



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Everyone has that one scar that either makes or mars them for life. Truthfully, no one deserves to be scarred, but we are humans and one way or the other we'll eventually face one or two. It's often easier when they are trusted allies around to provide some form of solace. But what happens when supposed allies turn enemies at a time when you yearn for their comfort the most?

This is where I found bravery. Bravery to fight for myself through the pain, bravery to refuse to give up and finally the bravery to tell my story.

“My Story”

Trust me, it's nothing extraordinary and certainly nothing like a Hollywood movie. It's simply my voice praying to get heard, it's my only defense against the accusations they might hurl against me. It is proof of the battles I've fought and a gift to my precious daughter Rosalie whose life I've been deprived a chance to be in.

This story is me and I am this story.

So, if I ever get to tell the world about it, I'm hoping with the tiniest of belief that someone out there reads this and is inspired. I'm hoping you don't let your battles define you and I'm hoping your scars don't mar you in the end.

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing fictitious or untrue about this book. While I may have added a few wits and humor here and there, the message of the story remains untampered with. I guess you can say my life feels like something out of a movie but the truth is, it is as realistic as it can be.

The names of places and characters used are entirely true. This is my story after all. And for one based on my life, I owe it to myself to be truthful. I have to reveal the memories that have both haunted and built me into the woman I am today.

These memories I'm not scared or ashamed of. They are me. In no way am I seeking some form of personal revenge or making excuses for my wrongs.

This is why I will bring my story to you undiluted.

Trust me, you're in for one hell of a ride. So fasten your seatbelt and get ready.

Let me take you back to the place it all began, where this story was born and where broken dreams lie.

PROLOGUE

The phone rang abruptly, jolting us from our laughter. Chris picked it immediately, putting it on speaker. It was his wife, Tanya.

"So there's no other person for you to cheat on me with apart from my friend?" From the expression on Boris' face, I could tell he clearly didn't see this coming. "She grew in front of my eyes, how dare you!" she screamed, hanging up before Chris could utter a word. He turned to me wordlessly. The silence was broken by the sound of my own phone ringing.

My heart raced as I punched the receiver. "There's no other man in the world that you decide to sleep with him....?" The line ended abruptly like it had with Chris.

We both turned together. They knew. Our little big secret was finally out in the open. This two-month rendezvous of ours was finally over. We were too close a family to continue. Our families knew each other and Tanya and I were even workmates.

Nervousness washed over me. I knew how my family would react to this news. My mother would spit and curse. And Will, my husband, I could already see his cold eyes harden even further. Our marriage was barely hanging with a tiny thread and this was enough to cut the last strands. I thought of how much I'd have to kneel and beg for forgiveness and how desperate I was to make things work. Little did I know that I'd never be forgiven. That my sin would be held against me for life and that I'd lose the most precious gift I had - Rosalie, my beloved daughter.

CHAPTER 1

Cold sweat began to break from my forehead as I made my way into the courtroom. A few glances were thrown my way. I made sure to avoid them all. I wasn't here to share my misery and neither did I need any pity.

I was nervous but only a few people could sense it. The way my eyes darted around and how I clutched my palms, it was my own way of reassuring myself. Today, I was about to lose everything I had ever had. These past months had been hell, but nothing compared to what I was feeling today.

Will was somewhere across the room whispering something to his lawyer. I couldn't make out what they were saying, not that it mattered anyway. I stared at the back of his head, making out the outline of his face, unconsciously summoning past memories.

"Great! Way to boost your misery, Monika."

"Forever" how often we used those words on each other. Was this what we meant? I remembered the initial glee and ecstasy we shared, the bond, the romantic little notes he would always leave me around the house and the promises we made.

Was it all a sham?

*You see, my Will was a bit of a helpless romantic. Our life was almost every bit of a fairy tale, except the **'they lived happily ever'** part.*

I allowed myself this pleasure, I was free to reminisce after all. It was all I had left. The memories of the bliss we had shared and enjoyed before things fell apart.

My daydreams were cut short. I felt it. I was always a sensitive person, not really the typical alarm bell investigator instinct. This was different. Familiar. I turned instantly and our eyes met.

Whatever notions or hopes I had, quickly deflated. The eyes of the man whose gaze was locked on mine were solid cold. At once, I could feel the disdain and negative energy emanating from him.

"No Will, don't do this," my eyes begged silently.

We can make this work, I thought desperately. I watched his eyes narrow even further. The coldness I saw earlier was gone. But what I saw next was worse.

"Hate." Deep seething hate so much that I could feel it across the room where I stood.

I felt my waters burst open and the tears threatened to pour. He turned away first. I struggled to stay calm, desperately begging the tears to hang on.

I heard him first before his arrival. The Judge was making his way in. The court clerks stood up to command attention, silence filled the room and in that terse mood, walked in on the man that would make my heart breaking situation official.

We were getting a divorce. The one who would bring our three year long fairy tale into an end and shatter the forever I had always thought we had.

I closed my eyes and exhaled briefly. This was really over. In that one brief moment, a realization had dawned on me. I had done my best and given it one last shot. But no, it wasn't my fault alone anymore and my soul found peace in that.

But how did we get here? How did I manage to watch time slide past me? Well, technically, life happens. And this time, before the court officials would finish their entry protocols, I knew my mind would wander again. I had a destination though, I already knew where I wanted to wander to.

Home. I'm coming home, to the place where it all began.

“Children are magic because they look for it” – Christopher Moore

I was like every other child. There was nothing extraordinary about me. Just the regular kid in the block with the usual innocence. Of course, I had dreams, they were what made me special. I could sit for hours imagining a whole lot of things and never get tired. I've always wanted to go to the University, but sadly, I didn't get to live that dream because my mother could not afford to pay my tuition anymore after she got a divorce.

I was born in Denmark, a beautiful country with very warm people. We lived in the city of Ebeltoft, one of Denmark's most beautiful cities.

Ours was a strict home. Mother raised us mostly. We were a small family of four. It was just Mother, Father, Eloise and I.

Eloise was my elder sister with at least seven years ahead of me. We lived as a close family, but I don't really think we were so close.

You see, Mother never really wanted me. She had always favored Eloise over me and while I was a kid, I often wondered why. I didn't have to wonder for long though. Whenever I made her mad, she would angrily tell me that her life would've been better if she had just peed me in the toilet or if I had simply died. I think my mother had always wanted just one child, so my coming was definitely unwelcome. I've heard funny stories of the things she did when she found out that she was pregnant with me. I said it was funny, but trust me as one who is now a mother, I do not find those attempts funny anymore.

Mother used to tie her stomach with a tight belt and take random pills in a bid to abort me. She even threw herself from the stairs in the hopes that she would get rid of me. Yep. That's how badly my mother did not want me.

It wasn't until she was 5 months along in the pregnancy that she finally told my Dad and everyone else. I must have really been destined to live because I survived all those attempts. But not without some scars.

You see, I was a small baby. The pills and the tight belt had an effect on me. I was only 1.9 kg with a 50-50 chance of survival.

But I did. So mother had no choice than to raise me even though she clearly would rather not. I often think to myself that the only reason why she didn't leave me in a home for homeless children is because she cared too much about

what others would say. It was this reason that she stayed in an abusive relationship for 29 years just so she could avoid the talks from people. Her religious beliefs were strictly orthodox and mother took hers so fanatically that it was equal to craziness.

It was with this strictness that she tried to raise us. As her favorite child, my sister Eloise did all she wanted and was the perfect daughter. In return, she was showered all the affection and motherly love my mother could give.

I, on the other hand, was my Dad's favorite. He used to take me out with him to the local coffee shop to buy me cake and juice when I was a little child. He always said that I was his "sunshine" and his "daughter."

But to my sister, he was very judgmental and hard on her. She always seemed to do the wrong things to him and was never good enough. I think whatever affection I lacked from my mother, I received tenfold from my Dad.

In fact, he trusted my suggestions so much that he would always take me along when we went to buy home décor or clothes.

My parents were hardworking people. They worked in a plastic factory. We also had a small business and they both ran it together. Most times they had to work for 16/17 hours per day every day. It was not an easy job, but they ran it well.

There was one problem though. My dad had a drinking habit. Once we finished dinner, he would start drinking until he could not talk anymore.

His speech would get all slurred and he could barely walk. My dad was not a happy drunk. He wasn't the type to get all joyful once had alcohol. He was an angry drunk. Often once he had some alcohol he would get aggressive and start to beat my mother, Eloise and I for absolutely no reason.

If we got invited to a party or prom, we knew what would happen once we got home because my dad would definitely not reject the alcohol.

So while most kids were excited to get invited for a party or a family outing, mine was pure dread. I knew an automatic beating awaited us whenever we came back home. Mother never fought back. For 29 years, she stayed silent enduring whatever drunk bruises my dad gave her.

It wasn't for love. My mother was the type to rather die than have someone call her a bad person. She had a reputation to keep and she protected it even above her own life.

These values she tried to teach Eloise and me. To stay silent and endure whatever came your way just to save face. Eloise clearly listened too much, for Mother soon found out I was never going to be her faithful disciple. I think this put a further strain on our already bitter relationship.

I don't recall receiving any gifts from her. She wasn't the type to give hugs or pat backs to encourage her child, especially not one she clearly never wanted in the first place.

As for Eloise, I cannot exactly paint our relationship as sibling goals. She was far older than me and was in charge of taking me to school because our parents were always working. She helped me with homework from school and was very responsible in carrying out her duties. I faintly recall her doing all the chores, tidying the house, washing plates and even doing the laundry. She barely had time for me and saw me as a duty she was obligated to care for, no more no less. When we were much younger, she always made sure to put the blame on me when she did something wrong. If she broke a dish, I would get blamed. This further painted me as the black sheep in the eyes of Mother.

You see, Mother accepted no mistakes, so Eloise had to constantly keep a clean slate. When she failed, she made sure to blame me for it so she would not lose Mother's affection.

We argued a lot growing up. She was very strict with me. I was just a kid and she was a teenager. She made life hard for me whenever she had to watch me and I sure frustrated her as well. It was always a case of silent battles with both of us trying hard to outdo and discredit the other person. Eloise to my mother and I to my father. Fortunately, once we both became adults, things changed and we became best friends. I still have fond memories of us, holding our kids together in the park, attending traditional dance classes and even shopping together.

I guess we somehow found a way to work around our childhood conflicts.

CHAPTER 2

The world of adulthood was clearly much more than I anticipated when I was a child. The fairy tales I had spun in my mind were totally different from reality. I do not mean to sound like a killjoy but that's exactly as it is.

I soon learned why my parents toiled so hard and spent less time with us. Money was an important commodity and while we lived in a relatively peaceful community, Denmark was suffering from the results of political party feuds which made things hard for the common masses. The entire government system was corrupt and it was the people who paid dearly for it.

I had just lost my first business idea. A small café in the center of the town. I had put all of my little savings into it. It was one of my dreams to run a business of my own. Life had other plans for me though. It was as if it was sitting in a dark corner, twisting its mischievous mustache and saying "we'll see about that" when I made my plans. The point is that I failed miserably and even got into debt. Of course there was nothing else to do, so I decided to return to my village where Mother lived as of that time. Mother had a small vegetable business and I was better off helping her than starving in debt. I would help Mother gather the vegetables and take them to the market in town where we would sell them. That was how we survived. The money from the sales were used to support the house and other necessities.

Our struggle to survive served as an eye opener for me. Adulthood was clearly not easy and in time, I began to nurture a desire to have a better life than the one my parents could afford to give me. I knew if I started early and worked hard, I could turn the hands of whatever held my fate. So I put all my energy into selling our produce at the local market.

Little did I know that, it was in this market that I would meet the man who would later become a huge part of my story.

The local market was where almost all the families in my village depended for survival. Will's family was one of them. Like us, they too sold their production in the marketplace. Actually, I've known him since I was 14 and he was 19. But we never talked to each other at that time. Just two people who were familiar with each other but did not engage in any conversations together. I knew him, he knew me, simple.

Things took a sweet turn during my prom. We had just finished the official part of the occasion. Every student would definitely agree that it was the unofficial part, the after party that determined how fun a prom night went.

In any case, Will and I had our very first conversation that prom night. We bumped into each other at the disco club and I can never forget his first words. "Hello, congratulations! You look stunning." I returned a blushed smile and mumbled my thanks. I was still a bit naïve. The next day, he sent me a friend request and we started a little bit of communication. You would have expected that things would go further from there, but no. For reasons best known to him, Will suddenly cut off all forms of communication I had with him.

It wasn't until after I turned 19 and he was 24 that we resumed communication. We had both just recently broken up with our partners and weren't emotionally ready for any serious commitment. By then I had involved myself in about three different serious relationships, excluding the numerous affairs I would not want to recall. I was young and beautiful and lived my life for fun.

But then one day, Will invited me to watch football with his friends. I didn't want to start anything, but since he was someone I was already familiar with, I finally decided to go. Mother was in support of seeing Will. Our families knew each other and he was from a responsible home. Eventually, we let the pressure get to us and in less than 3 months he proposed to me and I said yes. Yep! That fast.

Will's family welcomed me warmly. His mother Nita and his father Kennieth were nice people who would never show their disapproval in you no matter how badly they disliked you. His brother Josh didn't really hate me either. He was just a gambling addict who was too busy losing money to care if his brother brought a wife home. I had always wanted a stable home so the support and attention I was suddenly receiving overwhelmed me.

Even though I worried that it was too early to take things too serious with Will, he found a way to charm himself into my heart. For one thing, he knew all about my naughty past, yet it didn't matter to him. He wanted to commit seriously to our relationship. I liked attention and Will clearly knew how to handle that. He gave me so much attention and romance that it wasn't long before I began to imagine a fairy tale life of love with him.

Will was every bit of an eligible bachelor. He owned a big house in the center of the town but it needed a lot of renovations to become the dream home that I wanted. Will did his best to give me all that I wanted, so he decided to begin a renovation project before we would get married. We moved into my mother's house where we had our own separate flat on the second floor, while Will made preparations for the place that would become our home once we got married. There was so much to do. My social circle immediately widened and suddenly everyone wanted to hang out with us in town.

Even Mother seemed to find me less displeasing seeing that I would soon have a home of my own.

Like every young bride to be, I was full of ideas. I had so many plans and they were an endless list of things to do and buy. Will and I had to spend so much time together to get to know each other. We were practically inseparable. Wherever Will went, Monika was there and if you saw me, you needn't look twice to see Will. We went to the market together to pick items for my engagement, gifts for the guests, home decorations, kitchenware and everything else a new couple would need. These little things drew us closer to each other and our bond deepened. It was almost too good to be true, but he was the perfect man.

Well, now I know perfect doesn't exist, but then, he was everything I wanted and more. There was something very special about Will. He was a helpless romantic and I loved every bit of the romance he showered me. There were times when he'd leave random papers and cards with written messages in different locations of the house and ask me to find them all. Each card would reveal the location to look for the hidden objects.

I remember going round the house looking for cards to give me clues and in the end it would lead me to an amazing gift he prepared for me.

There was even one time he ordered a handmade personal art with my zodiac sign (Leo) on it. Will was very meticulous with his surprises. They were very

organized even to the tiniest detail. When he found out that I liked fruits, he bought about 10 kilos of apples, oranges and many others. He made little emoji's in each fruit along with a little paper message that he personally wrote for me and an hour long story by the side and put them for me on the floor of the living room. Another time, he made plans with a female friend to trick me into going to the town center. We got there only to discover people gathered with flowers and candles. He had even planned a cute romantic dinner on a hill near our village with little chairs, flowers and candles. The pancake was even made by him! But this wasn't even the height of his romance. Out of his surprises I think his proposal surprise was the best. The events of that day are still evergreen in my mind. It was sometime in January I think. Precisely 2016.

We were already almost in New Year's Eve and he had earlier promised me during my birthday on 16.08 that he would propose during the end of the year. So I had guessed it would be on New Year's Eve, but I was wrong.

At this point, I had given up guessing as we were already in a new year.

Little did I know that clever Will had something up his sleeve.

It was about 8 o'clock when Will's phone rang.

"Hey Dad, what's up?"

"Hmmm, right now... okay, we'll be there soon... Yeah..."

I did not get the entire conversation, but Will was quick to explain.

"Dad's got a problem with a pipe at home and needs urgent help to fix it. I want you to come with me."

"You've got to be kidding me," I raised my eyes towards him from the couch I sat. I don't really remember why, but I was mad at something at that time plus the weather was minus 15 degrees. I was cold and I didn't want to go anywhere.

"C'mon, I need you to hold the torch for me, please," Will begged.

So, I went anyway. We jumped into the car to go to his Dad's house right away.

The journey was smooth then in the middle of nowhere, the car stopped suddenly. Will tried to restart it but failed. There were no houses in sight, just bushes around and the icy winds were blowing.

I blew out a sigh of exhaustion. I should have never left the house.

"Let's go outside and check it out," Will urged.

We were barely out of the car when he saw a fire.

"Look there's a fire," he shouted excitedly.

I turned around and saw a massive fire in the hill nearby.

It was weird. We were in minus 15 degrees' chilly weather, not to talk of the winds roaring around us. How on earth could there be a fire?

I turned back to say something to Will, only to find him on his knees with a ring in hand. He was saying something I can't remember exactly but had something to do with spending the rest of my life with him. Of course, I was mind blown.

Nothing prepared me for this surprise. So I said yes! Next thing, his friends were jumping out of the nearby bushes holding glasses and tequila, which was my favorite drink as of that time. It was the most surprised I had ever been. I couldn't even stop wondering how he had planned everything out. We got many congratulations that night and later I got to hear the entire story.

Basically, no one had called him. The entire call was a prank set up to make me join him outside that night. He painted a scenario to convince me and yes, I fell for it.

He had dug a hole on the hill to make a fire hearth and filled it with straw.

The plan was to quickly set it on fire and hide once his friends saw us stopping the car. Oh yes, Will would've made a good Hollywood actor because he acted his role so well that he could have fooled anyone.

Thinking back on these memories, I can't help but wonder how it became possible for a love this strong to disappear faster than a shadow.

To be continued