

HONEY, I'M HOME

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a muscular man standing in a doorway. He is seen from behind, with his hands on his hips, looking out into a bright, overexposed light. The man's silhouette is dark against the bright background. The doorway is framed by dark wood paneling. The overall mood is dramatic and mysterious.

JANEL J. TUTAK

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By

Janel J. Tutak



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Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
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www.sbpra.com

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my favourite sister for being this book's biggest fan since it was first written on loose yellow pages and throughout its stages of creation. Your continuous support and enthusiastic encouragement is, and always will be, greatly appreciated.

Also dedicated to all the men in my life, past and present, who aided in the creation of the character Thomas Beatrice. *jt*

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Chapter 1

HURRY HOME, KATIE

Music blasted from her car stereo. She tried to concentrate on the music, but wasn't succeeding. What did Tom mean by "please hurry home"?

The sound of his voice led her mind to imagine thousands of horrible things; reasons why he would need her to come home in that urgent voice. After five years of marriage, Katie learned that if Tom needed her to do something, she'd better do it.

Despite her worrying, she'd managed to calmly promise to be there twenty minutes tops. She winced, remembering his phone call had caused her to sign out of work four hours earlier than normal.

Katie Beatrice worked as a bookkeeper in the office her husband worked at. It didn't pay much, but she enjoyed the chance it gave her to get out of the house. And more importantly, it gave Tom the opportunity to check up on her. He worried about her a lot, so getting her the part-time job at Witco Insurance made sense.

Her fingers trembled as she turned the doorknob. The sun made the metal hot, and it almost burnt her hand as she opened it.

Slowly walking in, Katie felt her pulse quicken. A slate-grey paint welcomed her home as she entered the hallway. It wasn't at all warming. There was a wooden table by the door for keys and such. She set her purse down and tried to take deep breaths. *In and out. In and out.*

The hall led to each room—kitchen straight ahead, living room to the right. The staircase was farther down the hall to the left, as was the dining room, the bathroom, and a spare bedroom, which had been converted into a study. Cement steps led to the laundry room. Upstairs was their bedroom, another bathroom, and a guest bedroom.

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She walked past the front hall closet, where their jackets hung neatly all in a row; perfectly measured, perfectly spaced. All their boots and shoes were likewise neatly set up.

“Hello, Tom? I’m home,” she managed to squeak. Her voice echoed for a moment, then nothing. *In and out.*

The house was silent except for the sound of her heels clicking on the hardwood floors. She wasn’t interested in this game of cat and mouse they played on a regular basis. She wandered from room to room, then climbed back down the stairs, her legs heavier with each step. Where was he?

His study? She wasn’t allowed to go in there. But what if he was in there and needed her help? His phone call had sounded so critical, but was it worth it? What if he wasn’t in there? He may become very angry. *In and out. In and out.*

No, she didn’t want that.

She took her hand off the doorknob. “WHAT are you doing?” boomed a voice behind her. She spun around and came face to face with an angry Tom.

“I . . . I-I was . . .” she stammered.

“You were just snooping in my study!” he finished for her.

“No, it wasn’t like that. You phoned . . . and I . . .” she tried to explain.

He slapped her face. “I know what I did! I thought you could help me, but I guess not!”

Tears stung her eyes; now she’d done it. Why couldn’t she do anything right? She silently prayed the slap would be the end of today’s fight. She barely heard his fierce words as he yelled. She held her arms against her body as she leaned against the wall. She couldn’t bear to look at his disappointed face. She stared down at his feet. A familiar spot, a way to hide, to forget the pain. He wore his shoes in the house, as he always did. Italian leather. Everything had to be perfect.

Hearing her name screamed again, she glanced up, trying to wipe away tears. *Big girls don’t cry!*

His expression changed, looking at her unhappy face. “Oh Katie, I’m sorry honey. I’m working on a surprise present for you, and it’s not finished. Just think if you’d seen it! I’d be heartbroken.” He paused, taking her hand. “Will you forgive me?”

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“Of course,” she mumbled. “I know I’m not supposed to be in there. I’m sorry—it’s all my fault.” Just like it was yesterday, when she broke his favourite glass. She should have waited till her hands were dry. She couldn’t believe how careless she’d been; then again neither could he.

She gently felt the bruise on her thigh. It didn’t hurt too much—*and after all*, she thought, *I deserved it*. It was his favourite beer glass. Her flashback was like a violent hurricane.

“My glass? Is that what just broke.” She was silent as she’d bent down and fumbled to pick up the shattered pieces. “What the hell is the matter with you? I can’t believe you’d be careless enough to drop my favourite glass! Do you even remember why it is important?”

Did he actually want me to answer? He’d slapped her, but she’d stayed in place. She didn’t flinch. *Just pick up the glass and go to bed, Katie.*

“I won that last year at a Super Bowl party! Everyone in the office wanted it, but I won!” He’d kicked her in the leg like a football player kicks a field goal. “You were always jealous of that. I saw you eyeing it when I brought it home!” He’d kicked her again, this time hard.

She’d whimpered as the force caused her to jam a piece of the sharp glass into her finger. *What hurt worse?*

Then she was on her knees before him, like a servant to her master, and he was looming over her screaming. “Is that what I have living with me—a jealous bitch? I can’t believe you!” She’d come face to face with his feet. Where were his shoes? There was a hole in his sock, and a gnarly big toe stared back at her. She’d turned away.

“Katie? Katie!? KATIE?!?” Tom exclaimed.

“Hmm? Oh sorry, yes Dear?” she stammered.

“I’m hungry. Could you make something please? Please Katie—no one makes a BLT like you.”

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