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The Darkness Within

Written by Lisa Stone

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Chapter One

It was always worse when he'd had a beer or two. That Feeling. Hot, urgent and raw, tearing through him. Making him restless, argumentative. Angry. It was as though something or someone took control of him, forcing him to act badly, to be nasty and cruel. It happened when someone had a go at him, took the piss or said something he didn't like.

The feeling was there at other times too, Shane had to admit, but it was worse when he'd had a drink. It didn't take much; just a few beers. He wasn't an alcoholic, but it lowered his guard enough to allow his anger to come to the surface.

It was because of his childhood, Rosie said. They'd moved in together four months ago, and on the whole she was sympathetic. In some respects, she was too understanding for her own good. She was a good person and he liked her, even told her he loved her when she asked.

But why didn't she realize that the kinder and more understanding she became, the easier it was for him to overstep the mark?

It almost incited him to do it. Yet she continued to be understanding despite what he did to her: hitting her, making her scream, cry out and beg for mercy. Afterwards he knew that it wasn't the gentlemanly way to act, but when he was angry and out of control he didn't care a fuck for the gentlemanly way.

Anger, resentment, the feeling that he wasn't good enough brewed together in an unwholesome concoction and made him act as he did. He sensed that others felt he was inferior to them; that he was uneducated, stupid, and fair game to laugh at. That was the worst feeling – that they were laughing at him, especially when it was someone he knew taking the piss. It made him so angry that he couldn't be held responsible for his actions. This had got him into trouble many times and then recently he'd smashed a bottle and glassed his best mate, Kevin, which had put him in prison. They'd been drinking and telling jokes and Kevin had told one which he hadn't immediately grasped. Kevin had laughed and called him a dickhead. The others had laughed too, which didn't help, but he expected more from Kevin, being his best mate. Then before he realized what he was doing he'd smashed the top off a bottle and had ground it in Kevin's face.

He looked at Rosie now, cowering in the corner of the bedroom, the one that was theirs since he'd moved in. Why she'd let him move in he wasn't sure, but he was

pleased she had. It was kind of her, but then Rosie was kind. He could admit that even now when she'd got on his nerves and made him hit her. Had she been a horrible bitch, a slag, like his mother, he could have better justified hitting her. He'd gone to his mother's house first on his release from prison but she hadn't wanted him. No surprise there; she'd never wanted him, not even as a baby. The shrink he'd seen in prison had said his mother could be part of his problem – his anger stemmed from her lack of nurturing and ultimate rejection of him. But it couldn't be helped. No one was perfect; not his mother or even Rosie for all her kindness and forgiveness.

The bedroom had been decorated in pale pink when he'd first moved in. 'Yuck,' he'd said to her when he'd first seen it, and she'd laughed.

'Jesus!' he'd exclaimed as he'd looked at her collection of china dolls in period costumes arranged on a small satin-covered chair. 'Dolls in my bedroom! What do you take me for? A nancy boy?'

He'd told her the dolls would have to go, but she hadn't understood to begin with because they were still there for another two days. Then he'd got angry that she hadn't done as he'd told her and he'd thrown the dolls and the chair across the room.

He might even have thrown Rosie, but he wasn't sure. He'd been in a really bad temper at the time. What normal bloke has dolls in his bedroom? He'd asked her nicely to remove them, and he'd had a couple of beers that night when he'd hit her so he couldn't be held entirely responsible

for his actions. Perhaps on another day when he'd been in a better mood he might simply have asked her again to remove them. In any event, the dolls and the frilly chair had gone, together with the flowery duvet cover and the matching pillowcases. She'd heard him the first time when he'd told her to get rid of those, and together they'd chosen plain white.

He liked white, it was pure and virginal, which made him feel good and think happy thoughts. The only problem with white – as it turned out – was that it showed every mark, and the bloodstains never completely disappeared. Even when Rosie scrubbed the stains over and over again and used bleach, the blood spots greyed but were still faintly visible. Once white was damaged it was spoiled for ever.

Now he saw her gaze shift to the fresh spots of blood on the duvet cover. 'Sorry,' she said, her voice quivering. 'It'll wash out.'

'No, it won't,' he said. 'You've ruined it.'

'I'm sorry,' she said again. Seeing her cowering in the corner, apologizing with her face covered with blood, reignited his anger. He felt nearly as hot and uncomfortable as when he'd discovered that all the beer had gone from the fridge. He'd only had a few bottles and had been expecting to find more. It was a Saturday night for fuck's sake, and if a bloke couldn't have a few drinks on a Saturday, what was the world coming to?

It was Rosie's job to shop, to buy what they needed and restock what they were low on. But she hadn't bought more beer or vodka because of some silly discussion they'd

had after the last time he'd hit her about him drinking less. He couldn't remember agreeing to that, it seemed highly unlikely, so he'd been bitterly disappointed at the lack of alcohol. He'd been anticipating a pleasant Saturday evening in with Rosie – a few beers, a takeaway, and then sex. He liked having sex with Rosie but she'd ruined it all. When he asked where the beer and vodka were she reminded him of his promise. It was the wrong thing to say; his disappointment had exploded into anger and he'd hit her. He hadn't meant to split her lip and send splatters of blood across the white duvet cover. It had just happened.

He appreciated that she wanted space now. After they'd argued and he'd hit her she usually needed time alone to wash her face, clean up the flat and change her clothes, so that when he returned all evidence of their disagreement had gone. She would cover the bruising on her face with make-up and all traces of blood would vanish. He didn't like any reminders of what he'd done.

'We're out of beer,' he said. 'I'll go and buy some. Do you want anything?' He was feeling a bit better now.

She shook her head.

'OK. Won't be long,' he said jovially and left.

Chapter Two

'Fuck! It's raining,' Shane said as he stepped out of the block of flats. He didn't like the rain. Getting wet reminded him of when his mother had left him for a whole night in a bath of cold water, because he'd said something bad.

Rosie's car was parked by the kerb. It was their car now. He used it whenever he wished. She'd given him the keys to the car and her flat when he'd come out of prison and moved in. She was good like that, he had to admit. He really shouldn't have hit her so hard, but he'd make it up to her. He'd buy her some of her favourite chocolate, he decided as he opened the car door and tucked himself in. That would please her and make it OK. Arguments upset him and reminded him of his childhood, so a few beers for him and some chocolate for her and their evening would be back on track.

As he started the car and then switched on the wind-

screen wipers, he briefly wondered if he might be over the legal drink-drive limit. He'd had three premium-strength beers. Was that enough to do it? He doubted it. But just to be on the safe side he wouldn't drive into town, he'd go to the hypermarket instead, which was along a less-used route. The police wouldn't be patrolling out there, stopping and randomly breathalyzing motorists; they'd have more pressing matters to attend to in town on a Saturday night. It was a bit further to drive but better to be safe than sorry. He didn't want another spell in prison. He'd already spent too much time inside and wasn't going back there any time soon, not now his life was good and things were looking up. He liked living with Rosie in her nice flat and driving her car. It made him feel normal, someone, like others he knew. That was one of the reasons he hadn't told her he'd already lost his licence for driving while under the influence of drugs and alcohol. He wanted to be able to hold his head proud, and then perhaps his mother would be proud of him too.

The only fly in the ointment was the age and model of Rosie's car. It was old and small. He was a big chap and had to stoop to get in, and he could never get the driver's seat comfortable. His head nearly touched the roof. It was a car designed for a woman or the elderly, not a man. To feel really proud a bloke needed a new car that reflected him – big and powerful – and a dark colour, not light blue. This wasn't at all good for his image. He didn't mean to sound ungrateful but it just wasn't right for him, and the car was well past its use-by date. Not that Rosie

minded. She loved her car, treasured it, and when he'd told her they should buy a new one, she'd said she couldn't afford it, which had niggled him. Surely having a decent powerful car was a priority, but he supposed that was women for you. They'd rather buy clothes or a handbag. But he'd work on her and persuade her. She'd see he was right in the end.

At least the engine wasn't completely fucked, he thought as he accelerated. She still had some power in her, probably because she hadn't done many miles. It took her a while to get up to speed but with his foot firmly down, she understood and responded. He did this a lot when he was alone in the car – pushed her to the limit. Once he'd done it with Rosie in the passenger seat, when he'd dropped her off at work. He'd put his foot down hard, making the tyres screech and the engine squeal, and the car hadn't been the only one to protest! 'Treat Betsy kindly, she's getting old,' Rosie had said. He'd laughed scornfully. Betsy! He referred to cars as 'she' but to give it a name was pathetic.

He'd laughed loudly, perhaps a bit harshly, but had eased his foot off the throttle. Not so much from any desire to treat Betsy kindly – cars, like women, needed to be worked – but because he'd been doing seventy in a thirty and there was a speed camera ahead. So he'd slowed to the limit. If he was caught on camera, they'd discover he was banned from driving, and that would ruin everything.

After that he never thrashed Betsy in the town or where there was any chance of being caught. He drove steadily,

within the speed limit, and while not exactly courteous to other road users he made sure he kept his rage under control and didn't draw attention to himself by getting out and thumping anyone.

Thankfully there was no need for all that polite constraint nonsense now. The road he was on didn't have speed cameras so he could thrash Betsy to bits if he wished. And Rosie wasn't with him to protest so everyone was happy. It gave him pleasure, a thrill; the ultimate blow job as she sucked up the road. He'd done it before on this stretch when he'd been alone. Race her, press her to the limit and see what she could do. He was a racing-car driver, the best in his field, zooming around the track. A Formula One driver leading the way and well ahead of the others in the Grand Prix. He could picture it, see the crowds waving and cheering, the look of admiration on their faces as he flashed past, skilfully taking another bend with the minimum drop in speed, the smallest deceleration required to keep him on the track and in the lead. You couldn't let up if you wanted to stay ahead of the rest. Sometimes he swerved to avoid an oncoming car. Idiots! Didn't they know he was in the race? The number one leader. Admired, respected and revered by men and women alike.

He swerved again, narrowly missing another oncoming car. 'Get out the fucking way, you prick,' he yelled, sounding his horn, and cursing their existence for slowing him up.

The road was poorly lit and the rain didn't help; driving on full beam, he was still forced to slow to take the next

bend, which was a bummer. He really would have to talk to Rosie again about getting a new car, with better roadholding. He would explain that the new models were safer as they were lower and gripped the road better. Safer for them both to drive. That was the way to tackle it – women appreciated and understood talk of safety, not powerful engines. He felt very clever for having thought of the best way to approach Rosie about the idea. Perceptive, intuitive, that's what he was, and it made him feel smart and proud.

The windscreen wipers continued their relentless journey back and forth as he pictured himself in his new car. A black one, large, big wheels, with presence and a hint of mystery. He would have liked blacked-out windows but they were illegal now, so he'd have to settle for the darkest tint that was available. Yes, he could see himself at the wheel of that large powerful black car. He'd start visiting garages on Monday while Rosie was at work and test-drive what he liked the look of. The salesman would be so grateful when he showed interest in a decent car and then struck a deal.

Headlights came towards him. What the fuck! Was someone trying to overtake? No – it was a wide vehicle, he realized too late as he slammed on the brakes and pulled the wheel hard left to try to get out of its way. A delivery lorry. A fucking delivery lorry! He felt the whiplash in his neck at the exact moment he heard the crunch of metal and the sound of shattering glass. In a split second, almost simultaneously, the wipers stilled, his headlights

went out and he felt as though he was flying through the air, up and over and then down.

'Fuck!' he cried as the car landed on its roof and the pain shot through him. 'Fuck you!' Then his world went very dark and silent as he blacked out.