

The sun was dwindling as we got into the car; we stopped by the nearest shop and Daddy bought me a bottle of coke for the last time. Daddy drove me and Mammy through Dublin city, past the Northside and further out, into the countryside. They left the radio off; when I asked a question about visiting my uncle they didn't reply. I watched the sun touching the horizon across the fields, waiting for night to come.

As darkness drew in the road began to narrow. Houses became fewer and farther between. Soon the headlights were the only thing between us and the pitch black. I closed my eyes for a few full seconds at a time, imagining that the car's lights had died, and we were just riding blind into the night, or that we'd have to pull over and wait while my father went to find help.

We said nothing between my unanswered question and when the tyres crunched the gravel outside my uncle's house. A light on upstairs; a silhouette arose behind thin curtains. The last time I had been at this house was shortly after my seventh birthday, a few years previous. Mammy stayed in the car as Daddy pulled me along by the hand. There was a frosted glass bit beside the black front door where I could see the half-light in the hallway. When Daddy pressed the doorbell, it took a long time for my uncle to arrive, bumping heavy and slow down the stairs. Without saying hello, he nodded at Daddy, who pressed his hand against my back to lead me through the porch. I asked Daddy if he was coming in, and he turned away. My uncle held his hand on my shoulder as Daddy walked straight back to his car; he told me to wave to my parents as they drove off. I watched the headlights as they wined back down the road, then disappear as they turned around a corner.

My uncle walked me down the long corridor to the kitchen, where my auntie had put some food out on the table - ham and potatoes with Brussels sprouts. I hated sprouts, but made myself eat them. They had electric lights in the house, but there were just a couple of candles lit on the table. I looked out the window at the darkness outside the kitchen. Beyond the whistle of the wind, there was a silence deeper than anything you would hear at my parents' house in Ranelagh.

My uncle and aunt talked about grown-up things for a bit, laughing and joking. Then my uncle asked me if I knew why I was there. I said I'd some idea but not really. He explained that my parents weren't able to look after me, and that I would be staying with him and his wife. Maybe my parents would come and take me back in a few weeks, maybe a few months, maybe a year or two. Things were going to be different in this house. I wouldn't want for anything, but I was going to have to start doing some jobs around the house. There were going to be more rules, and there would be *real* trouble if I broke them. I started to sob, and my auntie said that if I didn't stop mewling she was going to smack the head off me until I stopped crying. I blubbered something about wanting to be excused, got up from the table and began to walk away, not sure where I was going, but my uncle grabbed me and pulled me by the jumper back to the table. He told me to finish my dinner and that we would talk about things after we finished eating. I ate, too nervous to cry now. My auntie finished her dinner last, and gazed at me, licking her fork. No words were spoken for a moment. I picked up my plate and put it in the sink, then did the same for my uncle and aunt's things.

My uncle started smoking a cigarette. He faced me and said that I had been nothing but a burden to my parents, and it was little wonder they had sent me here. He was pretty sure they were never going to come back. If I didn't want to end up somewhere worse, I had better do just as they said. As a matter of fact, he had a little job for me just now to see if I wasn't totally useless after all. He brought in a mop and bucket from the next room. He set them by the table, then stood in the middle of the kitchen, took his willy out and started peeing on the kitchen floor. My aunt was laughing hard at this. He handed me the mop and I started to mop it up into the bucket. He made me throw the pee down a drain out the back and then go over the kitchen floor with water and some cleaning fluid.

In bed it was completely dark. I heard my uncle and aunt talking and laughing in the next room, then it was totally silent. It was still summer holidays – what would the next month be like? I wondered if my parents would stay in their house for long or if they would leave and move somewhere else. Yet somehow, I sensed that everything from before was gone, like a toy that had just fallen in the fire.

For a long time, I lay awake in the darkness. Eventually I started to feel tired enough to sleep. As I drifted between waking and sleeping, I opened my eyes a little. There was something to my left; the outline of a man standing over me. I tried to move but I was gripped by sleep paralysis, like a hand reaching up from the mattress through my chest, hooking its fingers between my ribs and skin to drag me down. I opened my eyes wide. The room was empty; there hadn't really been anyone there. Still I stared towards the bedroom door, waiting for someone to walk in.

I stayed hidden beneath the covers. In my imagination I slipped out of bed. I tiptoed to the kitchen, and looked through the different drawers. I took out the biggest knife I could find, crept upstairs, and hesitated in front of the door of the other bedroom. I could make out my uncle's and aunt's sleeping heads peeking over their duvet. I stood over my uncle like the shadow phantom I had seen over me sleeping. I stabbed him in the neck. He only made a gurgle as he bled. Then I stabbed my aunt.

Hiding in the bed, it felt like I'd really wanted to do it, but then I thought of the sun rising the next day, and being alone in the strange house with enough food for a few days. Maybe it was still summer, but it felt so cold in that room.

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Dear Reader, there are three things you should know about this story.

The first is that it is not true.

The second thing is that I am going to tell it to my husband as if it *were* true.

The third thing is that I am not intending to make a specific false accusation against a particular uncle; I am simply telling my husband this story in order to exert control over him.

My name is David Hector. I am a Professor of Psychology at an Irish university. I am in the process of conducting a case study of emotional abuse within the context of a marital relationship; my own. It is a project that gives me gratification at an emotional and professional level. Although I am the narrator, my husband Vincente is the hero; he is a handsome schoolteacher who puts the interests of his pupils first. I'd also like to put you in the shoes of a student sitting through my module *Introduction to Psychology*. Try to keep up. I hope you enjoy the course.