

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

---

Before we begin, take a moment with me to settle in.  
Let your shoulders soften.  
Let your breath fall naturally into rhythm.

This story, like many survivor stories, asks that we witness without judgment and listen with both heart and mind.

When I look back, I can almost hear the faint ticking of a clock somewhere in the distance — steady, indifferent, certain.

Time has a way of escorting us to endings we did not choose but somehow always needed. For me, that hour arrived on Valentine's Day of 2021 — the day love is marketed as flawless, and loneliness is dressed up as failure.

It's strange how trauma can sharpen the smallest details. The feel of air that morning. The hollow echo in the house. The quiet knowledge that something irreversible was about to unfold.

As survivors, we often live in a fog of "almosts." Almost safe. Almost believed. Almost free. But there comes a day when "almost" ends — when clarity becomes an act of survival.

(research insight)

Psychologists like Dr. Judith Herman describe this threshold as the moment of reconnection: when the survivor reclaims the narrative that was once controlled by fear.

That was the beginning of my end.

Or, more truthfully, the beginning of my liberation.

### Part I – Perfect Timing

Of course he would leave on Valentine's Day.

It was his beloved mother's birthday, after all. How poetic that the woman who shaped his worldview would also preside over his final performance.

In his world, nothing ever happened by coincidence — only choreography.

For years, I couldn't understand why my marriage to Dolus felt like an endless episode of The Twilight Zone.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

Moments of tenderness spliced between acts of cruelty.

Apologies that sounded rehearsed.

Silence that felt like punishment.

Each day, I performed the role of peacekeeper while quietly unraveling behind closed doors.

(legal note)

Like so many survivors, I endured injuries — physical, emotional, and spiritual — that never reached law enforcement records. Fear was my warden.

In the language of trauma, that is called coercive control: a pattern of domination built not only from violence but from surveillance, isolation, and humiliation.

(research insight)

Dr. Ramani Durvasula describes it as “a slow erosion of self that masquerades as devotion.”

Dolus never acted alone. His parents — Milly and Filly — were the chorus to his every act, the silent scriptwriters behind his moral theater.

Their ideology was extreme, their emotional enmeshment complete.

Their influence was not hidden; it was celebrated.

Dolus sought their approval in every decision, from finances to faith, from parenting to punishment.

And when he left, I knew — as surely as I knew my own name — that they had authored the final scene.

For years, I watched their dynamic play out like an old stage production: the son who worshiped his mother and the father who demanded obedience from all.

Milly, the family matriarch, was his goddess, Filly, the patriarch, his disciplinarian.

Together, they had written a script in which my compliance equaled virtue, and my independence equaled betrayal.

When I reconnected with my family after a decade of isolation, I shattered that script.

(research insight)

Experts on family systems, such as Salvador Minuchin, warn that enmeshed families view separation as treason — not growth.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

My attempt to reclaim connection was, to them, a declaration of war.  
I had broken the family code.

I had chosen myself.

Over time, I could see them clearly — without the fog of fear.

And in that clarity, I recognized something profound:  
their disdain was not punishment; it was confirmation that I had finally become  
unreachable by their control.

So, when Dolus packed his boxes, I could almost sense the triumph radiating from his  
parents' home — as if my liberation were receiving well deserved retribution.

But even then, I refused to surrender to bitterness.

The day he left was indeed the beginning of the end.

But it was also the quiet dawn of my rebirth.

And sometimes, endings arrive wearing the costume of love.

## Part II – A Family's Scorn

When we talk about abuse, we often imagine a single aggressor. But sometimes, it is a family  
system that holds the reins.

(research insight)

In family systems theory, Dr. Salvador Minuchin describes enmeshment as a pattern in  
which personal boundaries dissolve and individual identity becomes secondary to group  
loyalty.

Dolus had been raised inside that pattern. His parents' worldview shaped his thoughts, his  
reactions, even his vocabulary. What they believed, he echoed. What they condemned, he  
punished.

Over the years, I had come to understand that my resistance — even polite disagreement —  
was treated as rebellion against the family's faith, their traditions, and their authority. The  
consequences were swift: silence, ridicule, or withdrawal of affection.

Filly, the patriarch, believed compliance was synonymous with respect. Any show of  
autonomy, particularly from a woman, registered to him as insolence.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

### (legal note)

Experts in domestic violence recognize this mindset as a hallmark of patriarchal coercion — a framework in which power and obedience are confused with love and duty.

Milly, on the other hand, wielded emotional control. She was the moral compass of the household, but the needle always pointed toward her. Dolus adored her, deferred to her, and defended her at every turn.

If Filly demanded loyalty, Milly demanded reverence.

When I first joined their family, I mistook their unity for closeness. Only later did I realize it was a unity born of fear — a closed circuit of control.

### (research insight)

Dr. Ramani Durvasula calls this “the echo chamber of narcissistic systems”: environments that sustain dysfunction by rewarding conformity and punishing independence.

Their scorn intensified after I reconnected with my own family. My decision to rebuild relationships that Dolus and his parents had discouraged for a decade was viewed as betrayal.

They called it disrespect. I called it oxygen.

I often wonder whether they recognized what they were doing — the constant triangulation, the surveillance masked as concern. But intent matters less than impact.

### (research insight)

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, chronic psychological manipulation within a household can create ambient abuse, in which children internalize fear without visible violence.

My children had begun to feel that chill — the unspoken pressure to obey, the sense that peace was always conditional.

I saw it. And once I saw it, I could never unsee it.

When Dolus decided to leave, it wasn't a spontaneous act of self-liberation. It was a performance, meticulously staged by the family that had coached him all his life.

And like every act before, it was meant to end with my silence.

But I had learned a new rule: silence is no longer my obligation.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

### Part III – A Vindictive Departure

If he had wanted to leave quietly, he could have gone on Thursday, February 11th. His new lease allowed it. His vehicle was packed. The path was clear.

But he waited.

Valentine's Day.

His mother's birthday.

The day devoted to love — now repurposed as spectacle.

#### (legal note)

In trauma-informed legal language, this is called symbolic violence: when an abuser selects dates or rituals that amplify the victim's emotional pain.

I cannot know his full intent, but I have lived long enough with patterns to recognize choreography. His departure was deliberate — a parting gift of confusion and shame.

Boxes had lined the bedroom, living room and basement for weeks. The sound of tape being pulled from its roll was the daily soundtrack of our unraveling.

He walked through the house cataloging what was his and what he believed was his — documents, titles, weapons, even air.

My children moved like ghosts through the hallways, pretending not to notice the growing absence.

I tried to match his calm, though my heart pounded with every clink of metal and every zip of a suitcase.

#### (research insight)

Dr. Shahida Arabi writes that survivors often endure anticipatory trauma: an anxiety state triggered by the countdown to an abuser's departure, knowing freedom will come at the cost of confrontation.

That final morning, he stood by the door with the weight of his own mythology on his shoulders.

He turned to me and said, almost theatrically, that he was waiting for me to beg him not to leave.

There it was — the script.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

The line designed to pull me back into orbit.

But I did not beg.

I cried, yes, because grief is still love in its dying form.

But I did not perform my pain for him.

As his car backed out of the garage, I pressed the door opener — the same one I'd retrieved for my safety plan — and watched the panel descend like a curtain on the final act.

In that quiet, I felt both desolation and deliverance.

For the first time, the house exhaled.

(research insight)

Therapists who work with survivors of long-term coercive control often describe this moment as body-level liberation: the nervous system finally realizing the threat has left the room, even before the mind can believe it.

I knew the story wasn't over. Abusers rarely exit the stage without an encore.

But the symbolism of that day — of his choice to make my suffering a spectacle — became, in the end, my first proof of freedom.

Because when a person chooses cruelty to mark their leaving, they also reveal the truth: they were never love.

## Let Us Reflect

If you are listening to this and recognize your own life between these lines, I want you to remember something vital: you are not imagining it.

Patterns of control and humiliation are not misunderstandings; they are strategies.

(research insight)

As Dr. Brené Brown reminds us, "Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do."

Recovery begins the moment we tell the truth — first to ourselves, then to others.

Today, when I think of that Valentine's Day, I no longer see an ending.  
I see an initiation — a passage into clarity.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

The woman who watched that car drive away was shaking, terrified, and uncertain.

But she was also standing at the threshold of her own life.

Healing doesn't always roar. Sometimes, it whispers: You made it through.

## Sincere Thoughts From Me to You

This story is true.

It is told not to relive the past, but to offer understanding to those who are still inside it.

The details remain as they occurred — not sensationalized, not softened, simply witnessed.

If you are someone still living within control or fear, know this: there are resources, advocates, and people who believe you.

You are not invisible.

You are not broken.

You are beginning.

Take a deep breath with me — in through the nose, out through the mouth — and remember: liberation often arrives disguised as loss.

## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

### Bibliography

1. Arabi, S. (2018). *Power: Surviving and Thriving After Narcissistic Abuse*. Thought Catalog Books.
2. Bowen, M. (1978). *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. Jason Aronson.
3. Brown, B. (2015). *Rising Strong: The Reckoning. The Rumble. The Revolution*. Spiegel & Grau.
4. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence on Children*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
5. Durvasula, R. (2019). *Don't You Know Who I Am?: How to Stay Sane in an Era of Narcissism, Entitlement, and Incivility*. Post Hill Press.
6. Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books.
7. Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and Family Therapy*. Harvard University Press.
8. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2023). *Domestic Violence Facts and Statistics*. [ncadv.org](https://ncadv.org)
9. North Carolina General Statutes § 14-134.3. Domestic criminal trespass.
10. Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1–18.
11. U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. (2023). *Coercive Control and Domestic Violence*.
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2023). *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence*.
13. American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). (2020). *The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence*.
14. Durvasula, R. (2015). *Should I Stay or Should I Go? Surviving a Relationship with a Narcissist*. Post Hill Press.
15. Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Hazelden Publishing.



## Valentine's Day Liberation – The Beginning of the End

© 2025 HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com — All Rights Reserved

Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

### Support & Crisis Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline (U.S.): 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) — [thehotline.org](https://thehotline.org)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) — [rainn.org](https://rainn.org)
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: [ncadv.org](https://ncadv.org)
- Loveisrespect (For Teens & Young Adults): 1-866-331-9474 — [loveisrespect.org](https://loveisrespect.org)
- National Center for Victims of Crime: [victimsofcrime.org](https://victimsofcrime.org)
- NO MORE Global Directory Hotlines and Support Services — [nomoredirectory.org](https://nomoredirectory.org)
- If in immediate danger, call 911 (U.S.) or your local emergency number.

For more survivor education and resources, visit: [HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com](https://HappilyEverAfterAbuse.com)

*"From the ashes of control, I rebuilt my voice — and it speaks, still, for those who are finding theirs."*