

# stalker

And she got out of her car, walked across her driveway, and walked up the stairs to her porch, trying to enjoy her solitude, trying not to remember that he followed her once again. She thought she was free of him; she thought he moved on with his life and that she would not have to see his face again.

Why did he have to call her, on this one particular day, years later, while she was at work? Maybe if she could have been suspecting it, she might have been braced for it. But then again, she didn't want to think about it: she was happy that she was finally starting to feel as if she had control of her life again.

It had been so many years, why would she have expected him to follow her again? Didn't she make it clear years ago that she didn't want him waiting outside her house in his car anymore, that she didn't want to receive the hang-up calls at three in the morning anymore? Or the calls in the middle of the night, when he'd stay on the line, when she could tell that he was high, and he'd profess his love to her? Or the letters, or the threats? No, the police couldn't do anything until he took action, when it was too late. Why did he come back? Why couldn't he leave her alone? Why couldn't it be illegal for someone to fill her with fear for

years, to make her dread being in her house **alone**, to make her wonder if her feeling that she was being followed wasn't real?

All these thoughts rushed through her head as she sat on her front porch swing, opening her mail. One bill, one piece of junk mail, one survey.

It was only a phone call, she had to keep thinking to herself. **He may never call again**. She had no idea where he was even calling from. For all she knew, he could have been on the other side of the country. It was only a phone call.

And then everything started to go wrong in her mind again, the bushes around the corner of her house were **rustling a little too loud**, there were too many cars that sounded like they were **stopping near her house**. Her own breathing even scared her.

I could go into the house, she thought, but she knew that she could be filled with fear there, too. **Would the phone ring?** Would there be a **knock** on the door? Or would he even bother with a knock, would he just **break a window**, let himself in, **cut the phone lines** so she wouldn't stand a chance?

No, she knew better. She knew she had to stay outside, that she couldn't let **this fear** take a hold of her again. And so she sat.

She looked at her phone bill again.

She heard the creak of the porch swing.

She swore she heard someone else breathing.

No, she wouldn't look up from her bill, because she knew no one was there.

**Then he spoke.**

"Hi."

She looked up. He was standing right at the base of her stairs, not six feet away from her.

“What are you doing on my property?”

“Oh, come on, you used to not hate me so much.” He lit a cigarette, a marlboro red, with a match. “So, why wouldn’t you take my call today?”

“Why would I? What do I have to say to you?”

“You’re really making a bigger deal out of this than it is,” he said, then took a drag. She watched the smoke come out of his mouth as he spoke. “We used to have it good.”

She got up, and walked toward him. She was surprised; in her own mind she never thought she’d actually be able to walk closer to him, she always thought she’d be **running away**. She stood at the top of the stairs.

“Can I have a smoke?”

“Sure,” he said, and he reached up to hand her the fire stick. She reached out for the matches.

“I’ll light it.”

She put the match to the end of the paper and leaves, watched it turn orange. **She didn’t want** this cigarette. She needed to **look more calm**. Calm. Be calm.

She remained at the top of the stairs, and he stood only six stairs below her. She sat at the top stair.

“You really think we ever got along?”

“Sure. I mean, I don’t know how you got in your head -”

“Do you think I enjoyed finding your car outside my house all the time? Did I enjoy

seeing you at the same bars I was at, **watching me** and my friends, like you were recording their faces into **your memory forever?** Do you think I liked you coming to **bother me** when I was working at the store? Do you -"

"I was."

She paused. "You were what?"

"I was logging everyone **you were with** into my head."

She sat silent.

"At the bars - I remember every face. **I remember every one of them.** I had to, you see, I had to know **who was trying to take you away.** I needed to know who they were."

She sat still, she couldn't blink, she stared at him, it was just as she was afraid it would be.

And all these years **she begged him to stop,** but nothing changed.

She couldn't take it all anymore.

She put out her right hand, not knowing exactly what she'd do if she held his hand.

He put his left hand in hers.

"You know," she said, then paused for a **drag** of the red fire, "This state would consider what you did to me years ago **stalking.**"

She held his hand tighter, holding his fingers together. She could feel her lungs moving her up and down. He didn't even hear her; he was **fixated** on looking at his hand in hers, until she caught his eyes with her own and then they stared, past the iris, the pupil, until they **burned holes** into each other's heads with their stare.

“And you know,” she said, as she lifted her cigarette, “I do too.”

Then she quickly moved the cigarette toward their hands together, and put it out in the top of his hand.

He screamed. Grabbed his hand. Bent over. Pressed harder. Swore. Yelled.

She stood. Her voice suddenly changed.

“Now, I’m going to say this once, and I won’t say it again. I want you off my property. I want you out of my life. I swear to God, if you come within fifty feet of me or anything related to me or anything the belongs to me, I’ll get a court order, I’ll get a gun, I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you away forever.”

“Now go.”

He held his left hand with his right, the fingers on his right hand purple from the pressure he was using on the open sore. He moaned while she spoke. She stood at the top of the stairs looking down on him. He slowly walked away.

She thought for a moment she had truly taken her life back. She looked down. Clenched in the fist in her left hand was the cigarette she just put out.

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