



Light and Shade by Kirstie Parry

(Finalist, 15 years and over category, Janis Clark Short Story Competition)

She stared despondently into the mirror. She tilted her head and watched the sunlight caress the livid bruising; the perfect handprint of purple fading away through blue and yellow to her own pale skin. Again she wondered how it had happened. How had she become this non-person, this anonymity, a mere possession? The thought crept in unbidden; was it her fault? It had seemed so perfect; *he* had seemed so perfect. She dragged her mind back and forced it to search for the first trace of what was to come. When had attentive become possessive? When had the relationship become isolation? When had the kisses become interspersed with bruises and lovemaking become lovetaking?

She shook off the thick confusion of memories; it didn't matter anymore. The case sat on the bed packed. She had refined her escape over nights laid motionless in bed listening to his endless breathing. Her hand reached down to stroke the slightest swell of her belly and she looked again in wonder at the black and white dots of the ultrasound picture that was a new life inside her. A flutter of excitement ran through her as she dared to think of a different future, a life out of these shadows and into the light. She turned decisively and picked up the small case; she was only taking essentials, leaving as much of this life behind as possible. Slowly, out of habit, she crept down the stairs. At the door she paused, suddenly fearful of opening it to find him on the other side. Before she could stop them, her hands darted to grasp the key from the hook by the door and turned it in the lock with unsteady hands. She could feel her heart dancing crazily in her chest as she turned the door handle and suddenly there it was - freedom, in all its glorious reality, just one footstep away.

She crossed the doorway into her future, allowing the door to close decisively behind her. Without looking back she hurried down the street until she reached the main road. She allowed herself a moment to steady her breathing and turned her face up to receive the warm glow of the sun. Never again would she need to keep her face hidden or turn away in shame. Again her hands drifted protectively to her belly. With a sickening jolt she remembered the ultrasound pictures by the mirror in the bathroom; she would jeopardise everything by leaving them. She would not allow him the possibility of entering or polluting this new life. His pursuit of them would be unceasing if he knew about the baby. Her breath came in ragged gasps as she turned and ran back. She felt for the key in her pocket as she reached the door only to recall the finality with which she had left. Pressing her face into the unforgiving door, a tear slipped unbidden over the purple handprint. She breathed deeply, turned, and walked away.