

Battered

by Jim Schicatano

"I heard . . . " The woman hesitated before completing her sentence. Her voice was weak, displaying a lack of confidence. She swallowed hard and took a deep breath, before forcing herself to continue. "I heard . . . you have powers."

The old gypsy woman instinctively motioned to her son to leave her and the mysterious woman alone.

"I'll be out front if you need me," he said before departing.

The gypsy scrutinized the woman sitting across the small table from her. Despite the dim lighting in the back room of the gypsy's shop (decorated to display an aura of mysticism), the woman did not remove her dark sunglasses. Hidden behind those lenses, the gypsy suspected, the woman did not eye her but rather timidly directed her focus onto the oakwood table. She noticed the woman's hands tremble, her swollen lips quiver, and a teardrop trickling down her left cheek. The woman wore heavy makeup but the gypsy noticed patches of blue buried beneath the cosmetics.

Stale, warm air saturated the shadowy, ominous back room and the woman found the damp, heavy air difficult to breathe. She waited in silence for the gypsy to begin the conversation.

"What can I do for you, my child?" the gypsy asked the woman in an Old World accent. The tone of her voice was compassionate, as she suspected the origin of the black and blue marks.

"You know why I'm here," she replied in a shaky voice.

"I can tell you your fortune. I read palms, cards . . ."

"No."

"What then?"

"A friend of mine . . . She had a problem and came to you."

"And what problem is that?" She pretended not to understand the nature of the woman's visit.

The woman finally lifted her head and directed her attention to the gypsy. She took another deep breath before slowly removing her

sunglasses. Swollen, teary, black and blue eyes were revealed.

"How long has this been going on?" the gypsy solemnly asked her.

"Over a year now," she replied in dismay, as she reconcealed her bloodshot eyes with the sunglasses. Then, she quickly added, "It didn't start out this way. But . . . But lately, he's grown more violent. It's the alcohol . . . He won't stop drinking."

"You have no one else you can turn to?"

The woman wiped away some tears as she shook her head. A melancholy feeling enveloped the room, as the two women shared in silence, the fear, uncertainty, and betrayal which only women can share when they are victims of their spouses' violent ways.

The gypsy offered some tissues to the woman. "Be strong," she entreated her. "Now dry your eyes." Displaying a sense of reluctance, the gypsy added, "I can help you."

The woman nodded in appreciation as she wiped away her tears.

"You realize that what you ask is irreversible. And that it is a very serious sentence for anyone."

"I don't love him anymore. And . . . And I want him to feel what it's like – to be battered again and again and again."

The gypsy nodded sympathetically before rising from her chair. She turned and opened a large, leather chest behind her. Then she reached in and pulled out a thin, three-inch long, black candle.

"Light this at midnight, my child, and you shall be made free. Allow it to burn completely." She handed the woman the candle. "But make sure this is what you really want," she cautioned her. "Exhaust all other options. It is a terrible price for any human being to pay. You may use this power one time only. Go now and think of what you are about to do."

"Thank you," the woman softly replied as she gratefully took the candle. She offered the gypsy a twenty-dollar bill.

"No," she refused. "I too have been in your position. I know the pain and fear that you must feel. My reward shall be in knowing that you are free from his violent hand."

The woman thanked her and left. At midnight, despite grave misgivings, the candle was lit.

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Where was he? The last think he recalled was going to sleep but he was no longer in the security of his bed. What had happened to him?

Horror struck him as he suddenly perceived reality. His arms and legs were gone! He could no longer see; his eyes had been somehow removed! He could no longer hear; his ears had simply vanished! There was no sense of breathing – no ability to move.

Had he died? Had he gone to hell? Something enclosed him – a wooden coffin, perhaps, engulfing him in blackness. He was unable to hear, see, or move but he did possess the ability to sense. And he could feel.

There were mysterious vibrations all around him but he was unable to discern their origin. He felt the presence of others. Other people were near him – he sensed them. How many were there? What were they doing? Were they in the same predicament? Or were they part of whatever was happening to him?

Something was moving toward him. He felt its vibration as it neared. What was it? He attempted to count the others. There was one . . . Two . . . Three . . . But his situation was such that he could not concentrate on the task he endeavored. He wondered if the others were aware of him.

He desperately wanted to cry out to them – to somehow communicate with them. He wanted to scream for help. Terror gripped him. What was happening? The vibration grew stronger. Something was approaching. It was large and moving swiftly. He was unable to move out of its way because he possessed no means of moving!

Perhaps the others could help him. If only he could contact them. The vibration intensified. Only seconds remained before impact. He desperately sought a solution to his predicament. But no options seemed available. How could he avoid this? What was coming toward him?

Bam!

He was jolted backwards, slammed into a hard wall by the powerful impact of the object. The tremendous pain delivered by its formidable blow lingered. The absence of a mouth denied him even the ability to scream out in agony! He found himself on his side, trying to regain coherence. But he was quickly pushed away. Something was moving him, turning him in all directions. If only he could see or hear what was happening. If only he could understand.

Moments later he felt himself standing upright once again. The others were with him; they were together. His mind wavered between reality and unconsciousness. The vibration began. He was dizzy and still suffering from the previous impact. If only this nightmare would end. But he could not awaken. He could not flee. He was trapped here in this unknown world. If only . . .

Bam!

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"Strike!" the bowler cried out in elation, as all ten pins were knocked down again. "I'm on a roll."

The alleys were always crowded during midnight bowling at 'King of the Lanes'. The heavy, powerful bowling balls rolled swiftly toward the pins, driving them backwards with tremendous force upon contact.

He was forever trapped, his consciousness encased within the confines of the battered pin. Another bowling ball rolled toward him; the alleyway vibrated under its rapid movement as it spun over the wooden alley toward its destination.

And he would be battered by its powerful, painful impact again and again and again . . .