



February 2019

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Recommended Citation

Barnett, Erin (2019) "Tragedy or Triumph," *SWOSU Sayre Student Anthology*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 7 , Article 28.
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/sayre_student_anthology/vol1/iss7/28

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Tragedy or Triumph

By Erin Barnett

It was a cold, dark evening in January seven years ago, as my boyfriend and I sat quietly in the front room of our home watching some ridiculous horror film. With every tick of the clock, the tension between us screamed louder than the frightened victims in the movie. Of course, I knew I couldn't leave, because on previous occasions, he had threatened to kill my entire family *and me* if I did.

I gazed into the keeper of time that was mounted above the fireplace in the front room of our home as I thought, "What is he so angry about now? We have a new baby at home. Surely, he won't . . ." An unexpected "ding" on his phone jolted me out of my thoughts as it alerted him of a new message. I used that distraction to get up to slip into another room with our baby for a few moments of peace. He was a pillar of stone, studying his message, motionless, as I maneuvered myself around him and managed to flee into the nursery.

After tending to my daughter, I inched my way back into the living room alone to find it completely empty. He had left the house without saying a word. I called him several times, and he rejected each call. Livid that he would continue to treat me so poorly, I lashed out at him through text, declaring, "Where are you? Cheating on me, I'm sure." Hours passed. Angry, emotionally drained, feeling abandoned, I unleashed my anger on him without much of a response from him. However, when I finally got his attention, I was filled with an unshakeable regret.

In a moment's time, Kevin burst through the front door like a

predator seeking his prey. Reeking of tequila and lime, his darkened eyes zeroed in on his target --me. I stood frozen with my baby girl in my arms. Unsure what to do next, I whimpered part of an apology as he hurled a piece of plastic he was chewing on at my face. He nearly struck our baby, so I scurried away into the nursery hoping the worst was over. I managed to feed her for a few minutes before the blood-thirsty predator reappeared from around the corner. I staggered to my feet clenching my daughter closely. I attempted to reason with him,

but his emotions remained untouched. I knew there was a volcano brewing beneath his surface, and it would soon be erupting.

Suddenly, he commenced kicking and slapping me repeatedly. Still holding our baby girl, I pleaded for his mercy.

"Stop! PLEASE! Let me put her down and you can do whatever you want to me!"

"Okay. Put her down then, stupid bitch."

I turned my focus toward my bright-eyed baby as I slowly placed her in the basinet. I prayed that if only one life was saved that night, then it would be hers. I turned slowly to face Kevin as I awaited

my punishment.

Immediately, he clutched his hands around my shoulders and hurled me onto the bed arranged next to the basinet. He mounted himself atop me and struck my left bicep about six times. With him be-

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In a second's time, he began
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ing at least twice my size and strength, I knew it was only a matter of time before my humerus bone snapped. How ironic, I think, looking back. I attempted to roll to my right side to take some heat from my left arm just as he stopped. I wondered if it was over, only to be swiftly reminded that the hand of the devil had additional plans in store.

Before I could recover from the blows my arm had just taken, he demanded that I give him my phone. I reluctantly obliged to avoid further conflict, and he allowed me to continue feeding our daughter. He phoned my sister, Jennifer, who was in no mood to deal with his threats. They verbally bashed each other, as threats echoed through my home.

"I'll kill her first, and then come for you!" he screamed. My sister didn't take his threat lightly.

"If you hurt her, not only will you go to jail, but our brother and Ian will return from the war just to keep you away from her!" she screamed, inadvertently informing him of another man interested in freeing me from the wraths of his hold, as well. As that thought sank in, Kevin locked his eyes on mine as he turned to question me.

"Who's Ian, Erin?"

My eyes widened with shock and despair. She had not only told him of a possible escape plan, but she had also triggered another button on the maniac at large. Our six-week-old baby wailed in desperation for peace, as she sensed the imminent threat. I cried out in a desperate attempt to avoid the madness.

"Stop, Jennifer! You're making it worse!" I cried.

Kevin then lowered the phone, furrowed his brows, then disappeared into the kitchen without a word. Turning to the screaming infant, I began feeding her again to calm her nerves as I hummed a soothing tune.

Moments later, Kevin emerged from the kitchen. This time he had a butcher's knife and sharpening rod in tow. With a joker-like smile plastered on his face, he slivered toward us as the sounds of metal scraping against each other screeched throughout the love-abandoned home.

Suddenly, he slipped while sharpening the knife. He sliced his left palm open instead! He groaned in pain and dropped the weapon at his feet. As he rose, I shook with fear watching his darkened eyes turn

solid black. In a second's time, he began smearing his blood on my face. My taste buds were flooded from the bitterness. He flung his blood at us and in every direction of the room. Desperate to keep her safe until I could call for help, I placed my frantic baby back in her basinet.

Once I was empty handed, he jerked me out of the room and dragged me toward the front door; his blood painted every room we passed. He hurled me out of our house, leaving his crimson traces of blood splattered on the front porch.

Alas, the Ada police department pounded on the back door requesting an answer. My sister had made a life-saving decision and alerted them of a possible violent situation.

Still susceptible to Kevin's control, though, I followed each command he gave me, as he assured me that if I said anything, then everyone I knew would pay. Obeying his orders, I turned out all the lights, locked the back door, and covered the bruising he'd left on my right arm a few nights before.

Several minutes had passed once I'd finished my tasks. Then I heard the officers announce a countdown to kick in the door. Kevin's blood on the porch gave them the authority to force entry. Their countdown sang out like a death sentence to Kevin, but a hymnal to me; and the song was almost over.

"Three . . . two . . . one!" yelled the officer. BOOM! The door frame was busted to pieces as my saviors invaded the torture chamber that I knew as home. With guns drawn on their suspect, they were forced to wrestle him to the ground and arrest him for assault and battery.

With this being an extremely traumatic experience, I realize now that I'm not alone. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence website, "Nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men." Once I became engulfed in his web of lies, chaos, and threats, it became more difficult for me to leave. One of my biggest mistakes was believing my love for him could change his ways. I am now fully aware that abusers don't stop. If there are initial signs of aggression in a relationship, like biting or pinching, PEOPLE MUST RUN!

Aggression progresses to violence, and being the subject of violence can lead to either a tragedy . . . or a triumph.