

# *Chapter One*

*The* door swung open fiercely, almost coming off its hinges. Heavy thumping sounded on the floor as angry footsteps entered the house. An immense shadow cast its silhouette against the wall and floor. Backing away from the door, Angelica awaited her dark half. She had been in the kitchen preparing dinner, praying that she could make up for lost time and finish cooking prior to 6:00. With apprehension, she looked at the clock hanging adjacent to the door. Although the dew of perspiration stung her eyes and she had difficulty seeing, her blurred vision noted that the clock read 5:59 with the second hand rapidly racing toward the twelve. Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock the red hand raced. It seemed to synchronize with the throb of her heart. In what seemed like five seconds was sixty and the clock now read 6:00-simultaneously, she turned off the burners because dinner was ready to be served. "Just in time," she murmured with a sigh of relief. Her life revolved around being punctual, and dinner being served late was unacceptable. She hurriedly placed the dishes on the table, making certain that the utensils were in their proper place.

"Dinner is ready," she said in a voice so faint not even the sensitive ears of a trained canine could hear. Of course, this was not the utterance of a secret jamboree

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but a plea for mercy. Today was the first time in a long time that dinner was not ready at least fifteen minutes before it was due. Towered by his formidable size, Angelica is struck to the floor.

“Nooooo! Please, somebody help me!”

Her voice went unheard for there was no one around to hear her. Living in the country had its advantages and disadvantages. Privacy was one of the disadvantages, for these impetuous beatings went unheard and unnoticed most of the time. On a rare occasion, a nosey neighbor overheard her perilous screams or caught a glimpse of her horrid beatings to no avail because people simply minded their own business.

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Continuing to crouch in the corner while using her hands to shield her face, a series of blows descended upon her one after the other.

“Please stop,” she cried through the cave created by her arms encircling her head.

Again and again the blows came, crashing down with immense pressure to the top and back of her head. On occasion, when she came up for air, a blow would catch her already battered face. When he realized that she was protected from his fury, he snatched her up from her security position and flung her into the stove. The metal bit into her flesh and she let out a yelp. He raced toward her with one of his hands reaching out for her and the other clasped angrily in the air preparing to render a powerful blow. Angelica, realizing the impact that this blow would carry, tried to flee, but he caught her dress from behind and caused her to fall backward and strike the right upper portion of her head. A loud blunt sound followed and she lay lifeless on the floor. Angry eyes

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watched her with fury and rage, and his anger diminished. His God-given weapons had once again rained with hatred. Angelica lay unconscious on the floor with speckles of blood staining her blouse, the floor and the oven.

He now sat at the table swallowing the bitter liquid which had become the epitome of his destruction. His boss had just laid him off and there was no way he could feed his family. His job let him down and so did his wife. Every day he slaved for her, earning a living so that she wouldn't have to work. Most women would appreciate that, but not Angelica; she needed that sense of independence. Thinking over the events, he considered himself a reasonable man. He allowed her to have a job and mingle with her friends. His dad told him a long time ago that a woman's place was at home and the sooner you let her join the harlot gang, the sooner you'll lose her. A woman with friends can't be trusted. He had always been faithful to her and knew that she had dark secrets. For the past few weeks she had been getting home late and not having dinner ready. Her routine had changed and her preoccupation with the soaps had definitely altered her personality. She was looking and he knew it.

Angelica remained on the floor. Her eyelids were blackened and shut by the impact of his fists. Her body lay motionless on the floor. Ivan loathed what he had just done. Another day like many brought him home to terrorize his wife. His fists marked his strength and the emblem of his power. The voice he hadn't the guts to use in the workplace, he used to succumb the gentle, loving lamb that lie before him. No matter how hard he tried to justify to himself what he had just done, the outcome

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4 remained the same-she was a good woman and his mind was overreacting. His jealousy was making him crazy and his obsession to control her had become inherent. He wondered why he hadn't just punched his boss. Instead, as always, he came home and punished his wife for sticking by his side when he needed her the most. His fury subsided and the rage that had once again taken possession of him faded. He noticed the foil-covered pan on the stove along with two smoking pots. Ivan wondered what she had prepared for dinner, and he walked over to the stove to take a look. He lifted the cover to smell the pleasant aroma of freshly steamed vegetables; nicely browned ribs in a roasting pan were coated with homemade hickory smoked barbecue sauce. He could feel his stomach churning. Angelica knew her way around the kitchen and one thing she loved other than him was cooking. Dinner was never late and definitely not burned. Ivan hated burnt spots in his meals.

When the smell of his home cooked meal filled his lungs, Ivan looked to see why Angelica hadn't come to fix his plate. Normally she would bounce back into action, but this time she didn't even stir. He returned his attention to where his wife remained. He knelt to the floor and slid his hands underneath her back and thighs then raised her from the floor. He carried her to the bedroom and placed her on the bed. Looking at her face, he became troubled at the blood clogging her nostrils. He hurried to the bathroom and wet a towel with cold water, then returned to where Angelica was lying. Gingerly, he wiped at it until he had removed all traces of his ugly act. He didn't mean to hurt her, he had just become so enraged at his boss and needed to vent. It just happened. As usual,

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the memory was vague. He really didn't remember doing it he just knew that he did. It was as though someone or something had taken over his body and caused him to commit such an ugly act. Guilt ridden, he called her name.

"Angelica! Angelica! Come on, honey. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I promise I won't do it again."

Her lips remained shut. Not even a quiver was to be seen. Ivan became concerned. He raised her swollen eye lid and she looked through him with a blank, unknowing stare. He placed his hand under her nose to see if she was breathing. A very faint wisp of air escaped her nostrils. "No," he cried and, stricken with fear, he snatched her up from the bed then hurried her off to the hospital.

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After being summoned to the emergency room, Dr. Painkin hurried to see the incoming patient. "What happened here?" he questioned, noticing the woman's right eye was swollen and blue. He also immediately recognized the broken nose bridge, which was twisted irreparably on her face. There was a slow trickle of blood escaping from her nostril. The doctor pulled his penlight from his pocket shining it into her eyes. Immediately he noticed the imbalanced pupils. A secretion oozed from her right ear, which didn't appear to be blood, but when he carefully mopped it up, a pink halo immediately formed around it. "Shit, cerebrospinal fluid!"

His angry eyes looked up at her husband who stood there biting his nails, wondering if he had struck her one time too many.

"Did you do this?" he questioned him. Before Ivan could answer, the doctor ordered the patient to be rushed to radiology for X-rays. "I don't want any time wasted."

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The two nurses at his side hurried the body down the corridor. The other summoned radiology to the operating room. A scan was performed revealing an acute subdural hematoma caused by a remote fracture, which shattered under the surface of the cranium creating multiple brain lacerations and arterial tears.

“This is going to be a tough one. I want my team summoned right now.” Dr. Frank said while examining the film. “She must have received a pretty hard blow for this type of injury. Take her to Trauma One and make certain she’s prepped for surgery. I want her ready five minutes ago!”

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Angelica was rushed to the first trauma room without delay. Her hair had been removed from the surgical area by the nurse prior to arriving to the surgical ward. The area had been cleansed, and it was now the responsibility of both the cardiologist and anesthesiologist to make certain the monitors were attached, and anesthesia administered.

In less than five minutes, Dr. Painkin entered the room with a trauma surgeon at his side. Because he specialized in neurosurgery, it was understood that this was his show and not trauma’s. Also standing by for assistance were two surgical residents and a fourth year medical student. Nurse Green, the circulating nurse and best friend of Painkin, looked on alertly for supply requests. There were five doctors surrounding Angelica’s helpless body. A briefing was given to the other surgeons by Dr. Painkin, and the incision spot was marked and opened. A thin incision was made to each layer cautiously until the swollen flesh was revealed.

“Look at the size of that thing,” exclaimed Sherry

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Aredt. She had worked side by side with Dr. Painkin on three major brain operations since being on his staff over the past six months. As a resident, her surgical experience had heightened, but nothing could have prepared her for what she was seeing this very moment. Inside this woman's head was a hematoma the size of a golf ball, complicated by irreparable arterial tears. The increased swelling of the hematoma didn't make things easier as it continued to severely force the brain down into the brain stem. Although she was not an expert, she realized the desperate need for a miracle. If repair was at all possible, the patient would more than likely remain dysfunctional after the procedure. Sherry imagined that being a vegetable for the rest of your life was definitely worse than dying on an operating table.

“Damn, what am I going to do for this young lady?” exclaimed Dr. Painkin. “There is no help for her. She needs an angel of God to help her.” He could feel anxiety and failure taunting him. He felt the acid building, racing to his throat. This beautiful woman was going to die and there was nothing he could do about it. *There was a time I felt I could save the world and there was no problem that I couldn't solve. Now a young woman will die on my table under my knife, my knife*, he thought again. The others looked at him for direction feeling the shared concern. No amount of study could have prepared them for this. Not one of them anticipated the disaster that lay before them. There would be six saviors going home with the same blood on their hands; a life lost who was beyond revival.

While the six stood around Angelica's head deciding how to proceed, there was a seventh person in their midst. Although they could not see him, he was there

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looking and observing what was transpiring before him. *You men have little faith-prayer without belief is useless.* Looking from one to the other, he willed one of them to beseech his help. Without the summoning of the heart, his presence was void.

8      *What's this?* he questioned in disbelief. There was a despondent cry in the room. Someone loved this woman and was asking for help. Looking across the table, he spotted the unheard voice-Dr. Painkin had belief. He was asking that a higher power manifest its power and give this young woman another chance at life. He wanted to save one life from the hands of death and become her protector. Painkin had never seen her before, but he felt an obligation and longing for her.

In hearing this, the power was granted. The unseen visitor's existence in this time would be short and his abilities limited, but he had sat long enough watching this woman suffer at the hands of her husband. He didn't deserve her and certainly should not get away with it.

As the hand of the lead surgeon began the procedure, a miracle happened. His impotent hands made an attempt to stop the bleeding-it was remarkably easy. The clot was cleared and the pregnant tissue settled intact, in its proper place. Wondering eyes looked on in disbelief with renewed faith. Dr. Painkin could see the praise of his understudies. But what they didn't realize was that this was not a miracle by his hands, but someone even higher who heard the covetous cries of his heart.

Her temporal readings were stable and signs of recovery, which had been bleak, were now promising.

"Okay, everything looks good," Dr. Painkin said while his amazed eyes stared at the woman before him. "Let's

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close her up. Looks to me like another success story.” Certainly, this must not have been her time. He knew that there was a greater power in the room with them watching over her because she was destined to die in surgery. When he saw that things were in place and his guidance was no longer required, he turned to leave the room and thought he saw a shadow walking ahead of him. He turned to look back at the others to see if they had noticed it. When he realized that they were diligently at work, he discarded the apparition as his imagination and figured he’d better keep it to himself.

Dr. Painkin cleaned up while staring at his reflection in the mirror, wondering if he was losing his mind. A tingle raced up his spine as his sixth sense told him that there was someone behind him. He spun around.

“Who’s there?” he asked demanding, looking wildly around the tiny scrub room. He saw no one, but again he felt the dicey breath in his ear this time. Then a soft whisper spoke to him.

“Take care of her. Take care of this angel. She is now your responsibility.”

Dr. Painkin searched again, but he saw no one.

“Who are you? What do you mean take care of her? What about her husband?”

“Your request has been granted. Show yourself approved!”

Dr. Painkin waited for another response but received none. He beheld the shadow figure walking away from him. He left the room using a door which only he could see. He waited for something else or for a revelation but got none. The room was silent and no one else heard it.

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Ivan paced the waiting room floor for hours waiting for the results. Signing the permission slip to allow them to operate on his wife was like signing her over to judgment. He looked at his watch and wondered if this nightmare would have a positive ending.

“How could I have allowed my drinking to destroy my life and the life of my wife?” he cried.

10 The nurse only listened. He didn’t deserve any kindness for what he had done. He should be punished; no one should get away with hurting someone like that. When he opened his mouth to say something else to her, she walked away and started pulling files from the cabinet. He would not find comfort from her. He would realize that what he had done was wrong.

After ten long hours, Ivan was notified by Dr. Painkin that the surgery was over and his wife was now in recovery.

“Your wife will be taken to intensive care where a close eye will be kept on her for about six to eight weeks.”

Ivan listened intently as the doctor explained her remaining condition.

“Can I see her now?” Ivan petitioned in a whisper of a voice. He knew that everyone despised him, but she was his wife and they had no right to keep him from her. The doctor sighed as he fell into thought. As much as he wanted to protect his patient from this vicious man, the law was against him. Ivan was apparently a clever man and was able to satisfy the questions of the police and evade an immediate arrest. Unless his wife confirmed their sus-

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picious and pressed charges, there was nothing he could do about keeping him from his wife.

“Alright, you can see her, but only for a moment. She must remain at complete rest. She will not be able to respond to you so don’t expect one. Any sudden movements can cause her to go into shock and she may begin to hemorrhage. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand. I really didn’t mean to hurt her, I was just so angry and...”

“Please, don’t finish. I know exactly what happened next. It shouldn’t have happened.” After sharing an awkward moment, he walked over to the nurses’ station and instructed a nurse to show him to recovery.

“Come with me, Mr. Carty.” She escorted him down a very dimly lit corridor, which seemed to have no end. Ivan wondered if she was escorting him to hell.

“Are you sure this is the way?” he asked the nurse with apprehension. Ivan felt a chill he had never felt before. There was something cold lurking at his heels, breathing down his neck, taunting him, loathing him. He tried to shake the thought, but couldn’t. He looked behind him, but saw nothing. It was there. Ivan had an eerie feeling that something was there watching his every move, and letting him know that he was hated and would not go unpunished. Even when he cheated on his wife, it was there threatening him. Of course, nothing is said, but he knew that something did not approve of him or his behavior.

The nurse looked back at him then continued in the direction she was going without answering him. Finally, at the end of the hall was a dimly lit room. Ivan slowly stepped into the room observing his surroundings as he

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entered. To the left of the room was a curtain pulled around what he presumed to be a bed. He heard a beeping noise coming from behind it. Cautiously, he moved closer to the curtain wondering if his wife was really behind it. Then a thought flashed into his mind—he wondered if the hospital was plotting to kill him. *Why would the curtains be pulled so tight?* he wondered. He turned to look back at the nurse still standing at the door watching him.

“Look, do you want to see your wife or not? I don’t have all day,” she said in an annoyed tone.

“Yes, I’m sorry. I’m just afraid of what I will see.”

12 “What do you expect to see? You just bashed your wife’s head in. Do you think a miracle occurred during the past ten hours?”

Ivan felt a chill behind the nurse’s statement. He finally stepped up to the head of the bed and pulled the curtain.

“Aaaaaah!” he shrieked. “Oh my God,” he said backing away, almost running. The nurse watched him trembling like a sufferer of Parkinson’s disease.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Mr. Carty?” Her voice was strongly admonishing him for almost knocking her down.

“What happened to her?” he stammered, demanding answers.

“That’s none of your damned business!”

“It is my business! That’s not how she looked when I brought her here!”

“How the hell would you know what she looked like when she got here? You don’t even know her! Your wife’s in the next bed!”

The woman was so heavily sedated that she didn’t

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hear any of the ruckus going on.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Ivan said as he sheepishly re-entered the room bypassing the first bed avoiding any contact. He hurried over to the next bed where his wife lay with her head bandaged. The nurse fought hard to keep from laughing. He did exactly what she expected. She knew that he would look for his wife in the first bed. That patient scared her the first time she saw her, too. *He’s lucky he didn’t defecate on himself! That patient has severe nerve damage which caused her face to puff up and twist in a horrifying way.* Anyone would have responded that way if they didn’t expect to see that.

Ivan had a lovely wife behind all those bruises, but of course no one could see it because five long years had passed and not a week went by that she didn’t suffer at his hands. And now, her beauty was concealed by white bandages. He held her hand, wishing that he could wipe away her pain. A tear found its way to his eye as he lowered his face to hers to give her a kiss.

“Mr. Carty, you’re going to have to leave now,” Dr. Painkin interrupted him with his sudden appearance and abrupt order. Loathing him, he remained in the doorway.

“Alright, please take care of her. She’s all I’ve got.”

The doctor scrutinized him expressionlessly. “We’ll do our best; of course you know it will take some time.”

“How much time are you talking about?”

“As I said before, it will take at least a month. It all depends on her recovery and how she fights to get through this.”

Ivan thanked the doctor and walked out of the room. The nurse stepped aside to allow him to pass. The doctor checked her chart and told the nurse that it was time to

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administer her medication again.



Angelica, in her sleeping state, heard a voice speaking to her.

“I have come to save you!”

“Who are you?”

“That isn’t important right now. The only thing that matters is that you recover.”

She squinted and strained her eyes to see the figure that stood in the shadows.

14 “If you are here to help me, why are you hiding from me?”

“Now is not the time for me to reveal myself. In time I will tell you who I am and why I am here, but for now, I want you to focus on getting better. Will you do that for me?”

“Yes. Are you some sort of angel or something?”

“No, not really, but if it makes you more comfortable, you can say that.”

She started to ask him another question, but he turned and walked away. In a whisper he responded.

“Your love-your savior is before you and he will protect you.”