

It was a warm midsummer night, and Elijah lay sleepless in his half-empty bed. Accepting the fact that he wouldn't be asleep anytime soon, he shifted the blankets off him and stood, the wood floor cold on his feet. He opened the window beside him, gazing into the miles of tall grass stretching to the horizon that expanded into a moonless sky. He loved the rural American Midwest, adored the isolation and the endless plains. It was the best place on Earth. Wind blew in, carrying the scent of a coming storm. Taking in a deep breath, he left his room and wandered the hallways.

His wife, Katherine, was in the kitchen of their home, and he could hear her pacing footsteps as he approached. She turned around and smiled sheepishly as she noticed him, "Hi, honey."

Eli placed a kiss on her forehead, hand brushing her pregnant belly. "You should be trying to sleep already, darlin'. It's late."

"I know," Katherine said, "but the baby's been kicking and I wanted some tea," she gestured to the kettle sitting atop the stove.

"Tea's nice, but don't let it keep you up all night." He ruffled her hair.

She nodded, turned away from him. Eli frowned. The whole day it was as if she was purposefully avoiding him. Probably nothing but a passing feeling, he hoped.

She mumbled under her lips— maybe a prayer, he couldn't tell, but she was cut off by the squeal of the kettle. She immediately poured out the water into a mug and dipped the teabag, taking a drink, and ignoring how it was mostly boiling water. Eli could see her hands shake as she brought the mug to her lips.

"You alright?" Eli asked, reaching up to brush her shoulder, only meeting air as Katherine moved away. She fiddled with the cross necklace at her chest.

After a bout of silence, Katherine finally said, "I know you've been cheating. With that Liza lady from church."

Eli met her eyes. Another broken bitch.

He opened his mouth, but his wife didn't let him get a word in, "Please, don't even try to play dumb. I just want to know why." Eli could see the tears gathering in her eyes.

He sighed and softened his eyes, slumped his shoulders. He took gentle steps towards her, hand raised like she was a wild animal that needed to be tamed— a dangerous creature needing to be soothed. She hated it. She hated *him*.

“Hey, now,” Eli said, voice low and smooth (though Katherine could hear its sharp edge), “no need to go around pointing fingers. How ‘bout we just calm ourselves down and get some sleep?”

“No, no...” Anger bubbled up inside her, years of torment coming to the surface. “I want to--”

He grabbed her wrist, pulling it away from the cross on her chest and towards him. He tightened his grip, digging his nails into her skin. “I *said*, we should get to bed.”

Katherine shook her head. He couldn’t force her to do anything this time. They stood in silence, glaring into each other’s eyes, silently daring the other to act first.

It was Katherine who tore her wrist from Eli’s grip, watery eyes still locked on him. Then, she started sobbing. She fell to her knees, the tile floor the only thing preventing her from sinking into the dirt. Eli backed away. Again, like she was a goddamn animal.

Eli only stared. When Katherine made no move to get off the floor, he went to the bedroom. He closed the window and though the door was closed, he could still hear his wife’s cries echo into the night.

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It was three o’clock in the morning when Eli awoke. Katherine was still gone from his bed. Stubborn whore, she must be.

His mouth was dry and the lack of sleep made his eyes heavy, yet he was too awake now to bother trying again. He hauled himself onto his feet. A breeze blew through his hair through the open window. He walked over, brow furrowing. His hands reached to shut it, but he paused. The night was darker than it had been. The fields outside were still—windless—and shadows clung to every crevice.

An uneasy feeling rose within Eli, something he couldn’t place. As he stared out into the expanse before him, he could’ve sworn he saw someone move out of the corner of his eye among the grass. There and gone again before he could process. Katherine must be having one of her fits again, running around in tears like she usually did after he’s stern with her. Though, whatever

he saw didn't look like her at all. Taller, skinner, longer hair. The image of his ex-wife came to mind, but he brushed it off as a trick of the dark. She was long dead, and he was all the better for it.

Behind him, a floorboard creaked. He jumped, only to see Katherine, her face still stained with tears.

"Sorry, honey. I went to get a drink of water." She stood shyly, hands behind her back and head down like a child.

Eli slammed the window shut and Katherine flinched. "I hope you've learned your lesson." She nodded, lips pursed. "Now let's see if we can actually sleep." He collapsed into bed, not bothering to see if she followed.

Katherine crept to the edge of the bed, Eli sleeping on the opposite side. She was so close. She brought her hands forward. The kitchen knife she held in them shone even in the dark, yet it trembled as she brought it closer to Eli's heart. No, his neck would work better. She moved it up. She pressed the tip to his skin, only the barest bit of force.

Eli's eyes snapped open and he jumped, drawing a line of red across his shoulder. He whipped his head towards his wife, fury burning in his eyes, "What the fuck?"

Katherine cowered, backing away. They were on opposite sides of the bed, a queen size mattress keeping the two apart. Nothing felt farther.

"What were you trying to do?" Eli demanded, his fists balling and a vein in his forehead protruding. When she didn't answer, he yelled louder. "Answer me!"

Katherine looked at the weapon in her hand and back at her husband. She was tired. So, so tired.

She let the words fall out. "You think I ever wanted to be this? You think I ever wanted to be a wife? A mother? I never did! Never..." She trailed off, lip trembling. All the years of hatred had come to this. She had loved him, the juvenile pursuits of a teenage girl who thought being with an older man made her mature. When she said her vows, just barely 18, she thought it would be forever. She couldn't have been further from the truth. Ghosts of old bruises stung her skin and she reminded herself: he never loved her. She knew she was right about that.

God forgive her.

She lunged across the bed, teeth bared and a strangled cry escaping her throat, but Eli was quicker as he dodged the blade and sprinted out of the

bedroom into the living room for the single landline that sat in their house. The singular source of connection with any other people for miles. But just as he reached for the handset, Katherine swiped at the cord. Sparks flew like the smallest fireworks from the exposed wires.

“Jesus fucking Christ, you psycho bitch! What’s wrong with you?!”

Katherine swiped at him, eyes wide in adrenaline repressed rage . Eli only stepped back and back again, narrowly dodging her attempts. It was almost a dance with the way they moved around the house. It was almost beautiful.

The dance continued, but Katherine could not and would not let him leave with his life. He could plead, beg, but she knew it would end with blank and soulless eyes. It had to.

She cornered him in the kitchen. Eli backed against a corner, chest heaving and eyes darting. Katherine approached, hair matted to her forehead, blood across her lip and dripping from a head wound. Despite her pregnant body, she had been fast. Unnaturally so. Eli would’ve never expected her to be so capable, to not be so pathetically helpless. But, looming in front of him, she had power over him for the first time. Shadows crossed his vision, blurry, but soon they settled into a shape behind Katherine. A person. Pale, dull skin marked by something dark and dripping, and her neck bent at an unnatural angle.

Katherine kept the blade by her side, only asking, “Why?” When she spoke, there were two voices.

Eli didn’t answer, balling his fist and taking the opportunity to punch her across the jaw with a sickening crack. He squeezed his way under her arm, sprinting to the front door. He was fast, but Katherine—cheered on by fury—was just barely faster. She tackled him, pulling them both to the ground with a thud. With Eli pinned under her, she raised the knife above her head.

She hesitated. Nothing more than a moment, a single second that seemed to stretch into her personal type of forever. And as she brought her blade down, she felt another pair of hands guiding her towards her mark, a second heartbeat in her chest. Like her guardian angel.

Eli’s eyes widened, “Devils! Devils, both of y—”

Katherine’s knife pierced his neck, digging into the muscle. Deep scarlet erupted from within, covering her hands. Red bubbled from his mouth as tears started to form in fading eyes. She stabbed him again, and again, and again, lost in ecstasy. Finally, his eyes stared up into nothing. Open but unseeing.

Katherine stared at what she had done. She hauled herself to her feet, taking a moment to breathe. And then, she screamed. A raw, hoarse cry made up of every single emotion she had ever felt. She shouted until it was painful, and even then she continued a bit more.

Sparks crackled from the other room, she waited until she saw flames dancing across the hardwood. With her vision clouded from tears and blood, she took ahold of the cross at her neck and snapped it off, throwing it on Eli's corpse.

May God have no mercy on his soul.

Katherine left through the back door. With the stench of smoke and old memories behind her, the house went up in flames. She limped ahead. Under the moonless night sky, she couldn't help but smile.