



Silence!

Abuse Th

## *One*

### *An Unusual Anniversary Gift*

Anniversary gifts come wrapped in many different packages--from the miniature box, containing maybe a precious diamond necklace, to the medium sized package, possibly enclosing a sexy negligee. Or, it may come in the form of a husband, placing his hands over his wife's eyes, leading her to their front lawn, then, Tadaaaaa! There, draped in broad, red ribbons with the largest gift bow ever, may be a brand new, black Lexus or a BMW convertible.

But if anyone would've said that my third wedding anniversary present would be wrapped in the finest beating ever, delivered with a 2x4 plank, by the man around whom my entire world revolved, I would've said it was a lie from the pit of hell.

It was a Sunday morning on June 26 during the early 1980's on the East Bank of the Demerara River, in the Republic of Guyana, South America. I was awakened to slender sunrays peeking through the peach-colored lace curtains of our ground floor apartment which my husband, William, and I rented from my parents. I lay in bed inhaling the fresh scent of dew, mixed with the fragrances from the yellow daffodils, red roses, and tiny white forget-me-nots. My parents lived on the floor above us and the scent from my mother's garden was always a welcomed awakening. I smiled, looking across at William, sleeping beside me. He was lying on his stomach, with slight snores intermittently escaping his nostrils.

Slipping out of bed, I tiptoed to the small room adjoining ours. Our two-year-old daughter, Kianna, was peacefully sleeping in her crib. Opening the wardrobe, I grabbed the "Happy Anniversary" gift bag, then tried to quietly crawl back into bed.

“Ummm morning, Hon. Why you up so early?”

“Happy anniversary, Will. Together for many more,” I held out the colorful gift bag, smiled broadly, then bent over, and kissed his full lips.

William heaved his sturdy 5’ 5” chocolate frame to a sitting position, bracing his back against the wooden headboard. He cocked his head to one side, knitted his brows and looked up at the calendar on the cream concrete wall.

“Shoot! Forgot,” he said, holding his head with both hands. “Sorry, Angie, but thanks.”

Some of the joy with which I awoke dwindled away.

I watched William remove the package from the gift bag and unfold the wrapping paper, revealing a fawn silk shirt with matching tie.

“You know you didn’t have to do this. Was so tied up I forgot, but that’d be the first thing on my agenda tomorrow morning.”

“Oh, no prob,” I replied, “but let me name my gift since you didn’t get it as yet.”

“Sure, but don’t be unreasonable now,” he said, smiling.

“You know I have no unreasonable bone in my body,” I replied, stroking his head, returning his smile.

“Still waiting to hear what you want?”

“Come to church with me today.”

“Angie, please! Please!” William adamantly shook his head. “Now *that* is unreasonable. You know I worked hard all week and today’s my rest day.”

“Shoot! Forgot,”

**Is this a norm in your relationship?  
Are important dates normally forgotten?  
If so, take stock and act!**

“But Will, it’s only 7:30. You can rest until around 10:00 and we can leave home just about 10:45 for 11:00 a.m. church,” I pleaded.

“Angie, naaah. I’m tired and I’m spending this day in my bed.” He started going through some cassettes on the nightstand. I got up and looked out the bedroom window.

“Then I will not go,” I said, stifling a sigh. “I’ll spend the day home with you.”

William slid my favorite gospel tape into the stereo and I quickly forgot about my denied request. Nothing lifts my spirit more than gospel music and he knew it. My sister, Gloria, took Kianna to church, so we had a part of the day to ourselves. Among other things, we cooked together and when our daughter returned, we had our lunch. After the meal, we relaxed in bed while listening to the cricket game.

Kianna eventually wanted to go to her grandparents. Scooping her up and collecting some of her toys, I noticed William get up from the bed, grab his towel, and head for the shower.

*No, he’s just freshening up, he can’t be going out.*

By the time I got back, William was dressing. I was hurt. Maybe I shouldn’t have been because he spent most of the day with me, but I was.

*Can’t he stay home for a day without going out? It’s only 4:30; he ain’t even spend a full day home and is on his way out again.*

I said nothing. Grabbing a novel from my nightstand I tried reading, but kept seeing the same line over and over.

“Angie, press this pants fo’ me?” he asked.

I was lying on my stomach, staring at the book and didn’t respond.

“You’re so easily angry when I got to go anywhere. You should know a woman’s place is in the home. Why you think I gave you a daughter? She will keep your company,” he said,

pulling at my toes. My anger boiled but still I said nothing. I later heard and ignored every thud of the heavy iron against the creaky wooden iron board.

Then he was ready to leave. He pulled at my toes again.

“Miserable, I’ll be back in a while.”

I didn’t answer. And yes, I was angry. It was our wedding anniversary. Not only did he not get me anything; he had forgotten our important date. Then, he refused to go to church with me -- the only thing I asked of him that day.

William pulled at my toes yet again and gave me a playful slap on my butt. I glared at him.

“If you know what’s best for you, you will leave me alone,” I said through clenched teeth.

He then poked me with his fingers, sending a sharp pain through my side. Suddenly, I sprang from the bed like a leopard with one last chance at catching its prey, charging after him. He dashed out of the bedroom with me in pursuit. Reaching the living room, he was struggling to unlock the front door. Realizing he would be through it before I got to him, I instinctively picked up the first thing I saw--a crystal vase, a wedding present from my employer. I hurled it at him. The vase struck the door a fraction of a second after he ducked. *Oh shoot! I could have hurt him seriously had the vase hit him. Hell! I told him to stop provoking me.* The flowers fell to the vinyl floor and some of the sand got into William’s soft black hair, but most of it fell to the floor. Miraculously, the vase didn’t break.

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**If you have experienced this, it is not okay! Let it not be repeated. Talk to a counsellor.**

William rushed at me and started slapping me in the face and head repeatedly with both hands. Wildly and angrily I lashed out at him, kicking and punching. My retaliation angered him even more and he began striking me about my body, face and head. Tasting blood and feeling it running down my chin, I cried out. William was coming at me again. I couldn't get away. I looked around; a glass picture frame was standing on the china cabinet. It housed one of our wedding photos. Snatching it, I hurled it at his face. He dodged; the picture frame crashed into the concrete wall, shattering into many pieces. Stunned, William held his head, looked around to where the remnants of the picture frame lay, and then back at me.

“What! Oh, you playin’ bad! Then you goin’ take what bad girls get,” he shouted.

Our apartment’s back door carried a 2x4 plank measuring about 6 feet in length which was used to firmly secure the door. William raced across the room to the kitchen door and yanked the plank from its iron holders. I tried getting out the front door, but I wasn’t quick enough. My husband began beating me with the plank. I was unable to get away from him. One blow landed across my stomach. My feet gave way and I collapsed to the floor, unable to fight back. I began screaming for my parents and siblings, but no one came to my rescue.

I lay there in a crumpled heap, groaning. That was when the beating stopped. William then simply leaned the bar in a corner and went into the bedroom. He emerged shortly afterwards with his hair neatly combed and his clothes straightened. Looking at him, one would never believe what had just happened.

William stepped over me on his way to the door. Shaking his left index finger and with a ‘pleased-with-performance’ smile, he said, “Don’t you ever play you fighting with me again. When you play bad, you take what bad girls get.”

He left, slamming the door shut behind him.

I either passed out or fell asleep, because the next thing I knew the house was completely dark. For a moment I was startled, but then the horrific scenes from the afternoon came rushing back.

I held on to a chair and like an old woman, painfully pulled myself up and struggled to get my balance. My head throbbed, I was dizzy, and my throat was parched. Licking my lips to moisten them, they felt heavy and painfully dry. The musical clock on the wall chimed seven times, alerting me that I had been out for roughly two hours. I fumbled in the dark to find the light switch, then limped to the bedroom. Glancing at the wardrobe mirror I was horrified by my reflection. Both eyes were swollen and there was a black and blue mark under the right one. The front of my shirt was stained with dried blood, probably from my now puffed lips and lacerated forehead.

Both eyes were swollen and there was a black and blue mark under the right one. The front of my shirt was stained with dried blood, probably from my now puffed lips and lacerated forehead. . . . William could've killed me and no one would have known.

**Abusive situations should never be allowed to get this far. Seek help before it is too late.**

I sank onto my bed, crying, trying to figure out my next move. I was ashamed to go to my parents' home, looking like this. Then again, I shouted for them and no one came to my rescue, so why should I go to them, anyway? William could've killed me and no one would have known.

In Guyana, family members seldom involve themselves in domestic disputes. They lived by the motto - "You make your bed hard, you lie on it hard." Although I knew that, I couldn't believe my family would hear me scream for them and not come to my rescue.

It was quickly approaching Kianna's bedtime and I knew someone would soon either call me to get her or bring her home. I had to get out before anyone saw me. With much effort, I took a shower, which made me feel slightly better. Unable to bear the thought of anything close-fitting on my sore body, I wore a loose dress. Placing a broad-brimmed hat on my head and

pulling it down just above my eyes, I left the apartment without even going upstairs to say goodbye to my daughter.

On my way out, I was sure of one thing – William would no longer be in my life. Hailing a taxi I went to my friend, Miriam's. She had married three months earlier and lived in the city. Rawle, her husband, standing nearly seven feet tall, dark, handsome, and sporting a beer belly, answered the door.

“Angie, no! Don't tell me is William do this to you! Tell me no!” Miriam said angrily, lifting my hat, holding my chin and gently turning my face from side to side, examining my wounds. Before I had finished explaining to Miriam and Rawle what happened, Miriam excused herself. Five minutes later she returned in jeans and t-shirt and her hair pulled back in a pony tail.. She was going to find William.

“Miriam, I know you annoyed, but where you think you goin' find William this night?” her husband asked.

“Even if I got to sit at the door till he come home, I goin' do it,” Miriam responded, shoes in hand.

“Come on, sit down and cool yo' head. You can go to his work place first thing tomorrow mornin' – you might get more satisfaction from that,” Rawle said, smiling. Taking her shoes, he gently led her to the sofa.

“All he doin' is allowin' you mother and father to say is the same thing they did tellin' you. If I could only catch he now, I would strangle he with me bare hands,” she said, clenching her fists.

“I can't understand why he got to be like that. Is only a coward beat up a woman,” Rawle added.



“Angelique, if I had me way, I woulda never let you go back, but that is a decision fo’ you to make, not me,” Miriam said. She headed to her bedroom, returning with a jar of iodine. Swiftly brushing a tear from her eye, she started applying the medication to my wounds.

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The following day, I felt as if I had been run over by an iron-wheeled donkey cart.

“You should go see the doctor . . .” Miriam started. “I was thinkin’ so, too,” Rawle chimed in.

“No, I’m good and I will be even better by tomorrow, I’m sure,” I responded, at the same time getting up and excusing myself from the table. I knew if I went to the doctor the police would be after William. I couldn’t have my daughter’s father locked up.

It was Monday, a workday. Telephoning my job, I said I was sick and requested two days off. While Miriam and Rawle went to work, I rested at their home, took painkillers, and placed ice packs on the swollen parts of my body. I missed my daughter terribly but didn’t want to explain anything to my family. After a while, I reluctantly picked up the phone.

My mother answered after the first ring, as if she were sitting there expecting my call. “Angie? Where you? Wha’ happen? Since when you does go out and spend all night? I asked William fo’ you this morning and he say you must be sleep at a friend. Since when you does do things like that?”

“Mom, I cannot explain right now. Is Kianna all right?”

I knew if I went to the doctor the police would be after William. I couldn’t have my daughter’s father locked up.

**Most victims think this way. Wouldn’t it be better to get help for the abuser than to die and**

“Yes, she okay, but she asking fo’ you all the time. Angie, what happen? You and William had a fight?”

“Yeah, Mom, but I just called to let you know I’m okay and to find out how Kianna doing. Kiss her for me. See you in a couple of days. Bye, Mom,” I said, replacing the receiver before she had a chance to respond.

Two days later, still with some visible bruises, I made it back to my job at the lawyers’ office. I was thankful nobody asked me anything, except Mr. Crumwell, my boss.

“Angelique,” he started when I entered his office. “Your mother called here twice looking for you. I told her you called out. Is something wrong?”

“William and I had a fight and I stayed with friends.”

“I suspected something of the sort. Boy, that is disrespectful - your parents live right there. Why would he do such a thing? What are you doing about it?”

“Not sure, but I’d like an extended lunch hour to go see my daughter,” I replied, hoping to dismiss his inquiry.

“Sure, go right ahead. I’ll be here for most of the afternoon, anyway.”

I thanked him and walked away from his desk.

“Angie,” he called after me. “Let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

*Maybe file my divorce.*

“Sure, thank you.”

“I suspected something of the sort. Boy, that is disrespectful - your parents live right there. Why would he do such a thing? . . .

**Outsiders looking on at situations like these may be able to help save lives if action is taken, instead.**

*Gosh, all the others probably know, too. And imagine, instead of William, it's my mother searching for me. I'm not surprised.*

*To be continued . . .*

Abuse Thrives on Silence. Break The Silence!