

You Can Never Leave

by JackieJLH

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Chapter 1 of 1

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She screams.

Every night, she screams. She cries and wails, and thrashes on the bed -*your* bed, from once upon a time, when life was a fairy tale of happiness and comfort. When you had believed that you were safe, and she was safe, your child was safe, and most importantly, *he* was safe, and nothing could ever touch you because you were together; you were family, no matter what anyone else saw or thought.... You had to be family, because that was what *he* needed, and *he* needed to be all right. *He* needed to bring an end to this.

You leave when she screams. You can't sleep, and you can't watch her, can't listen to her and can't be there, so you just leave. You wander the streets, thankful for the spells that drown out the sound, thankful that they've held up all this time. A woman walks by, her arms laden with packages, and pulls her small daughter closer to her body. You scare them; you know this. You hardly have the energy to keep up your appearance these days. It doesn't matter, because who will see you? Really see you.... No one sees you. Not since she stopped being able to see anything, see everything, since she stopped living in this world and fell into her mind. Not since this world and that world became one world, and everything became so confusing and terrifying and different.

You wonder if you'll be punished for leaving. God, Merlin, Satan, bloody Albus Dumbledore with his twinkling eyes... whoever may be watching, waiting, judging you and her, whoever had taken your child and had taken *him*, and had left you here to listen to her screams... would they punish you for leaving her? Do you care? You don't think so. You cared once, once when things looked as though they may get better, when you thought that maybe you could save her, could change her, could find her hiding inside that shell of a woman that lies in your bed, that stares and then cries, and wails and then screams. But you stopped caring a long time ago, because if you care, you're sure that it will drag you down. Drag you down just like her, just like them, just like everyone always falls....

You go home in the morning and trudge up the stairs. She's sleeping now, always sleeping by morning. You used to think it was the dark that scared her, and you'd light your room at night, light it so that she could see that there was nothing to be afraid of. But she still screamed, and the lights attracted too much attention, so you leave her in the dark now. You wash her and comb her hair, her long hair that she's *always* worn long, and you can't bear to cut it because she loved it long. You stroke her face and watch as she flinches, as she stares, sees right through you, past you, watches with fear and hatred and dread, and your heart breaks. It breaks a little more every night as you leave, and a little more every morning when you return, and you wonder how there are any pieces big enough to break anymore.

But they're still there, and you're here, and she's here, and it still hurts every time, so you finish as quickly as you can and disappear into *this* room. This is where you sleep now, where you lay down to think and to cry, where you punch holes in the wall and scream anguished and terrified screams of your own, and fall asleep lying on the floor. Maybe it's because this room reminds you so much of *him* that you come here, because *he* was supposed to save you, and being here makes you feel just a bit *safer*, even though there is no place that is *really* safe anymore.

You think about your boy, your son, your child who was taken away, and you miss him. You miss his round, chubby face and the way he laughed. You miss the way he

was just himself, and how nothing seemed to bother him, how he was happy as long as he was warm and fed. You remember his funeral, how your wife had screamed then too; but she didn't scream all the time then, and you'd held her and cried and fallen to your knees in the damp grass, and you'd pitied her. Now you hate her. You love her, but you hate her, you hate her almost as much as you hate your son for leaving, and you hate *him* for failing, for leaving you to handle everything. But you hate yourself too, because you shouldn't hate them.

You don't work anymore. He had quite a bit of money when *he* died, and somehow you ended up with it all. You almost feel guilty after all, it wasn't your flesh and blood who had earned this money, it wasn't yours by any right, but you have it and you need it, so you spend it freely.

You don't use names anymore either; everything is he and she and the boy and the woman and the child, your child, your son, and ~~he~~, never forget *him*, because *he* is the reason for all of this, and the answer and the problem, and *he* was everything to everyone, but you know different. *He* wasn't a saviour, *he* wasn't anything special, *he* was just *him*, and now he's gone and you miss *him*. You swear that you don't, but you do. And you don't know why you can't say *his* name or her name or your boy's name, but you can't, you just can't. You try, but the words just stick in your throat and you choke.

Kicking, screaming, yelling, praying; this is how you spend your days now. She listens to you, and you wonder if she wishes that she could leave you just like you leave her, that she could wander outside and let you scream all by yourself. At least you're not left in the dark. You're *NOT* afraid of the dark, but you don't think that you could *handle* the dark, the shadows, the way that the curtains sway and resemble dementors, the way that it presses in on you. The darkness whispers to you, threatens you, and you think that maybe you're going a bit crazy yourself, because you answer it sometimes. You think that maybe, just maybe, you *are* afraid of the dark, though you'll never admit it. Only children are afraid of the dark, and you are most assuredly not a child.

He's gone, *he's* gone, *he's* gone...dead, not just gone. *He's* dead, and even when *he* first fell, you knew that it could only mean trouble. Without *him* to protect you, to protect her, to protect everyone, the world was in danger. This world and that world, your world and her world, but not *his* world, though; not anymore. *He* left you to fend for yourself.

They tell you that *he* died a horrible death. You weren't there you would have liked to be, you realise, but you weren't. You were blissfully unaware that ~~he~~ had been captured, blissfully unaware as you sat at home with your wife, your beautiful wife, and your son, your handsome son who looks so much like you. Looked... he *looked* so much like you, but now he doesn't look like anything, you suppose. The curse had ruined his face, had ruined his features, and you didn't even recognise him when they'd asked you to identify his body. Your poor boy....

And *he* had fallen, but not before doing damage to his attacker. The terror didn't end there, it never seemed to end, but that lasting damage weakened the Dark One and he fell, too. But not before he took your son's life and your wife's mind, and killed countless others whose families now cry and scream and long for them. Not before he destroyed your world, the whole world. If he had only died on that battle field, fallen once and for all at *his* hand, then perhaps things would have been different. But *he* had failed. *He* had not killed him, only taken one of his 'lives', as you understand it, his last life, his last chance for immortality, the last part of his *verpoul*. And later, when he was no longer invincible, someone had killed him, defeated him, and you had thought for a moment that things may get better.

You're beginning to see now that things will *never* get better. Now everyone knows the secret that you so diligently kept all these years, the secret that a whole race of people have kept hidden for so long.... They all fear this new piece of the world, this new thing, and you don't blame them. It scares you these days as well. But you are strong, and you will survive. They tried to drive you into madness, but you resisted, you managed to shake off the curse, you're sure of it, you're sure of it, you *know* that you survived because *you are strong*. You know this, no matter what anyone else may say.

And no one talks about it anyway; no one acknowledges that anything has happened. Everyone talks about rebuilding and reforming and regrouping, about coming out on top and okay. No one talks about burying their dead, the thousands of graves that are still being dug to house the rotting corpses. No one talks about the curse that makes people lose their minds, the Dark One's curse that was created just for him. No one talks about the hundreds of people who are now in asylums and institutions, the hundreds of people who are strapped to their beds, their husbands' beds and their wives' beds, just waiting for death to free them. Perhaps it would have been better if he had killed them all, because they aren't living, not really.

You didn't ask for this. It wasn't your fault. Yes, *he* seemed to bring a great deal of trouble *his* way, but you were already in too deep to leave, and you couldn't just *leave* because those years that you knew *him* meant *something*, didn't they?

She's crying again. She's always crying! You can't stand it, even though she's barely making any noise this time. You curl up into a ball in the corner of your new room, throwing a pillow at the door to push it shut, covering your ears and your eyes and crying. You weren't made to handle things like this, it isn't fair, it isn't fair, *it isn't fair!* When did life become this? When did your life, her life, everyone's lives become this hell, this misery, this punishment for surviving?

"Vernon! Help me! Please make them stop! They're coming for me! Oh God! Vernon, help!" she starts screaming, begging for you, and you shake your head. She's begun early tonight, and you can't handle it right now. You get up and pull your shoes back on, ignoring the fact that you're still in your pyjamas, ignoring the fact that she's calling your name and is terrified out of her mind. Knowing that you can't help her, knowing that she won't see you even if you go to her, you leave.

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