

Dale's dead, that much is obvious. Motionless, he lay in the bright red blood that trickles from the gash in his neck. The gash from where you swung at him with the kitchen knife when he came at you in a drunken rage. The last time he'd ever come at anyone, intoxicated or not.

The knife was an accident. It was the first thing your hand closed around when you attempted to defend yourself. The rolling pin on the counter was what you meant to grab. You only intended to slow him down, not kill him.

As you sit there on the floor next to him, knees to your chest and staring at him over your bruised and bloody arms, a sense of relief washes over you. The beatings and abuse will stop now. No longer will it be necessary to wear long sleeves in the summer to hide the rainbow of bruises. Sunglasses can be saved for when it's sunny out.

The police need to be notified. Dale's body will be taken away and you'll be questioned. They'll want to know why you did it. Why you stabbed your husband and stole his life. You killed in self-defense. Anyone can see that, can't they?

What if they can't? What if they still blame you for Dale's death? The recent feeling of relief deserts you, replaced by terror. Your new freedom can be taken from you as fast as it arrived.

A knock at the door startles you, sounding unnaturally loud in the silence. Standing is difficult after sitting for so long. Bruises from the broomstick he swung shine red and angry, turning purple against the whiteness of your legs. Each and every one a reminder of him.

Grabbing a dishtowel on your way to the door, you scrub at the blood on your arms. Some of it's yours, but most of it is his. You frantically start to think of excuses. Maybe whoever's at the door wouldn't notice.

Another knock.

"Just a minute," you yell. Whoever's calling certainly doesn't have much patience. Peeking out the window in the door reveals Miranda Withers from across the street. What could that nosy busybody want?

"Miranda." You force a smile and civil tone as you open the door just enough to carry out a conversation.

"Lizzie. Hi. Is everything all right?"

"Yeah. Everything is fine. How are you and Otto?" *Keep her out on the front step but don't raise her suspicions.*

"Oh fine, fine. Listen, we were wondering if you and Dale would like to join us for dinner Saturday night. Nothing fancy, just a neighborhood get-together. It's been so nice we thought a barbeque was in order. What do you say?"

"Sounds lovely, but I think Dale might have plans. Saturday is his bowling night, after all." A lie slips out your mouth.

Miranda places a hand on the door, ready to push it open and walk past you. "Is he home now? I can talk to him if you like."

You contemplate letting her in, letting her see the mess in the kitchen. Asking her for help and advice. It would be so much easier to have someone to share the burden with.