Why Did You Stay?

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A memoir about self-worth

Rebecca Humphries



SPHERE

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In order to maintain anonymity in some instances, the author has changed the names of certain individuals.

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That love is all there is, is all we
know of love

EMILY DICKINSON

My name is Rebecca Humphries and I am not a victim.

I wasn't sure whether to respond to events from the past week, but I feel the narrative has missed a couple of crucial elements that I would like to clear up.

It's incredibly good of Him and the dancer to apologise in the media. I have received nothing, other than the support of my family, friends, and a host of strangers on the internet who all wanted to make sure I was OK. What I have also kindly received are many offers to sell my side of the story, but I would prefer for it to be on my own terms.

Those pictures were taken on October 3rd. It was my birthday. I was alone at home when He texted at 10pm saying the two of them were going for one innocent drink. We spoke and I told Him, not for the first time, that His actions over the past three weeks had led me to believe something inappropriate was going on. He aggressively, and repeatedly, called me a psycho / nuts / mental. As He has done countless times throughout our relationship when I've questioned His inappropriate, hurtful behaviour.

But – this whole business has served to remind me that I am a strong, capable person who is now free; and no victim. I have a voice, and I will use it by saying this to any woman out there who deep down feels worthless and trapped with a man they love.

Believe in yourself and your instincts. It's more than lying. It's controlling. Tell some very close friends who, if they're anything like my wonderful network, will swoop in and take care of the logistics and of you.

It's important also to recognise that in these situations those who hold power over you are insecure and fragile, and their need for control comes from a place of vulnerability. I think it certainly does in His case. Despite everything, I hope He gets what He wants from this. I'm not sorry I took the cat though.

Love, Rebecca
8.18PM – Oct 8, 2018 – Twitter Web Client

4.7k comments 15.7k retweets 84.7k likes

Replying to @Beckshumps
If he was that bad, why did you stay eh?

Author's Note

I never wanted to write a book. All I ever really want to do, at any given moment, is dance about to gay songs. But I need to. I need to do it because several years after surviving a relationship (one that culminated in the bin-fire of all break-ups), I am still seeing with my own eyes some of the coolest, cleverest, sexiest women allowing their brilliance to be drained in the name of love. I need to do it because, as Jane Fonda says, 'Once you know what's wrong and you stay silent, you're part of the problem.'

And although no one *actually* has to answer a BS, victim-shaming question like 'Why Did You Stay?', I hope that my choice to reclaim it will empower anyone who feels as lonely in their story as I once did in mine.

But this is as much a story of how I left it behind me as why I stayed. Because what defines you in life isn't what happens to you, but how you deal with it. I'm sure anyone who has ever experienced difficulty will attest that in their darkest moment, a part of them – an astonishing, resilient, actually quite iconic part they never knew existed – stepped out of the shadows. This is a book about how to hold on to that part moving forward.

I fully acknowledge this is a story from my perspective, and that everybody else featured will have a perspective of their own. Some of the names in this book have been changed to protect identities, and some people's names I haven't mentioned but

you're going to know who they are anyway. I will definitely, definitely piss some of them off with all this. When certain people read it and think, *She's written that bit about me*, not all of them will be right, but some will. To those of them who are right, and who aren't very happy about it, I do understand because I probably wouldn't be happy either. I hope, though, that they will at least accept my right to express my version of events (as some of them have done already).

Finally, to anybody that feels this book has been inspired by their actions, I would just like to say:

> I am sorry if what I've included makes you feel bad.
> But I humbly accept your gratitude
> for the things I have graciously opted
> to omit.

I Left

Because, finally, the truth

At around 11:30 p.m. on 6 October 2018, my worst nightmare came true while standing in a car park.

The date is easy to remember because it was three days after my thirty-second birthday. My friend Theo describes my energy as 'a Diva everybody said was washed up on a sold-out arena tour', which is to say, a total slag for attention. But this year my birthday went uncelebrated. And I hadn't seen Theo in months.

Anyway, I'm in this car park, which is outdoors, and it's raining dribbly 'neither here nor there' rain. My umbrella is *in*doors, specifically a gazebo 15 feet to my left that's fizzing over with revelry and mutual fluffing.

'You were AMAZING!'

'YOU were amazing!'

The light from inside it is bleeding on to the wet tarmac, making the puddles on the ground brighter than the sky. I think that they look like spotlights, and am quite pleased with myself for connecting the showbiz dots. I am not standing in a spotlight, of course. I'm barely visible here in a dark bit, which is deliberate but not my choice.

The car park in question is one of many inside BBC Elstree Studios. Growing up I had expectations of television studios. I used to imagine the BBC as somewhere I could saunter down the street from *EastEnders*, then turn a corner and dodge bullets

from a cop show, then a gaggle of feathery showgirls would teeter past like flamingos while somebody yelled 'ACTION!' into a big cone. It isn't. The fact is it's functional – a vast network of giant metal sheds with people in North Face jackets bombing around. A place where television gets done, rather than where magic gets made. That said, I did once walk past Tom Jones by a Portaloo.

Stood directly opposite me is my boyfriend.

I'm always freezing even when it's hot, but especially tonight because I'm wearing a new dress, £200 give or take (it's give, it's always give), which is roughly the size of a cobweb and just as thin. In expensive shops the price tag is often attached with a safety pin, making it really easy to take things you can't afford back after the weekend, so long as you've avoided red wine, haven't been anywhere too sweaty and given it a good Febreze. I've taken to doing this for the last few weeks – returning things after wearing them at the weekend (or 'borrowing', as I prefer to call it). I haven't had a job in a very long time and am quite skint, and the thing is for the past few weekends I have been mingling with VIPs, each and every one of them dripping in opulence. I myself am no VIP, not even an IP. Just a P, and a fraud, but at least I'm well dressed.

I should explain.

Earlier tonight I was sitting in the audience at the studio of *Strictly Come Dancing*, and the boyfriend standing opposite me was one of the celebrities competing in it. *Strictly Come Dancing* is the biggest show on UK television. Forgive me if you already know this; rest assured, I know how you feel. I myself am reminded almost daily. Lots of the time it's when He staggers home from rehearsals after 10 p.m.

'It's the biggest show on television!' He goes.

The 'biggest show on television' part is spoken in italics, and it quite often feels as though the words are sweeties for

the speaker to have a good suck on rather than information for a recipient. Still, I got the message. The stakes are high, millions watch it live, no one wants to screw up. There's a good chance I'd be on the biggest show on television too if He referred to me in His thank-you address to the camera, which is something that the celebrities often do. 'I couldn't have done it without my wife/husband/partner', etc., camera cuts to a beaming face in the crowd. For the last four weeks it hasn't happened in my instance, but I've been wearing a new dress every time just in case. I have paired this one with flat black Chelsea boots. I toyed with sharp stilettos, which are less 'me' but more feminine. In general, though, I always try to avoid anything that gives me more length or girth at *Strictly*, as around the women who appear on the show I often feel like the only manatee at Mermaid Lagoon. That's in physical terms, of course. Personality wise I am much smaller, more like a mouse looking through its hiding place at all the bendy, confident cats licking their own genitals.

And tonight it happened! The dress and me got our airtime! I had been standing and clapping and crying when a big stick on wheels topped with a big black cuboid was urgently skidded right in front of my face. His paso doble had just ended, and He'd done a really great job, which was unusual as He was usually quite crap. Dancing is not part of His professional remit, to be fair. He's a stand-up comedian, so most of His job involves, well, standing up, but relatively still and on His own. Last week, in particular, He royally mucked up a jive, which are hectic at the best of times, and had to wince His way through the judges' comments, when one of them gave Him a three (that's out of ten, for anyone who has never watched it. It's bad). I say all this to illustrate just how triumphant His paso was this evening. In *Strictly* terms, doing a great job after everyone has written you off is the Holy Grail – you become the underdog the audience

roots for, you're Erin Brockovich, or the Jamaican bobsleigh team in *Cool Runnings*.

Incidentally, the paso doble is a Latin dance that depicts a fierce, four-minute fight to the death. The story of each number centres around the male, who takes the role of matador: grounded, controlled and muscular. His eyes burn into the female/bull, who whips up a wild display around him, tearing his arms off her body one moment and begging him 'tame me!' the next. When done well, it's like the sexiest row you've ever had, and reminds me of a quote from Colette Dowling: *Relationships are like a dance, with visible energy racing back and forth between the partners. Some relationships are the slow, dark dance of death.*

So, this car park.

My boyfriend standing opposite me is dressed in black as always. When we started going out five and a half years ago He used to dress in vibrant blues that matched His eyes, because, in His words, 'I'm happy now, so I should probably stop dressing like somebody died.' I can't remember when He went back to wearing black. I can't remember when I stopped noticing His eyes were blue.

His dance partner was wearing black tonight as well, on the telly. A black leather catsuit, with black feline make-up applied by the best in the business. She looked like the type of woman you should be worried your boyfriend was playing the matador to. This isn't really about her, though.

Here the pair of us stand, anyway, in the dark, on the cusp of a nightmare.

'What's going on?' I ask His maybe blue eyes, wondering what I've done.

'Where are you sleeping tonight?' He asks the air over my shoulder.

Something in the gazebo smashes, the cheers waft out and

coil around us. He continues to stare over my shoulder. I'm still staring at His eyes.

'Um, at home?' I say it like it's obvious cos it is, cos I live there. That's where I sleep.

'No you're not.'

'I – I don't . . . What?'

I'm doing that thing where I free-fall standing upright. I try to ground myself by tasting my breath. Marlboro Gold washed down with the champagne I cheerfully glugged when His agent suggested He 'take her over there and tell her'. I slick my tongue around my teeth and try to focus on what is real rather than allowing my unreliable, erratic, overly emotional mind to fly to its default state: 'ways to punish myself for being myself': *Your contour looks like sideburns, like Wolverine, not enough cheekbones, too much thigh, should've gone spinning, should start checking calories, look at the women here, these are proper women, these are what women are meant to be.*

Brutal, obviously, but. It feels good, doing the thing you're best at.

He emits a feral 'UGGGHHH!', interrupting my thoughts just as they're getting going.

And I will never forget this silence. Between His exhausted bellow to the sky and the following sentence, told to His own outline on the wet tarmac.

'The *Sun* have got pictures of me and the dancer kissing.'

A beat. Then I say, 'Oh.'

'And I have to get the fuck out of here before her husband hits me.'

Huh.

Strange.

I feel . . .

I *feel*.

'I'm coming with you,' I say.

'No you're fucking not!' He wasn't expecting that. Me, speaking like somebody who had been right. His eyes flick up at mine for the first time.

I step towards Him, and into a spotlight.

'*I am.*'

I Stayed