

He asked me to marry him under a full moon. I felt like he'd handed it to me as he slipped a shining circle on to my finger. As he held me, I felt so warm and safe, as though no one could ever hurt me as long as he was around. He had a dark softness to him that I'd never seen before – it was like the moment chocolate melts. We were going to take care of each other. Sure, my family were worried. We were young, but what's the difference between being nineteen or thirty? They just didn't like him because he wasn't afraid to call them out when they were wrong. He spoke his mind and my parents had taken great care to make sure their kids didn't. One time, I remember, we had them round for dinner and he turned to my mother like a snake and said, 'You stick your head in to check on my chops one more time and I'll shove this spatula down yours'. They just blinked at him, while I had my face pressed into my napkin so hard I thought I might choke on it, trying not to laugh. 'You stick your head in to check on my chops one more time and I'll shove this spatula down yours'. We were married in the beautiful little church where my baby sister was buried. She hadn't made it out of a fever, but I wanted her there to celebrate that day. She must have still been contagious because it was so hot by noon that I almost sweated my dress off walking through those pews. He took it off anyway. Later I mean. When we were alone. I didn't have to touch a thing before he'd taken me.

The first year of our marriage was a difficult transition. I'd never lived with a man before, but he was very patient and helped me learn how to be his wife. I mean, I didn't even know how to iron shirts properly. I usually put in more creases than I took out, but he bore it all so gently. He did lose his temper a little, just a little, this one time, and in his hurry to correct me he may have accidentally knocked the iron on to my leg. I got it under the water in no time at all though and had an ice pack on it for days, so it barely left a scar, don't worry. He was so apologetic; it still makes me laugh to think of it. Shortly after our first anniversary, I fell pregnant. It was a tremendous and, at times, overwhelming joy. We didn't have much money and I think he was a tiny bit angry with me for letting it happen. He was so caring though; He insisted I stop going to work because I deserved to have my feet up and took on so many extra chores around the house, like sorting out the bills and taking over our savings account. I lived like a queen, really. I let that go to my head and started taking too much time for myself. One night, Carol, a friend from work, she called me up and asked if I wanted to come out for a non-alcoholic cocktail with the old group. He was down at the pub, blowing off some steam, so I thought, well why shouldn't I? I came back, still giggling through the door, when it hit me. I don't mean metaphorically, I mean my polka dot mug came flying out of the air and hit me across here. It didn't hurt that much really, just left a few small bruises and scars, but it was the wake-up call I needed. What was I doing, out on the town, just a few months away from being a mother? It was unjustifiable and, more importantly, it was unfair on my husband, who had taken up the slack specifically so that I could rest. I didn't tell anyone about it – especially my parents, because I knew what they'd say. Probably would have told me to leave him. Yeah, sure, and push one out on the street; umbilical mess mixing with the grey puddles of pavement.

He did hit me more after that. Never too hard though, and never when I didn't deserve it. Sometimes, at first I couldn't see what it was that I'd done wrong, but it always became clear to me once I'd actually thought about it. He never did anything for no reason. He definitely didn't mean for me to fall. It was my fault. I was trying to pull away. If I hadn't pulled away then I wouldn't have slipped. It's silly to mess around like that near stairs. I shouldn't have done it. *(Pause)* It's weird to think that I'd be a mum right now if I hadn't been so stupid. Can you imagine, a little baby in my arms? Putting on her little socks and taking off her tiny cardigans. Finding her fingers and hands and

feet and toes. He would have been a wonderful father. He just would have been so sweet and gentle because she wouldn't have done anything wrong. How could she? Babies are perfect.

That's why I can understand what he did. That night. When I didn't want to be touched. When I was still bleeding. When I was still missing myself. When I was still undone and done up. When he inched off my frozen underwear. When he told me to stop crying. When he told me he'd cut me if I made a sound. When he told me to open my legs. When he broke open my legs. When he told me it didn't matter. When he told me he was fucking me. When he told me to stop crying. Stop crying. When he didn't stop.

When he told me it wasn't rape.

In my head, in the part of me he couldn't reach, in an endless cycle, I played a tape, 'Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Of course I would forgive him. Of course would let go of what happened. Of course I would still be here. Where else would I go?

I am a wife.

He is my home.

My shelter.