

HIDDEN

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In the cold of night, the stars lit up the sky while cars lit up the streets. I was sitting on my window seat glancing over at the television when my doorbell rang. I got up from the window seat to see who was at the door. Looking through the peep hole I saw a tall man with a dark complexion, green eyes, and black hair standing there. He rang the bell again, so I opened the door.

“Hello.” I was hesitant because the man did not look familiar to me.

“Kalina Risolen?”

“Yes.” Now I was more curious who this man was.

“Dorian Mitchell would like you to meet him at Morgenstern Mountain Lodge and Restaurant at ten tonight.” The man was wearing a suit and tie. I noticed a parked stretch limousine behind him.

Dorian was my boyfriend at the time. He was a professional football player. He spent most of his time on the field or doing other work-related promotion. The idea of him wanting me to meet him without notice was not typical of him. It was already eight, so I hit the shower, changed my clothes, put some make up on and was on my way.

The driver made it to the Mountain with ten minutes to spare. I figured I would have a little time to touch up my make up and maybe get a song or two in on the radio, but no sooner than when I pulled out my compact, there was a knock on my window. I rolled down my frosty window to the face of a man with a look of fright. He was shaking hysterically and muttering something. I asked him to speak up. “There is a man trapped in the cave and I can’t get him out will you help me?” The man’s clothes were torn and he had no coat. He was freezing.

I told the driver to call for help and jumped out of the car and followed the man to the cave. The trail was hard to see because it was pitched black out; luckily the man had a flashlight with him. The forest’s trees were covered in dew. My high heels seemed to sink into the grass as we ran towards the cave at full speed. I stepped into the cave with the man’s flashlight in one hand and my cell phone in the other. Water dripped from the ceiling of the cave. As we went further in the walls and ceiling seemed to be closing in on us.

“Is there anyone in here?” I screamed as loud as I could in hopes the man still had enough strength to respond. “Hello?” My voice echoed through the passage ways. “Hello?” Still no reply so I continued to walk further into the damp cave. The man seemed to have disappeared after we entered the cave. I continued on without him.

I came to a three-way intersection and saw a light at the end of one of the passageways. The light struck me as odd since I was in the middle of a cave, so I explored that route. A bat flew right past my head and landed on a pile of rocks along the path. I began to become frightened because I hadn’t seen the other man, so I began to look for him, but my interest in the light drew me back. I continued forward through the cave.

“Is there anyone in here?” I screamed once again hoping the man was in the light area.

“Over here,” a familiar voice shouted out in a faint but loud voice.

I ran frantically toward the light. A group of people stood in the middle of the cave with grins of happiness. My boyfriend Dorian was in the middle of the crowd of people down on one knee. I swear I could have killed him, but I figured I would spare him just that once. After a few moments I caught my breath and Dorian approached me. He gave me a grin that I had never seen before. He knelt down on one knee in front of me and reached out for my hand.

“Kalina Echo Risolen will you make me the happiest guy in the world and become my wife?” The next couple minutes were a blur. I was told that I fainted in shock of the question, but I still don’t remember. I awoke in the cave in Dorian’s arms.

“So?” He was still eager for my response.

“Yes of course I will marry you!” I responded grabbing him and pulling him into a tight embrace. He was excited about my response and his sigh while he held me showed his relief.

I found out later on that evening the entire evening was a set up. The cave was fake, the guy that knocked on my window was Cory Bayler, Dorian’s lawyer and best friend dressed in costume, and the man who came to my door was an actor that Dorian hired to put his master plan in motion. I couldn’t ask for anything more in my life. I had a fiancé who adored me and a group of friends that would support me in any decision that I made. The only thing wrong was that I wasn’t happy.

One would think that my life was going to be long and full of everything a girl could want and more after that day, but it was not. The chain of events that followed that cold night was anything less than happy. I would say it was excruciatingly horrible both physically and emotionally, and not only would my life be literally turned upside down, but I would be compelled to explore a whole new world.

Dorian and I had been living together for a year before he proposed, but it was made official when he proposed that night. A couple months passed and it was pure honeymoon bliss. We had a couple arguments here and there like most couples, but nothing too drastic. Until one night, it was a normal night for us, we were doing the same old thing, but for some reason this time it was far from honeymoon bliss.

“Why should I always be the one cooking and cleaning, you could get off your lazy butt and do it yourself you know?” I was standing at the sink washing the dishes from the dinner which I had cooked that evening. Dorian had a maid before we got engaged, but quickly after our relationship was officially announced she quit. Dorian chose not to hire another maid because he wanted us to be more like a normal couple, so he said.

“That is not the way it is supposed to be. In case you forgot honey I am the quote, unquote, husband and you are the quote, unquote, wife and you are supposed to wait on me hand and foot. Now bring me a cold beer.” Dorian was sitting in the living room on the black leather recliner watching old game clips.

Our house always seemed to have this environment. I felt like I was his Cinderella not his fiancé. He always wanted me to clean or cook. Dorian never once worried about what I wanted or whether I needed any help, all he cared about was his precious football career and his beer.

I was at my wits end. I had never been in an emotionally abusive relationship. When he put the 2 carat diamond ring on my finger he seemed to think that meant he owned me. I did what any other self-respecting woman would do; I kept my mouth shut and did what I was told; until he crossed the line.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. I was sitting in the living room watching television. I had just got done doing the dishes and putting away dinner. It was the first time I had sat down all day. I believe I was watching a late night talk show. He came into the living room and started yelling at me.

“The bed isn’t made. Did you decide that wasn’t important enough to do?” He stood in front of me and starred down.

“You could do it yourself you know.” That was my typical response to ridiculous arguments like this one.

I guess he had a bad practice that day, which would have explain his excessive rudeness and crankiness, but I just blew it off as him being a jerk as per the usual. Instead of blowing me off that night he grabbed me by the head and pulled me out of the chair. He pulled me upstairs into our bedroom and threw me onto the bed.

“Do it you worthless piece of trash!” He commanded me like I was his bitch.

I was in shock at his words; he had never spoken to me like that before. The tone of his voice still haunts me to this day. I got up from the bed and he pushed me down again. “I can’t fix the bed unless you let me up.” I pushed myself up again and was able to get out of the bed. His eyes were burning a hole in my skin, he starred so hard. I threw the covers up to the top of the bed and walked out of the bedroom, slamming the door behind me and went back down stairs to hid out until he fell asleep.

I waited about an hour before I even thought to move. I was afraid if I made a sound he would hurt me. I made it into the guest room that night without making a sound. I crawled into bed and passed out.

I got up the next morning and the house was empty. The daily note with a list of things for me to do was taped to the marble kitchen counter. Dorian wanted me go to Cory Bayler’s office and pick up some sponsor papers that he needed to sign. Cory had been his lawyer for about five years now and was a good friend of both Dorian and myself. Cory and Dorian worked out on a daily basis together, when Dorian wasn’t out of town. Cory and I spent a large portion of our time together because Dorian had me handle a lot of his dirty work. Dorian was gone frequently and, since I was always in Lakeshore when Dorian was at away games, Cory and I would watch the games together with friends. Dorian did not allow me to go to his games because he said I would be a “distraction.”

Cory and I had gained a common respect for each other and I knew that he was the only person in my life that I could trust. I went over to Cory’s office first. I would do the rest of the list later on.

“I am here to see Cory Bayler.”

“Let me see if he has a moment.” His secretary had a rude tone when she spoke to me. I guess she felt threatened by me. She went back to his office. When she came back she gave me the evil eye and just nodded her head. I took that as you may go back and went on.

Cory greeted me with a tight long embrace. I was amazed. It was like he knew what I needed. We sat down on the couch. There was an awkward silence and we traded glances.

“So how’s the engaged life?” Cory knew that Dorian and I were not on the best of terms. When he came over he witnessed our nightly fights, but said nothing.

I broke down into tears. “I don’t know what I did to deserve this. All I wanted was to be happy. I guess I’m not supposed to be.” Cory pulled me into an embrace as I cried onto his shoulder. “He’s such an ass. He’s always pushing me around. Do this! Do that! If I hear one more command, I swear to God I’m gonna smack him.” I was emotionally hysterical. All it took was one question from Cory and I broke down. Cory was confused. He broke from our embrace and looked at me with compassion and almost understanding in his eyes. I was hurting and he could see it in my eyes.

“What’s wrong sweetheart? You don’t get this worked up over just anything. Yah Dorian is an ass, everyone in the world knows that, but what did he do this time? What’s got you all worked up?” Cory knew from all the time that we spent together how strong I was when it came to Dorian’s games.

“He just crossed a line last night. The line I vowed I would never let him cross.” I didn’t want to tell Cory because I knew how he would react.

“Did he hurt you? If he did I swear I’ll –”

“No you won’t. You won’t do anything. He didn’t hurt me. You can’t tell him anything about this. It will get worse if you say anything. Cory please don’t say –” He cut me off before I could even finish my sentence.

“You don’t have to say it. I’ll keep quiet. You just have to promise me that if he ever lays a hand on you again you will tell me. I don’t care how much bigger that asshole is than me I’ll kill him. He has trained me himself how to fight. I’ll kill him with my bare hands if he even lays one finger on you.” I knew Cory cared about me, but his words were a lot more passionate than I expected. Cory looked at me and only me. I could feel his dark green eyes against my skin. He had the same look that Dorian had before he picked me up the night before, but when Cory did it I felt safe, not frightened like I did when Dorian looked at me.

“You have my word.” Cory rolled his eyes at me knowing that I was too strong to ever admit that I was wrong. “Do you have those papers I came for?” He handed me the papers and held onto my hand. “You can let me go now.”

“Maybe I don’t want to.” His eyes were the purest green I had ever seen. He was looking at my soul. He knew what I was thinking. I could feel him inside me through his eyes. “I know you don’t want me to.”

“Yes I do!” I jerked the papers out of his strong hands and stormed out of the office letting the door slam behind me. I wasn’t mad about what he said, I was scared. I had never had anyone look at me the way he did in that moment, not even Dorian. My response was a reflex from being scared about the way it felt when he touched me. I went back to the loft and began the rest of my daily chores.

The day went by rather quickly. I was sitting on the couch watching the news and I realized it was almost eleven. Dorian wasn’t home yet. Usually he would have called by now. I began to worry. I called over to Mariah’s house; she was the wife of one of Dorian’s fellow teammates. He had been home for hours. I began to panic. I paced the house hoping that he would come storming through the door. At this point I didn’t care if he was drunk or sober I just wanted him home. Where is he? Who is he was with? What is he was doing? Who is he doing? What is he drinking? Is he even alive? Every question imaginable and every scenario played through my head like a film strip caught in its projector.

At three in the morning the front door swung open. In stumbled Dorian. He was so drunk I don’t think he could even see his own feet in front of him.

“I was worried about you. Where have you been?” I stood up from the couch and looked at him.

“Sit down bitch! I’m perfectly fine!” He slammed his coat down on the couch. “You need to get over yourself! You didn’t need to worry about me, I’m a grown man!” He walked over to where I was standing and stared me right in the eye. His eyes were glazed and he had a huge hickey on his neck.

“I will always worry about you. That’s what you do when you love someone. You worry about them. Obviously you don’t love me.” I wasn’t thinking straight. “I mean I –”

“Don’t you ever say that again.” He reached out and pushed me onto the couch.

“The truth hurts doesn’t it? You come home at three in the morning and expect me not to worry. Your buddies were home six hours ago, so I know you weren’t with him. Who in the hell were you with Dorian? Where in the hell were you? Tell me God damn it! Tell me the truth. If you ever fuckin loved me you will tell me the truth.” I could hear the torture and concern in my own voice and I stood back up to face him. I was scared to talk that way to him. I didn’t know what he would do. I had never spoken to him like that.

“You really wanna know?” I shook my head. “Fine I’ll tell you, you stupid bitch, but don’t say I didn’t warn you. I was at a strip club, spending my hard earned money on a lap dance from the hottest girl I have ever seen. Yes, hotter than you.” He stumbled over to the other chair. “She was gorgeous. She had long legs, blonde hair, blue eyes, big –”

“That’s enough! Spare me all the horny details. Unless you want to admit to cheating on me with that little dancer, hooker, slut, oh whatever the hell you want to call her I don’t want to hear it. I am going to bed. You help your sorry drunk ass up there!” I turned towards the steps and began to walk.

He grabbed me. I managed to pull myself free. I ran for the steps. I was half way up the first set when he grabbed my ankle tightly and pulled me all the way down. I slammed my nose into the each step. My nose was gushing blood. I screamed in pain hoping maybe his heart would kick in, but he just kept pulling until he managed to throw me on the couch in his drunkenness. He lifted his football throwing arm and smacked me in the face. He smacked me so hard I fell back onto the floor. Writhing around on the floor in pain he bent down and grabbed both of my arms and began kicking me. I somehow managed to pull one of my arms free from his grip and I punched him right in the crotch. This gave me enough time to use all of my strength run upstairs and into the bathroom. I slammed the door shut and locked myself in.

I dropped to the floor immediately. I felt something in my back pocket as I sat up. It was my cell phone. Luckily in the struggle I managed not to shatter it. I almost screamed I was so happy. I knew I was supposed to call 911 at a time like this but I chose to call the first person I came to in my phonebook. Cory was that person and I hit the send button. All of my strength was gone. It took everything to even pull the phone to my ear. I was shaking in fear. My palms were covered in sweat, tears, and blood.

“Cory, need – help – now!” My voice was quiet and shaky. Dorian’s banging on the door and loud screaming muffled my words like train in the night. “Please help me, please, I’m so scared.” My voice panicked at the sound of silence on the other end of the phone. Had I called the wrong number? Why wasn’t he talking? I was trapped in a half bath with no windows.

“I’m there.” That was all I heard and the phone went dead.

I dropped the phone to the ground. I could hardly breathe. I crawled over to the mirror that hung loosely over the sink. My head and nose were still gushing blood from being dragged down the stairs. I couldn’t see anything. My bun had come loose and my hair was beginning to mat itself together with dry blood. Sweat was streaming down my face and mixing with my tears. I picked myself up to search for a towel, but I had done laundry earlier that day and the towels were in the dryer. I collapsed back on the floor and waited in fright for a man that I would have to trust with my life. I knew if I called he would come I just didn’t know how long it would take.

I remember the room began to spin and hearing the door open downstairs. I heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Dorian started hollering Cory’s name and cursing at him when he saw him. I assume Cory was slamming Dorian against the wall because the mirror that hung above the sink was shaking. He slammed him repeatedly up against the wall, until I heard his body hit the floor. I heard footsteps coming towards the bathroom door. The knock was rough, but not like Dorian’s.

“Kali open up sweetheart, everything is fine. Dorian’s down and his ass ain’t gettin up. He is out cold. If he does get up he’s not gonna make it too far before I nail him again. Kali I promise he’s out, you’re safe. Open the door.” He knocked again.

“I will open the door on condition!” I crawled over towards the door.

“What Kali?” I saw the doorknob try to turn.

I unlocked the door and opened it slowly. “Get me the hell out of here!” I took everything thing I had to say those words.

He picked me up from the cold tile floor and placed me on the toilet seat. He grabbed a rag from the highest shelf of the linen closet and soaked it with warm water. His gentle touch against my face was soothing. He left me sitting in the bathroom, which I protested, but he assured me nothing would happen. He went into my room and grabbed some clothes and put them in a duffle bag. I watched him from the doorway and as he passed Dorian he kicked him in the ribs for good measure.

Cory ran back towards me. He threw the duffle bag of clothes over his shoulder and gently picked me up from the toilet where he had left me. Cory’s strength amazed me. He carried me down the stairs and out to his car.

My hair was matted with blood. By the time we reached his house the bleeding had stopped, but my clothes were blood red. He carried me into his house and into his bedroom. He laid me onto the bed as gently as he could.

“Thank you for saving my life.”

“I would do anything for you Kali,” he leaned down to my face as I lay on the bed “and I do mean anything.” He pushed the blood matted hair away from my face. “I’m gonna go start you a bath.”

“That would be great.” I rolled over on the bed and curled up to try and ease the pain. I felt safe in his bed. It felt like home. Cory vowed that night never to let another person hurt me again.

The next day began like a dream. I awoke in the softest bed that I had ever slept on. I was alone in a room with light music coming from the radio on the bedside table. I could remember barely anything about what had happened the night before. I knew that Dorian and I had gotten in a fight, but the rest of the night was a blur. I knew that I was at Cory’s, but had no clue how or why I had gotten there. A gust of window blew through the window and I pulled the covers over my shoulders. The sunlight hit the bed at just the right angle so that it kept the covers warm.

“Well good morning beauty.” Cory’s soothing voice awoke me further.

“Hey” I rolled over in the bed to face him. He was sitting on the sofa reading the newspaper and drinking a cup of coffee.

“Did you sleep well?” He put the paper down on the coffee table and walked towards the bed.

“Like a rock. Your bed is amazing. What happened?” I knew that I needed to get it over with so that Cory knew that I did not remember everything.

“Long story short, you and Dorian got in a huge fight. It became extremely violent and you called me to come get you.” He came and sat next to me on the bed.

“Ouuuuch” I tried to pick up my arm. “Ahhhhh” I managed to pull myself up. Cory offered his assistance to get me upright. “Ugh, I hate this. Why would he do this to me?” I looked at Cory hoping that he had answers.

“Be careful Kali, don’t push yourself. It’s over. You are safe now. He will never hurt you again. I promise.” Cory’s thoughtful words were an embrace without contact. He knew what to say to make me feel safe.

I felt the safest I had ever felt in my life. I knew he was going to protect me. The ringing of his cell phone that was lying in the kitchen broke the moment. It was Dorian’s ring tone. I looked at Cory. He saw it. He saw the fear in my face.

“You’re fine.” He got up and went into the kitchen to grab his phone. He missed the call and waited for the voicemail notification. He called his voicemail and put it on speaker phone.

“Hey Cory, its Dorian, I know she’s with you. Just tell her to come home already. I need her. Call me back if you know what’s good for you.” The tone of his voice alone scared me. I didn’t want to be around him. I didn’t even want to hear his voice.

“I hate him Cory. I hate him, but I still love him.” I began to cry. “I know he hurt me last night, but he needs me. He can’t do anything without me.”

“Don’t you even think about going home at this point! Kali you know it’s gonna happen again and possibly worse. Stay with me? Please stay with me.”

I remember the look on Cory’s face when he thought I was going to leave him. He gave me eyes like I was going to kill his little puppy. Cory didn’t want me to leave and the only reason I wanted to go was because I knew what Dorian was capable of doing. Cory pulled me into a hug and there was a large knock on the door. It sounded like the door had been knocked down. We both jumped.

Cory got up to check on the door and I sat in the chair by the door listening to everything that was about to go on. I held my cell phone in my hand with the security number ready to dial if anything went wrong.

“Open the door Cory. I know you’re in there.” I knew it was Dorian. He couldn’t leave me alone for longer than day.

“I’m coming. Shut up man!” I heard Cory yell from the other side of the door. I heard the door open.

“Where is she?” I cracked the bedroom door open so that I could see what was going on. I knew Dorian was mad, but the look on his face was like I had never seen before. He was coming towards the door that I was sitting behind.

“She’s here Dorian, but you can’t see her. She doesn’t want to see you.” Cory grabbed a hold of Dorian’s arm making sure he didn’t get to me. Dorian kept his back to Cory and his focused on the door I sat behind.

“Oh and you’re gonna stop me from seeing her.” Dorian pulled Cory around him and forced Cory to stand face to face with him. Cory’s back was to me and he was placed at just the right angle that Dorian could not see me, but I could see the look on Dorian’s face. I knew that look. It was the same look he gave me before he hurt me the night before.

Dorian stood a couple feet taller than Cory, but the amount of strength that Dorian had doubled Cory's. Dorian's build was that of a football player. He was strong from head to toe. Although Cory was in shape he was not built like a professional athlete. The only reason why Cory managed to get Dorian down the night before was because Dorian was plastered. Dorian's strength intimidates many people, but not Cory. Cory told me last night that even though Dorian was stronger than him Cory knew his weaknesses, me being one of the biggest.

"Yes I am. Calm down man. She doesn't want to see you right now. Give her time to cool off. You beat her last night. She deserves some time to her --" Cory stood tall guarding the door between me and the man who I was supposed to marry.

"That's what she told you, that I beat her. I would never do -- "

"Stop right there. Don't even try to manipulate your way outta this one. I witnessed this one myself. I don't have to pick sides. I know what happened this time and all those other times that I sided with you. How dare you treat a woman like that?" They just stood there face to face full of anger. I could only see Dorian's face, but judging from his responses to Cory I could tell Cory was getting under his skin.

"I was drunk and that whore deserved it." Dorian walked away from Cory and towards the kitchen.

"So let me get this straight. Kali's a whore and caring about where her fiancé is, is a crime now. Bullshit" Cory sat down on the couch and never took his eyes off Dorian.

"Shut up. You don't know what you're talking about." Dorian walked back towards Cory.

"I know more than you think, dude."

"Let me see her!" Dorian's voice raised and his tone was becoming annoyed.

"I have a better idea. Get out of my apartment and forget that Kali ever existed." Cory stood from the couch and walked toward Dorian.

"Ha. That is the funniest thing --" They met face to face again in the middle of the living room.

"Get out!" I watched from my cracked door as Cory grabbed Dorian's arm and pulled him towards the door.

"Your weak ass isn't gonna throw me out." Dorian pulled in the opposite direction with equal force towards the bedroom.

"Yes I am!" With all of his strength Cory pulled Dorian to the door and pushed him out. The door slammed shut and Cory locked it. He looked at me with a sigh.

"This isn't the last you'll see of me Cory. You're still my lawyer." Cory waved his arm to signal me to shut the bedroom door. Cory pulled the door open again.

"Oh by the way Dorian, I quit!" I heard the door slam again, but this time the picture hanging above the bed shook.

"Oh you just made you're death bed boy. This isn't over. This is war!"

Cory and I spent the rest of day locked in his apartment. I was so scared. I had never in the fifteen years that I had known Dorian ever seen him act like that. Even after the beating that I took from him the previous night I was shocked by the anger in his eyes as he stared Cory down in the living room. I couldn't help but wonder what was wrong. I didn't understand why all of a sudden Dorian decided to go psychotic. I wasn't going to worry about him right now. The only thing I wanted was no to be around him.

I spent the next week locked in Cory's apartment. I refused to leave because I was afraid I was going to run into Dorian. I knew that he was on the road for a game, but I still didn't want to take the chance. Cory went to the office to get some paper work on one of his other clients and I stayed at the apartment and watched a movie. Cory sat the phone on the arm of the couch and leaned down to kiss me on the forehead. At the same moment I looked up to tell him bye and instead of kissing my forehead he kissed my lips. My entire body shook. I had never felt that feeling before. I was speechless. He quickly apologized and ran out of the apartment with a quick goodbye.

I knew how Cory felt about me. He definitely wanted more than just a friendship. When he looked at me it was as if I was the only person in the entire world. It didn't matter how Cory felt about me. I was not even officially done with Dorian and the ring in the nightstand drawer was proof. I heard my cell phone ringing in the other room, so I hobbled into the kitchen and grabbed it without even looking at who it was.

"Hello." I knew I should have looked before I answered, but since Dorian was scheduled to be playing a game at that moment I was not all that worried about it.

"Kali?" A familiar voice was on the other end. It sounded as if they were trying to be quiet.

"Who is this?" The caller ID on my phone read unregistered caller, so I had no clue who it was.

"It's Dorian, please don't hang up" At that moment I dropped my cell phone on the floor. I leaned over to pick it up.

"Why shouldn't I?" He had beaten me to the point of me not being able to work just a week before.

"Because I want you to hear me out baby --" I was surely not his baby. That was his pet name for me when he knew that he had done something wrong and needed to make it up to me.

"I'm not your --"

"I know Kali, but I really need to talk to you. I want to explain everything. Please just come let me in. I am outside Cory's apartment. Please."

"You can tell me over the phone. I can't even look at you right now Dorian. I don't feel safe with you and Cory's not here."

"I know he's not. I watched him leave." I couldn't figure out what was going on. The last time I checked Dorian's team they were scheduled to be on the other side of the US that day.

"You're watching us. Why aren't you playing ball? What do you want? Why can't you just leave me alone? Go away please. I'm not sure how much longer I can --"

"Pretend you don't still love me. Kali I am so sorry. I never meant to hurt you. It has been a rough couple of weeks and I took it out on you. I never thought that I would get this bad. I thought if I ignored it, it would go

away.”

“What would go away?”

“I just. Mom told me that dad is dying Kali. She doesn’t know how much longer he has. I went to the doctor and he told me that I have early signs of the same cancer dad has and since I am an athlete I will be affected faster.” He sounded so sad. I had a hard time believing him, but I had known Dorian for a long time and when it came to family he didn’t joke. He knew he was going to die and he did the one thing his dad always taught him to do when things got tough, drank. He was drunk the night he attacked me, but that did not excuse the amount of pain he inflicted on me.

“I’m sorry. That is not an excuse for what you did to me or the horrible stuff that you said. I am staying here with Cory. I am not coming home with you Dorian. Just give it up. Leave us alone.” I knew there was something wrong, but I never imagined that he and his dad were fatally sick. I know I sounded cold hearted, but I felt the safest I had ever felt in my life at Cory’s and I wasn’t going to change that for a man who would have killed me had I not gotten away from his clutches.

“Kali I am begging you. I am on hands and knees outside the door right now. I need you right now. I need you in my life. Please don’t shut me out. Please forgive me for everything I said and did. At least think about it.” He hung up the phone and I was left to think.

I heard from Dorian off and on after that. I caught glimpses of Dorian occasionally on ESPN and in the tabloids, but I never saw him again after the day he came to Cory’s apartment. When I heard from him our conversations were never angry. It was almost like he had blocked out our entire romantic relationship and was treating me like the friend I was before we started dating. After Dorian’s team won the Super Bowl, and he retired from football, the phone calls began to decline, until I never really heard from him again. I knew he was okay because I had kept in touch with some of the wives of his friends, but I knew that if he wanted to talk to me he would call. Since he didn’t, I didn’t make the effort to call him. I cared about Dorian, don’t get me wrong, but the things he did to me were unforgivable. I never thought that something like that was going to happen to me. My life was perfect at the time when Dorian and I got engaged and I thought that was only the beginning of an amazing relationship. It was the beginning of something just not what I expected, but I don’t regret it.

The amazing kiss that Cory gave me before he rushed out of the apartment a week after the fight with Dorian caused a series of even more breath taking kisses. I never left Cory’s apartment again. He went over to Dorian and mines house and got all of my stuff while Dorian was out of town and that was the end except for occasional phone calls.

Cory and I were happy. The relationship I had with Dorian taught me so much and without that experience I would have never found the man I married. Cory and I lived together for two years before he asked me to marry him. He proposed to me while we were lying in bed. It was the most romantic moment of my life. The last proposal I had gotten was lavish and public, I enjoyed the privacy of Cory’s proposal. He rolled over in bed and looked at me. I remember the words he said perfectly.

“I could do this. I could do this forever. Wake up and look into your endless blue eyes. Kali will you let me do that. Can I wake up next to you for the rest of my life? Will you marry me?” To this day when I wake up I roll over and thank the lord for giving me Cory. Without him I don’t know where I would be right now. Cory is truly my angel. He helped me realize what I was hiding from and how I was hidden from the true reality of love.