

The Release  
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As my mother's car slowed to a stop, my stomach was full of butterflies. I was so nervous. I didn't want to see his face, and even the thought of it created the feeling of sandpaper in my throat. My mom interrupted my thoughts with a calm and loving touch. I looked out the window to take in my surroundings. It was a gorgeous sunny day, and I could feel the warmth from the sun coming in the passenger window. My mom slowly eased her small black sports car into a parking spot right in front of the courthouse, and it loomed over me like a haunted house in a Halloween movie. I opened the black folder I had on my lap and fingered through the pages, even though I knew exactly what was in that folder. I had carefully and meticulously constructed every inch of it.

I had always taken the brunt of his sinful ways. I had children to protect and was willing to take the pain for them. I know I didn't deserve this treatment, but they shouldn't have to see it either. Part of my heart was here for them today, to no longer endure the scenes of their mother's abuse. I wanted to tell him I'm not afraid of you anymore! Instead, I would let the courts handle him. I had all the proof I needed to demonstrate that he had hurt me repeatedly, and now I was ready to tell the world.

My thoughts were interrupted by my mom tapping on my passenger window. I gathered my things and stepped out of the car. I walked to the door with a quickened stride. I entered with my folder clenched tightly to my chest. My high heels echoed loudly across the shining floor of the court hallway until I approached the large wooden door to Courtroom 2. I stepped through the doorway into the large hollow room, and my eyes scanned for him. The Bailiff directed us to all rise as the judge took his seat. I could feel my heart beating out of my chest, and for a moment, I felt people could see the constant rhythm through my white blouse. I could feel him

standing next to me at the other podium. My mind went back to so many occasions when that voice was deep, and the evil things he said spewed out of his mouth like hot lava, stinging me with every word. The judge was an older man with wispy white hair and a soft-spoken voice that made me feel at ease as he directed his attention to me to speak on the charges of domestic violence. My stomach was a knot of nerves traveling up to my throat, and I could feel his compassionless eyes burning a hole into me. I approached the microphone slowly and mentally prepared myself for the minutes ahead. I placed my hands flat on the podium and could see the traces of a handprint from the sweat that accumulated on my palms. I opened my black folder and began.

It was the most challenging speech I had ever had to give in my life. I told story after story of how I was beaten and broken. He had physically, mentally, and emotionally scarred me. No one deserves to be treated the way I had been, and I was here to stand for it. As I finished reading my statement, the tears became inevitable. I could feel the warm salty drops stream down my cheeks and watched as each one left a perfect circle on the paper in front of me. The judge thanked me and I approached my mother, and she consumed me in her warm embrace. I felt slightly calm for a moment. The moment vanished quickly as my mind started to race.

The judge asked him to approach the microphone. I braced myself. The judge showed no expression as he listened to his story of exaggerations and excuses. As he concluded his statement, the judge politely thanked him. He then shot a glance in my direction, and I could feel his eyes piercing me like a hot brand. The seconds ticked by like hours as I looked on to see if I could see any telling expression on the judge's face. I felt as if I was at the top of a roller coaster and were only seconds from going over the edge. The judge then stiffly cleared his throat. The moment of truth.

The words almost came with a sort of echo when he spoke. The judge looked at him, and the words that followed were music to my ears. Guilty. As I continued to listen, my heartbeat began to slow to a more normal pace, and the happiness inside felt as if it would burst at the seams. I had done it; I again began to cry, but the tears were different this time. They were tears of happiness. I felt so many emotions at that moment. Satisfaction, accomplishment, relief, and many more. He got what he deserved, and I pursed my lips to keep from smiling.

As the case ended and the Bailiff directed us to leave the courtroom, I walked down the aisle to the large brown door again. My mom took my hand as we happily walked toward the exit. As I stepped outside into the fresh air, I took a deep breath and let it out. At that moment, I felt it leave me. I was finally able to release it. As I walked to the car, the world outside suddenly felt like a better place. As I plopped into the passenger seat my smile became permanent, and I had never felt so proud of myself. A day to remember as I continued to remind myself to leave it all behind. At that moment, the release I had been expecting came full circle.