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The Last Days

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If your heart is still beating
But your brain
is gone
Are you still here?
I would tell you I love you
But I know you won’t hear
Do you know that I do?
If your spirit still lingers

But your soul is gone
Can you feel us near?
When He took your spirit
And led you home
Was Grandma there?
If the machines have been stopped
But your will hangs on
What are you waiting for?
I will miss you, you know
But I will see you soon
Will you meet me there?

It was Thursday, April 26th. Christy and Dylan had spent the last few months trying to fool themselves and each other into believing that things were getting better. As a final straw, they settled on a pact: if either relapsed again, they would break up. The glaring problem was that neither had cleaned up in the first place. He would ask if she had used and she’d lie to him. She’d ask, and he’d lie to her.

Christy let things go on like this because she had two needs: to get her kids back and to keep Dylan in her life. She couldn’t hope to be happy having one without the other. Even though using meth was the number one thing getting in the way, it was how she stayed focused; everything was set on course to crash sooner or later, but until that happened, she would not give up.

Pretending to be healthy was the only hope left for their relationship.

Today, Christy was spun enough to give herself away. Dylan caught on to her sketchy, twitchy mannerisms. She had carelessly slipped into a tank top baring her needle pricked arms; she was tired of pretending anyway. He turned to her as they sat on his couch.

“I can tell you’re high now,” he accused.
“Yep,” she answered wryly, smirking.
“Well why don’t you give me some of that?” She sat up straight from resting her head on his shoulder. Her eyes searched his wildly. She felt a tremendous relief from the pressure of having to fake sobriety for so long.

“It’s about time!” She pulled the bag of meth from her bra and threw it his way. She carried plenty of dope for more than the both of them. Their pact was out the window with an unspoken agreement that this would be the last time.

Their run lasted them another fifteen hours until it
was time to come down. The tail-end of a high brought out the worst in them. And Dylan, with a proven history of violent and abusive behavior, never hesitated to turn his irritation into the bruises that stamped Christy's body.

The rhythm of their relationship consisted of extreme highs, explosive arguments, expensive gifts from Dylan, to make amends, and an extended period of mounting tension that Christy could always sense. It was as if Dylan was constantly planning his next big blow-out fight. Although she knew the final remedy was to leave him for good, she would provoke his anger just to get it over with. Like diving into the wall of an oncoming wave she would call him a punk, letting the wave crash over her. It was the last thing anyone should call a man just out of prison.

"Say it again!" he threatened.

"You fucking punk!" He grabbed her by the neck, and in a strained voice she stubbornly kept on, "Punk!!" This way she never wondered when she'd get beat up. She could plan it. She was in control for the moment, and the waves always seemed to pass. Tonight, however, the rage and swells of Dylan's mood were more treacherous than anything she was prepared for.

Christy recalled never knowing fear until she was begging for her life that night.

This was the first time his rage had brought him to the point of wielding deadly weapons against her.

First there was the gun.

Dylan usually felt ready to die either on the prospect of returning to prison or whenever Christy threatened to leave. As she came down, the familiar regret and shame harped on her conscience. She began to see Dylan as the reason her life was so screwed up. She mustered up enough confidence to threaten to leave him one more time. Dylan was sweating. His goatee trembled under his jaw as his mouth hung open. His scowling face and wide eyes pulsed with every beat of his angry heart. He was ready to take them both out.

He had the gun pointed at her head.

"I'm gonna do us both in….or….no, I'm gonna make this as hard on you as possible." He wrapped the gun up in Christy's hand with his fingers still on the trigger. He turned the pistol toward himself to make it look like Christy was the killer. "If you kill me, I'll get what I want, and you," he continued with a malevolent chuckle, "you will get what you deserve. If I can't have you, no one can."

An eternity passed and Dylan's menacing stare turned distant and lifeless. Christy stood deathly still; hoping he would think twice and let her go.

"Forget it." He dropped the gun.

The night dragged on. A typical war of words grew between them from mutual feelings of dejection and hopelessness. Dylan commenced with his usual dig.

"Bag bitch!"

"Fucking prick! You're the one who got me into this in the first place, you ass!"

"You dirty cunt, I'll kill you if you ever say that again!"

"It's true. You turned my life to shit. I hate my life because of you!"

It was finally enough to set Dylan over the edge. He chased Christy with a kitchen knife into a corner. From a display of Samurai swords mounted on the wall, he grabbed the nearest one and pointed it at her stomach. His half-closed eyes and emotionless grin made him appear resolved to finally get rid of her.

"I could do you in right now," he said.

"Please, please don't…please, please don't….Oh, Jesus, please…please…please come help me, please…In the Name of Jesus, Dylan, 'no weapon formed against me shall prosper!'"

He dropped the sword.

With the kitchen knife still in hand, he pressed the blade to his neck.

"You know what? I'll just do myself in. I'll just kill myself and then you won't have anything to worry about. " With a dramatic "u" motion, he sliced the surface of his skin. Blood seeped down his neck.

He stopped and stared at her.
“Dylan, you are crazy!” Christy walked away.

He paused a moment and thought she might have actually been right. He went into the bedroom to check his self-inflicted wound.

Thinking fast, Christy devised a plan to stop Dylan from doing any more damage. He needed some final distraction from his anger. Her plan was to make him think that her meth addiction had gone too far. If her life was in danger for reasons other than his violence, then the abuse would end.

She had to act quickly.

The two were already high when she had tossed him the bag earlier that night. They left enough for her to get spun beyond anything she’d done before. With only minutes to get Dylan to believe she’d overdosed, she slipped unnoticed into the nearby bathroom and locked the door behind her. She hurriedly prepared the needle.

With a full T left in the dope bag (about two grams) she used the blunt end of her lighter to crush the crystals into a fine powder. She funneled the powder into the shaft of the needle and added water to make it liquid. She shook the needle, pumped out the extra air, found the right vein and unloaded the drug into her already wasted form.

There.

It’s done...he can’t hurt me anymore.

But soon the intensity of the high scared her.

Oh God, what if I don’t survive this? I’ve never done a full T.

I don’t want to die yet...

...but my brain is...aaah, it’s...I can hear it frying...

Oh God, oh God, oh God...

Dylan came out from the bedroom as Christy stumbled from the bathroom, barely upright.

“Dylan...I mistake...I made...I, I made a...a mist--”

Her heart pumped wildly from her chest. Her thoughts were clear yet panicked. She couldn’t say anything that made sense. Dylan knew by her enormously wide open eyes, profuse sweating and contorted face what she had done. The drug’s attack on her central nervous system caused her jaw to lock and her lips to purse grotesquely. She tried to verbalize a cry to Dylan for help but could only think it.

Dylan I’m so scared! What do I do?

Call the Drug Line. Yes, do that, they’ll know what to do, they can help. OK, Christy, focus...get the words out...

Forming sentences was impossible...Dylan had to interpret the stuttering and gibberish that spilled from her mouth:

“You, you, you, and the, uh, you know...the the drug, poison....p-p-p-people, on the phone...they uh, they call them...to find what I do...just call.”

Dylan got off the phone with the drug line and turned to Christy:

“We have to get you to the emergency room.”

“Dylan! How’m I gonna get there if you don’t take me there with a no contact order? What am’t we gonna do?”

The no contact order. Christy called the cops on Dylan a couple months back after the first time he threw her around. If they were caught together, he’d go back to jail. He came up with a different plan.

“We need go for a walk.”

A walk? No, no, no...there are WAY too many scary things out there...I can’t, they always follow me...

“Okay,” she replied timidly.

“Maybe he’s right. I can try.”

Outside, Dylan and Christy walked around the block trying to calm her. Dylan talked and talked and kept on talking. Christy could barely comprehend a single word. All she was aware of was the whispering voices from the imagined “treeples” and “bushnarks” that followed her the entire way. Their voices taunted and teased relentlessly.

“Ssh!”

“Keep quiet!”

“Come closer...”

“Hahahah...she’s getting closer!”

“Stay down!!!”

“Ooooh...Christy, Christy, Christy...”

The voices and shadows of people who weren’t there were becoming too much. It was time to go back.
Christy’s tweak leveled off enough to make it to school the next day. Kelly, Christy’s friend from beauty school, was the only person she could confide in about her violent encounters with Dylan. Kelly was a squat, frizzy haired, red-headed woman in her forties. The type Christy would never normally get close to. But something about her compassionate green eyes made her feel safe enough to open up. She brought up everything that had happened the night before. Kelly listened and shook her head in disbelief.

“Christy you cannot let this go anymore, you’ve got to call the police and turn him in for that.”

“I can’t call the police again. I can’t. And if they find out we’ve broken the no contact order, he’s looking at prison again for a long, long time, you know? I mean, he’s not supposed to have any weapons, and... and I already called once, that’s why we have the no contact order.”

“How do you know if you’ll survive this next time? You know what, why don’t I call?”

After school Christy waited at her mom’s house while Kelly made the call. The police arrived shortly around four o’clock. They took her report and drove her across town to the Domestic Violence Advocates office.

She was handed a sheet listing the twelve most common characteristics of an abuser attached to a clipboard. A light went on in her head as she scanned the page of familiar attributes:

- Dual Personalities
- Extreme Jealousy
- Controlling and Possessive Behavior
- Emotional Dependency
- Poor Self-Esteem

Geez! He’s all these.

- Unpredictability
- Blame
- Abusive History
- Cruelty; Abusers may be cruel not only to you but to children and animals as well. They may be preoccupied with violence, guns, knives, etc.

  Hm. I don’t know about cruelty to animals. But maybe he was... who knows?

She checked twelve out of twelve and handed the clipboard back to the counselor. A “seen this a million times” look was on the counselor’s face as she advised Christy — another helpless case — to flee while she still had her life.

“You know, if you go back there, he’s going to kill you the next time this happens.” It was advice Christy had heard before. The difference now was that she was finally telling it to herself — and believing it to the core.

The police needed to know every entrance, exit and window in Dylan’s duplex apartment. Christy drew a rough sketch of his place, as well as listing every known location of his weapons. Dylan would get off work at 5:30pm: one hour from now. It wasn’t enough time for her to get to Dylan’s before the cops would. If only she could make it, he might not suspect that she was behind it all.

At exactly 5:40pm the Vancouver Police pulled up into Dylan’s driveway and were calling his name.

“Dylan Stewart, come out of the house with your hands up. This is the Police. We repeat, come out of the house with your hands up.”

Anxiously waiting at her mom’s house, Christy’s phone chimed Dylan’s ring.

“Hey babe.” Oh, God, here we go.

“Did you call the cops again?”

“No, I didn’t.” “Kelly did.”

“Well, they’re outside my house, and they want me to come out and I’m not going back to jail... I’m not going back.” He started threatening to kill himself, which meant nothing to Christy because she had heard it so many times before.

“I’m just a good for nothin’ lowlife... If you’re leaving me, I have nothing to live for.” He continued his rant of self pity until Christy could hear it no longer.

“You know what, Dylan, if you’re going to kill yourself, just do it... just do it or shut up.”

Dylan held out until about an hour later when the police gave up.
The next morning, Christy took Dylan’s cousin along with her to make sure he was okay. The two split up and tried knocking on the front and back entrances.

Christy took the front and yelled out, “Come on, Dylan!” Bang. Bang. Bang. “Come on, Dylan, open the door!” No answer. His talk of ending his life hung in the back of her mind. He sent more suicide-threatening text messages throughout the night before. She was convinced his threats were empty, until the last one gave her the feeling that he might have gone through with it:

“Call me selfish call me weak. I don’t give a rat’s ass. U dont feel my pain. Dont cry 4 me, I luv U. Find someone who can take care of U like I could not.”

Her suspicions drove her to call the police again, only this time not for her own life— for Dylan’s. The more the police did nothing, the more she called, begging them to break into his house.

“Vancouver Police, can I help you?”

“Yes, hi, this is Christy Hubler. My boyfriend, Dylan Stewart, he’s—you guys were at his house yesterday, he wouldn’t come out— but you need to break in and check on him, he may have killed himself, please.”

“Thank you, Ms. Hubler, we do have the report from yesterday and we will be looking further into—”

“God dammit! You don’t understand… just please go over there now, I know he has a gun in the house and he’s threatened to kill himself.”

The police never came.

The next day Christy came by herself, knocking on Dylan’s door.

Still no answer.

Whatever. I live here too, I’m going in there.

Determined to get inside she removed the screen from one of the side windows and used all her weight to slide open the glass pane. The window was locked, and behind the sheer green curtain panels she noticed a stack of two-by-four wooden planks that had to have been nailed there from the inside.

After scrambling up and over a ten foot fence near the carport, she found a screwdriver on the ground. She used it to break through a window in back with only a TV blocking it from the inside. She pushed the TV down with her foot and it crashed on the hardwood floor. A quick jump down and she was in.

The beer-soaked carpets and smoke-saturated walls smelled like relief to her now that she was assured of finally seeing Dylan. The atmosphere was a trifle more dank than usual. She glanced around to see if any food had been left out. Not immediately spotting the source, she moved on.

“Dylan!” she called out, “Dylan!”

Still no answer.

As she glanced over at the front door, she was shocked at the measures he took to prevent anyone from getting to him. Chains were criss-crossed over the door with large pieces of wood and cinder blocks reinforcing a makeshift barricade. All windows were nailed shut. It was eternal night inside his home. In her head, Christy was sure Dylan wouldn’t really kill himself. He should have been well over his emotional breakdown at that point. She started up the stairs, and noticed a tiny note on the second step. Before she read it she spotted Dylan’s face peeking around the corner from the top of the stairs. She called up to him.

“Geez babe, why didn’t you answer the door?” She began to see his face more clearly through the dark.

His eyes were closed and his head was slumped over the rope that had choked him to death.

His body dangled in a squatting position as he hung from the outside of their bedroom door. Christy’s body was petrified in horror. Only her eyes were able to move; they scanned the rest of his body. Deep cuts and knife wounds swarmed almost the entire surface of his skin.

Wailing and writhing with grief, she attempted to approach his body for a final touch, to know this was really happening. But she was confronted with a presence so evil that dread seized her bones. She watched as a familiar shadow suspended itself over Dylan’s shoulders, as if it were trying to occupy his now soulless corpse. This shadow she had seen before.
When Christy moved in with Dylan she made the acquaintance with this spirit as she walked into their room upstairs to fold some laundry. She had frequent encounters with demonic voices and hallucinations since becoming a meth addict. They were easily dispelled by one fool-proof command: “I rebuke you in the name of Jesus. You have no authority here. I am covered by the blood of Jesus and you cannot touch me!” Christy watched the demonic shadow float from the closet to the bathroom, its presence laden with fear. She began to command it to leave, but the fear was so intense she was prevented from forming the name “Jesus” in her mouth. She stood staring at the apparition and made a mental agreement with it: Ok, you leave me alone, and I’ll shut my mouth about Jesus, deal?

The devil staring from behind Dylan’s shoulder had not kept its promise. Christy refused to make another move toward Dylan’s body.

Don’t take another step... just get out of here.

She scrambled back down the stairs and remembered the note. She pulled it from her back pocket, only wishing to have read it sooner:

Babe, please don’t go upstairs, Love Dylan.