

How To Save A
Life

—*Tabitha Clark*

MY HUSBAND AND SON LIE DEAD ON THE FLOOR at my feet – I killed them. This morning, I made them French toast with strawberries, and now they're dead.***

I walked into the house, and saw no one in the living room. "I'm home," I said, to no response. I heard muffled crying coming from my bedroom, and started toward the back of the house. Oh God, I thought, Justin's spanked Dylan too hard again. Dylan was only five, and his dad sometimes got carried away with punishment. I opened the bedroom door and fell into every mother's nightmare: my husband was fondling his penis, while my son was lying face down on the edge of our bed with his pants pulled down to his ankles.

"What the fuck are you doing!?" I screamed, flying toward him.

He grabbed my arms and threw me against a wall. "Stay out of this."

"Fuck you." I whispered, picking up the phone off the floor. "If you touch another hair on his head, I'm calling 9-1-1." I got up, my head swimming from the impact, and picked up Dylan. I pulled up his pants, comforting him and whispered. "Sweetie, Daddy was just playing. Could you go to your room and turn on your TV?" Dylan nodded his head, wiped the tears out of his eyes, and walked out of the room.

Justin, stood there, looking at me. "That's ok sweetie," he said, head down, his eyes peering at me from under his large brow, "you'll do."

"I don't think --."

"Did I ask you to think?" He lunged at me, knocking the phone out of my hand and slamming me against the door.

I wanted to scream, but I didn't want

to scare Dylan.

"I do what I want, when I want. You've forgotten your place, little girl. I think it's time I remind you." He grabbed my wrists and dragged me over to the bed.

"Justin, please don't..." He ripped off my t-shirt and khaki pants as I tried to cling to them. Then, he grabbed me by the waist and pulled me against him. "If you scream, I'll get rough. It may just kill you," he chuckled. He threw me onto the bed. "Turn over."

I turned over on my stomach, too scared to do anything else.

He grabbed my hair and yanked my head back. "I mean what I said. Listen to me, or this just might kill you. Do you want your son to come in here and find his mother naked, dead on the bed like a cheap whore?" Then, he shoved his way inside me.

I fought the screams that were creeping their way up my throat as my insides were torn apart. I clung to the sheets, bit into the pillows, anything to muffle the sound. I tried to think of something else, tried to retreat into my mind, but I was ripped back with every slap and claw to my back and sides, brought back to the pain, the smell of anger mixing with sweat, and the sound of his

voice that seemed to get angrier every second.

"You like that, that's what you want," he said, breathing heavily into my ear. As the thrusts got harder, he pulled my hair until it felt like it would rip out of my skull. He moved against me so hard the last time that I yelped. Then he collapsed on top of me.

"Now," he whispered, huffing and out of breath, "go sleep in your son's room. Go guard him like the little pup that he is. And don't try to leave, or I'll kill you both...and I'll make you watch him die."

I grabbed a towel and limped to the bathroom. After cleaning up the blood and semen, I pulled on my nightgown and lay down on a comforter in my son's room. He slept so soundly, considering everything that had gone on next door. I saw the dried tears still clinging salty on his cheeks, lit up by the blue glow of the TV.

"We'll leave baby," I whispered. "When he goes to work tomorrow night, we'll leave."

I dropped the blood caked bat and collapsed next to my five year old. "I'm so sorry, sweetie," I sobbed, holding his head in my lap, trying to wipe away the drying blood. "I'm so sorry we didn't leave sooner.

I'm sorry this happened." I rocked him and stroked his face. There was a roll of thunder outside, and lightning lit up the scene: blood on the carpet and wall. The baseball bat rested against my husband's leg, a line of blood showing how the head of the bat rolled when it hit the ground.

I should call someone, but how am I going to explain this?

The next morning, I made breakfast for everyone, and while Justin took a nap, Dylan and I went to the park.

When we got home, smoky black clouds were moving in. Dylan and I walked into the house, and saw Justin standing in the middle of the living room with a baseball bat. "Where have you been?"

My eyes widened, and I pushed Dylan behind me, blocking my son from his father's view. "We went to the park, Justin. I just wanted to get Dylan out of the house so you could rest before work tonight."

"Yeah Daddy, Mommy says we're going on a trip when you leave for work tonight!"

I looked at my son, realizing that I didn't tell him it was a secret. *Why did I tell him?* My forehead wrinkled in worry, and I started shaking, afraid to turn around and face the beating that was coming. Justin didn't make

idle threats.

I turned and saw that look in Justin's eye. He was breathing heavily and drooling, his eyes bloodshot and black with rage. "What did I tell you?" He raised the bat and prepared to swing.

I closed my eyes, waiting for the beating, waiting for the pain. Instead, I felt a small hand push my waist, heard "NO! Don't hurt my Mommy!" and then a sickening crack, and a thud as something fell to the floor. I opened one eye and saw my son lying on the floor, his head bloody. Justin still held the bat. Now he was shaking.

"I didn't mean to. I swear to God, I didn't mean to. Check him. He's ok right? Check him!" He dropped the bat and fell to his knees to check on our son.

A calm rage fell over me. I walked around him, picked up the bat, and got into the batting stance that helped me smack home runs during softball season. "You bastard! You will never," the first swing connected with the side of his head knocking him to the ground, "ever hurt anyone again!" I brought down the two final swings on his chest, hearing the ribs snap and splinter under the weight of the bat. Now I was breathing heavily and drooling. I felt the adrenaline coursing through my veins.

Then I realized my entire family was dead, and it was my fault.

The rain began to pat against the windows of our small two-bedroom house. It was time to call the police. I kissed my son, laid his head on the carpet, and walked to the closet before grabbing the

phone. *Why didn't Justin use the gun? Maybe he wouldn't have missed. I know I won't.*

"9-1-1, what's your emergency?"

"Send the police. There have been three murders."

The last thing the 9-1-1 operator heard was the sound of gunfire, and the clunk of the receiver as it hit the floor.



—Mark Tomsic, "Confessions of a Hypocritical Pastor"