

The End of Anna

My name is Anna. A bad man has me. Call the police.

I want to go home. Just take me home.

I want my mother. My daddy.

The bad man gives me pills. He's vile.

I try to spit, but he watches me.

I'm so afraid.

The bad man puts me into bed. Then he gets in. He sleeps in the same bed with me!

I tell him, *Get out!*

He says, *I'll stay on my side, Anna.*

He says, *Please, Anna. Put your head on my shoulder.*

He's so old. So old. But sometimes I do it. I put my head on his shoulder.

No!

Another man comes. He helps me walk. Why do I need help? Other people can walk.

Why can't I walk?

I'm so afraid. Please, please call the police.

The old man puts me in a soft chair and sits and watches. Sometimes he helps me walk, like the younger man does. But he's not as strong. We walk through the rooms. And when he isn't ready, bang! I bump him. Hard!

He falls! Good! I fall too, but I don't care.

I don't care!

I hate him! He should be ashamed of himself.

I love you, he says. *Why do you do this, Anna?*

He says the same thing when I bite. I bite him good!

He's careful, when he helps me stand up. But I trick him. I say, *I'll pull myself up. Let me hold your wrists.* We try it. *Help me*, I say. He leans back. Farther. Farther.

I let go. Ha! And land in my soft chair.

The old man goes down! His head hits something. Bam! Blood on the carpet. On the phone, too, when he calls for help.

You really hurt me, he says.

I say, *Good!*

A woman stays with me while he goes to the hospital. She says, *Don't be scared. You won't go to jail.* But I want to. I want to go to jail. No I don't. I want the old man back. What's taking him so long?

I hate him!

One day he fell asleep and I got up all by myself – all by myself! – and walked to the front door. Unlocked! It's raining on the porch, but I don't care.

Help! Police! Help!

The old man comes out to get me.

I'm not letting go of the railing! *Help! Help!*

Anna, please, he says. *Come inside, honey. It's raining.*

I see houses in all directions. *Help!* No one helps.

The old man calls somebody on the phone. We go back inside. It's no use.

I can't think. I can't walk.

I can't get away.

I want to go home.

Another man comes.

I have to go home, I tell him. I have to get dressed for school.

I just want to go home.

I want my Mother. Mother! Daddy! Mother! Where's my mother?

I ask the man, *Do you work here?*

No, he says. This is a house. Your house.

This isn't my house, I tell him.

I'll push you in your wheelchair, he says. We'll look through the rooms. At all your things.

No, I tell him. I don't want to.

He gives me a pill. I point and say, *look!* When he looks, I drop it.

Anna, he says.

He tries to make me take it. Tries and tries.

Okay, I say. Give me the glass.

I throw water on him.

Why did you do that, Anna.

It's poison, I say.

It isn't poison.

How do you know, I say. How do you know, for sure, it isn't poison?

He laughs, but it's not funny.

Okay, he says. I don't know, for sure. But your doctor prescribed it, and I picked it up at the pharmacy, and it isn't poison.

I'm just so afraid, I tell him. Aren't you afraid?

What are you afraid of?

Men are coming. With guns.

No, he says.

They're watching. We'll all be dead by morning.

There are no men with guns. And if there are, we'll protect you.

You're so naïve, I say. You don't know anything.

You're afraid, he says. But remember, the danger isn't real. It's just your brain fooling you.

He's lying. Or . . .

Tell me the truth, I say. Am I crazy?

You've just been alive for a long time. Your body's getting weaker. So is your brain. It plays tricks. You don't recognize people you know. You see things that aren't there.

That can't be right. Can't be.

Can't be.

Tell me this is a nightmare, I say. Please tell me I'm asleep and when I wake up, this will be over.

I wish I could, Mother. I'd wake you up in a heartbeat.

He said Mother. My son. He's my son.

I call my husband over, and pull him close.

His ear approaches my mouth, and I want to bite again. This time I don't.

I'm sorry, I tell him. I did the best I could.

He's crying now.

I didn't mean for it to end this way, I say.

And there's something else he needs to know, before it's too late.

Did I ever tell you how much I love you, for taking care of me?

No, he says. *You never did.*

Well, I'm telling you now.

And then . . . I don't know. Time passing. Confusion.

Sleep and haze and unhappiness.

Then life snaps into focus.

My bed is in the dining room now. I'm propped up. Looking into the backyard through patio doors.

A sunny day. My husband is out there, filling the bird feeder. Slowly.

Mother, you're awake. It's my son.

We used to have a cat, I tell him. My sister and me.

He holds my hand.

You never told me, he says. What was its name?

Kitty, I say. I think we just called her Kitty.

I'll be right back, he says.

I close my eyes. The back door opens. I know that sound.

Dad! Get in here. Mother's awake.

Through my eyelids, the day is bright. Then, a shadow. A familiar scent.

Anna, he says. It's my husband.

Anna. Anna.

The brightness dims, and becomes darkness. Everything is darkness.

Another voice: *You can talk to her. She might still hear you, even if she can't respond.*

Hearing is the last to go.

My daughters, my sons, my husband. Talking to me. To each other.

Now, silence.

Voice: *She's holding on. But it won't be much longer.*

My husband: *No.*

Voice: *It's her time. Tell her you love her, but that you'll be all right. That she can move on.*

My husband: *Why would I do that? I won't be all right. Anna! Listen! Don't go! Breathe deeper, honey! You can do it!*

My poor husband! What I've put him through! I can just see him there at my bedside, holding my hand. And I can see myself, too, and it's not dark anymore, there's light, and it's brighter and brighter, and there's Mother at last, and Daddy, too, and I rush to them and hold them and they hold me and I say Mother, Mother, tell me, please tell me, please tell me this is not a dream, I'm not sleeping, and she lays her hand on my head and says, Anna, my sweet Anna, this is not a dream.

And we are forever beyond the reach of sleep.