted to fight for my dignity and run as far away from him as possible. Still somewhat locked in his strange embrace, I forced my sharp acrylic nails into his arms and began voraciously scratching him with them to the point where I left white scratch marks on his forearms and drew some blood.

“OW! STOP!” he yelled, pushing me away from him.

The second he let me go, I ran towards the front door, grabbing my purse with the keys inside quickly from the top of the coffee table. He quickly caught up with me and locked me within his arms once again.

“Get off me!” I screamed.

“Just calm down, you’re not going anywhere.” He said.

“Why are you even trying to keep me here? You don’t love me!” I yelled.

“Who said I didn’t?” he asked, tightening his hold on me.

I didn’t stop to answer that ridiculous question. If he had loved me, he wouldn’t have treated me so harshly for years and looked for other women to satisfy his supposed “needs”. Unbeknownst to him, I predicted that he would grab me again from past fights we’ve had and I grabbed the stun gun I had hidden within my purse beforehand. I quickly pushed down the on button on the side of the stun gun and pressed it down on his right leg. He screamed and fell back immediately, with me falling back on top of him. I continued pressing down the stun gun until he began shaking violently and his arm muscles loosened enough for me to free myself from his grasp. My keys and wallet fell out of my purse. I grabbed them, ran out of the house, and into my car. I got the feeling that some neighbors had heard our screaming because the entire street was now illuminated by the bright house lights that weren’t previously on when I initially arrived home. I backed out of the driveway and raced down the street with the same vigor that I had speeding down it earlier that evening. The difference was that this time, the marvelous array of stars and the moon seemed to smile as they showered rays of light down upon me.