

KATY PERRY



Katy Perry

"Roar"

Prism

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Capitol

The Lioness Wakes

Juliette van der Molen

I thought I was going to vomit the first time I packed the kids in the car and went to the domestic violence shelter. I sat in the car, squeezing the steering wheel and looking at the large privacy fence that surrounded what I would have thought was just an ordinary house. My daughters, 13 years old, were old enough at the time to understand why we were there. They'd had a front row seat to the disintegration of their mother for almost ten years. Signing up for group therapy and getting a divorce lawyer was proof that I was going to do better by them. I would finally put myself first and, in the process, bring them along with me.

When I tell people this story, I get asked the same question by almost every person. I've almost stopped confiding in anyone because of it. So, why tell it here? Because it's too important not to tell. Not only that, I start to feel like it's irresponsible of me not to share.

"Why didn't you just leave?"

It's a slippery slope, abuse. My life with him didn't start out that way. There were also complications. He was bipolar and sometimes it felt impossible to sort out him from the disease. It didn't help that he refused to manage himself with medication. I walked a tightrope, trying to keep the peace and not wanting to break up the only family my children had ever really known. I somehow believed that what everyone else needed was more important. I come from sturdy Midwestern stock. Sometimes life is tough, and you roll with that. You're also polite and not demanding. My family can argue with a smile and cut each other with so much tenderness that it's a shock to see the bleeding. Over time, I became a person I didn't even recognize.

I used to bite my tongue and hold my breath

Scared to rock the boat and make a mess

So I sat quietly, agreed politely

I guess that I forgot I had a choice

I let you push me past the breaking point

I stood for nothing, so I fell for everything

Oh, Katy knew me; her words embarrassed me when I realized how true they were. Most women in my situation don't get the chance that I had to change things. I was lucky enough to go away on a long term work project in Canada and bring my kids with me. I left my husband behind for almost two years. He couldn't cross the border—that's a whole different story full of lies and deceit. Going to Canada on my own, as basically a single mother, taught me a lot about my capabilities. Slowly, the ice inside of me thawed. I never thought I'd lose the winter of my life so far north.

We were happy. I didn't dread coming home at night. I was tired, worked to the bone and exhausted with middle school girls to ferry back and forth as I tried to figure out a new city and country. Even so, it was nothing compared to what I had been dealing with before. My bruises faded, but it took longer for my confidence to grow back. I was able to shelter it in the cold Canadian windswept plains and give it enough sunshine to grow.

The foreign language of laughter filled our house. Frown lines faded. My girls and I were silly. We played loud music that we chose; we danced in the kitchen. We had chocolate chip pancakes on Sunday mornings and sprawled over the couches in our pajamas. Smiles were easy. Even his demands to be included via Skype felt like a hollow echo far away, blessed by a bad network connection.

I didn't miss him. Not for a moment.

Distance gave me strength, experience gave me courage. I knew I would have to go back to the United States once the project was over. I also knew that it was time to cut ties permanently and seek a divorce. It was going to be messy.

I stood up to him in person. I planted my feet in the ground and told myself I was ready. If he was going to hit me, it was going to be the last time. I was prepared to call the cops. I made my demands. And then something magical happened. I saw his eyes begin to water. He wouldn't cry in front of me, but I finally saw the tiniest crack in his armor. I took my opening and pressed hard, I wasn't going to back down. I held my finger over the send button of my phone, just in case, where I had already punched in the numbers: 9-1-1.

I won't lie. I was scared.

Sometimes when I read stories or watch movies about heroes that go in to slay dragons or fight beasts I think, I could never do that. I'm not calling myself a hero. In fact, I've beaten myself up a long time for staying in such a bad situation for so long. But I did understand in that moment how it feels to stand up and ride a wave of courage. Righteous adrenaline shoved aside my fear. Clarity shot through me and electrified my heart. The 'self' I had lost for so long was back. I was finally ready to battle, and he never saw it coming.

*You held me down, but I got up (hey!)
Already brushing off the dust
You hear my voice, your hear that sound
Like thunder, gonna shake the ground
You held me down, but I got up
Get ready 'cause I had enough
I see it all, I see it now*

I had been biding my time, making plans, squirreling away money. He never knew because he was the one that taught me how to hide my feelings and shrink myself so no one noticed me. Abused women go back an average of seven times before they can break free. Sometimes they don't live that long. That wasn't going to be me.

It was a hellish roller coaster ride, that divorce. When the police in our little town told me that they couldn't find him to serve him a restraining order, I was indignant. While I knew the order wouldn't stop him from doing something outrageous, I also knew it might scare him enough to leave us alone. Out of desperation, I took matters into my own hands. I stalked him as carefully as I could from a distance. I called the cops and told them where he was, I watched them serve the restraining order to him from a Five Guys parking lot. I felt a deep sense of satisfaction when he completely lost his shit over it.

I didn't sleep well. I looked over my shoulder constantly. I became a helicopter parent that drove my kids insane. I had plans to leave the area when the divorce was final. Each step was difficult and frightening. But, it was all worth it. I found my voice, I found my roar, and I was unstoppable.

*Now I'm floating like a butterfly
Stinging like a bee I earned my stripes
I went from zero,
to my own hero*

My daughters and I became a tight knit group, an all-girl band singing from the same song sheet. We packed up our lives and moved across the country. Two thousand miles later we re-branded ourselves, got a new contract. I still worried that maybe the damage for my daughters had been done. My biggest fear was that the cycle would repeat itself for them; until one day, when I heard my daughter on the phone with a guy.

She said:

"The way you're treating me is unacceptable, and I'm not going to stand for it."

I don't know what he said to her from the other end, but her last words made me want to hug her so tight.

"Guess what, we're done!"

When I asked her if she was okay, she said she was great. She shook her head at the stupidity of what happened. She smiled at me. She didn't need anyone to save and protect her; she would do that for herself from now on.

*I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter
Dancing through the fire
'Cause I am a champion, and you're gonna hear me roar
Louder, louder than a lion
'Cause I am a champion,
and you're gonna hear me roar!*

She found her roar. I was proud. Katy would have been, too.