

# *Hope Reigns*

*A Journey from Domestic Violence*

Mary Farmer

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## *Acknowledgements*

I spent my entire childhood reading books which fostered the dream of someday writing my own. God saw my heart and I'm grateful that he is a loving Father who tends to the most intimate details of our hearts.

I'm thankful for my daughter, Amanda, and my husband, Kevin, who kept the encouragement coming when I wanted to give up and quit writing. Thank you. I love you both so much.

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God bless all of the survivors who have lived my story. I pray you will find healing, courage and hope in the pages of this book.

To all the survivors I have had the privilege of working with as your advocate: I dedicate this book to YOU. I hope this book will help others understand the answer to the question we are always asked: "*Why don't you just leave?*" Leaving is harder than staying. I get it and I hope the world will get it too.

## *Foreword*

It's about abuse ... and I couldn't put it down. Mary's book, *Hope Reigns*. Everything else automatically went to the back burner and I sat reading in suspense ... from the very first sentence onward. Hers is more than a novel; its tension and heartache wrapped up in her self-styled personal narrative. And that's what makes it a top ten on my list is that fact. It has the feel of a novel but it is NOT FICTION; it's her own real life's story of tragedy ... and victory. It shows how God Himself is working in the affairs of men and circumstances to bring about rescue.

"Why don't you just leave?" is the question too often asked of the abused. You will see here some of the reasons why it's just not that simple. It starts with the sweet joy of tender new love. Then, once the trust is secure, then comes first a fragment of shocking anger, but

a quick apology. Then, comes a slap, followed by another apology. Then, it's another and another, with slow degradation. And emotional harm, hidden bruises and a crushed soul. And before you know it, you're in a cesspool of whirling muck-water, trapped by intimidation, or by presence of a child to protect, or by threats toward parents or job, or even the threat against your own life. "Just leave" ... if it were only that simple.

It's not simple. But it IS possible. It takes courage. It takes prayer. There is hope.

Mary's story here shows others who are also abused, both women and men, whether it be in their marriages, their live-in situations, their jobs, whatever their circumstances, there is hope for them. And it doesn't matter how serious, how demeaning, how tragic their lives are, Hope Reigns! Mary illustrates how there are open doors. There is escape. There are walls, yes, but there are open windows and gates with people standing there with welcoming arms. And those people are sent by God to help, whether those servants know it or not.

Mary found them. And if you are a Mary, you can find them too.

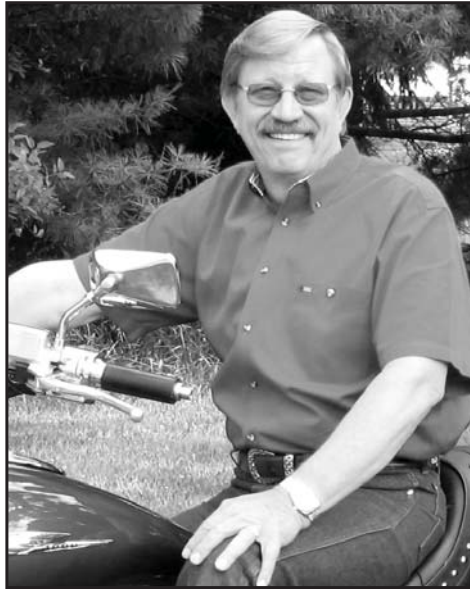
Mary lifts Him up; it's God who is the hero in this play, in this real-life drama. It's HIM

saving the lives of both Mary and her daughter, Manda.

Mary becomes the “Miss Barnabas” of encouragement for you here in her book. Hope Reigns and you can find it too.

Larry West

Author; Speaker, Director, We Care Ministries







## *Part 1: The Escape*



# *Chapter 1*

*April 19, 2002*

As the clock on the dash flashed the time, a sinking feeling began to rise in the pit of my stomach. I sped down the dark country roads toward our house. *Every minute that passed was another offense against me.* Twenty minutes is nothing to some, a miniscule fragment of time, worth nothing in the grander scheme of life, but to me it could be the difference between life and death.

Heart pounding in my chest, I gripped the steering wheel as I navigated around the bumps and ruts in the potted road ahead of me. Minutes continued to tick by as my daughter and I tried to race the incoming storm home with the hopes that he wasn't there yet. We were late. We had missed that narrow window of time that I was allowed to go to church and get back home.

One more turn and we would be almost home. I wanted to believe it was going to be okay. So many times in the past Manda and I would pull

into the driveway and be so grateful that the truck was gone. We were safe for a moment, but how long would it last? Somehow even before I saw the headlights and the vehicle careening towards us, I knew. I just knew.

We both saw it at the same time. Manda began to cry in the seat next to me.

“I’m sorry Mom ... I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to get you in trouble.”

My heart melted at the desperation in her voice. Fourteen years of sadness. Guilt and shame welled up within me and washed over my soul like a heart-wrenching flood. I hated myself for all those times in the night when I would promise God we would leave if I survived but when the sun came up, I stayed. I raged inside my head as I watched him speed toward us for all of the years she had suffered for my decisions. She deserved better. She deserved a mom and a dad who loved her. She deserved a life with parties and dances and friends. Amanda deserved to come home from school each day confident that I was alive and safe instead of the stark dread of not knowing what she would find.

As the truck drew closer with a madman behind the wheel, I braced myself for an impact. Never quite sure what he would do when he got in that state, I was preparing my heart to die.

“It’s not your fault, sweetie. It’s okay. It’s

going be okay.... There is *nothing* wrong with us getting an ice cream.”

How stupid the words sounded even to my own ears. What normal person even has to even question such a thing? Why? Why? Why? Was I such a horrible person that I deserved this fate? Was my fate to die and him to live? Had I committed a sin so great that this was my punishment? What had Amanda done to deserve this hell of a life, for that is what it was.

Suddenly the truck was next to us and he slammed on the brakes. In my mirror I saw the truck slide sideways behind me. My foot pressed the brake knowing there was no escape. Not now. It wouldn't do any good to try. Trying would just make it worse. I wasn't sure if I was expected to stop or continue on the final few miles to our house. The answer was quickly apparent as he spun the truck around behind me, veered around me and flew ahead in a scary burst of speed. Anger poured from the truck like a visible cloud, and I half-feared *and* half-hoped that he would crash and settle it all before we reached the house.

Amanda began to cry and I began to search for that place in my mind that didn't feel anything. I had learned to do that over the years. I became an ice princess where nothing could touch my soul. My physical body would cry and beg for my life,

but there was a place that even he couldn't reach. He couldn't. It wasn't his. It was mine. Once again, I would play his vicious hateful game of cat and mouse, but if he won? He wouldn't win.

Our trailer beckoned for us to come home as we pulled into the driveway, the home where my grandparents had lived before their death. Home, where Grandpa loved his girl. Memories of a loving place had now become my prison. Slowly, I inched my Buick into the space beside his truck. He already stood waiting in the driveway. Amanda cowered in fear of her daddy, but still, as always, she tried to protect me.

"I'm sorry, Daddy, It's my fault. I'm sorry."

My little girl, who wanted nothing more in this world than for her daddy to love her, tried to bridge the gap on my behalf. I was both scared for her and proud of her courage. At times she refused to back down and it usually cost us both. I wanted so badly for her to be his little princess. Her brown eyes matched his with expressions that said they could be twins. His DNA proudly coursing through her veins. Brown eyes met a mirror reflection as she implored for mercy on my behalf, but his heart was set like a stone. This person we both loved and hated, who was both my judge and jury, had already handed down my sentence. Her soul, connected through love and pain to mine, wanted to absorb guilt so that

I could go free. My arms ached to hold her and kiss away her heartache. I prayed that somehow God would fix this awful mess. How did we get here? To this time? To this place? I shivered in the driveway as I knew there was no escaping what was about to happen. Once the lock clicked on the door, it would be a very, very long night.

Totally ignoring the pleas from his only child, he said, "Get your A... in the house."

She knew better than to say it again. It would only make it worse for me. As she walked to her room, I wished she could escape from her prison without locks. She knew the rules. She couldn't come back out. No matter what. All of the endless long nights for my beautiful, precious, perfect little girl to spend crying herself to sleep, needing to go to the bathroom, needing to know her momma was okay, and feeling guilty because there was nothing she could do to save me. The thin walls of our mobile home only served to intensify the noises, so she would raise the volume of the television to block out the cries in the stillness of the night.

Softly, I laid purse and Bible on the dining room table as I tried to search him out in the blackness of his mind. What was the trigger that ignited *this* particular inferno? Was it really the broken curfew? Was it someone at work? Did he get in a fight? Was his back hurting? The source

was never relevant because the punishment would always be mine.

The silence in the house was deafening. I could hear the pounding of my heart beating through my chest. To calm the man who could change in an instant I had to stay calm. Much of the world saw a charming man with big brown eyes who would help strangers on the side of the road or snuggle babies on his knee and laugh. That was the man Amanda and I longed for and loved. He was the one that we needed to be our protector. He was also the one we needed to be protected from.

“Who were you talking to? I know you were talking to someone. Was it Stan? I know it was. I was there, you know. I SAW you.”

“You didn’t see anything. I wasn’t talking to anyone. Go ask your mom or any of your family.” The old familiar drill rising up again. It was dreadful and repetitive and exhausting. The endless mind games and questioning for hours upon end. My soul became weary and aged in just a moment’s time. My soul was tired. So tired. Endless interrogations, over the years, put my nerves on edge every time I had to speak. Constant precautions in place for every aspect of life to prevent a night like this. No matter the lengths I went to trying to avoid ever having to speak to a man, or breaking a rule that I couldn’t



share, covering up the truth and wearing a mask. It was never enough.

I knew I had done nothing wrong on this night, but that was not the point. To him, I was guilty. I was guilty of not being able to fix what was broken inside him, and my punishment was going to be great. The pain that raged inside of him became unleashed on me. This was my fate. This was my life. I was his wife.

The interrogation went on for a bit and I was surprised as his fury seemed to wind down in a miraculous way I wasn't expecting. Dare I hope that it was over? Please, God, let it be! What a wonderful gift that would be! Would he accept that it was simply an ice cream cone and not something more?

Cautiously, I prepared for bed. A nightgown left me vulnerable to the dark, cold of the night. If I needed to escape, fully clothed was the better option. I knew this from experience. Trying to leave clothes where I could get to them was not always an option, but the thought was always there. Just in case.

Lying in bed, the television projecting voices that I cared not about, I felt the slightest glimmer of hope that it was done. He stretched out on the bed beside me and began to talk about something the newscaster had said. I felt the tension start to go out of my body and I began to relax. As he lay

on his back watching the television, I felt safe to turn onto my stomach and settle down for the night. The quiet in the house was deceptive.

I had barely turned over and closed my eyes, when suddenly I felt a shift of his weight as he moved with the grace of an experienced assassin. Suddenly I couldn't breathe as his vice-like hand covered my mouth and nose while his other arm surrounded my neck. I clawed at his arms to release me. I was pinned to the bed by his 200 pound frame half-sitting, half-lying across my back and waist. I couldn't move. Panic rushed over me like a wave. Every moment I couldn't breathe, the terror raged more and more inside of me. Spots began to float in front of my eyes. My head and neck began to go numb. It was the oddest sensation not being able to capture life sustaining air. The seconds seemed endless as they ticked by and he continued to maintain his grip. I prayed desperately and tried to cry out, but he only increased his hold. "OH MY GOD! HE'S GOING TO KILL ME!" Demon vultures of death swirled above me in my mind's eye, mocking me in laughter, taunting me with their truth, my agonizing terror made real!

My baby, my life, my heartbeat was literally only feet away from us across the hall. I wasn't going to be able to tell her how much I loved her or how very sorry I was. So sorry. For everything

that was her life. The all too familiar shotgun was only inches from my head. I recounted all of the times in the past where he had held pillows over my face. I compared those endless seconds ticking by—each precious, life giving, tick. Never had he held me this long.

Just when the spots started to come and go in my consciousness and I felt moments of reality slipping away, he suddenly released me only to shift his position and mine. In just a matter of seconds I was flipped onto my back, pinned under his weight. I desperately searched his face looking for that glimmer in his eyes that melted me in a flash. The boyish grin that everyone loved. I prayed he would love me and end this madness before it was too late.

The face I saw was not the face of the man I had married. He was different. Altered. Evil had replaced all of the goodness that I knew was buried within. His soul had surrendered to that other self. I searched desperately to find the man who had once loved me with sweet passion and eyes that had looked at me with boyish devotion. All of the childlike promises mocked me in the hate resonating from his dark, glassy-eyed stare. A darkness settled over him. It was as if there was a shadow of a man behind him, a puppet master, fully in control. The man I married was defenseless against this master

manipulator of power and control. That vow of love once between us was replaced with a torrid gut-wrenching pain of betrayal and destruction. Neither one of us could escape this horrible production that was our reality. How it would play out, for both of us, was yet to be seen.

An all too familiar gleam came into his eye and I wasn't surprised to see the white of the pillow covering my face. This pattern, this battle for eternity, was raging within both of our souls. It was a battle of wills, this stealthy ballet of evil verses good, of which there would be no winners. To both of us there was a cost. The stage was this room, this bed, this place, this moment in time. The scene replayed from the beginning of time. This puppet master, seeking total control, slipping in from home to home, setting the stage, whispering words of deception and lies into unwitting ears, hoping to hear applause from the flames of hell as another family is vanquished.

As instinct replaced rational thought, my body began to fight for air as the pillow took the place of his hand and reality once again began to spin out of control. Years of practice proved my expertise as I wiggled and inched toward the edge of the bed. His total focus was on snuffing out any vestige of air, closing off any path of escape, and bringing me under complete subjection to his will. Turning my head just enough, I was

able to inhale fresh air before he discovered that precious air had filled my lungs. It was over as it quickly as it had begun. I lay on the bed gasping for air. Warily I watched, preparing for the next attack.

“You’re a liar! Why do you always have to lie to me? Skank! You stupid slut!” Round after round of shots to the heart. Each one struck its intended target. The years of staying strong had taken an unexpected toll upon my heart. No longer able to withstand the attack, the pieces of my heart disintegrated and disappeared. Nothing in life seemed to matter anymore. I didn’t even really care, in that moment, if I lived or died. Death was preferable to another day of that life! My fear in that moment was that death wouldn’t come easy and it wouldn’t be kind.

I watched from the edge of the bed as he paced around the room. So many ways to die in that room. Guns, bows, razor sharp broad head arrows, custom hunting knives... all within easy reach. Surely my soul would be saved. Surely I wouldn’t truly burn in hell as he had often promised I would. I just prayed it would come easy.

He left the room but quickly returned. Fleeing was pointless. I would never make it out the door. With his back to me, he did something by the dresser. As he moved back to my side,

hysteria bubbled forth and I couldn't contain it. I had to fight or my death would be long and painful.

"Put it in your mouth!" I stared in disbelief as he handed me a baggie with a sock inside. He expected me to gag myself. He also held a neck tie. *Oh Dear God, not again. Please, not again. I can't take that again.* I felt the pieces of my sanity quickly slipping away. Memories of other times and other places... other nights with my hands bound as my body took the beating. Unable to move or escape.

"I'm not putting that in my mouth."

"Do it!"

"NO!" *God, please don't let him do it. Please, don't let him.* I hoped that bargaining with God would somehow release me from this nightmare. Something seemed to change inside of him and he tossed the baggie back on the dresser. I was afraid to move. He was like a caged lion, roaming back and forth, issuing insults and forcing me to beg for my life. The inhumanity of begging for the life that belongs to you is a feeling like no other. He came toward me again, this time with a leather belt in hand. I stared at him, eyes wide open, unsure of what was coming next. As I sat on the bed, he stood over me and placed the belt around my neck. He began turning the ends that he held in his hands tighter and tighter until I

realized what he was doing. I clawed and gasped to get it from around my neck.

“I’m going to put you in the truck and take you out into the woods and I’m going to do this until you pass out. I’m going to do it over and over again... and no one will ever know.”

A sick sense of dread coupled with adrenaline coursed through my veins. I had been in those woods with him before. The whole incident came flooding back. I could almost feel the cool of the night and hear the sound of the woods at night.

*A few years before, he seemed to drive forever before going down dirt trails back into the protected forest owned by the state. Farther and farther he drove into the woods, all the while hitting me and slamming my head into the windows. Forcing me to strip naked and give him my glasses, he dragged me out of the car into the night air.*

*“This is where people dump dead bodies. They don’t find them for years. I’m going to leave you out here... like that... to find your way out of these woods alone.” I stood there in my nakedness, full of shame, before the man who had professed he would cherish me always.*

*“Now, run!” My head jerked to attention as I realized he had gotten back into the car and was coming toward me. I ran off the trail and hid behind a tree. He got out of the car and dragged me back to*

*the trail... I stood there... The lights on the car were headed straight for me. I began to run...*

If evil were alive and had a home, it was in those woods. I never wanted to enter that dark place again. I knew without a doubt that he was capable of all that he had spoken. His eyes watched me closely for my response. Quickly, I tried to cover my fear and hide the terror that I felt.

“I’m so sorry. Please, forgive me. Please, don’t hurt me!” Perhaps the madman would be appeased by my begging. He released the belt, as if in a trance and tossed it on the bed. “Please, let me leave... if you don’t want to be married to me anymore. I’ll just go. You can have everything. I promise. Just let me go...” He would never let me go. I knew this already. I wasn’t human. I had no rights. I was property. His property.

If only I could convince him of the depth of my love for him. I needed him. For some strange, twisted reason, I wanted him, no—I needed him to know that I loved him. Why couldn’t he see it? Was my sacrifice of self not enough? I had given up everything to be his wife. I had nothing left to leave at his altar. I was a shattered remnant of the person I was before. I had given him every ounce of me and yet my gift was not enough. Night continued its journey and the torment continued throughout, hitting, begging, groveling, accusations and fear.



The tirade, mingled with slaps and blows, continued into the early hours of the morning as my strength began to fade away. Nearly at my breaking point, I would have done almost anything to make the nightmare stop. With a calm hand, he picked up the shotgun. My mind had been stretched beyond its limits as weariness of the moment permeated my soul. I no longer cared if I lived or died. I just wanted this night to end. I closed my eyes as I heard him load a slug into the chamber of the gun. I felt cold steel touch my head.

“Pray!” I had never stopped. The room felt cold and stark much like the remnants of my heart. “I’m going to kill you and then I’m going to kill myself.”

Hollow, empty words I had heard before. It really mattered not to me what happened anymore, except for Amanda. She was still in her room, alone. She had been there all night. She had to be safe. She had to live. Her precious life was my legacy. The bond between mother and child is like no other. The need to protect and nurture and save, it only grows stronger. It never dims. So many memories of nights spent alone, with a bottle of pills in my hand, as I stared into nothingness trying to find a reason to continue living. She was that reason.

“If you kill me and you kill yourself, you’ll

leave Amanda an orphan." I prayed my ploy of diversion would work to distract him from his task. I clung to the thought and hoped that somewhere deep inside him, he desperately loved his daughter. However, I had underestimated the power of the puppet master.

"Don't worry... I'll take care of that."

Inside every person is an imaginary, but very real, line that once it is crossed there is no turning back. As I processed his simple statement, the truth of what he was saying sank to the pit of my soul like hot molten lead. I felt myself slowly, yet deliberately, taking that final step to the point of no return. The last vestige of hope was gone. I would have used the last shred of love that I could muster up to end his misery, if I could have just gotten the gun. Even the value of my life and his really didn't matter in the larger scope of things. That beautiful soul, who loved to draw, and loved princesses and wanted to be a fashion designer, deserved to live. The hellish audience would not get a bow from the master... not on my watch... not if I could help it.

"I'll do anything you want. Just don't hurt Amanda."

Never, not a single time in fourteen years, would I ever have thought it would come to this. That the words could even form in his mouth was almost too much. Bloodline, lineage, family,

none of it meant anything. The lies and delusions had stolen something from his heart, something precious, something sweet, something pure: a father's love for his daughter. What a tragedy. How could this be? The beautiful child that had cleaned and done chores to buy him camping equipment for Father's Day so they could go camping together... the artist who had made him cards on notebook paper and spent hours making them perfect, trying to earn the love of the man she needed so much. How had it come to this?

"I hate you!" he hissed. *I know*, my heart cried out.

One more torment. Another threat. Surely the night couldn't last much longer. For some reason, he put the gun back in its place and sat on the edge of the bed. Tears welling in his eyes. The puppet master weaving a web of guilt with his manipulation had us both in his trap of lies. "I don't know why you do these things to me! Why do you have to make me SO MAD? WHY? Tell me why!" As he spoke those words from his twisted place of despair, a final wave of anger ravaged his exhausted body. The night had taken its toll.

In a final fit of rage, he threw me back on the bed, full circle, back to the beginning. I saw the white of the pillow once again. My weary

body almost too tired to fight, bucked in one final protest as he knuckled down his grip. Instinctively, I once again tried to get my head to the edge of the bed. This time, he was on to my ploy for air. As he grabbed me to pull me back onto the bed, we both slipped from the bed and landed in a heap on the floor. That's when I heard the snap in my back as his entire weight landed on my torso. The odd angle at which I was laying made it impossible to move and the excruciating pain seared through my entire being. Tears flooded my eyes as I struggled to sit up.

“I can't get up!”

The puppet master released his grip and quickly the little boy expression was back. This time it was an expression of fear. He had gone too far this time. Way too far.

Mercifully, his arms reached down and he lifted me to the bed. I forced myself not to cringe at his touch. I lay there, on the bed, gasping from pain, trying to catch my breath, as a terrifying thought struck me of a life and a future in a wheel chair—at his mercy for a lifetime. Death be merciful and come quickly... I inched myself up on the bed into my spot near the wall knowing that it wasn't over yet. The final test. I didn't know if I could do it but if I didn't... oh God, if I didn't, it would start all over again....

He flipped off the light and darkness filled the room. Revulsion filled every fiber of my being with a hatred I couldn't explain. I knew what was expected of me, in his arrogant offering of mercy. *I don't think I can do it. I don't think I can do this*, was the resounding scream echoing silently in my soul. *Please, don't make me*—the words I wanted to beg of him would never pass my lips. The thought reverberated and echoed into the abyss of the never spoken.

I heard the words I dreaded.

“Show me you love me.”

Nausea rose in my throat. The pain coupled with that sick feeling of having to go through the final disgusting, humiliating act of penance was almost more than my stomach could hold. How could such a sacred act of covenant become so dirty, so defiled, and so repulsive? Everything lovely and pure about my womanhood was taken and used to gratify a sinful need to obtain complete submission and surrender of my soul. The very act that should always be freely given in a demonstration of love was taken, used and tossed aside as nothing.

As he drifted off to sleep, I lay there, numb with pain of soul and heart and body. Broken in a way that I didn't understand. My body was past the point of exhaustion. Terror kept me awake. Words from the past echoed in my mind,

*I've lain here and watched you sleep...wondering what it would feel like to kill you....* I listened to him breathe and waited for the remaining two hours of the night to pass.

## *Chapter 2*

The pain was excruciating as I lay in the bed next to this man who had pledged to always be there for me, to love me and protect me. Fear kept my eyes from closing, searing pain kept me from moving, my mind knew it wasn't over. I lay there listening to him breathe and to the rise and fall of his chest. Even in the dark, I could feel the presence of the loaded shot-gun still propped against the wall next to his head, an ever present reminder. Part of me wished I had courage to take the gun and the part of me that loved Jesus was afraid of burning in hell.

Something had shifted in the atmosphere this time. An irreversible change. A darkness, an evil that I cannot explain filled our house. It was almost as if, in the darkness of the night, I could hear an echo of supernatural laughter as evil

forces circled their prey to finish off the task... to steal, kill and destroy.

A place deep in my soul had been broken, and I didn't know if I could ever put it back together again. It was that epiphany moment where time seemed to stand still as I struggled to formulate a plan, but felt as if precious moments were simply gone in a second. Before I was ready, those two short hours of remaining night had passed and soon the slumbering beast would reawaken. If I was lucky, the façade of normalcy would continue and I would devise our escape... if not, I might not see the light of another day.

My body instinctively tensed as the minutes ticked away and still I jumped when the alarm shattered the silence. A sickening fear that I cannot describe started in the recesses of my gut and quickly began to spread throughout my body. I couldn't control the trembling of my body, soul and spirit as he began to stir. Never a pleasant riser, I knew this wasn't going to be easy.

Slowly, I inched my pain ridden body to the edge of the bed to gather his work clothes and lay out a towel for his shower. The physical act of standing almost had me in a crumpled heap of brokenness on the floor. I knew the injury to my low back was serious and I was afraid that with any one step I might be paralyzed. Slowly



making my way to the bathroom, I flipped on the light and shut the door. I needed a moment to gather my strength and put on the mask of submissive wife. Nearly twenty-four hours had passed since I had slept. How was I going to do all that I needed to do and survive it?

As I looked in the mirror and saw eyes swollen from crying and a face battered and scratched, my breath stuck in my throat. An unrecognizable face stared back at me. After years of assaults with hidden bruises, this face staring back at me was unexpected. The façade was shattered. How fitting that the only times my face was bruised were the very first and the very last. I stared at the stranger in the mirror and I knew that we had danced to the evil puppet master's music for the very last time. How the story would end I wasn't sure, but I had a sinking feeling that if I didn't leave that day... I wouldn't have a chance to ever dance again... at least not in this life.

I knew that I had to be cautious to play my part well this day. My very life (and maybe Amanda's) depended on it. Revulsion at the thought of what lay ahead held me captive for just a moment. I hated games and wearing masks. I wasn't sure I would be able to pull it off or that he would believe me. I felt myself on the precipice of insanity and just one small breath would shove me over into the abyss.

He was eerily quiet as he prepared for work. I let my baby girl continue to sleep even though it was time for her school bus to arrive. The middle school bus came early. As I packed his lunch, I started formulating the beginning of a plan. Would I have enough courage to carry it through? THAT I didn't know. As I teetered on that edge, my mind shifted back and forth from the paralyzing terror of leaving and the hopeless dread of staying. Somewhere in our house my keys and glasses were hidden. First things first; I had to get them back, but my timing had to be perfect.

Moving through the motions of dressing, he never mentioned the night before. His eerie silence spoke volumes. It seemed as if those periods of time were always swept away into never-never land, only spoken of in my secret prayers.

The rattle of the school bus caught my attention as it slowed in front of our house. I waited for the pause and held my breath. His voice of complaint was silent. After a hesitant moment, the bus continued its lonely, early morning journey down our road. Softly, I exhaled. It might just work.

He moved in slow motion toward the door. Following behind with his lunch in my hand, I knew I only had one shot to get it right.

“I need to take Manda to school.”

Forcing myself to look him in the eye, I had to convince him there wasn't a plan. Somehow I was convinced he could see straight into my soul. I wasn't strong enough to carry on the façade for long. The abyss was widening as I stood there teetering waiting for his response. I knew he would either allow me to drive her or he would tell me to keep her home for the day. The stillness in his voice threw me off guard. He was as numb inside as I was. I felt a twinge of the familiar softening, the bond trying to re-form. I fought it back and cried inside from the loss of it.

I wasn't sure about the day, the plan, or even my next breath. I didn't know if I could pull this off. How could I be strong enough? Now, as I stood in this pivotal moment, all I had was just one moment to decide. Dare I risk it?

“Can I, please, have my glasses and car keys? She missed the bus. I can't take her to school without them.”

His eyes looked deep, peering into my soul. That broken cord between us affected us both with sadness. I was sure he could read the truth written on my heart. Looking back, I think maybe he also felt the loss of what should have been. Perhaps, he was tired of the dance as well.

He went into the bedroom and handed them to me. Slowly, I stretched out my hand to take