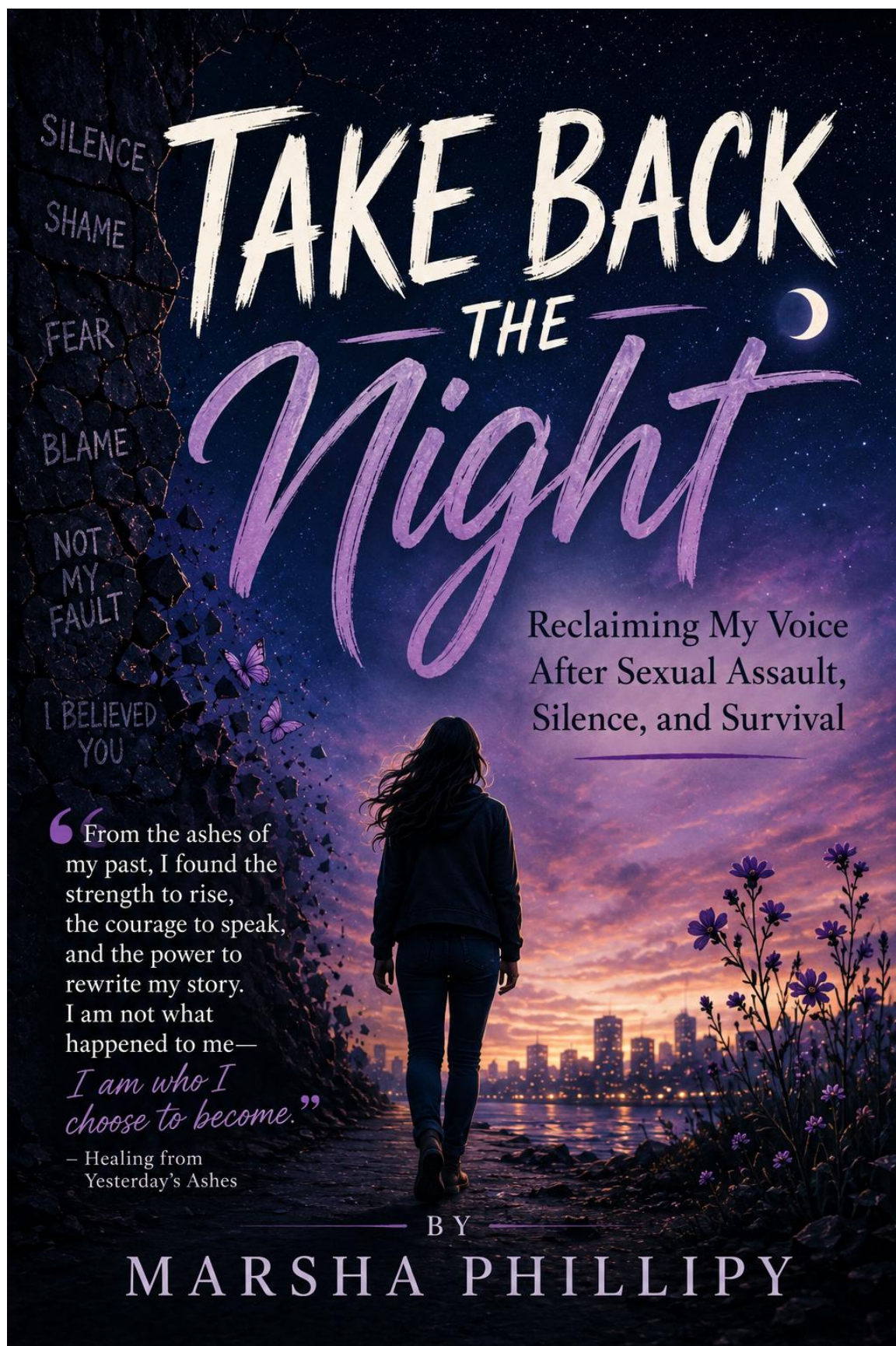




SILENCE

SHAME

FEAR

BLAME

NOT
MY
FAULTI BELIEVED
YOU

TAKE BACK THE Night

Reclaiming My Voice
After Sexual Assault,
Silence, and Survival

“From the ashes of
my past, I found the
strength to rise,
the courage to speak,
and the power to
rewrite my story.
I am not what
happened to me—
*I am who I
choose to become.*”

— Healing from
Yesterday's Ashes

BY

MARSHA PHILLIPY

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Take Back the Night: Reclaiming My Voice After Sexual Assault, Silence, and Survival

By Marsha Phillipy

Trigger Warning

This book contains discussions of sexual assault, underage drinking, drug-facilitated assault, emotional trauma, suicidal ideation, family rejection, and the long-term effects of unresolved trauma.

Some experiences shared may be triggering and/or emotionally intense for survivors of abuse and/or violence.

Please take care while reading. You are encouraged to pause, step away, or seek support at any time.

If you are in crisis or need immediate support in the U.S., you can contact: **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988** or **RAINN Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)** or online chat at www.rainn.org

You are not alone!!!

This book is dedicated to that version of me that survived in silence...and the version of me that finally learned how to speak.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: THE INVITATION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING	7
CHAPTER TWO: THE NIGHT I COULD NOT SAY NO.....	8
CHAPTER THREE: SILENCE, FEAR, AND MILITARY SHADOWS	8
CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT I BURIED TO SURVIVE.....	9
CHAPTER FIVE: SHAME THAT NEVER BELONGED TO ME	10
CHAPTER SIX: RELATIONSHIPS BUILD ON SURVIVAL, NOT SAFETY	10
CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNING TO CONFUSE LOVE WITH ENDURANCE	11
CHAPTER EIGHT: WHEN EVEN FAMILY STOPS FEELING LIKE HOME.....	12
CHAPTER TEN: WAKING UP WITHOUT ANSWERS.....	13
CHAPTER ELVEN: LOSING FRIENDS, LOSING PIECES OF MYSELF	13
CHAPTER TWELVE: SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND THE SILENT COLLAPSE.....	14
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND THE MYTH OF BEING “FIXED”	15
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE MAN WHO DIED AND THE QUESTIONS LEFT BEHIND	16
CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THOSE WHO DENIED IT EVER HAPPENED	16
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: RECLAIMING MY BODY, MY VOICE, AND MY STORY	17

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: WHAT HEALING ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE	17
CLOSING NOTE	18

“Take Back the Night”

I learned early
that some nights don't end when the sun comes up—
They just change where they live inside you.

In the quiet after laughter fades,
I carried things I never agreed to carry,
folded them into my silence
like they were mine to hold.

I told myself stories
that made the edges softer,
that made the blame easier to wear
than the truth.

Because the truth, back then,
felt like a door I wasn't allowed to open
without losing something else
on the other side.

So, I stayed quiet.
Not because I was empty—
But because I was trying to survive
What I didn't yet have language for.

Years passed like tides that never asked permission.
I learned how to smile while breaking,
How to answer, “I'm fine.”
without knowing what fine even meant anymore.

And still—
something in me refused to disappear completely.

A small, stubborn light
kept insisting I was still here.

Not what was taken.
Not what was said about me.
Not what I learned to believe in the dark.

Just... here.

And slowly,
I began to understand:

What happened to me
It was never mine to carry as shame.

What I survived
does not define my worth.

What I lost in silence
can still be found in truth.

So, I speak now
not to relive the night,
but to take it back from the places it hid inside me.

Piece by piece.
Breath by breath.

Until the night no longer owns me—

and I learn, at last,
to belong fully to my own morning.

CHAPTER ONE: THE INVITATION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

I was eighteen when I first learned how quickly a night can turn into something you spend the rest of your life trying to explain.

It started like many stories that do not seem dangerous at first. An invitation. A gathering. People who seemed older, more confident, and more connected, especially the men who had served in the military. There was a sense of authority in the room that I did not yet know how to question.

I remember thinking I was lucky to be included. The feeling of being chosen, being seen instead of being ignored, due to being the shy and quiet woman I was becoming. It became so powerful when you are young, unsure of your own place in the world.

There was alcohol involved, what do you expect when it is a party of older adults and what you thought were mature adults. Too much of it for someone my age, but at the same time, I did not fully understand how easily lines could be crossed when no one is watching where they are drawn.

Looking back now, I see how many small decisions I had just to belong changed, and lines in the sand were crossed. How fast I had ignored the quiet instincts in my body that told me to slow down, to leave, to call someone. But at eighteen, I did not yet know how to trust those instincts. I thought survival meant fitting in.

What I did not know then was that fear does not always arrive loudly or even with an announcement. Sometimes it grows slowly, once you realize you are no longer fully in control of your own situation.

That night would become the kind of memory that does not stay in the past. It follows, it rewrites how you see people, it also changes how you understand safety.

And when it was over, I did not tell anyone.

Not because I did not know something had happened. But because I had already known what telling might cost me.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NIGHT I COULD NOT SAY NO

There are moments in life where silence is not peace-it is survival.

I remember pieces of that night in fragments. Not a clear story, but broken impressions. Feeling small in a room that suddenly did not feel safe. Laughter that did not match what my body was feeling. The confusion of trying to understand what was happening while also trying to stay invisible.

At some point, my ability to say no, my ability to understand even fully what I was saying no to, was gone. And that is the part I carried the hardest afterwards. Not just what was done, but the way my voice disappeared inside of it.

What makes it harder to explain is that I had never reported it. I had many reasons why I did not report it. Let me explain why I did not report it. It might make some sense to some, especially if you were assaulted as well, you might have even used the same rational thinking. I did not report it because I was underage drinking. I did not report it because I was in a military environment where I believed the consequences would fall more heavily on me than on anyone else. I did not report it because I was afraid that I would become the one blamed.

So, I stayed silent. And in that silence, I had later learned, there is a way to turning into shame when it has nowhere else to go.

I told myself stories to survive it. That might have been where I was misunderstood. That maybe I should have been more careful. That maybe if I had been different, more cautious, more aware, more willing to leave sooner, it would not have happened. Those thoughts did not protect me. They had trapped me.

Over time, that silence did not stay contained to that night. It had followed me into friendships, into relationships, into how I allowed myself to be treated. I started to believe that I had to accept less care, less respect, less safety than I needed, all because some part of me had already been taught that my boundaries did not matter enough to protect.

And I did not realize then how long that belief would take to unlearn.

CHAPTER THREE: SILENCE, FEAR, AND MILITARY SHADOWS

After that night, I did not tell anyone.

Not my friends.

Not my family.

Not anyone who might have been able to help me make sense of what had happened.

At first, I told myself it was because I did not have enough words. But the truth was more complicated than that.

I was afraid.

Afraid of being questioned. Afraid of not being believed. Afraid of what it would mean to admit I had been underage drinking in an environment connected to military life. In my mind, the fear was not just about what happened to me-it was about what would happen to me if I spoke.

So, I stayed quiet.

And silence became its own kind of protection, even as it slowly began to harm me.

What I did not understand then was that silence has weight. It does not stay contained. It spreads into everything-how you see yourself, how you trust others, how you move through the world.

And in that silence, I began to carry something that was never meant to belong to me: shame.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT I BURIED TO SURVIVE

In the days, weeks, and months that followed, I tried to return to normal.

I went through the motions of life as if nothing had shifted inside me. But something had. Something I could not yet name. I became more cautious around people, more guarded in conversations. More aware of how quickly trust can be broken.

But I also became good at pretending. Smiling when I was disconnected, laughing when I felt far away. Saying “I am fine” when I was not sure what fine even meant anymore. I buried what happened because I did not know what else to do with it. There was no language for what I had felt, no safe place to put it. So, I placed it in the only place I knew, it was put somewhere inside of me that I prayed would it stay quiet forever.

However, we all know that buried things do not disappear. They wait and wait. Over time, I buried began to shape how I moved through the world-how I let people close, how I interpreted attention and lastly how I defined love. I did not realize then that I was not just surviving what happened. I was building my life around it.

CHAPTER FIVE: SHAME THAT NEVER BELONGED TO ME

Shame is not always loud; sometimes it speaks in whispers.

“You should have known better, you should have left, you should have said something,” all these should-haves were whispers that constantly lived inside of me. I replayed everything I could remember, searching for the moment I could have changed the outcome. As if responsibility somehow explained what had happened. As if blaming myself could make it feel more controllable.

The truth is that I was young, and I was vulnerable. And I was placed in a situation where my safety was not protected. The shame I carried was never mine to begin with. It was something I absorbed because I did not know where else to put the pain. And slowly, I began to learn the difference between what I did and what was done to me.

CHAPTER SIX: RELATIONSHIPS BUILD ON SURVIVAL, NOT SAFETY

I did not realize it at the time, but the way I began to move through relationships was shaped by survival.

I confused attention with care. I confused intensity with connection. I was confused being wanted and being valued.

I had stayed in relationships that did not treat me gently because, somewhere deep inside, I had believed that I had to earn gentleness.

I had tolerated things that I should have walked away from. Not because I wanted to be hurt, but because part of me had already been trained to question whether I deserved better.

And when those relationships ended or fractured, I often blamed myself. I did not yet understand that trauma does not just stay in memory. It becomes a pattern until you learn how to interrupt it.

Just like many other trauma survivors, I have learned that relationships are based on a place of safety that was formed from a place of survival. I had become an expert at learning to scan for danger, anticipate problems, and prepare myself to disappointment before it happens.

I was developed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in my early twenties because I was becoming more hypervigilant where I was constantly on edge where it was causing me

to be mentally exhausted looking for immediate danger. I started to avoid people or even certain locations and even refused to listen to some music that was playing in the background of my assault. I had become more of a people pleaser when I did hang out with others because I had already lost my control when I was assaulted, so if I gave in, it was easier than trying to address why I did not want something. I started to become more isolated and thought it was keeping me safe, but it led to more hopelessness and depression. Lastly, I wanted to be perfect and started to be more of an overachiever. I had to do the best job, and it had to be right, because I was afraid that I had failed myself or others again.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNING TO CONFUSE LOVE WITH ENDURANCE

For a long time, I had thought love meant staying, even when I was hurting, felt unheard, or when I was shrinking inside relationships that had asked me to be smaller than I was.

I honestly thought endurance was a sign of loyalty. But in all honesty, endurance without safety is not love; it is survival. The longer I stayed in places and relationships that were not healthy or safe, the more I felt like I was doing something right. But over time, I had learned to abandon a little more of myself each time. It took me years to understand and unlearn that pattern. Years to understand that love is love is not supposed to cost you your voice.

I got into bad relationships one after another because I developed the unhealthy beliefs that love means putting other needs before your own, if I endure this pain, it will eventually get better, and that my personal boundaries did not matter.

The cost of endurance had me ignoring red flags, accepting the unacceptable behaviors of others, and minimizing my own pain. However, over the course of healing from my trauma, I am learning that I must stop measuring my own worth by my ability to endure suffering and start measuring it by my own willingness to protect my own peace. I had also learned that love should never require me to lose myself, and NO is a complete sentence; I do not need to justify myself or my decisions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: WHEN EVEN FAMILY STOPS FEELING LIKE HOME

One of the most painful parts of my healing has been realizing that not all wounds come from strangers. Sometimes they come from a distance, from misunderstandings, from the absence of support when you needed it the most.

There were moments when I felt like I was on the outside of my own family looking in, as if it was like I did not truly belong anywhere I was supposed to feel safe. Yes, I never told my family what happened to me, and when I did, I got the message that I should have said something sooner, or you've got to get over it. Sadly, some things you just cannot get over, and the reason they want you to get over it is that they do not want to be the reason for you feeling an outsider in your own family.

It was this kind of emotional distance that created another layer of silence. I started to believe my feelings were too much, or even not even important enough to address, so I started to carry more silence alone. I stopped feeling it was not important enough to share and developed the belief that it is normal to carry it alone.

CHAPTER NINE: THE SECOND TIME I WAS NOT HEARD

I never thought it would happen again, but trauma does not always stay in the past. It sometimes finds a familiar pattern in the present and shows back up when you least expect it to. It was about eleven years later when I experienced another violation of trust. However, this time, it came from someone I thought was a friend.

Some substances were involved that left me unable to fully remember what happened; only fragments remain. Gaps where clarity should have been. The first time I was assaulted, it had shattered my sense of safety, but the second time, it had shattered my sense of trust. It was this unique kind of pain that comes with the person who harms you being someone you considered a friend.

You learn that friends are supposed to be safe; they are the people who listen, protect, support, and respect us, but when the friend becomes the source of trauma, that wound extends far beyond the moment itself. It comes as a betrayal of trust.

All I remember from that incident is waking up with a deep sense of something that had been taken from me again-my safety, my awareness, my ability to consent. Then, in the aftermath, I was more confused and had questions. How could this person call themselves a friend? Was our friendship real? Did they really care about me? How could they choose to hurt me like this?

Later, I had lost friends I thought had my back; they left me alone, believing that friend over me, instead of support, I saw distance. It led me to ask myself once again, “How could something be so wrong and feel so unacknowledged?”

CHAPTER NINE: WAKING UP WITHOUT ANSWERS

There is a specific kind of fear that comes from not having a memory of what happened. Your mind is trying to fill in the blanks, but the answers never come, and you still feel alone with sensations instead of facts, with intuition instead of clarity. Lastly, you develop an unsettling feeling that something important was taken from you, and no one is confirming it.

The uncertainty can be its own form of trauma. Because without the answers, you are forced to live in the space between knowing and the unknown. And in that space, I felt myself unraveling and feeling overwhelmed because it made me feel like having control over my life is never going to happen. I started feeling misunderstood again.

I do not know about any of the other survivals, but I had questions I really wanted to know the answers to, but I knew that the so-called friend would lie to me and say I did give my permission before doing anything. However, why did I not remember the incident happening if I had given my consent? Why, when I tried to talk about it, did he change the subject?! Was he feeling guilty of it? Or was he just trying to cover his own ass?! Why, when I was surrounded by other friends the next day, they were laughing at me, and had a female friend tell me, “You finally got what was coming to you?!” I had a lot of why questions, but no answers, and still to this day, no answers?! Don’t I deserve the answers or am I better off not knowing the why? Either way, I still wonder, but for the sake of my sanity and mental health, I would rather keep focusing on the present and not the pain or the past.

CHAPTER TEN: LOSING FRIENDS, LOSING PIECES OF MYSELF

After the second experience, I not only lost my sense of safety, but I also lost people. I lost people I thought were friends; I thought they would stand by me, but instead, they became more distant. Some just disappeared entirely, and others questioned what I remembered or why I could not remember everything. It began a different kind of grief, one that unfolds quietly over time.

When I had experienced the sexual assault the second time, I had expected to feel fear, confusion, and anger, but I did not expect how many more pieces of my life would

disappear afterwards. Again, I lost my voice because it was too complicated to explain what happened without all the information. I began to withdraw again, not because I wanted to be alone, but it was because I honestly did not know how to explain pain that no one seemed to be willing to hear fully.

Instead of friends asking me how they can help me heal or how they can help me be heard, I was being victim shamed. I was told I should have known something was going to happen because I wore a tank top and shorts around a man. Why would I honestly think about that when I thought I was safe hanging with a friend and was only planning on having one drink? I did not stop hanging out with my friends because I was ashamed; I was no longer feeling understood or safe.

Over the years, I realized that yes, the assault took pieces of me, but it did not take all of me. I had lost friendships, yes, that hurt deeply, but over time, it revealed something more important. The people who truly cared stayed, they listened without judgment, they sat with me in silence and listened to me that way. They reminded me that I was not defined by what had happened to me. Like Carl Jung said, "I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." These close friends helped me find my purpose in life.

Survivors often carry a hidden grief because we grieve for the person we once were before the assault, we grieve for lost friendships, lost innocence, and we grieve for lost opportunities, dreams we had. Today, I still carry these ugly scars of what happened to me, but I am still carrying the strength on moving forward.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND THE SILENT COLLAPSE

There were moments when the weight of everything became too heavy to carry. Moments when I could not see a way forward that did not feel like more pain, more isolation, and more silence. Yes, I had reached a place emotionally where I thought survival itself was felt with uncertainty.

After my sexual assaults, I found myself trapped between what happened to me and who I was trying to become. The feelings of fear, shame, anger, and loneliness became overwhelming. I often felt some days invisible and unheard, and the world had continued to move while I was still frozen in the moment that changed my life.

The weight of trauma can convince any survivor that they are alone, and it can lie to you that healing is impossible, the pain will never end, and no one will ever understand. I had

moments when I questioned whether I had the strength to keep going. I know I am not the only one who has felt these feelings and stupid beliefs.

But I am still here. Was it easy? No, and it was not because the pain disappeared either. It was something inside me that I did not fully understand at the time, which refused to let me disappear completely. It is now, I know why, I am meant to help others find their reason to keep going, it has allowed me to become the founder of Healing from Yesterday's Ashes.

CHAPTER TWELVE: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND THE MYTH OF BEING “FIXED”

For a long time, I believed that if I could just find the right person, everything would finally be okay. I thought love would heal what trauma had broken. I had also thought that marriage would silence the memories. Somehow, I thought building a life with someone would somehow erase the pain of my past.

Boy, was I crazy for assuming those beliefs. Just like many other survivors, I had carried my wounds that were invisible to everyone else. I had desperately wanted to believe that once I had found happiness, those wounds would disappear. But trauma does not work that way; in truth, marriage is not a cure for trauma. Love is supposed to be supportive; healing help provide safety and comfort. But even in the strongest relationship, it cannot do the inner healing for us.

So, when I entered my marriage, I had brought my hopes, dreams, and commitment with me. But I had also brought along my emotional baggage containing my fears, triggers, insecurities, and unresolved pain. Some of those wounds had been buried so deeply that I did not even realize they were still affecting me.

Trauma has a weird way of showing up in relationships; it can make trust difficult, create a fear of abandonment, make vulnerability feel more dangerous, and lead to misunderstandings when one of the partners does not truly understand the impact of past experiences.

At times, survivors tend to blame themselves for relationship struggles, and we tell ourselves that if we were stronger, healthier, or more healed, things would be different. I know I did this. When my marriage faced challenges, I had often wondered if my past had made it too difficult for me to love. I had often questioned whether the assault had damaged something inside of me that could not be fully repaired. These thoughts were painful and not true.

The end of a marriage does not mean the person is broken, divorce does not mean healing has failed, and surviving trauma does not make someone unworthy of love. My broken marriage did not erase my past, nor did my divorce define me as a failure. I was not broken. I am still healing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE MAN WHO DIED AND THE QUESTIONS LEFT BEHIND

There are parts of this story that will never get closure, not because the story ends, but because it changes shape over time. Years after my first sexual assault, I had learned that one of the men who was involved had died by suicide. At first, I did not know what to feel. There was no simple emotion for something like that; there is no instruction manual for how to hold grief that is tangled with harm, silence, and unanswered accountability.

It did not erase what happened to me, it will never rewrite the past, and lastly, it did not give me resolution. But what it did give me was a chance to sit down with something complicated: that people can carry their own hidden battles for years, even while leaving harm behind them.

Trauma will not always offer closure in the ways we expect, but it does leave me with the final thought that I do not ever need to answer to heal from my trauma. Healing is learning how to live with the unknown without letting it consume the present.

This is my story, not his ending or anyone else's denial, not the silence that followed. Mine. And I do not have to be held responsible for carrying both sides of a story that was never balanced to begin with.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THOSE WHO DENIED IT EVER HAPPENED

I can tell you the hardest part of healing for me is not only what happened, but also why the people refused to acknowledge it happened. I had gotten no apologies, no one was held accountable, and no recognition of harm. All I got was distance, denial, the quiet suggestion that I should move on without ever being met where I was left or even let it go; it does not matter twenty years ago.

When you hear people in denial, it creates a second wound. It makes you question your memory, judgment, and worth. But I had learned healing had taught me something more important: "Someone else's refusal to accept truth does not erase the truth. I do not need

agreement for my experiences to be real; I do not need validation from those who caused harm to validate my survival. My voice does not become any less real because someone else chose to stay silent.

It's okay to be in denial, but it doesn't make it go away, and you must heal from the trauma, somehow find a way to cope with the aftermath. I had found that being an advocate had helped me heal; it does not stop the pain when you hear others' stories, but it does give someone hope that their story is not over and does not define them. So, like a phoenix, you can rise from the ashes of yesterday and shine ever brighter, which will piss off the attacker even more, especially if you do go to court and they end up in prison for their crime.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: RECLAIMING MY BODY, MY VOICE, AND MY STORY

For years, my body did not feel like it belonged to me. It had carried fear that I did not always understand. It reacted before I could explain why. It had learned to guard itself in unsafe relationships.

I had mistaken survival for love. I had mistaken endurance for loyalty. I also had mistaken being chosen for being valued. I stayed in relationships that echoed old wounds, because part of me had believed that I was allowed to receive. But healing is not a single moment; it's a slow return. A return to say "this is not okay," "this is not what I deserve," "I am allowed to leave," and "I am allowed to be safe."

Reclaiming my voice did not happen overnight; it happened in small choices such as saying no, walking away, speaking the truth even when my voice shook, and lastly, choosing myself when it felt unfamiliar. And slowly, I had stopped surviving my life and started living it again.

I am allowed to say NO and make it a complete sentence, and for those who do not appreciate my answer, they can walk out of the same door I had invited them in from. I will refuse to stay silent or be hurt again. I am a fighter, and I be damned if I ever let anyone hurt me or steal another piece of my soul for their own sick and twisted pleasure ever again.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: WHAT HEALING ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

Healing is not linear.

It does not erase memories.

It does not remove pain.

It does not suddenly make everything easy.

Healing looks like:

Some days remembering everything.

Some days remembering nothing.

Healing is not becoming who you were before.

It is becoming someone who can carry what happened.

Without letting it define every part of you.

It is learning:

I am more than what happened to me.

I am more than how I survived it.

I am still becoming.

CLOSING NOTE

If you have reached these final pages, I want to acknowledge what that means. It means you have sat with a story that was never just about one night, or one moment, or even one version of pain. It was about the long echo of silence that follows trauma, and what it takes to slowly, painfully, begin speaking again.

For a long time, I believed silence was the safest place I could live. I thought if I kept everything contained-if I did not name it, did not disturb it, did not let it spill into the world-I could somehow stay in control of it.

I have learned something different over time. Silence does not erase what happened. It only delays your return to yourself. This book was never about staying in what hurt me; it was about refusing to carry it alone anymore. It was about taking back the parts of my story that shame tried to claim and placing them back where they belong-in truth, not secrecy.

There are pieces of my story that will never fully fit into words. Some memories remain incomplete, relationships that have changed shape, and versions of me that no longer exist as they once did.

And still, I am here. I am still rebuilding, learning and still choosing myself in ways I once did not know were possible. To anyone reading this who has lived through their own version of silence, I want you to know: Your survival was never a weakness. Your silence was never consent. Your healing does not have to look like anyone else's timeline.

You are allowed to begin again, as many times as it takes. I close this book with the words that carried me through my own rebuilding: **"Healing from yesterday's ashes means I do not become what broke me-I become what rises after it."** And in that truth, I am no longer only what I survived. I am what I chose to become after surviving. This is not the end of my story. It is the beginning of living it differently.