

# Breaking the Chain – When House Rules Become Prison Bars

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Narrated by Delicia Brown for Happily Ever After Abuse

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Before beginning, take one calm, steady breath.  
Feel your shoulders lower.

This is not a story about pain returning; it is a story about understanding what control looked like—and why it no longer lives here.

## Part I - The Rule

For as long as I could remember, Isis and Suchus never voluntarily used our house phone.

It wasn't by accident.

It was a deeply entrenched house rule—one they instinctively obeyed.

So automatic was their compliance that they subconsciously ignored the sound of the phone ringing altogether.

(research insight)

As the late sociologist, Dr. Evan Stark described in his 2007 book, *Coercive Control*, abusers often govern small, everyday behaviors to reinforce dominance. Over time, these “micro-rules” condition families to equate obedience with safety.

In our home, the phone symbolized hierarchy and fear.

It wasn't just a device—it was a reminder that power belonged elsewhere.

## Part II - The Required Calls

Despite that unspoken fear, my children were required to use that very phone for one recurring purpose: to participate in scheduled conversations with their paternal grandparents, Filly and Milly.

The pattern never changed. Dolus would begin feverishly texting on his cell phone, and I learned to read his pauses.

When the gaps between messages grew long, I knew he was communicating with one or both of his parents.

Then, with dreadful knowing, I would brace myself for his next words.

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He would summon them by announcing that their Mema (Milly) and Papa (Filly) were about to call them.

Without fail, Isis and Suchus immediately stopped whatever they were doing and appeared before Dolus.

They had learned from earlier lectures and punishments that any delay in answering was a blatant display of disrespect toward their elders.

The ritual had become reflex.

(research insight)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network notes that children in controlling homes internalize compliance so completely that it becomes a form of automatic self-protection—what psychologists call anticipatory obedience.

## Part II - Scripted Conversations

Every call followed the same pattern.

Dolus would either have the children wait for an incoming call on the house phone, or he would dial Milly's number himself before handing the receiver to our daughter, Isis.

Regardless of who initiated the call, the sequence never changed.

Isis always spoke first.

Milly and Filly's tone was coldly polite, their conversation short—perhaps a few minutes of small talk before moving on.

Then Isis, still required to remain in place, would hand the phone to Suchus.

That handoff always triggered laughter and adoration from the other end of the line.

Suddenly, voices once restrained became warm and enthusiastic — praising, encouraging, elevating.

(research insight)

Dr. Judith Herman explains that in abusive systems, children are often assigned emotional "roles" that divide them: the golden child who receives conditional affection, and the scapegoat who absorbs blame.

Both roles are forms of manipulation, binding loyalty through inequality.

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### Part IV - The Turning Point

After that Valentine's Day—our day of liberation—I made a vow: my children would never again be forced into those phone calls.

Dolus had underestimated the permanence of my decision. His rulebook no longer applied.

But freedom doesn't erase persistence.

Two weeks after his departure, Dolus began making uncomfortable requests—demands that revealed how control tries to survive absence.

He asked that I either sell our home quickly or refinance it in my name.

He also instructed me to organize and maintain phone communication between his parents and our children.

(research insight)

Dr. Ramani Durvasula calls this “post-separation abuse”—when an abuser attempts to retain psychological authority through ongoing instructions or expectations.

His demand angered and wounded me, but the answer was simple: unless Isis and Suchus chose to initiate contact themselves, I would protect their mental health by refusing.

On February 25, 2021, I received a text message from Dolus.

He wanted me to begin facilitating phone calls between the children and his parents.

My reply was brief but firm:

“I prefer that your parents call the children. They have called them before. We are all adults, and Isis and Suchus are their grandchildren. I honestly prefer not to be your parents' facilitator, given their role in our troubled marriage.”

The next morning, his response arrived:

In a show of “grace”, Dolus proclaimed that he chose not to respond to my message the previous evening because he was slightly annoyed with its contents. Then shifting blame, he accused me of failing to embrace the role of facilitator while knowing that when he called the house phone, no one answered.

If I were to respond today, with the clarity freedom brings, I would write back simply: “Of course no one would answer the phone. Doing so would be against the house rules.”

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### Let Us Reflect

In that moment, liberation didn't look like defiance.

It looked like stillness.

The same rule that once enforced submission collapsed under its own contradiction.

(research insight)

Dr. Shahida Arabi writes that survivors reclaim freedom not by seeking confrontation but by choosing alignment with peace. Refusal becomes affirmation.

That text exchange, as simple as it was, represented the final unraveling of control.

It all came full circle: the house phone rule that once silenced my family ended by its own absurd logic.

In refusing to obey, I didn't create conflict. I ended it.

### Sincere Thoughts From Me to You

Every word of this narrative is true to the events that unfolded two weeks after February 14, 2021.

Nothing more, nothing less.

The phone, the texts, the obedience, and the irony are factual. The rule ended not with confrontation, but with recognition.

I share this story for every survivor who still measures peace by the absence of noise.

May they learn that silence is not fear—it is ownership.

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### Support & Crisis Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline (U.S.): 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) — [thehotline.org](https://thehotline.org)
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: [ncadv.org](https://ncadv.org)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: [childwelfare.gov](https://childwelfare.gov)
- 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)

*“The rule collapsed under its own irony—what once demanded silence now speaks peace”*