

RIGHT OF POSSESSION

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Thwack. His right hand against my left cheek. I stared at him in utter disbelief. Time stood still, and then I could hear him apologising. All these words that didn't make any sense, and the slap rang in my ears and hung between us like a curtain separating love and reality. But it was a net curtain, the kind you could see and touch through because I couldn't separate my love for Michael from what he'd done.

We'd had a good marriage, at the beginning. Michael had been everything I'd hoped for in a husband. Strong, well defined muscles, a toned body. Not classically good looking, not what you could really call handsome, but when he turned his head and the light caught his profile; sometimes it took my breath away. He had very intense eyes. I should say 'has', he's not the one who's dead, but you always talk about ex-lovers in the past tense, don't you? There was something dark and slightly scary about his eyes, which should have clued me in, I suppose, but they were gorgeous too. I never could resist dark brown eyes.

He was ambitious, and he needed me to be the perfect wife, and I was, for a time. So I suppose you could say it was my fault for ceasing to be what he wanted me to be; for thinking I could just be me. But battered women always think it's their fault. It is not. I know that now all these years later. But the things I've had to endure to come to that knowledge. I hope this record might help you realise sooner.

It was just a slap that first time. *Just* a slap, ha listen to me! Across the face. It was the shock that got to me more than anything. He never hit me on the face again. He didn't want any marks to be seen. Everything had to remain perfect on the outside. Oh, did I mention how clever he was? That was another thing I liked about him. We had fantastic conversations about films, books, politics. He had such interesting opinions on things. It was later I realised only his opinions mattered; he didn't want to hear mine. But I