

## Death of a Home

Rod and Justine Glazier and Richard Riley, their realtor, drove along winding country roads. It wasn't a perfect summer's day; it was cloudy, but it was nice enough. Justine chatted amiably. Maybe she talked too much, but she didn't want to allow any awkward moments in which Rod would say something wrong; and Richard was delighted with her chatter. He was a pleasant man in his sixties and had known Justine as a child growing up in the community.

"So, how's Linda doing?" Justine asked Richard. Linda was his daughter and one of her childhood classmates.

"Oh, she's doing fine," Richard replied.

As he proceeded to bring Justine up-to-date regarding Linda's activities, Justine thought Rod was sulking. That didn't surprise her. In Utah, he hadn't liked her spending time with her friends. She didn't care that he was sulking; at least her conversation with Richard kept Rod quiet; he wouldn't swear or let his prejudices slip out.

But Richard didn't know that Justine wanted Rod to be quiet. "Rod, Justine and Linda both played flutes in school. I remember them practicing together."

"Um hum," was all Rod offered in return.

Justine couldn't understand why he resented the time she spent with friends. As she and Richard talked, she wondered how Rod was going to react to their family's move to her hometown—where there would be so many friends and family asking for her time.

As they neared their destination, Justine observed, "Oh, this is the road that led to the church camp where I worked when I was younger." Then they rounded a corner and pulled into a short driveway. Justine was speechless for only a moment.

"I know this house!" she exclaimed. "This is the Rose House! It belonged to the church camp when I worked there!"

Justine loved the house; she loved it for the past she had with it. She loved it for the future it immediately offered. Memories of happy summer days at the camp ran in rapid succession through her mind. She felt sad, remembering the camp manager, Levi, who once lived there and had died years before. She felt surprise that the house and its property had been separated from the camp. And she felt an intense desire to be the new owner.

Rod, Justine and Richard stood outside for several minutes assessing the exterior. The house looked solid, and Justine was sure that it was. Levi had taken good care of it for the camp. Justine wasn't crazy about the color. It was painted beige with brown trim. Justine imagined how nice the house would look painted white—traditional. *Of course, one thing would have to go*, Justine thought. The front door had a concrete block front porch. *That wasn't original: a wrap-around porch would look nice*, she thought.

Still, the house was attractive. It was obviously old. As a matter of fact, it was nearly one

hundred years old. There was also a bay window which added to its charm. The window beckoned from one side of the house in the shade of a large maple tree. Justine remembered it well.

The house sat on a country plot with large trees bordering the backyard, a gurgling stream, and raspberry bushes on the large lawn. Justine took this all in and imagined a garden out by the raspberry bushes. She looked at Rod to see if she could gauge what he was thinking.

Rod was looking at the house. His gaze lifted to the roof. *God, I hope it looks good. I hope he doesn't say 'No' to the house just because it's part of my past.*

Justine looked at Richard. He seemed to be studying Rod, and she followed his gaze. Rod was tall with broad shoulders. His brown hair fell to his shirt collar and was slightly receding. He was ten years older than Justine. She knew that people often thought that he looked intimidating. At present, though, as he looked at the house, his expression was placid. None of the sharpness was there. Richard saw Justine looking at him, and he smiled at her.

"Let's look inside," Richard suggested, waving an arm toward the house. He led Rod and Justine through the front door. The past converged on Justine. She glanced at the room to their left. When the house belonged to the camp, the room was the camp office. The room was now empty except for a wood-burning stove which was a new addition.

When fifteen-year-old Justine had been in the house, the rest of the rooms were devoid of any furniture or decoration, so it looked familiar now. The rooms were empty. Justine yearned to run room to room exclaiming at the best features. She uttered, "Ooh, it's so big."

Richard smiled indulgently at her.

Rod glared at her. She interpreted the look to mean that she shouldn't show her enthusiasm to Richard. She looked back and frowned but nodded in agreement.

They walked through the empty "office" to the kitchen. Recent owners had cut a doorway through one of the walls to allow access to the kitchen. The kitchen was bright, as Justine remembered it. The long windows, typical in old houses, provided plenty of light and also afforded a view of the trees and stream behind the house. Justine imagined washing dishes at the sink and looking out on that scene.

When the house belonged to the camp, the wood flooring was painted gray. Some of it was still gray, but someone had stripped some of the floors and refinished them. It was a welcome improvement.

There was a small bathroom off the kitchen. It had been remodeled, but not well done. A cheap vanity supported the sink, the bathroom smelled, and Justine thought that they would probably have to replace the linoleum flooring.

While Richard pointed out changes and positive features, the three continued walking through what had once been the pantry and into the room with the bay window.

Justine recalled how she, as a young girl, sat in the window seat thinking, *This house would be really pretty if someone bothered to fix it up.* It was the first time Justine had ever dreamed of a

home of her own. Prior to that moment, home had been a place of disappointment. She despised the household chores that her mother assigned to her; she never did them to her mother's satisfaction. She didn't want a house to take care of. But at the camp, Levi approved of her work. He rewarded her efforts by giving her more responsibility—showing her that he thought she was capable. Perhaps that is what allowed her to sit in the window seat and dream.

Now, she stood looking at the seat in which she had dared to dream. She looked at Rod. When she met him, he shared the details of his youth, and she recognized that it was a difficult time for him. His father died when he was still a toddler; his mother had to work to support six children, so he had little parental supervision or nurturing. Justine felt sorry for him and wanted to give him the love he had missed out on. He was untrusting, but he could begin to trust, she thought, if only allowed the benefit of time. Fifteen years later, she was still waiting for time to heal his wounds and for him to open up in the relationship. Their move to Ohio offered a new beginning.

Other than the charming window seat, the two large front rooms displayed some beautiful craftsmanship. The wall between the two rooms contributed one of the house's most striking features. It had a wide opening into the next room and was bordered by square oak columns resting on bookcases with glass paneled doors. All of the wood had been refinished and the rich wood grains gave additional detail to the already dignified feature.

Justine didn't remember it from her youth and couldn't resist exclaiming, "God, that's beautiful!"

Rod retorted quietly through gritted teeth, "Get hold of yourself."

Justine glanced at Richard to see if he had heard Rod. Obviously he had, because he smiled reassuringly at her and nodded as if to tell her not to worry.

The three completed their tour of the downstairs and stood at the base of the stairs leading to the second floor. Justine explained to Rod and Richard that when she worked at the camp, Levi lived upstairs, and she had never seen that part of the house. Levi was concerned about impropriety and said it wouldn't do for young women to be in his living quarters. Justine looked forward to going upstairs; but as they approached the stairs, Rod stopped them, saying, "I want to see the basement."

Disappointment was evident on Justine's face. Richard led them to the basement stairs as he noted, "It won't take long to tour the basement. Its walls are sandstone block and there is no evidence of seepage."

After the diversion to the basement, the three again stood at the base of the stairs leading to the second floor. The stairs were oak and curved at the bottom. With their complementary banister, they beckoned the threesome up the stairs to a spacious open hallway. At the end of the hallway was an impressive built-in linen closet with drawers. Justine wanted to exclaim over its beauty but knew that she had to keep the peace with Rod. Besides, she understood what he was trying to do. He wanted to demonstrate that they were only mildly interested in the house so sellers wouldn't press for a better price.

There were four bedrooms—not particularly large, but sufficient. One of the floors had alternating strips of light and dark wood. It was a striking contrast.

In her head, Justine was planning which rooms would be the children's. She and Rod had four children; she chided him that he wanted to keep her home barefoot and pregnant. Actually, she suspected there was some truth to it; but after Thomas, their youngest, was born she had gotten her tubes tied. Rod had not been supportive of the decision, and Justine felt their marriage had been more strained since then.

The girls, Ashley and Sarah, were the oldest; they were twelve and ten. They could have the room with the pretty floors. The room across the hall was probably the largest; she and Rod could take it. The other two rooms were the smallest; Levi, eight, and Thomas, six, could have those rooms.

The bathroom on the second floor was horrendous. It had a cracked tub. The vanity in this bathroom was also cheap and unattractive, and Justine thought she had never seen uglier linoleum. To demonstrate to Rod that she understood his tactics, she remarked to Richard, "This is awful; there's a lot to be done in here."

"I have to agree with you," Richard replied. "It is probably the worst feature of the house. Let's finish our tour by looking at the attic."

A closed off stairway led to the attic. They climbed the stairs and all three stood on the narrow patch of flooring that surround the top of the stairs. The rest of the attic was unfinished. Justine took it all in and saw the potential for two large rooms including an escape for herself. Then again, it would be better if they turned the attic into a large recreation room for the children. Dormers provided a view of the lawn below, and Justine imagined the boys pretending that this was their castle and they could spy out enemy soldiers coming their way. As the girls became teenagers, they could bring their friends to the attic for the secretive gossip girls enjoy.

"Well, that's it," Richard said as they descended the stairs. In the downstairs foyer, Richard told them the seller's price; Justine practically shouted with delight knowing that they could afford it.

They had made a nice profit on the sale of their home in Utah where Rod was a supervisor in the maintenance department at Cooper Container, Inc. Justine had worked in the product development division until they began having children; then she quit to be home with the children. It was what she wanted, and Rod said he wanted that too, but she knew that for him, it also kept her away from other people. Rod had found his first wife in bed with another man, and his jealousy told her that he feared she would do the same thing. She almost had, and the guilt made her apply herself even more to their marriage.

When they left Utah, Rod had withdrawn his retirement income and profit sharing. Coupled with the profit from the sale of the house, they could pay the \$58,000 asking price in cash.

With a cautionary glance at Justine, Rod made a counter offer to Richard—one so much lower than the asking price that Justine feared the sellers would reject their offer. After they left Richard,

she complained.

“You heard Richard. Houses like that are hot. They’re going to sell it to someone else.”

“It’s my money!” Rod retorted. “You’ve got to trust me once in a while. I know what I’m doing.”

“Yes, Rodney,” she said evenly, using his full name—knowing he hated it because he didn’t think that it sounded manly. He shot her a stern look and she fell silent, thinking, *It’s always his money.*

All they could do was wait. Justine threw a few prayers in for good measure. When they learned, a few days later, that their offer had been accepted, she was elated. Rod was smug, but she didn’t care. For her, the fact that they got the house was an omen that they finally had their lives on track.

Rod had wanted to get away from the growing black population in their neighborhood in Utah. He had certainly accomplished that by moving them to this white conservative farming neighborhood. More importantly, he wanted to get her away from her friends in Utah—particularly Steve, the man at church that Justine had befriended. She and Rod separated briefly in Utah over that friendship, and only to herself did she admit that she had cared more than she should have. But now there were hundreds of miles between them; and that was just fine. Justine was reunited with her extended family, and she and Rod just purchased a home that she loved. She welcomed the chance for a fresh start.

Justine carried happy memories into the house with all of their boxes and furniture. The church camp, and more specifically, Levi, was her first employer. Her work as second cook and in maintenance gave her the first sense of competence that she could remember. Levi was like a father to her. She remembered when Andy came to work at the camp, and she fell in love with him. Levi had been protective; he loaded Andy with work details so that he had barely any spare time to spend with her. Justine chuckled to herself, *Poor Andy.*

Justine also made a lifelong friendship with Nancy, the lifeguard who shared her cabin. She smiled remembering the first day she met Nancy. Justine was in the kitchen baking cookies for the next day’s snacks. Nancy had just arrived for the summer and came into the kitchen for, unbeknownst to Justine, her evening ritual of tea and cookies. When she saw that Justine was baking cookies, she assumed the personality of Jim Henson’s Cookie Monster and chased Justine around the kitchen growling, “cookie,” over and over again. Over the years, they laughed about it because it took a couple of years before Justine told Nancy that she had been genuinely frightened by her charade.

“I thought you were plum loco!” she confessed.

As Justine moved about the house, she thought of Levi as a benevolent spirit overseeing her efforts. As the family settled in, Justine worked to help the children get acclimated: taking them to the library, joining the reading program for the boys’ classes, and encouraging the girls to invite new acquaintances home.

Rod began remodeling the upstairs bathroom and making a workshop for himself in the basement.

Two months passed, and Rod had not said anything about looking for a job. Much as she hated to disturb the peace, Justine decided to ask Rod about his plans. Questioning Rod was not an

easy place to go. He always became defensive—even over something as practical as how he was going to make a living. He always reacted as if she were prying into his personal affairs. *His personal affairs?* Weren't they supposed to be partners? A couple?

Well, time for the new beginning. He promised her that when they moved to Ohio everything would be different—better. It was time to start acting like it.

Justine wandered into the bathroom, leaned against a wall, and watched as Rod taped drywall. As nonchalantly as she could, Justine asked, “When are you going to look for a job?”

“God!” he retorted. “I’ve got to get this bathroom done.”

“I know,” she answered, “but the money won’t hold out forever.” They had applied most of their cash to purchasing the house; but with such a large down-payment, the bank had not hesitated to extend them a home equity loan. Consequently, they could keep some of their cash liquid.

Rod continued with his work. *He’s so good at fixing things*, Justine thought. *Why can’t he be as talented at working on our marriage?* His self-sufficiency was one of the things that had attracted her to him; they never had to call a repairman. Her grandfather and father were the same way; but watching Rod now, she almost resented that he was so capable with his hands. If she could have her wish, she would rather he had more interpersonal skills.

When she didn’t leave, Rod added without looking up, “If you must know, I plan to take a whole year to work on the house.”

The announcement stunned Justine. *I know what he’s doing! He’s not going to trust me, even here in Ohio. He wants to stay home and stand guard over me.*

Struggling to keep her voice even, she countered, “Well, we need health insurance. What if Thomas has an asthma attack?” Then, in frustration, she added, “And I am not your ex-wife.”

Without waiting for their discussion to escalate into a yelling match, she turned and left the bathroom. Years of experience taught Justine not to press too hard. Sometimes, when their relationship was strained, she wrote him letters. It allowed her time to think about what she wanted to tell him; it helped her avoid face-to-face confrontations. If he got too angry he might refuse to speak to her for days. Once it lasted for an entire week, until she finally capitulated and apologized for some minor infraction that she knew was not cause for him to alienate her as he did.

Rod never mentioned their exchange. No surprise to Justine. He never pursued a discussion; he hated talking—about anything. But he did begin looking for a job, and found one. It was some distance from home, and it offered an income comparable to the one he left in Utah.

Justine thought everything was perfect. The children liked their new school, and she was involved with their activities. Rod was working. They had her dream home. And then, Justine found an opportunity to write for the local newspaper.

She had seen a small article in the paper with a plea for a writer, and she responded. It wasn’t a paying position, but it gave her an opportunity to write. When they moved to Ohio, a couple of former classmates had asked, “Do you still write?” She didn’t remember that she had had that much interest in

writing. It took their questions, asked at separate occasions, to remind her that she had once enjoyed writing as a hobby. It was something that she wanted to do; she wanted an activity that was her own.

Rod, however, was not pleased. "It's not making us money," he complained. "It's costing us money!"

"What is it costing us?"

"Gas costs us every time you go do a story. And the ink and paper for the computer are not free," he retorted.

"Well, fine!" Justine shot back. "But it's good experience, and you don't know where it might lead. I have the right to have my own interests."

"Why? I don't!"

Justine didn't know what to say. He was right. When she met him, he enjoyed photography and hunting; but he gave those up long ago—*probably just so he could make this point—so I had no argument for my own interests. What he's more concerned about is that he can't monitor my activities.*

When a few days later she found a password protect on the computer, Justine confronted him. "Damn it, Rod, let me on the computer!"

As usual, he didn't answer, but when she checked the computer later, he had complied. Then a week later, when they ran out of computer paper, he demanded that she not "waste" money on more. And the checkbook was in his name only—after all, it was *his* money.

Justine wrote him a note, leaving it in the kitchen near the coffee maker. She wrote, "Rod, you said we would start over when we moved to Ohio. Is this our new beginning? If we love each other, shouldn't we be supportive of each other's interests? If you wanted to go hunting, I wouldn't stop you—I never did. I like writing for the paper. I'm happy taking care of you and the kids, but I want to do something for me."

Rod didn't respond; he didn't say anything, and he didn't buy more paper. He had chosen his stance; now she would have to choose hers, and she wasn't going to cave in. She knew that she wasn't being unreasonable in her request, but she would try to meet Rod halfway—a half-hearted attempt to pacify Rod while still doing what she wanted.

Refusing to be deterred, she went to the editor of the newspaper and asked him if he would supply her with paper. He told her he would supply her with paper and floppy disks.

Rod had delivered one of her stories to the office the week before, and he had been argumentative with the editor. Concerned, the editor said, "Justine, I don't want this to be a problem in your marriage."

"Don't worry about it," Justine replied, brushing off the comment. "I can handle Rod." She didn't want to discuss her problems with the editor. *Getting paper is the least of my problems*, she said to herself.

When Rod saw her return home with a ream of paper, he seethed, "You don't listen to me." Justine tried to look unmoved.

“No, you *won't* listen to *me*,” she answered.

Rod turned toward Sarah, who was sitting at the dining room table making friendship bracelets, and said, “Do you hear something whining?”

Sarah looked up with a quizzical expression. She squirmed uncomfortably in her seat, and then gave her attention more intently to her project.

*Oh, don't use the kids to attack me; I won't let you turn them against me*, Justine thought, not allowing herself to respond aloud to his taunt. She bristled, but turned and carried the computer paper upstairs to the desk in their bedroom.

Everything was definitely not perfect. The problems they faced in Utah were not just resurfacing—they never went away. After that last comment, Rod became distant and started drinking. Beer bottles stacked up along the wall in the kitchen, waiting to be carried to the recycling bin in the basement.

Justine pleaded with Rod to stop drinking and talk to her. His only reply was a blank expression that seemed to say, “I don't hear you.”

Justine hated the bottles sitting in the kitchen where the children could view them, but she was determined that *she* wasn't going to touch them. Staring at them one morning, she decided to act. She pulled the camera from a kitchen drawer and took a picture of the bottles; then she went into the family room, where Rod was sitting on the floor playing a Nintendo game, and said, “I just took a picture of the beer bottles in the kitchen. If you don't do something about them, I'm going to show the picture to Children's Services and asked them to declare you an unfit parent.”

She had no idea if Children's Services could, or would, react, but hopefully Rod didn't either.

Rod didn't even look up from his game—he didn't say anything, either.

Justine's spirits were failing, even when she tried to antagonize him, for the sake of opening some line—any line—of communication. Rod refused to respond.

Later that day as she drove to the store with the cash that Rod had given her to get groceries, Justine mulled the broken promises over in her head. She was spending a lot of time in her own head. Forget the marriage vows; that was too long ago. She thought of the love they professed for one another. It seemed distinctly lopsided. All of the years of trying to prove to Rod by her constancy that he was lovable and deserving were futile, despondent years.

Their brief separation in Utah had brought them back together with passionate fervor. Even then, she knew her reason for reconciling was for the children and driven by guilt—not because she held out any hope for their love. She knew that deep down she had not genuinely trusted Rod's proposal of a new beginning in Ohio. But outwardly, she did want it, even if it was for the kids' sake. Besides, how could she have made it on her own?

As she drove to the store, she glanced at a large maple tree near a bend in the road. She imagined plowing her car into the tree—hoping for death to bring closure to the sense of futility that was threatening to overwhelm her.



Yet death did not seem to be an option. How could she leave the children with *him*? Perhaps if she could imagine that Rod would be a good father, then death would offer an escape. But Rod teased Levi because he was emotional, he doted on Thomas, and he ignored the girls. She knew the children needed her.

A week later, Justine asked Rod for money for groceries. He refused, saying, "I'll get the groceries."

So Justine made out a grocery list. Included on the list were feminine hygiene products. When Rod returned from the store, the items that she had requested were not in the bags. *So, she thought, that is how it's going to be. Now, what do I do?*

Getting a job would be difficult because she would have to find, and pay for, childcare. And her car was in need of new tires and brakes, and Rod had refused to give her the money for the repairs.

Several days later, when nothing had improved at home, and Justine was driving home, she again found herself thinking of wrapping her car around the nearest tree. Suicidal thoughts were not new to her; when she was a young teenager she had contemplated suicide. Her home life was troubled by her parents' unhappy marriage and her inability to please her mother. She didn't commit suicide then, and she didn't think she would now; but now there was no camp to escape to.

She decided to make an appointment at the local mental health clinic. When she arrived, she explained that she had no money. The clinic waived the fees when they learned she was there because she was thinking about suicide. She was ushered in to see a nurse. The nurse suggested that anti-depressants might help for the short-term.

"I don't want drugs," Justine complained. "I just want to know what's wrong with him."

In her first session with a counselor, the counselor suggested that she was in an abusive relationship, and she should contact the domestic violence shelter. Justine protested.

"Rodney is not abusive. He doesn't beat me," she replied.

"Domestic violence does not have to involve physical abuse," explained the woman. But Justine looked at her, taking in her conservative dress, glasses, and out-dated hairstyle. She thought the woman looked like an old maid; she'd probably never been married, and if she was, it was to some mousy bookkeeper type. Justine decided that the woman didn't know what she was talking about—didn't understand "dynamic" relationships. Despite her skepticism about her counselor, Justine was not ready to give up.

At her second session, the counselor insisted that Justine call the shelter and at least talk to them.

"If you don't do something," the woman told Justine, "I may have to call Children's Services because you're transporting the children in a car that is unsafe." Then she dialed the number and handed Justine the phone.

Justine spoke to a pleasant-sounding woman who explained that emotional abuse was just as threatening and harmful as physical abuse. If Justine wanted to attend support group sessions, or

ever needed to come to the shelter, she could call them any time. Justine thanked her for her time and hung up.

She still wanted to believe that the relationship would improve. If only Rod could see what a good life they had. But the counselor's cautionary words threatened her and made her feel guilty about jeopardizing the children in her effort to keep the family together.

During the next week, Rod remained cold and distant, Justine decided that if the children's school year ended and there had been no sign of improvement, she would take the children and leave.

To resolve the problem with the car, Justine went to the bank and withdrew two hundred dollars, even though her name was not on the checking account. Rod had allowed her name placed on the home equity loan, in an effort to show goodwill. She felt guilty for dipping into the money, but she had to take care of the car. Justine got the brakes fixed and had a little cash left over.

Rod was furious when he learned what she had done. "Good one, Justine," he fumed. "I put your name on the account, and you take advantage of it!"

Justine looked back at him. She wasn't angry. She wasn't hurt. She couldn't even feel guilty anymore. Calmly, she replied, "Well, I had to get the car fixed." Then she turned away, knowing he wouldn't say anything. She knew that if she looked, she would see that he was seething.

Though they slept in the same bed, Justine and Rod had not had sex in weeks. That night, Justine lay alone trying to allow sleep to overtake her. Rod was downstairs in the family room playing Nintendo, and she could hear the sound of weapons firing on the game.

Sleep eluded her, and she finally heard Rod moving about. Then she heard him ascending the stairs. She heard anger in his steps, and when he entered their bedroom, she heard him panting as he pulled off his clothes. If he had had on a buttoned shirt, she was sure he would have ripped the buttons through their holes. She knew that he intended to "make love" to her. *Nothing to get excited about*, she told herself. Sex was a means of diffusing tension in their relationship. *Maybe this will set us back on track; it had worked before.*

In truth, she held out little hope. But she knew what he was about to do, and she didn't want to fight him. It might lead to a physical fight—one she knew she couldn't win. She knew his strength. Once when they were arguing, she had dared to poke him. He swung his arm and knocked her across the room. Afterward, he apologized profusely.

*I've had sex with him often enough. This isn't a problem*, she tried to persuade herself. She could argue with words, if she could dart in, parlay, then withdraw. She could make a more extended argument, if she could write. But more direct, more potentially explosive confrontations were scary.

Rod yanked back the bedcovers, and without a word—certainly not a caress—he jerked her loose pants down her legs. He mounted her roughly and thrust himself into her. His thrusts were forceful. His hands were balled fists beside her shoulders.

She lay there—unresponsive, continuing a dialogue with herself. *I don't even get the satisfaction of deflecting a kiss. I can only lay here, wondering if he knows that I'm not participating.*

Rod didn't take long. When he was done, he lay down beside her. He didn't say anything, and he didn't touch her. *What? He can't even show me that his anger is spent? I guess this was not his usual attempt to "make up."*

Justine just lay there staring into the darkness—waiting—feeling numb. *Never again.*

The next day, she wrote him a letter. As they had breakfast, he didn't speak; and she didn't want to speak either. She wrote only to inform him of the decision that she had made. She explained that until he agreed to talk to her and get help, she would not sleep with him. She knew this would not bring reconciliation. From past experience, she knew that the only way they would "work things out" would be if she apologized—apologized for anything, for everything. He always waited for her to capitulate. She always did. But not this time.

Justine began going to bed each night in one of the children's rooms, placing her body behind the child's so Rod could not accost her while she slept. Thomas was particularly pleased; he enjoyed the security of Mommy sleeping in his room.

Still, Rod did not react. He neither replied to her letter nor answered her verbal treaties.

One day, Levi asked Justine for a cough drop. Knowing that he didn't need it but merely wanted to eat it as candy, she refused. Moments later, she found Levi asking Rod for a cough drop.

With a smug glance at Justine, Rod replied, "Sure, Levi, you can have a cough drop."

*Great*, she thought, glaring at Rod, *one small example of how he undermines me with the kids.*

The next day, Rod left for work. Much to his consternation, he had to work third shift because he was the newest employee at Superior Technologies. Justine agreed that it wasn't ideal; but she pointed out that the pay was good and eventually, as he built up his seniority, he would get a better schedule.

His complaint was justified. It was unpleasant to have to leave home late in the day and miss evenings with the family. The children were at school all day, and he only had a few hours at home with them before he had to leave for work. Yet Justine felt that that was a superficial complaint. The reality was that he couldn't know *her* evening activities.

It was late—perhaps 11:30. Justine was sewing pillows to put in a craft show and watching television. Long ago she had been an "early to bed, early to rise" kind of person; but after she had had children, she found the quiet hours of the night the best time to be productive or to enjoy her own idle pursuits. She enjoyed doing needlework, reading, and writing letters to friends. During the day, the demands of Rod and the children disrupted the quiet contemplation she preferred, so she had taken to staying up late—waiting for the house to become quiet. Suddenly Rod was in the room standing behind her. "Oh," she said. "You're home early. What happened?"

"They didn't need me," he replied, looking not at her but at the stitching in her hands.

*Likely story!* she thought. *You came home to check on me. Well, ha, ha, here I sit embroidering a pillow. What a disappointment it must be.*

Justine arrived at this conclusion after considering Rod's abrupt appearance in the room, and

knowing that their marriage was plagued by his fear that she would duplicate the infidelity of his first wife.

Rod's sudden appearance was not a fluke. She was sitting in a chair facing the television and the bay window. The bay window faced their parking places outside where she would have seen him pull in, and there were only lace, tied-back curtains in the window. She would have seen his headlights.

Even if she had failed to observe the headlights, the outside lights would have come on. Rod had installed a motion sensor light on that corner of the house shortly after they moved in. The light would have come on when he crossed the yard and ascended the stairs of the back porch. But the light hadn't come on, and that meant only one thing; Rod had skirted the light by crossing the lower yard and ascending the stairs on the other side of the porch. Then, he must have quietly entered the kitchen door.

*How sly he is, she thought. What did he expect? To find me in the arms of a lover?*

Well, she had tried to look up a high school boyfriend when they moved back to Ohio. She assured herself that it was only to catch up on the intervening years since she had last seen him. Or was it?

She confronted Rod one night after the children were in bed. "We've got to do something about our problems!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said casually.

"C'mon," she pressed, "talk to me." She was not going to avoid a full-blown confrontation if it came to it.

"I am talking to you," Rod replied with a shrug.

"You're impossible!"

"Well, you've got a big nose!"

Justine couldn't help herself. She laughed. *Typical! He can't say anything productive, so he uses my one-time complaint, that I think my nose is too big, to try to hurt my feelings. Well, you know—no more. I'm not going to be humiliated; I'm not going to try to pretend nothing's wrong; I'm not going to do this any more.*

With building anger, Rod shot back, "And by the way, you're no writer. Everybody in town knows that the only reason you're writing for the paper is that you're sleeping with the editor!"

"I don't believe that," Justine countered, stunned but not intimidated.

"You will if I tell you often enough," he threatened through gritted teeth.

Later, in bed, Justine mulled over what he had said. *Could people really think that I'm sleeping with Dave? Geez! I can't let him get to me.*

But the fact was that he did "get" to her. It wasn't just the mind games. Rod threatened to take the phones out of the house, claiming that their phone bills were too expensive. He was still buying the groceries, but not purchasing items that she needed. Surely, the strain in their relationship was hurting the children. And for all her bravado, Justine felt the same despair that she felt when she first went to the mental health clinic. It was the fact that she could lift her chin a little higher, but

inwardly, she couldn't shake the rising tide of futility. All the hope that she felt when they moved to Ohio was gone. She only had fifty dollars left in her wallet. She had to leave.

The next day when Rod left for work, Justine called the domestic violence shelter and said she needed help. The woman explained that the location of the house was not to be shared with anyone, and then proceeded to give her directions.

Justine hurriedly began to leave with the children. She packed all her clothes because, once, in anger, Rod had threatened to burn them. Then she packed some of the children's clothes, knowing that they would return some time in the future to visit their father.

She called to Ashley, Sarah, Levi, and Thomas and told them to get in the car. Not until they were in the car did she tell them their destination. "Kids, we're going to a shelter. Daddy can't know where we're going."

The children responded with dismay, though Ashley, as the oldest, had begun to sense that there was something wrong between her parents. She was, however, fearful of the unknown. "How are we going to go to school?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Justine. "We'll work it out when we get where we're going."

Sarah was sobbing quietly. Levi, his voice quivering, asked, "Where are we going to sleep?"

"I don't know," Justine said again. "We'll find out when we get there."

Thomas wailed, "I want to see my daddy!"

"I know," Justine answered, trying to sound reassuring. In reality, she was praying that she was doing the right thing.

The shelter was in a large old house that reminded Justine of the home she had just left. But this house seemed safe. She had to identify herself by intercom before the front door was unlocked and they were ushered inside. A friendly woman filled out intake papers while another woman took the children into the family room where a few other children were watching television.

After the intake process was completed, Justine and the children were given a tour of the downstairs. It consisted of a large living room, a parlor, a family room filled with toys, books, television and video games, and a large kitchen. In the kitchen, Debbie, one of the staff members, explained the house rules which included rising early, participating in group meetings, and cleaning duties. A cleaning schedule hung on the refrigerator and each resident was assigned to make dinner and clean bathrooms and the other rooms used in common.

Then they were led upstairs to the bedrooms. Justine and her children were given a room to themselves because they were such a large family. The room had a chest of drawers, two sets of bunk beds, and a twin bed. They shared a bathroom down the hall with other residents. Justine hated that but knew that was a small price to pay for having somewhere to stay.

The next morning, she and the children rose and dressed and went to the kitchen for breakfast. While they ate cereal, they met two of the other residents. One was a black woman with two children.

Justine observed her children looking at the woman curiously. Rod's prejudice was reflected by the children's reaction to the woman. *As much as I tried to ward them from some of his negative influences, I have a long way to go to give the kids some new attitudes.*

When she called home two days later to allow the children to talk to him, Rod yelled at her. He demanded, "I want to see my kids!"

"It is not my intention to keep you from them. As soon as we can, we'll arrange for you to see them," Justine responded, grimacing at his anger. She grimaced only because she imagined that one day she would have to face that anger outside of the security of the shelter, but for now, she knew that her voice was firm and confident. Not only did it reflect the security that she felt in the shelter, it also reflected her resolve—she would not submit to him again.

When he talked to the children, Justine could tell that he was trying to coax them into revealing their hiding place. She took the phone away from Thomas and told Rod that if he persisted in trying to locate them, she would not let him talk to the children. The shelter staff had warned her that if Rod learned their location, they would be asked to leave.

It took weeks for Justine and the children to work out the details of where they would go next. She had no idea how she was going to support the children alone. She was afraid that Rod would kill her if he could get his hands on her.

Separately, Justine and the children met weekly with a psychologist; it was a requirement of the shelter. Justine found a lawyer that would handle the divorce, with fees to be paid when the house was sold. Then finally a family member offered to pay the deposit and first month's rent for an apartment. They prepared to leave the shelter.

The children were excited. They would see their father soon. Justine was afraid. She was afraid of what Rod would do when she was no longer in the security of the shelter. Rod had somehow learned the shelter's location; he proved it by describing the house to the children on the phone. But the staff told Justine that they could stay because Rod had not tried to approach the house. She still felt more secure there than she could imagine feeling out in the community. The shelter had an impressive security system.

Justine was also afraid for the future. She had to find a job. She had to meet a budget. She had to ask for public assistance. The future arrived, despite her fears, and it offered hope.

Six months later, Justine had a job as a secretary. The children were in a school and meeting weekly with the school counselor. Justine and Rod met in the police parking lot to exchange the children for visitations because her lawyer had explained that the parking lot was monitored by video cameras.

The divorce continued to drag on. In one hearing the magistrate ordered that Justine should be allowed back in their house in two weeks to remove her possessions. Rod was furious. "She has no right!" he yelled, as the magistrate looked on disapprovingly. "She left! Everything is mine now!"

The court disagreed.

One week later, a friend, whose husband worked for the volunteer fire department called.

"Justine," she said in a strained voice, "your house is on fire."

"Oh my God!" was all Justine could say. Shock and horror stunned her.

A few moments later, she located the phone book. Finding the number for the fire department, she placed the call.

"I understand a house is burning outside of town," she told the man who answered.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied. "I can't talk right now."

"Well, I don't know if you're the one I should call," she hurried on, "but that house is involved in a divorce. I want it investigated."

Unsurprisingly, the man then took the time to question her.

Two hours later, two investigators arrived at the apartment to talk to Justine. She spoke to them in hushed tones because she had put the children to bed and did not want to alarm them. Justine and the two men sat at the kitchen table, talking in low voices. She told them her story—the story of why she left Rod, of their time in the shelter, and of their new life. They asked her where she was that night, and she explained she had been trick-or-treating with the children. Could anyone corroborate her story? Yes, she told them, various family members had seen her.

As the investigators prepared to leave one and a half hours later, one of them said, "You were our suspect."

"And now?" she asked.

"I don't think you did it," he replied.

"I didn't," she answered confidently.